

KUMKANI



KUMKANI

CHAPTER 1

KHAPHELA

I look around me and I am surrounded by Matshoba and her beauty. This year we had lots of rain, everything is green. I am standing in one of the highest mountain watching my beautiful Kingdom, yes mine. My father stepped down as King and left me in charge. According to tradition, he leaves the throne to his firstborn child and I must do the same when the time comes. I asked my father how I will know when it's time to step down and he said I will know, whatever that is. He is the one that showed me this secret spot. Every morning we would take a walk to this place and he would tell me how one day it will be my responsibility to watch over Matshoba and her people.

Unlike my father, none of my children is interested in knowing about the kingdom or anything. Those kids are spoiled and I wonder what they teach them in schools these days because they are nothing like my generation when I was growing up. What worries me the most is that none of my children is interested in the throne. Who will look after the Kingdom when I am gone?

Khumbulane seems interested but that boy worries me. I don't think he would make a good King. He has a temper at such a young age and he scares me. I was looking to crown Joshua but that boy gives me a headache. He stresses me more than my female children.

“Kumkani (King)...”

I raise my hand to stop the guard from talking. I know it's time to go back home but I am still enjoying some peace. I can't even find that at my house anymore. Not when I have two wives and five children. It's always chaos.

QUINN

Have you ever felt like ending it all but can't because you are scared to hurt the few people that care about you? That's how I feel, I feel like death is the only escape. I feel like that is the only thing that can save me from the voices in my head. Nothing I do is ever good enough. Everyone says I am a good child except for one person. To my mother, nothing I do satisfies her and is never enough. When I try to voice out my feelings she calls me disrespectful. When I tell

her about my trauma she says I watch a lot of television. You know there's a certain pain that only a parent can inflict either by their words or actions but to them I am just spoiled...

I clutch the blankets hard when I hear the door opening. This is why I hate being home. There is no privacy in this house. People walk in and out of people's bedrooms as they please.

"Princ..."

I interject, "Get out!"

"Breakfast will be ready in thirty minutes, your mother asked me to wake you up."

“I said get out, Nandi... don’t make me get out of bed just to kick you out.”

I hear the door opening again and I know only one person drags her feet in this house and that could only be the Queen. I hear her dismiss Nandi followed by the blankets being pulled off me. “Get out of bed before I drag you to the bathroom!”

“I am up mom no need to yell,” I drag myself out of bed. I have been up since five am. I never sleep past that but since I am the lazy child in the family, I let them think whatever they want.

“Go bathe and join everyone at the table. You know how your mother gets when you are late.”

“Good morning to you too, your highness.”

“Thirty minutes, you have thirty minutes,” she says before exiting the room. I go to the bathroom and stand in front of the mirror mimicking her. That’s Karen by the way, my mother or should I say, my stepmother. Most people would expect me to hate her but I don’t, Karen is a nice woman and treats me like her own. Treats me better than my own mother. My mother wishes I was a boy – she claims that my father wouldn’t have married another wife if I was a boy. One would think she doesn’t have a male child but I have a brother, his name is Khumbulani – in total, I have three brothers but that’s a story for another day. I bathe and prepare to be fake all day. I prefer boarding school to home.

“Good morning,” I greet everyone while sitting between my sister Amahle and my brother Khumbulane.

“Do we always have to wait for you to show up every time, can’t you be on time for once in your life,” that’s my mother Laleti. She hates the sight of me. I roll my eyes and then smile at my father – he told me that I am his favourite child but I bet he says that to everyone.

“Laleti can you please for once not fight with Quinn...can we eat in peace without any quarrelling?” father folds his newspaper and places it on the table.

“Let us all pray, we need to bless the food before we eat,” says Laleti. It’s very sarcastic that she loves God she has never seen yet hate

me her daughter, someone she carried for nine months. Everyone joins hands and closes their eyes except me. I don't know what I believe in. It's hard to believe in anything when everyone believes in their own thing in this house. Laleti believes in God, Karen has a spiritual gift and can talk to the ancestors, my brother Joshua is an earthiest whatever the hell that is and my father is just living – as long as he has a place to stay and food on his table he is good.

LALETI

I toss a piece of bread and gulp down almost a half-full glass of juice. This is not how I pictured my life. Only if Quinn was a boy, my house wouldn't be this crowded. Only if she was a boy, it would be just my husband and me. Now I have to share him with another woman and I

have to pretend everything is fine when it is not. Now my children won't even be next in line to become king of Matshoba Kingdom since Karen's son is the firstborn, the heir to the throne. This is all Quinn's fault only if she was a boy. I prayed so hard to give my husband a boy child but I don't know what God was punishing me for. I look at Karen and shake my head, I think she fakes her gift, no spiritually gifted person behaves like her. She only did this so she can trick my husband into marrying her.

"Mama, can you please pass me the salt?" Amahle innocently requests. I flash a smile and hand her the salt. This is not how I pictured my life would be. I grew up in a royal family and I was given to Khaphela when I was born but he just had to take another wife.

“I’m full,” Joshua stands up and leaves the table. There’s something off about this child. He doesn’t like being around people and he doesn’t act like boys his age.

“Me too,” Quinn tries to stand up but I stop her.

“Stop being dramatic and sit down!”

“Lale let her go, she is full,” Khaphela permits Quinn to leave. This is why she doesn’t listen to anything I say. She is very spoilt.

KAREN

I watch Quinn leave the room. She is a very troubled young lady and her spirit weighs on me.

Quinn is the type that bottles things up, she is the type that isolates herself and suffers in silence. Her mother doesn't realize how much she hurts her with her words. The words might mean nothing to her but she is hurting her daughter. And the fact that she does not hide that she wishes she was male makes it all worse. I know she thinks Quinn ruined things for her but it is not true. I fell in love with Khaphela first. The only reason I could not become his first wife is that I am a commoner and royalty marries royalty hence I am his second wife. Laleti doesn't know that even if Quinn was a boy, her child is the second child because I got pregnant first but it's one of those secrets only known by the royal house.

The kids leave the table one by one leaving me with Khaphela and Laleti. I clear my throat and Laleti side-eyes me, she doesn't hate me but

she doesn't like sharing Khaphela with me either. "Since it's the school holidays, how about we do something for the kids?"

Laleti rolls her eyes, "Do you want us to brew alcohol and introduce them to the ancestors?"

"That's not funny, Laleti...you have never heard me mocking your beliefs."

"Because you know there is only one God!" she sips her juice.

"Laleti stop... please not today," says Khaphela then he shifts his attention to me, "What did you have in mind?"

I smile, at least he is interested in knowing, "I was thinking of taking the kids home with me for a couple of days, they will love it there."

"That sounds like a nice idea but I can't leave the throne..."

"No, you don't have to come...I can handle the kids," I retort and see Laleti smiling. I am sure she will be very happy to have Khaphela all to herself.

JOSHUA

Heir to the Matshoba Kingdom my left foot. Has anyone ever asked if I want to be crowned prince or if I want to be next in line? I just want to live my life in peace and be like other children

my age. If it's not Mama Laleti shoving her God down my throat my mother Karen telling me never to forget the ancestors then there is my father telling me that I should behave like a man. I am eighteen, I should be chasing girls in school not learning how to manage a kingdom. I don't want any of this.

I stand in front of the mirror and look at myself. Have you ever felt uncomfortable in your skin? Ever felt like your soul is in the wrong body? That's how I feel. I feel like God or the ancestors or whatever wanted to make me a girl, not a boy. Is something wrong with me? I open one of my drawers and take out a red lipstick that I stole from Quinn and apply it to my lips. Why do I feel better like this?

A knock on the door startles me. I quickly wipe

the lipstick away with my shirt, “Who is it?”

“Open up! Why is your door locked?”

“I am coming!” I check myself in the mirror before going to open the door. It’s Quinn!

“What’s up!?”

“Why are you panting? You know what, never mind...do you want to go hunting?”

I feel like rolling my eyes. Quinn loves doing manly activities or it’s her way of trying to get away from the house as possible, “I don’t feel good.”

“Come on, don’t be a sissy... you are going to be

the next king, toughen up.”

“You should be next Kumkani don’t you think? You are tougher,” I say and she laughs.

“You are full of jokes...let’s go.”

I lean on the door, “I am really not feeling it, can I do your hair instead...you look hideous.”

“I look fine but I could never say no to someone doing my hair.”

I stand aside so she can come into my room. Quinn and I get along very well. She understands me and I her. She sits in front of the dressing table and lets me unplait her

cornrows.

“Does your mother know?” she asks, sounding rather concerned.

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 2

LALETI

“Create in me a clean heart Lord, amen,” I say before getting off my knees and sitting on my bed. It’s been a long day and I was having my afternoon prayer. The house is chaos when the kids are around. I am already tired when they haven’t even been here for a week. While I am

still sitting on the bed, my eyes dart to a picture of me and Khaphela that is hanging on the wall. It is a picture of our wedding day, our traditional wedding. We were very happy and I thought he meant those vows he said to me that day. Three months later he told me he wanted to marry a second wife.

I couldn't understand why and all I could ask was if I did anything but he told me it had nothing to do with me. A month later, Karen moved in with us. To say that broke my heart was an understatement. The five Ws were driving me crazy. I had not given him reason to want another wife. In fact, I was good to him and did everything I was taught. I was submissive but I guess that was not enough. I got pregnant first and he was happy to receive the news only to blow my bubble by telling me Karen was also pregnant. Not only did she

overshadow me in everything, but she also gave my husband a heir.

Someone knocks on my bedroom door and I permit them to come in. Khumbulane walks in, dragging his feet. "Mama I am hungry."

"You are always hungry, come give me a hug."

"I am not a child, are you going to make me something to eat or not?" he folds his arms leaning on the door.

"Does the word please mean anything to you?"

"Mom it's your job to make sure I am fed. You are my mother and you had me so I am your

responsibility,” he retorts now focused on his phone.

I sigh and get out of bed. The house is full of helpers but he just wants me to make food for him, “What do you want me to make for you? Do you want your favourite?”

He nods and we both head to the kitchen. Quinn is also in the kitchen. This child is always glued to her phone. I bet she is talking to boys or even worse she has started sleeping with them.

“Hey mom,” Quinn greets, now pouring herself a glass of juice.

“Can you leave, I want to cook.”

“Don’t mind me, I won’t be on your way,” she answers then yells when Khumbulani takes her juice. She even slaps him.

“It’s just juice Quinn...do you have to slap your brother like that over food. There’s juice to feed the whole kingdom in this house.”

“Why do you always take his side? Khumbulani is not a child and he should be treated like everyone else.”

I clap once, “Oh so now you raise your voice at me. And since you are an adult then it shouldn’t be hard to pour another glass of juice.”

“I hate this house,” she mumbles leaving the room. This boarding school of hers is making

her disrespectful. Maybe we should put her in a public school – that should knock some sense in her.

I shift my attention to Khumbulani, “And you, I warned you about eating people’s food. Do you want to be crazy like your siblings?”

“It’s just food.”

I reply, “It’s not just food. You may never know who loves and hates you in this house. You could be next in line as Kumkani so...”

“Good afternoon,” Joshua walks into the kitchen after clearing his throat. So this is the future King of Matshoba? This boy is not man enough...look at those lady arms. Khaphela

should make Khumbulani crowned prince, he should be next in line, not this weakling. I watch Joshua pour himself some milk.

“Why are your lips red?” I ask Joshua and he quickly wipes his lips with his shirt.

“Uhm... it must be something I ate,” he attempts to leave the room but I block his way.

“Why do you get so jumpy? What are you up to?”

He stammers, “Me? Nothing...I didn’t do anything... I mean what could I be up to?”

“Is everything okay?” Karen speaks from behind

me.

I turn to her, “Everything is fine, I am just having a chat with my son. You did say that I must treat the kids equally.”

She looks at me suspiciously, “Joshua your father is calling you.”

Joshua rushes out of the room then his mother follows minutes later. Why is she looking at me as if I would do anything to her child? I get back to what I was doing, if I don't take care of my son then who will? I need to do everything I can for him while I am still able.

“Do you want to go to church with me this Sunday?” I ask Joshua.

“No, thanks.”

“Next time eyy,” I rub his arm then see Quinn passing by, she is now wearing a different dress, “Where are you going?”

Quinn answers, “I am going for a walk with Nandi.”

Nandi is her personal maid. “Oh so now you want the whole kingdom to see your thighs? What kind of a dress is that?”

“It’s not that short.”

“Of course to you it’s not because you are used

to walking around naked at boarding school,” I retort.

“Nandi let’s go,”

I feel sorry for the man that will marry her. I wonder who she took after because she is nothing like me, “And we are going to church this Sunday! You need some Jesus!” I yell.

JOSHUA

Father forced me into taking a walk with him. I hate these walks because he only talks about the kingdom and how one day I will have to watch over the people. I wish I could voice out that I don’t want to take after him. He should groom Khumbulane or Aiden. I don’t want the

throne. I want to one day be a fashion designer, I want to be me. As it is I feel suffocated and my father is putting too much pressure on me. It is not only my father but my mother is also putting pressure on me.

“Enough about the kingdom, how is school?” father asks. I wasn’t listening to anything he was saying.

“School is great, my grades are good.”

“A wise king, that is good,” he pats my shoulder.
“So any lucky lady?”

“Dad!”

“Come on you can talk to me. You are eighteen and no longer a child. Soon you will be paired with a beautiful princess and I need to know if there’s someone you are seeing. We don’t want you having two wives like me, don’t we,” he nudges my arm.

“I am not seeing anyone and I don’t want to be paired with any princess.”

“You will understand as you grow that you have to whether you want to or not. If you marry princess you will be uniting two kingdoms and...”

I interject, “I don’t want to be paired with anyone and I don’t want the stupid throne!”

He looks at the guards that are walking a little further away from us and says, "Watch your tongue boy. I am not only your father but I am your king."

"And I am not only the prince of Matshoba, I am your son. When last did you ask me what I want or even ask me how I am? It is always about the kingdom and the throne."

He answers, "That's how it is, you put your people before yourself."

"Well, I don't want to be part of it. I don't want the throne" I walk back the way we came.

QUINN

“Where are we going?” Nandi asks.

Honestly, I don't know but I needed to get away from my mother as possible. It seems the sight of me irritates her and maybe if I stayed away from her she would hate me less. It's been eighteen years, can she let it go already? I wish she can understand that I also wish I was a boy. Maybe if I had been a boy she would hate me less. I also need my mother just like anyone child but the only memories I have of my mother are painful. All the memories I have of her are painful ones. I don't hate her but I hate how she treats me.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Nandi asks.

“I am fine.”

“You can talk to me, my princess,” she insists but I increase my pace walking ahead of her. I am glad that she doesn’t push, she lets me be. She lets me walk ahead while she follows the guards. I don’t know why we even need guards. These people even follow us at school.

I head towards the river. I know a secret spot where people hardly go. I come here when I need to clear my head. I take off my dress and get into the water. This place is very peaceful, this is the only thing I look forward to when coming home. I get under the water and be still, now this is what I call peace.

I am at peace until someone yanks me out of the water and then asks, “Are you crazy trying to kill yourself?”

For a moment I forget that I am in only my panties and bra. Does this person know that my father is the king of this Kingdom calling me crazy? I wasn't trying to kill myself, I would never do that to my family. I just like being under the water, it is...peaceful.

Before I can give this rude person a piece of my mind, Nandi comes running towards me with the guards. I look at the distance between us. Does it mean I floated all the way here? I think I understand why he thinks I was trying to kill myself. But I wasn't drowning or anything, I love it underwater.

"Princess are you okay?" Nandi asks handing me my dress and I quickly put it on.

“I am fine,” then I turn to the stranger, “Thank you... but I swear I wasn’t trying to take my life.”

He does respond so Nandi says to him, “Thank you for saving the princess. The king will reward you for your kindness.”

“I want nothing from your stupid king and had I known you were his daughter, I would have let you drown,” with that he walks away.

“What do you mean?” I ask but he doesn’t respond, he continues walking so I run after him and block his way, “What do you mean and why do you hate my father.”

“I don’t answer to you.”

“I am your princess and I am ordering you to speak,” I command him.

“You are their princess, not mine,” he pushes me out of his way and continues walking.

(My honeys I have fallen behind again please vote for me 🙏)

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 3

QUINN

“Do you know him?” I ask Nandi as the stranger

walks away. The guards wanted to take matters into their hands but I am not in the mood for drama today. I mean he can't just walk away while the princess was still talking. What did he mean I am not his princess and why does he hate my father? Well, I guess it's not everyone that will love the king.

"You guys can head home first, I want to visit a friend," I say to Nandi forgetting that she follows me everywhere I go. Forgetting that she must guard me with her life. I don't understand this whole watching me thing. I can take care of myself and I am sure given a fair fight, I could take down the so-called guards.

"Don't say it," I stop Nandi before she tells me what her job is. I have heard the story a thousand times. 'My princess my job is to keep

an eye on you and make sure nothing happens to you. My job is to help you with anything you need,' she always says when I ask for space or when I ask her to stay behind.

"Just don't crowd me," I lead the way, after applying lotion to my skin. I told Nandi to carry it because the river water is not kind to my skin.

I have a friend that lives down the road and it's a walkable distance. I am sure one is wondering why the princess of Matshoba is even walking, well this princess is crazy sometimes does however she pleases. Plus I hate that the royal cars don't travel in singles because we always have guards following us around and everyone knows the royal cars. I love walking, I get to enjoy the sun and some fresh air.

I really love what my father has done to this kingdom since he took over as King. Everyone now has electricity in their homes and he made sure every house has a tap, it was a hustle for people to go down to the river and thank God the network boosters are now working and we have perfect internet connection. He really did a great job, everything is advanced.

“Stay outside please, wait for me under that tree...I promise I won't be long,” I say opening the gate. They need to give me some space, we can't be crowding people's houses because I am a princess. I get to the front door and knock.

“If it is not the princess of Matshoba...what do I owe this pleasant surprise, your highness?”

“Xolani you knew I was coming so don't act

surprised and are you going to let me in or keep looking at me like I am your favourite snack.”

He bites his lower lip, “You are my favourite snack,” he pulls me into the house, closes the door then kisses me. Did I mention he is more than a friend? My father would have a heart attack if he found out I have a boyfriend.

Although I don't see the big deal. I am eighteen and I am now allowed to date but don't worry Xolani and I are not doing anything we are not supposed to. And the other thing, Xolani is not royalty so I know my parents would never approve of the relationship. Xolani knows that there's no future between us but we are together still. It's been a year now and I feel like he is the only person that understands me, after Joshua of course.

“Are you enjoying the school holidays?” Xolani asks, we are on his bed and I have my head on his lap. I am sure Nandi and the others are tired of sitting outside, we would invite them in but this is not Xolani’s house and his parents are not very welcoming. They know about me but they think Xolani and I are just friends.

“You know I prefer being at school to home.”

He strokes my face with his fingers, “Is it your mom again?”

“It’s always my mom. I am sure if it was up to her, she would kill me just so she cannot see my face anymore.”

“Hey don’t say that... I am sure deep down she

loves you. Maybe she is just scared to show you her good side after treating you bad for so long. She loves you, after all, she is your mother," he states.

"That woman has many sides but trust me, none of them is good. I don't understand how she even prays when she has so much hate in her."

He leans over and kisses me on the lips, "Don't let her get to you, parents are like that sometimes. They think their way is the best so don't let her get to you."

"It's not that easy, Xolani...do you know how painful it is to have your parent hate you? Call you names and repeatedly tell you they wish you were never born? It hurts!"

He wipes the tears that have just rolled down the corner of my eyes, “Everything will be fine. Do you want a hug?”

I love his hugs so I sit up and hug him. How I wish my mother would give me a warm hug like this. I am sure the day she does so, I would have a stroke and die on the spot.

After a lovely afternoon with Xolani, he walks me home. I am sure Nandi feels like slapping me. I had them waiting for hours outside Xolani’s house – in my defence I did tell them to go home. While Xolani and are walking, holding hands, a car stops in front of us. It’s Khumbulani’s car.

The window rolls down, "Get in the car, Quinn."

I retort, "Don't tell me what to do. Go where you were going and leave me alone."

"Get in the car or I am calling mom. I will tell her that you are fornicating with a boy, a commoner on the road. I have evidence," he waves his phone and I snatch it from his hands and throw it in the bushes, "Quinn!"

"He is my friend and you will not insult him in front of me, are we clear?" I say then turn to Xolani, "I will call you, you can go back."

I open the car door and get into the car. Nandi and the others get in the other cars.

Khumbulani loves showing off and being the

spoilt brat he is going around with hundreds of cars.

“Mom will know of this,” he mumbles folding his hands.

“You better not try me and you are the one who insulted my friend. You might tell mom but I will also make sure you lose a front tooth.”

He doesn't respond, good for him. He knows not to play with me.

KHAPHELA

Laleti is pacing up and down being dramatic as she always is. She wants us to go look for

Khumbulani. She claims he has been out of the house for hours now and his phone is not reachable. It is ringing but he is not picking it up. That boy is sixteen, boys disappear to go play with their peers but Laleti is just being her dramatic self.

Karen is also here and hasn't said anything, we are sitting on the outside stoop. The air is nice here during summer. If something was wrong I am sure Karen would have seen that or maybe it doesn't work like that.

"We should look for him, what if something has happened to my son," Laleti then asks Karen, "Did your ancestors show you anything?"

Karen replies, "The boy just went to get some air and if something had happened, we could

have heard something – news travel fast in this kingdom.

The gate opens and Khumbulani's cars drive in. They park with the other cars, Khumbulani and Quinn come out of the same car and I can tell Khumbulani is not happy by how furiously he is walking. Quinn is walking behind him and they are both walking towards us.

Laleti is the first to ask Khumbulani, "Are you okay? Did something happen to you? Your phone is not reachable?"

Khumbulani answers, "Quinn threw my phone in the bushes. I am sure it's dead."

"Quinn why would you do that?" I ask Quinn who

seems to want to be anywhere but here.

“He was insulting my friend.” Quinn answers.

“Her boyfriend mom... I saw Quinn doing the unmentionables on the road with her boyfriend. I warned her not to do such since she is a princess and it will give her a bad name, she insulted me with her boyfriend. They even took my phone and threw it in the bushes,”

Khumbulani explains.

Laleti jumps to attack Quinn without even hearing her side of the story but Quinn quickly runs to hide behind me, “I am going to kill you and then cry at your funeral. How dare you harass my child?”

“Laleti stop! You are not going to hit anyone... we don’t even know the full story.”

“You heard what Khumbulani said,” I don’t know why she hates Quinn so much.

I turn to Quinn and ask, “Is that true?”

“He is lying...he insulted my friend and called him a commoner. Yes, I threw his phone in the bushes to teach him a lesson that he shouldn’t go around calling people names.” Quinn says playing with her hands, “You can even ask the guards what happened.”

“Are you now his mother to teach him a lesson? You better stay with your father because I will kill you today,” Laleti shouts.

“Laleti stop threatening my daughter and you Khumbulani you have no right to insult people just because you are a prince. Quinn, two wrongs don’t make a right... now both of you apologize to each other.”

“I’m sorry,” Quinn mumbles. Khumbulani refuses to apologize to his sister and storms out of the room. This boy!

“Quinn you may go,” I say.

Laleti uses that opportunity to yank her by her hair followed by a slap that leaves everyone shocked. We didn’t see that one coming. “I am not your father that spoils you, Quinn. You are a child in this house and...”

Quinn pushes her mother off her. What is wrong with these kids today?

“Never lay your hands on me ever again, Laleti!”
Quinn’s voice comes out hoarse and deep as if it’s not her speaking. “You don’t get to abuse this child, enough is enough!”

I look at Karen and she shrugs. Quinn goes on to say, “You know what you did and soon the truth will be out.”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 4

QUINN

“What truth are you talking about?” father asks. What truth is he talking about and why is everyone looking at me like that? My mother, Laleti looks like she has seen a ghost and why does my cheek sting so much?

“What do you mean, I don’t understand?” I reply with my head down. I don’t even know why I am still here because my father permitted me to leave the room after that spoilt brat Khumbulani left. I am so going to punch him in the face after this, how dare he lie. I hope he also stays away from Xolani because he will have me to deal with. I don’t care if mom protects him or not.

My father shifts closer to me but he hesitated at first. He cups my face and looks at me as if he is noticing something, “Are you okay Quinn?”

“Yes, why?”

“You don’t remember what just happened a few minutes ago?” he sounds worried.

“You told me to leave the room and I don’t know why my cheek stings. I don’t remember getting hit or anything.”

My father shifts his attention to Karen, “Karen what is this? What is going on with my daughter?”

“I don’t know... I only see what the ancestors show me do you maybe want to consult the royal seer or do you want me to...?”

“You have an ancestral calling damn it! They should show you something, anything. I don’t want anything happening to my daughter,” father retorts.

At least someone cares about me in this house and why is he getting worked up for nothing? Am I missing something? I look at my mother hoping to get answers but she looks away. My father kisses me on the forehead and tells me to go to my room. Consult with the royal seer? Is this about me having a boyfriend?

I don’t dwell much on it, I leave for my room. I am glad my mother didn’t hit me for throwing away Khumbulani’s phone. I go to my room and make sure I lock the door – Nandi tends just barge into my room. She knocks but then gets in without me permitting her.

I head to the bathroom, fill the tub with warm water then get in. I take a deep breath and get under the water until I am disturbed by my ringing phone. I sit up and reach for it on the floor next to the tub. It's Joshua.

Me: Miss me already?

