

INKANYISO

PRELUDE

“Nobody knows that except Nolundi, myself and your father. If you invite them to our lives they will know him and start asking questions,” she says.

“But what happened to the maid? Did she sleep with dad?” I ask.

“Yes, then she tried to abort the baby, however Mamkhulu rushed her to the hospital and we got there on time.

Then we had to make a decision, I talked to Nolundi, we talked to your father and he talked to her. She decided to give Nqanawe to Nolundi.

It was all legal. She fell sick shortly after giving birth, she was in Nomuzi’s house in Durban and we

were here. Before we could get her medical help Nomuzi called and said she had died in the hospital.”

How convenience! I doubt they were going to help her, they took the baby and left her to die, that’s why they’re scared of the Ngwenyas getting close.

“So what’s going to happen now because I’m not going to let you evict the mother of my child’s family?”



CHAPTER 1
NKANYISO

“Have you landed?” that’s my mother’s third text.

The car has already picked me up, but I know she won’t stop texting if I don’t show her any proof that I’m on my way. I take a picture of my arm in the car and send it. Now she can rest, my father always tells her to. But with me she’s always been like this; more than involved in her 25 year old son’s life than any mother should. My grandmother, the one we are burying today, Balungile, always said I grew up in my mother’s hip. Growing up she was my best friend, I was closer to my mother than I was to my twin brothers. Well, I also came as a plus-

one with them, we are triplets, but I've always been different from them. After finishing high school they both went to University of Zululand, thankfully they didn't pursue the same course. They could have, they were always doing things together growing up, even making it hard for people to tell them apart. I looked like them from head to toe but it was easy to tell me apart from them. I had a very scanty personality, I wasn't the people's person and I didn't go out much in the village. And well, I have burning scars all over my right thigh down to my knee. I had an accident as a baby, my nerves were severely damaged. Even though I don't have any difficulties, but when winter hits sometimes I limp.

I've been residing in the United Kingdom for the past two years, working as a marketing director in South London. I left shortly after graduating. My father was against the idea of me leaving the country but what Mercy can't do still doesn't exist. My father is stubborn to everyone but not my mother. I only had to convince her that I wasn't going to forget who I am and where I come from, then she took it to her husband and came back telling me to start planning for my departure.

I know I will receive some backlash from my father because I should've been here at least two days before the funeral. I'm the last one to arrive from my siblings, it's 11:36am when I get to the royal house. Even though my grandmother had come back home

from her marital house, she was married so she will be buried at the Ncubes next to her husband. It's down the village, I have to take my car and drive another 25 minutes to get to the location. Hopefully Nqanawe treated the car well. I left it in his care, he's our brother from my father's first wife, just two years younger than us.

I didn't expect to find anyone home but for some reason Mamkhulu is here, she didn't go to the funeral. I walk into her watching TV in the family house. One big house that caters for everyone in the yard and is used for family gatherings and meetings. We are not a divided family but it's a polygamous household, both my mother and Mamkhulu have their separate houses in the same yard.

“What time is this Nkanyiso?” she asks, standing up with her arms open. I check my watch and tell her; “It’s 11:41am Ma.”

I earn a slap in the head for that accurate answer. I laugh and hug her, she’s always been our second mother. For some growing up in a polygamous family is a problem, but to me it was all about having two mothers. When my mother and I fought, I’d always seek refuge from Mamkhulu.

“How are you?” she asks, sizing my arms and looking at me from the feet.

“You look fit,” she says.

I smile, my crazy work-outs are paying off.

“But your father is mad at you. You’re not an American, your grandmother is being buried and you’re arriving on the day of the funeral?”

“I know Ma, I couldn’t get a flight on time. Also, I don’t stay in America,” I always tell everyone this. I don’t know why people assume being abroad means America.

“It doesn’t matter, go and change,” she says, pushing my shoulder.

“Why are you not at the funeral?” I ask, grabbing a pear before heading to the door.

“I decided not to,” she says.

We are a big family, people don’t always see eye to eye. Plus her and Gog’ Balungile’s children never got along. I hear they bullied my father and undermined the kingdom before my mother came here and kind of rebuilt everything.

Nqanawe left with my car. I don’t know why he’s not buying his own car

because he got the job as soon as he graduated. Bab' Zibulo hired him right away, it's what happens when your father's brother has multiple businesses and likes you the most because you went and studied what he told you to study. The twins, Khanyisa and Skhanyiso, weren't much interested in joining any of the family businesses. They wanted to clown and cause trouble far away from those who'd scold them. Mamkhulu gives me my father's Hilux's keys, I hope this doesn't get me in any trouble. My father treats his cars better than his wives- those are my mothers words, not mine.

CHAPTER 2

NKANYISO

Fortunately when I get to the Ncubes my father is not at the cemetery, I quietly join a group of elder men. I spot my brothers, Skhanyiso, Khanyisa and Nqanawe, all with spades and shovels. I'm not taking off my expensive jeans to dig a grave, I will pass bottles of water and make necessary phone calls when requested. "What time is this Nkanyiso?" the voice says behind me.

I turn around, it's Bab' Zibulo. Damn, I thought I was hidden between these people.

"I couldn't get a flight on time," I say. "Why didn't you tell me then? I would've arranged one for you," he says.

Sometimes I forget that we have a millionaire in the family. But my arriving today was intentional, I had to nurse a broken heart before preparing for my journey. It's what you get from Ukrainian girls, I'm single after 6 months of absolute blissful relationship with a woman I thought was going to be my forever. I know it's a lame excuse but my grandmother is dead and she'd be still dead even if I got here last week. "Go and help your brothers," Bab' Zibulo says.

"I'm not dressed for the grave-digging," I say.

He frowns, "What?"

"I'm tired baba, please."

He gives me a look before walking off. If this wasn't such an environment he would've given me an earful. There's

a way that we are expected to carry ourselves. My father has always been humble, sometimes he'd make us do things outside our comfort zone just to prove to the village that we weren't some golden boys. We are just like any other boy in the village, so if there's a grave to be dug we are expected to pull up our pants and get in it.

The time comes for the burial to take place. We fetch the coffin, my brothers and some other guys carry it to the cemetery. I accidentally lock eyes with my father and I can tell that he's not impressed. I keep my distance and mingle with senior men who are standing at the side. We throw soil into the grave, saying goodbye to Gog' Balungile, then it's time to go and bath in the river. It's 15 minutes away from

the Ncubes, I can't do it. I'm actually tired, I can't walk such distance. It's not like I touched anything, so I join the elders who are washing hands with *umswani* below the gate.

I need to find my mother, I only saw her from a distance at the cemetery.

She's obviously in the kitchen with Azande's mom, Bab'Zibulo's wife.

I bump into my sister, my mother's third born child and the apple of my father's eye. Ayabongwa, everyone calls her Yaya. She's eating a dessert, when she sees me she laughs.

"Dad is so going to kill you," she says before greeting me. She's the only girl that my father has, any punishment passed to the boys excites her. I think women in general enjoy seeing men being tortured.

“As if I don’t know that,” I say and then hug her while her arms are holding the bowl she’s eating from. She lives in her own world and trust me, her own world doesn’t have any of us living in it but her.

“Where’s Ma?” I ask.

“She’s inside the kitchen,” she says.

“Please ask her to come and see me.”

There’s a crowd inside the kitchen, they’re probably dishing for the people coming from the cemetery, I don’t want to disturb.

“Okay, I will tell her the prince is here!” she gets back inside the house.

My mother comes out. I’m not a mama’s boy but she’s my world. She envelopes me in a big hug. She’s the only person who’s not going to give

me a hard time for coming late. I'm here, it's all that matters to her.

"You almost gave me a heart attack. How can you not respond your texts for over 5 minutes?"

My mother is the reason why they invented the word 'drama'. I laugh and hug her again.

"You're so annoying. Have you eaten?" she asks, pulling my arm and taking me inside one of the rooms.

She instructs one girl we pass standing in the passage to bring me a plate of food. I get inside the room, there are some chairs and roughly every suitcase thrown on the floor. This is where guests stored their luggage.

I sit on the chair and look at my mother, "You look good. But why is the queen in the kitchen cooking?"

“To look good, like I’m down to earth and all,” she says.

“And Mamkhulu didn’t care?” I ask, laughing.

“Nobody actually cares, it’s just that me and Thando were fake enough to come,” she says.

It looks like everyone has a problem with my aunts from Gog’Balungile. They made things awkward at the cemetery, I don’t like hearing women cry, it’s deep and triggering.

“So how is everything?” I ask her.

She shrugs with a low sigh. “Nothing much, your father will brief you once he’s calm.”

I was about life in general, not about the things that concern the kingdom. For some odd reasons everyone has always thought I’m interested. I don’t

know why, maybe because I'm a good listener than all my siblings combined. "You and Mamkhulu are good?" I ask. "We are good. We are actually planning to have a family celebration," she says.

"Celebrating what?" I'm confused.

"Having grown kids and a husband who's no longer whoring around," she says.

Jeez, I shut my eyes.

"He's my father," I wouldn't defend him because I know how much stress he's put on them, sometimes disappearing and not telling them where he is. But he's repented, he's a changed man.

"Don't be like him Nkanyiso, I beg of you. You're going to marry one girl who's going to be educated and self-

driven like you. Someone who is in touch with her culture and traditions.” I’m looking at her, laughing. She didn’t go for an educated man, but all of a sudden it’s a requirement.

“Don’t laugh, I mean it,” she says. For some odd reason she’s serious.

“Ma, I will date anyone I want to date. I’m not even sure I want to get married yet,” I say.

“What have I always told you?” She’s hugging me on the shoulders and resting her head.

“About the life planned for me?” I ask.

“Yes, you’re not like your brothers or any of your friends. You were raised differently, that’s why everything you do matters to your father.”

I’ve heard this talk before. I was always treated differently from my brothers, however it wasn’t anything

special that benefited me. If anything I did the most chores and father-shadowing.

The girl who was sent to fetch me food walks in. I don't pay attention until she kneels in front of me. Even my mothers kneel when giving me something. I don't remember having anyone giving me something on their feet, even when I was just a child.

Maybe that's one thing about being raised differently because none of my siblings get knelt for.

"Thank you," I say to her.

She gets up and rubs her knees.

There's no eye contact, she's not allowed to. I watch her leave, she's got really fit body.

"Who is she?" I ask my mother.

"I don't know her, I think she's one of the neighbors that you have no

business knowing. Eat your food,” she instructs.

This woman! I wasn't even asking because I want to have any business with her. I just have never seen her around, even though I only saw her back and dropped head.

CHAPTER 3

NKANYISO

I only see my father the next day, he's summoned me to his hermitage, just me alone. My mother knows I'm about to get a scolding, or even worse a punishment to be his shadow the whole day. She's been trying to soften him up all morning. My mother rarely wakes up and makes special breakfast for just him. I hope it worked, I'm not in a mood to get shouted at.

I walk in and take a seat. When I lift my eyes he's calmer than I imagined. He's resting his back on the chair and playing with his wrist-band.

"Bayede," I say.

I don't call him dad when he's here, sitting on that chair.

“Nkanyiso,” he says and blows out a faint sigh.

“Do we need to book in advance for you to come home for important occasions?” he asks.

He’s aging gracefully, he’s greying but still looks physically better than a lot of men in their 50s.

“No, I did tell Ma that I wasn’t getting a flight,” I say.

“Then it’s time you come back home, so that we won’t have flights problems,” he says.

Not this again!

“It won’t happen again,” I say.

He exhales heavily and signals that I pour him a drink. He’s into whiskeys now, I don’t know when he adopted Bab’ Zibulo’s drinking habits.

I do, I pour quarter in the glass and give him.

“It is time,” he says.

I don’t understand what he’s trying to say.

He clears his throat, “Zibulo and I have spoken. You have to come home and be ready.”

“Please baba, tell me you’re not talking about that again. I asked to move abroad for a reason, I love staying in London, I have a life and career there.”

“You’re not a career person, you’re a prince and if I don’t get better you will have to take over.”

Okay, I’m lost. Yes, I’m a prince but so is the rest of my brothers. And what does he mean if he doesn’t get better?

“Are you sick?” That just raised my alarm. He looks fine but one can never be too sure.

“Don’t panic about it, I’m not dying but if I don’t get treatment I might have to step down,” he says.

“Okay, but if you step down it doesn’t necessarily need to be me who takes over. There’s Khanyisa and Skhanyiso, then Nqanawe who I think is the right candidate since he’s born from the first wife,” I say.

“It’s complicated, son. Not everything is the way you think it is. You are the one who stand to take over should a new king be needed. You were raised that way, hence you’re wearing that skin around your neck and it doesn’t look like the ones your brothers wear.”

I touch my neck. Why didn’t anyone tell me that it’s different for a reason?

“Why me?” I ask.

I've never been interested in the kingdom, simply because I don't like spending the rest of my life in the Dunga village with its civil wars and all.

"Your mother and I decided when you were one year old. We chose you," he says.

Still, that doesn't answer my question.

"You've always been different Nkanyiso. You had leadership qualities as soon as you were born," he says.

Leadership qualities? How do you identify such from a one-year old?

"Wasn't I slow?" I ask.

He chuckles, "I wouldn't say slow, even though I thought so at first. You just had physical difficulties due to the burning injuries."

I've never really asked this, I just know that I got burnt from a basin of boiled water.

"Who burnt me?" I ask just to know, not that I care much, I love my scars. He throws the drink down his throat and passes the glass to me. He wants more.

"Your mom, but she wasn't in a good state of mind. It was early into our marriage, she had just given birth to 3 babies and married within 6 months. She was dealing with a lot, at some point she was put in a mental ward for a week."

Okay, this is new information.

"Was it an accident?" I ask because somehow it doesn't make sense why my mother has never mentioned this.

"No," he says.

I can't put a finger on my emotions but hearing this for the first time hurts me in some way.

"She just was not mentally fit," he's justifying it.

"Was she sorry?" I ask.

