

Forced Love

Insert One

I find my parents already at the breakfast table, "Morning." I say taking a slice of toasted bread.

"Sit down Nontle, come on eat like a normal person." Says my mom who for two decades has never sat down to eat because of work.

I shake my head looking at my wristwatch, "Nope, no can do." I tell her. Before she replies Junior walks in teary looking like a mess, that is my cue to go. This isn't anything new, he probably got involved in something stupid and needs to be helped like always. 23 years of age and still no responsibility whatsoever. "I will be on my way." I say taking a second slice of bread. He has been AWOL for three days now and this

is how he looks when he comes back?
Whatever he did will shake the world to its core.

I don't even want to be a part of whatever it is that he got himself involved in while drinking money he doesn't work for. I don't see his car where it is used to park but that isn't any of my business, I have the morning traffic to worry about.

I put on music before driving out the garage, just as I drive out mama and dad come out yelling and shouting at the guards for a car; I continue driving out.

My phone rings just as I join the freeway to town, "I'm listening." I say as soon as the car Bluetooth answers for me.

"We have a problem." Duh, there is no other reason for my PA to call me when I am already on my way to work.

“Yes?” I swear this girl still tiptoes around me like I am some bull dog. Yes, I have had bad days but I am not such a bad person.

“One of our bridges fell, in Durban. You haven’t heard the news?” one day I will sleep and wake up to find that I have to turn Satan into an angel because what is this? A whole bridge. “Everyone has been saying no comment all morning but Mr Samuels wants to see you as in yesterday.” She says.

“Okay. Get me two bran muffins downstairs and a cup of coffee, I’ll be there now.” I say. What I need is a driver for days like this. “Tell me how is the situation?” I ask.

“Bad. Four buses were in that highway, an oil truck, many taxis. There are about 30 casualties so far.” Shit! “The minister is sitting in Samuel’s neck. On twitter there is a trend #SamuelKills, you know everyone thinks it is our fault.” She tells me and I sigh. I am sure the politicians

sent them our way. We are being used as scapegoats now.

“Okay. Monitor the trends and follow the story until I get there.” I say.

“Ummm... Ms Samuels asked me to help her PA call clients.” Well Ms Samuels will have to do her job along her PA now without mine.

“And I am saying you follow the news for me and get me something to eat. You are my PA, not hers.” I say and end the call before putting on the news station. I am sure it is making headlines, seems like I am in for a very long ass day today. I should’ve eaten at home because now I will eat while on my feet running around and giving out media statements. Spinning lies. Twisting the truth to suit me. Fixing someone’s problems.

Thembi at the front desk is frustrated and the phone is ringing off the hook; I wave at her and

pass. Panicking will not change the situation so I am not even going to ask her how bad it looks, in the lift I take out my earphone and plug them in playing some music because God knows I need something to calm me when the temperatures get high.

I find Liz in my office writing something down, “Hey. Go get me the food, I’ll take it from here.” I say taking out my earphones.

“Mr Samuels asked to see you as soon as you get here.” She says.

“Go get me my coffee, I’ll see Samuels when I am done here.” She nods and walks out, I take out my laptop and increase the news volume. We are making headlines; more victims are being pulled out of the rumble.

The door opens and Liz walks in with my coffee and just as I take it from her the door busts open and Mr Samuels walks in; “The entire

world is coming into rumbles and you are here having coffee?" he yells.

"I am having coffee and trying to find a way to save the world, now give me an hour and I will come to your office." I tell him.

"Unbelievable! You better have a good strategy, the media is hounding us." He says.

"And I am going to deal with that, now tell your employees to maintain a 'no comment' stance." I say before he walks out.

Liz looks spooked. This girl is always scared.

"Get Lihle on the line, tell her to post in the media outlets that at 1 pm there will be a media brief." I say.

"okay." She says and walks out. I check on Twitter to see how the odds are now. The deaths keep piling up and so are the injured, what a nasty shit!

“Here!” I say to Samuels handing him a printed media statement, “Read this, memorialise it all for the media brief in an hour.” I say looking at my wristwatch. I worked throughout lunch on this.

“You will be there, right?” Samuels loves pretending to be a child, I don’t need to hold his hands.

“Fine. Just go over it, how far is your sister with her investigation? We need everything to make us look good.” I say. “I need reports of that project, I need to know everything because if we are to blame the media will find out and we better be ready.” I add.

“She will have something before the day ends.” Yeah right! My phone rings before I ask him the most important question here.

“I have to take this, Tata.” My father hardly ever calls midday.

“You have to come home sisi, there is an urgent matter we need to discuss.” He says.

“Can’t it wait? I will be home in a few hours.” I tell him.

“No. it is a matter of life and death.” Okay, he is scaring me.

“Okay, I am on my way.” I say and end the call, “You’ll have to do the press conference without me, there is an emergency home.” I tell Samuels.

“Can’t it wait? We are in the middle of a crisis.” He says.

“And nothing more can be done now. I need to go home. Just tell your sister to have everything ready by the time I come back.” I say walking out; a lot of employees always say that I do as I like here but I’d go crazy if I followed every rule in this place.

In my office I collect my stuff and tell my PA to call if something important comes up then

make my way out. I am sure nothing wrong will happen in just a few hours and I can always come back if shit comes to shove.

Forced Love

Insert Two

This has to be a joke! That is the only sane thing here, only it isn't. No one is laughing, they all looking at me with serious faces.

"So he ran into someone last week and killed them?" I am beyond shocked, dad nods. "Now his family wants me to marry their eldest son or they kill him?" I ask just to be sure. What kind of people are these? A person kills your child and you want their siblings to join your family? "I am afraid Junior will have to go to jail then." I say.

"We suggested that but they want a wife for

their son or they kill him. And they will do it, they will kill your brother.” Mama says.

“They are just angry.” I know if someone ran over this brat and killed him I’d want their head but that doesn’t mean I would actually kill them. Okay, maybe I would get inkabi in some hostel in Jo’burg. Or KZN. One from KZN would do a better job.

“They will. They are known for these things.” Tata says.

“So you are asking me to marry killers?” I cannot believe this! I get up taking off my blazer.

“They won’t hurt you.” How does he know that? None of them know that. “Nana please, they will kill your brother.”

“He deserves it! How many times have we spoken to him about his behaviour? Now you are asking me to give up my life.”

“We are sorry baby; we are but please.” For the

first time my mother's tears do not move me; not even a bit.

"And I am sorry." I say wiping my tears with the back of my hand, "I am sorry that you spoilt your son so much that at 23 he doesn't have any sense of responsibility, this is your fault. I hope you know that. I will do it." I say wiping the tears again. I will never be able to live with myself if Junior was to die even though it isn't my fault. "On one condition." They both look up immediately; "The moment I leave this house to be that man's wife take all my photos and anything I will leave behind and bury it, that will be my grave. I am the dead one. Your son lives." I take my blazer and walk out leaving mama sobbing.

I close my bedroom door leaning on it then slide down, only then does the sob escape my mouth. How can they do this to me? Me? I have carried this family on my back and been the perfect

daughter and they are selling me? To a family of killers? For their spoilt brat?

Everything is happening fast. I have written a resignation letter and sent it to work, switched off my phone, my bags are packed and I am ready to go.

“I am sorry.” I don’t want to hear his voice, why can’t he shut his mouth? I am sitting here looking out the window waiting for the end of my life to pull up the driveway and he is busy talking shit. “Sisi, I am sorry.”

“One more word Junior I will take that knife and stab you right in the neck.” I say looking at him and he looks down.

The car drives out the driveway and I can see

my parents disappearing in the background. I am crying, I am going to have the most painful life going from here. I saw the hatred of the driver, if he wasn't under the order to take me to my marital home he would probably kill me on the side of the road. I am sitting at the back of this SUV, I would've never dared to sit next to this man. 13 hours is a long-ass drive to be sitting next to a man who hates you.

"I will stop along the way so you can buy something to eat." Even saying a few words to me sounds like it disgusts him.

"Thank you." I don't know what else to say, my brother killed one of his bosses and the boy was so young. Junior was in the wrong, he was drunk and he crossed a red light killing the boy. I switch my cell on as we stop in a garage, he mentions that he is giving me 15 minutes and remind me what will happen should I try any funny business. While he is filling up petrol I

walk into the store and the first stop is the toilet then I buy small stuff to eat along the way, and buy my captor water. If I will survive this marriage then I will need a few kind people so maybe by showing people some kindness they will reciprocate.

I find him leaning on the car on a call so I open the front passenger seat and put two bottles of water and an energy drink. He is driving us all the way to Butterworth so he needs to stay awake. He gets in the car and starts the drive without saying anything about the drinks but I keep it moving to, listen to Samuel yelling on my voicemail telling me how I will never work in Cape Town again.

I dial Liz on her personal phone when I am done listening to Samuel call me every insult in the book. "Boss what is going on? Samuels is busting, saying something about you resigning." She says.

“Yes. I will send you an email now about my plan with dealing with the media, I will send you a suggestion for how they should respond going forward whilst the investigation is ongoing.” I say.

“Okay, but what is going on? Are you okay?” the concern in her voice raises a lump in my throat.

“No but I will okay, I am a big girl. What is it that you always call me?”

“A tough cookie.” She whispers and I laugh wiping my tears.

“Yes, that. So you know I’ll be cool.” I sniff back my tears, “I want you to clear my office. That business award I got last year, it is yours. Take it as a reminder that you can achieve anything, you are very bright Liz and I have no doubt you will finish the course top of your class.” I say.

“That is big. Are you dying?” if only I knew.

“No. I am not dying Liz, listen to me now. In my

drawer there is a watch, I was wearing it the other day, it is yours too. Take anything you want to keep it, the photos please burn them." I say.

"Shouldn't I take them to your house?" she sounds shocked.

"No. Burn everything you can't keep. I am leaving everything behind." I let her know, "And Liz, you have been an amazing PA. Thank you." I say.

"And you have been a super scary amazing boss. You are such a kind person and I am glad I worked under you." She says.

"I am glad. Tell Ndoda I am sorry I will miss his birthday, I will currier the present." I say. Ndoda is her seven years son, a very handsome boy who has the most beautiful eyes and speaks nonstop.

"Okay. Good luck with what you will do moving

on.” She says.

“Thank you. Goodbye for now.” I say and the call without awaiting her response; the lump on my throat is making it hard for me to breathe. The moment the phone slips out of my hands it escapes and I almost scream but I put my hand over my mouth and open the window with the other. This cruel man says nothing but keep driving, maybe I don’t want to have any sort of a relationship with them, or even try to have them on my side. I will just keep hating them just as they hate me for something I didn’t do.

When I have calmed down I log into WhatsApp and go straight to the group I share with my three friends. I clear my throat and start recording a voice note. “Hey guys, I hope you are all well.” I sound so formal but that is what it takes for me not to start wailing. I look out the window and sigh, “I know y’all will cause drama when you hear this so kahleni, don’t do anything

hectic. I am not kidnapped and I am very much alive, check with my parents if you don't believe me. Lolo, I know you and your conspiracy theories so ungaqali. Zizo, I am fine so don't worry your pretty self and Akhona you better don't start crying like I'm dead; uzokwenzani when I am already dead?" I chuckle and blink my tears. I might be on my way to die as it is. "I want to tell you guys I will be away for a while, and a while might be a year or years. I am still unsure but I will text and call you guys. You know I've got you, mara it will be a while before I am in the Cape again. The reason I am sending this here instead of through a call I don't want a hundred questions; this isn't a Q&A session. Just know that I am okay and I am where I am willingly but I will ask of you guys to give me a bit of space to deal with something. And to adjust to my new environment. I love you guys, a lot too. Don't forget that. And no, don't call to try and find out

more, my cell will be on flight mode. I love you.”
I say and end the voice note.

The moment I am sure it is sent I put my cell on flight mode and put on my headsets to play my music.

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Insert Three

It is the morning of the next day when we drive into town, so this is Butterworth. I am from Cofimvaba and has lived in Cape Town my entire life so I have never been to this side of the Eastern Cape. I want pee, “Are there any toilets around here?” I ask him looking at the time on my phone. It is not that early in the morning, there is just heavy fog, as it is only 10 am.

“Okay.” This must be like the first thing he has said to me in a few hours. He drives into a busy rank and tells me to take five minutes or he will be coming searching for me after showing me the toilets. My feet are swollen and the sandals I am wearing are a bit tight but what can I say? We move. I hurry to the toilets and thank god they are empty do I pay the R3 needed.

I may have thanked God a bit early, I am beyond disgusted at the state of the toilets. I pinch my nose and wipe the toilet using my face wipes a few times before peeing, even then I don't sit. How are people even pay just so they can pee in such disgusting conditions?

My annoyed driver is standing outside the toilet and literally jumps on me when he sees me and hurries me to the car, if my shoulder is not dislocated then maybe it will never dislocate. If the staff has the right to treat me like dirt then how much more is the family? He bangs the

door behind me hitting my leg and I scream, he just looks at me and then get on his side. I move my aching leg inside and close the door as he starts the car.

“Look, you may hate me but if you ever do that to me again or even drag me like that I will have you arrested. I know people who can have the entire police minister on your ass and I won’t even care if you kill Junior.” I tell him trying not to cry at the ache of my leg, it is painful okay? And the door did hit the ankle. He looks shocked at this, “So this little bit of power you are trying to exercise over me? I won’t tolerate it.” I add then look out the window. He seems to have forgotten he is the help. We drive out this rank and he drives further into town only to stop next to frozen, gets off, and walks to a woman wearing a long dress with a jacket tied around her waist. He takes the drinks in front of her and loads them at the back, and they get into

the car.

I am a prisoner and I cannot really ask any questions, the hatred I saw in this woman's eyes when she looked at me is the reason I am sitting here looking out the window taking the pain in my leg without asking if any of them has any painkillers. I will just have to take it until I can have access to my suitcase, I am sure I have something in there. I switch flight mode off and I have tons of missed calls from my family and friends but I don't have the strength for them so I put my phone back to flight mode again.

We have been on the tar road before we joined the gravel road but it also just seems to take forever. It is a while before we drive into a village with a big sign written 'Welcome

KwaPhalo' and I instantly know that I have just made it to my prison. We drive up the bumpy road and stop a few times to let livestock pass, we pass a clinic then a good twenty minutes from it we pass a school then after 10 or so minutes we drive into a big yard with so many huts I am dizzy from trying to count them and there so many people going up and down. The funeral must be sometime this week; my heart pains a bit at the thought of a mother awaiting to bury their child. I should've let them kill Junior, how am I supposed to face these people? Their pain will forever be in my face and right now, right now it is very raw and I will be here to see it. Why am I always the one having to be punished for Junior's doings?

"Take this one to Sokhaya's hut." The woman says before getting off the car.

"Stay here." The driver says getting off too. I sit and wait for them to offload then the driver gets

inside and drives for a good 2 minutes before stopping in front of a hut, "Get off." He tells me getting off too. My leg is still very painful and it takes all of my strength not to cry a river when I put my leg on the ground. I limp behind this man who is carrying my bags and walk into the hut that is clearly used by someone. There is a black vest on top of the bed, he puts my bags next to the bed and walks out leaving me standing in the middle of the room. I hear the car drive off and I suddenly become teary, I've just lost the only familiar thing in this yard.

I limp to my bags and put the small one on the bed then open it, I might as well take this time to bathe and put on something else other than this pencil skirt that I had worn to work yesterday. Just how easy my life was then. I don't know what I will use to bathe, I am even scared to open the white door. What if it doesn't lead to a bathroom and I see things I am not

supposed to see? Dead bodies, maybe. These people threatened to kill my brother so they must have dead bodies hidden somewhere. The door opens and two women my age walk in they don't want to be here too.

"Why are you still standing like that? There is a lot to do." One says.

"I was hoping to shower first." I say.

"Hoping to shower? Must be nice, my sister's son is lying in a cold mortuary and you are hoping to shower. Mmmhh, go on. There is the shower hurry." Another one says. So they're the late boy's aunts, I nod and take my whole bag to the bathroom with me. I first take pain meds before taking the quickest shower I've ever taken since my teens. I put on an ankle-length black skirt and polo neck before a jacket on top and wrap my head with a scarf. It is a bit wet outside so I put on sneakers. I find them still waiting in the room, "I am done." I say and they

lead the way.

I have no other option but to follow behind them to wherever it is they are going. And it is to a full kitchen, women are moving around the kitchen making food and stuff, all clearly used to one another as they are chatting.

“Bafazi, this is Soyama.” One says.

“Nontle.” I correct them because I don’t know what gave her the impression that I am Soyama.

“Soyama here is Bhut’Sokhaya’s bride; uzoyalwa after the funeral. Show her what she needs to do.” The second one says and then they follow each other out. Then I guess I am Soyama, just that no one thought it was a good idea to ask ‘Soyama’ how she feels about the new name or at least make her aware.

“Okay, what do you need?” I ask, I might as well since I am thrown into the deep end.

“We are making dinner, actually we were not

sure who will do it because we are all preoccupied at the moment.” One says.

“Okay, do whatever you are doing and I will make dinner.” I say, they show me everything and I get into it.

“You will be able to make dinner for everyone?” one asks. Well I don’t know, I’ve never ran a catering company now, have I? At home, there is only four of us but I don’t even remember the last time I cooked for us.

“Yes.” My grandmother did teach me how to cook so I will make a plan. One shows me the biggest stove pots and tell me that is what I’ll be using, I swear I am cooking for the whole village here. They go about their business and I go about mine. I don’t think they know my brother has something to do with dead guy here because they are actually treating me better than anyone else in this yard.

My leg is burning from the pain and I so want to sit down but I also don't want to be caught slipping so I limp around the kitchen doing what I am supposed to do.

"Soyama, your father wants to speak to you." A man I didn't see nor hear coming into the kitchen says and we all look at him, it takes me a good minute to realize I am actually who he is speaking to. I thank him and take the phone, limp outside so I can have some privacy. I don't think I'll ever get used to being called Soyama.

"What do you want?" I ask the moment I am certain I am out of ear shot, didn't I tell them to leave me alone?

"Nontle, we are worried about you. You didn't even tell us how was your trip." He says.

"Oh well I didn't have much time to myself, I'm here slaving for your son's sins so I hardly have time for calls. And you are the last person I

want to speak to. Stop trying to call me, you sold me to save your killer son. I meant it when I said me and you will never speak until one of us goes to the grave. And I am Soyama.” I say and end the call. I turn to find the guy who gave me this phone leaning on the wall behind me watching me closely, he probably heard everything but then again he must know who I am and how I got here. Hell he even knows who I am married to and I don’t even know that.

“What happened to your leg?” he asks taking his phone.

“I tripped and fell.” There is no need to make a big deal out of this, I will be okay. He nods and walks away, I limp back to the house I have things to do.

Luckily for me I am still not allowed to serve the main house so I dish up and the others take the plates to where they have to be taken. And only then do I take a breather and sit down, but there

is never a resting moment here because a child walks in to tell me Tamkhulu wants to see me.

I find an old man sitting alone in a tent, is he the dead boy's father or grandfather? But the aunts were old enough to be his granddaughters. But I've seen weirder situations.

"Molo tamkhulu." He looks older than my father and might be very much older than him, he looks up and gives me a smile. He is definitely the grandfather, the three ladies I've met today look like him a lot. He mentions for me to sit and I take the chair opposite him.

"What happened to your leg?" he asks.

"I tripped and fell." I tell him the same lie I told that man earlier.

"Looks too swollen though." He says.

"I have been standing on my feet all afternoon, it will be fine Sir." I assure him and he just takes out his phone and dial someone.

“Nxuba, I need your help.” He says to the person on the other side. “No, my blood pressure is very much fine. It is my granddaughter.” Maybe I am not so alone in this family after all.

Forced Love

Insert Four

Nxuba is the family doctor, in his 60s if not late 50s and very kind. He gives me an ointment to use and puts an ankle guard on then painkiller before asking to speak to Tamkhulu outside the tent about something. Tamkhulu comes back shortly and sits opposite me and looks at me.