Joshua: I have been knocking on your door and you are ignoring me...are you okay?

Me: I would never ignore you, Josh, I am in the bathtub. Give me a couple of minutes, I am coming.

Joshua: Aren't you just in love with the water? Weren't you at the river not so long ago?

Me: The water loves me. It calls me like the sea calls Moana.

Joshua: (Laughing) Hurry up I need to tell you something.

Me: I am coming...patience dude!

I wrap a towel around my body, find a dress then put it on. I open the door for Joshua. He gets in and sits on the bed. I sit in front of the dressing table moisturizing my skin. I know Joshua doesn't mind.

"So I talked back at dad today...I am even scared to run into him."

I gasp, “What did you say?”

“He kept going on and on about the kingdom and I just snapped. I am scared to even go get water in the kitchen.”

“I am sure he has forgotten about it. Khumbulani and I had an episode I am sure that made him forget what you did,” I then tell him how Khumbulani insulted Xolani. Joshua knows about my relationship with Xolani.

“Honestly I don’t understand why you and Khumbulani are always fighting. You fight over the little things and I am not getting involved in your fights.”

I answer, "You don't need to, I can handle myself. Only if mom doesn't get involved I swear I would have broken his one leg by now."

"Violence, Quinn."

"This world is not for the faint-hearted and I need to be tough for you, Amanhle, Aiden and that crazy boy Khumbulani," I join Joshua on the bed.

"I heard your mom slapped you, are you okay?"

"My mom slapped me, when? Who told you that?" is that why my cheek sting so much? How come I don't remember?

“Sunny told me,” Sunny is his guard and why were they talking about me?

“Why were you and Sunny talking about me?”

“It doesn’t matter...why did she hit you?” he asks.

“Honestly, I don’t remember the slap. Maybe she slapped my senses out of me. You know what my mother is like, she got mad that I threw away Khumbulani’s phone away.

My phone rings and this time it is Xolani. I show Joshua the phone screen and he gets off the bed. He knows it’s his cue to leave. I lie on my back facing the ceiling.

Me: Hey babe.

Xolani: I guess that means you didn't get in trouble with your parents. I was very worried.

Me: Everything is fine but Khumbulani is not happy with me.

Xolani: You did throw his phone in the bushes he has every right to be angry.

Me: And he insulted my man so he deserves it.

Xolani: I looked for Khumbulani's phone after you left. It's not damaged or anything, it landed on the grass. You can come to get it.

Me: I will send someone to come and get it...thank you.

Xolani: Anything for my princess...listen I will check on you later. I love you.

Me: I love you

I hang up and flinch when I feel a sharp pain just below my left breast.

LALETI

I rushed out of the room soon after Quinn left. She scared me today. What was that and what truth is talking about? Is it the truth I think it is or maybe it was all in my head? But I am sure

Khaphela and Karen heard the same thing. I wonder when Karen is leaving with the kids. I need some time to fix this before things get out of hand. I need some time to fix all this – I call my mother.

Mother: Look who decided to call.

Me: Mama I need your help.

Mother: Of course, you need my help. When have you ever called me without needing anything?

Me: Things have been very hectic for me. I am calling about Quinn.

Mother: What about Quinn, is she sick?

Me: No but something happened together when I hit her. She mentioned that the truth will soon come out.

Mother: I don't understand.

Me: She was speaking in third person as if something had possessed her. Her voice was deep and scary. Mama, you would be freaked out as I am if you witnessed it. She mentioned the truth coming out.

Mother: Stop panicking Laleti. That could mean anything or it could be that sister wife of yours trying to shake you up. She could be using your daughter against you. But just to be sure, bring

Quinn here and I will handle everything

Me: Mama you want me to bring her? Quinn and I...

Mother: (Interrupting me) I know you hate that child but what if she tells your secret? What are you going to do then?

Me: I will bring her and I don't hate her... I just wish she was a boy.

Mother: That is not her fault that she is a girl. The problem is this church of yours that twists things and preaches the wrong gospel. Why do you call yourself a Christian when you hate your daughter? Doesn't Christian mean Christ-like? You don't act like Christ to me.

Me: I am already having a rough day, please.

Mother: I am just saying it as it is. Goodbye.

I sit on the bed. I messed up once Lord. Please don't punish me for that one time. I was stupid and I know it. Someone knocks on my door and then lets themselves in. It's one of the guards telling me the king wants to see me. My heart starts beating fast, I know he wants to ask about Quinn. I say a silent prayer before going to Khaphela's bedroom.

I knock once on the door then let myself in. I find him sitting on the bed.

"You called me, baba," I announce my presence.

He pats the bed and asks me to join him. I take a deep breath and walk up to the bed. I sit next you him, a couple of inches away.

“Is everything okay?” I ask because I can tell something is wrong.

“Why do you hate Quinn so much?”

I mumble, “I don’t hate her.”

“You do Laleti. I have noticed how you treat our daughter, you harass her and you’re always shouting at her. What you did today..what was that?”

I reply, "Quinn had to be taught a lesson."

"What about Khumbulani? So it's okay that he called someone a commoner. I don't understand why you treat Quinn like she is not your child. I have had it with you abusing my child, it's either you fix yourself or I am distancing you from my daughter. Do you want her to end up killing herself because of you? I have tried ignoring it but you are overdoing it. Everyone in the house now knows about how you ill-treat Quinn."

"What do you mean fix myself?" I hope he is not saying what I think he is saying.

"If you don't stop what you are doing then you have to leave."

“Baba!” he is joking, right?

“Did you see what happened today? Those were the Madiba ancestors speaking through Quinn. Even they have had enough.”

I fold my arms, ‘Is that what Karen told you? I know she is just trying to get rid of me.’”

“Fix yourself or leave!”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 5

KAREN

The tension at the table can be cut with a knife. Everyone is quiet, the only sound we can hear is forks and knives hitting on plates and chewing. Today no one is even asking anyone to pass them anything. I think we are all quiet because Khaphela seems in a bad mood. We follow him, we see his mood first and adjust. No one wants to be shouted at so we avoid that by all means.

I clear my throat for the thousand time. I want to say something but I am scared. The kids and I are supposed to leave in two days. There is an event I want us to attend, I know the kids will love it. It happens annually. I reach for water and pour some into my glass. I clear my throat again.

“What is it, Karen?” Khaphela asks and I see Laleti roll her eyes. I hope she doesn’t change

her mind about taking the kids with me.

“I wanted to ask if I can still take the kids home with me?”

“When are you leaving?” Khaphela asks, he doesn't seem interested in engaging in this conversation with me. I wonder what he is mad about. He normally gets like this when something has to do with the kids. If there's one thing this man loves it is his children.

“I was thinking tomorrow, there's this event that happens in our village and I think they will love it.”

Khaphela announces, “Kids you will be going with your mother to her village for a couple of

days.”

Amahle is the first to groan in annoyance, “Mama’s village doesn’t have electricity.”

Originally, I am not from Matshoba but that is a story for another day. Joshua mumbles, ‘The network is terrible that side.’”

Aiden adds, “I don’t want to go.”

“Everyone is going and that is final,” Khaphela stands up, “Everyone except Quinn. She will stay here at the palace with me.”

I frown but quickly hide it with a smile. Why is Quinn staying? I look at Laleti and she also

seems shocked by this meaning this is new news to her too. I take a deep breath and gather the courage to ask, "Why is Quinn staying?"

Khaphela responds, "I have my reasons and Laleti, it's been long since you visited home don't you think?"

"Baba!" – Laleti

"Visit your mother for a couple of days," Khaphela says then exits the room. What is he up to?

I look at Quinn and she does not seem bothered that she has to stay. I am sure she is happy that she won't be going to my village with no taps and electricity. I tell the kids what time we are

leaving the following morning and suddenly everyone loses their appetite and leaves the table. They are going to have fun and not even want to come back to Matshoba.

At the table, it is now Laleti and me. Laleti shifts her attention to me, "What did you say to our husband?"

"I didn't say anything, what do you mean?"

"You better not be using any of your witchcraft on him because..."

I interrupt her, "Because what Laleti...what are you going to do?"

She scoffs, shaking her head, “Don’t test me, Karen. Stay out of my way just like I do to you.”

She stands up and leaves the table. I pick up the glass of water and take a sip. I stand up and go to the kitchen I need to bake some cookies for our journey. I get started while the helpers clean up. When I am also done, I clean up the kitchen.

“Hey Quinn,” I greet her when she walks into the kitchen. I don’t know why she doesn’t ask her father to put a mini fridge in her room because this is her daily routine coming to get water in the kitchen at night.

“Hey, Karen.”

“Excuse me! Did you just call me by my name?”
what has gotten into this child?

She looks at me and shifts closer, “I am sorry, I meant mom.”

“Quinn are you okay?”

“Stop what you are doing before it backfires.
Laleti carries a light you cannot dim.”

Great ancestors, what is this? “What? What are you...”

Quinn scratches her head, “Man I forgot why I am in the kitchen again. Oh hi...are you baking? Smells good in here.”

I take a deep breath, “Quinn what was that?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Never mind,” I storm out of the kitchen and head to my room.

KHAPHELA

I lie on my bed facing the ceiling. I cannot get the words the seer said to me out of my head. He said someone in the royal house is using witchcraft. It could be one of the servants or it could be one of my wives. I swear a part of me wanted to kick them out right away but the seer told me that if I do it'll affect one of the children. He says he cannot see clearly, his guides are

not showing him things clearly but among the five children, one's stars were stolen when the child was born. Meaning the child will have bad omen all their life.

I don't believe in witchcraft but I didn't know what to think after that episode with Quinn. Dlodlo has been the family seer since I can remember so I just had to go with it even though I don't understand these things. I care about my children and I wouldn't want anything happening to them. I am more worried about Quinn. The seers said she carries a certain spirit. I don't know how or what that means. But, he told me not to worry because the Madiba ancestors are watching over her. Even though they are watching her, something was done to her when she was born.

So I have taken it upon myself to keep an eye on Quinn for the next few days since the others are leaving with Karen. I am also sending Laleti to her mother because her attitude pisses me off these days. I am fed up with how she treats Quinn. I think it's best she goes away for some time.

Someone knocks on my bedroom door and it's Laleti. She walks in and kneels next to the bed.

“Baba I would like to apologize if there's anything I did wrong.”

I answer, “You did not do anything but I figured you might miss your mother that's why I planned this trip for you.”

“To me, it seems like you are trying to get rid of me.”

I sigh heavily, “If I was getting rid of you, I would have sent word to your family that I am returning you.”

“Why is Quinn not going with the others if I may ask?”

“I want to spend some time with her without the others thinking I am favouring her. My daughter hasn’t been okay for some time and she needs a break.” I tell her.

She looks down, “I am such a bad mother. Honestly, I don’t know why I am like that to her. It is as if something takes over me.”

“Take some time away and refresh, you will come back. I am very tired Laleti please close the door on your way out,” I say and she nods getting off her knees.

QUINN

I am standing by the river looking at the water. My spirit feels calm when I am in this place. I take off my clothes and get into the water then the next thing I hear is a scream. I get out of the water, put on my clothes and run in the direction where the noise came from. I find a boy sitting on the ground holding his leg. He lifts his face to face me and I recognize him.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

“Leave me alone!”

“I heard a scream, are you hurt?” I ask looking at his leg where his hand is holding.

“I was bitten by a snake but I don’t need your help.”

“Let me help, what if it was a dangerous or poisonous snake?” I run around the bushes and take some tree leaves then find a stone to crush them with and then put them where he got bitten.

“What is that?”

I shrug, "I don't know."

"You are treating me with things you don't know, they could be poisonous."

"They are not... now stand still," I apply to his wound. I look up and find him looking at me, "What's your name?"

"It doesn't matter it's not like you will remember it anyway."

"I am Quinn." I tear a piece of my dress and bandage his leg.

"Kumkani!"

“Wake up! It’s burning daylight,” I feel someone yank the blankets off me. It was a dream.

“Joshua I am going to kill you.”

He sits on the bed and pinches my cheeks,
“Were you having an erotic dream about Xolani?”

“No, and what are you doing in my room so early?”

He answers, “Mom woke us up at four to get ready. She says it's best to travel before it gets hot. It was going to be nice when you were around.”

“I am just glad I get to stay here. No offence but it sucks that side.”

“Do you think if I fake a stomach ache they would let me stay?” he asks lying on his back and facing the ceiling.

“Are you forgetting your mother knows how to mix herbs? She will have you A-Okay in no time.”

He gets out of bed, “Please help me pack.”

“Joshua you abuse me.”

“You are my older sister and you should take care of me,” he takes my hand.

“Says the future king.”

We bump into Karen on the passage. She is avoiding eye contact when I greet her and I notice she is not enthusiastic like she is when I see her. Maybe I am reading much into it. I help Joshua pack and then help take his bags to the car. I go back to my room to bathe and see Khumbulani coming out of Amahle’s room. Since when are they buddies?

I bathe and then join everyone for an early breakfast since Karen and the others are leaving early. My mother is also leaving today. I find only my mother at the table. I greet her and then sit three chairs away from her. I wouldn’t want to make her lose her appetite.

“How are you?” she asks me and I choke on my juice.

“Uhm... I am okay.”

“Do you want to come with me to my village?” she asks. Why is she being so nice? Does she want to kill me without any witnesses?

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 6

QUINN

The house is very quiet with everyone gone. I feel bad for turning my mother down the other

day. I didn't turn her down to be precise - my father came to my rescue. He told her that he wants to spend some time with me hence I was staying. I still don't understand why my father wanted me to stay because we don't do anything together. He spends most of his time in the throne room and only comes to check if I am fine or if I have eaten.

"Dad I am going out," I announce standing by the door. I didn't realize he is in a meeting so I wave and head out. I am going to see Xolani and yes, Nandi is with me and four other guards who didn't listen when I told them to stay.

"Nandi do you have a boyfriend?" I ask as we walk to Xolani's house. It's a walkable distance and Nandi always complains about why we don't take the cars but I hate that the royal cars

will be parked outside the house then everyone will know I am in there.

Nandi smiles, "Even if I had one, I won't get time to see him."

"See what I mean when I say you don't have to watch me always. Do yourself a favour and get a man. Every time I go to see Xolani you can use that opportunity to see him too."

She sighs heavily, "It doesn't work like that my princess. I am to know your whereabouts always. Imagine if something was to happen and I am not around. Your mother would have my head."

"My mother doesn't care about me so don't

worry about her. That woman hates me.”

She answers, “She loves you. Things weren’t always like this you know.”

“What do you mean? How long have you been at the royal house?”

She shakes her head, “It’s not my business to tell.”

“How old are you Nandi?”

“I am twenty-eight, my princess,” she answers.

Oh my God, that is way older than me yet she lets me speak to her however I please. Now I

feel bad. I leave Nandi outside Xolani's house and make my way in. I knock at the front door and no one seems to open so I try the door handle and it opens.

"Hello," I get in and close the door, "Xolani!"

I don't know if I should be going into people's houses without permission. Maybe I should have called before coming here. I hear something drop and it's coming in the direction where Xolani's room is. Maybe he is around and just did not hear me knock. I make my way to his room and when I get closer I hear giggling. I slowly open the door and find Xolani with some girl I recognize from school. They are on the bed and she is giggling because he is tickling her.

Xolani jumps out of the bed as soon as he sees

me, "Quinn! You didn't tell me you were coming."

"I am glad I didn't tell you otherwise I wouldn't have seen this," I turn and walk out.

He follows me and catches me before I reach the front door, "Quinn it's not what you think. We are just friends."

"Xolani don't lie to me. We are done."

He holds my hand and pulls me back, "She means nothing, I promise."

"Then what is she doing in your room? You said I am the first girl to be in your room."

“It’s...I love you and I want you. I swear she means nothing,” he holds both my hands.

“Are you sleeping with her?”

He looks down, “Can we sit down and talk? I will explain everything.”

“She can have you. If you cheated with her then you want her more. Bye Xolani and don’t follow me because I will have my guards break your legs.” I head out, more like storm out.

“That was quick,” says Nandi when I walk out of the gate.

“Let’s go home.”

“My princess are you okay?” she follows me trying to keep up. I don’t reply, I walk faster. I just want to be in my room and alone. Xolani was one of the people I trusted. He is one of the people I let in on my secrets and I felt safe around him. I told him my secrets and told him my traumas. I trusted him. I get home and lock myself in my room.

“Quinn you can talk to me,” Nandi knocks on my bedroom door but I ignore her and put headphones on. I put my phone on aeroplane mode so Xolani cannot reach me. I can’t believe Xolani has been cheating on me. He has been nice to me but I guess to him I was a troubled princess desperate to be loved. I feel so stupid. How did I not notice this? The worst part is that

I always see that girl and she talks to me like everything is fine. Boys are trash. I am done with them.

I feel someone yank the headsets off. I quickly stand on my feet when I notice that it's my father. Did he break down my door?

"Quinn are you okay?" he looks very worried.

"It's nothing, I am fine."

"You are not fine if it is making you cry. What is wrong?" he asks. I look at the guards standing by the door. I am not about to say my business in front of all these people. My father dismisses them and then closes the door. It's not closing properly since they forcefully opened it, "Talk to

me, what's wrong?"

"It's nothing baba... it's stupid."

"I want to hear that stupid thing," he sits on the bed and tells me to sit on his lap. I am not a child why is he doing this to me. I sit next to him instead.

I clear my throat, "My boyfriend cheated on me."

He wasn't expecting that, his facial expressions says it all, "You have a boyfriend, since when?"

"Since I was seventeen but it doesn't matter because him and I are done. I hate him. I hate all boys."

“Hey don’t say that,” he pulls me into his arms,
“It’s all part of growing up. You will meet people
that will hurt you but don’t give up on love. You
are a very beautiful girl and you will meet a man
that will love you and treat you like the princess
that you are.”

“I wanted him, he understood me. He was my
safe place and now I have no one. He is the only
person that loved me.”

Father replies, “Quinn a lot of people love you. I
love you, the family loves you too.”

“You won’t understand. He listened to me and
understood me better.”

“A relationship shouldn’t be your rehab sweetie. He might have understood you but did you understand him? Was everything about you or the two of you? A relationship should not be one-sided,” he states.

“That doesn’t excuse what he did.”

He rubs my back, “I know and I am sorry he hurt you. And stop crying you still have one man that will never stop loving you and that is me. I know you feel like you have no one but I am here if you ever need to talk. You have your two mothers and your siblings. We all care about you.”

“I know.”

He pinches my cheeks, “Don’t just say that to get rid of me. We do care Quinn. I care sweetie and you can talk to me about anything.”

“Okay.”

“What can I do to cheer you up?” he asks.

“You can go hunting with me.”

“Today I have a meeting with the elders but I promise we will do it tomorrow,” he kisses me on the forehead. “Go get the tools box so I can fix your door.”

“I was about to complain about it.”

My father fixes my door over small talk with me. My father and I have never spent more than an hour together. He fixed my door then we have ice cream. I go out when he starts his meeting. I need to do something that will keep my mind off Xolani. I ask the guards to accompany me hunting. I don't know why I enjoy it so much. I just love the forest and the river. They are my favourite places.

My phone rings just before we leave the palace. I should leave it behind because I might lose it. Luckily it's not Xolani.

Me: Hey Josh!

Joshua: I have been trying to call you, do you know how hard it is to find signal in this place? You should pick up your phone when I call.

Me: My phone was in flight mode. Xolani happened, I will tell you everything when you come back.

Joshua: Just tell me now.

Me: Xolani and I broke up, he cheated on me.

Joshua: I am so...so...rr...y

Me: Josh you're breaking.

Joshua: Hello, can you hear me?

Me: I can hear you.

Joshua: This bloody network, I will call you...I want all details keep your phone with you.

Now I am forced to take my phone with me in case Joshua calls me. I ask one of the guards to keep it safe for me. We drive to the forest and leave our cars near the road with two guards watching them. I have to admit today I am messing up, my head is all over the place. I still can't wrap my head around what happened today. I trusted Xolani and the fact that I know that girl makes it all worse.

"My princess we can't cross here," says one of the guards.

"Why not?"

He answers, "This is where the Dumazulu kingdom starts."

'That's stupid, usually, the kingdoms are divided by rivers. Let's just track this animal then we go back.'

I lead the way. Just when I am having fun now they want to go back. While we are still following the animal we see a kudu from a distance. I am not letting this one go. I took my father's bow, and since he couldn't come with me, he let me use it. I shoot the arrow but for some reason, two arrows lend on the animal.

A boy/ man and I reach the animal at the same time. He is also with five more men and by their

outfits, I can tell they are royal guards.

“I shot it first,” I say.

“As you can see both our arrows are on it and shouldn’t you be knitting or doing girls stuff?” he says then laughs.

“Don’t mock me, you don’t know me.”

He shifts closer, “True but sweetie you are on my land and everything on this side is mine.”

“Princess let’s just go,” one of the guards pulls me back, “We apologize, we didn’t realize we were on your side.”

“Prince...” some boy shows up but stops talking when our eyes meet. He is the guy from my dream. He clears his throat, “My prince your father is asking for you.”

The prince turns his attention to me, “I will let you have this one, my princess.”

“Thanks.”

“I’m Denzel by the way,” he extends his hand to me but I don’t shake it.

“Bye, Denzel!” I tell the guards to carry the kudu. My arrow is on it too I can take it. I turn and look at that guy from my dream. Why did I dream about him?

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STARTING 1 NOVEMBER

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 7

KHAPHELA

I don't know when last I saw my daughter smile so widely. I think spending some time with her was the best idea. Quinn never talks when at the table and today she just won't stop talking. I am surprised that this is the same Quinn that was crying over a boy this afternoon. After her hunting trip, she came back in a lighter mood. I knew Quinn loved hunting but I didn't know she was good at it. I look forward to going with her the following day.

After supper, Quinn forces me to watch a movie with her. This child is forgetting that I am the King of Matshoba. But again, I am a father before I am a king and right now my daughter needs me. Amongst all my children Quinn is the

only one I hardly spend time with. She always locks herself in her room or she is on hunting trips, and I hardly see her. I only see her at the table and she is always quiet.

Quinn falls asleep before her movie even ends. She must be tired from all that crying and hunting. I carry her to her room and put her in bed. I look at her for a moment. The seer said she possesses a certain spirit. I wonder what kind of a spirit it is. I hope it's not something that will harm her in the future. I kiss her forehead and leave the room for mine.

I change my clothes and then get in bed. I need to check on my wives before they bite my head off. I start with Karen. I met Karen when I was on my way home from school. She was the prettiest thing I have ever seen but I couldn't act

on my feelings back then because I knew I already had a wife chosen for me. For some reason, I kept running into her then we became friends, one thing led to another and I ended up falling in love with her.

Me: Mfazi (wife) how are you?

Karen: (sighs) I am good just tired of hearing your kids complain about internet connection. These kids are very spoiled.

Me: And who spoils them if I may ask?

Karen: That's not the point. So how is everything on that side?

Me: Everything is fine, Quinn and I had a wonderful day.

Karen: I still don't understand why you wanted her to stay. Is there something you are not telling me?

Me: I just wanted to spend some time with my daughter that's all.

Karen: Don't you think that is a little unfair? Quinn is not your only child. I have never heard you say that about Joshua or Amahle.

Me: Karen you know I spend time with Joshua all the time in fact he is the one that doesn't want to spend time with me. Quinn is going through a lot.

Karen: Quinn is a teenager and they act up sometimes.

Me: Can we not fight, please? I called to check up on you and since you are fine, I am going to hang up.

Karen: You promised not to favour any child more than the others.

Me: I don't understand why you are making a big deal out of this. Karen, I just wanted some time with my daughter that's all. Is it a crime for a father to want to spend time with his child?

Karen: I didn't say that but you let me plan this and now you change without telling me.

Me: What difference would Quinn's presence have made? Why are you so angry about this?

Karen: I don't want to fight with you so I am going to hang up.

She hangs up. I chuckle shaking my head. Women can be dramatic I tell you. Why is she mad that Quinn stayed? I know I said to treat the children equally but Quinn is not even her child for her to be so mad. I take a deep breath and call Laleti. Even though I never loved her at first, Laleti is a wonderful woman. She was humble and loving when we first met. Her parents groomed her well and she was everything a man wanted in a woman. She changed when Karen moved in with us. She started being bitter and things worsened when

she got Quinn. I don't know what happened to the sweet woman I first met.

Laleti: Baba.

Me: Good evening my queen, how are you?

Laleti: I am good and you were right, I needed to go home for a while.

Me: I guess that means you are having fun.

Laleti: Let's say I am enjoying being pampered by my mother.

Me: How I wish to be you right now. I am also glad you are having a nice time.

Laleti: How are you and my baby?

That is the first time hearing her say that.

Me: Quinn and I are having a blast.

Laleti: That's good...listen I have to go, my mother needs me.

Me: No problem. Goodnight my love.

KAREN

I am sitting outside the house watching the beautiful moon. This place holds so many

memories, good and bad. I always wished to grow up and have a great life, better than all my siblings. The ancestors seemed to have heard my prayers when they paired me with Khaphela. He was my ticket out of the life I was feeling and I also found a man that loved me the way I wanted to be loved.

Even though I tried to escape my life, I couldn't escape reality. I was no royalty and I was crushed when Khaphela's family didn't accept our relationship. Khaphela assured me that he loved me and wanted me and told me that he was just marrying Laleti because it was custom and a bunch of things I did not understand. At first, I thought he was done with me then months later he married me.