He nods, "She was, when she came back from the hospital she made a lot of efforts and bonded with you and your brothers."

"So me being chosen as a prince to take over was out of guilt?" Now it all makes sense, I'm angry at the fact that my mother, whom I talk to about everything and love so dearly, has been keeping this from me and she, together with her husband, wants me to take the throne as a compensation.

"It wasn't out of guilt, you're a suitable person for the throne," he says.

“I would’ve agreed, but baba I still have a limp during winter and cold days. Don’t hurt me and think that I’m strong for dealing with your pain, then expect me to take the throne as if it’s a favor and walk in the park.”

“Where is all this coming from?” He frowns.

“You’ve always known that you got burnt as a baby and there’s nothing your mother has ever done to show that she doesn’t love you and she wouldn’t lay down her life for you. Out of all your siblings, you’ve been spoiled Nkanyiso, with everything that you wanted,” he says.

Is he being real?

“I’m angry because my mother boiled my leg with water intentionally and now I’m expected to come home and leave my life and come here to be on

standby," I'm getting really worked up.

"I didn't say intentionally, I said she was not at the right state of mind," he's twisting his own words.

I asked him if it was a mistake and he said no. I'm not sitting here and listening to this.

I push back the chair and stand.

"Don't you dare walk out while I'm talking to you," he says.

I'm one person he can't intimidate. I walk out and go straight to my mother's bedroom. I know she's still doing her facials, there's nothing she fears more than aging.

I walk in without knocking. She turns her head, ready to shout but when she sees that it's me, she smiles. Now I'm

not sure if the soft upbringing was out of guilt or love.

“You should knock, surely you don’t want to see your mother’s butt,” she says, going back to pasting whatever that is on her face.

“I just talked to dad,” I say.

“Yeah? What is your decision?”

“I’m not staying,” I say.

She looks up, disappointed.

“I know your father doesn’t have the best approach on things but baby, this is important, he might not be physically fit in the next few years.”

“Am I physically fit?” I ask.

“Don’t tell me they infected you with diseases in the UK,” she says, narrowing her eyes.

“I was burnt as a baby, Ma,” I say.

She looks away, I don’t know why I haven’t asked myself the ‘how’s’ all

this time. I almost got crippled from the incident.

“You did it intentionally Ma. Was it me you didn’t like the most?” I’m hurt. All these years I thought I was her favorite.

“Who said that?” She stands, eyebrows snapped and eyes getting teary.

“Is it a lie?” I ask.

“I had PPD, I wasn’t in control of my mind and actions. Do you know how much I hated myself for harming you? It took me years to live with it. I’ve never not loved you at any point in my life. You’re my son, I love you.” She’s on my face grabbing my cheeks as if I’m a child.

“You’ve never thought of apologizing?” That’s what blows my mind off.

“My apology was changing and becoming a better mother,” she says. “So you were never going to tell me and you’re not going to say sorry?” She takes a step back, frowning. “Did your father say something about me? I don’t understand all this.”

Wow, she doesn’t understand that I want to hear her acknowledging that her PPD left me scarred for life and she should’ve told me.

“Choose another son, I’m not doing it.” I walk out, she’s screaming after me.

I need some fresh air.

CHAPTER 4

NKANYISO

I've never walked the valleys alone. I don't even know how far I am from home, I've been walking for almost an hour now, avoiding bumping into people and getting bowed to. I've calmed down, I'm ready to go back home and book my flight back to London. I want to be gone as soon as possible. I definitely don't want the throne by any possibility. I want to live my life, to make mistakes on my own and learn from them. I can't imagine spending the rest of my life here; finding a traditional wife to bear me kids to raise as prince and princesses. I have a lot of things planned for my life.

I'm walking through the bush, trying to find my way back home. It's quiet, I didn't expect to walk into someone.

It's a young woman tying a fagot of firewood. All the villages have electricity now, who still collects firewood? This is a dangerous area for a woman to be in alone.

I'm not in the mood to bump into people and make small conversations. But I stop and greet her.

She lifts her head and almost drops to the ground. She wasn't even aware that someone was walking up to her.

It could've been a lion for Christ' sake. "He...hello, I'm sorry I was..."

I raise my eyebrow. She's sorry for what?

"I didn't know you were standing here," she says.

“Why are you here alone? It’s dangerous.” I’m looking at her and trying to figure out how do I know her. I feel like I’ve seen her before.

“I come here often, it looks dangerous but it’s not,” she says.

It’s even more dangerous that she thinks it’s not dangerous being in a bush alone.

“Don’t you have electricity?” I ask.

“I do, but it’s not free,” she says.

I nod, I wish I could bite myself for thinking everyone has my privileges.

“I’m Nkanyiso,” I say, extending my hand for a shake.

She looks at her own hand, then wipes it at the side of her dress before shaking mine.

“I know who you are,” she says.

I bet everyone does, but I don’t let that gets into my head.

“I’m Nonsikelelo Ngwenya,” she says.

I nod, “Nsike.”

She smiles, but she’s visibly tired.

“Is home close by?” I ask.

“Yeah, I will be fine,” she says,
convincing me with another flash of
smile.

I look at the fagot she’s about to carry
on her head and I feel bad. I grew up
with a lot of privileges, I’ve never had
no light in the house or had to wisely
use the electricity.

“I can send you electricity when I get
home.”

“Oh thanks, but how? I don’t know
my meter number by head and I lost
my phone last week.”

That’s tricky, I thought I’d take her
number and send it. I hate raising
someone’s hopes and not coming
through.

“Maybe if you give me directions,” I say.

I don’t know if she doesn’t believe me or just surprised because all this is happening in the middle of the bush. There’s a confusing look on her face.

“I can come, I will drive,” I say, convincing her.

“Okay, I’m behind the hill, the two unpainted rondavels and a coop,” she says.

It doesn’t sound like good living conditions, everything including her being here in the morning collecting firewood.

“I will come,” I say.

This is a promise, I will go and see where she lives. Maybe I can help with more than just electricity. I still don’t know where I know her from, I turn around and find my way home.

I get home, my father's car is not in the yard. I know I have to talk to my mother, I hate apologizing when I'm not the one who's wrong but she's my mother. I'm calm, I still think she should've said something to me when I was grown but I also understand her fears. I'm angry at her, she was scared this was the reaction she was going to get.

I bump into Skhanyiso, it looks like he's going out. "Where have you been?" he asks.

"I took a walk," I shrug.

"Must've been Mandela's long walk to freedom. Ma is worried about you, you know how she is. Just go and talk to her, man," he says.

"Where are you going?" I ask him.

“To my new girlfriend. You should try black local, maybe you wouldn’t be heartbroken and late for your grandmother’s funeral. It must hurt two times more when she’s the offspring of your ancestors’ oppressor,” he says.

I click my tongue and leave him laughing. They say he’s the funny one, Khanyisa is the short-tempered one that gets into fights easily, and I’m the quiet one that people find hard to understand.

My mother is with Khanyisa, she’s having a cup of tea and he’s sitting with her. The only time she gets this attention from them is when she’s sad. I walk in, Khanyisa stands. He was waiting for me to come home then he’d be free from comforting her.

“If you don’t beat his ass, Mercy, I will say you’ve really lost your touch,” he says, putting his cap on.

He’s the one who gets a teaspoon thrown at his ass. That’s for calling an African mother by her name.

“Where were you?” he asks me, taking the teaspoon back to my mother.

“I took a walk. Can I have a cup of tea too?”

“Do I look like your London maid?”

He turns to Ma and asks, “Belt? Heel? Or sjambok?”

“As if you slept home. Take these to the kitchen,” Ma says, giving him the saucer and the cup she’s been drinking from.

I laugh, the best memories I have of home are from the banter and petty fights with my brothers. I hate that I’m an extra version of them. We are

similar to a fault, I can't even tease them with the dorsal humps on their nose because I have the same hump on mine.

He walks out, I take a seat next to my mother.

She's waiting for me to go first.

"I know you love me," I say.

I'd be lying if I say there's a time in my life, as far as my memory can stretch, when she wasn't there for me.

"But I feel like you could've said something, not for me to find out like this. You and I talk about almost everything, you could've just told me about the PPD thing first, I would've understood. Now for me to find out about it along with everything else, it's too much," I say.

"I hate that your father did that and said it was intentional. He's a serial-

liar, a betrayer and..." Oh Lord! I think whatever they're fighting about really has nothing to do with me, I'm just thrown in the middle.

"Are you sorry?" I interject.

She exhales heavily and nods.

"I'm sorry, everytime I see you limping when it's cold I go to bed crying. Your father knows how this has broken me, I try as much as I can to love you and compensate for the first 9 months that I was a horrible mother to you boys. Unfortunately your scars are there to forever remind me that I'm a bad..." She's crying.

I hug her, it's all forgiven.

"It's okay Ma, I'm alive and you're here supporting me everyday, even when dad would rather have me killed, you stand by me. You're not a bad mother, you raised us well."

She wipes her tears and sits up straight.

“It’s just that I didn’t have a good start in life. I didn’t have a good upbringing either. Sometimes I wonder how my life would’ve turned out if I didn’t put myself in this situation,” she says.

“If you didn’t marry my dad?” I’m shocked because not even once have I ever thought she had a slightest regret of marrying my father. They have their ups and downs, just like Mamkhulu and any other married woman.

“Yes,” she says and cracks a short chuckle. “It didn’t turn out to be what I envisioned. Yes he learned to love me and do right by us, both me and Nolundi. But what if I didn’t meet him? Maybe I would’ve found someone better.”

“Ma!!!” I’m scared, why is she speaking this way because of a temporary situation?

“I don’t want you to rob yourself of life by committing to something that hasn’t proven to give you any happiness,” she’s looking at me.

I’ve never seen my mother looking like this.

I’m scared of the response, but I ask;

“Are you unhappy?”

“Yeah, I’m not happy,” she nods.

I feel a knot sitting below my stomach.

“Is it because of what he told me? I swear I’m not angry and I’m glad there’s no secret between us now,” I say.

“No, I haven’t been happy in a long time,” she confesses with tears in her eyes.

I love both my parents and I want them together for me to have a stable home. But it breaks my heart to know that she's here and she's no longer happy.

"What did he do?" I ask, trying not to sound too broken. If it's a specific thing I'm sure my father can work around it.

"I'm just tired, I think he's tired of pretending too. I've given him children, if your little brother didn't die at birth it would've been 5 beautiful children. I've played the part he wanted me to play, now I have nothing to offer."

"Have you spoken to him about your concerns?"

"I'm no longer interested in fixing things and making it work. I just want to see my kids flourishing and living

their best lives. And you sitting on the throne one day," she says.

This is a lot to digest. My parents are not happy, I don't know how I'm going to live with that.

CHAPTER 5

NKANYISO

I haven't booked my flight, I've been thinking about my mother's situation all day. It makes me sad, I'm old but I don't know if old enough to talk to my dad about his marital issues. I don't want to be that child, but fuck he needs to love my mother the way she wants to be loved, that's not even going to up for negotiations.

"Are we going to the end of the world?" I don't know who that is between Skhanyiso and Khanyisa, my mind is not here.

"I didn't ask anyone to come with me," I say. They just tagged themselves when they saw me getting in the car. Nqanawe is here too, so it's

all Mabhungu's sons, I hope Nsike doesn't get overwhelmed.

"Who are we here to see anyway?" Nqanawe asks.

"I told you her name, I don't know anything else about her. I saw her collecting firewood and promised to bring her electricity, that's all."

"But what's special about her that we had to drive all the way to Emoyeni?" he asks.

He's the only child from Mamkhulu and we all know he's spoiled to the core, that's why he's complaining.

"You can get out of my car and walk back home Nqanawe," I say.

"Damn, you're so moody!"

I'm moody? No, they're bugging the shit out of me. I think we've arrived, I can see the isolated homestead with two rondavels.

“I’ve never seen this homestead before, I had a girlfriend around here two years ago,” Skhanyiso, the community boy, states.

Ma always says he took after my dad, he’s literally a panty-dropper, we are just lucky that we are not uncles yet. They’re all coming out of the car with me. This is going to be overwhelming for Nsike and her family. All four of us just walking in without an invitation!

There’s an old dog lying on the doorstep of the rondavel by the yard entrance. I love pets but this one is wrinkled, old and ugly. It gets up to try and bark at us but there’s no much strength left. It ends up wagging its tail and brushing itself on Nqanawe’s legs. The thing is Nqanawe hates

everything called a pet. He's kicking the poor dog, it falls to the ground and whimpers.

"You're cruel bafo," Skhanyiso says.

"You want it to infects me with viruses," - Nqanawe. He's saying this loud, there's someone emerging from the rondavel and I bet he heard the dog insult.

He's an elder, we quickly get it together and not just stand straight in another man's yard.

"Sawubona baba," Khanyisa greets.

The man stands in front of us. He's wearing a huge frown, looking at each of us.

"Are you the Dungas?" he asks.

"Yebo baba, we are here to see...." He can't remember the name.

“Nsike, I saw her collecting firewood and promised to come by and see how I can help with electricity,” I say. His frown disperses, “She didn’t mention it, come inside please.” In the village it’s disrespectful to walk in someone’s house with your shoes on, unless permitted to do so. But Mamkhulu’s spoilt-brat doesn’t budge, he walks in with his shoes on. The man gives us two grass-mats to sit on and then excuses himself. He comes back after a moment carrying a plastic chair. Behind him is Nsike wearing a short floral dress. She’s freshened up, she looks way better than the girl I saw in the bush. I see her legs and suddenly remember where I saw her from. She’s the girl that gave me food at my grandmother’s funeral. How did I not

see it? If there's anything called dark beauty it was inspired by her. I don't know if I'm blown away by her beauty or just seeing her in a different light.

"They're here for you," the man says.

She looks at Skhanyiso, then at me and Khanyisa. I see the confusion, she can't tell which one is me.

"I'm Nkanyiso," I say, almost lifting my hand up.

Our eyes lock, I can see that she's not comfortable because all eyes are on her. I ease her up with a smile.