“Nxuba wants you to go see him at his practice tomorrow.” He says and my heart skips, what if I tore my ankle? “He wants to do an X-ray to be sure nothing happened. He is certain that you didn’t trip, now I won’t ask you to tell me what

happened but no one is allowed to mistreat you here nor lay their hands on you so should that happen I would like for you to tell me.” He says “Yes.” But I won’t share that little incident that happened earlier, he did say I don’t have to.

“Good.” He says and then goes silent for a long moment, “You know in our times when families were at war, very huge wars that could wipe the bloodlines old people used to sit and find a solution that isn’t violent and hopefully will not lead to that. That is where a marriage between the two families would come in, family doesn’t kill each other. That is why you are here.” He tells me. “What your brother did was a very bad and fatal mistake.” He says.

“Trust me he makes many of those.” I find myself saying.

“I know. He is very young, spoilt too and that is something your father will have to look at. The

kind of man he wants to continue his name. My grandchildren are very angry, very. Your brother took their nephew, my great-grandson. I am not happy too but also killing your brother will never bring Samkelo back, sadly. But we would be cutting a life short, a very young life. This is not like saying we will kill your father who has lived a very long life but a very young boy who has only lived two decades. And killing a father for their son's sins is killing the entire family, I am not in the business of breaking families. So I asked your father to give us a bride if he has an unmarried daughter, not to punish you but to tie my children's hands. They can't kill their brother-in-law, they might hate you now but you are the woman whose sons will lead this family and they can't hurt you like that. See, Sokhaya is the only son my only son had, he has five sisters. Samkelo's mother is the oldest. Samkelo was her first child, she has three. Sokhaya comes after Nomakrestu, then his three sisters follow.

Nomfundo, Andisiwe, and Asanda follow after Sokhaya. To all of them, Nomandiya's children are their own children and it will take time for them to heal." I nod, what can I say?

"And Sokhaya's mother and father? How angry are they?"

"They are both late. Sokhaya's father was the only child I had and he went on to give me six children with his wife, they died in a car accident twenty years ago." He tells me, "I raised my grandchildren alone as that accident did not only take my only son and a woman who has become my daughter but my wife too." I would've gone crazy, imagine losing your child and wife at the same time then you are left to raise six children who can't be that old alone. I was only six years old twenty years ago, how old were his grandchildren? "They were all very young. Nomandiya was merely a young girl too, she had just graduated from college to do

nursing. She didn't work for a good 4 years helping me with her siblings. Asanda has no memory of her parents except pictures, she was only a year old." He says.

"I am telling all of this so you understand their closeness, they have come to depend on each other and Sokhaya is very close and overprotective of them." He says.

"I hear you. What you are saying here is I am going to be very hated in this family, especially by the man I am marrying." I sum it up because that is what he is saying in simple words.

"A man can be changed. Any woman has power over men, she can manipulate any situation to her favour." He says. I hope he isn't asking me to seduce his grandson, I give fire rounds, yes but anyone who treats me like trash doesn't deserve them. "And Sokhaya will come around, just give them time. The wounds are still very fresh." He says.

“I don’t have any other choice.” I say.

I am expecting him to say I had one but he nods and says, “Of course, you didn’t. The choice you were given was really not a choice and that is why I knew you would be coming. I don’t want the blood of a young boy on my conscience but sadly not everyone in this house feels like that.” He tells me.

“I hear you.” That is all I can say.

“Go rest now. Andisiwe and Asanda will clean up, you need to rest that leg. I will ask Siphokuhle to bring you bottled water for pills, I will tell everyone to let you be.” He says. “And be ready at seven to go.” He says.

“Thank you.” I don’t ask about his grandson; I am sure he will boycott that room now that his enemy is using it. He gets up and helps me to my feet, we walk out of the tent together and he goes in the opposite direction.

The hut is exactly how I left it. I put the vest that was on the bed on an empty chair and wheel my bags to the front of the wardrobe before opening the blankets. There is a knock at the door and the little girl who came to get me earlier turns out to be Siphokuhle and she has a sealed water bottle.

“Thank you. Do you want sweets?” I ask.

“Mama doesn’t want us to eat sweets late.” She tells me, okay that is valid. These humans can get very energetic instead of sleeping.

“Okay. Goodnight then, thanks.” I say. She smiles before jogging out. I change into a nightdress before closing the door, I need to find a key tomorrow so I can lock the door. Hopefully, no one kills me in my sleep. I take the pills before switching off the lights.

I bump into something; I use my hands to feel what exactly it is. A human?! I sit up instantly

and jump out of bed, what if they are making me sleep next to snakes that resemble humans? Maybe if they can't kill me physically they will use witchcraft. I switch on the light and a very dark man stares at me. It takes me a very long moment to recognize him as the man who had brought me a phone earlier.

“What are you doing here?” lord please, let him not be who I think it is.

Can it be a matter of mistaken room or something?

Please.

This is a man I wouldn't even give a time of the day under normal circumstances. I am into tall, dark, and handsome not charcoal dark and Mr here is the latter. And the handsome? Not so much.

As if that isn't enough he has this huge scar that moves from under his right eye to his left

cheek, that must have hurt like hell but he is a walking terminator. If there had to be a hitman in this family then it is him, he fits the role perfectly.

“This is my room.” God! He is my husband! Thank God we are not that serious. Do you know that serious where you fuck and reproduce? Yes. And did he grow up in war? Besides the fact that he seems to be a fan of tattoos he has scars on his upper body, like the one that runs across his left nipple to his throat, how did that not kill him? Terminators don’t die, that’s the only explanation.

“You are Sokhaya?” I ask, he is just staring at me and he swallows then look up, I look down and yes I am wearing the shortest nightie I own.

“Yes, and I am sleepy. I slept only two hours ago, switch off the lights.” He says before pulling up the blankets.

“So we will share a bed every night?” I ask.

“Yes, aren’t you my wife? Isn’t that what husband and wife do?” he asks sitting back up, he looks annoyed and yes, he looks scary. Especially with that nose flared like that.

“Ummm, technically no. We didn’t sign anywhere nor was I welcomed into the family.” Not to mention that we are total strangers.

“Well, we are trying to bury the child that your brother killed.” I swallow and look down.

“I will switch off the lights.” I tell him.

Forced Love

Insert Five

I yawn switching on the kettle, I am still sleepy but after turning and turning next to that man who slept like he isn’t sleeping next to a

stranger he hates I woke up and went to shower. The time is 5 am and I am showered, dressed and ready for anything. Okay, I am lying. I am not ready for anything but going back to bed.

“I thought I was the ghost in this yard.” I turn to find a girl I hadn’t met earlier.

“Hi. I couldn’t sleep.” I say and she smiles, now this is warm.

“A lot of us can’t. Can you make me a cup too? I tried to sleep after catching up on school work but I can’t.” she says.

“I get you. I’ve been awake since midnight.” I tell her. She sits and looks at me, not the creepy way and there is no hatred in her eyes.

“You are beautiful.” I am shocked, she didn’t just say that. I thought everyone hated me, “Don’t tell me you never receive such comments.” She says.

“Not so random and out of the blue.” I let her

know.

“Oh well, I am that random. By the way I am Asanda.” She says.

“I am No.. Soyama.” It will take me ages to get used to my new given name.

“Are you making breakfast?” she asks as I pour her a cup of coffee.

“I am not sure what people have for breakfast here.” I let her know.

“Make soft porridge. I am sure Asakhe will make them lunch.” Asakhe is one of the women who were here last night, she is married to Sokhaya’s cousin.

“Okay. I am going to the doctor too so I might be around here late, after lunch.” I tell her.

“Your leg? Tamkhulu did mention it.” She says.

“How is it?” she asks.

“The ointment from your doctor helps a lot.” I

say.

“He is good yena but very loyal to Tamkhulu.” I noticed that; he did call him to tell him what he thinks of my leg in my absence, “So if you want to have secrets you better find yourself a doctor.” She tells me and I look at her shocked.

“What secrets? Asanda don’t teach Sokhaya’s wife amanyala.” Tamkhulu says walking in.

“No one said anything about secrets here Madiba, you must be getting old.” She tells him and he just laughs.

“Should I make you a cup, Tamkhulu?” I ask.

“No. I have to go check on my livestock, go wake your husband. We have a lot to do.” He says.

“Shouldn’t you have something to eat before that? I am making soft porridge.” I say, they can’t go choosing livestock hungry, what if a cow chases after them? Not that Somnyamana

wouldn't be able to fight it off.

"Okay, Asanda make me that cup. You wake Sokhaya up." He says. Argh! I was hoping Asanda offers to go but she doesn't so I leave the room after asking her to heat up water for me.

Sokhaya is awake, he is standing next to his hut smoking. In his boxers and he doesn't look like he is in a good mood. I am taking deep breaths as I approach him, "Morning." I say standing next to his very tall self and he looks at me and then puffs. Okay, maybe my voice annoys him or rubs him the wrong way.

"Tamkhulu asked me to get you." I say.

"For?" Or maybe not so much.

"He said something about livestock." I say.

"Okay. Take out my green work suit and a top." Excuse him? What am I? his maid? "Why are you looking at me like that? Aren't you my

wife?" he asks and I take deep breaths and walk inside. The bed is unmade and I guess even that is awaiting his maid, right? I first make it and he walks back in when I am putting pillows in their place. He says nothing and just walks to the bathroom. I open the wardrobe and look for what he mentioned, I also take out one of his very dark tops. Who owns only brown, navy, and black tops? No colour whatsoever? Must be a medical condition, that is the only explanation here.

I leave when I am sure I have taken out everything. I find Asanda busy on her phone in the kitchen, "I thought you got lost in this big yard." She says.

"No, I was taking out some stuff from your brother." I tell her.

"Don't let him bully you. I took out mealie-mealie for you." She tells me.

“No, it is fine. I am always happy to help.” Such a big lie but Asanda doesn’t need to know, she is a kind person.

We are finishing dishing up when the lady from town walks in, she looks at us and we both go quiet. “Have you forgotten that we are mourning here? Busy laughing.” She says glaring at me, she just needs to say ‘because of your brother’ out loud.

“We are done with breakfast, is sisi up?” Asa asks completely ignoring her anger or is it an annoyance?

“And kill ourselves? No thanks. I will make oats for us.” She says.

“Soyama woke up early to cook, everyone will eat what she has made. Asanda, take the food for your sister.” Tamkhulu says walking in and he is followed by his grandson.

“Sit Tamkhulu, I am done dishing up.” I say taking out the bowls of porridge I put aside for them.

“Okay. Sit Sokhaya, and Nomakrestu, we spoke about this. None of you will treat this girl like an outsider, she didn’t ask to be here. I did.” He says shrugging off his coat.

“Okay, Tamkhulu. Soyama where is mine?” she asks.

“This one.” I point and she looks at it and then back to me.

“Yours?” I show it to her and she takes the one meant for me before walking away, she really believes I am out to kill them? Sighs! I give Tamkhulu and Sokhaya their food and take Nomakrestu’s bowl.

“Tamkhulu, Mhonci is asking to speak with you before you leave.” Asanda says walking in. The woman everyone calls Mhonci is married to

Tamkhulu's younger brother from what Asanda told me and they call her that because they grew up with everyone calling her that.

Apparently, she is the one who sits with Samkelo's mom on the mattress along with Nomakrestu and Nomfundo. Asanda and Andisiwe are the official errand girls.

"Okay sisi." He replies. What a kind man. We eat with Asanda asking me questions about my life before coming here and I kind of humor her.

"So you were a media leisure person?" she asks.

"No. yes, I dealt with the media a lot but I was kind of like the fixer there. My main duties had to do with the media but I fixed problems before they reach the media, sometimes ensuring they don't get to the media." I tell her.

"Sounds exciting." She says and I laugh.

"Challenging. I prefer challenging. It was a lot, like the time the boss' son lost a sex tape and I

had to ensure that it doesn't reach the media. Frustrating times." I say and she laughs.

"What did that have to do with your job description?" she asks.

"On a normal day, it doesn't. but that would've been the worst time to have the surname on the company letterhead linked to a sex tape. The big bosses were busy negotiating a deal with a Mozambique billionaire. He is very big on family and prefers to work with scandal-free businesses. So you can imagine how busy I was. Then bam, Vince loses his sex tape." Asanda is actually laughing, now that I think about it is hilarious. The way I wanted to strangle that boy.

"Seems like swiping things under the carpet." Sokhaya says.

"More like used to cleaning up other people's messes." He must never make the mistake of thinking I am a pushover. "Tamkhulu I am ready

to go.” I say.

“Oh, I am not the one taking you. Your husband is.” Lord take me now, send your heavenly electricity to electrocute me!

“I am done, lets go.” He won’t change? “Why are you staring at me like that?” he asks.

“You are not changing?” I hear myself ask and doesn’t his sister burst into laughter?

“I will get your purse sisi.” She says.

“I am fine, bring my car keys.” Tamkhulu did mention that Nxuba’s practise is in town, right? Kanti ndifelani?

Seems like he will keep proving why he isn’t my type. Going to town in boots full of mud? Overalls? Lord!

Forced Love

Insert Seven

Asanda meets us at the car and helps me with the bags while telling me that maybe I should just buy bread and make soup because Mhonci is complaining. I haven't seen this Mhonci as I have not been to the mourning room, and I am not planning to.

"Why did no one come help?" I ask her as we make our way to the kitchen.

"Apparently Sis'Noma told them there is no need; they can come help tomorrow. And now she has been stopping anyone from cooking." She says.

"It's fine, get the oven ready. We will bake I brought with me dough." I say.

"Okay. But that will take long." She says.

"I know, I have back up." I say. I put on the kettle and take out one 10L of scones, I bought four. Some will help at the funeral tomorrow. Asanda

gets her sisters to help give everyone tea and scones as a starter while I start baking. I can't believe in a yard with full-grown-ass women they would've all died of hunger because they are awaiting me to come to cook.

Nomakrestu walks in, stares at me before walking out then comes back with a big scarf. "You are not officially a bride but you can't have your arms like this. The body will arrive in three hours, you can't be this naked." She says putting this hideous thing around my shoulders. I took off my blazer because well it was never designed for the kitchen to start with.

"Okay. Is there something I should do to prepare for tomorrow?" At home when we are getting ready for funerals we hire a catering business and I never really get involved in the planning. I help with planning the service but that is about it, here it seems like I am the one being the adult.

“Asakhe and others will come very early in the morning. You must be up by 4 am to welcome them. The groceries have been bought, please make sure you bake more bread for tomorrow.” She tells me.

“Okay.” I am going to be dead exhausted when I go to bed I can tell already.

Many relatives are arriving today so everyone is treating me kinder, I can tell none of these people know what is going on here. Asanda is just a sweetheart the entire day, she keeps helping me with everything.

“Yhuu, I swear you kids of today are not scared of things, how do you come cohabit while there is a funeral?” That is Sokhaya’s aunt from his mother’s side, she speaks a lot I’ve come to see but she is very helpful.

“She was set to get married any way but then

this happened.” Asanda comes to my rescue, truly her grandfather’s daughter.

“And she saved you, I know you bantwana baka sisi. You are very lazy, why is Andisiwe and Nomfundo sitting on the mattress? They have no business there.” Well, I like them there, to be honest, my life here is already hard as it is. My cell rings, it actually startles me, I thought I had put it back on flight mode.

“Hi.” I say walking out of the house.

“Sis, don’t hang up.”

“What? Hell no!” I end the call and put the damn thing back in flight mode before walking to the house. Asanda and her aunt are laughing about something and I am shaking, how dare he?

“Are you fine?” Asanda asks and I nod, I will be fine. And I can’t exactly say it is her nephew’s murderer.

I swear I will fall off. I am yawning all the way to the hut I sleep in, makazi and I stayed up making sure everything is complete. Asanda wasn't okay. Samkelo's body arrived and now it is in the main hut, the air changed in this yard the moment that body arrived. And I was forced to be there to welcome it, as a member of the family. It didn't have to be like that since well, I am not officially family and I don't know the boy but Nomakrestu insisted. She wanted me to see her sister, Samkelo's mom.

And I did.

Yes, she hates me.

And no, she will never forgive my brother.

The pain in her eyes, the hatred that I saw when she looked at me. If she could she would've jumped at me and strangled me; I am going to stay out of her way from now on. I never want to bump into her even on the corridor, she might

just strangle me to death if her stares don't kill me first.

I push the door open and the door is empty, thank God! He is probably spending the night somewhere because if he was sleeping here then he would be here because it is 1:30 in the morning already.

I undress after locking the door now I am left with my panties, I need a quick shower before sleeping. I set my alarm then walk to the bathroom, argh I left my toiletry bag in the room!

"God!" I yelp, where did he come from? He is staring at me like he didn't just scare me so much I jumped out of my skin. "I locked the door." I say. He doesn't say but looking at me with those red eyes, was he crying? "Are you okay?" I ask.

"You are naked." I am? Lord Jesus!! I am naked, I push him aside and run back to the room to

get something to wrap around myself. My gown is on top of a chair so I put it on and sigh, thank God!

He is standing at the bathroom door now, watching me and now I feel so awkward. I am even fumbling with my robe as I sit down on the bed, "I thought you were not here." I say. "I mean this place was empty when I walked in." and what was he doing in the bathroom? I didn't see him nor hear any sound when I walked into that bathroom.

"I was just sitting there thinking. Go on, I'll sleep." He says and I nod, I walk to the bathroom, this time taking my toiletry bag.

I walk into the bathroom and close the door then look around. This place is not that big, I couldn't have missed him but also I would've heard the door open, and I was in here for a second so he wouldn't have taken off his jacket and vest that fast. I walk out the bathroom

again and he is sitting on top of the bed, “Where were you?” I ask he and he looks at me confused.

“The bathroom.” Obviously, he won’t tell me what happened here. I walk back to the bathroom and close the door behind me.

What if he is a witch? He could have just landed from a broom, I need to start praying or I will be a victim of witches. This is the only explanation that makes sense, that he was flying over people’s roofs and choosing his sacrifices. Maybe he is looking for a body to bury with his nephew, I’ve heard that witches accompany their loved ones with other people’s blood.

Lord, do you think he is the only witch in this family? What if they are all witches? And I will be sacrificed? God! They probably had a meeting deciding on how I should die.

I sit down and let the tears slide. I am married

to a family of witches, they are such bad witches that even a man practices. What was I thinking not sleeping early? From now on the moment the clock hits midnight I will be long asleep, I mustn't stumble over their stuff. I don't want to be recruited.

Oh Mighty God! Would they recruit me?

But ... but we are not good like that, right?

But to punish me they might turn me into one, or maybe into their baboon. Lord! I jump into my feet and bump into the table, my toiletry bags fall.

"Are you fine?" he yells and I look around, can he see me?

"Ye .. yes!" I reply.

Let me shower and sleep before one of them appears behind me.

Forced Love

Insert Eight

The service is going on in the tent on the other side of the yard and I am keeping myself busy in the kitchen. All the wives here offered to take over so I can attend the service, he was my husband's nephew after all, but I've politely refused. Told them I am not really a funeral person, which is true but it is not entirely the reason why I don't want to go. I don't want to hear how my brother cut Samkelo's life short, I don't want a front-row seat to this family's pain, not when I have seen it from the moment I arrived in this place.

"Do you guys believe in witchcraft?" it has been in my mind all morning, I hardly slept.

"Why?" Asakhe asks.

"Lord! They have got to you, haven't they? Look,

people will always talk, and just because people believe your husband's grandfather has a snake it doesn't mean he does." A woman I've come to know as Nakhane says.

"A what?!" I am shocked.

"Snake. It is just jealousy, you look spooked. Kanti why were you asking?" Oh my! Oh my goodness! I am going to be licked by snakes one of these days! Jesus, I need to find a church around here.

"I..I.." my throat is dry, "My cousin was telling me she thinks someone is practicing witchcraft on her, that's why I'm asking." I lie giving them my back, I am spooked.

"She must pray about it and find a healer to help her." That might be a good idea.

"Is there a church nearby?" One will need to get to know their God if they want to survive this place.

“We can go together Sunday.” Nakhane says and I nod, “You look spooked. What she told you is just pure nonsense, of course, there is no snake here.” Well, I cannot be sure, Sokhaya appears and disappears as he likes but I nod. Whatever they say.