What hurt me was that he cared about Laleti, he

loved her. He didn't just marry her because she was chosen for her. Khaphela loved that woman. She was everything that I was not and it wasn't fair. Why do other people get to have it good and live a good life? I had to do what I had to do. Since I couldn't get rid of her, I had to create a division between her and Khaphela. What better way to make Khaphela loathe her than through what Khaphela loves the most, his children? From the looks of it, that also went wrong.

"Karen I am talking to you," says my sister Nomasonto sitting next to me. Nomasonto is a Sangoma.

"What did you say?"

"Why are you sitting here all alone?" she asks.

“Nothing just thinking about my life. Never had I imagined I would share a man with someone for the rest of my life.”

“That woman is still there?” as if she doesn’t know, “Come on, K you know how to mix herbs.”

“It doesn’t work like that.”

She asks, “Have you tried or do you just assume it doesn’t work? What about that thing I told you about and where is Quinn?”

“Her father couldn’t let me bring her.”

“Karen you were supposed to bring her, I

specifically told you to bring her,” now she is shouting at me.

“Khaphela wouldn’t let me okay...my hands were tied.” I stand up and head inside the house.

LALETI

My mother and I are in my room. My room is still as I left it, with my old furniture and all my teenage things. My mother says I have to one day show all this to my daughter but I don’t know. Quinn and I are not the best buddies. I really don’t know why I feel so much hate towards her. I hate that she is a girl and I just can’t control it. The funny part is that I knew she was a girl from the get-go and I was excited about it then suddenly I developed this hate towards her. My mother said it will fade with

time but it didn't, it is as if my hate for her grows daily.

"So your husband is alone at the palace with Quinn?" my mother asks.

"Yes and he seems to be enjoying some alone time with his daughter."

"Let the man be plus that child deserves a little love after how you treat her," she sips her tea.

"What do you mean how I treat her? I am teaching her to be a strong lady."

She shakes her head, "You are abusing the child, Laleti. She doesn't need to be made strong, she

needs to be loved.”

“I am loving her the best way I can but something just takes over me when she gets near. Do you think it is because of what I did?”

She shrugs, “I am no seer but I did tell you to bring her with you.”

“Khaphela wouldn’t let me you know how he is when it comes to his children.”

“Speaking of children, how is that boy, Karen’s child...what is his name, Joshua?” she asks.

“He is fine and Khaphela is grooming him to be the next king. That boy is too weak. Khaphela

should have made Khumbulani crowned prince.”

“Khumbulani isn’t the first son and you know it,” she says.

“Only if Quinn was a boy we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

“Stop it with this only if she was a boy. She is not a boy, I swear next time you say that I will slap you,” she shouts.

QUINN

I am in my room lying on my back and playing games on my phone. I am waiting for noon so

my father and I can go hunting as he promised. I hope he does not change his mind and I am enjoying spending time with him. I hope the others don't get jealous when they find out about all the things my father and I have been doing together. I thought he was going to break Xolani's legs for hurting me but he just said it wasn't meant to be.

"My princess, may I come in?" Nandi knocks on my bedroom door.

"It's open."

"My princess your father asked me to get you ready, you have visitors," Nandi says already going to my closet.

“There goes our hunting trip.”

“Tomorrow is another day. How is this blue dress?” she shows me the dress.

“I will wear whatever you chose, Nandi.”

“I think you will look good in this one, here you go,” she says wearing her contagious smile.

“Who is visiting?”

She shrugs, “I don’t know my princess.”

I quickly change into the dress and then join my father in the throne room as we wait for our guest. I don’t even know why I have to be here.

About half an hour later our guests arrive. It is the king and prince of Dumazulu. That man who saved me at the river the other day is one of the king's guards. I thought he hates my father. Denzel winks at me when our eyes meet, jerk! Where is that boy? I look amongst the guards and he is there, hands behind his back and face down. The boy from my dreams.

My father asks me to show Denzel around while he talks to Denzel's father. That boy seems to be Denzel's personal servant because he follows behind him. I have so many questions I want to ask him. Is his name even Kumkani?

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 8

QUINN

I am showing Denzel around the palace while Nandi and Kumkani follow behind us, whatever that boy's name is. How I wish I can just get a moment to talk to him. I want to know his name and maybe ask a few questions like if he has ever been bitten by a snake. Why did I dream about him and then meet him the next day? Nothing I ever dream about ever happens but for some reason, I dream about this boy and saw him. That has to mean something. Who is that man with the king? Why does he hate my father? I wouldn't want anything happening to father. What is the King of Dumazulu doing here? Is it about me hunting in their land? Do they come in peace? See how I am overthinking now.

“Are you even listening?” Denzel holds my hand
my I quickly pull away.

“I am sorry...I am a little worried. Are you and
your father here because I was in your land
yesterday?”

He shakes his head, “No. Why do you say that?”

“Don’t tell me that it’s a coincidence that I saw
you yesterday then the next thing you show up
at my house the next day.”

“Let’s just say I wanted to confirm if you are
really a princess,” he answers. Boys!

“What if I wasn’t a princess,” I fold my arms to

my chest.

He replies, "Then I was going to search the whole of Matshoba looking for a beautiful girl that knows how to hunt."

"You knew I was a princess stop acting dumb. You saw my guards."

He nods lightly, "I just wanted to see you, is that a crime?"

"Dragging older people here in this heat is the crime. You could have just come by yourself."

He answers, "We both know that would be disrespecting your father. Enough about me, tell

me about yourself.”

“I am not in the mood and this is the rest of the palace. Let’s go back,” I try to walk away but he pulls me back.

“Not so fast princess. So you are not even going to tell me your name?”

I scoff, “Why didn’t you ask the people you came with? Everyone knows me.”

“Please!”

I sigh heavily, “My name is Quinn...Quinn Mandela.”

“Nice to meet you, princess. I am Denzel Bhebhe.”

I turn to check if Nandi and that boy are nearby - they are standing just a distance from us. I wonder what they are talking about. I want to ask Denzel about that boy but at the same time, I don't want to sound weird. Denzel and I find somewhere to sit then I ask one of the helpers to get him something to drink. I like that he talks to the helpers like people. I have seen people treat helpers as if they are nothing. Nandi and that other boy are now in the next room.

“You still haven't told me about yourself, princess,” Denzel says.

“What do you want to know?”

“Everything... who is Quinn and what does she like. How old is she? Does she have a boyfriend?” he mumbles the last part.

“Well, nothing is interesting about this girl. I am just Quinn, I love the river and I love hunting...that’s all.”

He says, “You didn’t answer everything I asked.”

“I am eighteen.”

He adds, “You missed the other question.”

“I don’t have a boyfriend. We...we broke up, and he cheated.”

“When are we breaking his legs?” he asks and I burst into laughter.

“It wasn’t meant to be so I rather not dwell much on it.”

He answers, “You are much of a bigger person than me. I was going to be petty, I swear.”

“Tell me about you.”

“I am Denzel, I also love hunting, anything that makes my blood rush to be precise. I am twenty-one and very much single,” he retorts.

“We should get back at the others.”

JOSHUA

The network in this place is very terrible. Can we go home already? I am sick of this place and I miss my sister. Quinn is the only person that gets me and I miss gossiping with her. I also didn't get the chance to ask about how things ended between her and Xolani. They seemed very much in love and I can't believe Xolani cheated on her. Curiosity is killing me, I want to know what happened and the network in this place is very terrible I can't call Quinn. There is great service in my mother's room but I am avoiding her at all costs. Every time we come here we are made to take disgusting herbs and they say it's for protection. I never drink any of that stuff. I always throw it out.

“Joshua I have been looking for you and you are here hiding,” says mother. I am hiding behind the kraal my mother wanted me to help the others slaughter a cow and I don’t do that. I don’t even know why they are slaughtering a whole cow for, what are we going to do with all that meat? They don’t even have a fridge to store the remaining meat. And another thing the event my mother wanted us to attend, not so crazy about it. But, Khumbulani and Aiden seemed to love it. Amahle was just as bored as me.

“I wanted to make a phone call.”

Mother folds her arms, “Let me guess, you are calling Quinn? Why are you even bothering yourself calling her, does she ever call you?”

“Mom please stop...why are you looking for me?”

She sits on the stone that is next to the one I am sitting on, “Joshua I want to ask you something and I need you to answer me honestly.”

“Sure,” I cross my fingers that she doesn’t ask about my sexuality.

“Is it true that you don’t want to be king of Matshoba?”

I look down and pop my fingers, “I don’t want to be king.”

“Why? Who doesn’t want to be king plus you are the firstborn and it’s your birthright.”

“I know but I don’t want the throne. Father should crown Khumbulani,” I said and she stands on her feet.

“Abomination! You are the firstborn child and you are going to be the next king of Matshoba. No Khumbulani is going to be crowned.”

“Does it matter who gets crowned? As long as the person is going to take care of Matshoba and her people. Really mom I don’t think I am up for it and I don’t want the throne,” I retort.

“Listen to me and listen well. Take whatever thought you have and shove it away. You are

taking over after your father. I just need to mix something for you that will take away your fears.”

“I don’t want your stupid herbs mom” I yell, “I don’t want any of this and you will not force me.”

I leave her by the kraal. I am sick of everyone shoving this being king thing in my face. Why can’t they get the message that I don’t want to be the next king? They should crown Khumbulani. I don’t mind, even Aiden. I bump into aunty Nomasonto.

“Where have you been, your mother was looking for you?”

I roll my eyes, "I just saw her."

"Boy don't roll your eyes at me and what kind of a boy rolls his eyes, are you crazy?"

I mumble, "Can I go?"

"Go and go help others... you are a prince in Matshoba not here."

I am not helping with anything. I walk straight to the room I am using. I am sharing this with Khumbulani and Aiden. I find Khumbulani on the bed. If there's anyone stubborn it is Khumbulani. I am sure he straight-up refused to help.

"You are here," I sit on the floor and lean on the

bed with my back.

“They wanted me to help slaughter a cow. I am not doing that.”

I laugh, “I am sure you told them that.”

“You know me. I said it upfront.”

“When are we going home? I am sick of this place,” I say.

“Come on...the place is not that bad. I love it here, I get to rest from hearing mom yelling at Quinn.”

“That I have to agree with you,” I retort. Aiden

walks into the room and throws himself on the bed.

“I want to go home. I hate this place, they are making me chase a chicken and the chickens here are so fast. The other one ran away headless,” he moans. What kind of a chicken runs headless? We need to convince mom that it is time to go home. We have had it with this place.

QUINN

I think I judged Denzel too soon, he is a great person and we had a great time. He is a nice well-groomed prince but if he is getting close to me in hopes to date me then he is wasting his time. I am done with boys, not after what Xolani did to me. Or maybe I am getting ahead of

myself with Denzel. He did not even tell me that he liked me yet here I am thinking he likes me. Maybe he just wants to be hunting buddies.

Denzel and I joined the elders in the dining room. Denzel's father and my father seem to be having a great time. I keep looking at that man that saved me. There's something about him that I can't put my finger on but I know it's not good. My instincts are never wrong.

After a couple of hours, King Bhebhe announces his departure. I say, "My mothers love giving people gifts before they leave so can I please give you something."

Bhebhe smiles and says to my father, "You have a wonderful daughter there," he then turns to me, "We can't turn down a gift, princess."

“Give me a second,” I stand then turn to Denzel’s servant, “Please help me.” I need to talk to this boy before he leaves.

He doesn’t hesitate, “Yes, princess.”

We head out of the room. We have a lot of gifts and I know where my mother keeps gifts we give out to visitors. But, I did this so I can talk to this boy, “What's your name?”

“Lucas, my princess.”

Not Kumkani? That’s weird, “Lucas have you ever been bitten by a snake? I know that sounds weird.”

“Actually..... it happened a couple of days...
but...never mind.”

“What? I want to know?” I insist.

“The wound didn’t hurt, it is as if it healed on its
own. Weird right?”

“Not really. Come this way,” I say leading the
way. Now I am more curious.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 9

QUINN

His name is Lucas...then how come in my dream he said his name is Kumkani. Now that he has confirmed that he got bitten by a snake, I have many questions. I am sure everyone in the dining room is asking themselves why I didn't ask for help from one of my servants. I needed to talk to him, I wasn't going to sleep with all the unanswered questions that I had, I still have more but I don't want to put the boy in an awkward situation.

"Please don't let the door close, it only opens from outside. I don't know why no one ever fixes it," I say.

"Yes, princess."

"My name is Quinn, call me Quinn," I get on the ladder. I don't even know what I am looking for

but I will take anything big and nicely wrapped. Where do we even get these gifts? Maybe it's gifts we get when people visit the palace.

“I can’t call you by your name, princess. I am not allowed.”

“I am permitting you to...” I miss a step and almost fall but I hold on to the ladder, the gift falls instead.

Lucas rushes to my side and helps me get off the ladder, “Are you okay, princess?”

“Yeah, I am fine. The door!” I rush to the door. The handle inside does work. Stupid door!

“Let me try,” Lucas offers.

“It won’t open trust me, I always get stuck in this room. I’ll call Nandi to come and open for us.” I take out my phone and call Nandi but she is not answering her phone. Maybe she left it in her room. I try my father but he is also not picking up. We have visitors so I doubt he has his phone near him.

“I am sorry, I thought you were hurt.”

I answer, “It’s not your fault, don’t worry about it.”

“So how are we going to get out?”

I sit on the floor and lean on the shelves, “We are stuck here until someone comes looking for us.”

“Will they come anytime soon? I don’t do well with enclosed places, I don’t want to faint on you.”

“Why don’t you sit down? Nandi knows about this door and they will notice that we have been gone for some time and follow us. Sit down and take deep breaths,” I stand up and walk to him, “You can sit down, it’s okay.”

I can tell he is keeping it together. I have heard about this phobia but I have never run across anyone that has it. They call it claustrophobia. His breathing escalates oh great God he is going to die on me. I send Nandi a text

message and dial her phone again but still no answer.

“Do you know or have Denzel’s phone number on you?” I ask and he shakes his head. I really don’t know what to do. I get something to fan him with but he’s sweating and trembling. I take my phone and google how to stop a claustrophobia attack and none of the results I am getting is helping at the moment. Relaxation and...that’s should help. I just need to help him relax.

I cup his face and make him look at me, “Lucas listen to me, everything will be fine and we will be out of here in no time. Nothing will happen to you, I promise. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out...you can do it. Help is on its way. Nandi replied and she is on her way.”

Nandi didn't reply but anything to help him calm down. He takes a deep breath in and out. It takes a while but after a couple of minutes, he starts breathing normally. Where is Nandi when one needs her? I continue fanning Lucas and assuring him that he is going to be fine. When he is better, I sit next to him.

"You said Nandi is coming."

I hold his hand, "She is coming."

He untangles his hand from my mine and stands up. He buttons his shirt, "I am sorry about that."

"Does it happen a lot?"

“Only when I feel trapped,” he murmurs. There’s something about him. I shift closer to him and he shifts away. He has a certain aura around him I can’t explain. I feel like hugging him.

“Please sit down and relax a little.”

“I am going to be in trouble for this,” he sits on the floor, “I should be watching you and it seems like it is now the other way around.”

“This is not your fault Lucas. I will explain to your king so don’t worry. How long have you been working at the palace?”

He sighs heavily, “My parents worked at the palace. After they died, the king took me in. I

think I was ten.”

“How old are you now if I may ask?”

He hesitates but answers, “Twenty-two.”

“Do they treat you right at the palace?” I don’t even know why I am asking all these things. I guess I am killing time until someone gets here.

“I can’t complain it’s better than living in the streets. Prince Denzel is very nice to me and I work around him.”

I say, “What’s your full name?”

“Lucas Abrahams.”

I don't know why I was expecting his other name to be Kumkani. Why did he say Kumkani in my dream? "Your parents were white?"

He chuckles, "Mixed, my mother was Xhosa and my father was an Afrikaner."

"That explains why you are light-skinned."

Where the hell is everyone? Don't they see that we have been gone for so long? Now I am the one panicking. What if they forgot about us? What if no one comes here and we get thirsty or we need to use the bathroom? I look at Lucas who is sitting on the floor. I can't afford to panic because he will panic too. I sit down but this time next to Lucas. Things are getting awkward now, we are no friends so we don't know what to talk about.

“Can I see where you got bitten?” don’t judge me, I have nothing left to say. I know he won’t talk first either since I am a princess. He shifts up his trousers and shows me. It’s just like in my dream, “Shouldn’t you bandage it?”

“It doesn’t hurt.”

“Did it hurt when you got bitten?” I ask running my finger on the wound. I can’t believe this.

“It did sting at first but then the pain died down.”

“Wow!” that’s all I can say. I take my phone and call Nandi one more time. She is so going to get a piece of me today.

“She is not coming, is she?”

“I am sorry, I don’t know why she hasn’t noticed that I haven’t been there for some time.” I retort

DENZEL

I have never been this bored in my life. One moment we were ready to leave the palace then the next thing the king, Quinn’s father offered to show my father some of his land so we had to drive to the place. It’s weird the things old people talk about. They are talking about the land and future developments and sharing tips. I wish I had stayed with Quinn, she is the reason I begged my father to come here. I wanted to see her again. I think I like her. I also like that

we already have a thing in common.

The king brought with him a girl called Nandi. I think she is here because Quinn is with my guard. It feels weird to call him my guard. Growing up, I thought Lucas was my brother. My parents explained everything when I was crowned prince of Dumazulu that Lucas is there to watch me. I thought he was always around you know like an older brother. I guess I always ignored the part where he called me 'my prince'

"Hi, Nandi right?" I get closer to her.

"Yes, my prince. Can I help you with anything?"

" Kind of...can you please tell me a little bit about Princess Quinn. What kind of a person is

she and what does she like?" I ask. I hope I am not overstepping my boundaries.

She smiles, "Does the prince maybe like our princess."

"I think so and I would like to ask her on a date. What does she like and do you think she will agree?"

"I don't know about agreeing, she will answer that but the princess loves the outdoors. She loves anything to do with nature," she retorts.

"Thanks, Nandi."

Finally, it's time to go back. I am never coming

here with my father again. He should have gotten the message that I am only here for the princess and he just had to make this about him.

LUCAS

It's confirmed, no one is coming. The princess and I have been in this room for more than two hours now. The princess was hungry so she went through the things and found something to snack on. I was not hungry but the princess is very persistent. I think she is scared I might have another attack. I don't know why I freaked out like that when I found out we are stuck. It has been long since I had those attacks and did that have to happen today? In front of the princess of Matshoba. Kill me!

The princes and I are sitting on the floor,

waiting for a miracle. We have tried calling for help but nothing is working. Did I mention the princess found a bottle of wine? She was complaining about being thirsty and now she is halfway through the bottle. I can't drink, I am not allowed. I think the princess is drunk because she now has her head on my lap.

"I had a dream about you," she whispers but loud enough for me to hear her. I think that is the alcohol talking. How can she dream about someone she doesn't know?

"What happened in the dream?"

"You were bitten by a snake and I healed you, with tree leaves. Imagine tree leaves," she laughs.

I shift her hair off her face, “Maybe that’s why my wound doesn’t hurt.”

She sits up and looks at me, “Why did I dream about you? I don’t even know you?”

“I don’t know, princess.”

She smiles, “I like how you call me princess. Can we be friends?”

“You know that’s impossible.”

She sighs, “I know... being a royal comes with rules and regulations. It’s not as fun as it looks. We can’t even choose who to love. I want to

choose the man I love, I want to choose the one I feel I deserve. Have you found your soul mate yet?"

"Not yet."

"Maybe there is a reason I dreamt about you, what if you are my soul mate?" she questions.

"I think you are a little drunk my princess."

"Would a drunk person do this?" she shifts closer and smashes her lips on mine.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 10

QUINN

“I am sorry,” I shift away from Lucas. What is wrong with me? Why did I do that? How I wish I can kick myself for this? I just made a move on a boy – worse a boy I don’t like. A boy that doesn’t like me. Oh my God, I am the worst. “I am sorry, Lucas. I didn’t mean to make things awkward. My apologies.”

“It’s okay.”

It’s not okay because what if someone had walked in on us? I know they were going to blame Lucas for this. I should stay away from him for his sake. I try calling Nandi one last time and this time my phone switches off. Great! I sit

down with my back against the door. Lucas is still where he was.

“You won’t mention that to a to anyone, right?” he asks.

“Of course not, I wouldn't want to get you in trouble. We will keep it between us... not that there is an us but no one has to know.” Can someone help me so I can stop making a fool of myself? I hear voices outside the door and knock hard so they hear that someone is inside. To my surprise it’s Nandi and before I can scold her, I notice Denzel behind her.

“I am sorry my princess, your father asked me to go with him where he was showing King Bhebhe the land,” says Nandi with her head down. Go with her when her job is to watch me

– yeah that makes sense.

“I am not in the mood to talk to you right now,” a part of me wants to yell at her badly but we have visitors.

Denzel shifts closer, I hope I don't smell alcohol, “Are you okay, princess?”

“I am fine, the door closed by mistake and...” I clear my throat. I am avoiding saying his name because it will raise suspicion that I know him. “We have been stuck here.”

Denzel replies, “Nandi told me.” He then shifts his attention to Lucas, “Are you okay?”

“I am fine, my prince thank you.”

Denzel lends me his hand as we head out leaving Lucas with Nandi. I don't know why he is worried. I was just stuck in a room not being attacked by a lion. He insists I sit down so we go to my room. I sit on the bed and he sits on the chair in front of my studying table, a little far from me.

“Are you sure you are fine?”

I chuckle, “I am fine Denzel it's not like your guard attacked me or anything. In fact, I would have fainted if he wasn't around.”

“I am glad you are fine.”

“So where did you and my father go?” I sit comfortably, laying back on the soft pillows.

“He was showing my father some land, I wasn’t paying attention,” he answers then stands up walking closer to the bed, “Are you busy tomorrow?”

“No, why do you ask?”

“Do you maybe want to have lunch with me?” he asks and he sounds nervous.

“Denzel I just broke up with my boyfriend less than two days ago. I don’t think...”

He interrupts me, “It’s just lunch, I promise and

if you are not comfortable I will bring you back.”

“Denzel I don’t know.”

“Please! It would mean a lot to me, princess Quinn,” he locks his palms together as a sign of pleading. I hate it when people use the word princess and my name in one sentence because Quinn sounds like Queen. So saying princess queen is weird. Maybe I am the weird one.

I take a deep breath, “Fine but I want to be in Matshoba. I will be comfortable when I am here.”

“No problem so how does one thirty pm sound?”

“Fine with me,” I retort.

“Okay, my father is waiting for me so I will see you tomorrow. Do we hug or?”

“Fist bump,” I hold out my hand.

Instead, he takes my hand and kisses the back of it, “Take care of yourself, princess.”

“You too, prince Denzel.”

I smile and watch him until he closes the door. He is quite a charmer. I get out of bed and take off the dress I am wearing. I only dress like this when we have visitors. Someone knocks on my

door and then announces, "Princess your father is calling you."

It's Nandi and she knows she is in trouble that's why she won't even get into my room. I wear a knee-length dress and then go to the throne room - our visitors are gone and my father seems in a happy spirit.

"I didn't know you were friends with the prince of Dumazulu?" he asks as soon as I sit down.

"We are not friends, I met him yesterday when I was hunting."

"And thanks to that I have finally met the king of Dumazulu and I see a great alliance in the future," he utters with so much enthusiasm.

What alliance is he talking about and what does he mean by finally meeting the king? Shouldn't all kings know each other? I spend the rest of the afternoon in my room then go out when my father calls me for supper. He keeps going on and on about the king of Dumazulu.

“Dad how come there is no river dividing Matshoba and Dumazulu in the forest? Usually, we are divided by rivers.”

“You are one smart girl, Quinny. Okay so back in the day when my late great-grandfather was king, Dumazulu and Matshoba were one Kingdom until there was a royal feud well commoners were also involved, I don't know what happened but the kingdom was divided into two making it Matshoba and Dumazulu.”

“But won’t it be a problem that you and the king of Dumazulu are now building a relationship? What if some people still hate the Mandela family?” I am worried.

“That was in the past and everything is fine now. Bongani Bhebhe is king now and he understands that we have nothing to do with what our fathers did.”

“I hope so dad. I wouldn’t want anything happening in the name of the past is in the past,” I say and he rubs my arm.

“Nothing will happen little one but thank you for caring.”

“Okay I am full and I am going to bed,” I stand

up.

“Today you are not watching your movies?”

I walk to him and kiss him on the cheek, “I am a little tired.”

I go to my room and get in bed. I have a missed call from Joshua. He’s going to scold me for this but luckily it was two minutes ago so I call him back.

Me: Before you shout, I was having supper.

Joshua: I wasn’t going to shout, I am in a good mood today.

Me: Okay...what's up?

Joshua: We are leaving this place tomorrow. Finally, I get to come back to my cosy bed and perfect internet connection.

Me: I thought you were staying two weeks. What happened?

Joshua: Two weeks in this place? We would die...we protested and we won.

Me: (laughing) seriously what is wrong with you people? How could you do that to mom?

Joshua: It sucks here Quinn. So tell me about your day.

Me: Nothing interesting, we had a visit from the king and prince of Dumazulu. I got stuck in the gift room.

Joshua: You always get stuck in that room.

Me: I always get stuck alone but today it was different. I was stuck with the prince's guard that I ended up kissing.

Joshua: Quinn! How?

Me: I don't know okay, I just did...poor boy probably thought I was throwing myself at him.

Joshua: Was it nice?

Me: We are not having that conversation.
Goodnight and bring me something nice.

I hang up and shove my phone under the pillow.