"Do you know the meter number now?" I ask.

"I wrote it down," she says, retrieving a piece of paper. I notice that her hand is shaking a little. I go over to her and take it, I give her hand a little squeeze and go back to my position.

“Mmmmm,” the fool sitting next to me says.

I hope Nsike is not one of her ex’s because he fucks almost every girl he comes across.

“This is kind of you, I didn’t know we’d be visited by royalty otherwise I would’ve told her to clean the yard and cook a chicken,” the man says.

“It’s okay baba, we came here to help wherever we can. I don’t think my father knows about the situation here. I see you don’t even have the RDP house even though there was Phase2 last year.”

He exhales heavily, “He knows ndodana, but there wasn’t much he could do since nobody has an ID here. I’m still fighting Home Affairs to get one, from there I will apply for my

niece here then hopefully everything will open.”

Nsike doesn't have an ID? That breaks my heart because in South Africa you can't do anything without it.

“So nobody works?” Khanyisa asks.

“No, not really, I just hold piece jobs around,” he says. Nsike is sitting next to him with her head dropped.

“It's just the two of you?” Khanyisa again.

“No, the boy is at school, he's 13,” he says.

Man, this is sad. Even Skhanyiso, the one who only cares about pussy, agrees that we should log heads and come up with something to help them at least temporarily. If we contact Mkhulu Mathe surely he will use his contacts and help them get IDs.

The uncle has left to take the goats out. I ask to talk to Nsike aside, we walk out and leave others inside the house. "How old are you?" I ask as we stand at the side of the rondavel.

"I'm 27," she says.

Say what now? I'm 25, I can't be younger than her, I mean she looks younger and shorter.

"Why are you laughing?" she asks.

I pull myself together, I don't know why I'm trippin'.

"I'm 28," I say. This is a pure lie that I'm not even sure why I'm making in the first place.

"I really feel bad for you. Did you manage to finish high school without an ID?" I ask.

"Yes, I did but I couldn't get to college," she says.

"Where are your parents?" I ask.

“They passed just after my sister passed 23 years ago, it was before they could get me an ID. I live with my uncle and his son, it’s not a good situation but we survive,” she shrugs. “Right we can only help with money, but we will go home and talk to our parents and see what’s going to come. Thank you for being so strong.” I put my arm around her shoulder. I just thought she’d use a hug but maybe I’ve overstepped boundaries, she’s tense.

I mumble a low sorry and mistakenly lock eyes with her. She’s beautiful, I want to tell her that but I don’t want to come across as weird.

“How do I tell which one you are if you are with your brothers?” It was about time she asks this question.

I laugh, "Just listen to us when we talk, I sound wise and educated, them not so much."

She laughs too, there are two dimples up on her cheeks, just below her eyes. This is another God's special creation. "I'm also bigger than them, just give yourself time and you'll notice that I have a scar on the cheek, as well as on my thigh," I say.

"Okay, I guess I have to pay attention to those. It's weird though, like you have two human beings that look like you," she says.

I laugh, to me it's not weird at all.

"You're the one who stays in America?" she asks, I don't know what she noticed because I still talk like any other person in the village. Don't I?

"I stay in London," I say.

“Don’t you miss home?*

I don’t know why but I smile. It’s the way she’s looking at me.

“I do but I have to work,” I say.

She nods. Nothing more is said, I’m just looking at her and she’s avoiding me.

After a moment she asks that we get inside the house. I don’t want to go inside to those clowns, I want to stand here with her.

“No,” I say.

She stops and frowns.

“I want us to talk,” I say.

“About what?” she asks.

“I don’t know but I don’t want us to go inside.”

She stands, confused.

One devil steps out of the house, Skhanyiso.

“Here you two are!” he says.

I want to kick his balls so bad.

Nsike steps away from me, I feel cold.

“It’s been a long time since I came to this side of the village,” Skhanyiso says. He looks at her, “I’ve never seen you before.”

“We haven’t been here for too long,” she says and turns her eyes to me, “Let me get you guys something to drink.”

I watch her as she walks away. There’s something about her, she doesn’t deserve living like this. She’s the type of woman that deserves good things; nothing but a soft life. She has this thing that makes people, or rather me, want to take her in my arms and shield her from all the struggles.

“Okay Dunga, you’re taken,”

Skhanyiso’s voice snaps me back to reality.

“Taken by what?” I ask.

“The way you’re looking at her.”

He’s reading too much on nothing.

“No, I just feel sorry for her, there’s nothing more that I feel or need from her,” I say and ask that we get inside the house. Standing like this in someone’s yard is disrespectful.

“Are you sure about that?” he asks behind me.

He thinks everyone is a whore...

“I’m not looking for love in a village,” I say.

That shut him up.

CHAPTER 6

SKHANYISO

I'm driving up the hill, trying to find a short-cut back home. It's late, and unlike me Nqanawe has to be home before his mother goes to bed, otherwise she will panic and it will be a dramatic scene.

"Mano is texting me," he says.

I'm trying my best here, there are no streetlights in the village, can he not frustrate me more?

"Tell her we are almost home," I say.

"But we aren't," he's always like this.

That's why he still calls his mother 'mano', he will never break rules because that upsets mano.

"Then tell her we have a flat tyre," I say.

"She will tell dad," he says.

More whining, less solutions.

My phone rings, I check the screen and it's my mother. It's a wives' association against us.

I answer, "Oulady."

"Skhanyiso what time is it on your watch?"

"It's 8pm, we have a flat tyre please give us an hour," I say.

"Where? Is it safe there?" One thing about my mother, she understands that we are boys and sometimes we do boys' things. This phone call is probably just for putting Mamkhulu at ease with her only son's safety.

"Yes, we are with some uncles just before the supermarket," I say.

"Okay, keep me updated," she drops the call.

I glance at Nqanawe, he looks relieved now.

“See, now we have an hour to ourselves,” I say slowing down to a human figure waving at the car. I don’t like giving lifts at night but this is a woman with white shopping bags at the side of the road.

“Maybe it’s a ghost, don’t open the window,” Nqanawe says. You can tell he grew up under his mother’s skirts. He sends me to a fit of laughter.

I roll down the window against his disapproval, the woman comes closer.

“Hi,” she says, leaning closer to the window.

Her voice sounds familiar.

“I’m sorry to bother you but I need a lift, you can drop me wherever your stop is, I’m going to Emoyeni,” she says.

Emoyeni is in the south of the village. We were there earlier to help...Nsike.

“Is it you?” I ask.

“Yes,” she says.

“Jeez, what are you doing here at night. Get in the car,” I’m shocked. She loads her shopping bags in, it looks like she’s coming from the supermarket. Her home is about 30 minutes away from here and it’s this late.

“Why didn’t you go to the supermarket earlier?”

“I didn’t have the money earlier,” she says.

Things must’ve been really bad if she took the money we donated and walked to the supermarket after us.

“You should’ve told me, I would’ve driven you to the supermarket,” I say. She just chuckles and thanks us for the lift.

“We will go and drop her off first,” I tell Nqanawe.

“Come on bafo, you know my mano would go crazy,” he complains.

“She won’t, they think we have a flat tyre.”

He sighs, “Yoh, I’m in deep shit today.”

Remind me to never take kids with me the next time. 8pm is usually just morning for me.

Nsike chuckles behind, “You sound like someone I know, and kind of look like her.”

“Me?” I ask.

“No, your brother.”

“Really? Maybe he has a twin, because other than his father’s forehead he looks nothing like anyone I know,” I say.

Nqanawe is now pissed at everything, he's not even interested in finding out who she thinks he looks like.

"Yes, my older sister who passed away when I was a little girl, she also called our mother like that," she says. "Oh, she was a mommy's girl too?" I say.

"I'm not a mommy's boy," Nqanawe rumbles.

"Don't say that, Mamkhulu will be heartbroken." I'm teasing him all the way to Emoyeni side of the village where we will be dropping Nsike off. It turns out she's not a shy girl, she was probably just tired or hungry. We shared a few jokes on the way. I initially thought Nkanyiso had hots for her but I was wrong. He's never dated locally in his life, he was just sympathizing with her.

“You deserve to have someone
massage you before you sleep,” I say
as I offload her bags from the car.

“I’m used to walking long distances,”
she says.

“It doesn’t mean you don’t deserve a
massage. Which I can come and give
you later,” I say.

She takes the bags and moves to the
side.

“Please invite me over,” I beg.

“I don’t know you to invite you over
and I don’t like massage,” she says.

I’m used to girls like her, they will
give you a hard time whereas they
need you as much as you need them.

“I will leave before your uncle wakes
up.” I will keep on pressing, I really
don’t want to sleep alone today, not
when it’s this cold. When Nkanyiso
brought us here I didn’t just look at

her, but I saw her. I get sexually attracted easily, so when he confirmed that he had no desire to pursue her for anything I knew I'd go for her, I just didn't know this soon. She's got curves in the right places and a tight-looking ass, I want a piece of her.

"I'm not like that, I'm not that type," she says.

"But we are both grown-ups, we can do our thing. I'm not taking you for granted, I just need company and I believe you can use some as well."

"I don't know," she exhales heavily.

"Can I have your number? I will call you when I'm here, I have to go and drop my brother home first," I say. She takes another deep sigh before calling out her number for me. I'm coming back armed with condoms.

I hug her around the waist and whisper goodbye in her ear. She's suddenly shy again, I'm smiling as I get back in the car.

"Seriously bafo!" he groans with dissatisfaction.

"She's beautiful," I say.

"Can't you appreciate beauty without dipping your dick in it? What did Ncane say about you acting like dad?"
Bla bla bla! I reverse the car, I need to drive back here before 11pm so that we will have enough hours together.

CHAPTER 7

NKANYISO

I stood for almost an hour outside, I had almost given up when she finally came to let me inside her rondavel-serving as her bedroom. She's cleaned, the single bed is neatly made, and the table organized with all her cosmetics. The light is on, I can see her clearer than I did in the car. She's wearing a black nightie, it's short and giving me a full glimpse of her thighs. I brought her a gift card and necklace that I bought for another girl who dumped me before receiving them.

"You brought me a gift?" She's surprised.

I'm surprised too.

"You're a woman, I wouldn't just visit you without any gift," I say.

She smiles and looks away shyly. I put the gift bag on her table and come back to sit next to her.

“You’re beautiful,” I say, running my hand on her arm. She’s uncomfortable at first, but within a minute she has relaxed.

“I still don’t understand why you wanted to be here, with me,” she says.

“From the first moment I saw you, I wanted to be here with you, doing this...” I pull her face gently and kiss her lips. I can still smell traces of toothpaste in her mouth. She smells fresh, I push her with my chest until she’s lying on her back.

I kiss her deeper, my body is heating up. She’s kissing me back, giving me the same energy and affection.

I take my jacket and T-shirt off, then I unbuckle my belt and get in the bed

with her. I pull her closer, we continue where we left off- down each other's throats.

I lift her nightie up and find my way beneath her panties. It's a little bush down here, I roll my fingers on her clit. She's a bit uncomfortable, pulling together her legs.

"Relax, I won't hurt you," I plead.

She relaxes, I get my fingers into her warm, tight cunt. The thickness of her lips down there will drive me nuts.

Nuts as in wanting to nut right now.

"How long has it been since you did this?" I ask, tearing the condom foil between my teeth.

"I don't know," she says, hiding her face with her hands. She's shy and cute.

"You can't even remember?" I kiss her nose and roll the condom over my

throbbing dick. "Don't worry, I will make you feel good, you won't regret this and so will I."

I lift her nightie, I want it out, my best sight when fucking missionary is boobs. Big, firm boobs like hers. I want to watch them shaking as I pound her pussy.

She's tight, really tight. I push in slowly and patiently. Her hands are on my shoulders, she's grabbing me with every inch that gets in and begging me not to hurt her.

I'm gentle with the first strokes, I want her to get used to my thick meat inside her, then I will devour her with a generous pace.

Her low moans against my ears turn me on even when I'm hard and already inside her.

"Kumnandi?" I ask.

“Yeah,” she responds in a low whisper.

I lock her lips in a kiss, then I pound every corner. She’s moaning on my mouth, I’m shutting her with kisses. I see her eyes bulging out, her body goes rigid. There’s a warm liquid splashing over my dick. Shit, she’s cumming already.

“That’s it babe, give me that hot splash!” I press her clit and pound her harder, raising the pace and focusing on the spot I find to be very spongy.

“Please, no!” she’s crying as her body convulses violently.

I pull out and lift her legs over my head. Her whole pussy is on my face dripping juices, her cunt is still doing those breathing movements. I lick her, she tastes good as I thought. Raw meat

with small pinches of salt. I pin my tongue on her clit.

“Please don’t do that,” she says while holding the back of my head down between her legs.

I muff her, she drizzles on my face, I still suck and lick her. When she’s allowed her body to be all mine, I stand and put my dick back in. She’s lets loose, allowing me to spread her legs wherever I want. This may just become one of the best sex occasions I’ve ever had.

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The alarm goes off. I set it for 4am, yet I’m annoyed that it’s obeying me and doing exactly what I wanted, when I wanted it. I need to wake up and leave before her uncle and neighbors see

me. But I need to do a proper goodbye first.

“Nsike,” I whisper in her ear.

I woke up horny, I slept too close to her ass and my dick is God, it doesn't sleep day and night.

“Mmmm,” she's drowsy, not even opening her eyes.

“It's 4am, I have to leave,” I say.

“Mmmm,” she says.

I kiss her cheek and shift closer. We slept naked, both of us. It makes things easier, I spread her butt-cheeks and rub my tip in her crack. Then I push it down and lift her thigh with my hand.

“Please, I just need one for the road,” I say.

She lets me lift her knee, giving me good exposure from behind. I thrust into her opening, she's still soaked

from her last night cum. She's even warmer this morning, her coochie is still swollen from last night's hard fucking. No matter how much I try to hold back I know I will be bursting a nut soon.