They change the topic but in my mind, I am trying to think of what I might have to do to get the snake out of here or at least far from me. I will never live with a snake, what will I do if it visits Sokhaya? Or if he turns into one? “Lord!” I gasp.

“Are you okay?” Nakhane asks, I nod and rush out of the kitchen.

I swear it was like this day would never end, everyone has left, the tent has been taken down, everyone has had dinner and I’ve cleared the kitchen. Asanda is doing the dishes so I am

going to sleep. Sokhaya disappeared some time, probably out hunting for their snake. I walk into the room and I can hear the shower running so I fix the bed and changed into pyjamas before taking out my laptop, I need to relax so I will watch a movie or anything on Netflix. Only if I had a glass of wine, no, make that a bottle. I need a bottle of wine to be able to sleep soundly, it is after all another night sleeping next to a stranger.

He walks out the bathroom and I make sure not to look up, I wouldn't even have heard the bathroom door had this God-forsaken place had a good network connection but it doesn't.

"Did Tamkhulu tell you that the day after tomorrow uzonxityiswa?" I take out my earphones and look at him, now I am shocked. No, he mentioned nothing of that sort to me.

"Well?"

"No." I answer.

“Oh well, it is happening.” He says.

“How will this work?” that day he never gave me a straight answer so maybe I will get one now.

“How will what work?” The is no way he is that stupid, not at his big age anyway.

“This marriage. Do we see other people? Keep up appearances?” I ask.

“By seeing other people you mean are you allowed to have a boyfriend in this village? No. You won’t come here and embarrass me like that, not where I was born and raised. As far as the people here are concerned we are happy and in love, we will keep it that way.” He tells me getting on his side of the bed.

“But we are not. You hate me. And I don’t even want to be here.” I say.

“True but a small price to pay for your brother’s life don’t you think?” Oh yah, a reminder to keep me in check, right? “Switch off that thing I want

to sleep, I have an early morning. I have to complete rituals for my dead nephew.” He says before pulling the blanket over his head.

Five weeks.

35 days.

840 hours.

50 400 minutes.

And 1 209 600 seconds.

Yes, I am counting. I have been counting since the day I was officially named Soyama and introduced to the ancestors and welcomed to the family and the community as Sokhaya’s wife. And in my life, I’ve never cried as I cried that day and the following weeks. I cried from 3 am when I was woken up to be washed off any filth I may have picked along as an unmarried woman. As I went under that cold water I cried.

I didn't just cry because I was officially Sokhaya's wife or that I am now married to a man I don't even like. I cried because now I am stuck here, in this God forbidden place with people who hate me. I cried for what could've been, my dreams, my hopes, and life.

That water's coldness was the last thing on my mind, I could feel that water strip me of my being. I could feel myself being washed away by that cold water, and when I came out I was gone. Something had been left inside that river and I am afraid that even if I manage to escape this place I will never be Nontle again. I don't think I will ever escape Soyama again, from here onwards I will forever be Soyama. I sat there listening to them telling me the dos and don'ts of this new role of mine on earth and I choked on my tears, I was being taught how to not live unless I am under Sokhaya's shadow.

And the sad part? There is nothing I can do

about it.

“Sorry sister.” I jump yelping, I had gotten lost in thoughts. That happens a lot these days.

“Yes.” I say blinking.

“Mlungu told me to tell you he might not be home tonight, he went to Mthatha.” He says and I nod.

Mthatha? You may wonder, that is where his long-term girlfriend lives and works. Seems like the exclusivity rule only applies to me. I know he won't be back so I stop what I am doing.

Tamkhulu is visiting some relatives and everyone else went back to their lives, turns out only Sokhaya and Tamkhulu live here but now I have become the ghost of this yard. I am not allowed to leave this yard without a shadow, can't be out for more than 3 hours unless I am in town. So like a prisoner, I am always wondering about this yard. I've even switched

the flight mode off but I am also not on any social network, watching my peers and friends live is hard.

I will have bread and eggs, what is the use of cooking if I will eat alone? Sokhaya will probably be away until tomorrow night.

Bam! I jump. Look around, must have been dreaming.

Bam! It goes off again. Now I jump out of bed and look around the hut but this is a rondavel with just a bathroom and a wardrobe, where would I hide? The guns just keep going off and like a rabbit I am jumping around the room looking for a hiding spot.

“Stop!” I stop in my tracks, I turn to find a tall man pointing a gun at me, I move my hand from the bathroom door handle and put them in the air. “So Sokhaya left his wife alone in this big

yard?" he says walking in.

"I am sorry." Why am I apologizing? Being the wife he hates?

"I must say he can choose." He says brushing the gun on my cheeks, "I might just enjoy myself before ending you. Nothing will kill him like knowing I didn't just kill you but ate on his plate too, and you begged me not to stop."

What is he....? Lord no! God no!

"Please, no. please." I am on my knees now, "Kill me, go ahead. Do it." He may as well free me from my misery but he must not rape me, he can't do that to me. He is unbuckling his belt, his trousers fall to his ankles and his dick dangles on my face. "Come on touch it, I know you want to." He says then puts his gun on my forehead, "Do it or I shoot you." He says.

"I'd rather d..."

Bang !!

Forced Love

Insert Nine

“Sisteri you cannot leave, please wait for Mlungu.” I swear I will jump onto this man if he doesn’t let me through this gate. I don’t know how I am getting back to Cape Town seeing it is Sunday and this is a village but I will hitchhike until I get there, as long as I am away from here.

“Do you see him? Is your Mlungu here? Wasn’t I the one who almost died?!!” I yell at the top of my lungs. I am sure the neighbours can hear me and the nearest neighbour is a good 15 or so minutes away.

“It won’t happen again.” He looks tired, well I have been screaming since last night telling them I am leaving and it is not even 5 am yet.

“Please go inside, it is not safe for you to be

standing in the middle of the yard.” Does he think I am safe inside? Where that man walked in and found me alone? And almost killed me?

“As if I am safe in there. Bhuti wabantu I am going home and you are not going to stop me. So tell your goons to open that door.” I say I am tired of yelling so I say it quietly this time.

“I will take it from here.” Oh! If it isn’t the husband of the year! The man looks so glad to see him and I am sure it is because his ears probably hurt like hell. “You are causing a scene.” He says.

“Well if your man would let me leave then I wouldn’t be making a scene.” I say.

“Go inside Soyama, this little show you are putting up isn’t helping anyone.” He says. I blink back tears, I almost died. I almost got shot, that man would’ve raped me.

“I hate you.” He just stares at me, “I hate you

and your whole family! I I ... I” My chest is closing off, I hold it trying to breathe but I can’t. he is saying something but I can’t hear him. My throat is closing off. My vision is becoming blurred.

I open my eyes and look around, I am met by the room I’ve woken up in a couple of times. My eyes land on the bathroom door and I jump off the bed screaming; the door is pushed immediately. Men carrying guns run in and start looking around.

“What are you doing here?” Sokhaya asks standing next to the door while I am shaking next to the dressing table.

“She screamed Mlungu.” One tells him.

“Leave.” Why is he so rude? “Are you okay?” like he cares.

“I’ll be fine.” I say looking at the spot that man

fell in. Everything happened so fast, one moment he was threatening to rape me the next he was dropping dead next to me and his blood all over my gown, I get on top of the bed and curl myself into a foetus position.

“Nxuba said you had a panic attack and that is normal after what you went through.” He says and I nod, hot tears streaming down my face. “Are you hungry?” I shake my head. “Okay. Rest.” He says and turns to walk away.

“Will they come back?” I whisper and I think he didn’t hear me but he stops.

“No, you are safe now. They won’t try anything now.” He says.

“Can you stay? Until I fall asleep?” I ask but I regret it the moment I ask him, “Or one of your guys could come and sit on the chair until I fall asleep.” I add.

“I’ll stay.” He says and walks back to the chair

and sits, he stares at me and I didn't ask him to come here and look at me like that. I turn around and sleep in the same position closing my eyes.

"He said he wanted to teach you a lesson." I sniff away my tears, "He was going to shoot me." A sob escapes my mouth, he wanted to kill me. Why am I so unlucky in life?

"You are safe now Soyama." I keep nodding but I don't believe him. I will never be safe as long as I am married to him, as long as people think I am the woman he loves and would die for. I will forever have a target on my back, whatever is going on between him and those men is too personal, the hatred in that man's eyes was too real. They will keep coming back over and over again until they've hurt him.

"They knew you were not here." I tell him before pulling the blanket over my head.

I wake up alone again, this time I don't scream but get off the bed, I am hungry. I can feel my stomach hurting from that pain. I am putting on my jacket when the door opens and I scream dropping it. "He is not here. He is not here. Please." I yell falling to my knees and putting my hands over my ears. "Please, don't hurt me." I keep screaming as someone hugs me from behind.

"Is she okay, Bhuti?!" I hear Asanda yell and I look around, it's Sokhaya and his sisters.

"Leave." He says, he still hasn't let me go and I am just sitting there listening to my heartbeat; "You are safe Soyama." He tells me.

"I am hungry." I say and he lets me go before getting to his feet, I pick up the jacket and put it on.

"Come, Asanda had cooked earlier." He tells me

and I nod, "Come." I let him lead me out of the house, we walk in the cold chills of the morning, I have no doubt it is the early hours of the morning. We walk into the main house through the kitchen door, Asanda is in the kitchen.

"Sisi, are you okay?" she asks. I nod, "I have your food, let me warm it up. Bhuti Tamkhulu asked you to go see him." She tells her brother.

"Okay." He says before walking out.

Asanda warms up my food in silence and I sit there in a daze, she pushes it to me then sit and watches me while I eat. "I am sorry." She finally says.

"I am fine." I lie.

"You don't have to lie; someone should've been here." She says.

"You couldn't be here; you were at school." I say, "And I am glad that you weren't." I'd never wish what I experienced on anyone, not even

Nomakrestu who hates me passionately.

“I wish you weren’t here, too. He could’ve killed you.” She says.

“Or...” the words get stuck in my throat.

“What did he do to you Sisi?” she asks.

“He wanted” fresh tears fall off my tears, “He was naked Asanda.” I say and she gasps and quickly come to my side to hug me and I sob.

“He had his trousers on his feet.” I sob.

“Did he touch you?” I jump at his voice and turn to find him standing at the door with Tamkhulu, “Soyama, did he rape you?” I shake my head and get off the chair.

“Makoti you need to tell us.” Tamkhulu says but I rush out of the house and run to where I sleep, I don’t want to talk about what happened. In the hut, I get into bed and pull the covers over my head before sobbing. I hear the door open and close then footsteps towards the door.

“Soyama, what did that man do?” he asks and I just sob, “Soyama!!” he shouts my name.

“What do you want to hear? That you were not here, that none of you were here and I was left to pay for your sins? Huh?! What do you want me to say? That I begged him to kill me just so he doesn’t rape me? Huh? That he had his dick in my face and a gun in my head? Telling me to touch him? Or do you want me to tell you that I would’ve done it because the gun was so cold on my forehead that I actually peed on myself?! Huh?!!” I yell.

He is quiet now.

I just hold the blanket tighter around me and sob, why did he force me? I didn’t want to speak about this, he should’ve let me be.

Forced Love

Insert 10

There is something heavy on my body, I try to move but it holds me tight. "I am sorry." He says holding me tight.

"Let go Sokhaya, I need to go make something to eat for you guys." I say.

"They have already eaten. Sleep." He says.

"Sleeping won't change anything. I won't spend my life under these blankets." I tell him.

"I will make them pay." He says.

"Then what? They come back and do more damage and then you'll go and attack them too? It is a vicious cycle; can't you see?" I ask.

"After I deal with them no one will ever think of coming here ever again, they didn't have to do that to you." He says, "You have nothing to do with any of this." He adds.

"I want to forget. That is all I want, erase that

man's smell and everything about him." I tell him.

"It will take time. I will get Nxuba to get you sleeping pills." He says.

"That won't change anything." I let him know.

"Maybe get you the brain doctor." He suggests, I shake my head. "What will make you forget?" he asks. Having my memory wiped maybe?

"Sex." I have thought about this while I turned and turned in this bed and I have decided sex will make me forget what almost happened to me, it will make me cope.

"Huh?"

"Sex Sokhaya. I want sex." I say.

"Tjoooh." I know exactly how he feels about me and that is why I don't want the sex from him.

"Not from you." I add, now he lets me go and sits up, I sit up too.

“Did that boy hit your head?” Really?

“You hate me, fine. I am not expecting sex from you, had I been in Cape town I’d have a hook-up lined up but I am here so I don’t know anyone here. But I will make a plan.” He looks modified but I’ve made up my mind. Sex has always helped me cope, always. When my older sister died, sex saw me through. When I lost my baby, sex was what helped me forget until the pain didn’t suffocate me. Until I could cope on my own.

“How many men have you slept with?” what does that have to do with this?

“I’m 26, I’ve been having sex since I was 18 so how many do you think?” I ask.

“You are my wife now; you can’t go sleeping around. Next thing you’ll come home pregnant.” He says.

“You are sleeping around too, next thing you’ll

come back here with many kids.” I shoot back.

“It is not the same.” He says, mxm! I get out of bed.

“Either way I am going to find someone. I was just doing you the courtesy of telling you.” I say and walk away, I need a shower so I can take the sleeping pills and sleep.

The water is so warm, it hits my skin so soft and I close my eyes but all I see is that man, his dirty smelly dick in my face. Okay, I let out a big breath, I can get rid of him, I just need to find a happy place. That is what Dr Tamryn said after Sihle died, that finding a happy place inside me will help me deal and that is what I’ll do. Until I can find my escape.

Hands touch my shoulder and I don’t jump, I still have my eyes closed and I am thinking of my graduation day, Sihle is coming towards me with a bunch of flowers and she has this huge

smile but I can't see her clearly. Her face is blurred now, I shoot my eyes open and turn my body around to find Sokhaya.

"I thought you wouldn't do it." I say.

"I am your husband. At some point, we will have to have sex." He tells me.

"Doesn't mean it has to be now." I say, "But I am not complaining." I say before standing on my toes to kiss him. This doesn't have to mean anything, and besides, I've done this numerous times, had sex with a man I don't care for, and discarded them. Some whose names I don't even remember. I break the kiss and look at him, "Are you clean?" he stares at me confused. "Do you have any STIs or HIV?" I ask.

"No. I am clean." He tells me and I drop to my knees, he is big, okay? But this is terminator after all, everything of his is big. Even his hands are big so I didn't expect anything less, it is

popping veins, that is how hard he is. I tease him a bit, kiss the tip before taking him all in and as expected it reaches my throat, and I almost gag. Almost! Phela, I'm a pro at this.

I move it up and down my mouth, move out to almost taking it all out then put it all out. I take it out, and lick it before taking the balls into my mouth while playing with the dick.

He is calling his late mom.

His big hands are about to break my skull but I'm a big girl so I soldier on. He lets out a big growl, tenses, holds my head much tighter, and his seed spills all over my breasts.

He is panting and seems like he is out of breath but I am not done with him, not by long shot. I get up and kiss him, he kisses me back, lifts me up so my legs are around his waist before putting me against the shower wall. It is slippery, "We will fall." I pant but he doesn't

answer me. Instead, he is sucking my breasts and his free hand is between us, he rubs my clit. Cold air hit my head instantly and I have lost reasoning now.

I am panting, holding onto his shoulders while my legs shake from the earth-shattering orgasm that has shuttered my world apart. He slips in, very slowly and calculated. "Sokhaya." I whisper as my walls stretch and I clench around him, I am still shaking from what just happened. He pulls until he is all out then slides back in.

Repeats this.

Then he moves slowly. I grab his butt and keep pushing him, helping him. "Rougher." I tell him.

And rougher is exactly what I get.

I am tired, I am sleepy and I can hardly keep my eyes open. Sokhaya lifts me up and we walk out to the bathroom with me in his arms and my arms tight around his neck. "You need to get

dressed.” He says.

“I need to sleep.” I can hardly say the words without yawning. “Thank you.” I say when he puts me down on the bed, I am not sure if for the sex or for getting me to bed. Might be the former though because he exhausted me, I might not need those sleeping pills after all.

“You look better today.” Asanda says and I laugh, I feel better. I did say sex will make me feel better and her brother is not that bad, he can do his thing.

“I feel better. Take this to by the kraal.” I say handing her a tray with two glasses. Just as she walks out my cell rings, it is back on. “Hey chomie.” I say.

“You are still alive? God is good.” Trust Lolo to be dramatic.

“Hayibo! I did say I will be busy.” I say.

“With what? For all we know you could be kidnapped by some gangsters.” She should consider being a sangoma because what is this? Spot on!

“I am okay. I have been just under the weather lately but I am fine. How are you guys?” I ask.

“Your mother said you are married.” She did, didn’t she?

“Long story.” I say.

“Make it short Nontle, you are married. Married? How? You were not even seeing anyone.” She says.

“Not now. One day I will tell you guys everything but not now, lets not fight Lolo please. I had the worst week of my life and I am finally feeling okay so lets not argue.” I say.

“Fine. Anyway I have news.” Of course she does.

“And I have time.” I will not be making dinner

until later on.

Forced Love

Insert Eleven

Asanda has left and again, it is just me and Sokhaya. Tamkhulu is gone again, something about visiting a friend, I feel like he is doing this on purpose too. His grandson has been spending a lot of time at the farm now, Mandla is looking after the livestock in the yard. He comes home when he thinks I am asleep, I always hear him drive in, and he always takes at least an hour before coming into the hut to sleep. We have had sex a couple of times since that day, he sometimes initiates it. In fact, he has been initiating it a lot lately but also he'd look the other way afterwards.

I will be honest, I don't know how to navigate

this, I have never had a booty call I sleep next to every night.

He hired more security. I have come to see more men I don't know in the yard.

Today is Sunday, he is at the farm again but today I am going to church with Nakhane and I always look forward to seeing her. Nakhane is a doctor and works at the local clinic, her husband works at the farm with Sokhaya and is his best friend.

"You look miles away." She says as we walk to the church.

"It's nothing." The lie comes easily, all my life I never really shared my issues with anyone but I've always solved everyone's issues.

"Come on, I can tell you are not fine. Tell you what, lets skip church. I have wine in my car, I know a place." She says already turning around.

Mandla always drops me off at church then

leaves and Nakhane would drop me off or he'd pick me up again. I follow behind her in disbelief. And true to her word once we are inside she drives off, "I know this whole arranged marriage must be hard on you, and this thing with your brother makes matters hard." I am almost faint from the shock.

"You know?"

"Our husbands are best friends, of course I do. But I don't care, you are here now, you are Sokhaya's wife and you are my friend, at least I see you as one." She says.

"I see you as one too. And I am glad you know, I am frustrated. This pretending is driving me crazy." I say.

"You guys will be fine, believe it or not arranged marriages are a thing around here." She says, "But we are not going to speak of those men, they are probably still at the farm." She says.

“Mlo works late too?” I ask.

“Yes. A crisis with shipment, Sokhaya isn’t avoiding you. He isn’t a coward, at least I don’t know him to be.” She says. She stops in a veld and we get off, we both take off our heels before she takes out a fleece and two bottles of wine. “We won’t stress, we will talk about random stuff. Shopping, latest fashion, gossip or whatever woman discuss.” She says.

“I need to go buy some wife appropriate clothes.” I tell her.

“Then we need to start shopping, don’t you think?” she gulps the drink and hand me the bottle. “I will get leave and we can go shopping in East London or PE. Your husband’s lackey can drive us.” She says.

“That one. You want to be followed around?” I ask.

“He will sit in a food spot or the car, andimoyiki

uMandla and you shouldn't too. He is all bark and no bite, just a lackey that follows Sokhaya around, just like Mavuso." Mavuso is her husband's driver, almost like Mandla.

"Mavuso respects you." I say.

"No. he is scared of me, you should stop acting like you did something wrong. You didn't. And those men in that yard should know." She says.

"As long as Sokhaya keeps his open affair, they will never respect me." I tell her.

"Oh that one? That could be fixable Soyama, you can get rid of that woman and get your husband but the question is do you want that?" Do I want that? What a huge question.

"The sex is good." She bursts into laughter.

"Sokhaya is actually a smart guy, I didn't expect that, he has this caring side that I like, and he is not that ugly." I tell her.