KAREN

My children don't love it here. They are too spoiled. I grew up in this village and we were very happy but kids of this generation cannot live without their cell phones. Now we are forced to go back to Matshoba. I was enjoying being at home. You know I also enjoy being around my mother just like everyone else. The kids are already packing and I don't think I am ready to go back to the palace. Quinn scared me the other day. Does it mean she is spiritually gifted?

What if she sees right through me? Call me a bad person but I was just a woman trying to save her marriage. It is hard sharing your husband with someone else.

“You will die of overthinking, what is wrong now?” Nomasonto walks into my room.

“Nomasonto leave me alone.”

“Karen why stress over things you cannot control instead of focusing on what you can control?” she asks and I shake my head. It’s not that easy – somethings are easier said than done. She hands me a bottle of water with some roots in it, “Take this and put it in your bathing water when you bathe.”

“Nomasonto what is this again?”

“You will thank me later but of course, if you don’t want to use it if you don't want. It’s all up to you. I am just trying to help you,” she stands up and leaves.

The things Nomasonto makes me do. I put the bottle in my bag and sit with my face buried in my palms. Why did Khaphela want to stay alone with Quinn? Did he suspect something? Does he maybe know my secret? Well, it is not like I am the only one that has secrets in the royal house. Laleti is also not as holy as she seems. If I am going down, I am taking her with me.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 11

LALETI

I received a call from Khaphela telling me that Karen and the kids are back home. I guess that is his way of telling me that I should come back. I thought Karen said they will be there for two weeks. I have to admit, I am enjoying being at home and being with my parents. Here I am a princess, not a queen and it's nice to be pampered and not worry about stuff. I think I am going to stay here for a couple of days.

“Was that your husband?” my mother walks towards the bench I am sitting on. I am outside, in the garden – I left the house answering my phone and I didn't realize someone saw me. They say you know you are getting old when

things like the garden and pots fascinate you. I came here answering my phone then ended up fixing the garden.

“Yeah that was Khaphela, Karen and the kids are back.”

She sits next to me, “Does it mean you have to go back to your house?”

“Are you kicking me out already? I thought you were enjoying having me around.”

“Not that I am kicking you out but you do have your husband and family to go to,” she retorts.

I mumble, “Karen is there.”

She shakes her head and answers, "I will pretend you did not say that."

"Fine, I am leaving tomorrow." I stand up and head into the house. I am not ready for the lecture that is following so leaving her is the best option. I get to my room and sit on the bed. I take my phone and text Khaphela that I am coming the next day. I scroll down my contact list wanting to call Khumbulani but then decide to call Quinn.

Quinn: Mom? Is everything okay?

Me: Yeah... I was just checking up on you, are you okay?

Quinn: Uhm...yeah...are you sure you are okay?

Me: Quinn I am just checking up on you. Is that a crime?

Quinn: I am just surprised, you never just check on me.

Me: I know...how was your day? What did you do?

Quinn: My day was great. I didn't do much, I had lunch with the prince of Dumazulu.

Me: Prince of Dumazulu? Are you two friends?

Quinn: I guess we can say that. Mom, are you sure everything is fine?

Me: Yes. I am coming home tomorrow. Do you need anything on this side?

Quinn: Anything... as long it's from you.

Me: okay baby I will see you tomorrow.

Quinn: Bye.

Wow! We just held a conversation and everything was fine. Weird! I leave my phone in my room and then look for my father. I have to tell him I am leaving and I also have to see my other relatives before leaving. On my way to the throne room, my mother calls me. This woman is everywhere.

“Take this bag, gifts for my grandchildren. I don’t know what Joshua likes but I hope he loves this jersey I knitted for him.”

“Aww mom that’s sweet of you and the kids will love their gifts.” Man, this bag is heavy. Having a grandmother is nice eyy, and the kids are going to love these gifts. When did she get time to knit a jersey?

“And please be gentle on Quinn.”

“Mom I am not that harsh on her,” I protest.

“You are and yesterday I saw something about depression in the television please don’t push my granddaughter to that.”

I chuckle, "Quinn is not depressed mom."

"The signs are not always visible. Please try to talk to her too. Sometimes there are things that need a mother's love."

I nod, "I hear you."

"And pray Laleti. This world is full of cruel people who would go to greater lengths to get what they want."

"What do you mean?" why is she scaring me?

"Pray hard my child."

Okay. Old people and speaking in riddles. I smile and thank her for the gifts than go to my room to leave the gifts. Where was I going? Right, to the throne room.

KAREN

We are at the table and everyone is happy. See there is happiness at the palace when Laleti is not around. I have nothing against her kids, they are lovely children but Laleti is the problem. She should stay with her parents. I hope Khaphela didn't tell her that we are back. The house is fine as we are now. Aiden is telling his father the story of the chicken that ran away after he cut off its head. Farm chickens are not for these spoiled royals, they are smart and run fast. Would you believe me if I say we didn't find that chicken that ran away? I am sure it's

somewhere rotten. Nomasonto wasn't happy that we had to kill an extra chicken. She takes everything way too seriously.

While we are still having a nice time, we hear the front door open. First, we see Mandisa and she is wheeling a big suitcase. The Queen of Mean is back and Mandisa is her personal maid. The kids get off their chairs and run to hug her.

"Seems I have been missed," Laleti hugs the kids one by one and I notice Quinn standing behind everyone else. Laleti smiles and opens her arms for her. She hugs her for the longest time. That's odd – usually a second is too much. She can't stand Quinn. She even kisses her forehead.

I look at Khaphela and he is smiling looking at

his wife and kids playing happy family. Laleti announces, "I got gifts!" she starts giving everyone gifts and the kids get excited as if she was in England. Khaphela stands up and goes to greet her. He hugs her and kisses her on the forehead. He wasn't this excited when I came back. The kids are showing each other their gifts and everyone seems excited. I swallow a lump growing in my throat and stand up walking towards them.

"Welcome back, Laleti," I flash a smile.

"Thanks Karen. I also brought you a gift," she hands me a small box and inside is a bracelet. It looks hand knitted. I thank her and put it on. "I'll go make everyone some dessert."

Khaphela replies, "Don't worry about dessert."

They all leave the room. There's no way I will eat alone so I also leave for my room.

LUCAS

DUMAZULU KINGDOM

The prince and I took a walk. He does this whenever he is excited and I guess today he is excited that he met princess Quinn. I think he likes her. It's nice being royalty, I am sure his family will make sure their son gets the woman he loves. I think Denzel and Quinn would make a great couple. I don't know much about Quinn but she seems like a humble lady and Denzel is also humble. He is a great prince, well-raised and mannered.

Some people don't even know that I am Denzel's guard because he treats me with so much respect. He treats me like a brother which is why I have to bury whatever feeling I think I am developing for Quinn. Denzel likes her and I need to step back – not that I have a chance anyways.

“Do you think I will be rushing if I called Quinn?”
Denzel ask.

“I don't know, my prince.”

“But I last talked to her when I left her at her house. Maybe I should call just to check on her,” he does not wait for my response, he takes out his phone and calls Quinn. I shift away to give

him some privacy.

I lean on the tree with my hands in my pockets and for some reason, my mind goes to when Quinn and I were stuck in that room. She seemed to care. When she cupped my face and the kiss. I seriously need to snap out of it, Quinn is a princess and I am just a guard. I also shouldn't forget that Denzel likes her.

"She is fine," Denzel says excitedly.

"I am glad my prince."

"So when you two were in that room did she mention anything about me?" he questions.

“We were both worried about how to get out we hardly talked.”

KING BONGANI

I am in the throne room, I had a meeting with the elders. The villagers demand a lot sometimes. We are trying by all means to accommodate everyone's needs but it's not everyone that we will please. I am glad that my son and the princess of Matshoba are getting along meaning we can actually put the past behind us and have a nice relationship with Matshoba. One may never know, we might need them one day.

“My king,” Mawande walks in with his head down. He is one of my advisers.

“Mawande, I thought you left for your house.”

“I was about to but I need to talk to you about something my king,” he bows.

“I am listening.”

“My king yesterday we visited Matshoba, I just wanted to confirm if you are aware...”

I interrupt him, “I am aware Mawande and I would love to leave the past in the past. I don’t care what our great grandfathers did but we are having a truce.”

“But my king...”

I raise my hand to stop him from talking, “My world is final. We will not bother the people of Matshoba and no one is to start a feud or they will have me to answer to.”

I can tell he is not agreeing to this but my word is final. He nods, “As you wish, my king.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 12

QUINN

My mother hasn't yelled at me since she came back from her kingdom. I don't know if it's

because I have been avoiding bumping into her but her mood towards me has changed. She only came back last night but I know my mother and she always finds something to shout at me for. I will stay away from her as possible that way I don't piss her off.

A message pings into my phone and it's a good morning text message from prince Denzel. I reply to his text message and he asks to call. It is six in the morning, why does he want to call but I permit him anyways.

Denzel: Morning princes.

Me: Morning, prince Denzel.

Denzel: I know it's still early but I wanted to hear

your voice.

Me: Denzel we talked about this, we are just friends remember?

Denzel: And I wanted to hear my friend's voice.

Me: I am not eight anyways what are you doing up so early?

Denzel: I wake up at four princess. If I am going to be the future king then I need to know the kingdom like the back of my head.

Me: Future king huh...

Denzel: Do you know whom the title queen

would fit?

Me: Enlighten me.

Denzel: This beautiful flower from Matshoba kingdom.

Me: (clears throat) Can we talk later?

Denzel: Sure, take care of yourself.

Me: You too.

Denzel is really making things hard for me. He is likeable and all that but...someone knocks on my bedroom door, "It's open!"

Karen walks in carrying a tray of food,
“Breakfast in bed for the princess.”

“What did I do to deserve breakfast at six,” I sit
up.

“You are the fairest of them all my dear Quinn.”

“Aren’t you the best mom in the world? Thank
you very much. Let me brush my teeth first.” I
say.

“I want to know about the prince of Dumazulu
first. Eat while you tell me. Should we start
preparing wedding attires?”

“God no,” I shake my head, “We are just friends. I don’t want to get married yet – I am still young.”

“Your mother and I were about your age when we got married.”

“That was in the old days when women only wanted marriage and their only goal was to please their husbands. It's 2022 now and things are different.” I retort.

“In other words, you are calling us old.”

I chuckle, “Your words not, not mine.”

“Eat your food before it gets cold.”

“Yes, mom.” I put the tray on my lap. My phone vibrates under the blankets when I lift my knees to get it, I knock off the tray and everything spills on the bed.

“Quinn! Do you know how long it took for me to make that food?”

“I am sorry, I was just reaching for my phone. I am really sorry mama Karen,” she looks mad and I wonder what time she woke up only for me to spill it.

“You kids just can’t get off your phones it’s very annoying,” she heads out, slamming the door behind her. I really didn’t mean to. I get out of bed and take off my bedding. Everything is

ruined.

‘Nandi are you up?’ – I send the text message.

‘Yes my princess, do you need anything?’

‘Yes, please can you help me with my bedding?
It’s a mess come see for yourself.’ – me.

Within five minutes, Nandi is in my room helping me put on the new bedding. She insisted on doing it herself but I want to help. I also feel bad for spilling this when Karen made it with love.

“Why are you eating so early if I may ask?”

I sigh, "Karen brought me breakfast in bed. I ruined it, I feel bad for spilling everything."

"She brought you breakfast in bed? At six am princess? How did she even know you are up yet?"

"I don't know Nandi but I am sure she saw me online. I feel bad," I throw myself on the bed.

"I am sure she understands that it was a mistake. Please get off the bed so I can put everything on."

"I am going to Joshua's room," I get off the bed and put on my gown, "Uhm Nandi did you by any chance share contact details with Denzel's guard?"

“No, why?”

I fake a cough, “I just wanted to ask him something about Denzel. I wanted to do something nice for him.”

“I can ask him for his phone number if you want.”

I shake my head vigorously, “No, I don’t want to make him uncomfortable I mean he will question himself why I want his phone number.”

“I will ask as if I want the numbers. You should do something for prince Denzel.”

“Nandi do you know something I don’t?” I fold my arms to my chest.

“Me? I don’t know anything.”

“I hope so,” I head out, going to Josh’s room. This boy loves locking his room so now I have to knock and then wait for him to open.

“Josh come on!” I continuously knock. Is he sleeping or dead? How can he not hear me knock?

“Quinn it’s six in the morning, what are you bothering your brother for?” my mother asks. Where did she come from?

“I ruined my bed so...”

She sighs shaking her head, “You can go sleep in my room.”

“Your...your bedroom?”

“Go to my room Quinn,” she walks past me. This woman is behaving very strangely but I now go to her room. I don’t know when last I was in my mother’s room. I get under the covers now this is a bed.

LALETI

I couldn’t sleep very well last night, I kept having nightmares and there’s something about that

room. I didn't sleep well in that room. I pray every night but something is up. I plug the kettle. I could use some coffee, I am sure I look like a zombie, I hardly slept.

"Good morning my queen," Mandisa walks into the kitchen. Everyone is up early today.

"Morning Mandisa. Do me a favour...get the cleaners to please turn my room upside down. I want everything cleaned," you think it's nightmares when it is just dirt.

"Yes, my queen."

I add, "Do it later because Quinn is sleeping in my room."

Mandisa leaves the room then Karen walks in. I greet her and she answers the adds, "The kettle is boiling, did you switch it on?"

"Yes, I want to make some coffee."

"So early? Is everything okay?" she asks and tell her that I couldn't sleep, "I am very sorry but sometimes that happens when you are too tired. Let me make you something that will make you feel better."

"Ahh thank you, Karen."

She tells me about her trip and how dramatic the kids were. I always say that these kids are very spoiled. Karen also makes herself a cup of tea. Look at us chatting like the sister wives

that we are. Khaphela walks into the room and he seems happy to see us not biting each other's heads off. He tells us that he wanted to go for a walk with Joshua but the boy is not opening his door. I wonder what kind of a king that boy will make.

I stand up and go put my cup in the sink. I feel so sleepy. I go to my room although I am already feeling sleepy. I get to my room, close the door and get in bed.

"Quinn move to one side," I say.

"There is a heavy aura in your room. I can't even close my eyes peacefully."

"I know, I felt it too," I yawn, "Let me rest first

then I will ask the helpers to thoroughly clean the room.”

My phone rings and it's my mother. Just when I was trying to sleep. I put my phone on silent and drift to sleep.

QUINN

I was enjoying the comfort of my mother's bed, I ended up falling asleep. I am so going to twist my father's arm and get him to buy me a bigger bed. Or maybe it's the blankets, not the bed. I have to ask Mandisa about this because I am loving this bed. I am awake but I am still in bed. It feels good to be next to my mother. I wish it can always stay like this, I wish we can always get along like this. I see her moving and close my eyes. It would be weird if she found me

watching her. The bed moves when she sits up. She yawns and stretches herself.

“Quinn,” she shakes me, “Wake up lazy girl it’s almost noon.”

“Noon?” I sit up and also stretch myself.

“Yes, noon and I am surprised you are still sleeping. What kind of a girl sleeps so long and don’t look at me like that? I hardly slept at night.”

And she is back. I knew it was a matter of time until she goes back to her old self. I get out of bed and take my gown.

“What kind of a night dress is that and don’t tell me you were going to Joshua’s room dressed like that. Are you trying to seduce your brother?”

“Mom! How can you say that?” I put on my gown.

“Whatever, get out of my room.”

I leave her room and bump into Karen by the passage, “Are you okay, sweetie?”

“I’m fine it is just... it's my mom. I thought...she just...” I burst into tears.

She hugs me, “I am sorry baby. Parents are like that sometimes, it's okay.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 13

KHAPHELA

I don't know what is wrong with Joshua but clearly there is a loose screw in his head. We were supposed to be out of the house at five am but he woke up at eight am telling me he didn't hear when we were knocking. Maybe we should just remove the door in his room. I don't think this boy understands the importance of grooming him. One day he will have to step in as king and how will he be king when he acts like this? People need a strong leader.

Now we have to go out in the heat because of this spoiled child. In fact all the children in the royal house are spoiled. Maybe Karen should take them back to her village. A year there will knock some sense into them. Just when I thought things would get better this boy named Joshua came wearing his tight trousers. Matshoba is in trouble. It is by tradition that the firstborn child takes over after his father hence I can't groom Khumbulani but Matshoba is in trouble with a king like Joshua.

“Joshua please be serious for once in your life. This is not a game and I suggest you start taking it seriously. How are you going to lead the people when you can't even hunt or wake up early?”

He shouts, “I told you I don't want any of this.

Baba, why are you shoving all this down my throat? I told you I don't want to be next in line!"

"Don't raise your voice at me, young man. It is your duty as the firstborn child."

"Quinn is the firstborn, crown her then," this boy is just applying to be beaten by me in front of all these guards. How dare he talk back at me in front of people?

"Joshua stop this nonsense while I am still talking nicely. You are the heir and this is your responsibility."

"Baba I have other brothers. Groom Khumbulani, how many times do I have to tell you that I don't want this? Baba if you care about me please

don't push me into doing this. Do you want me to kill myself for you to believe that I don't want this?" he says.

"Joshua, what do you want me to do then? You are the first male in the Mandela family...this is how we found things and we will follow custom. Listen to me and listen well boy. You are the crowned prince, I don't care if you like it or not but we all have to make sacrifices once in our lives. Right now a princess is being groomed just for you and soon you will get married so stop acting crazy. And stand upright! Who stands like that?"

"A princess? So you're also going to force me to marry someone I don't like?" he asks as if I have never mentioned this before. Royalty marries royalty.

“Do you listen to anything I say? Didn’t I mention princess Zanele to you?”

He mumbles, “Baba why do you do this to me?”

This boy is crying. Abomination! “What is wrong with you? Really Joshua what is wrong with you?”

“Baba I don’t want to get married or be king.”

“And that makes you cry?” clap once. This is the male child my ancestors gave me. I turn and walk back to the car, “Let’s go and stop crying are you crazy?”

I swear a part of me wants to slap this boy. Why is he even crying? Who doesn't want to be the future king and does that make a person cry? Maybe I should send him to my brother, he will make a man out of him, not this crybaby he is. They spoil these kids. We get to the house and I am the first to get out of the car. I walk into the house and go to my room. On my way there, I see Karen hugging Quinn and she looks like she is crying.

"Is everything okay?"

Karen replies, "She had a fallout with her mother."

That is weird. Laleti was happy just last night and she was talking about spending time with Quinn, what changed? I hope she wasn't just

putting up a front because I meant what I said. If she doesn't change, I am sending her back to her parents.

“Quinn go to your room and don't cry.”

Quinn nods and leaves us. I ask Karen to follow me to my room. I need her advice on something because Joshua and I keep going in circles. I need the next king to be ready. I may never know how much time I have left on this earth. I don't want my children fighting for the throne if something was to happen to me.

We sit on the couch that is just in front of the bed. Before I can tell her why I called her, Karen asks, “Do you want anything to drink?”

“No, I want us to talk about your son...”

She interrupts me, “What did Joshua do?”

“He doesn’t want to be king. Do you maybe know why? Have you ever talked to him about the throne?”

She shakes her head, “No but why doesn’t he want to be king?”

“You tell me, Karen. You are the one spiritually gifted but it seems your gift is not even helping the family. You should see things, am I wrong?”

She answers, “Baba you are not being fair. I only see what I am shown.”

“But you can consult but how come you don’t do that?”

“Spiritual gifts are different baba,” she retorts, her face down. Today she won’t even look at me.

“I am bringing in the royal seer. He will tell us if we are doing something wrong. Maybe Joshua isn’t the chosen one.”

“No!” she stands up, “Joshua is the rightful heir of Matshoba.”

“The kids doesn’t want to be king, what do you want me to do?”

“Let me talk to him,” she requests, “I will talk to him.”

I exhale heavily and then tell her to leave. I wonder who is using witchcraft. The seer did say someone is using witchcraft in the palace. Could it be Karen or Laleti but why? I hope it is neither of them because I would lose it. I need help because I feel like I am going to lose my mind. I call my father – he is old but I know he will help.

Me: Madiba!

Father: Khaphela how are you?

Me: (sighs) I am trying but it's not easy being

kumkani.

Father: What is the problem?

Me: First it's my son Joshua that boy doesn't want to be the next king. Then (sighs) I called the royal seer and he says someone is using witchcraft in the palace.

Father: Khaphela I did warn you about having two wives. Two women can never share a kitchen - that is impossible.

Me: My wives seem to get along fine. I don't see the need for any one of them to use witchcraft. I can't even confront them because the seer said if I do and chase out the person, one of my children might be affected. I really don't know

what to do.

Father: Listen to me Khaphela, I understand that you love that second wife of yours but making her child crowned prince was a bad idea. We don't know much about their family and putting that child on the throne might give you problems.

Me: But he is the heir of

Father: (Interrupting me) I know it's custom, I know this is our way.

Me: What do I do?

Father: I don't know Khaphela, do what you feel

is best for Matshoba. I trusted you with the people and I hope you do the same with your heir.

That wasn't helpful at all. I hang up and place my phone next to me. I need a sign, anything to show me that what I am doing is correct.

JOSHUA

I am in my room, with my headphone on. I talked back to my father again and I know he is disappointed but I wish they could all get the message that I don't want the throne. I don't even want this princess Zanele they want to set me up with. Why don't they understand or hear what I want? I see my mother walking into the room. I take off my headphones and get off the bed. She looks angry.

“Mom I...”

“Shut up! Shut up Joshua and listen to me,” she grabs me by my collar and pulls me to get closer to her, “You are going to be next king, do you hear me.”

I push her hands off me, “Wow mom, so you are not even going to ask why I don’t want the throne? Why do you even want me to be on the throne?”

“You are the first male of the Khaphela Mandela.”

“Admit it, mom, you know you are nothing if I wasn’t male. You were not even a princess and

were not supposed to marry dad. Stop using me, we both know this is not about me. You know you will have a high power than mama Laleti if I am on the throne. You are..." a slap lands on my face.

"Don't you dare Joshua! Never talk to me like that because I will kill you with my bare hands."

I gently rub my cheek, "Stop forcing me to do what I don't want. I will not sit on that throne. Birthright or no birthright."

"You are the chosen one and you cannot run away from this," she turns and walks towards the door.

"So you are not even going to ask why I don't

want any of this?”

She turns to face me then fold her arms, “Why?”

“Because I am gay mom. I don’t like women, I don’t want the princess chosen for me and I don’t...”

She closes the door and hastily walks to me, “Shut up! You hear me, shut up and keep that to yourself. No one is born gay, if you could hide it all this while then it means you can keep it to yourself.”

“Wow, mom... that’s your response?”

“What do you want me to say?” she asks, “Do

you want me to congratulate you? You kids think just because you have rights now you can do anything or be anything you want. Being gay is a spirit and we are going to cast it out - do you hear me?"

"Do you think I want this? I was born like this."

"This is not who you are." she yells, "Even the bible doesn't allow this!"

"You want to talk about the bible mom? Doesn't it say we were created in the image of God? I was born like this and maybe he wanted me like this and this is his image!" another slap lands on my cheek.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 14

QUINN

I don't know why I got my hopes up like that. For a second I thought my mother had changed. The way she hugged me and kissed my forehead, I thought she had finally realized that what she was doing was wrong but I was the one wrong. But again I don't understand because when I saw her in the morning she was fine and even let me sleep in her room. Maybe it was all in my head, lightning would strike me if that woman was ever nice to me.

I have a message from prince Denzel but I don't want to reply to him. I am scared I might end up

telling him my problems. I don't want him to also see me like a troubled princess as Xolani did. But, I really need someone to talk to. I would talk to Joshua but I feel like I have burdened him enough with my problems. He also has his problems to deal with. I guess it's not only rich kids that are troubled, royal children also go through a lot.

My phone rings and I decide to ignore it but it keeps ringing so I end up answering it. It's my grandmother, my mother's mother.

Me: Gogo how are you?

Granny: Hey my baby how are you?

Me: I am good, I can't complain.

Granny: Oh my poor baby, what did that mean girl I gave birth to do to you?

Me: You know how she is.

Granny: Do you want to visit me for a while?

Me: I will talk to my father, I need a break.

Granny: I was calling to check on you. Please do me a favour nana...before going to bed I need you to pray okay. I know praying can be hard but try it, and set an alarm if necessary. Ask God and the Mandela ancestors to watch over you okay?

Me: Granny you are scaring me, is something going to happen?

Granny: Quinn we don't pray because something is going to happen but we pray for protection and for God to cover us from any harm. Promise me you will pray.

Me: I promise but I hope I don't forget.

Granny: I will send you a text message every day reminding you. I love you, okay.

Me: I love you too granny.

She wants me to pray? I don't even know how to pray but I do know the Lord's prayer from

school. I need something to help me forget about my mother. I want to go to the river but it's late and my father would never let me go out this late.

"Princess," Nandi walks into my room. See what I mean when I say she doesn't wait for permission.

"Good evening ma'am."

She chuckles, "I know, next time I will wait for you to tell me to come in. I was just excited to tell you that I got Lucas's number."

I act dumb, "Who is Lucas?"

“Prince Denzel’s guard. You did say that you wanted to do something for prince Denzel.”

I nod, “Yes! Yes, thank you, Nandi. Please send it on my WhatsApp.”

“Done,” she sounds excited. I thank her and then tell her to close the door on her way out. Now that I have Lucas’s number I don’t know where to start. Why do I even want to contact him? He did mention that we can’t be friends. I shove my phone under the pillow and lie on my back facing the ceiling. I bite my lower lip when that kiss with Lucas crosses my mind. He was shy and it’s cute. Quinn snap out of it.