She's fully awake and moaning as my thighs clap against her butt. She's got one of the best asses I've ever seen. I'm staring at it as it juggles with the claps, the sight drives me closer and closer.

"Ungibhebhisa kamnandi, yeses!" I really don't want to leave, at least I need her on her knees then I will be good.

"Please kneel," I beg.

She's easy to control once you've given her a few good strokes. I fuck her from behind, it takes me less than five minutes to nut. I release inside her, it was impossible to pull out. I

should have though, because I didn't bother with a condom.

I don't know if she felt it. But is it possible not to? She's not going crazy like how most girls would. I don't say anything to raise her alarms either, I just turn her around and wipe her.

Then I kiss her forehead, "This was good. Thank you for letting me come, I had a great night."

"Me too," she says.

I check my wallet, the money I have is a little shorter from R500. She will get the pills and snacks.

CHAPTER 8

NKANYISO

I don't meddle into their affairs. It's not how I was raised to be, but my mother's grievances chip into my soul. I can't leave before confronting my father about this. He married my mother, she gave him 5 kids and stuck with him through his ups and downs. I don't care what his reasons are, but he needs to love my mother, that's not negotiable. As long as she's here and called his wife, respect and love is what he will give her.

I step outside my rondavel, Skhanyiso is parking in. It's another night that he didn't sleep at home.

"You don't see Mercy," I say.

"Keep your voice low," he hisses.

I laugh loud. It's not like anyone still expect him to be a good boy, he's what he is, they still scold him because it's religiously what parents do. But I think now everyone has made peace with me.

"Whose daughter did you fuck last night?" I ask, not that I'm really interested in knowing.

"I was in a night vigil, leave me alone." He heads to his rondavel to sleep the sex off. If this was still an HIV-dominant era he would've been on meds by now, he's lucky condoms are cheap and available for all.

My father finally wakes up, he slept with Mamkhulu last night. I don't know how he handles both of them because now they're like twins, my mother being the most unruly one.

I must say he looks happier when he's from Mamkhulu's bedroom. With my mother it's either they come out of her bedroom not talking to each other or he comes out with red-rimmed eyes and terrible mood swings.

"Mr London, which watch are you using?" He's really in a good mood.

"I'm always an early bird," I say.

He chuckles, "Be early and useful, don't just stand, get a tick spray and get inside the kraal."

Chores, chores, and more chores.

"I will, but can I talk to you first?" I ask.

He stops, looking at me with an approving look.

"It's about my mother, I'm sorry I'm doing this when you just came from Mamkhulu. It's something that's bothering me," I say.

He frowns, "Okay?"

"My mother is not happy, she's starting to have regrets, thinking she made wrong decisions but have to stay for the sake of us."

"Oh, that's what she told you?" He's in a fighting mode within a heart beat.

"She trusts me with her feelings. I wasn't sent by her, I just felt like I need to talk to you man to man," I say.

"You're a man now Nkanyiso? Udodiswe ubani?" he asks with an undermining tone.

"Treat my mother the way she deserves. I don't care what happened, but the fact that you fetched her from the Mchunus and she gave you children, makes her deserves being loved and respected."

"Nkalipho don't school me, you don't know your mother the way I do. I

don't even know why she's making me a bad person to you."

"Baba, this is a request from me to you. Treat my mother good, if you don't I will motivate her to give her second thoughts the benefit of a doubt."

"What are her second thoughts?" This one hits the right nerve. I love the panic in his eyes.

"Just pull up your socks," I say and walk away.

#MERCY

Dunga walks in, by looking at his face she can tell that something is wrong. Waking up from another bedroom and going into another before the sun is fully up is an insult to the wife you

slept with. Mercy is still in bed, Nkanyiso told her he's postponing going back to London with a week, she wants to host a family braai. Dunga closes the door and locks it. It's a big issue and she has no desire to hear it at this hour.

"I just spoke to Nkanyiso," he says, standing next to the bed.

"Morning to you to, my husband," - Mercy.

"Please MaMchunu, there's nothing good about the morning where my son disrespects me because of you," he says.

She yawns, "What did he do?"

"You told him, my son, that I'm not treating you well. How dare you? What haven't I tried to make this work? I can't be begging you my whole life," he's fuming.

“Begging me for what? You tried to turn my son against me, telling him I burnt him on purpose.”

“So this is a payback? We are using kids to fight our long-collapsed marriage?”

“Oh, it has collapsed Dunga?” She sits up, glaring at him. They’ve never been fully okay throughout their marriage, that’s the truth she can’t run away from.

“Yes, our sex produced kids, it was never fully given to me without any complaints following. Not when after I committed to you. You whine about everything MaMchunu, it’s tiring. We are old, very old. But if you think someone out there wants you, then go.”

“Dunga?” She blinks back tears as they warm her eyes. This is not

something she expected so early in the morning.

“Yes, you can go to whoever you think is going to make you happy. But don’t forget that I married you, laph’ ekhaya wathelwa ngenyongo.”

“Okay, thank you,” she says.

He wasn’t expecting that short answer. He wants them to lay their chests all out.

He exhales heavily, “We are stressing the kids. Imagine the stress Nkanyiso will take with him to London because of two grown ups who can’t make peace with their wrong decisions.”

“My wrong decision was you Mabhungu,” Mercy says, heading to her closet and yanking the doors open. She pulls all her clothes from the hangers and throws them on the floor.

He talked out of anger, he starts panicking when he sees her getting ready to pack.

“Yima MaMchunu silungise izinto,” he pulls her from the closet. He thought he was done begging but he can’t stand the idea of her leaving, even if it’s just for the day. Yes, she’s crazy, but she brings balance to his life. As long as MaMzotho is there after the storm, he will go through the storms with her.

“I spoke wrongly, I was caught off guard when Nkanyiso threatened me and said all those things. They’re grown-ups MaMchunu and you’re their mother, they have a soft spot for you. They will fight me for you and that’s going to break this family. You’re giving him more reasons to

reject the throne. Please, yehlis' omoya."

"Our sex produced kids, Mabhungu? That's all you see me for?" She was offended. It hurts because only she was able to give him kids as a wife and that's being reduced to nothing.

"I put it wrongly, what I wanted to say is that can I please be happy when I'm with you? Can we make love? Can you remind me why I left my wife at home and drove to Durban for you? Can you give the Mercy that I fell in love with?"

She swallows hard and tears her eyes off him. He caresses her cheek and turns her face back. "Skhanyiso will give us grandkids soon. Imagine grandma and grandpa not being together to raise them? Forgive me

MaMchunu, I know I've made a lot of mistakes and hurt you."

"Are you really sorry or you are just saying that because Nkanyiso confronted you?" she asks.

"I mean it, I miss my wife," he says. She exhales heavily, he knows he's winning. He grabs the dress in her hand and throws it on the floor and pushes her back to the bed.

"Don't do it, I don't want MaMzotho to think I rode over her," she says, pushing him off.

"It's a new day, your day, let me see how well you've taken care of *ukudla kwamaDunga*." He's pulling down her pyjama pants. His duty is to make her happy, if he doesn't do that his family will break apart.

CHAPTER 9

NKANYISO

I'm going somewhere, my mother asks me to see her before I leave. Her and my dad have been all smiley since morning, I don't know if I'm now the villain.

I find her busy with her cosmetic staff. She's old but these things keep her fresh. I love that for her; beauty is a priority.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"Yes, except for the fact that your brother didn't sleep home again," she says.

The fake stress they give Skhanyiso's whoring habits.

"He was with his girlfriend," I say.

"He needs to bring her home, we are tired of him being everywhere. He's a

royal son, he shouldn't be sleeping on people's beds."

"Then talk to him," I say.

"Your father will talk to him. It's you that I want to talk to about what you did."

Lord, I'm in trouble.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't keep quiet," I say.

"No, you helped us, he apologized."

That's great and funny at the same time.

"Why are you laughing?" she asks.

"I'm laughing because that line is famous; 'he's apologized'," I say.

"Stop laughing at nonsense and tell me when you're finding a girlfriend. Even Nqanawe has one, we saw him standing with her at the supermarket."

"You're stalking us?" I'm shocked, yet laughing.

“No, it was a coincidence. So MaMzotho confronted him, he said the truth and brought her over for lessons,” she says.

“For lessons?” It can never be my nonexistent girlfriend.

“Yes,” she says, boldly.

“Then you will share those lessons the day I’m ready to have a girlfriend. At the moment I’m just into helping struggling families with the little that I have.”

“Little?” She pulls her eyebrows. I laugh, “I don’t want to flex. But seriously there’s this Ngwenya family that’s situated Emoyeni side.”

“A Ngwenya?” She’s shaking, almost dropping her hand-mirror.

“Yes, do you know them?”

“No, not at all,” she says.

I know my mother, she's not acting normal.

"Well, they're struggling, we went to see them yesterday and donated the little that we had in our hands at that moment. I want to see them again today and see how they're doing. I would love for you and dad to get involved in their dilemma. They need help from housing to Identity documents. It's an uncle and his niece and son," I say.

"Okay, I will talk to your father about it. I'm sure we will come up with something."

I came alone today, I think I will have more privacy and space with Nsike. She's all I've been thinking about since yesterday. I don't want to call it

anything, but I do feel something towards her that is too early to understand. My main reason of coming here is to see her.

I let myself inside the yard and then greet in front of the kitchen door.

There's someone cooking inside, the aroma is inviting.

She comes out with her hands coated with flour. She's wearing an apron, looking all busy and wife-able.

"Hey," I have a smile that I can't help spreading to my cheeks.

"Hi," she's staring at me, almost like trying to remember me.

There's three of us, she's probably confused.

"I'm Nkanyiso," I say.

"Oh, hi," she steps closer, seemingly relieved. I can't stop looking at her.

“I didn’t expect anyone, I’m sorry you found me messy like this,” she says.

“Messy? You’re a beautiful sight.”

Eish, I probably shouldn’t have said that.

“Thanks,” she says casting her eyes to the ground.

I clear my throat so that what I say now makes sense “I came to check how you’re doing,” I say.

“My uncle is not home today, but we are alright. I’m trying to cook fast so that Zeh comes home to a cooked meal.”

“You’re a good cousin,” I say.

“More like a guardian for both of them.” She’s trying to be humorous but it’s just sad. She has a lot on her plate.

“Can I take you inside the house and come back to clean my hands?”

“Yes, that would be good.” I mean being taken inside the house means I’m welcome to stay longer.

She lays a grass-mat for me and then leaves. There’s a photo album on the chair next to where I’m seated. I grab it and page through it, just to distract myself. Nsike has always been beautiful, even when she was just little. And her uncle used to be good-looking before struggles took over. There are other people I don’t know. But one catches my eyes because she resembles Nqanawe with more than two features. She has his eyes and the square chin and the exact smile. I pull it out and read behind it. Most people write names behind pictures and whoever this album belongs to didn’t disappoint. *ZAMANGWENYA*- that’s

written on the back. Only her name,
nothing else.

CHAPTER 10

NKANYISO

“That’s my late sister,”
I didn’t hear her coming in, I’ve been
looking at the pictures of this
Zamangwenya. The resemblance
could be just a coincidence, we are not
related to the Ngwenyas, neither are
the Mzothos.

“She passed away after being ill for a
short period,” she says.

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“She once worked in the royal house
but not for too long. She moved to
Durban and died after a year there,
she was no longer coming home but
she was sending money every month,”
she says.

The fact that she once worked for my family and looks so much like Mamkhulu's son makes it all weird.

"Is it me or she looks like Nqanawe? My other brother, not the two clowns," I ask.

"I said the same thing yesterday," she says.

"Yesterday, when?" I'm confused.

"I met your brothers again coming from the supermarket around 8pm. They gave me a lift and came to drop me here. One of your copies and him, my sister's look-alike," she says.

It's Skhanyiso who was out with Nqanawe till late. I'm glad they did that, giving he a lift for me. I mean, for her.

"Maybe you guys are related to us," I say.

“What? No,” she says like we are a bad virus to be associated with.

“You don’t want to be related to me?”
I ask.

“I didn’t say that,” she says.

I stare at her again, she’s sitting on the chair and I on the grass-mat.

“Do you have someone?” I don’t know how that question came out of my mouth.

“Someone like...?”

“Someone like me,” I say.

She laughs and looks away.

“I’m serious, you can be the reason why I miss home and actually come back.” I’m saying things I didn’t plan on saying and didn’t even think of.

“No, I don’t think I can be,” she says.

“Why not?” I ask.

“Just nje,” she shrugs.

Zulu girls, I forget how they’re like!

“I know we are just strangers and trust me, I didn’t come here to say that. It’s my heart speaking without consulting my sane senses,” I say.

“No, please don’t say those things.” She’s restlessly storming down her foot. I think it’s just nerves.

“But I did plan to ask that we go out for dinner. Just to be out of the village a bit. I was going to ask permission from your uncle as a friend,” I say.

“It’s not a good idea Nkanyiso,” she says.

“Why? Are you in a relationship?”

“No,” she says.

“Then why are you worried? It’s just dinner and talking. My parents will come and see you soon, this is just me wanting to be a good friend,” I say.

She sighs, “Okay, I will ask my uncle and call you if he agrees. Just dinner, right?”

“Yes, from a friend,” I nod.

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I waited for her call, I prayed for it to come. And it finally came, I felt like I just won Lotto. I think I put extra effort on my looks. When I walk into the kitchen Mamkhulu exclaims.

“And then where is this gentleman of the year going?” she asks.

I laugh, I love how they always exaggerate to either make you feel good or bad.

“Out with friends,” I say.

“Mmmm, those friends must be important.” She’s snacking. In this family she’s the most peaceful

member that you hardly find angry for no reason.

I remember something and ask,
“Mamkhulu do you know
Zamangwenya who used to work
here?”

The reaction I get mentioning the
Ngwenya is two times worse than my
mother’s. She almost sprayed the nuts
she’s eating out of her nose.

“What? Where?” She’s also shaking.
“What’s up with you and mom and
the Ngwenya name?” I’m getting
suspicious.