"Then we are getting Nandipha off the equation.

Step 1, shopping. You are going to take care of how you look, you are already having sex so lets add a few things to spice that up. Step 2, the farm, that farm is Sokhaya's baby and what you will do is get involved, you will show interest and help out wherever you can." Tjoooh so much work? All for a man?!

"Manual labour is not my thing, I am already struggling with house work." I tell her.

"Sokhaya and Mlo are trying to get a skills programme off the ground, you can get involved in that, help with that. Step 3, my mom always said the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, she never lied. Step 4, never ask about Nandipha, ignore that relationship and trust me, that will annoy him because you will be doing all the things a loving wife does but still not caring about what he does." She tells me.

"You seem to know what to do." I say.

“Well, I married Mlondoloji because my parents owed his parents money, they had taken a loan from them to pay for my degree. He was with some girl from Ziphunzana, anyway I did what I had to do. And we are celebrating ten years next month.” She says.

“Tjoooh, I didn’t know.” I say.

“Well, you could always share him with her, every time you pop a child she will pop hers, every decision you and Sokhaya make will revolve around her, their plans.” She says, “Think about it.” She tells me.

We have been sitting here for hours, Nakhane even called some children who were passing to go get us a carry pack of savannah. We are chatting about random stuff right now, Mlo called and she told him we went out.

She takes her cell and laugh, “Look at the time.

Whoa, yazi kotyiwa ntoni?" she giggles and I giggle too looking at the time. It is already half-past seven. My phone rings, Sokhaya's name flashes on the screen and I show it to her, we both burst into laughter. Dang! I am so drunk.

"Zondwa." I answer and Nakhane falls to her back laughing.

"Soyama, don't Zondwa me, where are you?" he sounds angry, this is funny. "You are ... Soyama are you drunk?" I laugh again.

"You sound angry terminator." Nakhane is rolling with laughter. I cannot believe how fast we got drunk. We only had two bottles of white dry wine and well, two 330 ml savannahs each, not much.

"God! Unxilile, didn't you leave here going to church?" he asks.

"Well, plans change." I say.

"Give Nakhane the phone." I hand it to the

giggling fool next to me.

“Madiba Emaqaqeni.” She says and hands it back to me but the call is already cut. “Seems like we have destinated drivers.” She says shrugging.

“He sounded angry.” I say.

“I will open my last savannah as we wait, don’t mind that one. They will be strong.” She says, well opening another savannah sounds like a good idea.

Getting drunk seemed like a good idea but now I can’t stand straight, Nakhane is stumbling to her laughing husband. Mine? My husband is staring at me in disbelief. “Soyama?” he sounds shocked as I walk to him, trying so hard to not fall. “What did you two drink?” at least he doesn’t sound angry now that he actually opens his mouth.

“I can’t walk, will you help your wife?” I ask standing on one place. I’ve tried, I’ve failed. He walks toward me, put his arm around my waist and I lean on him as we walk to the car.

“See you Kusasa!!” Nakhane calls as she is helped into her car.

“Bye bestie!!” I yell back.

Sokhaya helps me into the car and gets on his side then look at me, “Kodwa Mkam what will I do with you?” he asks looking at me.

“I don’t know Madiba, have you eaten? I will make you something.” I say.

“You are too drunk to cook, I ate don’t worry. We can just go to sleep.” He tells me.

“Okay. But I am hungry, I haven’t eaten since breakfast.” I tell him.

“No wonder you are this drunk Soyama, I will make you something to eat.” He promises.

Forced Love

Insert Twelve

My head!

Oh, my damn head!

“Morning.” Why is he so loud, I open my eyes, sit up still holding the side of my head. “Don’t drink that much if you can’t handle it.” Yha Nakhane and I went to wild there, lord what was on those wines of hers? I am only 26, it’s too early for me not to be able to handle my alcohol. “I made coffee, drink it and the pills. I will be at the kraal.” He says.

“Okay. Umm Sokhaya, how did I get here?” I remember us driving home, not coming to the hut, not changing into this nightdress. I swore to never wear this short thing in this room

anymore.

“I had to carry you in, dress you up and all.” He says, just as he is at the door he stops, “Also I’m old Soyama, I will not have a drunkard for a wife. Don’t embarrass me.” And he walks out.

Sigh!

At least he made me coffee. And it is too strong! I drink it though, I have to if I want to make it out of this bed this morning. My phone rings, an unknown number, what now? Should’ve put it back to flight mode.

“Soyama Ndaba hello.” I answer.

“Glad you still remember who you are Soyama Ndaba.” Wait ... is that? Is that Si’Nomandiya? I jump out of bed as if she can see me.

“Sisi?” I am sweating right now.

“Nyinyi? Soyama ungumfazi okanye inkazana?” she sounds angry and this is the first time we

ever spoke.

“I am a wife, sisi.” I feel like a small child being reprimanded in the principal’s office.

“Then behave as such Soyama, behave as someone’s wife. We have a name, a name that you will not drag through the mud you hear me? If you were a known drunkard where you come from, you will not be that here.” She says.

“I am sorry.” I say.

“Behave yourself.” And the call ends. I sit back down and tears fall off, why are they making such a big deal out of this? Yes, I drank but we were on some secluded hill, he picked me up from there, I didn’t even go to the local tarven! A few savannahs and he called his sister on me? Maybe Nandipha can have him.

He walks in, his boots full of mud, it is raining outside and I am making something for lunch.

Scrubbing the cupboards, he looks at me but says nothing. Takes off the boots and put them by the door and goes to the fridge.

“How is your head?” he asks.

“Fine.” I reply.

“Should I send Mandla to buy dinner? I thought you’d want to rest.” He says.

“I’m okay. I’m the wife so I’ll do my work.” I tell him. He walks out without saying anything further.

I move from the cupboard to the fridge, I will clean this damn kitchen like this, every day, so that when they come home they will see I am taking pretty good care of their home.

Lunch is done. I’ve dished up and Sokhaya has been in the living room, I don’t get why he is not on the farm. Maybe he is scared I will go and get drunk, he shouldn’t worry himself.

“Sokhaya, tell me.” I say standing over him as he has his food and he looks up, “When are you taking a second wife?” he chokes on his food and I wait.

“Se ... second what? Soyama what are you talking about?” he asks.

“Yes. A second wife. Get a second wife Sokhaya, a wife who will be perfect so your sisters will get off my case.” I tell him.

“My sisters? Soyama what happened? What are you talking about?” he asks.

“You know who you called. You know Sokhaya, the wife you and your family want? I cannot be her. 1, I am 26 years old. Number 2, I’ve never been married before so I don’t know how to be a wife. 3, I don’t even know you and I am still trying to know the man I married. 4, I have never been a ‘yes ma’am’ ‘yes, sir’ woman so I will never be that. In case none of you noticed, I was

thrown in the deep end here, and every day I am forever trying to swim to the shore. One moment I was doing the work I love and happy with my life, the very next I was here being a housewife who does the same thing ever fuckin' day." I say and breathe, he is just staring at me. "Yesterday? Yesterday may have embarrassed you but I needed yesterday, I needed to sit like that with another woman and laugh at stupid things while getting sloshed, you and your sister may disapprove but I needed that." I tell him.

"What sister? Soyama what are you talking about?" he asks.

"Now I will go lie down. You think of getting a wife that will please you and your sister, I am not her. I give you my blessings." I turn around and walk out.

The front door opens and Sokhaya walks in with Tamkhulu, I get up quickly to greet him.

“Soyama, how are you?” he asks holding my hand.

“I am fine, how were the relatives?” when he left he said he is off to meet some relatives but Asanda thinks he is dating and was on some beacation. Apparently she called a few relatives, he wasn't there.

Sneaky old man!

He smiles, “They were good my dear.” This old man. “Soyama will you make your old man tea?” and he still loves tea.

“Of course, Bhuti ka Asanda you want tea too?” He stares at me, nothing annoys him like this Bhuti ka Asanda business but that is what his sisters said I should call him, I am being a good wife right now.

“Coffee is fine.” He says and I walk away. My

phone rings just as I put on the kettle.

“Is the battle over?” Nakhane is annoying, very. And in a good way.

“No. Far from it.” She laughs and I laugh too.

“Mlo and I will join you for dinner, should I bring wine?” she asks.

“Tamkhulu is home.” I tell her.

“Whoa that one, he is thirsty too. I will bring wine, meat and salads. You make rice.” She says.

“I am the host, let me cook.” I say.

“I have a helper, you don’t. Besides she will be cooking for the kids too.” She tells me.

“Then 7pm sharp.” I say.

“We will be there twenty minutes early.” She tells me, “Let me go inject some oldies.” She ends the call. See why she is annoying? No hello, No Goodbye, just vibes.

I take the tray of tea to the living room and Tamkhulu and his grandson seem to be in deep conversations, "Makoti sit." He says.

Okay. Okay, I was going to give them privacy, I sit anyway. "Is everything okay?" I ask.

"That is what I want to know, Sokhaya says you two have some problems." He says.

"We do? Bhuti ka Asanda we have problems?" I ask looking at him, things have never been this exciting since I got here, annoying Terminator proves to be joyful.

"See? Why am I bhuti ka Asanda all of a sudden? I swear Tamkhulu I will grow grey hair, this child you brought me is giving me headache." He sounds so annoyed.

"Then I will just call you bhuti, is that fine, Bhuti Sokhaya?" I ask crossing my legs.

"Kanti Soyama what is going on? I am too old for this, just be straight with each other please."

Tamkhulu says.

“Ask her. Just last week I was being told to get a second wife, now I am being called Bhuti ka Asanda, she wakes up at 5 am Tamkhulu, wears these hideous sleeping night dresses.”

“Okay. Don’t tell me about your bedroom.”

Tamkhulu looks terrified and I want to laugh, “Soyama, you want to bump into ghosts? 5 am?” okay maybe 5 am was not one of my brightest ideas but Sokhaya loves morning sex, he isn’t getting it. He is grumpy, works for me. He might get a heart attack from all the grumpiness.

“Well Tamkhulu I am being a good wife seeing he will not get one to be a good wife. He is the one who complained to Sisi about me not behaving how a wife should, well I am.” I say.

“See? I don’t know what she is talking about.”
He says.

“Didn’t you call Siphokuhle’s mom to complain about me?” I ask.

“No. Why would I do that?” he asks.

“Well your sister called me about something you knew about, she complained about my outing with Nakhane.” I say.

“Sokhaya? Don’t I always tell you to try to sort your issues with makoti together? Why call your sister over such a petty matter?” Tamkhulu asks and he takes out his phone and dial, it rings. He put it on loud?

“Mntaka tata.” Sisi answers on the other side.

“Did you and Soyama have a fall out?” I want to run, why is he putting me on the spot?!

“No. Not that I know of.” She replies.

“Maka Samkelo, you called my wife about her going out with Nakhane, something I knew about and didn’t have a problem with. Why?” he

asks.

“You didn’t have a problem? Well, Mandla called...”

He doesn’t let her finish, “So you have Mandla spying on us?” he asks.

“Utheni na Sokhaya? Impundu zalomntana ziyakuphambanisa?” she sounds upset.

“That is not your business. Were you not the one who asked me to make this work? Well we are doing our best, put your dog down or I will deal with him.” He says.

“Whatever, I have patients to deal with. You deal with your lapdog, tell Soyama I said sorry if the information I got was wrong.” She says.

“Call her, you have her numbers.” He ends the call and get up, “I am going to the farm, I have work.” He tells us and walk out.

“There you have it ke makoti. Seems like you

were in the wrong this time, child.” Tamkhulu says getting up. “I will go lie down.” He says.

Fuck Mandla.

I dial Nakhane when Tamkhulu is out of earshot. “Mandla called sisi.” I say immediately.

“What? Yhooo, do you need poison? For Mandla that is.” Sometimes I want a few minutes in Nakhane’s head.

“Sokhaya is angry and off to the farm, what should I do?” I ask.

“Give him sex.” Hebanna!

“Nakhane be serious.” I say.

“You have been giving him the cold shoulder, wear a nice little number and a coat then go see him.” She says.

“This idea is all great but your husband is probably in that office.” I say.

“Leave taka Sanele to me.” She says and I laugh.

“Okay. Hope it works.” I say.

“He has blue balls wherever he is, it will work.”
She sounds certain.

“I doubt, just because Nandipha is in Mthatha it doesn’t mean he wouldn’t have made a plan.” I say.

“Have faith on the guy please.” Nakhane thinks Sokhaya and I will be like her and Mlondolozzi, but as much as I wouldn’t mind it, I don’t see it also.

Why did I start liking the guy?

Forced Love

Insert Thirteen

This place is huge, and so many people work here. Many are greeting and smiling at me as I make my way to the office and some are just

glaring at me. I knock softly, "Come in!" he shouts. I breathe and open the door, he gets to his feet immediately, "Did something happen at home?" he asks.

"No. Everything is fine, I came to see you." I say closing the door behind me and looking around. Mlondolozzi isn't here.

"Oh, sit. I will get Nobuhle to get you tea."
Nobuhle?

"Nobuhle?" I ask.

"Yes. You look jealous." He says.

"No, I am not. We need to talk, I am sorry for everything." I am no longer feeling like sex anymore, not on a desk that Nobuhle has been probably spread on.

"It is fine but know I am not some little boy who hides behind his sisters." He says.

"I know now. What are you busy with? Nakhane

was telling me you are trying to start a literate programme.” I say.

“Yes, harder than I thought it would be. I might just have to ask one of the girls to play their part.” He says.

“Let me help, I have nothing I am busy with anyway.” I say.

“You know that would be helpful, I am too swamped I don’t have time for this.” He says.

“You can give me your plan, I will go over it.” I say.

“Over there.” He points at a desk behind him, I get up and walk there. “Soyama, what are you wearing beneath this coat?” Lord! I know God was never on my side because I was not supposed to give him time to even think of how my legs are all out in this knee length coat.

“Your skirts are not this short.” He is on his feet now.

What was my sin? I married such an old man who is probably going to see nothing sexy about this.

“A lingerie.” I reply after a long sigh.

“Yet I have not seen it.” He has this mischievous smile on his face, he is just a horny old man.

I thought setting up the foundation would be easy, I can only wish! People here do not trust strangers. I am struggling a bit, to even get them to be willing to participate in the project, yet it is here to help them.

My cellphone rings under the pile of paper, probably Mandla who has forgotten what I sent him to get.

But no.

An unknown number.

Am I not fed up with unknown numbers?

“Soyama Ndaba hello?” I hope whoever it is will get to the point.

“Sisi I cannot reach bhuti.” Okay, I don’t know who is this between Andisiwe and Nomfundo.

“Who am I speaking to?” I ask, I am too exhausted for the guessing game.

“Yhoo, sorry. It is Andisiwe.” She tells me, “Look, it is important to reach him. Is he home?” she asks.

“No, he must have left 20 minutes ago. He and Mlo have a meeting somewhere.” I tell her.

“God! Do you know which burner phone he took? I cannot play guessing now there is no time.”
Burner phone? Why would he use a burner phone?

“Burner phone? Why would he use that?” I ask.

“Oh God! He hasn’t told you? Jesus, kanti unjani

uSokhaya? Do you have Nakhane's numbers?
She will know." She says.

"Nakhane? I will call her." I say.

"Tell her they are about to walk into a trap." She says.

"Cool." I say and end the call then call the two-faced bitch.

"Mam'uNdaba." She answers.

"Tell your men they are about to walk into a trap." I say.

"Trap? Baby?" she must not try and play me.

"Drop the act, Andisiwe called." I say.

"Shit! Babe, he was ..."

I cut her, "I don't care. Just stop them." I end the call and put the phone on silence once I have sent a text to Andisiwe.

I don't know why I even bother with Sokhaya,

with him it is one step forward then ten steps backward. He actually made me believe that he was honest with me, we lay all our cards in the table only a month back.

When those men came to shoot here he told me that it was over the farm business, there was a fight over customers. I believed it.

I mean I have seen things happen in the construction business, certain people dying in unexplainable ways, people getting assassinated over tenders so I believed this.

And Nakhane? Isn't she my friend? She didn't even say anything by mistake.

None of them trust me.

Well, I will try and keep myself out of their circle.

I take my phone and dial Lolo, I need to laugh.

"Nontle, hey." She answers like she has been waiting for my call.

“Babe, how are you?” I ask.

“I am fine. You sound down.” She says and tears fall off.

“Have you ever felt like you don’t belong somewhere?”

“Your husband’s family?” she asks, I had to tell Lolo I am married and it was arranged, she isn’t aware of the full details though. She thinks it was my late grandfather’s dying wish that I decided to finally honour.

“Not just the family, the whole community. These people will never accept me, they don’t trust me. Him and his friends, even the friends I thought I have made so far.” I tell her.

“Come home.” She says.

“I can’t.” I wish I could, I wish I could just pack my bags and leave but I can’t. The reality is if Sokhaya and I cannot fall in love and make this work then we are going to live the rest of our

lives as complete strangers who just have to exist in each other's lives.

"Why? Surely if this does not work you can come back." How I wish it was that simple.

"I promised to give it a year, it hasn't even been six months." I tell her, "Come on Lolo fill me in, what has been happening?" I say.

"You will need to add everyone else to the call, a lot has been happening." She says.

"Well say no more."

Forced Love

Insert Thirteen

A knock at the door disturbs me and I sit up, "Hold on guys, come in!" I call to the door and Xolani, one of the guards, comes in.

“Mah, you need to come out. There is someone here for bhuti.” He says.

“Who is that now? I am tired Xolani.” I tell him, I was hoping it was Mandla, I am hungry.

“Ma please come.” And he bolts out, mxm! I seem to have managed to scare Xolani, if he doesn't stutter around me he runs off, it is both hilarious and annoying.

“Guys, I have to go. I love you.” I end the call and get off the bed.

There is a boy who must be 16 if I am not mistaken with a small duffle bag at hand standing in the middle of the yard.

“Hi.” I say and he nods, “I am Soyama, the lady of the house. You are?” Tamkhulu is off again to whatever thing he is busy with again and Sokhaya is out so I am very sceptical.

“I am Phumlani, Sokhaya's son.” I become lightheaded instantly. He said son?

Kanti how many secrets does this man have?

“Okay, come.” Xolani looks at me shocked.

“Ma, shouldn’t we wait for bhuti?” he asks.

“Wait where? In the cold? Sugula Xolani.” I say, “Call Mandla and tell him I am planning to eat tonight so he better hurry.” I say and lead the way.

We are inside the house and Phumlani is looking around, “Where are you from?” I finally ask.

“Cofimvaba.” He says and I nod.

“Are you hungry? I sent Mandla to buy me food but I swear he got there and was asked to kill the chickens and fry them.” I say and he chuckles a bit. “I will make you bread.” I say.

“Thank you.” At least he has manners, I walk to the kitchen and put on the kettle firstly.

“How old are you Phumlani?” I ask.

“17 years.” I’m I’m ... I’m nine years older than him? One day a person my age will walk in that gate and they will be my stepchild, I knew marrying an old man was going to be an issue.

“Phew! You are old.” I hear myself say.

Mandla arrives with the food and tries to interrogate Phumlani but I send him out telling him if he calls anyone before I speak to Sokhaya I will actually deal with his mending ass. He is not happy with that, I don’t care.

A car pulls up outside and I jump and run out.

“I can explain.” He says.

“Your son is here.” I say and he looks at me confused, “He is having dinner inside.” I say.

“Someone said they are my son and you let them inside the house?” he looks angry at me.

“Ungalinge undinyusele impumlo mna, tshini.” I say and turn around, the nerve!

He follows me inside and Phumlani is putting away the plate he used when we walk in. They stare at each other, "Who are you?" Sokhaya asks.

"Your son." Phumlani says folding his arms and stare back.

"I will go like down, your food is on the microwave." I tell Sokhaya.

"No, stay." He says pulling a chair.

A minute has passed.

They are staring at each other, either one not backing down.

"Your mother told you your father is here?" Sokhaya asks.

"Well she cannot do that from the grave." He says taking out something from his pockets, "She left this instead." He pushes a picture towards him. It is a picture of him, about

Phumlani's age, at the back written, 'You've always wanted to know your father, this is him.' And details of where to find him at the back. He looks at it.