My door opens and I was ready to shout thinking it’s Nandi but it is Joshua. I get out of bed when I notice his bloodshot eyes, “Josh are

you okay?"

"I hate this house, I hate everyone here!"

I hug him, "Hey, it's okay...what happened?"

"She doesn't believe me, Quinn. She says it's a spirit that needs to be cast out. She is my mother, she is supposed to understand me better than anyone."

"It's okay Josh," I gently rub his back, "I believe you and I know you did not ask for this. Everything will be fine, we got each other."

"I didn't ask for this you know."

“I know,” I retort, “I understand better than you think. It’s okay – I have your back.”

“Baba wants to force me to take the throne, he wants to force me to marry a girl.”

“Let me handle dad,” I answer boldly, “I will talk to him for you.”

I hold him in my arms and let him take it all out. We will be fine, we have made it this far after all.

LALETI

“My queen,” Mandisa walks into my room, “The maids are ready.”

I close the magazine that I am reading and take off my reading glasses, "Ready for what?"

"You said you wanted them to clean your room, thoroughly and move things around."

Did I say that? "My room has been cleaned, Mandisa tell them there is no need to clean it again."

"Yes, my queen," she bows then exits the room.

I don't remember asking anyone to clean my room. I must be getting old. I check my phone and see a missed call from my mother. Why is she bothering me today? I will call her later. I take my magazine and resume reading. Mandisa walks in again telling me that

Khaphela is summoning me to his room.
Khaphela can be lazy sometimes. What is hard for him to just come to my room? I place my magazine on the side table and then put on my shoes.

I get to Khaphela's room, knock then let myself in. I greet him then sit on the couch opposite him, "You called me?"

"Laleti what did I say to you?"

"What do you mean?" why is he angry, I didn't even do anything.

"Didn't I tell you to be nice to my daughter? Quinn was crying in the afternoon, what did you do to her?"

I clap once, "Quinn is my daughter too Khaphela and I am sorry if my teaching her the right way upsets you. The girl woke up at noon and you want me to smile. Then the next thing you say we spoil the kids."

"There are ways to tell her nicely, Laleti. There is a difference between abusing a child and correcting them. I am sick of you abusing my daughter."

"Listen Khaphela I know where this is heading. You did say that if I mistreat Quinn you will send me back to my parents, I am not mistreating Quinn. I am simply doing what any parent would do for her daughter. If you are looking for a way to kick me out just say so. I will quietly pack my bags and go. I also get tired you know. It's clear

you love Karen and I am just the third wheel.” I say although I didn’t mean to say that much. Honestly, I am tired of always being found at fault. How many times do I have to explain that I don’t hate Quinn? I just can’t control myself when she is around me.

“Laleti I have a lot on my plate please try to be gentle on Quinn. Do you know how happy she was when it was just us two? Please don’t drive my daughter into depression.”

I nod. He sounds worried about Quinn. I need to change the subject, “I will change, I promise.”

“You can leave.”

“How are things with Joshua?” I question.

“That boy stresses me, he doesn’t want the throne.”

“Maybe you should crown Khumbulani,” I suggest although I know he would never agree to it.

“Joshua is the firstborn and I can’t afford to upset the ancestors.”

QUINN

Supper isn’t nice today, everyone is quiet not that we usually talk much but there is tension at the table. Everyone is just in a bad mood, except Khumbulani. Nothing ever pisses him off. I wish I had his attitude, Khumbulani never lets

anyone ruin his day. Speaking of Khumbulani, I saw him coming out of Amahle's room again. I need to talk to him about that – or I should leave it. Maybe they just vibe like I am close with Joshua.

“Baba I have a question,” I say and everyone looks at me. They should look at their plates, I am not talking to them. “You said the firstborn child should be next in line as king right?”

My father nods, “Yes, why do you ask?”

“I am the first child, shouldn't I be next in line?” I see Karen scoff and my mother chokes on her food. I mean I am the first child, they should groom me to be the next king and leave Joshua alone. I don't like the pressure they are putting on him and right now I am mad at Karen. She

was supposed to understand Joshua – she is his mother after all.

My father answers, “Correction, Quinn...it’s the first male child.”

“But you said first child and why are females being ruled out.”

This big-headed brother of mine called Khumbulani jumps in, “Because a woman cannot carry the family surname, stupid.”

“Language, Khumbulani.”- Khaphela

Khumbulani mumbles, “It’s true, women can’t lead and women are weak.”

“Oh, you mean the same woman you came out of?”

“Quinn we are eating stop it,” my mother warns.

“Quinn these are the laws we found and Khumbulani is right, only the male firstborn counts that way they can carry the family surname and keep the legacy going. It has nothing to do with oppressing women or anything along those lines,” father explains.

“What if the firstborn child doesn’t want the throne and what if the ancestors reject him?”

I look at Karen and she has a frown on her face. Father asks, “What do you mean ancestors

rejecting him, where are you getting all this?”

“I had a dream father and it wasn’t Joshua on the throne.”

“Quinn shut up and eat your food. You had a dream so what, it was just a dream,” Karen utters sullenly.

“Mama you don’t under...”

She interrupts me, “Eat your food!”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 15

KHAPHELA

I can't stop thinking about what Quinn said during supper. She said she did not see Joshua on the throne. I know Quinn is just a child but the seer did mention something about her possessing a certain spirit and what if Quinn is spiritually gifted. What if she saw this and this is a warning? Or the sign I have been waiting for. I swear if there's one thing that will kill me this year, it is all this confusion. Why are the ancestors not showing me everything? Why can't the seer see everything? He says something is blocking him.

It's one am and I have been tossing and turning. I cannot get my father's words out of my head either. He said putting Joshua next in line with

bring problems for me since his mother is a commoner. All this is messing with my head. Only if I had known it would end like this, I wouldn't have married two wives.

I check the time on my phone again and it is one – twenty am. I get out of bed, put on my slippers and gown then head out. I go to Quinn's room and knock, she doesn't lock her door so I go into her room. I sit next to her on the bed and then lightly shake her. Quinn is a light sleeper so it's not much of a hustle to wake her up.

"Dad!" she sits up rubbing her eyes, "Is everything okay?"

I switch on the side lamp, "Yes but I need to ask you something."

She takes her phone and checks the time, “At one in the morning?”

“Yes, are you awake?”

She nods yawning, “Yeah...what is it?”

“During supper, you said you didn’t see Joshua on the throne, who did you see?”

She scratches her head still yawning, “Did I say that?”

“Quinn I need you to focus nana. Who did you see on the throne, I know it was just a dream but it’s important.”

She shakes her head, "I can't remember, I am sorry."

"Do you want to talk to the Madibas? Maybe they might show you something."

She chuckles, "Dad I am not spiritually gifted, ask mom Karen."

I sigh. She doesn't know yet. I kiss her on the forehead, "You can go back to sleep and if you remember anything tell me okay?"

"Okay, Dad."

I switch off the reading lamp and walk towards

the door, “Dad something is wrong with mom’s room. There is something in there.”

“What do you mean?” I turn back, but she does not respond, “Quinn?”

This child is fast asleep. What does she mean something is in Laleti’s room? What could be in Laleti’s room? The things of this house. I head to Lale’s room. The door is locked. I am definitely going crazy this year. I head back to my room but still struggle to sleep. I am even scared to eat anything in this house but because my kids are also eating that food, what can I do? If we die then we die as a family. BoMadiba please show me a way. Please guide and protect my family from whatever witchcraft is in this palace. You are the ones that gave me this family please guide them for me.

LUCAS

“Lucas! Lucas wake up,” Denzel shakes me.

“I am up, is there a problem my prince?” I get out of bed and try to stand on my feet although I am still half asleep. Did I maybe oversleep? I look at the wall clock and it’s just past five am. I wake up at six and the prince wakes up very early for walks with his father. I am supposed to be with him but he insisted I don’t come.

“I am sorry to wake you up, it’s urgent.”

“How can I be at your service,” I yawn. I am already tired when I just woke up, “My prince?”

“Can you please deliver something to princess Quinn for me?”

Now I am definitely awake, “In Matshoba?”

He nods, “Yes... I want to send her flowers and a couple of things but I want you to deliver them for me. Can you do that?”

I answer, “Yes but my prince I am not allowed to leave your side?”

“Don’t worry about that, I told my father about it and he doesn’t mind. Please do this for me, Lucas?”

“You don’t have to beg me, prince Denzel. I will do it,” I retort and he hugs me.

“You are the best so I need you to deliver the things by eleven am. Meaning you have time to get ready and have breakfast. Thanks, Lucas, I owe you one,” he heads out.

I throw myself on the bed, “Yes, prince Denzel.”

He wants me to go to Matshoba, alone? How am I going to face the princess alone? He will hear that I fainted in Matshoba. I am scared of girls. I just get shy and worse it is the princess. I don’t want to go but I can’t say no either. I hate my life. I get out of bed and hit the shower. What am I even going to say?

‘Good morning princess, I have been sent... no, prince Denzel asked me to give you these. No, I have been sent by prince Denzel.’ Argh, can the lightning strike me right here? I shower and then go back to my bedroom. The gifts are already on the bed with a note that I can use one of the prince’s cars. I hope the car breaks down on my way there. I get dressed then go and join the others for breakfast – the other servants, guards and etcetera. I hardly talk to these people because they have nothing good to say. All they do is gossip and find fault in everything. After eating I get the car. It has already been washed. Denzel is serious about this girl.

“Where are you going with flowers?”

I turn to see who it is and it’s Bab’Mawande, the

king's adviser, "Good morning! I am sent to deliver these by the prince."

"I didn't know the prince has a girlfriend. It seems we will be dancing and eating meat soon."

I mumble, "Seems like that."

"So who is the lucky girl?"

"Uhhh the princess of Matshoba, princess Quinn," I retort and he frowns.

"Matshoba? Aren't there other better princesses out there? He just had to choose Matshoba?"

“Can I go? I have to deliver these by eleven,” I request and he nods although I can see he is no longer happy. I don’t care whom the prince likes, it is not my business. My business is to follow orders. I drive to Matshoba practising my lines. I know I am going to mess up. I know myself. I get anxious when nervous and I hope I don’t make a fool of myself in front of the princess. I get to Matshoba earlier than I imagined. The people in Matshoba are very nice and welcoming. I tell them the purpose of my visit then tell go tell the princess.

“Look who decided to come to see us,” Nandi walks into the room I was asked to wait in. They offered me something to drink but I am scared I might drop their glass because I am very nervous.

“Hey, Nandi.” Is she always in a good mood?

“How are you, are those for our princess?”

“Yes, from prince Denzel,” I retort.

“I see a wedding soon. They would make a perfect couple don’t you think?”

Before I can answer that, someone says,
“Enough Nandi, leave my guest alone.”

It is none other than the princess herself. She walks up to me wearing a smile then extends her hand to me for a handshake. I shake her hand.

“Nandi leave,” she says and Nandi exits the room, “Breath Lucas I don’t bite.

“I am sorry.” I exhale heavily. I didn’t even realize I was holding my breath, “Prince Denzel sent me to give you these gifts.”

“That’s sweet of him, thank you,” she takes the flowers and smells them. Then puts them down, “You can sit, Lucas.”

See what I meant by making a fool of myself? I sit down and watch her go through her gifts. She looks good with her hair up. She takes out a box of chocolate and opens it, takes one and hands it to me.

“No, thank you.”

“You don’t like chocolate?” she asks.

“I do but those are for you princess.”

“I want you to have it, please,” she insists and I take it and shove it in my pocket. She chuckles and sits down, “I hope you didn’t have trouble finding this place.”

“Not at all.”

“How is your leg, where you got bitten?” she asks. I want to go. I am not comfortable being around the princess. I trying by all means not to get attached and it’s not easy not to think about the kiss when she is in front of me.

“It’s fine now.”

“Can I see?” she requests but someone walks into the room, a young man.

“Hello, good people,” he greets and reaches for Quinn’s box of chocolate.

“Khumbulani! Those are my gifts,” – Quinn.

“I am not taking all of them,” he opens the box and takes some then puts it back. He looks at me and smiles before exiting the room.

Quinn says, “I’m sorry, that is my mentally unstable brother.”

I look down to stop myself from laughing. It must be nice having siblings. A woman walks into the room and by the clothes I can tell she is someone important so I quickly stand and greet her. She ignores me and shifts her attention to Quinn.

“I am looking for you and you are here with a boy?”

Quinn answers, “Mom he is a guest.”

“I don’t care if he is a guest or not, did you do what I asked you to do?”

Quinn looks down, playing with her hands, “I am going to do this after my guest leaves.”

“Oh so now you don’t listen to your mother and value your guest more?” so this is the queen.

“Mom please stop, not in front of my guest,” she whispers but they are close enough for me to hear them. I think telling her to stop fuelled things because now she is shouting and accusing her of sleeping with boys. I don’t know if I should leave the room or what.

“Lucas let's go,” Quinn takes my hands and leads me out leaving her mother shouting.

“I am sorry,” I say, “I hope I didn’t get you in trouble.”

“My mother is like that, she doesn’t want to see

me smiling,” we get to some room and she closes the door. Please don’t tell me this is her room. The prince would kill me. She sits on the chair and buries her face in her palms. I think she is crying. No sound is coming out but the way she is breathing says it all.

I kneel next to her, “Are you okay?”

“I am fine.”

“But you are crying, princess,” I say but she keeps her head down.

“Don’t mind me. I don’t know why I always let get to me. I am sorry you had to witness that,” she stands up, wipes the tears off her face, “I should walk you out, thank you for bringing the

gifts. Tell the prince I love them.”

“Are you going to be okay?” I wish I could comfort her but I could lose my head for that.

“I will be fine,” she forces a smile and tears fall on her face, “I am such a crybaby.”

I lift my hand and wipe the tears off her face with my thumb, “Crying helps sometimes, helps relieve emotional distress. You will be fine.”

I stare into her eyes, I didn’t realize that both my hands are now cupping her face. She shifts her face towards mine but I shift back, “Denzel would kill me, princess.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 16 (NOT EDITED)

QUINN

I don't know why I am like this with Lucas. I am not the type that usually throws herself at boys. Especially a boy that doesn't like me. I keep telling myself that I will stay away from him but I never do. Why am I so drawn to him? Great ancestors help me before I put the poor boy in trouble. On the other hand, I cannot control these feelings I am developing for him. I think I am falling for Lucas. He hasn't done anything for me to fall in love with him but I think I have.

Right now he is staring into my eyes and the

only thing I want is for him to kiss me. I want him to kiss me badly. I shift my face towards him and he murmurs, "Denzel would kill me, princess."

I shift backwards, "I don't know why I do that. I just can't control these feelings I am developing for you. I am not throwing myself at you Lucas and I know this, us having a relationship is impossible. I really don't know what is happening to me when it comes to..."

He places his hands on the back of my neck and pulls me closer. He stares into my eyes as if he is having a conversation in his head. He lowers his head to mine and plants a kiss on my lips. He starts with a peck then sucks on my top lip while I go for the bottom. I am shorter than him. I thought Xolani made me feel things but

Lucas is making me want to lose my morals. Everything around us just disappears. It is as if it's just him and I. He quickly lets go of me when someone knocks on my bedroom door.

"Quinn lunch is ready," that's Amahle.

"I am coming." I then turn to Lucas and whisper, "It's just my sister."

"Can I come in?" Amahle asks, "I want to talk to you about something."

"I am getting dressed, let's talk after lunch."

"Cool," she answers and I wait to hear footsteps of her walking away.

I sigh heavily and look at Lucas. We just kissed. Well, he kissed me first meaning he feels something. He says, "I am so in trouble for that."

"No one has to know. We can keep it between us."

He retorts, "You don't understand, princess. I am just a commoner and even if prince Denzel didn't like you, your father could kill me for that."

"My father is also human like everybody else and it's not like you forced me. I kissed you back, meaning I wanted that kiss as much as you did."

“Prince Denzel likes you imagine what...” I place my finger on his mouth to shut him up.

“Prince Denzel and I are not together. He likes me but I don’t like him.”

He exhales heavily, “Still this feels like betraying him.”

“I know but it’s not like we planned this and we should get out of here, Nandi never knocks. I open the door and check if no one is nearby we need to go somewhere where we can talk and where we don’t have to worry about anyone hearing us. “Let’s go talk somewhere that is not my house.”

“But Nandi is going to be there.”

I retort, “Not when she doesn’t see me leave.”

I open the door and we both go out to my surprise we bump into my father. He looks at me and Lucas who greets him. My father asks, “Isn’t this the boy from the other day?”

I nod, “It’s him, he is sent to deliver gifts by prince Denzel.”

My father smiles, “That’s so nice of prince Denzel. Are you two seeing each other now?”

“Dad no in front of our guest,” I whisper.

“What’s your name boy?” my father asks and Lucas tells him, “Do you want to join us for lunch?”

“I would love to but I can’t. I have to go back to Dumazulu.” Lucas answers.

“No problem, young man. Greet the king for me,” my father says before walking away. That was a close one. Lucas and I go to the car he came with and I make sure Nandi doesn’t see me. Lucas and I go to the river. I know a spot where people hardly go. We find a place to sit and we just go quiet. I thought at least we would talk about the kiss.

“So where are your parents?” I ask Lucas. We need to talk about something.

“They passed away when I was ten.”

I forgot that he told me. I didn't know what to say and that was the first thing that popped into my mind, “Do you know how to swim?”

“Yes but I don't love the water.”

“I love the water, it soothes me. Is it weird that I love the water? I love anything to do with water, rivers, oceans.” I ask and he smiles. He's got a dimple. Cute!

“I read somewhere that being attracted to calm water means you are gentle by nature, very comforting and a giving soul with a sensitive nature.”

I chuckle, "But then I love hunting so..."

"It's something that you enjoy doing, it doesn't mean you love killing things."

"When you think of it, I do." I say then sigh heavily, "Are we going to ignore that we kissed?"

"I really don't know what to say about that princess."

"Do you like me?" I know that sounds too straight forward but I need to know. I need to know so that I know where I stand.

“Honestly, I do but you know this is just impossible. Not to mention the prince likes you. He also saw you first.”

I shake my head, “I saw you first.”

“I am not royalty. I am developing feelings for you but I think we should put an end to this. We can never be and you know it.”

I nod although a part of me hurts. Why am I so drawn to him? I think I am already in love and him turning me down like this kind of hurts, “I hear you.”

“Princess I don’t mean to hurt your feelings but you know how things are in royal families.”

I swallow the lump in my throat, "I know. I am sure they are looking for me at home, I should go back."

He stands up and helps me up, "Do you want me to drive you back?"

"They will know that I was with you so you should go home."

"I am sorry," he kisses my hand and walks away. I watch him until I can no longer see him. I don't know why it hurts so much. We were not even together. My ringing phone startles me, it's Denzel. I take a deep breath.

Me: Hey...I am sorry for not thanking you for the gifts. I kept forgetting to text you.

Denzel: Did you like the gifts?

Denzel: You sound low, are you okay?

Me: Yeah I am fine maybe it's because I am outside.

Denzel: Can I see you when you are free? I would love to...

I feel someone grab my hand and turn to see who it is. It's Lucas. He cups my face and kisses the living daylight out of me. I even forget that I was on the call and let my phone slip out of my hand.

JOSHUA

I wonder where Quinn is, she was supposed to join us for lunch but she was not there. I checked her room and she is not there. Even Nandi hasn't seen her but I am sure she is at the river. That girl loves the river. I am in my room avoiding going out. I wish Quinn and I can get our results so we know the way forward. I know my parents won't let me study what I want to study but I think I did well in my final year in high school. I was studying Fashion and Fabrics too. People think sewing is for girls but I have seen male designers.

“Joshua,” my mother barges into my room, “We need to talk.”

If it is about the throne then she is just wasting

her time, I am not interested but I don't say it out loud. I fold my legs and listen. She sits on the bed and says, "Maybe I didn't respond well about your condition yesterday."

"It's not a condition mom. I am gay...say it as it is. I am gay."

She exhales, "Josh this is hard for me too. I didn't even notice you were different. How do you think I feel finding out now that my son likes men."

"I don't care how you feel, how do you think I feel? And don't play the victim here."

"Josh I am trying to reach out to you. Listen I understand that you are different but baby there

are some things we have to keep to ourselves. What will the people say when they find out the next king is gay?" wow! Does this woman even care about me? It seems she only wants me to be on the throne and that's it.

I get off the bed and head out. I bump into Laleti and pass her without greeting her. She pulls me back by my shirt, "And then? Do you not see me?"

"Hello."

"And what are you angry for?" she asks and I don't respond, "Joshua I am talking to you."

My mother walks towards us, "Laleti leave my son alone. You don't hear me questioning your

children.”

“I am just asking the boy why he is angry, is that a crime?”

Karen says, “Don’t force him, what if he doesn’t want to talk to you? Go talk to your children. Oh let’s see, you can’t because your children disgust you.”

Laleti points at Karen with her index finger, “Don’t insult me. I never insult you in front of the kids.”

“Don’t point your finger at me Laleti. I am sick of always threatening me in this house.”

Is this still about me? Even Amahle and Khumbulani are out to see what's going on. I don't know who throws the fist first but a fight breaks out.

“Khumbulani call dad!”

“You call him,” this idiot even has his phone out, recording.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 17

KHAPHELA

Laleti and Karen are sitting in front of me. These two women have pissed me off in the

past but today they went overboard. Fighting! In front of the kids and that big-headed boy named Khumbulani cheering for his mother. I am very disappointed right now. Two grown women fighting like teenagers. The whole palace now knows that my wives were fighting and I am sure by now everyone in Matshoba knows that my wives don't get along. I understand what is going on because these two women seemed to be getting along all this while and then out of the blue they are pulling each other's hair.

I am really trying to contain my anger but I want to slap them both. How can they embarrass me like this? I had a meeting with the elders and Joshua ran into the room yelling that his mothers are fighting. These women have children that are now eighteen years old. Do they even realize how old they are? What pisses me off is the reason why they were fighting. No

one is saying anything tangible.

“Shut up! Both of you stop quarrelling amongst each other and tell me what happened.”

Laleti starts, “I saw Joshua by the passage when I was going to my room and he just passed me without greeting me. I also noticed that he was angry so I stopped him to ask what’s wrong then Karen came and started shouting at me. Baba, she called me names in front of Joshua and my only crime was asking Joshua why he was angry. I thought you said to treat the kids equally and that is what I was doing.”

Karen mumbles, “Says the woman who hates her daughter.”

“Karen! Don’t make me slap you,” I warn, “We are here to solve things not worsen the matter. And you Karen, what is wrong with Laleti asking Joshua if he is okay?”

Karen answers, “Baba she was attacking my son with questions and I never do that with her children.”

“The fact that you said her children pisses me off right now. Aren’t her children yours too? Does it mean you don’t like Quinn and Khumbulani?”

She shakes her head, “No, baba...I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I am sick of you two. You make my head spin and I don’t need this right now. I need you both to go to your rooms and pack your bags. Go home and come back when you want to act like adults. Isn’t you two want to act like kids? I am so disappointed.” I leave the room and the moment I open the door, the kids run in different directions. And you wonder why these kids are like this, they take after their mothers.

These women need to go and leave me with my children. That will also give me the chance to bring the seer into the house. Quinn did mention that there is something in Laleti’s room and I think I will need the seer for that. I mean what if it is a goblin and it kills me in there? Who will watch over my kids when I am gone? I also need to talk to the seer about who is next in line.

I wish I could call my father but I know he will tell me he told me so. The only person that can understand me right now is my brother Robert. I call him.

Robert: Kumkani! Mandela! King of Matshoba.

Me: Don't start, I am not in the mood. How are you?

Robert: I am a happy man, living my happy single life.

Me: Do you want to die without a wife or kids?

Robert: At least I will die at peace knowing that I am not leaving my children, orphans.

Me: What about us, what will we remember you by when you don't even own a dog?

Robert: As if you care about me. Let me live my life in peace.

Me: Robert we care about you.

Robert: Then how come you have never sent me money? There is so much gold in Matshoba and not even once have you thought about me. I swear if you cry at my funeral I will haunt you.

Me: Can you please be serious, I want us to talk about something serious.

Robert: Do you want to marry another wife?

Me: No! Can you just listen, please?

Robert: I was just checking because AIDS is real.
What were you saying?

Me: (sighs) I talked to the royal seer and he says someone is using witchcraft in the palace. I can't say some of the things over the phone can you please come this side. I need your advice on something.

Robert: You mention witchcraft then invite me to your house. What if your things kill me? I still want to live.

Me: Please! The kids could be in danger and I need you.

Robert: (goes silent for a while.) fine I will come but I am doing it for the kids.

Me: Thank you.

Robert: You sound exhausted brother. You need a break.

Me: Being king is a lot of work than it seems. I don't know how Joshua will handle this, that boy is weak.

Robert: What do you mean Joshua? He is not the rightful heir.

Me: Josh is the first male child.

Robert: A child you had with a commoner does qualify to take the throne. Khumbulani is the heir to the throne.

Me: But he is not the first male.

Robert: I am older than you but I didn't get the throne. Our mother had me with another man. Why haven't you asked why you were crowned and not me?

Me: I guess I never really thought about it.

Robert: Okay let me go tell my woman that I will

be going away for a while.

Me: You can bring her.

Robert: Nah she is just a fling. See you soon.