“No, I’ve just never heard of the
surname before. I mean, not here in
the village.”

“But there’s one at Emoyeni, surely
they were placed by izinduna
zikababa,” I say.

Her eyes widen, “What???”

“Iyoh! Please don’t turn me against the old man, we already had a fight this morning. I will see you later,” I walk away before I reveal more secrets. Clearly something happened between this family and the Ngwenyas. I have a date, I mean dinner to look forward to.

CHAPTER 11

#NOLUNDI

She's pacing up and down.

MaMchunu confirmed that Nkanyiso asked her about that family as well. As if that's not bad enough that their children have found their way to that family, Dunga has been keeping a secret. The very same husband who failed to give her a baby when she was still fertile and declared medically able to conceive. He was only giving MaMchunu babies, from the triplets to the one that passed on and their princess. Nqanawe is the only thing she got from him. He promised her that he was going to do everything in his power to protect this from not happening. How dare he then goes

and gives the Ngwenyas a piece of land!

He walks in knowing that the call he received summoning him to come home meant violence was awaiting him.

“MaMzotho,” he says, taking a seat. She’s just breathing, trying to calm down.

“Is everything alright?” he asks.

“You gave the Ngwenyas a piece of land. Here in the same village that I’m trying to raise my son at?” she asks.

He should’ve known this day was going to come.

“I didn’t mama, they were located by induna, when I found out it was too late, they had already built houses,” he says.

“And you decided to just sit back and do nothing? Not even telling us,” she’s almost yelling.

“I didn’t want anyone to panic, they don’t leave close to us,” he says.

“Okay, your sons know them and they want you and MaMchunu to go there and build them proper houses and get them IDs. Now my son will know them too,” she says.

“How will he know? Nothing points his roots there,” he asks.

“Mabhungu don’t start me. You gave me that child and you failed to give me another one. If I lose him, this marriage will mean nothing, just that I made the same mistake twice,” she says.

He clears his throat, “Let’s not panic, the Ngwenyas don’t know anything about Nqanawe, he’s your son.”

“It better stays that way Dunga, it better!”

He nods.

These boys will be a problem, why are they bothered about the Ngwenyas? If he refuses to help they will take it upon themselves and discover things. God didn't favor him when it comes to his marriage with MaMzotho. He destroyed her life from the first day he met her. Asking her to tie her tubes had its effect. They were never able to make a baby of their own even though they were both fertile. It just didn't happen, by nature. He gave her Nqanawe way before they even realized it wasn't going to happen. So Nqanawe then became what saved their marriage. She's a good mother, she's dedicated into motherhood and get along very well with MaMchunu

because they relate better now. If that is taken away from her it will be a problem.

“Please don’t be angry,” he says, pulling her arm.

“I can’t not be angry Dunga when you do something that threatens my motherhood. You’re a father, nobody can ever take that away from you. I don’t expect you to understand,” she says.

“But I understand,” he says.

She looks at his eyes, he’s still got an effect on her. She exhales heavily and allows him to hold her.

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He’s spending the night with MaMchunu. They are at peace, hopefully this time it’s going to last

the whole night. Even though he wants to talk about the Ngwenya dilemma, it will spoil the great night he planned to spend with her.

Their bedroom door is locked, he comes out of the bathroom naked.

Mercy looks at his dangling schlong and laughs. "People don't know their king doesn't know what the bathroom towel is for."

"I'm just giving you a view," he says, teasing her with a smile.

"What view though?" She's laughing. He wraps his hand around the base of his schlong and shows her. "This view. Do you like it?"

"Obviously, it gave me 5 beautiful children," she says, rolling her eyes a little.

"Then why you no longer blow it?"

"Because we are now old," she says.

“Yes I’m old but I love nice things.”

He gets in bed and gives himself a few hand strokes while she’s watching.

“Please suck it kancane, I miss having your tongue on me,” he says.

She rubs his tip, “Guga phela hawu, now I will choke and die on the dick because you want to stay forever young.”

He laughs, putting a pillow under his head and opening his legs for her to have better access.

“Do you think you can still get pregnant if I water you well?” he asks spanking her butt.

“No, what’s wrong with you?”

“I want to get you pregnant, so everyone will know that you are my wife and we still get it on hard. I don’t want people to think uyitshitshi, look

at how firm your butt is now. Maybe we should do anal.”

She stops massaging his schlong and looks at him with her eyes widen. She doesn't know whether to be scared or laughing at this whole thing.

“Are you okay?” she asks she chose to laugh at it.

“I'm okay, why?”

“You're talking weird.”

“Ngokuthi ngifun' ukukhwela umfazi wami? Saying I want to fuck my wife? You're really scared of sex these days, kodwa namhlanje ngzok' hlaba until your pussy turns numb.”

He's weird but gosh, that turns her on.

He's never made such threats yet he's always left her satisfied in bed. How much more with these threats?

Their eyes lock, the horny beast she once unleashed in a BnB illegally

comes out. He's giving her those eyes, he's not innocent as he may want to be under his Dunga demeanor.

"You want to fuck me?" she asks after taking his schlong into her mouth and swirling her tongue over his tip.

"Very hard MaMchunu! This is your home, that's your stick of joy and your coochie has given me a lot blessings.

Ngiyanithanda MaMchunu, wena nenkomo yami."

She's melting, her clit is vibrating. It's been a very long time since they were this happy and free together.

CHAPTER 12

NKANYISO

I wasn't sure how this was going to go, so I kept an open mind. To me this is like a date, because I wouldn't just pick a random girl based on her struggles to go with me to dinner.

There's something more that I feel for her. I know I just from a relationship and my heart still has fresh wounds.

But Nsike feels like she's home.

"Where are we?" she asks.

"This is my grandfather's restaurant, but he's not around, he's in Cape Town," I say.

"I thought Dunga Snr passed away."

"It's complicated, I have another grandfather," I don't want to get into details. We identify as the Dungas and royal because the grandfather who

raised my father was a king and after Bab' Zibulo left with his mother, my father had to take over the throne and protect his father's land and people. They only found out when my mother was pregnant with us that my real grandfather was still alive. He's old now, approaching 80. But we are one big family, our Mathe aunts were involved in raising us up. The Mathes are respected in the villages, they have invested in different businesses and funded many projects that my father started. They're probably the reason why my father classifies as rich now. Bab' Zibulo on the other hand is a self-made millionaire who lives in the bubble of his wife and daughter. Everybody expected them to have a second child but they never did.

Enough about my family, I have a dark beauty in front of me who's scared to pick a fork and eat.

"Don't you like the food?" I ask, worried. I requested a chef and the manager to close late today and give us an hour of privacy with a delicious meal.

"Can I use my hand?" she asks.

So that's why she wasn't eating? I put my fork and knife away too. We die together.

"Let's dig in," I say, rolling up my sleeves on both arms.

I'm happy to see her eat. She's not the ungrateful type, she eats and finishes her plate. I started with dessert, sometimes I have a sweet tooth, so I only eat half of my plate.

"Nsike," I say.

We are done eating now, I can talk.

She's looking at me, I have her attention.

"I meant what I said," I say.

"But I told you it was impossible," she says.

"Why is it impossible?" I ask.

"Because I've done things that I shouldn't have done," she says.

"Things like that? Do you know the amount of shit I've done? You will be surprised. I don't care about your skeletons and the things that happened before me," I say.

"Why though?" she asks.

I look at her, I'm confused.

"Why do you like me?" she asks.

"I don't know because I don't know you that well. I usually fall after knowing a person for some time. I guess it just came naturally," I say.

"So you've fallen for me?"

I smile, "Just give us a chance to explore, then I will know."

"Do I look loose?"

What???

"No Nsike, I'm not asking for us to have sex. It's not even my intention, I want to get to know you on a spiritual level," I say.

"I...I'm not sure. Why didn't you tell me yesterday?" she asks.

"I had just met you, I didn't want it to look like I came to help you because I want something from you. I don't take advantage of people, I don't want you to confuse my help and my feelings towards you," I tell her.

She inhales sharply and lifts the drink to her lips with trembling hands. "I don't know if I'm a good person."

"You're a good person Nsike, you don't need to be perfect." I send my

hand over the other side and hold her hand.

“Please just tell me we will be friends and then take it from there. I’m a decent guy, I will put you first and understand when you need space.”

“Okay, let’s be friends,” she says.

Her dessert is here with my second glass of beer. This calls for a toast; a celebration of the beginning of something good.

“To Nsinka!” I say raising my glass to her bowl of dessert.

She frowns and then laughs, “Is that a combination of our names?”

“Yes,” I laugh too.

CHAPTER 13

NKANYISO

We are friends, that's what we agreed on. But damn, I want to hold hands, I want to kiss her and tell her nothing is ever going to hurt her again. I want to promise her the world, even though I don't have it. We have come to the end of our journey, I have to let her out of the car before it gets too dark.

"I wish I can stay here forever," I say. She looks away, blushing.

"I'm going back to London next week. I don't know when I will be back, but I hope it's sooner. I hope you can give me the reason to want to come back."

"Will I be able to talk to you when you're away?" she asks.

"Yes, we will talk everyday," I assure her.

It's really hard letting her go. But I have to, I don't want to end up disrespecting her uncle.

"Can I get a hug?" I ask.

"Okay," she nods.

I expected a no, I get out of the car and go around to her door and open. I want to hug her properly.

"Am I going to see you again?"

"If you want to," she says.

"Obviously, I want to, in fact tomorrow," I say.

"Okay, let me know, call me."

I'm tempted to kiss her, but I don't want to scare her away. I just hug her tight and say goodbye.

I'm not the one to usually come home after 7pm. My father is standing outside, I park the car and make my

way to greet him. I just want to test waters and see if he's still mad at me.

"Bayede!" I say.

"You're like your brothers now?

Stressing your mother and coming home after 6pm?"

"Time ran fast, it wasn't intentional," I say.

"Where are you coming from?

Someone just saw your car Emoyeni?"

I forget that he has eyes and ears all over the village.

"I went to see Nsike," I tell him the truth. I'm not a child, I don't need to lie about my affairs.

"The Ngwenya girl?" he asks.

"Yebo baba," I nod.

"Maybe you should go back to London, you will come home when it's time," he says.

“Why? What happened between you and the Ngwenyas? Everyone looks like they’re hiding a big secret.”

“There’s nothing being hidden. You just need to understand who you are and your priorities. Your mother and I will go and see that family. There’s no need for you to be seen up and down there.”

Now I’m more convinced that they all know something and doesn’t want us to know about it.

“Do you know Zamangwenya? They say she worked here,” I ask.

He literally chokes in his saliva.

Mamkhulu did this, so did my mother. What really happened? I’m curious.

“Baba?” I raise my eyebrow.

“Yes, I know her, she worked for us for a few months and then left.”

But what's hard about that? Why does it constrict their breaths?

I don't ask more questions, I respect his need of space and will to keep a secret. I walk inside the house and find my siblings on the couches.

Dinner has already been served.

"Hey Ma," I greet.

She lifts her eyes and looks at me.

Then she gives me a silent treatment.

"Yaya where's my food?" I ask my sister. She's a brat, but she always comes through when we need her.

"They saw you at the Ngwenyas again and you left us behind," Khanyisa says.

"I didn't know you guys were my twins, going everywhere with me," I say.

“Mercy please don’t spare him,” he says, looking at my mother, advocating for violence.

My mother doesn’t say anything. Yaya comes back with my food and goes back to her phone. Skhanyiso is awkwardly quiet.

“Inkukhu yanqunywa umlomo. Did you get dumped?” I ask.

“I’m not you, I don’t get dumped,” he slams back. But he’s still not his usual self, he should be trolling and celebrating that my mother is not speaking to me.

“This beef is delicious. Who cooked?” I know who cooked, I just want her attention.

“I cooked,” Yaya says.

We all burst into laughter. She can’t even boil an egg, what does she know about cooking a full meal?

“Dad said he will take me to a cooking school when there’s a need for me to learn how to cook,” she says.

Her and her father always have weird future goals. A whole cooking school instead of telling her mothers to get her in the kitchen.

“Still, you won’t be original. Original cooks are the ones taught by their mothers,” I say.

“Artificial food,” Khanyisa adds.

“Just like her hair and nails,” I say.

“I shouldn’t have dished for you. Daaaaad!” That was going to come because she knows that he’s outside the door.

He walks in with a frown, “Who’s calling me?”

“Princess Diana,” Khanyisa says.

We burst into laughter.

“You two should’ve gotten married and moved out a long time ago. Don’t bother my daughter in her own home,” he says.

I don’t think we’ve passed the marriage and moving out stage. But whatever makes Princess Diana smile.

CHAPTER 14

NKANYISO

I've been trying to call her all night. I just want to know what is happening. I asked my brother if he wanted her, he said no. Nkanyiso is not like me, he doesn't pursue people for the fun of it. And he's never had interest on anyone here in the village. That's the only reason I went after Nsike. I had a good time with her, no feelings were involved. But I'd hate it for it to turn out that he wants something from her. I don't go after my brothers' interests, I respect and love them.

She finally answers in the morning, I was about to have breakfast and drive to Emoyeni.

"Hello," she sounds sleepy.

"Hi Nsike, this is Skhanyiso."

“Hi Skhanyiso,” she says.

“How are you doing?”

“I’m fine,” she says.

“I want to check on you and see if there’s anything you’d like to tell me.”

“I’m okay, there’s nothing I want to tell you,” she says.

“Did my brother come to see you yesterday?” I ask.

“Yes, he did,” she says.

My stomach turns cold.

“What was it about?”

“He wanted us to go out for dinner and become friends.”

Nkanyiso doesn’t just befriend people.

“Did you tell him about what happened between us?” I ask.

“No, I don’t know how to,” she says.

“Does he want anything more than a friendship?” I ask.

“Yes, he does,” she says.

“You can’t do two brothers, you know that, right?”