"Tell me, who was your mother?" He does not know who he was sleeping with at that age? God!

"Nosizwe from Cofimvaba." He says.

And I think it dawns to him.

"I didn't know about him." This hut is too small for both us.

"What did I say? Can you move?" I ask.

"Soyama you are wearing the bear again." Also why is he calling my onsie a bear? He must not annoy.

"Well, get used to this bear. Yiqhele because it is here to stay." I say.

“I was going to tell you.” He says.

“Oh? I thought you didn’t know about him.” I say.

“Not about him, Nosizwe never told me. But about our side business.” He says.

“Oh that? Don’t tell me your business, I am not your wife like that, go tell Nandipha.” I say,

“Speaking of which tell her we have a stepson.” I say throwing a pillow his way.

“Na ... ? Soyama what must I do with these?” he asks.

“You are sleeping on the floor taka Phumlani, I don’t want you in my bed.” I tell him, “When you are done standing there, switch off the lights. I want to sleep. I have an early morning.” I say.

Nakhane looks my way but says nothing.

She can’t. We are amongst other women, part of wife duties. When there is umsebenzi all the

young wives in the village go and help out,
manual labour just for getting married. Phew!

“Soyama, we have to serve tea.” No we don’t! I
take the tray and she carries the teapot,
“Chomie please let me explain.” She says.

“I am not interested Nakhane.” I hiss.

“He was supposed to tell you everything, it was
his place not mine. And I had given him an
ultimatum, he said he will after this deal.” Now
we are standing outside the house we are
supposed to be serving tea in.

“I have bigger issues than your secrets Nakhane,
Sokhaya’s son arrived last night.” I say walking
in.

“Sokhaya has a son?” she hisses in my ear as
we start serving tea.

“Kanene whose wife are you?” an old woman
asks.

“Ngumakoti wakwa Ndaba, Soyama what are you saying?” Nakhane blantly dismisses the old woman.

“You are married to Moses’ grandson?” the old woman refuses to give up.

“Yes.” I nod walking away, “Yes. He is 17, he arrived last night. His mother is late.” I say as we continue with the serving.

“Dr, how are the kids and husband?” another woman asks Nakhane. She hates serving tea because of this.

“Everyone is fine, Madlamini. Soyama, what will you do?” she asks as we quickly move away from the woman before she asks more questions, “A 17 years old? Yhoo! God must never test me, ever. How are you supposed to mother the child?” she asks.

“Mother? Me? I am supposed to? Nandipha will do that.” I tell her.

Finally we are done!

We follow each other.

“Don’t annoy me Soyama, come.” We put the things in the kitchen then she pulls me to the far end of the yard. “After everything you have done to make this marriage work? You are going to give up just like that? Because of one thing?” she asks.

“You all kept me in the dark Nakhane, I am not forcing things.” I say.

She sighs, “Soyama, this isn’t like the farm. This is way bigger than that. Look, at first after the shooting at your place the fear was you would use this to blackmail Sokhaya and the family.” Damn right I would have. “Then after the lie he told you, and you guys getting close. Mlo and I getting close to you, we were scared you will hear the whole truth and run off.” She says.

“Do I look like someone who has the option to

run off? I ask.

“He is scared Soyama, he is scared to lose you.” She says looking at the kraal, that is where Mlo and Sokhaya are with other men of the village.

“Sokhaya does not care about losing me.” I say.

“You really haven’t realised the odds have changed? You really see no change in Sokhaya?” she asks and I sigh, I see it. That is what is scaring me, it scares me to the core.

“I don’t know what I want Nakhane, what will change? His sisters hate me, my brother, my brother did what he did. How are we supposed to be in love?” I ask.

“You cannot have all the answers Soyama. Go with the flow.” She says and I laugh quietly, tears falling off.

“That is the thing, I don’t know how to go with the flow. All my life I have been in control, in control of everything. I am a fixer Nakhane, and

ever since I got here I've been out of control. My feelings are the only thing I've been in control of." I say.

"I know. I know." She says holding my hands.

"Don't ruin your make-up, you know those fools are watching." She says and I chuckle. How she dislikes people she grew up with so much is beside me.

"Waterproof." I say and she laughs.

"Of course it is." She says.

"Nakhane can you please borrow me my wife?"
where did he come from?

"Be fast, I need a friend there." She says
pointing at where we were busy cooking earlier
on.

"Are you okay?" he asks and I nod wiping tears,
"You are crying Soyama, did I hurt you that bad?
It wasn't my intention." He says.

“I know, you wanted to protect yourself. I get it. I am super emotional these days but I will be okay.” I tell him.

“Come, lets go. I will tell you everything.” He says.

“I can’t. We are still busy now, besides I must start taking these things serious now. We have a son.” I say and he smiles.

“Okay but we have to talk tonight, you have to listen to me and hear me out.” He says.

“Deal. Have you called family?” I ask.

“I will, once we receive the DNA tests. That is where we went this morning.” He says and I nod, he’d be stupid to just accept a child he is not certain about and Sokhaya is not a fool.

“Let me go back to the others.” I tell him.

“Fine.” He says, “Also, umhle mkam.” He says before walking away. Now I am a blushing

mess.

Forced Love

Insert Fifteen

He stops the car and I look at him, “We left a child alone the whole day.” I remind him.

“Phumlani is 17, he can manage alone.” He says, tjoooh! He must ask me where unattended boys end up, it is never a good idea not to parent.

“And I have a lot to explain to you. Allow me.” He says.

“I think the timing and place sucks, but go ahead.” I say.

“You know we run a farm, the farm supplies a lot of supermarkets with vegetables, we sell livestock too. But with the economy, at some point things got very hard, very bad we almost

lost everything.” I nod, “That was when I got into gun smuggling. Mlo and I had to do something to save the farm that our grandparents worked hard to build, so we sell guns.” He says.

“Guns? You supply countries at war with guns? Sokhaya?! Do you know what you are doing? How many people die from this?” I am shocked. Children die in war, killed by terrorists that buy guns illegally and he is giving them the ammunition to kill all those women and children?

“I don’t ask my clients why they need guns, I get them guns. And even if I don’t someone else will.” He says.

“Then let them. People die Sokhaya, they die.” I say.

“You say it like I kill them, I don’t.” he says.

“Doesn’t mean you don’t play a role. Does the family know?” what am I asking? Of course they do, they are killers.

“They found out two years ago. Tamkhulu caught me and well he told everyone, they made a big deal then made peace with it.” He says.

“Tjoooh.” I hold my forehead and look out the window.

I put the dishes in a dishwasher and sigh, this week has passed in a dazed, I was just not sure whether I am coming or going, a mess to say the least. Sokhaya is a killer. And then there is a bug I seem to have caught, an annoying bug too.

“Soyama.” I look up and he sighs, “Phumlani and I are going to the doctor for the results. Do you want to come along, maybe you can get something for this stomach issue you have.” He says.

“I’m okay, I woke up feeling a lot better.” I lie, I just vomited a while ago. He looks at me like he doesn’t trust what I am saying.

“Do you need anything in town?” he asks.

“Buy beef, we’ve run out.” I say, “Have you called Tamkhulu about Phumlani?” I ask.

“I will today, I wanted to be sure.” He says.

“Okay. Good luck then.” I tell him. He walks towards me and kisses my forehead, I just brush his upper arm.

“I hope we can go back to the last few weeks.” He says.

“I do too.” I tell him and honestly I do too. What we were doing was untagged but we were happy, I can say that. We were on sync and I actually looked forward to our coffee evenings, just sitting with him having coffee and just chatting. But I don’t know how to now, how does one go back to that after what he relieved?

“I’ll see you.” He says and walk out. I sigh and take out my phone from my pocket and dial Si’Nomandiya, she said she’ll be there as my

advisor then she should.

“Soyama, hello.” By the way she never called to apologise but I will let it slide.

“Hello sisi how are you?” I hope she won’t be rude, I need someone to advise me now, maybe she will tell me to go home.

“I am good and you?” she asks.

“I am well, well sort of. Sisi Sokhaya told me what is going on, his side business.” The line goes silent for a moment.

“And you are terrified?” she asks.

“Yes. I don’t know how to feel.” He says.

“You knew he is a murderer when you came to the family, I mean you knew we were capable of that because we threatened your brother. What is the difference now?” she asks.

“He is my husband, he It is not the same as it was when I came here.” I say going to sit down.

“You have fallen in love with my brother?” she asks.

“I see him more than just my hostage husband, we have grown close.” I explain.

“Then Soyama decide what this means for you two, it is either you go back to being the hostage bride or you accept this part of his life and you two continue with whatever it is you are doing.” She says.

“I was hoping you’d be more specific, like tell me what to do.” She laughs.

“Mntaka Dlomo! Are you a zombie? When you two changed the rules you didn’t tell me, now you are involving me? Andizingeni. Tell me, what happened to his relationship with Nandipha?” I didn’t call her to be a sore on my ass.

“I don’t know.” I say.

“Sunyaba apha Soyama, end this triangle.

However you came to this family, you are family now, and we are on your side. When you have had enough call a family meeting and we will end this nonsense.” She says.

“For real?” I am shocked.

“Yes. Ungumfazi wethu, Soyama.” She says.

“Then if I cannot solve it on my own then I will hit you up. Also there is another issue, not bad news though.” I say.

“Oh? What is it?” she asks.

“You are about to be an aunt.” I say.

“You are pregnant?” what? No!

“No! No! It is not me. A 17 years old boy arrived, claims to be his son. They went to get the DNA results but I think it is just a formality, that boy is his son.” I say.

Doesn't she start ululating? I have to move the phone from my ear before I lose my hearing. “I

am coming. I will call my nanny, I am coming.”

Haibo!

“Sisi, please wait for him to call.” I say.

“For what? Heh! Soyama I am leaving work in 30 minutes and I am coming.” Jesus.

“Okay but please don’t tell anyone else, lets let him break the news.” I say.

“Okay, I can do that. Bye ntombi.” And she does not wait for me, the caller, to reply. Now I have to make a full meal, and cook more because who say she will not call her sisters? I swear Sokhaya is going to hate me for this.

Forced Love

Insert Sixteen

They walk in, laughing. With more plastics of food than I thought.

“Mkam.” Sokhaya hugs me tighter than he should, “He is my son.” Well he could’ve paid me to tell him that.

“I knew that. Phumlani, how do you feel?” I ask looking at the beaming Phumlani who is unpacking the stuff they bought, there is cake.

“Relieved.” I am glad he is. “So I call you what? Sisi? Mama? Aunty?”

“Whatever feels right.” I reply but I am 26 lord, 26! I cannot have a person 9 years younger than me call me mama.

“Then I will call you sisi.” He says and I smile, that’s a relief! “We got cake and some fruits.” He says.

“Have you called Tamkhulu?” I ask Sokhaya.

“Can I go to my room? I need to call my mom’s sister.” He says and we both nod.

“I called everyone on the way but I get the

feeling sisi knew, in fact she is on her way.” He says.

“Well, we spoke earlier. I kind of let it slip.” I say.

“I knew it was you. Let me help you cook.” He say.

“Lets have coffee first, I made it the last time.” He looks at me and smiles, I sit on the counter while he goes and put on the table.

Sokhaya and I started having coffee together after that incident, we would speak about random stuff and that is how it moved from sex to something, where emotions got involved. It became a routine, unless he is busy. Coffee afternoons/evenings became our thing, and I love them, I never thought I would enjoy having coffee this much.

“We got muffins, bran for you.” He says.

“I want chocolate ones.” He looks at me and shake his head. “What?” I ask.

“Nothing. I’ll give you chocolate and have bran muffin.” He says. “How is your stomach?” he asks.

“I am less nausea now, I’ve been okay throughout the day.” I say.

“Maybe it was just a passing bug.” He says.

Finally he is done and puts everything in front of me, “Lets speak then Mkam.” He says looking at me. I first bite the muffin and smile, exactly my heart’s desire! Mmmmhhhh, I take another one and the smile keeps getting wider.

“Mmmmhhh, I hope the cake is chocolate, this is heaven.” I say.

“You are enjoying it.” He says, “I will be sure to buy you more chocolate muffins.” He promises and I smile.

“I thought about it, your side gig, and I can live with it. It is a part of who you are, not a definition of you or all of you. It is a part I do not

really like but there are so many I like and I will focus on those.” I say.

“Really? Thank you.” He says immediately.

“Don’t thank me yet, there are a few things I want in turn.” He nods rapidly, “You and Mlo need to find a way to separate the two, move this business from the farm. You don’t want to lose your family’s legacy when this shit gets bad.” I say.

“We will.” He promises.

“Good. Your affair, Sokhaya I cannot compete with your years. If we are to give this marriage a chance then I will not be in competition with anyone.” I say.

“Nandipha and I ended a month back, it proved to be hard to keep two women happy.” He says and I nod, “I want us to start on a clean slate, starting with your parents.”

“Nope. I want nothing to do with that mess.” I

say getting up.

“Haibo, coffee evening is over like that?” he asks getting up too, “Okay, we don’t have to talk about your family now.” Good.

And they’ve arrived!

Everyone is here, laughing, cooking. Sokhaya had to save Phumlani from hundreds of questions from everyone, his aunts want to know everything. Even the colour of the underwear he is wearing now. It is very funny.

“Soyama where are the spices?” Nomakrestu asks, they are in charge of cooking and I am just gracing them with my beautiful presence.

“Top shelf in the grocer cupboard.” I reply. I am chatting with Nakhane online and she is busy dissing them.

“I don’t understand why they had to be moved,

they were actually okay right where they were.” She says and I just roll my eyes.

“I will go find Sokhaya and Phumlani.” I say getting up and walk out. I am not in the mood for them and their nonsense, if they keep annoying me I might just ask that their brother buys a house in town and move there.

I find him leaning against a car watching Phumlani in the kraal, “He looks cute, doesn’t he?” I ask and he smiles.

“I don’t know where to begin to father him, this is so confusing.” He says and I laugh lightly.

“You will figure something out. It looks like he loves animals like you do.” I say.

“They are turning your kitchen upside down?” he asks and I sigh, I wonder when they are leaving.

“They should be out of here in two days. I am sure Nomakrestu’s husband will call before she even has her third dream tonight.”

“They should hurry. I am not in the mood to deal with their underhanded comments. Your sister is complaining over spices.” I tell him and he laughs, “Don’t laugh TakaPhumlani.” I say.

“Taka Phumlani? Don’t start Soyama.” He says and I laugh.

“I am not. I just called you what you are, you are Taka Phumlani after all.” I say.

“With you one never knows. Lets go, its cold here, that show of yours is playing right?” he asks.

“Yes. Phumlani!! Don’t stay long, its cold!!” I yell following behind him.

His sisters are chatting and laughing in the kitchen when we walk in, “Go, I will go get us snacks.” He says.

“Oh we’ve run out. Your sister ate them.” The moment Nomakrestu got here she started eating the snacks we had in the kitchen.

“Even my chocolates?” Sokhaya has a sweet tooth, he always keeps chocolates everywhere, “Mxm. She is annoying.” He says sitting next to me.

I switch on the television and lean on him, he puts his arm around me.

They walk in, “The food is ready.” Asa says.

“We will eat here.” Sokhaya replies.

“I want to watch news.” Nomakrestu says sitting next to me and taking the remote.

“We don’t watch news here.” Sokhaya tells her, everyone else goes silent and I keep minding my business.

“Sisi here is your food. Bhuti, here is your food.” Asa says serving us our food, feels good to be served. I sit up straight, Phumlani walks in.

“Your food is in the kitchen Phumlani.”

“Yheee Soyama, you look a bit happy now.”

Si'Nomandiya says.

"I am." I reply looking at Sokhaya who smiles back at me.

"I am glad yazi, you remember when she first came here? Yhoo, Makazi thought we were about to kill her." Nomfundo says, well they were.

"No need to bring all that up, we are okay now, right Bhuti?" Andisiwe says.

"Yes." Sokhaya replies.

They go on to make small chats with Phumlani, asking him about his life and what he likes.

They are really excited about him, they should be he looks really like a very good boy.

Forced Love

Insert Seventeen

The door opens and Si'Nomandiya walks in, "I thought I was the only ghost in this yard." She says.

"I thought I should make breakfast, you guys cooked last night." I tell her.

"I will just have coffee, I am ready to go home." She tells me, "But I am glad that you are awake so we can talk." She says.

"Oh? Is there any problem?" I ask sitting down and she looks at me for a long minute.

"I am glad you are settling well into this new role, you know the plan was not to mistreat you or make you pay for your brother's sins." She says, well they could have fooled me. "I am sure you can tell how hot-headed everyone here can be, they would have killed your brother with or without my consent. I didn't want that, I didn't want a child's blood on my hands, on my conscience. When Tamkhulu told me of a way

to stop this I took it. And besides we have been bugging Sokhaya to get a wife but he wouldn't." she says chuckling.

"Hitting two birds with one stone." I say and she nods.

"Yes. We love family here, even Nomakrestu does, you being Sokhaya's wife means your brother is safe from any of us. But also I want this marriage to work, I don't want my brother or you to spend the rest of your lives miserable." She tells me.

"We won't." I assure her.

"Your call the other day assured me of that, I don't doubt it now. You guys have already started fighting like a real couple." We both laugh.

"And you have started your family. You have a son now." We do, don't we? "So there is somewhere I want us to go. Go wear ixakatho

so we can go before they wake up.” She tells me and I nod.

Sokhaya is still asleep, in deep sleep and I put on ixakatho then go find Si’Nomandiya, she tells me we will walk to where we are going.

Soon we arrive, at the grave yard and she leads the way to four graves that are secluded from all the other ones.

“This is where my parents and grandmother are buried, my son too.” My breath hitches at the mention of her son. She kneels and asks me to do the same, “Mama, I brought someone today. Your son’s wife, a very beautiful wife.” She says looking at me and I smile. “And I gave her that name you loved so much, Soyama. Bazali bam, I want you to protect her, protect this beautiful girl. She came here through tragedy, Samkelo’s death, but nonetheless mama she is the woman who makes your son happy so I ask of you to please protect and love her. Protect her the

same way you protect us. And Samkelo, Samkelo sithandwa sam I hope you have welcomed her presence in our lives, I hope you understand why things had to be this way.” Her voice cracks and I have to hold her hand, “I am here today to ask that you treat Soyama as your child, love her as your own, and please keep her safe for us. Camagu.” She says and we stand up.

“That ... that was amazing.” I let her know.

“I hope that this shows you we have welcomed you. You are a part of this family now.” I know, I know that now.

Nomfundo and Andisiwe are making breakfast when we walk into the kitchen.

“Morning.” I say.

“Hey, where did you two go?” Nomfundo asks.

“The graveyard.” Their big sister tells them and they nod knowingly. “It was time. Ma-Ands please make me tea, I am so cold.” She says.

“Need help with something?” I ask them putting ixakatho on a chair and rolling up the sleeves of my top.

“You can cut the bread, we are almost done here.” Andisiwe tells me, “Did anyone call Tamkhulu?” Andisiwe asks.

“Sokhaya did, he called all of you yesterday but he says he will come back as soon as he can.” I tell them.

“Kanti where does Tamkhulu disappear to?” Si’Nomandiya asks, well she can ask that again.

“Clearly he is seeing someone. UTamkhulu uyajola.” Asanda says walking in, “Morning my darlings.” She greets.

“What? No. He is 89 Asanda.” Nomfundo quickly dismisses the idea but I don’t, it is highly

likely.

“And he looks like he is in his late 60s. Tamkhulu is not where he claims to be at, where is he?” Asanda is really right for choosing journalism, she surely can investigate.

“You could be onto something, thanks nana.”

Si’Nomandiya says taking tea from Asanda.

“How he is behaving lately is really telling. In the past year he has been disappearing on us, always visiting an old friend. Asanda is right.” Now we are all looking at her.

“Do we ask him?” I ask.

“Ask what? Yhoo! Never.” Andisiwe is the first coward and they all follow suit, tell me what a bad idea it is to confront an old man over his dating life, okay they are right. But why is he hiding it? His wife has been long dead, the children he is raising are all grown. Surely they wouldn’t mind him dating, right?