I hang up and lie back on the bed. Now I need to come up with a way I am going to explain to the kids why their mothers are going away. I need them to understand that they are not going forever and to learn something from that. One cannot just do bad things and get away with it, actions have consequences. It is going to be a tough one after they witnessed their mothers fighting. I am so disappointed in Lale and Karen. What had gotten into them that they would fight in front of the kids? Couldn't they talk it out like mature adults? They have to go home because I can't deal with any of this.

QUINN

Lucas and I are still by the river. The kiss happened and it felt magical we have been getting to know each other and talking about life in general. I don't know what is going to happen now but it's clear our feelings for each other are mutual. We are sitting on a rock with our hands locked and I just wish I can stay with him forever. So my phone fell on a rock and the screen cracked the time we were kissing. I will ask my father to get me a new one. I am sure Denzel thinks something happened to me because after just going off on him, I switched off my phone.

“Princess you should go home. I am enjoying being with you but you should go home.”

“I am more worried about you, are you sure you are not going to get in trouble? You left in the morning,” I say.

“I will cook up a lie and the prince never monitors me.”

I stand up and he does the same, “But let’s not give him reason to suspect you or hate you. You should go.”

He kisses me, “I will call.”

“Cool.”

“Aren’t you going home?” he asks and I tell him I

want to take a swim. He kisses me one last time and then leaves. I don't know what we are doing but it will get us in trouble. It is worth it though. I take off my dress and then get into the water.

When I get out of the water, I find Nandi standing there with her arms folded. Is she mad at me for leaving without her? She hands me my dress and lets me lead the way home. I nudge her on the ribs, "Are you mad at me?"

"How can I get mad at the princess?"

I stop walking, "I am sorry that I didn't tell you I was leaving but I needed to be alone after my mother shouted at me in front of Lucas."

“But princess you should have told me. My job is to watch you and do you know how worried I was?”

I hug her, “She cares about me. I promise never to disappear on you again. Do you forgive me?”

“You know I can’t get mad at you.”

I kiss her on the cheek, “Because you love me.”

“What are you so excited about anyways? For someone who said she left the house sad, you are very excited.”

“You know that the water does magic in my life,” I retort.

“Are you sure it’s only the water or somebody is falling for prince Denzel?”

“You are forward Nandi. And I am not falling for Denzel,” I walk ahead of her. I am in love with Lucas Abraham. My father would strangle me if he hears this but my heart is already beating for him in the little time I have known him. I swear I can feel it in me, Lucas is my soulmate. I know he is a commoner but I love him.

I am welcomed by Khumbulani when I walk into the house, my ever-happy brother. He asks, “Where have you been, you missed a Wrestlemania match.”

“What are you talking about?”

He replies, “Mom and mama Karen fought. You should have seen them.”

“I leave the house for a few minutes and people fight. Who won?”

Someone clears their throat and its father. He looks at Khumbulani and shakes his head then shifts his attention to me, “Where are you coming from?”

“I was at the river.”

“Come with me,” he says before leaving the room. I look at Khumbulani who shrugs. I follow my father and he is heading outside.

“Am I in trouble?”

“No but I want to talk to you about something – your mother was supposed to tell you this but you know how she is. You are growing up and you are no longer a child, soon we will pair you up with a prince,” he says and I laugh but he is not joking.

“Arranged marriage in this century dad?”

“I don’t care what century it is but this is how we do things so do me a favour and be a good girl. I don’t want you embarrassing the family, your aunties will start grooming you to be a perfect wife.” He adds.

“So I am not even allowed to marry the man I love?”

“If he is a prince then you can - as you know, royalty marries royalty,” he retorts.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 18

LUCAS

I feel bad for what I did. I shouldn't have betrayed the prince like that. How will I look at prince Denzel knowing that I am in love with a woman he loves? To make matters worse, I kissed her. I don't regret it but it sure will land

me in trouble. The royal house is the only family I have. What if they kick me out? The prince will be mad. I haven't seen him since I came back from Matshoba but avoiding him isn't an option since I am to be by his side always. What have I done?

"Lucas!"

I quickly jump on my feet almost dropping my phone. Thank God it's just the king. I swear I would have fainted if it was prince Denzel.

"Good evening, my king." I bow although he has told me a billion times not to do that.

"Why aren't you at the table? You know that we have supper together?"

I look down and don't respond. I am sitting at the back of the house, I don't even know how he found me. I am scared to face Denzel, how will I be able to eat at the same table with him knowing that I betrayed him?

"I am not hungry," I reply with my head down.

"Did something happen? I didn't see you the whole of today and you never miss supper, Lucas. You know you can tell me if something is wrong."

"Nothing is wrong, my king." I retort.

"Is it Denzel? Is he bothering you, you can tell me and he won't have to know. I made a

promise to your parents that I will take care of you and I will do exactly that. If it's Denzel then I will sort him out."

I exhale heavily, "It's me, my king."

"Are you okay? Did something happen? Lucas, you are hiding her instead of telling me?"

"I did something terrible and I hate myself for it," I mumble and hear him sigh.

"Boy you are going to give me a heart attack and I am sure whatever it is, it is not that bad. We all make mistakes."

"But mine is the worst. I am also in love with a

girl I can never be with. I am just a commoner.” I retort and he shifts closer.

“You are like family to us and don’t worry you will get that girl just tell me when you are ready to marry and I will sort everything out.”

It’s not that easy. Not when I am in love with the same woman as his son. I know he will choose his son over me. But I nod regardless – what else can I do? I almost pee on myself when I hear prince Denzel’s voice.

“We are looking for you and you are hiding here,” he says.

“My apologies.”

“Let’s go eat,” he grabs me by my wrist and we head to the main house. We see the queen on our way to the table.

“Oh thank goodness you are fine, Lucas you scared us!” she looks at me inspecting that I am fine, “Are you okay?”

“I am fine my queen, thank you.”

She adds, “Okay everyone let's go eat.”

See this is what makes it all difficult. Everyone cares about me and I am betraying them. I feel like calling the princess and telling her we should stop seeing each other but I love her. I didn’t realize I am in too deep until the kiss. I am silent at the table, I feel like it’s written on

my forehead that I am Judas. I am silent the whole supper and the first one to leave.

“Are you okay?”

“Jesus prince Denzel, you are going to give me a heart attack.” I lean on the wall catching my breath. I didn’t realize he is following me.

“What’s up with you today? Why are you so jumpy and acting weird?”

I answer, “It’s nothing.”

“So how did the meeting with the princess go? I called her but then her phone went off.”

I swallow hard as the memory of me kissing Quinn crosses my mind, “She seemed busy and I didn’t get much time to talk to her.”

“Then what delayed you?”

I clear my throat, “They had me waiting for her in some room. I wanted her to know the gifts are from you and she loved them, my prince.”

He smiles, “Thanks Lucas, I owe you one. Let me go try calling her again.”

I exhale heavily. I am in hot soup. My vibrating phone startles me, I swear today I will have a heart attack. I rush to my room as soon as I notice it is Quinn.

Me: Hey, are you okay?

Quinn: I hate my life, I wish I wasn't born into a royal family.

Me: What's wrong, what happened?

Quinn: Why can't we be together? I wish I was born into a normal family.

Me: (sighs) I know but we didn't choose families to be born in.

Quinn: I hope you didn't get in trouble.

Me: Not at all but I feel bad. I feel like I betrayed prince Denzel.

Quinn: Should we tell him?

Me: He will kill me and these are the only people I know Quinn. Where will I go if they kick me out maybe we should just...

Quinn: (interrupting me) No, we are not separating. Give me some time to think and I will get back to you. Please let's not give up without trying.

Me: Okay...you are a great kisser by the way. I can't get your lips out of my head.

Quinn: (giggling) stop!

Me: I am in love with you Quinn, I know it's too soon but I am in love with you.

Quinn: The ancestors gave you to me and I am not letting you go without a fight. Take care of yourself, please.

Me: You too.

QUINN

I put my phone on my side table and then lie back on the bed. Today we had supper early and both my mothers were not there. Joshua says father sent them home because they were fighting. I wonder what they were really fighting about because I am pretty sure it is not about Joshua. I am mad at my father, how can he say

my aunties will start grooming me for my husband? I should be given a choice to choose whom I want to marry. I swear –if they force me, I will kill the so-called husband and then kill myself. Who came up with this royalty marries royalty bull crap. People should be allowed to love anyone they want, commoner or not. And my father should understand this better than anyone, he married mom Karen.

I take my phone and the screen looks terrible. I need to ask my father to get me a new one but where do I start when I am mad at him?

Someone knocks on my bedroom door and it's Amahle, she is with Khumbulane. These two are always together and it's getting suspicious.

Amahle gets in bed next to me and Khumbulani opts for standing. The door opens again and Joshua walks in. This one and Nandi don't knock.

“You called me here,” Joshua sits on the bed and Khumbulani joins too.

“What is going on?” I ask and Khumbulani looks at Amahle, “Amahle what’s going on?”

Khumbulani says, “Amahle is pregnant.”

I gasp, “Is it yours?”

“What? No! How can you even ask that?” says Khumbulani.

“What do you want me to think, I always see you coming out of Amahle’s room.”

“You go to Joshua’s room but we have never said anything. How can you think I would sleep with my sister,” he sounds very offended but in my defence, I didn’t know what to think.

“Okay! Enough with accusing each other. Amahle how far are you and why would you sleep with anyone with protection?” now it is Josh’s turn to shout.

I am so shocked. Amahle is sixteen. The door opens and Aiden walks in, “I am sorry, I am late. I had to take care of something.”

Khumbulani says, “He was playing video games.”

Aiden also gets in bed, “What did I miss?”

Khumbulani answers, "Your twin is pregnant."

"With a baby?" – Aiden. Poor Aiden, what else can a person be pregnant with?

"So what are we going to do, do we tell Dad?" Joshua asks.

Amahle replies, "He will kill me, please don't tell him."

I say, "Amahle you can't hide pregnancy, soon you will start showing."

"I have been hiding it for the past six months," she answers and Joshua chokes on his saliva,

“I can still hide it and you all wouldn’t know if Khumbulani hadn’t forced me to tell you.”

Gosh, I feel like slapping her. “So what were you planning to do with the baby after it’s born? Amahle do you even know how to deliver a baby?”

She mumbles, “I will throw it in the river and it will be our little secret. Dad will kill me.”

“No one is killing an innocent child,” Khumbulani protests, “Amahle we talked about this hence we involved others. We just need a way to tell dad. Yes, he will have a stroke when we tell him but I think he can take it.”

“Then he will kill me after having that stroke. I

don't want anyone to know." –Amahle.

"Can I see it?" Aiden requests. Hell, we all want to see it.

Amahle lifts her pajama top. This explains why she suddenly loves baggy and puffy clothes. She was hiding a whole baby. We all take turns touching her stomach. She is so pregnant. The door opens while we are still touching Amahle's stomach and it's our father.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 19

KAREN

I don't know what is happening to my life but I feel like everything is turning against me.

Khaphela seems to be favouring Laleti, Joshua is gay, and everything is just not right. I thought finally everything was fine and I was now at peace but now it seems I am back to square one. It's not fair that I get to have it hard. Why does everything have to be hard for me? As if being called a marriage breaker and a commoner is not enough, now I have to fight to be recognized by my husband. This is not fair.

"Karen we need to talk," my mother sits next to me. I am sitting under the mango tree. I love home but it's not fun coming here forced. I want to come and go as I please not to be told that I will go back to my house when my husband pleases. Even my maid came with me to show that I might stay a while. How are the kids even

going to manage without me or Laleti? Honestly, I didn't mean to fight Laleti but I just couldn't hold myself. I just snapped.

"Karen I am talking to you," my mother snaps her fingers in my face, "Is everything okay?"

I force a smile, "Everything is fine, mom."

"Not that I don't want you here but Karen you were with us not so long ago and now you are back, did something happen between you and your husband?"

I wish I could lie and say nothing but this is my mother and I know she will see right through me, "Khaphela told me to come back home. Laleti was also sent to her parents because...we

were fighting.”

She claps, “I would have also sent you away if I was Khaphela. Are you and Laleti crazy? Are you forgetting that you are the queens of Matshoba?”

“Mama you don’t know what I go through okay? I was angry and I just snapped. Try walking a day in my shoes and you will see that I am walking on thorns in that marriage.”

She answers, “A marriage you got into by yourself. I warned you that it won’t work but were too stubborn, look at you today.”

“Mom I already feel bad as it is please don’t make it worse.”

She shouts, “You have every right to feel bad. How can you fight with your sister wife to a point that your husband sends you home? What are the kids supposed to learn from you? I am very disappointed, Karen.”

“What are you even shouting at me for? I didn’t do anything, Laleti started it. Why does she have it all – I fell in love with Khaphela first. Why couldn’t I be his first wife? This is not fair!”

She sighs and suddenly her eyes are filled with sadness, “Life isn’t fair my child. Somethings happen because that’s our destiny, some people are born holding on to suffering and there’s nothing you can do to change that fate.”

“Well, it’s not fair! God is not fair, the ancestors are not fair. Why give me a gift that I can’t use in my life?”

She answers, “Inyanga ayizelaphi and the only way you can survive that house is if you respect your sister wife. This is your life now and the sooner you accept it the better.”

She stands up and walks to her hut. I hate my life, why do I have to be second at everything? Why do I always have to get everything after someone? I loved Khaphela first but Laleti is his first wife and now even Laleti’s child will get the throne since Joshua does want it. It’s not fair, my child is supposed to be the next Kumkani but Laleti just has to have it all.

“Why do you look like you are plotting to kill

someone?" I don't know why Nomaswazi still stays with our parents but she is starting to annoy me. "Karen I am talking to you."

"Just leave me alone, please. I have enough problems."

"And then? I see being a second wife is turning you bitter, shame." She claps once, "Isn't you said you wanted to get married what's wrong now?"

"Nomaswazi leave me alone at least I am better than you who still stays with our parents."

She laughs, "But are you happy dear sister? Keep acting like a saint and you will lose Khaphela. You know you can have him all to

yourself if you want but hey you want to be a saint.”

“Actions have consequences, Nomasonto.”

She laughs even harder than the first time, “Karen you have already started this, why stop now? Just finish what you started and Khaphela will be all yours. It is that simple dear sister.”

I exhale heavily, “I think Quinn is spiritually gifted and the other day she almost caught me.”

“Then let me deal with her for you.”

I answer, “The Madiba ancestors are

overprotective over her, you saw what happened last time Laleti tried something.”

“Maybe Laleti did it wrong.”

KHAPHELA

I am speechless. No parent is ever prepared for this. I know these are my children and this is my house but it's clear I don't have control over anything in this house. I am glad Robert is on his way here because I can't deal with all this, I would die. Amahle is pregnant, she is just sixteen and the fact that these kids know just makes me powerless. How did I not notice all these? How did my wives not notice that Amahle is pregnant? I am very disappointed but at the end of the day she is my daughter and at some point, I will have to accept all this.

The kids are all squeezed into one couch with Aiden sitting on the arm of the couch. I asked for an explanation but no one is talking and I am starting to lose my patience. These kids are just quiet and not saying anything. You know what, I am sick of this. I leave the room and go to my room. Today I am going to whip the truth out of them - isn't they want to protect each other? I walk into the dining room carrying a whip and they all jump off the couch.

“Baba we also found out today!” Aiden screams. I knew he will be the first to break.

“All of you sit down, now and don't make me chase you or you will piss me off more than I already am.”

They hesitate but sit down on the couch they were on. Aiden is now standing behind the couch. These kids will be the death of me, I swear. I clear my throat, "I want the truth, what is going on?"

Nobody responds so I yell, "Do you want me to whip you so you can talk?"

Quinn answers, "Amahle is pregnant, six months. We also didn't know and found out today."

I feel like strangling Amahle. A whole six months, "Amahle do you have anything to say for yourself?"

She kneels, "I am sorry baba. I am very sorry."

“Who is the father?”

Amahle answers, “Some boy from school, he is my boyfriend.”

The Lord should hold my halo because I am about to murder this child. She has a boyfriend that she is already sleeping with at sixteen. Why didn't she tell anyone or her mother? What was she planning to do with the baby? I want to hit her but she is pregnant.

I rub my face with my palms, “Does anyone else have a secret they would love to share?”

Quinn starts, “I am in love with a commoner.”

Joshua follows, “I am gay.”

Khumbulani gasps and I shoot a stare at him, he quickly composes himself. I am not in the mood. I tell the kids to go to their rooms. I am defeated Amahle is six months pregnant, and Joshua is gay – since when? Quinn is already in another relationship and my wives are fighting. There is witchcraft in the palace. When will I get a break? I go to my room and lock myself inside. I take my phone and call Karen.

Me: Are you busy?

Karen: No, I was just getting ready for bed... is everything okay? You sound low?

Me: Do you know about Amahle?

Karen: What do you mean, baba? Is something wrong with her?

Me: Our daughter is pregnant, Karen. She is six months pregnant! How did you not notice that? Our sixteen-year-old daughter is pregnant – didn't you teach her about these things?

Karen: I did...I don't know...I didn't know...Baba, I am very sorry.

Me: Do you know that Joshua is gay?

No response.

Me: Damnit Karen you were supposed to tell me this. You were watching me groom that boy to be the next king. Why didn't you tell me this is the reason he doesn't want to be king? What kind of a mother are you? Our job is to watch our kids!

Karen: Don't put all the blame on me Khaphela, you are also his father why didn't you notice? Maybe if there weren't so many kids in that house we would notice something wrong. It's always chaos in the royal house and it is hard to notice anything. And don't tell me about what kind of a mother I am because you don't talk like that to Laleti.

Me: Watch your tongue woman are you forgetting who you are talking to?

Karen: (she goes silent for a while) I am sorry.

Me: What is the way forward, Amahle is pregnant.

Karen: She gets married, that is the only way.

Me: My daughter is not getting married at sixteen. She will drop out of school and will resume when the baby is born. I want you here by tomorrow.

I hang up. There's one more person I need to talk to before going to bed. I get out of bed and wear my shoes. I go to Joshua's room. One day this boy will die in his room and no one will be able to notice because his door is always locked. I knock and he comes to open it for me.

“Baba,” he says rubbing his eyes.

“May I come in?”

He nods and stands aside so I can get into his room, I walk to the bed and sit on it. I tell him to sit since he is still standing. I look at him and I can't bring myself to hate him, he is my child but gay. How does one become gay? I don't know about these things.

“How are you?”

“I am fine dad,” he answers looking down and playing with his hands.

“How long have you been ...gay?”

He doesn't lift his head, “Since forever, I think. At first, I thought maybe something was wrong with me then I realized that I was different.”

How is this even possible? How?

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 20

QUINN

It's nine in the morning and I am still in my room. I haven't gone to check on Joshua or go to the kitchen like I normally do and I also locked the door. I don't know what is happening to me but last night I had a terrible nightmare and I can't

even remember what I dreamt about but it was bad because I woke up panting and sweaty. Today I just have this weird feeling in my gut that something bad is going to happen. Or maybe I feel like this because of what took place last night. It's like I feel my father's pain – all the weight on him, I can feel it too.

I am trying to put myself in his shoes right now and I am sure he is quarter to losing his senses. A lot is going on in this house. My phone rings and I pick it up to check who it is. My lips voluntarily curve to a smile. It's my boyfriend – am I allowed to call him that or it's too soon?

Lucas: Good morning, princess!

Me: Good morning, how are you?

Lucas: I am good...just can't get you out of my head.

Me: I have a better idea, why don't you come to see me and stop using your imagination?

Lucas: I'd have to make an excuse to leave the palace.

Me: I can come to Dumazulu if you want. I can pretend that I am there to thank Denzel for the gifts.

Lucas: Princess you do know that Denzel likes you, right?

Me: I know and I will use that opportunity to tell him that I am in love with someone else.

Lucas: That's a little harsh on him, don't you think? The guy likes you.

Me: Lucas do you then want me to leave you and date him? I like you and I don't care whether the prince likes me or not.

Lucas: Still, I feel like I am betraying him.

Me: I know but it is what it is. I also told my father that I am in love with someone. Before you panic, I didn't tell him who.

Lucas: We are playing a very dangerous game

that will land us in trouble.

Me: What must we do? We love each other.

Lucas: Just so you know, I choose you all the way. I choose us.

Me: Me too. I will see you later okay?

Lucas: Okay princess.

Me: You know what, I will call Denzel and ask him to send you to pick me up.

Lucas: Quinn come on. Don't torture him like that.

Me: I am sorry but I am doing it and that's the only way we will get some privacy.

Lucas: Fine but let's hope he won't insist on coming with me because my hands are tied. I won't be able to refuse.

Me: Relax, I got this.

I hang up and get out of bed. I need to find something to wear then go lie to my father. I take a quick shower and get dressed. You know I am surprised no one has called me for breakfast, usually, we eat at nine am. I head to the dining room when I am done. I find Amahle sitting in front of the television with a bowl of cereal in front of her.

“Hey,”

She turns down the volume, “Hey... I was about to come to check on you. Where is everybody?”

I shrug, “I don’t know, I just woke up.”

I see Nandi passing by and call her. Before I can ask what I want to ask she says, “The king asked us to delay breakfast by an hour. He went out with the boys in the morning.”

“All of them?”

She nods, “Yes, princess.”

I thank her then head to the kitchen to make myself something to eat. I am not about to wait for people I don't know when they are coming.

'Can I visit you today?' I send a text message to Denzel.

'Of course princess, you can come anytime.'
That was quick, I wasn't expecting his reply so soon.

'My driver is not feeling well today, can yours pick me up?'

'I can pick you up, I don't mind.' – Denzel

'No, I can't let you do that. Ask your guard, it's

okay.'

'I said I don't mind, princess. What time must I come?' – Denzel

Damn it!

'I wouldn't want you getting in trouble with my father. You know how fathers are.'

'You are right, I will send Lucas. Is that okay with you?' – Denzel.

"As long as you trust him. Twelve pm will be fine with me." I smile shoving my phone in my pocket then take my food to where Amahle is.

LALETI

Khaphela is starting to irritate me. One moment he sends me away then the next he wants me at the royal house. I can't live like this. He should decide what he wants and stick to it. I am getting fed up with that house. The other thing that is starting to annoy me is my mother. She keeps telling me to pray harder. I am trying my best okay? I pray for my family, and I pray for myself but things are what they are. I am getting tired. If God really cared about me then why is Karen in our lives? I am getting fed up also.

I am supposed to be on my way to my house but I am still in Mpandeni, I will go back to Matshoba when I feel like it. I am sick of Khaphela ordering me around. Isn't he said I

mustn't come back until I want to act like a grown-up? How dare he embarrass me in front of Karen like that? Karen was the one who attacked me first – I was just checking on Joshua.

“Laleti!” I familiar voice calls me. This is why I hate walking around because then people would want me to stop and have a chat with them on the road. I wait as the person walks closer to me. When I finally notice who it is, I wish I did not wait, “I thought that was you.”

“Mawande what do you want and didn't they say you moved to another kingdom?”

He smiles, “I did but you know my family is still here in Mpandeni.”

“Good for you. I am rushing somewhere so goodbye.”

“Wait,” he gently pulls me back, “What’s the hurry Laleti? I am just greeting you. How long has it been? Almost eighteen years and you still look as beautiful as you were when I last saw you.”

“Mawande I really don’t have time for this. It’s nice to see you.”

“Lale come on...don’t act like we are strangers and it’s not like I am trying to snatch you from Khaphela. I am just greeting you. If there’s anyone at fault here it is Khaphela. I loved you first Lale and...”

I turn and walk back the way I came. I don't want to hear it. We were young and we were just fooling around. I was a princess and he was a commoner – we knew there was no future. I knew I was being groomed for Khaphela and Mawande was just someone that couldn't take no for an answer when I told him I couldn't be with him. I won't lie he made me happy but Khaphela was given to me by the ancestors hence I saved myself for him. It wasn't even that serious between me and Mawande – we were just kids.

'Lale what time are you coming?' – Khaphela.

I reply to his text message, 'I will tell you.'

‘Lale I told you I want you here as soon as possible. It involves the kids’- Khaphela.

‘I heard what you said and I am telling you that I will tell you when I am on my way

.’

‘Don’t give me attitude and come home before I send people there.’ – Khaphela.

I am sick of Khaphela ordering me around but I know he is capable of sending people to come to get me so pack as soon as I get home. My mother walks into my room and finds me gathering my things. I unpacked not so long ago and now I am packing again.

“Are you leaving again?” she sits on the bed.

“My husband wants me back at the palace.”

“Is this still a marriage or a joke? The things you and your husband do,” she claps once, “One moment you are sent away the next day you are called to come back. Is that how marriages are now? Am I the one getting old?”

Not at all. I am the one who is in a very complicated polygamous relationship. I pack my bags and the driver takes me to Matshoba. It’s a three-hour drive to get to Matshoba so I get there around noon. I see a car I don’t recognize leaving the house and Nandi is standing by the gate. I get out of the car and Nandi comes to greet me.

“Whose car is that?”

She answers with her head down, "Prince Denzel's. That was his guard, the person came to pick up princess Quinn."

"Oh, so Quinn is now allowed to date and get picked up by boys. And shouldn't you be with her?"

"She ordered me to stay my queen," she retorts.

"Does her father know this?"

She shakes her head, "The king left in the morning with the boys."

Another car drives into the yard and it's Karen's.

I feel like throwing up I respected her but not anymore after the stunt she pulled. Karen walks out of the car before she can close the door, and another car drives in. It seems we are famous today, cars going in and out.