“I’m not trying to do two brothers. I told him that I’m not a good person.” Her choice of words make me feel bad. “Having sex doesn’t make you a bad person, but hurting my brother would make you. He’s a good guy, don’t lead him on,” I plead.

“I’m not doing anything,” she says, her voice is trembling.

“Let it stay that way, I beg of you.” I don’t want to imagine my brother finding out that I had sex with his girl, even if it’s in the past form.

There’s a knock at my door. People don’t respect others ‘handsome sleeps’.

“I’m coming,” I yell and put my shorts on and go to the door.

I was home before 5pm, I slept home throughout the night and I'm waking up here sober.

"Baba," I'm surprised to see him at my door. He doesn't wake up from his wives to check on us now that we are grown.

"Is anyone in here?" he asks.

I can't help but laugh.

"Come in and check, I'm decent."

He walks in, I go to the bed and peel off the covers and lift the mattress for him to see.

"Do you see anyone?" I ask.

He chuckles, "Siyabonga Dunga, just one day of respect from you."

"Why are you up at this time? Trouble in paradises?" I ask.

"In one paradise, but it's nothing I can't handle," he says and blows a low

sigh. My mothers drive my old man crazy.

"I need you to tell me something about your brother," he says.

"Which brother? I have three," I ask.

"The London boy," he says.

Okay, this must be important because he knows we never snitch at each other.

"What about him?" I ask.

"Is he seeing the Ngwenya girl?"

"I doubt he is, he might just have an interest," I say.

"Okay, then I need you to stop it."

"How and why?"

"Figure it out, son. I don't want any of you to be associated with the Ngwenyas, we have a history and it's not good," he says.

"Then why not be upfront with him and tell him this?" I ask.

“Because he’s stubborn, he’s already asking questions and I cannot tell him because it will destroy one of my houses,” he says.

This sounds pretty serious. Part of the duties of being a royal son is to help my father store peace and keep his family and village together.

“Okay, I will try, I just don’t know how. Maybe I will talk to the girl and pay her to stay away from him. It’s not like she’s good for him anyway.”

He pulls his eyebrows, “What do you mean?”

I can’t snitch on myself. Only Nqanawe knows about this.

“Whatever secret you have on her Skhanyiso, use it against her,” he says.

He desperately wants Nkanyiso away from the Ngwenyas. It must be deep, I don’t even need to know what is it,

him and I want the same thing.
Nkanyiso and Nsike not to happen.
He has his reasons, and so do I.

CHAPTER 15

NKANYISO

Skhanyiso calls me, he's asking why is my car at Emoyeni. I tell him it's none of his business and wait for Nsike. Today we can't go to town, we will find a quiet spot around here and chill.

When I see her coming my heart dances. I don't take my eyes off her until she's standing outside the passenger door.

She sits and then looks at me. She doesn't as excited as I am.

"Hey are you okay?" I ask.

"I'm okay," she says.

She's lying to me, I can feel her energy is low.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"We can't be friends Nkanyiso."

I thought we talked about this and made a toast to our friendship. I don't know who she talked to and what was said, but one thing I know is that my intentions are pure.

"Let's go and find a spot, then we will talk about ending our friendship," I say.

She exhales and nods.

I'm not ending my friendship with her, she agreed and that's that.

I park above the local playground. It's empty and quiet around. The first house there is far, nobody can disturb us. We've been quiet, I'm angry at her because she's toying with my feelings. "You said we will end our friendship here," she says.

"Nsike you're not a child. You're here to tell me what I did," I say.

“You didn’t do anything,” she says.

“Then what you’re asking won’t happen. I didn’t ask to be your friends for the fun of it, I told you I have feelings that I want to explore with you. I know it was too soon, I’ve only known you for three days, but that doesn’t mean you should break my heart,” I say.

“I’m sorry if I’m hurting you, that’s not my intention,” she says.

That’s bullshit, I’m not going through another heartbreak, I don’t deserve that.

“You’re trippin’ Nsike,” I say.

“I’m what?” she asks.

I bury my head on the steering wheel and calm myself down. No, I can’t let her do this to me without even giving me a chance.

“You’re not fair,” I lift my head to her.

She drops her eyes, "I'm sorry."

"Ayikho into oyixolisayo Nsike. Tell me what I did. Did I upset you?" I mean, last night I called her and we were okay.

She starts tearing, she's not willing to explain anything to me. It hurts me to see her crying. I pull her for a hug, my heart is breaking too.

"Did someone put you up to this?"

She shakes her head and cries over my shoulder. I bring her face up and look into her eyes. I have nothing but genuine care for her.

I rub my lips against hers before slowly penetrating them. I capture her quivering lips in a kiss. I grab the back of her neck so that she's here with me. The connection is there, she can feel it too, she's kissing me back. I feel a swirl of electricity around my body.

I want more, I'm needy. My hands are on her waist, I'm grabbing her and smooching her lips like this is the last day I see her.

My hands dig below her waist. I want to be closer to her flesh and soul. I want her on a deeper levels.

"Come a little closer baby," I whisper, out of my sane reasoning, pinning her against my chest. I push my hand to her full panty, I want to feel her.

"I'm not going to hurt you Nsike, please trust me," I say.

"I trust you. It's myself I don't trust, I don't want to hurt you," she says.

I hold her closer and assure her,

"Trust me, we are going to be okay. If you need space I will give you."

"I don't want to hurt you or anyone," she emphasizes.

“I understand, just give me a chance to be your good friend.” My fingers slide over a slippery button. I don’t know when was the last time I was this horny. I want to be inside her, my good morals can’t even reprimand me.

“I’m sorry, I’m a bit sexually frustrated,” I say, feeling awkward about my throbbing dick and fingers that are deep in her coochie.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

She nods, I can see that she’s getting to my level of neediness. If she wanted me to stop she would’ve told me.

“Sizoshaya kancane, please ma.” I’m not the one to drop pants on second dates, but this time everything is out of my control.

She doesn’t say no, she’s moaning when I touch her clit. I cleaned my car and took out all Nqanawe’s things,

even his stashed condoms, and now I need them.

“I don’t think I have a condom. Is it okay if I pull out?” I ask, my voice hoarse from excessive lust.

I kiss her, she’s not denying me anything, not physically or vocally.

We don’t have a lot of space, it’s going to be a quickie. I kiss her, my veins are threatening to burst, I want to be inside her right now.

CHAPTER 16

#MERCY

Her sister is counting on her, after all it's her sons that went and discovered the Ngwenyas. If Nqanawe finds out anything it will be because of none other than her beloved son, Nkanyiso. Dunga walks in, he's dressed up.

"Are you ready?" He's wrapping his arms around her waist and kissing her on the neck.

"Just putting the lipstick on," she says.

"You want them to take you away from me," he says.

She laughs, "You're not complaining about me looking beautiful, right?"

"I am," he says.

"Then you need help myeni wami," she's laughing.

He hugs her and goes to her lips for another kiss.

“Let’s go,” he says, dropping his hands to her waist.

“How is Nolundi?” she asks.

“She’s scared,” he says.

“We didn’t steal Nqana though. His mother signed the papers and gave him to Nolundi. It was for the best, she’s raised him well and given him everything he wants.”

“Yes, but she doesn’t want him to know that she’s not his biological mother,” he says.

“Then you and I have to make sure that the Ngwenyas leave the village. I don’t even know what you were thinking,” she turns and picks her purse.

“How are we going to explain them leaving to Nkanyiso? He’s head over

heels with Zama's little sister," he asks, he's stressed.

"Nkanyiso will go back to London, then we will move them away. Let's go there now and donate to buy face, then when Nkanyiso is gone we will tell them to go. Find them a cheap house somewhere," she says. It's her who's made sure that this stays under wraps to this day. From the moment they took Zama to her sister's house in Durban and put her under guard until she gave birth. To the whole Home Affairs processes. Her death was natural. Could they have prevented it and gotten her treatment? Yes. But they didn't owe her anything, the only thing they cared about was Nqanawe. He was raised by Nolundi from 4 weeks old, he's her child.

NKANYISO

I got a call from Nsike thanking me. I expected things to be awkward after we had sex, you know how girls always feel bad after having sex thinking they lost their morals. But apparently my parents went to see her uncle and left R10 000. That's more than I expected, she says they promised to get her uncle an RDP house and then sort the ID issues. It makes me happy to hear her happy. I walk in to my parents watching news and sitting close to each other. They've made up, it's weird to see my father's hands all over my mother, yet cute to watch too.

"Can I watch Fast and Furious after this?" I ask, sitting on the single-seater.

“How about you buy your own TV?”
my father says.

I laugh, my mother is still not cool with me. It’s funny how she never stop talking to Skhanyiso or Khanyisa, whereas coming home late and not coming at all is a weekly routine to them.

“Are you okay Mercy?” I ask.

She gives me a look, my father chuckles.

“Am I your age mate?” she asks.

“No, but I miss you. Can I come and sit with you? Dad will move aside.”

She looks at her husband, “No, I’ve known him longer than I’ve known you. There’s no way I’m choosing you over him.”

The old man is smiling. I don’t know why his hand is around her waist. Just

because he's not wrinkled and frail
doesn't mean he's not old.

"Are you touching my mother?" I ask.

"No, I'm touching my wife," he says.

She smiles and snuggles on him. I
have to leave before I witness old
people sex.

I step outside and call Nsike. I just
miss her, that's all. She doesn't pick
up, she did say she was going to take a
bath and leave the phone in the
charger.

I leave a voice message; "I was just
missing you. I wanted to hear your
voice, I hope you are having a good
bath...I wish one day you can let me
bath you."

Someone is behind me. I drop the call
and turn to Skhanyiso.

“When are you going back to London?” I didn’t expect that question.

“I’m home, why do you need me to go?” I ask.

“Because you’re losing yourself bafo. You have bigger things to focus on instead of chasing girls you don’t know anything about.”

I laugh, “Are you giving me advice?”

“Don’t do as I do, do as I say, I’m five minutes older than you,” he says.

“Okay bhut’ omdala, I will focus on bigger things, thank you very much.”

CHAPTER 17

NKANYISO

I have a lot of decisions to make after I've arrived in London. I'm certain I will come back home, I just don't know how soon and I don't know if coming back will mean I'm ready for the role that my family wants me for. I'm sad I'm leaving, very sad. But I have to go back and decide what's next for my life. I asked Nqanawe to drive me to the airport, that way he can come back with Nsike and take her home.

Baba canceled his morning meetings to see me leave. My mother is doing what she always does when I have to leave the country; acting like I'm going to die where I'm going and never going to come back.

Yaya comes in with a book. It's her one of many design books. Everyone has been gifted a copy or two.

"Your farewell gift," she says, dumping it on my lap.

"Didn't I get the same book the last time?" I ask after looking at the first page. She's a fashion design collector, I don't know if there's anyone who's that thing in the world. What she does is collect different designs of fashions and put them in a book so that when there are family celebrations we all refer to our books and pick a style rather than starting from scratch.

"No, it was different," she says.

To me it looks the same. But I pull her for a hug and swing her around. She's the slimmest in the family and the most beautiful and sexiest.

Skhanyiso walks in, “Are we taking you to the airport?”

“No, Nqanawe has already offered. I’m just waiting for him to call when he’s around,” I say.

“Where is he?” Mamkhulu asks.

Everyone looks at me for an answer. I sent him to Emoyeni to pick Nsike for me. But I can’t tell them that, the whole house will panic.

“He’s gone to fill up,” I lie.

Skhanyiso knows that I’m lying but he doesn’t say anything. My phone rings, it’s Nqanawe. I will walk to the road so that nobody sees Nsike inside the car.

“Fam, let me see you when God says yes,” I say hugging Mamkhulu first. My mother is tearing up and comforted by my dad. It used to depress me throughout my flight, but

now I'm used to her crying whenever I leave. I hug her longer and wipe her tears. My dad and brothers walk me outside the yard.

Then he asks for a private moment with me. I know he wants to talk about the throne.

"Baba please let me think about it. I will make a decision when I've made up my mind," I say.

"That's the problem son, you think you have a choice about this. I don't want you to lose focus, I've put all my faith in you," he says.

"You still haven't told me what is wrong with you," I say.

"I might lose my vision completely in a few years. I have a disease called Choroidemia. Already at night I've lost my color vision, your mothers know this. My macula is degrading, I

cannot lead blindly, I need your help. It's not even about the throne, but honoring the man who raised me up by protecting his legacy. I've done this since I was just a young boy, I cannot give up now."

"Can't doctors help you?" I ask.

"If they could I wouldn't be bothering you. I know how much you love the path of life you've chosen for yourself and I'm very proud of you," he says.

I know he'd never beg a child like this if he had a choice. The fact that he's sick and I might have a blind father makes me sad and sympathetic.

"Can I have 6 months to myself before I take over?" I ask.

He smiles, "Yes, take your 6 months and come back home."

I hug him. We are not always getting along but he's my father, my hero.

“I will do it,” I say.

He smiles, I notice that he’s happier these days, even when he’s with my mother.

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I have a 20h45m flight. I’m usually excited to leave the country because my apartment in Sutton is my sanctuary. But today it doesn’t feel like I’m going to peace, instead it’s like I’m leaving everything that makes me happy behind.

Nqanawe bumps my fist and tells Nsike he will wait for her. We step a distance far from him. I can see that she’s sad too, I wrap my arms around her for a long two minutes, just sniffing her cocoa butter scent and mixed-fruit spray from her plaited

hair. I will miss her, my one week friend, she's special to me.

"I'm coming back soon, please take care of yourself and wait for me," I say.

She nods and snuggles herself on my chest. I hug her again and kiss her forehead. Life is unpredictable, last week I was in this airport with a broken heart and now I'm leaving with fulfillment and joy.

CHAPTER 18

#MERCY

They're both sitting with Dunga, the kids are not home. Nqanawe went to the airport with Nkanyiso, the other two are for the streets and Yaya is attending a friend's party in Durban.

They sent her with three security guards, she hates it but that's her life.

"He's going to take the throne,"

Dunga announces.

"Did he say that?" Mercy asks, doubting him.