“So you mind him dating?” I ask them.

“No.” they say at the same time.

“We have our own business to mind please.”

Nomfundo says.

Then Tamkhulu has nothing to fear.

Forced Love

Insert Eighteen

As Sokhaya predicted Nomakrestu is indeed the first one to leave, her husband couldn't find his shirt. I'd kill Sokhaya. What kind of an adult who cannot find his own clothes?

Si'Nomandiya had to drive back too, she has work so I am left with the young three, the sweethearts. They don't need to be served, they talk a lot, they are very useful around the house, and they are great company. Sokhaya and his

son leaves us to go to the farm so we are left alone.

Asanda takes the opportunity to have us dancing for some TikTok challenge. She is the last born, we cannot refuse her of anything. In these past months I have come to realise that no one in this family says no to Asanda, she always gets what she wants.

And what she wants now is a TikTok video, well we are dancing our butts off for it too.

Nomfundo has two left feet and keeps bumping on us and Andisiwe is a dancer, god she can move! And as for me? I try. The tiktoker tries too, at least she is not bumping into us like her sister. But it is funny, I am laughing my lungs out.

“I need to sit.” The floor is suddenly spinning under my feet.

“Sisi, should we bring water?” I nod a few times,

I swear inyongo will kill me, I need to find something to help myself before I die.

Asanda comes back with water and I gulp it down, now that is better. "How long has this been happening?" Nomfundo asks sitting next to me.

"A few times, I need to go see a doctor." I tell them.

"You do. Lets stop now, you have enough right Asanda?" Andisiwe asks.

"Yes." She replies.

These past few weeks have been nothing but peaceful, Tamkhulu came and left. He told us he and a group of friends are traveling Europe, he sends pictures once a week. Phumlani calls them proof of life. His granddaughters and I are convinced he is seeing a white lady, he is doing white people stuff. His grandson and I, we are

both in sync lately.

And I have managed to set up the damn foundation to help the women in the village! Mlo and Sokhaya gave us an unused building in the farm that Phumlani painted for us, he did a pretty good job that his father actually said should he fail academically he might consider being a professional painter. They get along well, much better than I expected too.

“Okay that is it for today.” I say sitting down, standing on my feet for long is very tiring lately, not that I am never tired. They pack up their stuff getting up too.

A lady in her 40s stops at my desk as I take a much needed breather, “Today was great, one would swear you studied teaching Soyama.” I smile at the compliment as she walks away. They still have not fully accepted me so for one of them to say that is amazing. None of them ever seems to pay me any mind outside of this

room, I don't know what it is that I ever done to them but whatever it is they have against me it is big.

"Get up!" And my dear hurricane walks in, Nakhane is always on a high, I don't know how her family deals with her. sometimes I pity Mlo.

"Where are we going?" I am already on my feet though before she drags me out of this room like the mad woman she is.

"You know I don't know why it took me so long to see, I mean I am a doctor after all." And as always I am not sure what she is talking about, I deem myself a highly intelligent woman but when it comes to Nakhane I never know what she is thinking. "Then it hit me, at midnight." And her mind never stops working.

We get into her car, I was hoping I'd see my handsome husband before I leave the farm but well, Nakhane is here. "What does Mlo say

about your overthinking?”

She smiles looking at me then starts the car, “Oh that one, he gives me sex, it keeps preoccupied.” Poor man, his back must hurt, she is always thinking. “Anyway, as I was saying, it hit me at midnight. You are pregnant!”

I choke on my saliva as she hums sweetly, proud of her genius discovery. What is she talking about? I am on the pill, she knows this too. “Sorry to disappoint your genius ass I am on the pill. Find another diagnosis.” I say with a huge smile of my own. I remember when I met her mother for the first time, she said we are like twins. Her mom has been my mom the past few months, an amazing woman.

“Sorry sis, the genius isn’t wrong. Pills are not 100% effective, no form of contraceptive is.” And I am only hearing this now? No doctor ever told me this. The only reason I used a condom before it was so I protect myself from illnesses

not from pregnancy. I always believed the pills are 100% effective. "But, worry not. We will not wonder for long. I got you pregnancy tests, ten of them. I am amazing aren't I?" Yes very.

All the way I am trying to think of when I may have fallen pregnant, I no longer doubt it, I mean all of a sudden everything makes sense. The vomiting, that was morning sickness, the dizziness, the tiredness, all of it makes sense. I mean I have a newfound love for chocolate lately, I eat a lot too. I stopped eating chicken, and coffee smells like death, literally like dead bodies, a lot makes sense now. I don't recall a time where we used a condom or a time when that fool actually pulled out, why did I let him nut inside of me? And Nakhane is in this great mood, Sokhaya and I are about to have a child and she is team Soyama and Sokhaya. A lot.

Hey boLoves. I am sorry for the silence, things have been hectic but to make up for it I will post an insert everyday this week.

Forced Love

Insert Nineteen

Her helper is feeding her 14 months old daughter when we walk in, we greet and hurry to the privacy of her bedroom. Her older children are at school.

“Here.” I always knew there is something wrong with Nakhane but today she proves it. Ten tests?

“Did you take all the tests from the day?” I ask in shock and she laughs.

“I bought them, these are few. When I took the tests the first, there was twenty of them.” Wow! I take three shaking my head and walk to the

ensuite bathroom. When I am nervous I always want to pee a lot so I have loads of that for the tests. Few minutes later I exit the bathroom and join her in the bedroom. She is so chilled, busy on her cell phone while I am nervously watching the damn things. Soon they all have two lines, not very helpful, how am I to know how far I am?

“Take this one, it tells the weeks.” She has this ‘I told you so.’ smug on her face as I walk to the bathroom again, and yes, I have loads of pee. I’d feed the village with it.

Now we wait for the weeks to appear so we can start celebrating. And there it is, 23 weeks!

Nakhane looks at me and laughs, “Kanti how long have you two been fucking each other?” she is really happy about this. “Half the year? I mean this is around the time of the shooting.” And her genius mind never forgets anything, she keeps them in shelves in there.

“That is when we started fucking, can’t believe I was distressed and he was impregnating me.” But I am happy. I don’t want to lie, I am excited.

“Well, good job Sokhaya. I might buy him a bells.” Nakhane says hugging me, “I am so excited.” She says.

“It feels so surreal, Nakhane I am pregnant.” And I want the baby, I want to carry the child for Sokhaya. I want us to have this child. I want to scream from excitement.

“Let me take you to him.” She says getting up.

“Nope, I am telling him tonight. Nakhane, I am going to be a mom.” Suddenly I am tearing up and she hugs me, and rubs my back while I sob then it hit me. I don’t have much time. “It says 23 weeks?” she smiles.

“Yes, almost six months.” But I am not showing. “Girl I swear I want your body, at this time I was a ballon.” She says.

“What if the child is suffocating then? Nakhane there can’t be enough room in my flat stomach.” And she laughs, she falls back on the bed and has a really good laugh. She is laughing, at least that is not a bad thing.

When she is satisfied she sits up and holds her chest then laughs a bit again, “Phew, in my time as a doctor I have been asked a lot of things but not this. Girl!” and there she goes again! “The baby is fine, very fine. If there were any issues you would have known.” She assures me holding my hands. “I will text you a number of the Gynecologist I use, she is the best.” She says taking her cell, “Call her and set up an appointment.” She says.

Throughout dinner I am humming and singing softly. Phumlani and his dad ask me numerous times what is going on but I am holding it close to my chest, well until Sokhaya and I retreat to

our hut. I hope for a girl, I can imagine a little cute thing following Phumlani around, I can see Phumlani being her protector, a big brother she will have wrapped around her fingers, but then a boy would be great too. He'd have someone to teach soccer, play video games with. And well, whatever child it will be it will have Sokhaya wrapped around its little fingers. Phumlani has him on the palm of his hands, he is that dad. I can't believe a whole crime boss is controlled by a teenage boy but he is. Now imagine another child, my poor husband will be grey before forty, at least I'll still love him.

"If I didn't know better I'd say you have a new boyfriend." He says taking off his boots as I hum the same song I've been humming all dinner whilst opening the blankets.

"Who says I don't. The guys at the farm are charmers." I tease and he laughs.

"They wouldn't dare, your husband is a killer."

Yhea, that is true. I sit behind him and take out the pregnancy tests from the pockets of my skirt and put them on his lap.

“Umm.” He turns to look at me still holding all four of them, “Soyama what is this?” I cannot read his expression.

“What do you think?” suddenly my walls clam up.

“You are not playing games right? Nakhane didn’t steal tests from her patients, right?”

Is he that dumb, “Nakhane wouldn’t do that.”

“She has done it before.” Huh? “We are going to have a baby?” he asks.

“Yes Sokhaya.” He is boring me to death, shouldn’t he be jumping up and down, calling me all the best names in the world? Suddenly I am suffocating, he is holding me too tight. My poor baby, we are dying tonight.

“I am going to be a father.” What does he mean, he is already a father, such an old fool.

“Yep, again.” I say hugging him back.

“We are going to be parents Soyama.” Now he sounds excited.

“Not if you continue suffocating me.” I say and he lets go immediately, he is crying. My handsome fool.

“But, your stomach.” He looks confused.

“Nakhane says it happens, but I am seeing a Gynecologist tomorrow.” I tell him.

“I am coming.” I am glad he is this excited for this baby. He hugs me again, not too tight this time.

Nakhane and I need to talk about what he said.

Today I was woken up by breakfast in bed, he prepared a bath for me and rubs my feet while I

lotion my body and texting Nakhane, her and I will have lunch so she can tell me what in the hell was she thinking with the pregnancy tests? “Do you think it is okay for you to continue working?” he suddenly asks.

“We will hear from the doctor, I doubt though. Move I need to get dressed.” I tell him getting up from the bed. He watches me get dressed as if I might disappear. “What is on your mind?” I finally ask as I tie my head scarf.

“That I am lucky, to think it took tragedy to bring me such an amazing woman.” He says and I smile.

“I wish it didn’t have to take that.” And that is true but also I am very much aware that I may have never given a man like him a second glance. On the outside he is too rural, and maybe that is what made him so different to all the man I have been with. Sokhaya turned out to be everything I have been looking for, he just

didn't come in tuxedos and twang. He came in overalls, muddy boots, and rough looks.

"Thing is, had it not been for it then you and I would never be here. Lets be honest, you would have never given me a second glance and I would have never have even approached you. A woman in heels, looking damn expensive and walking around like she is in a hurry to get somewhere? Nope." That is true. Him and I would have never given each other a chance in the perfect world.

"Looks can be deceiving." I whisper and he nods.

"True, behind all that lay a woman who was made for me, I am glad you've slowed down though. Sometimes slowing down and living the present is the best thing one could do for themselves." This place never gave me a choice, I had to slow down, in fact I had to sit still and for once let life happen.

“Come, we will be late.” I say suddenly realising just how emotional this whole thing has turned out to be and he smiles.

“I love you Soyama.” My ears suddenly flush and tears fall off, I never expected him to ever say those words to me, not like this anyway. And now I feel like I am stuck in my best dream ever.

“You are not just saying this because of the pregnancy?” I whisper.

“No. I mean it, it just seemed fitting for this moment.” He tells me. Now I walk to him and hug him very tight.

“I love you too.” I whisper

Phumlani is cleaning up when we walk into the kitchen, “I thought you are never waking up today.” And he doesn’t rate us at all.

“We are awake and we have news.” Is he going to tell him? Phumlani stops what he is doing

and look us at us expectantly, oh well he can break the news. “How would you feel about being a big brother?” he asks as if he has a choice.

Phumlani shrugs like it is no big deal, “Wouldn’t know, I haven’t been one.” This conversation is scarring me. Phumlani just got here so what if he feels like this baby will take his place?

“Well, you are about to be one.” Sokhaya says and he stares at us, for a long ass moment I am not sure I am still breathing. “Well?” Sokhaya suddenly looks nervous.

“I am still deciding how to feel, I mean I am seventeen for this.” And then he laughs, fuck! This child! He hugs me still laughing.

“Never do that, I almost died of panic.” I say as he goes on to hug his dad.

“No more, I hope they look like me.” He says, he looks excited.

“We have 3 or so months to go then we will know.” I let him know then his eyes run straight to my stomach, “Is the baby fine?” definitely his father’s son.

“Very fine.” I answer, I turn to look at Sokhaya, “He can come, then afterward we can have a meal at some place in town.” I suggest.

“Yes. Go get ready young man.” His dad says.

“Nah, I’m good. Lets hit the road fam.” And he leaves the dishes on the sink and lead the way. We look at each other and laugh. Sokhaya’s sperms made this one for real.

The gel is cold on my stomach but I am too excited to care, Sokhaya is holding my hand whilst Phumlani is staring at the screen impatiently. His excitement kept growing on the way it makes my heart warm. This child will his sibling to death, he already does. Something

appears on the screen, we all see it and it has us captured. "Looks healthy." The doctor is saying but we are all focused on the screen. A little miracle. A sound fills the room and suddenly I look around, the doctor smiles. "Has a very strong heartbeat." She says.

"That .. that is the baby?" Sokhaya is teary as he asks. The doctor nods. My heart is beating very fast on my chest, this is perfect.

"A perfect little lady." The doctor says.

"A girl? I will have a sister? Ma you heard that?" Then my heart stops for a bit, then beats faster than before, he said Ma.

"Phumlani." I whisper but he is completely unaware of what he just did, he is smiling on the screen.

"Ma." He replies still not paying me any mind.

"I love you." I just say. He turns to me with teary eyes.

“I know, I love you too.” Life can’t be more perfect than this, then he looks back at the screen, “You will have another one after this right?” And he is Sokhaya’s son, no surprises there.

“Yes.” His stupid father says and I just look at the doctor who gives me a knowing smile

We get scans, Phumlani wants his own so we get him his. Then after we get the next appointment date we leave the doctor for a meal, Sokhaya takes us to a place that braais meat, KwaNgumbela. He has spoken about this place a lot so I am excited to check it out, I want to know all the places he likes. In fact, if I had it my way I’d live inside his skin but sadly I cannot.

Forced Love

Insert Twenty

We spent the whole day in town, shopping for baby clothes. I don't know who is more excited between the father and brother, they were like kids in a candy store in the shops. "You think grandpops is home?" Phumlani asks when we drive inside the yard. He is driving, he says he will get his licence before the baby is born so he can drive around with her. seems like he has always wanted to have a sibling.

"You know your grandpa, he disappears and appear as he likes." Sokhaya replies. The car is his, no one ever uses it when he isn't around. Seems like he is back.

"He sure has great timing." True.

He isn't alone, there is laughter as we walk towards the house, and Phumlani is leading the way. Sokhaya and I look at each other then Phumlani stops at the door drops the plastic bags. Sokhaya and I both pick up our pace, Sokhaya has taken out his gun. Now I know why

he always has this thing on his waist, he will have to be careful with its safekeeping now. He has a teenage son and a coming baby, can't have any of them getting hold of it.

What on God's name is this?

"Tamkhulu?" Sokhaya cannot hide the shock in his voice, and as for me I am not sure whether to laugh or what?

In the middle of the room is Tamkhulu with an apron on standing next to a white lady who is wearing an apron too, clearly they are cooking together.

"Finally home! Maria and I made dinner." Maria? I am holding back laughter as I watch the situation in front of me. Sokhaya is actually shocked, I am not sure by the fact that his step-grandmother is white or the fact that his grandfather is seeing someone. Phumlani is open mouthed, the months I have spent with

him tell me he might just say something not so smart. His mouth and mind never work together. He turns to me and I brace myself for whatever he will say, hoping I will not laugh. “Kanti ooTamkhulu zange bahlukunyezwe lubandlululo.” And I burst into laughter. What did I say?

Now I have to savage the situation, “Move nina.” I say making my way in, “Tamkhulu, welcome back. And ..” I am not sure what to call her, this is so awkward.

“You can call me Maria.” She says shaking my hand.

“Nice to meet you Maria.” I say hoping those two fools will get out of whatever zone they are in.

“Nice to meet you Maria.” At least my husband has collected himself and joined us into the room, his son is collecting the bags from the

floor and walks in to greet Maria but he is definitely not over the fact that Maria is white. "Takmhulu, who is Maria?" we all want to know but we haven't asked.

"My girlfriend." I think Phumlani will faint. I want to call Asanda so bad, this is the gossip of the century, "And she will be staying here." Now I have to call all of them at once, lord!

"Cohibiting?" That is Phumlani, he has never known what is the right thing to say, "Aren't you like ..." I clear my throat and he gets the hint. "I will take my sister's stuff to your room Mama." And off he goes.

"Sister? Sokhaya don't tell me another child popped up, kanti what were you doing all these years, planting seeds all over Africa?" Tamkhulu asks.

"Not bringing ubandlululo home, that is for sure." Okay, let me end this before it goes any

far.

“I am pregnant Tamkhulu, had you not come home you would have found the baby walking.” I joke.

“Or already talking.” And with that he walks out.

Maybe Tamkhulu was right to hide his love life, this I wasn't expecting. I was never expecting the lady to be white nor for Sokhaya to react like that. “I will speak with him.” Maria looks like she might burst into tears.

“Congratulations sana lwam, I will speak to your husband.” Tamkhulu says taking off his apron and follow behind.

Now I don't know what else to say to Maria, “umm, let me go get comfortable then I will join you.” I say and hurry off, I am not running away from him but I need to call the sisters before I faint from so much gossip. Phumlani is next to the kraal with his father and grandfather so I

have the privacy of my hut to myself. Gossip time.

“No way!!” Nomfundo is the first one to exclaim. Asanda and Andisiwe are laughing their asses.

“So Tamkhulu is cohabiting?” Gossip makes even Nomakrestu nice.

“Yes, it seems so.” I say.

“Madlomo!” Si’Nomandiya exclaims while laughing.

“Now where is Makhulu?” Andisiwe asks and don’t they die from laughter.

“In the kitchen, she is making dinner.” I tell them.

“Hawu kodwa Soyama, what kind of a makoti are you?” and this time I know Nomakrestu is not saying this in the wrong way so we all laugh.

“Well my pregnant ass needs the rest.” I let it out as if it is no big deal then there is total

silence.

“You .. sis you are pregnant?” Asanda is the first one to ask.

“yep. In less than four months you will be aunts.” I say.

“Whee! Where are my bags! I am coming home!!” Andisiwe gives me her default answer to everything. Bad news? She is coming home. Good news? She is coming home. Bad day? You better she is coming home.

“We have packing to do, see you in a few Soyama.” And off they go leaving me with my video call.

I sit up just as the door opens and Nakhane walks in looking stunned, “Soyama, there is a white lady in your kitchen. Miriam or Maria.” She says as if she has seen a ghost.

“Tamkhulu’s girlfriend. Sit, I forgot about our meeting.” She rushes to my side

“Pregnancy brains. You said she is the old man’s woman? Weh, waze wenza umlando Madiba!” and she claps. “Come lets join her.” she says bringing me to my feet.

“Before that tell me, fake pregnancy?” doesn’t she laugh, so she did it. “Why?” I ask.

“Why not?” what does she mean why not? I am surprised they are still married, clearly Mlo is her soulmate because he does put up with her shit.

“Well I made the mistake of giving Mlo my virginity, he wanted sex over and over again. So I lied, said I was pregnant and the doctor recommended we don’t fuck for the baby’s sake.” I can never! Clap once!

“Because you didn’t want sex?” I ask just to be sure.

“Yes. Mlo is a beast please, and I was still scared of sex.” I don’t believe my ears, “Now

come lets go to your white granny.”

And with little choice I follow her to the main house where Maria is busy making us dinner.

“So Mari-Mari you are Mkhulu’s chic?” now I want to faint. Who would blame me? I am pregnant! Kanti how does Nakhane’s mind work.

Poor Maria smiles and nods. “Yhoo the bravery, you went for a black man?”

“Nakhane make tea.” I think she needs to keep busy so she stops talking shit.

“Okay. By the way I am Nakhane, your boyfriend and my late grandfather-in-law were besties.” She says taking off her blazer. She is staying.

Nakhane left, after giving Maria a few flushes.

“How long have you been married?” Tamkhulu didn’t tell her? That is good to know.