“Hello my queens, the queen of mean and the commoner...you all look ugly what is going on in this house? Didn't your husband teach you how to welcome visitors? Why are you just staring at me?”

That's Robert!

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 21 (NOT EDITED)

LUCAS

I can't believe Quinn's plan worked. I just picked her up from her house and we are heading to Dumazulu. I can't believe we are really doing this. I am in love with the princess and she loves me back. How I wish I was born into a royal family. I swear if I was, I would have proposed to her by now. I don't know but there is something about Quinn. I am so in love with her. I don't have a specific thing I love about her but I love all of her. I don't know where we are going but she is directing the way after all she knows Matshoba better. The place we are going to has fewer people I wonder how she even knows these hidden spots.

My one hand is on the wheel while the other one is holding Quinn's. How I wish my parents were

alive to see my first love. I have been in a relationship before but right now I am in love. I am in love with Quinn Mandela.

“Park the car right under that tree,” Quinn instructs.

“And how do you know all these hidden places?”

She bites her lower lip blushing, “Let’s say this is not the first time dating someone I shouldn’t be dating.”

“Oh, so this is your thing, Miss Rebel.” We get out of the car and I walk to her side.

“I can’t help myself,” she wraps her arms behind my neck, “When I love, I love hard.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with that,” I lower my face to hers and kiss her. I have been wanting to do this since I laid my eyes on her today. I have been wanting to kiss her badly.

“Somebody missed me,” she giggles when I plant kisses all over her face.

“If it was up to me, I would see you every day.”

She answers, “Me too but don’t worry our time will come and the ancestors will make a way for us.”

“You believe in ancestors?”

“I don’t know what to believe in but I am team whatever works,” she pecks me on the lips, “We need to go before Denzel calls you.”

“After you give me another kiss,” I lift her and let her wrap her legs around my waist. Sadly, we have to do this but that is the only option. I have nothing on Denzel and I know he likes and saw her first but my heart wants her and she wants me too so there is nothing I can do. The ancestors or God will have to forgive me for this one. But when we think of it, they are the ones who gave me Quinn. Maybe they are the ones who want us together.

After our make-out session, I drive Quinn and I to Dumazulu. Quinn is showering me with

kisses all the way, I just hope this car doesn't have a camera or anything that might get me in trouble.

Prince Denzel is sitting outside when we get to the palace. He was very excited telling me that the princess asked to visit. He is also in love with her. He is going to be crushed when the princess turns him down. I would also be crushed if I was him.

Denzel walks to the car and opens the door for Quinn, "Welcome, my princess."

Quinn replies, "Thank you prince Denzel and thank you for letting me visit your beautiful home."

“This is your home too and you are welcome anytime. Do you want to meet my mother?”

“I am not staying long...”

Denzel interrupts her, “It won’t take long,” then he shifts his attention, “You are the best, Lucas. You can do whatever you please for the rest of the day.”

I thank him and then head to my room. This would have been lovely if Quinn was in Matshoba because now I have nothing to do but go to my room.

KHAPHELA

Today I took the boys out with me to show them the kingdom. I have decided not to groom one but all of them. I will leave everything in the hands of the ancestors and let them choose who they want on the throne. I have been cancelling my meeting with the seer and I don't know when I will meet him. A lot has been going on in my house, I hardly have time to do anything.

I received a call from Robert telling me that he is at the palace. I am sure he is now harassing everyone there. Robert talks however he pleases, I swear he was going to make the worst king. Speaking about kings these boys are not ready for the throne. They are complaining about the heat and the network.

If there is one person who can whip them to

shape and make them tough it's Robert although I know they will hate him afterwards.

"Okay kids let's go back home," they are tired and no longer want to talk. They complained about being hungry until they shut up. These boys are weak, even Quinn can do better. We drive home and get there around one pm. The kids are angry today they are not even greeting people back.

"Your uncle is here and you all know how he is, continue acting like you are acting and he will sort you out," I say to them.

Aiden is the first to moan, "Uncle Robert? I want to go back to school."

"You still have another week so get your acts

right and go greet your uncle.”

I can tell they want to protest but they go to the dining room. We find Robert having a feast eating fruits with his feet on the table. Karen and Laleti are with him – I doubt they are there willingly. Robert stands up as soon as he sees me and comes to hug me.

“Kumkani! Look at you complaining about stress yet having a huge tummy. I was having a chat with your wives and I am sure they are wondering when I am dying,” says Robert laughing then goes on to greet the kids. They are tired to smile, “What is wrong with people in this house, everyone looks miserable, Khaphela what are you doing to your family?”

I laugh and go sit down after replying to my

wives who just greeted me, "A lot is going on in this house."

"That doesn't mean people should be miserable."

"Kids you can go," I say and they all leave, "You two can also go."

Laleti and Karen stand and leave the room, "Aren't you scared they are going to kill each other out there?"

"Robert are you ever serious about anything and what were you interrogating my wives about? I know you."

He shrugs, "I was just asking why they were fighting. Okay, let's talk about serious things. What is going on?"

"The seer said someone is using witchcraft in the palace and said I can't chase the person out because it might affect one of the children."

"Something doesn't add up brother. In other words, if you expose the person then your kids get hurt. Who is this seer?" Robert asks.

"The royal seer."

He says, "I will find someone for you but don't tell anyone he is coming. Just gather your family in one room and the seer then let him read the room. Let the witch be exposed once

and for all. The Mandela ancestors will protect their own don't worry. And don't trust the royal seer, I am sure even the so-called witch knows you go to that man so he cannot be trusted."

"What could I do without you?"

"Absolutely nothing," he then shifts closer, "What do you say about letting me mine..."

"No."

He shakes his head, "You are so stingy."

QUINN

I spent the whole day in Dumazulu. I don't want

to lie, I had fun with prince Denzel. He showed me around and I got to meet his lovely family. At least his father only has one wife and the queen is very nice. I haven't seen Lucas since the prince told him to do what he wants with the rest of the day. As much as I enjoyed my day with Denzel, I wish I was with Lucas. I excuse myself and go to the bathroom so I can call Lucas.

Lucas: Princess

Me: My heart.

Lucas: You sure how to get a man excited?

Me: (sulking) I miss you, I want to see you before I go.

Lucas: I miss you too but you know the drill sweetie.

Me: I will ask Denzel to let you drive me so I can shower you with kisses.

Lucas: I would love that.

Me: I love you...I love you, Lucas.

Lucas: I love you more, princess.

Me: Why don't you use my name? Call me Quinn.

Lucas: I will try.

Me: Okay I will be leaving in a few, let me talk to Denzel.

Lucas: See you soon sweet lips.

I fix myself then head out of the bathroom. I go to where Denzel is.

“Denzel I should get going,” I whisper to him, “It’ll be dark soon and I don’t want to piss off my father.”

“Okay, let me walk you out.”

I say my goodbyes to the royal family and they give me gifts to take with me. The Bhebhe family is so nice. Too bad my heart already

belongs to someone else. I would have myself nice in-laws there. I ask Denzel to let Lucas drive me and he agrees. He calls Lucas and tells him to get the car by the time we reach outside, Lucas is already waiting for us.

“You really made my day today, princess. Thank you,” says Denzel as I am about to get into the car.

“Thank you for introducing me to your lovely family.”

“Take care okay,” he says and I nod. He shifts closer and unexpectedly, he kisses me.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 22

QUINN

"Denzel stop, what was that?" I push him away from me but not too hard but only to get him away from me. How can he just kiss me without permission? I am so mad at him, I even want to slap him. Worse Lucas is here. I look at Lucas and he is not looking at us but I know he saw the kiss.

Denzel answers, "I am sorry princess, I thought..."

I interrupt him, "You thought what? You don't just kiss somebody without their permission!"

"I apologize, my princess," he sounds defeated making me feel bad.

"Look Denzel, I am sorry for snapping at you but you shouldn't have done that."

"I am sorry it's just that I thought we were on the same page today you were nice to me and I thought you feel the same as me," he replies.

"I am nice to everyone. It's getting late, goodbye," I open the car door but he holds it.

"Princess I didn't mean to upset you, please let me make it up to you."

"Denzel you don't have to." It's getting late and I

left the house at noon. My father will kill me.

"Princess I love you," Denzel confesses, "I am in love with you and all I am asking for is a chance, a chance to prove that I can make you happy."

"I can't, I am sorry."

"Why not?" he asks.

"Because I am in love with someone else. I love him and I want to be with him."

He chuckles, "Quinn don't lie, not so long ago you were heartbroken. Are you trying to let me down easy?"

"Denzel I really need to go."

"At least think about it," he pleads and I nod then get into the car.

"Lucas please drive faster."

My father is going to kill me and I am going to get home when it is dark. I am so dead. No one has said anything between Lucas and me. I am sure he is hurt by the kiss. I don't know what to say to him so I also keep quiet.

"Are you okay?" Lucas asks me.

"I am fine although Denzel caught me off guard. I didn't know he was going to kiss me."

"Oh." is that all he has to say? But I don't blame him. What else can he say? I let Denzel kiss me in front of him. I am sure he is mad but can't change what is done. We drive for a while and it's now dark. I am dead. They should start planning my funeral. Khaphela isn't going to spare me.

"Lucas stop the car," I command.

"Why?"

"Stop the car!" I scream. My nightmare! I now remember my dream. I was driving with Lucas and the car lost control. Lucas stops the car and gets off the road.

"What is wrong princess?"

I answer, "Something bad is going to happen. Don't get on the road."

"What about your father and how do you know?"

"They warned me in my dream but I didn't pay attention." I am panicking. My dream was terrible and Lucas was badly hurt but this time I couldn't save him. I hold his hand.

"Quinn you are freaking me out. I need to take you home and they need me back at the palace."

I shake my head, "We are not going anywhere."

We will stay here until it's safe. Lock the doors."

"The doors are locked."

I hold his hand and say a silent prayer. I know the Madiba's won't abandon me. Out of the blue, it starts raining, hard. Lucas and I sit in the back seat and he holds me in his arms. It's raining too much we are scared the car will be washed away by the water.

LALETI

"Your job is to watch her and be by her side always!" Khaphela yells at Nandi. Quinn has been gone the whole day and now it's raining. It's raining so hard that I feel sorry for people who still have huts, the rain will destroy people's

homes. I am surprised where all this rain is coming from. It wasn't promising any rain today.

Nandi won't stop crying, Khaphela is yelling at her. When it comes to his children he doesn't want stories. I go to the window and look outside. I feel something move in me, it's raining heavily. I hope my baby is safe. I feel tears fall on my face.

"Khaphela we should go look for her," I say and see Karen scoff. I know I sound crazy but my child is out there

Robert answers, "We can't get out, it's not safe and you Khaphela stop yelling at the poor girl. She was following orders isn't she takes orders from Quinn? You can leave young lady and stop crying."

Everyone is in the sitting room, it's raining and thundering I am getting worried. I try to call Quinn but there is no network the wifi is working only messages on WhatsApp are coming in.

'Mama, is it also raining in Mpandeni?'

'It is dry as the dessert, why?'" - Mom.

'It is raining here and things are not looking good. Quinn is out there mama. I am worried.'

'She will be fine, the water won't hurt her. Remember what was said.' - Mom.

'I am worried for my baby.'

'You know you surprise me. Have you noticed that one moment you care about her then the next you don't? It is as if the anger fades then refuels.' - mom.

'You are not making sense. I will tell you when Quinn is fine.'

I leave the room and go to the kitchen to make myself tea. My phone battery is low so I go to my room and put the phone on the charger. Why am I feeling so weird today as if something has been lifted off my shoulders? That reminds me, I wanted the maids to thoroughly clean my room. I must remind them.

KAREN

The whole family is in the dining room. It's raining cats and dogs outside and the rain has been pouring for the past thirty minutes. I wonder where Quinn is and if she is safe. It's dark outside and we haven't even had supper because we are worried about Quinn.

I go to the kitchen and make everybody some tea then serve them with scones since we haven't had supper. Where is Laleti? I give the tea to the kids first, they hate tea but it's cold today. I then serve Khaphela and his brother.

"I hope I didn't take Khaphela's cup that has love potion," says Robert and I frown, "I am kidding Karen Jesus don't you guys make jokes in this house?"

I flash a smile, "Relax I know it is a joke." I exit the room. I need to call Nomasonto. I use WhatsApp call.

Me: Nomasonto it's raining. I am in so much trouble.

Nomasonto: What are you talking about?

Me; The rain went over it, I didn't know it was coming otherwise I would have put it inside. I am finished.

Nomasonto: I am lost, what are you talking about?

Me: I put something outside the royal house and water wasn't supposed to go over it.

Nomasonto: What was it for?

Me: To block anyone who tries to look into the royal family be it, seers or anyone. Now everything will be in the open.

Nomasonto: So this is what you lost your gift for? Indeed the ancestors have turned their backs on you, my sister.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 23

QUINN

It's been almost two hours since the rain started. It's dark outside, Lucas and I are still in the car. I am scared for him. He did mention that he has a fear of enclosed places. I wouldn't want anything happening to him. I am sure everyone is worried about us. There's no network so we cannot call for help. I look at Lucas, I have my head on his lap facing up while my feet are on the window. Sitting can be tiring and we have been changing positions.

Lucas lowers his face to mine and kisses me on the lips, "Are you okay?"

"I am a little hungry."

He answers, "I am sure there's something to eat in the basket the queen gave you."

I sit up and reach for the basket in the front seat. We put it there when we moved to the back seat. There are fruits and snacks, thank goodness. It is also enough for two people so Lucas and I help ourselves. I am glad that I got stuck here with Lucas, not Denzel. Speaking of Denzel, I don't know whether he wants me to speak in tongues but he did not believe when I told him that I am in love with someone else. I am going to send him a text message the moment I get home that is if I get home. This rain is getting worse.

Grandmother (my mother's mother) always says the rain/water is good. She says water sanctifies. I love water and I love the rain but it shouldn't be too much because then it will destroy things and right now it's a miracle that we are still safe. After all, it raining a lot.

“What are you thinking about?” Lucas strokes my chin.

I smile and look at him, “We were complaining about spending time together and the ancestors decided to trap us here.”

“Would you look at that, even the underground team is on our side.”

I take the basket that is on his lap and put it on the front sit then sit on his lap, “Lucas I want to tell my father about you. He already knows that I am in love with someone who is not royalty and I want to tell him it’s you.”

“Does that mean I have to confess to Denzel

too? I think the sooner we tell him, the better.”

“So I will tell my father and you tell Denzel the truth right?” I ask and he nods although I am scared for him. I know he loves me but what if they kick him out of the royal house? But we have to think positively, everything will work out for us.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

“Why do you ask?”

I reply, “We have been trapped here for hours and you have fear of enclosed places.”

He smiles and pecks me on the lips, “Relax I

won't die on you."

"You better because I don't want to lose you when I just found you."

"You won't lose me, princess." And he is back to calling me, princess. I don't know why he won't use my name. I place both my hands at the back of his neck and glare into his eyes. How is it possible to love someone so much? Someone I barely know and I am already head over heels for him. Will this fade? Is this just the honeymoon phase as they call it?

I loved Xolani but I am in love with Lucas. My father will have to forgive me for this one but don't care whether he is not from a royal family or not. I kiss Lucas, I am addicted to his lips. He gives the sweetest kisses. I feel my body

tremble when his hands go under my skirt and caress my thighs. His lips go to my neck and I close my eyes and bite my lower lip. I am going to ruin his trouser because I am so wet down there.

“Princess.”

“Yes,” it comes out as a whisper.

“I won’t do anything okay, please trust me. I am just going to make you feel good.”

I nod vigorously, he can do anything he pleases with me – I don’t mind. He touches my chin and asks me to look at him, “Tell me if you don’t want me to do it okay.”

I nod and he laughs. "Use your words."

"Do anything Lucas, I am all yours."

He kisses me while his hand goes into my panties. I move up a little to give him access. See what I mean when I say when it comes to Lucas I can't control myself. I have never let any boy touch my lady parts but here I am asking him to do as her pleases with me. He kisses me while his fingers do wonders to me. I swear I am getting pregnant next because he is making me crave something I don't even know. Why didn't anything tell me about this?

KHAPHELA

It's very late and I am very worried about my

daughter. I hope my Quinn is safe wherever she is. Everyone is still in the dining room and we are waiting for the rain to stop so that we can go look for my daughter. I can't even contact Bongani to ask if my daughter had left Dumazulu when the rain started. The lights went off in the house, something burst and we can only fix it by going outside but this bloody rain won't stop. I hope the Mandela ancestors are watching over my little girl wherever she is. I cannot lose her.

"Kids, why don't you go to bed? We will fix the electricity and Quinn will be here when you all wake up," I hear Robert say. I am numb, I don't even know what to say.

"Baba are you okay?" Karen stands next to me. I am sitting alone in a dark corner away from

everybody else.

“I don’t know why my life is like this Karen. What did I do for my life to be complicated like this? I have done everything but it’s chaos after chaos. When will I find peace?”

Honestly, I am tired. I wish the Madibas could give me a break. I need a break from all this. If it’s not the villagers it is my wives, if it’s not my wives it is the children. Quinn could be hurt wherever she is, there is witchcraft in this house, Josh is gay and I don’t understand that, Amahle will be a mother in two months. When will I catch a break?

Karen shifts closer and holds my hands,
“Everything will be fine and I am sure Quinn is fine wherever she is.”

“What if she is scared, Karen? What if my baby is hurt? I can’t even call her because this rain is messing up everything.”

“You need to think positively and don’t worry the rain will die down soon,” she hugs me.

“Where is Laleti?”

She answers, “She went to her room.”

“Let me go and check on her,” I stand up and take one candle. I need to make sure my phone doesn’t switch off in case this rain stops and we need to go look for Quinn. I head to Laleti’s room. I get there and knock but she does not respond. I open the door and let myself in. I find

her kneeling next to the bed with her elbows balancing on the bed.

“Lale are you okay?”

She sniffles, “I am worried Khaphela and sitting here is killing me.”

“I know Laleti but what can we do? You see what the rain is doing.”

“We need to pray Khaphela, we need to pray for our daughter. That is the only way. I don’t care if Karen has to burn something or do anything but anything to protect my daughter,” she is even crying. I am also worried but I don’t know how to pray, I have never done it but right now I would do anything for my daughter to be safe. I

kneel next to Laleti and hold her hand.

KAREN

I am about to leave the dining room when Robert calls me. I wanted to go check on the kids and I also want to see Amahle. I didn't get the chance to talk to her since I got here. She was avoiding me and ignored me when I knocked on her bedroom door earlier. She knows she messed up. I am very disappointed in her. I didn't expect that from her. I didn't even know that she has a boyfriend.

"Karen I called you."

Robert just has to be a pain in everyone's life. Every time he comes here he just has to bully

everyone. I take a deep breath and walk you to him, “Yes, is there anything I can help you with?”

“You are spiritually gifted, right?”

I swallow hard. What is he on about? “Why do you ask?”

“Can’t you consult with the ancestors and check if Quinn is okay?”

What do I do? Khaphela has never asked me to use my gift before, “I...I can but...my things are in the outside room.”

“But you know there are other things that one can use to talk to the ancestors.”

I chuckle, "I know but you know it differs with every gift."

"Hmmm, okay. So how was home?"

I answer, "Home was great. I should go check on the kids."

"The kids are fine. They are grown up, Amahle even knows a man now."

Trust Robert to say it as it is. I know my daughter messed up but we all make mistakes and Amahle is not the first one. They should cut her some slack.

“Come sit down and let’s talk,” he doesn’t give me the chance to protest, he takes my hand and leads me to the couch.

“Do you want something to drink?”

He answers, “Karen sit down and talk to me.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

“You,” he retorts, “You and your gift.”

“What about my gift? Let’s do this, let me go check on the kids then I will come back and we talk all you want?” I stand up and prepare to leave the room. I won’t let him interrogate me. When I am halfway across the room he says.

“Khaphela had left you, how did you get back together?”

I swallow hard and turn, “What do you mean?”

“I mean exactly that. Khaphela broke up with you because he was ready to take the throne and marry his queen. He said he was ready to try things with Karen and leave you because there was no future between you two. How did you two get back together again?”

“He said he was only doing what his father wanted,” I answer boldly.

“Listen, Karen, Khaphela is my brother and he shared some stuff with me when we were

growing up. Khaphela left you but for some reason, he ended up making you his second wife.”

“I will not let you bombard me with questions. Ask your brother.” I exit the room.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 24

QUINN

“This is not fair, why are you teasing me like this,” I giggle and bury my face on Lucas’s neck. I don’t want him to stop, why did he stop? How can he start something and then tell me we

have to stop at a certain stage? I want to go all the way. Okay maybe I am speaking with my feelings, I can't lose my virginity in a car. I have to be better than Amahle, what if I get pregnant? My father would have a heart attack. I should lead by example and be a good girl.

"That is not kids stuff, princess," Lucas lifts my face to make him look at him, "This is how far we can go."

"What if I want to go further?"

He kisses my forehead, "Then I would have to make a plan to make you Mrs Abraham."

"Not only do I get you, but I also get a cool surname and light-skinned kids. Am I not the

luckiest princess in the world?”

“I am the lucky one,” he answers, “It seems the rain is dying down, should we start moving?”

“I don’t know, we don’t know how bad the road is.”

He rolls down the window a little and lets some fresh air come in then pulls me into his arms. It’s very late and I am sleepy. I don’t know when I fall asleep but I wake up lying on the back seat. The car is now moving and the sun is up. I sit up and stretch myself. My body is sore, the car is very uncomfortable.

“Good morning, princess,” Lucas looks at me through the view mirror.

I quickly search for my phone and look at myself sometimes I wake up a mess. I fix my hair then greet back Lucas.

He laughs, "Relax you still look amazing."

"Did I snore? I hope I don't talk in my sleep?"

"You don't snore but you do talk. You were like Lucas I love you. Lucas, I love you very much," he answers.

I cover my face with my palms, "Oh Lord."

"I am kidding you don't talk when sleeping."

I playfully slap his arm, "Don't play like that."

I check my phone and I have so many messages from my family. Even Uncle Robert left me a message. Does this mean he is in Matshoba? Uncle Robert is very strict and tells everyone their business but we get along fine. He loves hunting too and I cannot wait to go hunting with him. It's fun with Uncle Robert because we always put money on the table although I always bet with the money I don't have.

"We are here," Lucas announces. He drives into the yard and goes around to open the car door for me. There are so many people in the compound or maybe they are fixing things because that rain swept away everything. I see Uncle Robert walking towards me. I run to hug

him. He picks me up and spins me around.

“My Quinny, look at you all grown.”

I answer, “That should be a signal that you should stop lifting me. I am grown now.”

He pinches my cheeks, “You will always be young to me and where have you been? Do you know how worried we were? Your father went out to look for you.”

“It was raining hard so Lucas and I decided not to drive. We slept in the car.”

“Who the hell is Lucas?” I forgot he doesn’t care about language. I point at Lucas who is

standing in front of the car, “I heard you went to see the prince of Dumazulu. Is that him?”

“No that is his guard who was driving me home until we got stuck.”

“Oh,” he nods lightly then calls Lucas. What does uncle want now?

“Good morning,” Lucas greets him and I can tell he is not sure whether to bow or shake his hand.

“So you are Lucas?”

Lucas nods, “Yes sir.”

“Thank you for keeping our Quinn safe young

man.”

“I was just doing my job sir, the prince trusted me with her,” Lucas retort and then hands me the basket the queen gave me. I swear if my uncle wasn’t around I was going to kiss him goodbye. I blush when our eyes meet but quickly look away, “I should get going,” he adds.

“How long have you two been seeing each other?” Uncle asks, “Quinn don’t look surprised, you know what I am talking about.”

Lucas and I don’t reply so he adds, “I don’t know what you two are doing but it will get you in trouble. Quinn, you will get Lucas in trouble because right now he smells like you and your dress is not buttoned correctly. What is wrong with you children these days?”

I turn to Lucas, "You can go."

"Are you sure you will be alright?" he whispers.

I nod, "He is my uncle, he won't hurt me."

Uncle Robert says, "Don't be so sure about that."

Lucas leaves and I ask to talk to my uncle in the house. He does not seem interested but agrees then tells me to get him a beer in the kitchen. I get him the beer then join him outside. How the hell did he notice my dress? Uncle Robert should be a detective, he is wasting talent.

“So you are cheating on the prince?” did I mention my uncle hits the pin in the head?

“I am not with the prince. He likes me but I don’t like him.”

“Don’t you think seeing his guard is stabbing him in the back? Quinn do you want to start a war between the two boys? Does the prince know about you and this Lucas boy?” he asks and I shake my head.

“Lucas will tell him.”

“And your father?” he adds.

“He knows I am in love with someone who is

not from royalty but he doesn't know it's Lucas."

"You kids will give your father a heart attack. I should take you all with me for a week maybe you will learn a thing or two." I doubt anyone would want to go anywhere with uncle Robert. This man is harsh, "I called your father, he is on his way back and go fix your dress."

"You are not going to tell him right?"

"But you are going to tell him and get me another beer," he commands.

LALETI

I am the first one to get out of the car when we get home. I ask the helpers where Quinn is and they say she is in the kitchen. I rush to the kitchen and Quinn is eating while concentrating on her phone. She looks fine, thank God!

“Quinn baby are you...”

She gets off the chair and shifts backwards. Why does she seem scared, “I am sorry for disappearing. It started raining and I couldn’t come home.”

“I know baby but...” I stop talking when she shifts away again. I am sure she thinks I will start shouting at her or I want to hit her. Karen walks into the room and goes to hug her. She cups her face and asks her if she is okay. She inspects if she is okay, and even kisses her

cheeks.