"Yes, he said he needs 6 months to sort his personal things out and then he will come home," Dunga says.

"So we have 6 months to get rid of that family?" Nolundi asks.

"The sooner, the better," Mercy says. She looks at Dunga, "Find them a

house somewhere far, I don't care where, just where my son can't find them."

"Nqanawe says the girl said he looks like someone she knows," Nolundi says, she's losing weight because of this.

"That's another reason she can't be around our kids," Mercy says. Dunga clears his throat, "But she can't really do anything even if she finds out that he's her sister's child. Nqanawe won't leave home and go stay with them."

"But he will know that I'm not his mother," Nolundi says, almost snapping. It's frustrating how Dunga doesn't get her fears because nobody can take his kids away from him.

"You're his mother," he says.

"Not by blood," - Nolundi.

“What if he falls in love with a Ngwenya, not knowing that he’s related to the surname. I understand your concerns but we also need to put Nqanawe first.”

Both of them look at him. They used to be on the same page about this issue. Seemingly not anymore.

“Wait Dunga, was it really not in your knowledge that induna gave them a piece of land here? Or you brought them closer on purpose?” Nolundi asks.

“I wasn’t aware, but I don’t think it’s a bad thing, not to a certain extent,” he says.

“If they take him away are you going to give me a child Dunga?” she asks.

“I still shoot active soldiers, the problem would be you,” he says.

She releases a flood of tears. How dare he says this when he wasted good years of her life, making everyone pregnant but her? She was never the problem, even from the very first beginning. Had he not tied her tubes she would've had enough time to conceive. To make matters worse she had a premature menopause, there was nothing she could do.

"I didn't mean to offend you, I was just..." Mercy sighs.

"Just keep quiet Baba kaNkanyiso, you're not helping the situation with your active soldiers," she says.

He takes a deep breath and keeps quiet. Zamangwenya was a mistake but he can't be punished for that for the rest of his life. He agreed with everything because then he needed them to forgive him for cheating. It

was either he agreed with everything they wanted or lost both his marriages.

Nolundi stands, "I'm going to sleep, you will take care of your husband MaMchunu."

It's her turn today and she knows very well that no swapping is allowed, no matter how tense things are.

"Where are you going to sleep?"

Mercy asks him as Nolundi storms out.

"In your arms," he says.

He's crazy!

She looks at him and he's not joking.

Doesn't he remember the rules?

CHAPTER 19

NONSIKELELO

I shouldn't have- that's what I keep saying to myself. I should've made better decisions. Skhanyiso was a mistake, I didn't regret the night I had with him until I learned that Nkanyiso wanted to do more than just help me. He's a good guy, I would've given myself to him without a second thought if what happened between Skhanyiso and I didn't happen and if he wasn't his other half. Or is it his other quarter? It makes sense why Skhanyiso wanted me to stay away from him when I still had time. Lord knows I tried, but failing to give him a proper reason made him reject my request. Instead of ending the friendship that day we ended up

sealing the connection we have with something even more deeper.

I can't even compare them. There was no connection with Skhanyiso, but it was more fun. With Nkanyiso there was a connection and it was more meaningful. It all happened in a space of 3 days and now two weeks later I'm having cramps but no periods. My uncle has always told me that we, in this family, are not God's chosen ones. I can't stomach the thought of myself possibly getting pregnant from one quickie in the car. Just one. Skhanyiso did it safely, Nkanyiso didn't, he even failed to pull out as he promised. But I didn't think anything would happen, it wasn't even 5 minutes long.

I talk to him everyday. His voice heals me, it's good to have someone like him, even though I know what I've

done is wrong and it will hurt him if he ever finds out about it.

A knock comes to my door in the morning. It's Sunday morning, only Zeh wakes me up during weekdays so that I help him get ready for school.

I open the door, it's my uncle. He doesn't wake up at this time.

"Malume is everything alright?" I ask, opening the wider for him to walk in.

But he stands outside, "There are people here to see us."

"Who are they?" Like what time do people wake up. He doesn't tell me who they are, I put my flip-flops on and follow him.

The first person I recognize is MaMchunu, the young wife of King Dunga. She was here not so long ago with the king, they donated a lot of money that's going to last us for

months. She's Nkanyiso's mother, you can tell by the full face make-up that she wasn't born here. There's that urban sense from her. She's sitting next to MaMzotho, the village's favorite woman. People love this woman, she also loves them. It's just the two of them.

I notice when I greet that they're not looking friendly. I feel a thin droplet of sweat running down my spine. Did they find out about me sleeping with two sons?

I sit next to my uncle's feet.

"Are you Nsike?" MaMchunu asks.

I nod with my eyes dropped. I have no doubt, they know. My uncle will never forgive me for this.

"Are you dating Nkanyiso?" She's glaring at me.

"No Ma," I shake my head.

“Okay,” - that’s all.

The silence that follows is wrecking my nerves. My uncle clears his throat and asks if we have wronged the royal house by anything.

“No Ngwenya, you haven’t done anything wrong. As you know that your niece used to work for me before heading to Durban where she sadly lost her life. Nolundi and I have decided to bless your family with a house in her honor,” she says.

My uncle stands, he’s happy and can’t even help it. “Don’t come here and play with me, please.”

“We are not playing Ngwenya, we have purchased a house for you and your family in Nkandla. We also talked to certain people who have Home Affairs connection that side, they will help with the ID issues.”

My uncle sits, he looks a bit disappear.
“But we don’t know anyone in
Nkandla. We have no relatives there,”
he says.

I nod. I’d rather be poor between
familiar neighbors than to go and live
with strangers.

“Part of the reasons is that we want to
use this land,” MaMzotho says.

“That’s not fair,” I say, my voice
trembling. It sounded like a good
gesture until they gave more details.

“So you’re evicting us from the village
muzi kaDunga?” My uncle’s voice
breaks.

“With solutions,” they say
simultaneously.

“But you can move us to another area
that you’re not going to use. Why
move us to Nkandla?” I ask.

They keep quiet. They're not willing to negotiate further. Yes, this is their husband's village, but what they're doing is not fair.

CHAPTER 20

NONSIKELELO

I don't know who to talk to. We only have a month in the village. Zeh will be transferred to a Nkandla school, everything has been arranged. I didn't have anything holding me to the village, just that I've accepted this place to be mu home.

To make my life more dizzy I went to the clinic for cramps and came back with a maternal record book. I haven't told anyone about it. I'm crying myself to sleep every night.

Nkanyiso will come back to South Africa in 6 months. I will be in Nkandla by then, heavily pregnant and broke. If the royal wives find out I'm pregnant they will think it was

intentional and move me to Zimbabwe with their power and connections.

My phone rings, it's an international number. I've been crying since 7pm, my voice is hoarse, I have hiccups. I answer, trying to sound normal. But he knows me.

"What's wrong Nsike?" he asks.

"Nothing, I'm just sick," I say.

"Should I call my brothers and ask them to take you to the hospital?"

"No," I say, another sob slipping out.

"Nsike tell me the truth. Did anyone hurt you?" he asks.

"No, I just..." I don't know how to say it. I don't want more trouble with his mothers. "I went to the clinic and they said I'm pregnant."

He's still on the line, but dead quiet.

"I'm sorry, I didn't know," I say.

Then I hear his audible sigh.

“It’s me who should apologize, I thought you’re on birth control or something. I can’t believe this is happening,” he says, remorseful.

I didn’t expect remorse from him, I thought he’d insult me and say I’m trying to trap him with the baby.

“I’m going to see you soon, don’t cry,” he says.

“How soon Nkanyiso? I might not be in the village by the time you get here,” I ask.

“I will take the earliest flight I get. Don’t worry, we are going to deal with this together,” he says.

“Thank you, please come soon.”



#THE ROYAL HOMESTEAD

After hosting a women's conference Nolundi decided to cook dinner and invite everyone. It's a family dinner, even Thando and Zibulo are here. Everyone is happy, for tonight only they're forgetting their problems and cherishing the good memories as a family.

"One day we need to talk about Thando giving birth in front of her father," Mercy says.

"She was lucky it was her civilized father, I know someone who ran away the minute he heard that MaMchunu was having contractions with Yaya," Nolundi says.

Yaya looks at her father, "Did you run away from me?"

“Your mother’s screams were depressing me,” Dunga says, everyone is laughing at him.

“Contractions are nothing compared to the head coming out,” Thando says. Skhanyiso picks his fathers whiskey and pours himself a generous glass.

“Did you just pour from your fathers’ bottle?” – Mercy.

“Yes, because the baby delivery and contraction talk is depressing me.” He takes a gulp and passes to Khanyisa. Khanyisa sips a little and then passes to Nqanawe. Nqanawe takes the glass but looks at his mother first. It’s a no, he puts it down.

Everyone expected him to.

“You need to give us parenting classes because hhayi-bo,” Thando says.

Mercy laughs, “You only have one child. I deal with 4, then Skhanyiso is twice an abnormal child.”

Everyone is laughing. Then a car parks in the yard, Nkanyiso is home and nobody knows. He was lucky he got a flight and he’s here within 3 days after Nsike’s call.

It’s Yaya who sees him first and screams to everyone, directing the whole house’s attention to him.

“Mr London!!!”

CHAPTER 21

NKANYISO

I would've loved to stay for dinner. But I didn't come home for a gathering, I didn't know about it. I dropped my bags and drove to Emoyeni. I want to see Nsike, I want her to know that I'm here for her. Did I fuck up? Yes. I should've used my head to think, not my dick. She's not in a good position to have a baby. I should've helped her sort her life out first. But there's nothing we can do now except accepting what has happened and live with the consequences.

I'm at Emoyeni, patiently waiting for her in the car. I've never thought of myself as a father, not so soon in life. But I'm not against it. God has blessed

me with a soul and I'm going to embrace it.

When I see her coming my eyes stay on her tummy. I forget that she's just a month pregnant, not showing yet.

I open the door for her and hug her before she gets inside the car. I don't even know what is the first thing that I should say to her. Congratulations to us? I don't know what she's expecting.

"You look beautiful," I say.

She smiles, "Thank you."

She's pregnant, she's supposed to be gaining weight, not losing it.

"How are you doing?" I ask.

"Not good," she says.

I understand, it's the first pregnancy, she's scared.

She then takes a deep breath and turns her eyes to me. "Did your mother say anything?"

“No, we haven’t spoken,” I say.

“We’ve been evicted from the village,” she says.

I’m confused. What does she mean they’ve been evicted? I mean, how, by who?

“Please explain, I’m lost,” I say.

“I also don’t know the exact reasons, but your mothers came and told us we have to move to Nkandla, they want to use the area we are built on,” she says.

“My mothers? MaMchunu and MaMzotho?” I’m trying to make sense of this.

She nods, “Yes. I guess being a Ngwenya is a curse because nothing ever works out for us.”

“Can you give me a day to get to the bottom of this? I don’t understand why would my mothers do this.” A

part of me goes back to the reaction I got from them whenever I mentioned the Ngwenyas. There's something there, sadly Nsike doesn't know what it is either.

"I'm here Nsike, nobody is going to hurt you, I promise. And I'm going to make you proud, I will be a good father to our baby and I will take care of you," I say.

"Are they going to allow you to be in my child's life? I don't think they want anything associating you to the Ngwenyas," she asks.

"I'm about to be a king Nsike." I didn't mean to reveal that in this manner.

Her eyes are bulging out. "You're going to be a king?"

"My father is going to step down and I'm the next in line. So nothing is

going to happen, if you don't want to leave the village, it's your right to stay. Unless if they want a fight with me."

"No, I don't want you to fight with your mothers. Just find out what we did to them, then we can apologize. I want our child to grow closer to you."

Our child? Phewww.

"I'm going to be a dad," I'm digesting it and it's going down so good.

Dad...that's a blessing.

"Thank you Nsike," I say.

"For what?" She's looking at me, I've fallen deeply in love with her.

"For trusting me to be the father of your first child. I promise you, this child will have the best father any child can ever ask for. I'm going to be supportive, whenever and wherever you need me, I will be there."

She tearing up, but there's a smile covering her face.

"Ngiyak'thanda Nonsikelelo, I love you," I put definition to my feelings for the first time. Yes, what I have for her is love, deep love.

"Please don't say that just because I'm pregnant," she says.

I smile, "I was going to use any chance I get to tell you. I've been feeling like this since the third day that I met you. That day when you threatened to cut me off without a reason, that's when I knew that I was in love with you."

"Thank you," she's smiling.

I was looking forward to her response, but I guess she's not ready to declare her feelings yet.

CHAPTER 22

#MERCY

Everyone has gone to bed, she's up waiting for Nkanyiso to come back from wherever he went to. A part of her suspects that Nsike called him and told him they're being evicted from the village. They didn't think it that far, they underestimated this Nsike girl and now she's going to turn her son against her.

Dunga walks in, he knew he'd find her awake. He sits with her on the table.

"He's a grown up, he's safe where he is," he says.

"At Emoyeni is where he is, Mabhungu. He's linking up with that girl and God knows what she's saying about us," Mercy says.

“Let’s just come clean, Nqanawe is a big boy, he will understand. Let’s not make enemies and exercise our power wrongly,” he pleads.

Mercy frowns, “Why are you convincing me instead of Nolundi? It’s her child you’re talking about, my real concern is Nkanyiso dating that Ngwenya girl.”

“I will talk to MaMzotho, but first I need you to be on my side,” he says.

Mercy sighs heavily, “I will support Nolundi unfortunately, whatever decision she takes I stand by it. After all you’re a chameleon that changes colors.”

“Why do you say that?” he asks with a slight frown.

“You make decisions that suit you, not the next person. You’ve always been selfish with yourself. Me siding with

you won't guarantee that you'll give me the same energy in future. At least with Nolundi I know she's a keeper." "Wow, okay." Yes, he's highly offended. But he doesn't show it, he kisses her goodnight and leaves.

#NOLUNDI

Things have been tense, but today she just wants to be a good wife and take care of her husband the way she should. They have sorted out the Ngwenya issue, which was one thing that stressed her the most.