“A few months, I think five months before I fell

pregnant.” Now that I think of it in a month’s time Sokhaya and I will have our first anniversary. Unbelievable! I do not even remember the date we were actually pronounced husband and wife. “And you and Tamkhulu?” I ask.

“We met a year ago.” She says with a fond smile.

“He told you he has a lot of grandchildren, right?” I ask just so I am sure she is aware of what she is getting herself into.

“That he did. I don’t have many children myself, two daughters and four grandchildren.” That is a few compared to the mess she is coming to here.

“Oh well, then welcome to the family. His granddaughters are on the way, just to give you heads up. And don’t worry they will not be like my husband.” I say. I wonder what is wrong with

that fool.

“I am glad. You have one hell of a scary husband.” I know, he scared me at first glance too.

Forced Love

Insert Twenty One

Tamkhulu walks in followed by his grandson and great-grandson.

“Dinner is served, darling.” Maria says as Sokhaya sits next to me.

“Phumlani get your father’s plate.” I say to Phumlani who is staring at Maria, I don’t think he will get used to having a white woman live with us.

“Umm Maria, I can call you that right?” Sokhaya starts and I make a silent prayer, please don’t

offend the poor woman!

“Yes.” She is a bit uncomfortable, scared I think.

“I am sorry about my behaviour earlier, I just ... I am not really a fan of your race.” What an apology! Haiy no I have a husband.

“Your grandfather did mention but I swear I have no bad intentions.” She says and he nods. Now I want to know why he dislike white people, except for their privileged asses with big entitlement I have nothing against them. And it can't be that there has been many white people here. Unless ... the farm?! I look at Sokhaya, his jaws are rigid, he is not happy about this.

“Ooooh Sangena sangena!!” they have arrived! My sisters-in-law! Tamkhulu looks at the door then at me.

“Oh I told them I am pregnant, you know them.” I say shrugging. Wouldn't say anything about telling them about his girlfriend. He does not

get much time to prepare his bae because his daughters walk in, the youngest at front.

“She is white!” Asanda has drama for days.

“You have a white grandma, aren’t you happy?”

Phumlani asks, what did I do?

Then in, all they come.

They greet staring at her. introductions are made and then they are staring at her like she is an alien. “Hayi Madiba uyazenza shame.”

Andisiwe is the first one to say.

“At least she is beautiful.” Si’Nomandiya says.

“Thanks.” Maria smiles at the slightest approval, this has to be the longest day of her life.

“I cannot believe at your age you are dating.”

Nomfundo goes and I want to laugh so hard.

“You won’t steal the farm right?” Yhoo! Talk about being direct, Nomakrestu does not like other humans because what in God’s earth is

this?

“Nomakrestu!” Tamkhulu warns.

“What? We all know how it gets with white people and the farm.” And Sokhaya gets up looking annoyed, I was right.

“You will find me in bed.” He says to me.

“That was not necessary.” Andisiwe tells her.

She does not look like she understands how rude she was, “What? Why? Must we know her intentions when we are at court? Trying to prove we were born here? We’ve been there, done that.” She says looking bored at their politeness.

“No, it’s okay. I am not after the farm.” Well she wouldn’t have said, “I just love your grandfather.” She adds.

“That you surely do, I mean you came all the way to a black community. Apartheid never taught you oldies a thing.” Phumlani should be

Nomakrestu's son, I get up too.

"See you in the morning." I have a husband to talk to.

I find him lying on the bed awake, he looks like there is war on his mind. He still has his shoes on so I sit at the edge and slowly take them off. "What's up? Talk to me." I say.

"No, I'm okay." He replies but he is not and I never give up easily.

"Talk to me, Madiba." I say.

"Tamkhulu loves doing these things, he always brings us the trouble." He says, "My father was murdered for that farm, because he made white friends who thought they can stage a takeover." My breath catches, this is far worse than I thought. "Then the son of that man took us to court to prove that his father was defending his property, his property Soyama? We wasted so

much money in that court case. Now he is bringing us another white person? Doesn't he learn? Ever?" I am done with his shoes so I go sit next to him.

"Love knows no bounds, if it did you should have never loved me. My brother killed your nephew but you do. I should not love this family, you but I do even though you kidnapped me." We both laugh, "Tamkhulu will not make the mistake of involving her in the farm." I assure him without being sure myself.

"And if she wants him to prove his love? People do crazy stuff when in love." He says.

"He won't." I hope he won't.

"I told him I will kill her if he dares involve her in the farm." Oh my god! He said that to his grandfather? "And he knows I will."

"Sokhaya, that is not a good start." I say.

"Soyama, I will defend my father's legacy, I will

protect this for my children so Maria should keep away from the farm. Keep at what she is here for.” Tjoooh. Tamkhulu should have kept her hidden. I just lay myself on top of him and his arms come around my body.

“I am sorry about your parents. I love you.” I whisper.

“I love you too.” He says.

Nomakrestu is having tea with Maria when I get to the kitchen. A surprise.

“Don’t look so shocked. She will stay away from the farm.” Yhoo!

“Morning.” I greet opening the fridge.

“What are you doing out of bed so early?” she asks.

“I have to be at the farm.” Sokhaya left very early this morning. Said something about

harvesting and one thing I have come to know about him is that when he is battling with something in his mind he overworks himself. This morning he left at 4 am.

“Eat something.” She says.

I take out a yoghurt and show it to her, “I will see you later today.” I am no longer a makoti so I don’t have to make everyone breakfast, they can all sort themselves out. I bump to Tamkhulu on my way out and he does not look like he slept well. I feel sorry for him. Xolani is waiting beside my car. “Morning X.” I say.

“Hi ma, please put on your seatbelt.” I am sure these are Sokhaya’s instructions.

I am worried about the situation at home, I will have to sit and talk to Si’Nomandiya because if we let this continue we will have a disaster on our hands. Tamkhulu and Sokhaya should not be at odds, they cannot be at odds with each

other. My phone rings and it is Si'Nomandiya's name flashes on the screen. "Just as I was thinking about you." I say.

"I am surprised you are on your way to work Mthimkhulu." Me and her have come to be close and we call each other by our clannames.

"There isn't much we can do MaDlomo, not this morning anyway." I tell her.

"Come home for lunch then you will see that we can solve this, I will make you and my niece something to eat." She says.

"Then we will be there." I reply.

Forced Love

Insert Twenty Two

I leave the farm without seeing Sokhaya, he is not working in the office today but I knew that

he will do this. I am so exhausted on the way home I am actually sleepy, maybe I can pull sisi's arm and go sleep instead of trying to solve this problem. My phone vibrates, an unknown number, "Hello." I am so tired my eyes are closed as I answer.

"Sis, don't hang up." Junior? I won't end the call; I am not as angry as I was but I am still not very keen on meeting my family. Sokhaya has been wanting us to try fix the relations between the two families.

"I won't, what is this about?" I am happy yes but I can never forget how I was made a sacrificial lamb for him.

"It's tata Nontle." My heart beats against my chest immediately, what does he mean it's dad?
"He had a heart attack."

"A heart attack? Is he fine?" my father is no that old, he cannot be getting heart attacks.

“No, he did not make it. You have to come home Nontle mama needs you.” The cell phone slips off my fingers and I just sob, my father is dead? My dad? It does not make sense.

“Ma? Ma what is it?” the car has stopped and I open the door, X sounds so scared.

“I want my husband, get my husband Xolani!” I yell.

All I want is Sokhaya, I want him, he will fix things. Sokhaya can fix all of this, I just want him here.

I don't know how long we wait but the door opens and he slips in, “Xolani what happened?” he is scolding the poor guy and all I do is fall into his arms and sob, “Baby? Baby talk to me.” He keeps repeating.

“My dad Sokhaya, my dad is dead.” He holds me tighter and I scream, my father is dead! I never

went back home and spoke to him, why didn't I listen to Sokhaya? He died thinking I hate him. "I want my mother Sokhaya." I sob.

"Drive us home Xolani."

Death is so cruel, how does it take one so soon, so fast? How does it do this? Why didn't I get a warning? A chance to tell him it was never so bad, not as we all thought it would. Why didn't he get to sit with Sokhaya and share a bottle of Heineken? He would've loved him. He died thinking he sent me to hell but I actually found my soul here, I found sisters, I found love and happiness, I have a best friend here.

Everything is happening around me, everyone is packing. Andisiwe, Si'Nomandiya and Phumlani refuse to stay behind, so soon we are all in the minibus with Mandla and Xolani at the front, they are drivers.

"I will find us accommodation; Soyama you will

stay with at your family house?” Andisiwe asks as we drive out the village.

“Yes.” There is no other way I would want it.

“I am not leaving mama’s side.” Phumlani says.

“I know but we are not leaving her, your dad will be there and we will see her every day.”

Si’Nomandiya tells him.

“No, dabs. I will stay with Ma.” He replies stubbornly.

Oh my stubborn big baby, I brush his head and doesn’t he put it on my lap, “He can stay with me. He and Sokhaya can come with me.” I tell them.

“Are you sure? Is that wise?” Andisiwe asks and I know what she means, Phumlani does not know the full story of marriage to Sokhaya and I would love for him not to know but also I want him near me. I don’t want him to go.

“Yes. If I had it my way you would all be there.”
And I need them, I want them around me and my baby because I know when I fail to take care of us they will do it.

It is the wee hours of the morning when we drive home, the security looks shocked to see me. I am not sure if it is actually seeing me after almost a year or the people I am with. His eyes dart to Phumlani who is curled and asleep on my lap then to Sokhaya who has a proactive hand around me. After darting eyes, he lets us in, “Sure took his time.” Sokhaya mutters.

We first got Si’Nomandiya and Andisiwe checked into the hotel and they reluctantly let us leave with Phumlani, as if he would have spent a night in that hotel.

“Lani? Vuka boy.” I shake him and he opens his eyes and sit up looking around then nod.

It is a bit chilly and cold when we get off the car, the front door opens before we even go up the front stairs and Junior is standing at the entrance with a baby on his arms, I am shocked. He looks at me then Sokhaya before his eyes fall on Phumlani, I see something flicker in his eyes but it is gone immediately. There is something different about him, he does not look like the young 23 years old boy I left. He is 24 now but still, there is something different about him.

“Come in.” he steps aside and let us in. Mama is standing next to a young lady who is in her gown. I walk to mama and hug her, neither of us cry now and I greet the lady.

“I am sure you are exhausted.” Mama says looking at Sokhaya, I don’t think she trusts him.

“Yes. Sokhaya and I can take my old room and Phumlani can take the room next door.” I am too exhausted for introductions and I am

hungry.

“Okay. Elethu, please take them.” Mama says, I know she has a lot to ask but she cannot now. Not in front of whoever this Elethu is and God forbid in front of Phumlani.

“I am hungry; I need to eat first. Go with Phumlani Madiba.” I say.

“No.” they both say at the same time, I would laugh if my family wasn’t actually watching us, they must think I am in some hostage situation here.

“You two don’t even start, Phumlani its late go sleep.” I say staring at him.

“But I can make you something to eat Ma.” Junior chokes on something.

“Oh, I forgot. Ma, this is my son. Phumlani, Lani this is my younger brother Junior and my mom.” I say turning to look at the stunned people we woke so early.

“Nice to meet you Phumlani.” Mama says.

“Okay with that done, go sleep Phumlani. I will take your father, I won’t disappear.” I promise, I don’t know why he is stubborn when he is exhausted.

“I will get you milk Lani when we come up, and I will make sure she is fine.” His father promises. Reluctantly he leaves with Elethu and now I am left with Junior and my mom.

“Okay I am so hungry.” I say then remember, introductions, “Mama this is Sokhaya, my husband. As you know, this is Junior and this is my mom.” I tell him and he actually gives them a plastered smile.

“Nice to meet you.” I hope he does not get the idea to kill Junior. I don’t know how Si’Nomandiya will look at Junior, everything happened so fast we didn’t think everything through. And I know this is selfish but I want her

here, MaDlomo has become my anchor so I want her with me.

“Nice to meet you Sokhaya, we will speak in the morning Nono.” Mama says and leaves. I lead Sokhaya to the kitchen.

“First day went well.” I say.

“Wouldn’t call it a day but don’t worry, we are here to support you my love. You are more important than any hatred for anything.” He says hugging me.

“I know. Let me get you Phumlani his milk, take it and I will make us something to eat.” I know he is hungry. Nomfundo says we share the eating habits of this pregnancy.

He does not protest but does as told, I am left alone to make us something quickly. “You can have cereals.” Junior says walking in with bottles. “Or your husband doesn’t like them.” Of course Sokhaya does not like cereals, he isn’t

fifteen but he eats whatever I eat.

“More like this little madam doesn’t like them.” I say though, “You have a child?” I ask.

“Yes. Nontle, she is three months. Her mom and I are engaged.” He tells me. “Who is that boy?” he whispers.

“Phumlani? Sokhaya’s son.” I tell him.

“He looks so much like him.” I know who is him, I remember Nomfundo saying that too and I have never looked at Samkelo’s picture long enough to make the resemblance, I still feel guilty of how short his life was cut. “For a second I was back to that night.” He says.

“I saw it but he isn’t him. And he does not know the details so please Junior don’t make things awkward for that boy.” I say and he nods.

“Samkelo’s mother will be here tomorrow. She and her younger sister came too, they booked in a hotel.” I tell him and he sighs.

“They keep a tight leash on you.” He says.

I don't get a chance to tell him no because Sokhaya walks in and he looks hell of annoyed, “She is not some dog, she needs no leash.”

Father god!

Forced Love

Insert Twenty Three

I open my eyes and Sokhaya isn't besides me and for a moment I panic, I jump out of bed and go check on the window, surely there will be tons of police cars if he killed Junior. But he is in the garden having coffee while on the phone while Phumlani is playing soccer with my cousin's son. That's a relief. I don't want my kids to have a jailbird for a father.

The door opens and mama walks in,

“Mantombazana.” She says and I smile going to the bed. “Are you fine?” she asks.

“Don’t worry about me, how are you? I know how you loved dad.” I say holding her hands and she is teary.

“Only day 2 but already the journey ahead feels like an uphill, I will make it though.” I don’t think I’d survive losing Sokhaya, ever! “But what about you? Your husband seems overprotective, he told us to let you rest.” She asks.

“I am okay. For real. I am expecting my first child, I have a son as big as me and an amazing husband.” I say and she does not look convinced. “Sure it wasn’t easy; it was hard mama. For all of us there, they had just lost Samkelo but they have never mistreated me. In the darkest hole mama, I found a second family, I just wish I had come home sooner to tell you that. I just wish dad knew how happy I am. Sokhaya loves me, I love him. And I have found

sisters in his sisters. Samkelo's mom has been my rock, even through her own pain. They all treat me like their sibling, their grandfather treats me like I am his biological granddaughter." I say.

"I am glad. I worry about you. This isn't how you have always envisioned your life, I know that. You are now a housewife and that was never your goal." She says.

"Actually no. I run a skills centre at the farm. God! Let me call someone." I totally forget about that.

"My bhabha, are you good? Should I come down?" Nakhane says the moment she answers my calls.

"Nakhane, no. The skills centre bhabha, I totally forgot about today's meeting. The minister will be there at 3 to see the place." I tell her.

"Oh you are late; your husband has already fixed

that. I am going to be here to welcome her, pray I don't say something to embarrass you." I chuckle.

"No you won't. Thanks Hun, I will keep you updated about things this side. You call me if you need something." I say.

"Hayibo Hun, shouldn't I be saying that. Stop stealing my lines." She says in that humorous way of hers and I laugh. "So glad to hear that. I'd give you a verse but you know me, I only go to church for vibes." I laugh again; "But I will say this. Everything passes chomam, all pain pass. You know there is a season for all, and this may be that season for you but it will pass. There is also a promising rainbow coming your way, your beautiful daughter." I smile.

I brush my stomach, "I know. Wish my dad met her." I tell her.

"I know how you feel but mama always says

dead people are only dead in flesh, they are our guides and they watch over us. Your father will know your child, he will see her, protect her and love her. Look now, baby Rainbow already has so many guardian angels, your father, Sokhaya's parents and his cousins." I say.

"And his aunt." My dear sister, my beautiful Esihle.

"Exactly. And now your father is going to be there for her, you sure have strong forces on your side." She says.

"Why do you always manage to make things better?" I ask.

"Because I am fabulous like that. Let me go, I love you." And she doesn't give me a chance to say it back. She always says she knows how much I love her so she doesn't have to hear it all the time. My sweet girl.

I look at mama and we don't have to say

anymore, I just lean my head on her shoulders and we hold hands.

Family has started flocking in. Some even shocked to see me, I see the judgement in their eyes. They think I ran away to marry my blesser, and I actually don't care. It does not matter to me how I came to marry Sokhaya now, he is my husband and I am happy. My sisters-in-law are angels, they are busy working whilst my own family is busy going up and down the whole damn house doing nothing.

"I spoke to your brother." It is only the three of us in the kitchen and both Andisiwe and I stare at her. "He actually came to me, Tamkhulu was right about him. Sometimes it takes something like what happened for someone to grow." She goes on.

"And you think Junior is grown?" I will admit

there was a difference in him today, the Junior I know would be here throwing tantrums about dad's death after getting drunk but this one is on top of his game. And he is engaged. His baby mama is also busy with some stuff outside, along meeting the demands of tea and scones from my family, as if this is a café.

“What did he say?” Andisiwe asks.

“He actually apologized. He didn't make any excuses this time, didn't speak of how Samkelo was jogging on the road at night. He actually took responsibility of the fact that he crossed a red robot and he wasn't supposed to be driving in the first place. And he thanked me, thanked me for giving him a chance to turn his life around. And also for taking care of you, for the way we apparently treated you, he is happy you are happy.” She says and my eyes are glittering.

“I am glad something good came out of that dark cloud.” Andisiwe says, both her and I.

Elethu walks in, her baby on her back and a tray with a few cups.

“Do you guys need help here? I am done serving tea.” She says.

“No, sit.” Andisiwe replies.

“Where is Junior, we need to speak about dad’s funeral.” I say getting up.

“And he sure needs you but won’t admit it. There is some argument upstairs, about what your family and mom wants.” Elethu tells me.

I know them but also I’ve been dealing with Nomakrestu the past year, I can handle them. I leave the kitchen and yes there is an argument, the moment I am at the first floor I hear it behind the door of mama’s bedroom. I walk in and there is silence for a moment. “What is going on here?” I ask shutting the door behind me. Junior actually looks relieved to see me.

“This is not your business, you went and had

yourself married without even lobola.” One of my aunts says.

“And my father was fine with that. You think he did not know who I married? My parents knew where I was and why, now what is going on here?” I ask sitting with mama in the matrass.

“Mama wants tata to be buried here, near the lake at the back.” Junior tells me. I understand why she would want that. This is where their lives were, and my parents have nothing back in the Eastern Cape, it makes sense that she would want her husband near her too.

“So? What is the noise about?” I ask.

“Your aunts don’t want that.” Junior looks exhausted.

“Sadly it isn’t up to them.” I reply taking mama’s hand. “Mama is married to tata, he chose her and trusted her with her life. If there is anyone here who would know what tata would like it is

the woman he spent thirty years of his life with. No one else." I say.

"Then we will not come." My older aunt says.

"Come on dabawo, this is your brother." Junior says.

"They you will live with not knowing where your brother will be buried. Do you think tata would want this? For you to do this to mama when he isn't around? For you to treat her like this? Yell at her when she just lost the love of her life just 24 hours ago? Have shame. Have shame." I say and they all don't know where to even begin to look now. "Mama will make the decisions about her husband, we are all just here to help her and that is it, we are all in pain but she is in much bigger pain. Where is the sin in wanting her husband near her?" no one answers.

"Then it is decided. Mama is making decisions and we help her out." Junior says. I look at him

and smile, as much as he was destructive he has never been a person of conflicts. He hates them like shit and now he is deep within them.

“And about my lobola, my husband will pay it if it is that important. I hope no one will treat him otherwise because of it, because in his home I am not treated any bad.” I get up, “I have to check if he has eaten too. Also don’t annoy Sokhaya, he might just bring your lobola in brown envelopes if not sport bags.” And I walk out. He would, God knows he might just bring them gun money to keep them shut. And I’d support him, my extended family is very rude.

Forced Love

Insert Twenty Four

It has been a long week.

All of us running like headless chickens and organising this day. I am also glad that the rain of the past few days has cleared and we are able to actually hold my father's last ceremony in the garden. Everyone is here. My family from Cofimvaba after a lot of grunts about it they decided to come and then the family I have made in KwaPhalo, Nakhane, Mlo and his mother in-law are here. A few women from the skills centre also came, they all came here and made me a person. We didn't need to hire catering because they arrived and they took charge of the catering, they took over the tea making and just were useful.

My mother was in total disbelief about this. And she and Si'Nomandiya get along so well, I always knew they would. They are both in medicine but besides that they have a lot in common. And I watched Si'Nomandiya take care of my mom in a way I cannot explain. And

Nomakrestu has been, thankfully, sensitive and just not her rude self. Tamkhulu came with Maria, that caused a bit of a stir, well everyone was shocked I think. And Sokhaya didn't really want her here, he is still not trusting of her nor willing to give her a chance. Sisi was right we need a solution for their predicament before it takes much strain on Tamkhulu.

This past week has been emotional. A lot. Everything took its toll on us. Junior and I went to clean Tata's office and collect his stuff at work, Sokhaya drove us. Thank god they get along just fine. The way his co-workers broke down when they saw us, it made me feel weak. The pain I saw in that office, the awkward jokes trying to make us feel okay about the situation was kind of a torture. Then we had to help mama pack Tata's things as they will not be used for at least six months then a ceremony would be done to allow them to be used, I don't

know how I survive.

No, I am lying.

My friends and family carried me. Lolo and the gang came as soon as they could and they took care of me, gave me those power hugs that assured me all is well. Nakhane and her sassy jokes, her gossip and late night milk dates ever since she got here, carried me through also.

Phumlani randomly sending me memes throughout the day as I went about making arrangement for the funeral was great, him sending me VNs to talk to his sister while I was choosing flowers for the funeral reminded me that things are bad but there is also good.

And those hugs from Sokhaya during the day. He would just walk up to me, hug me and kiss me then remind me to eat. And at the end of every night he would rub my feet and then hold me. Also that man is amazing, he became my listening boarding from the very first day, he sat

up every night and listen to my feelings even though I said the same thing over and over again. But the most amazing thing he did in this time was to become a big brother to my younger brother. He took care of Junior, I watched him drive Junior around, helping him with his duties especially with all the drama my family was doing. I watched him remind Junior to eat, having a bottle of beer with him on the porch, listen and advise my younger brother. And Sokhaya is a big bear, I always say that, he'd hug him, let him cry after a shitty day with my family yelling and throwing demands at him. For that I will forever be grateful of the man who became my husband.

And this time gave me time to get to know the woman who has my brother's heart. What an amazing young girl, he really started making good decisions after I left. She is one of them. She is sweet and very honest, and the way she

loves him can be seen in her eyes. She is in love and I hope they find what I found.

And all of that, all of that led to this, to this moment. Saying goodbye to tata. It was hard but my family, the people I consider my family, actually came together and that is one of the most important things I saw happen this week. My family and Sokhaya's family came together and just supported each other, it was like there was never bad blood between us to begin with and I only wish that my dad had seen this. I wish he had actually could experience all of this. See the love that I saw this week. Even in the madness of the last week I had those moments where I just smiled alone, especially at night where everyone is gone and it was just us. There would be laughter, shared jokes and telling of childhood stories on the dining table. And mama would momentarily leave the mattress and join everyone.

Everyone came together to try to make this painful period a bit easy on my mom.

And I actually saw Nomakrestu's husband! What an ugly man. And not just in looks, he is not a good person. Somehow I could understand why she is this bitter, she is stuck with that man. Nomfundo's sweet husband was here too, he is really meant to be with our sweet Nomfundo.

The white coffin mama chose suits tata, my father had the purest intentions in every situation. He deserves to be buried in pure white, pure as his heart.

The stories people share about him are not a shock to me. They are a confirmation that I was never wrong about him, that I was right to hold him in such a high regard even at his death.

And another beautiful thing, Phumlani read the letter I wrote as my goodbye on my behalf, and

when he stood there the MC who is my cousin introduced him as my dad's first grandson. He wanted to cry. I am glad they all welcomed him, Junior is treating him like a little brother. They have already twisted Sokhaya and I's arms to let him visit them some time. I am happy they get along.

And instead of wails and tears of sadness, not that there is no sadness, we actually celebrated my father. We actually celebrated the man he was and we said goodbye in a way he would have loved. I let him go, when the coffin went down I meant my goodbye, I meant it when I said he is free to fly and be an angel. As Nakhane has said so many times, I have gained an angel and I will always know he has my back.

Everyone is conversing and having lunch, there is laughter. I am glad there is no heavy sadness in the air. I would rather we sit and laugh while

sharing dad's memories instead of crying. I look at mama and Nakhane's mother, another person I knew would get along with my mom. And she is mama's favourite, she did take care of me after all. I turn and walk back to the garden, the chairs are still here. They will be taken later on so I sit alone and look at dad's picture. He is smiling, his ever beautiful smile. My dear dad!

"Can I sit?" I look up and it is Nomakrestu, I nod. "Are you fine?" she asks.

"Yes." I tell her, she looks like there is war in her head. "Are you okay?" I ask.

"Made me think of the time we lost my parents, what a confusing time." She says looking at Tata's picture, "I still miss them, and I feel sorry for the rest especially Andisiwe and Asanda. They were too young." The wound of their parents' death has been opened by Maria's presence and then this happens.

“I am sorry.” I am never sure what to say to this one, you never know what is the right thing to say to Nomakrestu.

“But also it showed me how short life is.” She seems to have something else in mind, “I am divorcing my husband.” She chuckles and I am besides myself with shock. “It has been long coming Soyama. I want love, I have decided I want to be happy and he doesn’t make me happy. He instead ruins me. I am this angry person now and I am scared one day I will push all of you away.” She actually has tears and I put my head on her shoulders.

“You are our sister; we would never leave you.” I say.

“She is right.” Andisiwe says sitting next to us, she smiles. She and Andisiwe are always at odds but I don’t doubt the love between them. “I am glad you realise how unbearable you are. I have been waiting for this day because this isn’t

who you are, I know how kind and soft you are.” She tells her. Of course Andisiwe will give it like it is. It is just good she can take it.

“I know. And I called a therapist, I have a lot to unpack. I cannot go on like this; I need to do better for my children.” She says.

“Why do we always get the best from deaths?” I can’t believe I just made this joke, we all laugh then sigh.

“Sometimes there is a silver lining in dark clouds.” Nomakrestu says, “And you are that Soyama. You have make Sokhaya so happy, I am happy too. As long as my mother’s children are happy.” She goes on. “I am so sorry on how hard I have been on you. I hope you can forgive me.” She says. I squeeze her hand and smile.

Things will be fine. We will be able

Forced Love

Insert Twenty Five

Shuu. What a long week it has been. I won't lie I am so glad it is over, now we can breathe and start mourning. Everyone has left, Nomakrestu offered to go with Tamkhulu and Maria, much to her husband's annoyance. She is going to spend some time home with her kids, Asanda has school and she is in the middle of final exams, so I am left with Sokhaya, our son along with Andisiwe and Si'Nomandiya. You'd swear these two work for their father's farm the way they behave, also they have moved from the hotel, my mom wouldn't hear of it. My in-laws staying in a hotel when we have so many rooms. And thank God my family also left as soon as possible, no one needs their energy here.

"You are definitely God's favourite, look at how small your stomach is." Mama says walking

into my room, I am looking at my small bump in the mirror, I really am.

“And Rainbow is treating me very well.” I tell her looking at her, I cannot get used to seeing her wearing black clothing. Just as I can never get used to not seeing my dad follow behind her like her shadow, that man loved her.

“The aunts want you down for breakfast before they come dragging you.” She says and we laugh, those two are very serious at their taking care of me. I have never been taken off so much in my entire life, those two are the best.

“Okay, lets go.” I say taking her hand.

Downstairs we find Si’Nomandiya busy setting the table for lunch with Junior’s baby on her back, her mom had to go to school, she is a law student. Junior also went to work and Sokhaya took his son to sightsee, they said something

about spending the whole day with too much women, not that Phumlani isn't sending me pictures and videos. His father will need to buy me more storage or just get me a new cell phone. What's a phone when other women get cars for being pregnant?

"Hey sit, I will put this cutie down." This one loves children, she spent the entire week being Elethu's unpaid nanny.

"How are you feeling?" Andisiwe asks, earlier I was a bit nauseous and all but now I am fine.

"Good. Missy was ill behaving a bit." I tell her, this one was reminding me who is the boss.

"With all her ill behaviour, Rainbow did you good with the bump." Si'Nomandiya says. Rainbow is officially her nickname when we don't even have even the official one.

"She is now Rainbow, have you thought of names?" Mama asks just what I am thinking.

“No. Her father and I need to speak about that, but we haven’t.” I tell them.

“Do. Children never arrive when you think they will, I am sure between you two something will come up.” Andisiwe says.

“We will but Nakhane was I’d probably give birth at 10 months since it is my first baby.” I tell them.

“She is right; it is very likely to happen.” Mom tells me.

I dish up fruits for myself and my sisters stare at me so I have to add more, this makes mama laugh. They are a bore!

“Molweni.” Elethu says walking in, with mama’s laughing we couldn’t even hear the front door open.

“Hey, you look tired.” Mama says. I love their relationship even though I envy it a bit, I am glad she is not those mother-in-laws who hate their

daughters-in-law.

“I am but I will be okay after a hot bath.” She says already dishing up for herself, “How was little Nono?” I am still amazed that they named their child after me, what an honour.

“She is an angel; I might steal her.”
Si’Nomandiya says.

“Amazing how she behaves until she sees me or her father, that one is a rascal.” She really is. She is an angel to everyone then does her best to hassle her father. And it is not always crying but she does her best not to be still when she is with him, she is a bit better with Elethu. Mama says Junior was a hurricane child so this is his karma. And that thing she does with her eyes then smile? She becomes so cute that Junior has no choice to be wrapped around her little fingers. Also she has Phumlani and Sokhaya at the palm of her hands, I can already tell Rainbow will be spoilt rotten.

Phumlani, like his aunt, does not mind babysitting duty. He is always there for it. If he was not going to school next year he'd be my go to babysitter.

"You know Sokhaya and I have not started on so much when it comes to Rainbow, we still have to prepare her space you know. Get her a cot and everything. We don't even have a place to keep the money clothes we have bought for her." I tell them.

"Seems like you found a man as lazy as you." They all laugh. And mama and Si'Nomandiya start exchanging mine and Sokhaya's childhood stories, should have known it was a bad idea to have them at the same place for so long. Look at this mess now.

"You look so sexy now that you have a bump." He says watching me walk to bed, a bump that

looks like four months at most. God did me bad.

“Huh, we have a lot to do baby. For the baby, we don’t even have a name for Rainbow.” I say getting next him and kiss his cheeks before lying on the side and look at him.

“Name? I thought Rainbow was her name.” I stare at him and he laughs, “I am joking. I have a name; I cannot think of any name for our first child together than Thandolwethu.” That is a beautiful name, I smile and brush his cheeks. “Hope those eyes mean you actually like the name.” he says.

I like the name, this baby is a testimony of our love, how far we have come. “Of course I love the name. So tell me have you gotten over your fear?” Sokhaya believes that dead people don’t leave their homes immediately and that for a while their spirits linger around their homes for some time, it doesn’t help that tata was home when he had his heart attack, so we are not

having sex because apparently my father is so bored he'd watch us have sex.

"No, don't start Soyama. My father-in-law didn't even know me much, in fact all he remembers of me is me telling him I will kill his son now you want me to sleep his daughter under his roof two days after he was laid to rest?" I didn't know he was this annoying.

"He has seen you take care of everyone including the son you threatened to kill, I believe he wouldn't mind you making his daughter happy." I say.

"Nope, nothing will convince me." He says.

"Kodwa sithandwa sam, kanti why are you like this Madiba?" he smiles and I melt, my husband is handsome, rare beauty.

"You are beautiful Mkam." He says. "If Thandolwethu looks as beautiful as you do then I'm knocking you up in the next two years." He

swears.

“I was hoping once she crawls then we are making the next, five children aren’t something small.” I tell him.

“Five. Seems like I will have my hands full.”

It only dawns to me that since we have never dated we never spoke about children, ever. We were navigating marriage life as strangers at some point then Phumlani came then we were made aware of Rainbow. “You don’t want many children?” I ask.

He gives me a wide smile, “I want as many as you can give me. As long as you are willing to have more kids we will have them, any gender too.” Didn’t I win in the husband Olympics?

“You know I love you, right? Like in a way that is not explainable.” I say.

“I love you too. You are everything to me.” As long he keeps loving me like this then I will live

with his superstitions and beliefs about dead people. I can live even with his muddy boots; God know how annoying they are.

Forced Love

Insert Twenty Six

“Rainbow!!” Today her younger brother turns a year old. Sokhaya was right we had our second child just a week after Rainbow turned two, which means last week we were doing this and this week we are again. But I wouldn’t have it otherwise. Ngcwele was born at midnight, at home with a midwife in water just as Rainbow was. And ten months after his own birth, two months ago, we had Asiphile, the same way.

Unlike Rainbow, there was no flat stomach in these two pregnancies, I was big as a giant and half the time irritable too.

“Ngcwele!” I yell again. Ngcwele started walking at nine months, proving the superstition that falling pregnant whilst the other child is still on breast hinders their development wrong. And ever since he was able to use his legs he started running after his older sister. Now, Rainbow is her father’s daughter so every time they disappear they will be found playing with the pigs, today is not the day.

“Thando ...” I stop as Phumlani appears carrying the birthday boy.

“Had to take them to the shop to stop their endeavours.” He tells me.

Phumlani is grown. He is twenty years old and pursuing his law degree at Wits, he is doing pretty well and making me a proud mom. Besides we do need a lawyer in this family, God knows.

“Thank you sunny, where is Rainbow?” I ask

because that little missy could have sneaked a trip to the pigsty if she isn't killing Maria's chickens.

"She saw dad and dabs." He tells me.

Maria stayed. She and Sokhaya are in far better position that they were when she got here, she is indeed in love with the old man and they remain unmarried to date. Nomakrestu returned home permanently and is a principal at the local High school, I am proud of her. Asanda graduated and is working as a journalist for a paper in Gqeberha, Andisiwe decided to pursue a degree in accounting and has quit her job at the police force completely, and Si'Nomandiya and her baby daddy and long-time boyfriend officially got married.

It has been a happy few years but it has been a bit hard. Elethu died and Junior became a single father, he was awarded Nontle's full custody in court. He still lives with mom and got a job as a

coach for a soccer club, his dream job. Not so bad.

Nomfundo and her husband decided to adopt even against the wishes of her marital family, who after learning their son is the infertile one decided his brother can borrow him a seed. I am glad that they actually did not take it. There is nothing with siblings helping each other out, and donating semen is not such a bad thing but the brother and family expected Nomfundo to sleep with the brother-in-law. They were crazy, and made their son feel like less of a man, and that relationship has been proven to be hard to fix. Nomfundo and her husband relocated to Cape Town, they liked it when they were there for my dad's funeral. Also, I like that I have people I trust around my mom.

And it turned out Nakhane has a step child after all, one that is obviously older than her marriage or Mlo would be buried and dead. She didn't

come looking for her father, she came to visit as Phumlani's girlfriend and my genius friend stole her toothbrush. In her defence, the child apparently looked a lot like her late mother-in-law, of course no one thought anything of it because humans look alike a lot, but this is Nakhane we are talking about – she never stops thinking. And that is how that pretty girl met her father whom she thought was dead. And the mom was a one night stand from Msobomvu, the things Mlo do! Clap once. Her mom is now married and she lives with her grandparents so Mlo went to do what was necessary and was granted the permission to take the child. Me and Nakhane are now in-laws, who would've thought?! And you know what she said? We are definitely keeping the farm within the family. And because she is the doctor she randomly drops off condoms for Phumlani, a reminder to never make us grandmothers at this young age. I am 29, I'd die if I were to be a

grandmother. A lot has happened but thank God I still love Sokhaya. Imagine how awkward it'd be if it turned out to be just great sex and infatuation? Lord!

I am glad today is sunny, imagine if it rained when I have so many guests coming to celebrate my prince. "Mommy bear, no time to day dream." Si'Nomandiya says joining me, marriage glow has never left her face.

"Hey, when did you arrive?" I ask.

"Oh, now. What are you thinking about?" she asks.

"That I am happy I am not a grandmother, yet." I say looking at Phumlani and Nonopha who are leaning on Sokhaya's car laughing at something. Si'Nomandiya laughs.

"It won't be long at this rate. By the time you turn 35 you will be a grandma, if you are lucky."

She tells me.

“Not helping. Where is S’bari?” I ask.

“Sokhaya and Mlo took him the moment he got off the car.” She says rolling her eyes,
“Nomfundo’s husband looks happy now.” Those two arrived last night.

“He deserves it. They both do.” I say, “We all do.” I add.

“I know. Where are my kids? I didn’t see Asiphile behind Rainbow.” She says.

“Maria is bathing him, you know her and Tamkhulu love acting like grandparents of the century.” I say, “And Mellow is sleeping.” My children all have some cute nicknames.

Thandolwethu is Rainbow thanks to Nakhane, Ngcwele is Munchie thanks to his older brother and Asiphile is Mellow short for Marshmallows which came from her father as I loved them during the pregnancy.

“You are not pregnant are you?” she is side eyeing me and I laugh, she is always asking me that every time she sees me. “You and Sokhaya are on some mission.”

“No. We will give Munchies and Mellow a growing chance.” I reply.

“Thank God, you will run out of names.” She says.

We won't, we already have possible names for every child we will have. She is right though; we are on a mission. Giving my children what they have, siblings to rely on. When they lost their parent they had each other and that is what they will have, each other should Sokhaya and I ever leave this earth. Hopefully, it won't be until they have selected their own paths and have found happiness. I wouldn't want to die with children as young as Sokhaya and his siblings were.

“You two are gossiping.” My handsome man walks in with the little human, Mellow who us drooling saliva as always. “Miss here is awake.” He says kissing me. I cannot believe that he will be turning 40 in two years, he is so old. He even has a big of grey hair now, and his beard that he is growing is black and grey.

“The party should start.” I say.

“I will get Mr Party.” Si’Nomandiya offers and walk away.

“Ncncncnc.” He is watching Phumlani and Nonopha, “How long you think it will take before they impregnate each other?” Why is everyone so convinced they will be making a baby soon.

“Not soon if Nakhane and I have anything to do with it.” I tell him, “She is on contraceptives and there are condoms.” I say, “And you had a sex talk with him.” Well they had what I hope was that.

“Yes but I am not such great example, I did have him when I was 18. But enough on that, lets go celebrate our little love.” He says.

Si’Nomandiya and Munchies pass by the window going to the tent, time to go be a mom. We leave the house and everyone is already seated, Rainbow is sitting next to Munchies and that is the only way he will sit there as Mr Party.

Andisiwe is the MC and is actually in-charge of today, all I have to do is wave when I get my credits for pushing him out and appearing in amazing photos.

I hold Sokhaya’s free hand as the birthday celebration starts.

Who would have thought it’d work? Forced Marriage. No, Forced Love. This was love that was forced by the universe in the cruellest way but it has been the best love I have ever had. The past four years of marriage have been

amazing. Falling in love with this man with each waking day has been a dream come true. Life has come to mean so much, matter so much, ever since I stepped into this yard limping and terrified.

Would I change anything?

No.

Maybe.

Maybe Samkelo would have survived the accident, that would be ideal but I wouldn't have chosen anything over marrying his uncle under any circumstances. I would have resigned from Samuel & Co, gave everything up, excitedly if I knew what was actually awaiting me in KwaPhalo.

I was awaited by love, beautiful babies, friends, sisters and grandparents.

This I'd choose all over again.

“I love you.” My husband whispers then kiss the knob of my ear before turning to our son’s birthday.

The End.