Dunga walks in and finds a basin of warm water next to the foot of the bed. He dips his feet in, MaMzotho comes with a cloth and wipes his feet. Then he takes his clothes off and gets in bed.

He's not expecting anything, they've been fighting a lot lately. And God forbid today they don't have another big fight.

"We have to talk," he says.

She gets in the bed with him and actually shifts closer and holds him.

"About what?" she asks.

"MaMzotho we have to make things right by our son," he says.

"What do you mean?" She pulls her eyebrows, looking at him with lying rage.

"It's time we tell him the truth and stop mistreating Zama's family as if they did anything to us," he says.

"How is moving them to a bigger house mistreating them?" She's angry, he's threatening to take away one thing that means the world to her.

“Do they want to? Don’t discredit my father’s kingdom, his people should come first,” he says.

MaMzotho chuckles, “Now you know something about discrediting the kingdom. Were you not discrediting it when you hired a poor maid and got her pregnant?”

“That was over a decade ago,” he says.

“It doesn’t matter, you know nothing about respecting the kingdom. Don’t come to me with that nonsense. You want my son to hate me, because all this will look like I killed his mother and stole him. And you know that’s not how it happened. You gave him to me, MaMchunu asked you to talk to her and you did, both of you agreed that he would be my child. Now you want to take that away because it no longer suits your needs.”

“Maybe because I no longer care about scandals and my wrongdoings.
Whatever happened, happened.
Nqanawe is Zamangwenya’s son and that is the truth you owe him if you love him the way you say you do.”
She’s crying...how can he do this to her?!

CHAPTER 23

NKANYISO

There's a lot going through my head. I want to know who Zamangwenya was and why my family hated her so much that even the next generation has to suffer. I thought I'd have something to eat and then go to bed. My emotions are too high for me to confront anyone. But I find my mother in the kitchen, I know she was waiting for me.

"At last!" she says, yawning.

It's 11pm, I don't know why she's so stubborn.

"I don't want to talk Ma, I just want to have something to eat and then go to bed," I say.

"You just came home, you didn't talk to your fathers or spent time with

your siblings. Is that girlfriend of yours that important?"

"Ma, I don't want to talk to you."

"What did she say?" she asks, hands on the waist.

I go to the pots and dish left-overs. If I address this now I will explode, I want both of them, her and Mamkhulu. I want them to tell me which school of witchcraft they attended.

"Nkanyiso, I'm doing this for the family, please stay away from the Ngwenya girl," she says.

I turn to her, "That Ngwenya girl is the mother of your first grandchild."

"Excuse me, what?"

"Yes, you're evicting her and your grandchild from the village."

"Nkanyiso are you crazy? How can you do that? Do you know...Oh

Lord!" She's pacing up and down, sweating and being dramatic.

I'm just staring at her and wondering when she became this heartless.

"What did Zamangwenya do to you?"

She stops and looks at me. "Huh?"

"Yes, what did the maid do? Why hate them so much?" I ask.

"Go to sleep," she instructs.

"No, I could've gone to sleep. I told you I didn't want to talk and you kept pushing, and now we are going to talk about it." I put away the plate of food, my appetite has vanished.

"Nsike is carrying my child, I deserve to know how much they owe to this family so that I can pay for them."

"Whoah, what?" - the voice comes from the door.

It's Skhanyiso. He better not interfere, this is beyond him.

“Did you say she’s pregnant?” He’s walking in.

“Please bafo, this is serious,” I say, raising my hand to him.

“Nkanyiso she’s not telling you the truth,” he says.

“Then nobody is telling the truth because your mother isn’t telling it either. She hates a dead maid’s family to the extent of evicting a sickly man from the village just because he’s a Ngwenya.”

Skhanyiso looks at my mother, disappointed. “You evicted them?”

“It wasn’t my decision alone,” she says.

“What was the reason Ma?” –
Skhanyiso.

“It’s old family matters,” she says. I pull the chair and sit. “We have time.”

Skhanyiso sits too.

“Why am I getting confronted and blamed for something I did together with Nolundi and your father?”

“Just tell us the truth, make us understand. As I’ve said, Nsike is carrying my child, I deserve to know if I can compensate on her behalf.”

“We just don’t want Nolundi to lose Nqanawe,” she says.

“Why would Mamkhulu lose him?” I ask.

Skhanyiso looks like he’s trying to connect the dots. “Wait Ma, something doesn’t add up.”

I’m anxious. “What doesn’t add up?”

“Nsike mentioned something about Nqanawe looking like her sister. Is Nqanawe not Mamkhulu’s biological child?”

I look at my mother, my eyes widening out. Jesus Christ, she nods.

“Then if they’re Nqanawe’s other family why do you hate them?”

Skhanyiso is asking an important question.

“Nobody knows that except Nolundi, myself and your father. If you invite them to our lives they will know him and start asking questions,” she says.

“But what happened to the maid? Did she sleep with dad?” I ask.

“Yes, then she tried to abort the baby, however Mamkhulu rushed her to the hospital and we got there on time.

Then we had to make a decision, I talked to Nolundi, we talked to your father and he talked to her. She decided to give Nqanawe to Nolundi.

It was all legal. She fell sick shortly after giving birth, she was in

Nomuzi's house in Durban and we were here. Before we could get her medical help Nomuzi called and said she had died in the hospital."

How convenience! I doubt they were going to help her, they took the baby and left her to die, that's why they're scared of the Ngwenyas getting close.

"So what's going to happen now because I'm not going to let you evict the mother of my child's family?" I ask.

"I don't know," she says, heaving a sigh.

Skhanyiso clears his throat, "There's something you need to know. It happened before I knew you like her." I feel a knot sitting below my stomach. "Skhanyiso don't tell me she was your ex," I say.

“She wasn’t, but something happened, that’s why I didn’t want you to pursue her.”

I feel like I can’t breathe, like I’m running out of oxygen.

“What happened?” I ask.

“Nsike and I spent the night together, a day before you took her to dinner. I don’t even think she’s sure about the paternity of her baby, if she’s pregnant,” he says.

My chest closes off. My lungs can’t open. I’m gasping for air.

CHAPTER 24

NONSIKELELO

He calls me when he's parked above the road. I put my jacket on and go to him. My uncle probably knows that I'm dating by now. I don't usually go outside the yard when it's dark. He's just cool with it because I've never given him any problems before. He steps out of the car and stands afar. I'm hoping for closure, maybe his mother told him what our sin is. I don't get a hug, he looks rather depressed and sad. I'm not good with first moves, so I stand in front of him and wait for him to talk. "Your sister had a child," he says. I almost drop to the ground and faint. "Where is the child? And where did she get it?" I ask. Zama was my old

sister, she used to walk me to school and give me her pocket money to add to mine and say she will hustle for hers. I was still young, but I remember her coming home with shopping bags and clothes for me.

“He’s home, his name is Nqanawe and you’ve met her,” he says.

I should’ve known, there’s no way that boy would coincidentally look like Zamangwenya that much.

“Does he know about us? Why doesn’t he visit?” I’m trying hard not to cry. I didn’t think there would be anything to remind me of Zama again.

“He doesn’t know, they’re yet to tell him the truth. I gave them an ultimatum; the truth or I won’t take the throne. I did all that because I love you and I believe in living the truth.”

I nod, I wish I can hug him but he's cold. "Thank you very much."

"It's sad that nobody would do the same for me. Even telling me the truth, nobody affords me that courtesy," he says.

I'm confused. Where is all this coming from?

Then the passenger door of his car opens, Skhanyiso climbs out and comes to us.

My heart is beating out of my chest.

He's probably the reason why Nkanyiso is like this.

"He told you we slept together?" I ask before Skhanyiso tries to be the hero.

"Why did you lie to me Nsike?" he asks.

"I didn't know you liked me, you hadn't said anything to me at that time," I say.

“And the baby, is it mine?” I ask.

“Yes, Skhanyiso and I condomized.”

“Not in the morning, unless if you bought the pill with the money I left you,” he says.

I feel tears burning my eyes. I’m not a whore, before them I had slept with only one man. How can I be caught up in a scandal like this?

“Did you buy the pill?” Nkanyiso asks.

I can see the pain I’ve caused him. I was scared this was going to happen for the mere fact that I’ve shared a bed with his brother before.

“No, I didn’t,” I say.

He goes down and squats with his head dropped between his arms. I’ve hurt him, I’ve ruined one good thing I had in this life.

“So it could be my baby too and you’re my brother’s girlfriend?”
Skhanyiso.

I don’t know why he’s acting like I intentionally did this. He’s looking at me like I’m a disgusting piece of shit.

Nkanyiso stands, his eyes are bloodshot. “I’m going home.”

“I’m sorry Nkanyiso,” I say.

He turns and goes away. For what is worth, I loved him with my whole heart. I was going to tell him that soon.

#NOLUNDI

She didn’t want to be here when he’s being told. But she’s his mother, according to the papers, she had to be present and tell her side of the story.

He's not angry like she expected him to be. All thanks to MaMchunu's ability of making unpleasant situations sound pleasant. He looks rather confused.

"What does this mean? I can't visit the Mzothos and call Aunt Nokthula anymore?" he asks.

"No Nqanawe, I'm still your mother. My family is still your family. The only thing is, I didn't give birth to you and I was scared of telling you after you turned 18," she says.

"Okay, I don't think it's that deep. Why is everyone so tense?" He looks at everyone around him freaking out. They're relieved seeing how well he's handling it.

"I'd love to see her family though, that's if my mother is comfortable with it," he says.

Nolundi smiles nervously, “I’m okay with it. Your father and I can arrange for you to meet them.”

“Great! I think that’s Nkanyiso driving in.” He’s closer to Nkanyiso, he leaves the elders and goes outside.

CHAPTER 25

#THE ROYAL HOMESTEAD

Nkalipho's door is closed. As time goes by Skhanyiso decides to go and check on him. He knocks and gets no answer. He panics and calls their mother.

"Nkanyiso is not opening the door," he says.

"Why? What happened?" Mercy asks, marching to Nkanyiso's rondavel.

"We talked to Nsike and she's not sure who made her pregnant. They already had a relationship, he's heartbroken."

"I don't care, kick this door," Mercy says. She's scared because Nkanyiso is not like her other sons, he's got a big heart and he hurts easily.

Skhanyiso manages to kick the door until it opens. He stands outside

because he's scared that his brother might have harmed himself.

Mercy walks in, she's also beside herself with fear. She looks around and sees him sitting on the floor, leaning by the bed.

"Nkanyiso yamaDunga," she kneels in front of him.

He doesn't respond. She touches his cheek, he doesn't move. He's staring into space, next to his hip is a gun.

"Can I take this away? She's not worth you losing your life over," she asks.

He doesn't say anything. She gently pulls the gun, with a trembling hand she holds it. It looks small but it's heavy.

His phone starts ringing. She takes it and looks at the screen. It's her, the toenail of Satan!

She answers and puts the call on loudspeaker. She wants to hear what she has to say for herself.

“Nkanyiso....I hope you can hear me, I’m not going to be long. I just want to apologize, I’m truly sorry for how things started and ended. You’re a good person and I will forever know your name...I know you wanted to hear this, I love you. I was thinking this is your baby, I understand why you feel the way you do. Again, I’m sorry Nkanyiso. I will make things easier for everyone, I won’t be around anymore. If heaven really exists, you will find your baby there, or brother’s baby if it’s Skhanyiso’s. And I will be paying for my sins in hell. This is goodbye my sweetheart. My light. My everything. Thanks for being in my

life and for giving me the closure I've been looking for," – the call ends.

Nkanyiso hasn't turned his eyes or moved. It doesn't look like he heard anything, he's in another zone.

Mercy shakes his shoulder,

"Nkanyiso? Nkanyiso! She wants to kill herself and the baby."

He blinks twice and frowns. His mother repeats the same thing she said.

She ended it. She took her own life and died with the Dunga baby. Both Nkanyiso and Skhanyiso are devastated. The uncle didn't let the Dungas come closer, they stood afar and watched as the police van arrived. Mercy was with them. She regrets not being supportive enough and delaying

the truth because a lot of things could've been solved earlier.

They get home, it's quiet in the yard, you'd swear nobody is home.

They head to the family house where everyone gathers during the day. The door is locked from the inside.

This is weird.

Someone comes to the door and opens. It's Nqanawe, he's holding a gun and cellphone in the other hand.

"What's going on?" Mercy asks.

He ushers them inside, he's gathered everyone in the dining room. The mood is intense, nobody is smiling.

Nqanawe instructs them to join Dunga and sits. He remains standing, then he rereads the message he received from Nsike. It says the opposite of what these people told him.

His mother was killed, then he was kept away from her family and lied to his whole life.

“So who killed my mother?” he asks, he’s ready to spill blood. Nsike told him everything, even about these two women he’s believed they were his mothers going to the Ngwenyas and evicting them for no reason.

Skhanyiso sighs, he takes his cap off and puts it over his face and leans back on the couch. This life is a movie, so now this 23 year old wants to kill people.

Nkanyiso doesn’t care, he’s better dead than leaving. Nqanawe must keep one bullet for him.

“Nobody killed your mother, son,” – Dunga says.

“Shut up Mabhungu!” He points the gun at his father, tears are flooding his face.

“Bafo please, just let us go man,”

Khanyisa pleads.

“I don’t have a mother Khanyisa. She was slaved as a maid here, and impregnated, then killed,” –

Nqanawe.

“Let my kids and wives go, talk to me like a man, I’m responsible for all this,” his father says.

“I won’t go anywhere,” MaMzotho says and sits closer to her husband.

Mercy doesn’t hesitates when the little escape comes, she drags all her kids and walks out.

“What if he kills them?” Khanyisa asks, he’s worried about his Mamkhulu and father.

“He won’t, that’s my gun and it has no bullets,” Skhanyiso says and goes to his rondavel. He’s tired, this day has been long enough. Nqanawe is just angry, he will be fine.