“Mom I am fine.” Quinn says and it shoots to my heart, “I am fine, we were in the car the whole time. We didn’t drive when it started raining.

Karen hugs her, “I am glad you are fine my baby.”

I feel like the third wheel so I leave the kitchen and go call my mother. She said I must tell her when we find Quinn.

Mom: Laleti did you find her? Is my granddaughter fine?

Me: She is fine mom.

Mom: Where was she? Was she not harmed?

Me: I didn't get to talk to her but I heard her tell Karen that she was in the car when it was raining.

Mom: Told Karen? Why didn't you ask her yourself?

Me: She seemed scared of me, mom so I decided not to push too hard.

Mom: I told you to fix things with that child look now you are pushing her to Karen. Mend things with your daughter before it's too late.

Me: I will.

I hang up and shove my phone in my dress pocket. "Can you get me another beer?"

"Jesus Robert, how long have you been there?"

He answers, "I was here when you came outside, it's not my fault you don't look at your surroundings."

"It's not even ten am and you are already drinking?"

"It's not written anywhere that beer should be consumed at a certain time and what do you

mean Quinn is scared of you?" he questions.

"Robert, were you listening in on my phone call?"

"Yes now tell me?" he states.

"I am not telling you anything," I leave. I am not about to tell Robert my business especially when he is drinking, I know he will blab everything out at dinner. I go to the kitchen to check if Quinn is still there and she is. She is talking on the phone, smiling from ear to ear. She is such a beautiful flower and a man that will marry her is lucky.

"Quinny can I talk to you?"

“I’ll call you back and good luck. Please if anything happens call me,” she talks on the phone and then puts her phone on the table.

“How are you, nana?”

“I am fine, thank you,” she answers icily.

“Quinn I am sorry if I haven’t been treating you right, I don’t know what comes over me sometimes but please can we start over?”

“No,” she shakes her head, “No mom. We are not doing this again. You get my hopes up and then hurt me. No, just leave me alone,” she takes her phone and leaves the kitchen.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 25

QUINN

My mother might have been able to fool me once but not again. She acts as if she cares then the next thing she hates me again. I am not putting myself through that again. This woman hates me and she will never love me. She just tolerates me because she gave birth to me but I am sure if it was up to her, she would have killed me long ago. But I can't seem to understand how she can hate her child. A child she carried for nine months.

“Good morning, your highness, future king of

Matshoba,” I bow in curtsy as soon as Joshua opens his bedroom door. Ironically, he always keeps his door locked yet loves barging into other people’s rooms without knocking.

“Shut up and get in. Where were you all night? Do you know how worried we were?”

I get into the room and close the door behind me, “I was with my man, child.”

“Get out! You were with Lucas all night?”

I nod, “He was driving me home then the rain started so we decide not to drive because it wasn’t safe.”

“I want to know everything.”

I pretend to lock my mouth then throw away the imaginary key, “I don’t kiss and tell.”

“At least tell you used protection, we don’t want another Amahle situation.”

“We did not sleep together, Josh. Do you seriously think I would lose my virginity in a car?” Okay maybe I would but I have a boyfriend that respects me and wants us to wait.

“I am glad you didn’t but just between you and me, I would do it in the car and...”

I stick my fingers in my ears, “I can’t hear you.”

We both laugh and lie on the bed. I want to ask if he has talked to dad alone, I mean he came out and the whole family now knows that he is gay. I hope they don't try to 'fix him' I know many people don't understand this. It is hard to understand but Josh did not choose to be different. I am sure he also wishes he was normal like everybody else. Imagine not being comfortable in your skin. I can imagine the battle that goes on in his head. Will father still let him be the next king after this? Being gay doesn't make him less of a person. Gay doesn't mean weak.

"What is that pretty head of yours thinking of now?" Josh asks me.

"Why don't you want to be the next king?"

He sits up and folds his legs, "Being king seems like a huge responsibility, Quinn. Look at dad, he is quarter to losing his senses and you know I don't do well with pressure. I think it requires more than just being the firstborn child for one to be king. One needs to be brave and wise."

"You are brave and wise."

He shakes his head, "I don't want the throne, Quinn. I just don't want it and I wish everyone can understand that."

"I understand and I will support you no matter what decision you make. Now come let me kiss you."

He shifts away, “I don’t know where that mouth has been so no.”

“Josh!”

“Nope and I need to bathe so I will see you later,” he goes to open the door for me.

“Yes, my king.”

“Will you stop that,” he laughs before closing the door.

From Josh’s room, I look for my father. I want to talk to him about Lucas. I know he is going to hate me but I want to tell him the truth. I don’t want to get married to a Prince. I want a man I

love. While I am still looking for my father, I bump into Karen. I don't know if it's me but there's something about her that I can't put my finger on. I am not a spiritual person but there is something in her that is fighting with my spirit. Maybe I should talk to her about it since she is spiritually gifted, maybe she might share something.

"Hey, mom. Have you seen dad?"

"Hey baby, he is outside with your uncle," she retorts wearing a smile.

"Thank you."

She stops me before I can walk away, "Quinn...if you ever want to talk about anything, I am here,

okay?”

“I know and thank you.”

I find my father and uncle sitting on the outside stoop. Uncle Robert is a breath of fresh air although he always manages to piss everyone off. I think it is because he is a straight-talker. Uncle Robert says things as they are and he doesn't care if it rubs off the wrong way. I just hope he didn't tell my father about Lucas. I think it'll be best if he hears it from me.

I greet them and then ask them to speak to my father. Uncle Robert says, “I am not going anywhere. You found me here so if you want to talk to your father then you two need to find a place to talk.”

My father says, "It's okay, Quinn you can say whatever you want to say. Don't mind your uncle."

I clear my throat, "Baba I am in love with someone."

My father scoffs, "You mean the commoner you are in love with? We are not having that conversation. You are to be groomed for a prince. A princess marries a prince. That is how things are to be done."

I get on my knees, "Father I am begging you. Please I love him. As someone who fell in love with a commoner you should understand me better."

My father furiously stands, “Quinn my word is final.”

“Baba I am begging you. Don’t you want to see me happy?”

“I want to see you happy hence I am ensuring that you have a great future. You are in love I get it but this will fade. Love only is not enough. You won’t eat love, how will that man take care of you?” he retorts.

“Uncle Robert!”

Uncle puts his beer down and says, “Okay why don’t we all calm down. Quinn go to your room and I will talk to your father.”

I nod and get off my knees then exit the room. This is not fair. Why am I not allowed to fall in love with a man I love? Amahle got pregnant by a commoner but no one said anything. I go to my room and then call Lucas.

Lucas: Hey, princess. How did it go?

Me: My father is against it but I hope my uncle will be able to talk some sense into him. If he doesn't want to agree to this then I will take matters into my hands.

Lucas: Please don't do anything silly. Your father just wants the best for you.

Me: If he wants the best for me then he should

let me be happy. You make me happy and I want to be with you. I don't want to be with a prince I don't love.

Lucas: Why do I get a feeling they are going to pair you with prince Denzel?

Me: Which is why you have to tell them the truth. I know it's risky but we have to let them know we are together.

Lucas: (sighs) he is going to be angry.

Me: Do you maybe want us to keep things a secret? You could get in trouble or worse kicked out of the palace.

Lucas: I don't know princess. This is just complicated.

Me: I will support whatever you decide. I love you and would do anything to be with you.

Lucas: I will tell prince Denzel about us.

LUCAS

I asked to talk to the king of Dumazulu and the prince. I am in the throne room losing my mind. I know they will hate me after this and might get kicked out of the palace but keeping it a secret is also killing me. I betrayed Denzel and I feel bad. He has been nothing but kind to me and I owe him the truth. I owe everyone the truth. My heart skips a beat when the door opens but it's

just one of the king's guards. I feel like I am going to faint. He tells me that the king is on his way and then exits the room. I asked to talk to them in private meaning the guards won't be around. I wouldn't want the guards looking at me weirdly.

Since I am close with the king and prince, they know I am not going to do anything to them. I mean if I wanted to harm them, I would have done it long ago. I stand up and pace around the room practising how I am going to share all this. The king walks in first followed by the prince. They both sit on their thrones and I am in front of them.

"Lucas what is so urgent?" the king asks.

I go down on one knee and balance my elbow

on the other knee, "I have a confession, my king and prince."

"Is it that much of a big deal?" Prince Denzel asks, "Did you make anyone pregnant? Or..."

"Let him speak Denzel," the king cuts him off, "What is it Lucas, what confession, do you want to share?"

It's now or never. I take a deep breath, "I wanted to say...so..."

"Lucas say it already, what do you want to say?"
- prince Denzel.

The king comes to my rescue, "Let him speak,

Denzel.”

“I am in love with the princess of Matshoba!” I blurt out.

Denzel stands up, “You are in love with Quinn? Knowing that I like her? You know what... why am I even getting worked up over this, the princes would never fall in love with a commoner.”

“Denzel!” his father warns.

“No baba but we are talking about a princess here and I get that he loves her and it’s normal to have a crush on people. The princess is gorgeous, I don’t blame him.” – Denzel.

I add, "I am in love with the princess and she feels the same way. We have been seeing each other for a while now."

Denzel punches me in the face.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 26

LUCAS

The king holds Denzel back to stop him from throwing punches at me. Maybe I deserve it hence I am not fighting back. I am in the wrong and I would also be livid if I was in his situation. But I wish he could understand that I did not choose to fall in love with the princess. God knows I tried, I tried to hide my feeling and couldn't. It is as if, the more I tried to hide my

feelings, the more the feeling grew. I never meant to betray the prince.

“Stop this madness, Denzel. Are you crazy?” now the king is also angry. I am surprised the guards haven’t rushed into the room with all this noise, “Denzel calm down and stop acting crazy.”

“Calm down? You want me to calm down when my servant betrayed me? Put yourself in my shoes, Baba!”

The sighs, “Okay both of you sit down and let us solve this matter as grown adults.”

I wipe my now bleeding nose with my shirt. I am sure my face is now red, light-skin problems. I

easily gets bruised. The king takes a deep breath, “So in other words both of you are in love with the same girl?”

I nod, “Yes, my king.”

“Who saw the girl first?” the king goes on to interrogate us. Denzel tells him it’s him, “So Denzel you saw the girl first but she loves Lucas.”

Denzel snaps, “We don’t know that Baba, maybe he tricked her. The princess would never love a guard.”

“Denzel please sit down.” The king is ever calm, “Lucas you knew Denzel loves princess Quinn, why did you go for her? Do you understand that

he feels betrayed right now?”

“I understand that very well my king. I never saw the princess that way until she made a move. I swear on my dead parents, I didn’t make the first move. She confessed first that she loves me and I knew it would hurt the prince but at the same time, I realized that I had fallen for her.” I opt for the truth. Although I feel like I am throwing Quinn under the bus.

“This is a tough one,” the king says.

“He could be lying, Dad! We were with Quinn just yesterday and she seemed happy with me. He is lying and is the one that maybe went after her,” Denzel shouts.

I answer, "I have no reason to lie and I wouldn't have confessed knowing that I don't have my facts right. Why would I lie about the princess?"

"You know what, there is only one way to find out the truth, I am calling princess Quinn," Denzel takes out his phone. I know it's hard for him but I don't have any reason to lie. He puts the phone on loudspeaker. It takes a while for the princess to answer but she eventually does.

Quinn: Prince Denzel.

Denzel: I am going to ask you something, I want you to answer yes or no.

Quinn: I am in love with Lucas. I am sorry if I led you on but I am in love with him. I told you that I

was in love with someone and you didn't want to believe me.

Denzel: What about yesterday? We had fun and I introduced you to my family. Was that all a lie?

Quinn: It wasn't a lie. I was happy to spend the day with you but remember we had agreed to be friends and that's what I was doing. I was spending time with my friend.

Denzel: You fucken bitch!

The king snatches Denzel's phone. This is now getting out of hand.

King Bongani: Princess you are speaking to the

king.

Quinn: My king I am very sorry. I swear I am not playing anyone. I love Lucas.

King Bongani: Princess I would appreciate it if you never set foot in Dumazulu again. You are getting in between two people who care about each other right now. You might love Lucas but this could ruin his relationship with Denzel. Lucas is also barred from coming to Matshoba.

Quinn: But...

King Bongani: But nothing...whatever was going on between you and Lucas ends now. Am I clear?

Quinn: Can I at least say goodbye to him?

King Bongani: No! You are not to see Lucas anymore. I am speaking as his guardian. You being with him could bring him problems. What will your father say if he found out? I don't want anything happening to him so please end this.

Quinn: But I love him.

King Bongani: You will get over it. Goodbye.

King Bongani hangs up the call and hands Denzel his phone back. I feel the tears burn my eyes and something choking me. Why would he do that? I care about Quinn, I love her. She is the only thing I have had since I lost my parents. She is the only person that gave me hope in this

meaningless life. He might treat me as his own but that can never change the fact that I am not his son.

“Thank you, Dad,” says Denzel.

“I didn’t do this for you, leave me with Lucas. And you are not to abuse him because you will have me to deal with. Do not let a girl come between you. You hardly know this girl so don’t let her separate you.”

Denzel nods and then leaves the room. I stand up and look at king Bongani, “Why? Haven’t I done everything I can to serve the prince? I have dedicated my life to serving him. Not once have I ever wronged him or anyone in this house. I mess up one and you take this one thing away from me.”

“Lucas I am doing this for you.”

“Are you? You didn’t even ask me first. I love Quinn. I wouldn’t have confessed if I didn’t. I can’t even have anything!” I yell, “I get that this is my life but I love her!”

“Lucas I am protecting you here. What do you think the king would say if he found out his daughter is dating a guard? I promised your parents that I will take care of you and I am sorry if this seems unfair but I am doing it for you.”

“You are doing it for your son. I know I am not royalty but this is not fair! This is not fair!” I leave the room with the king calling after me.

When I reach the front gate the guards block my way.

“Butho get out of my way!”

Butho is the guard in charge of the gate, “The king said we mustn’t let you leave the compound. I just received a text message from his guard.”

“Get out of my way!”

“Get back inside, Lucas or we will use force. We take orders from the king and not you,” he says and I turn and go to my room. I throw myself on the bed and continuously punch the bed. Maybe I shouldn’t have told them the truth. Maybe I should have just kept them in the dark.

I take out my phone and try calling Quinn but her phone is not reachable. I am sure she is hurt wherever she is and the fact that we are barred from seeing each other makes it all worse. I am sure the king will send word to all the guards that I am not to be seen with Quinn. My only crime is being a commoner. My only crime is falling in love with a princess.

QUINN

After talking to the king of Dumazulu I throw my phone at the wall, pick it up and throw it again until the glasses fall on the floor. This is not fair, why would he just separate us like that? I love Lucas and I want to be with him. I wasn't playing prince Denzel, we were just friends. Now I have lost the boy I love. Why does it feel

like I lost a part of me? I pick up my side lamp and throw it at the wall. I hate my life. I wish I was born into a normal family.

“Quinn!” my mother storms into my room,
“Quinn what’s wrong.”

“Get out! Get out of my room!”

She shifts toward me but I pick up the book on my side table and throw it at her, “Get away from me. Stop acting like you care when you don’t. You hate me so stop pretending.”

“Baby I don’t hate you. What’s wrong, let me help you.”

“I don’t need your help mom!” I yell, “I don’t need you so leave me alone. You hate me and you wish I was a boy so stop pretending. I don’t need your pretence, not today. You act like you care one moment then you call me names the next. GET OUT OF MY ROOM!”

Now she is also crying, “Quinn I don’t hate you, I swear. I don’t know what takes over me but baby I don’t hate you.”

Karen walk into the room, “What going on?”

I rush to go and hug her, “I hate this place, I hate my life and...”

She rubs my back, “Everything will be fine okay? You can talk to me, what happened.”

“No one wants to see me happy,” I cry.

“Laleti what did you do now?” Karen screams at her.

“I didn’t do anything, I just found her crying.”

“You always manage to make her cry! Just go!”
– Karen.

LALETI

I am such a bad mother. I am a bad mother that is now known by everyone. Even my daughter hates me, she doesn’t want me near her. Is it too late to mend things with her? I swear I never

meant to hurt her. I don't know what had come over me. Can the Lord please help me? I don't hate my daughter.

I am in the garden crying my heart out. It hurts. It hurts that another woman can comfort my child and I can't. The same woman that came to replace me in this house. The same woman that gave my husband an heir. Why is God forsaking me like this? Why is God letting all this happen to me? But I pray. I pray and fast but still, nothing works out for me.

"Leleti what is wrong?" Khaphela sits next to me on the bench.

"Why does my daughter hate me so much? Why does she prefer Karen over me?"

He seems confused by my statement, “But do you blame her? You hate Quinn.”

“I don’t hate her why would I hate my daughter?”

He looks confused but pulls me into his arms and hugs me tight.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 27 (NOT EDITED)

KHAPHELA

I am in the throne room. I am just sitting there

alone thinking about everything. The throne, my wives and my children. Why is there so much chaos around me? What is really going on in this house? Why are the kids all like this? Not forgetting the witchcraft the seer mentioned. But, how can we have witchcraft in the palace when Karen is spiritually gifted? The ancestors should show her something, right? Quinn also has some sort of power but the seer didn't explain on that. Then there is Laleti, what is going on with her? Why is she acting like this?

"You wanted to talk to me?" Robert walks into the throne room. My ever-sloshed brother.

"I think it's time you bring that seer you were talking about and reveal the truth once and for all."

Robert asks, "Are you sure? I mean you want the truth but what if some things you don't want to hear come out? Will you be able to handle that?"

"I am ready for anything that comes my way. Things are already bad, what could go worse?"

"A lot could go worse brother but if you say you are ready then I will call the man," he takes out his phone and dials. He seems close to this so-called seer judging by how he starts by asking if he fixed his house. Robert goes on to ask about the man's wife and kids. I just wish he could hit the pin in the head and invite him over already. After what seems like forever he hangs up.

"And?"

He answers, "He is not available this week but he promised to come next week."

"Robert I would have lost my mind by next week."

He retorts, "The man is a busy Khaphela. Be patient and he will help you when he can. Rushing won't help with anything. I understand that there is chaos in your house but you have me and I will help you where I can for the time being."

"Thank you, brother. Words cannot explain how much grateful I am. Thank you."

"You could give me some of the gold Matshoba

is sitting on,” he mumbles.

“Robert we are not having that conversation and you know we can’t touch those jewels because we will anger the ancestors.”

“The same ancestors that gave you those jewels, they gave you so you can survive but you want to keep them on display. You people give the dead so much power,” he shakes his head. I found things like this and this is what I was taught and I am not about to go out of the way, following my hot-headed brother.

“Can we talk about something else, please?”

He sit up, “Let’s talk about your daughter, Khaphela you are being too hard on her.”

“I am not being too hard. Quinn will be groomed for a prince. A prince that will take care and protect her. Robert, you know how these things work, royalty marries royalty.”

“That is rich coming from you Khaphela. You were in love with Karen and you knew she wasn't royalty. You even married her – this is your daughter. You should be happy that at least she found love,” says Robert.

“Things are different. My situation...”

He interjects, “Don't give me that bullshit Khaphela and Quinn is eighteen. Let the child be. Khaphela you are king, you have the power to change things that our parents couldn't. Things

have changed from when we were growing up and you know it.”

“I care about my daughter and I want to see her happy more than anything but I can’t let her marry a commoner. It is going to give her trouble. My daughter will marry a prince, she will grow to love him and that is final.”

I stand up and exit the room. I don’t care if times are changing but I will follow the rules I know. I go to my room and that’s when I receive a call from king Bongani. I am sure it has to do with the messages I was sending the previous night when I was trying to reach Quinn.

Me: Good evening, king Bongani. I am sure you are calling about the messages you received. I couldn’t get hold of my daughter, that’s why.

King Bongani: To think of it, I haven't checked my messages but I hope she was fine when you found her.

Me: Yes she was, all thanks to one of your guards that kept her safe, I am forever grateful. Please pass my gratitude to the young man.

King Bongani: (clears his throat) I will.

Me: I am sorry but you called because?

King Bongani: I wanted to check if the princess is okay and if things will go as planned.

Me: Yes, of course. My daughter will be

groomed for prince Denzel then we can discuss the rest later.

King Bongani: Have you talked to your daughter about this, if I may ask? Is she interested in the union? Remember this is not only for joining two families together but the children need also to be happy. It is their lives after all.

Me: Don't worry, I will handle my daughter. Things will go as planned.

King Bongani: You will hear from me then.

BONGANI

Lucas confessing just made things hard for me.

This was the truce Dumazulu had always wanted with Matshoba. Quinn and Denzel were going to bring the two kingdoms together then maybe people can forget about the past. Lucas being involved ruins things, he is Denzel's guard and if Denzel manages to marry Quinn then it will hurt him. I wish I can shift him to another department but I can't. I need him where I can keep an eye on him. That boy is my responsibility.

"Are you okay, my king?" my wife, Olga walks into the room, "You seem distracted today."

I pull her to my lap. We have been together for twenty-five years and I still love her as the day I first met her, "You always see right through me."

“I have to, I am your wife. Now tell me, what is bothering you so much?”

I exhale heavily, “Lucas is in love with someone.”

“I don’t see anything wrong with that. I know you care about Lucas but he is a big boy now. Let him fall in love and go about his life.”

I add, “He is in love with the same girl as Denzel. He is in love with the prince of Matshoba. Not that I am picking sides but Denzel loved the girl first. This is just a mess.”

“Look, I know you care about Lucas. I know you promised his parents that you will look after him but you did your best. I know it sounds

unfair but if Denzel saw the girl first then Lucas has no right to go after her.”

I say, “What makes it all complicated is that I had already talked to king Khaphela about joining our families through our children. If Denzel marries that girl then it will ruin his relationship with Lucas. Those two are close, Olga. And at the same time, we need the union with Matshoba.”

“Lucas will have to get over it. Don’t feel guilty, you have given that boy all you can. You don’t owe his parents anything. You did your best, Bongani.”

DENZEL

Things are very awkward between Lucas and me since he confessed that he is in love with Quinn yesterday. I don't want to lie, I feel betrayed. He knows how I feel about Quinn yet still went after her. I know I also went overboard when I called him a commoner but I was furious. I sent him to get Quinn and he knew they were seeing each other. He spent the night with her, God knows what happened in that car.

I am having my morning walk around Dumazulu and Lucas is quietly following behind me. Today he did not greet me like he normally does. I don't know why he is acting like the victim when I am the one that got betrayed. The princess chose him over me, how is that supposed to make me feel? Lucas and I walk until we reach the river that divides Dumazulu, Matshoba and Mpandeni. I can't believe one day I will rule this kingdom.

“Lucas, we should get back,” I say and he doesn’t respond, “So you are just going to ignore me when you are the one that wronged me?”

“Let’s go back, your highness. Is that what you want?”

“Why are you even giving me attitude? You are the one that betrayed me and went after the girl I love. I told you I love Quinn and still, you chose to go after.” I yell.

“Are we going or do you want to yell at me some more? I didn’t choose to love Quinn and you’re lucky I even told you the truth.”

“Just because my family treats you like one of us, it doesn’t mean you are on my level. At the end of the day, you are my servant and I would appreciate it if you show me some respect,” I utter firmly.

He turns around to walk away then yelps as if something just hurt his leg. I look at he is and see something rushing into the bushes. I rush to where he is, “Was that a snake?”

“Just leave me alone, Denzel. Maybe the poison might kill me then you can have Quinn all to yourself.”

“You know what, I am trying to help you and you are giving me attitude. Handle yourself then,” I stand up and walk away but then regret it and go back. When I go back I find him with Quinn

and her hair is wet as if she was in the water.
What is she doing so early?

I feel the anger in me rising as she checks on him, why does she love him? What does Lucas have that I don't?

"What is that?" I overhear Lucas say.

Quinn replies, "I don't know."

"So you are healing me with something you don't know?" – Lucas.

"I remember it from my dream," she tears her dress and bandages him.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 28

DENZEL

I fold my hands into a fist as I feel the anger in me rising. Quinn is supposed to be my princess not for her to be in love with my servant. I saw her first. I fell in love with her first and I made the first move. What is so special about Lucas that she would choose him? And I am very disappointed in Lucas. I treated him like a brother only for him to betray me. My family took him in and raised him like one of us and this is how he repays us.

He knows very well that he is barred from

seeing Quinn but here they are, nursing each other. I don't hate Lucas but what he did is making me hate him. I think I understand how some people start as nice people and then just become ruthless. People will drain the nice personality out of you and then blame you for changing. These two people betrayed me and still have the nerve to nurse and smile at each other in front of me.

I inhale and exhale then walk up to them, "What are you doing here?"

Quinn stands up as if she did not expect anyone to see them, "Denzel, hi. How are you?"

"I feel betrayed, thank you for asking."

She scratches the back of her neck. What is she even doing here so early in the morning? Her dress and hair is all wet. She is going to catch a cold, “I came for a swim and I swear I didn’t know you and Lucas would be here.”

“Who swims at six in the morning, I am sure you two planned this. Do you know your Lucas could get in trouble for this? You are barred from seeing each other.”

Quinn locks her palms together, “Please don’t tell your father. I am leaving and I swear I didn’t know you two would be here. Please, Denzel!”

I swallow a lump growing in my throat. So she cares about him so much? I answer, “Well I am not as ruthless as you two. Lucas let's go.”

I lead the way until I notice that I am not hearing any movement behind me, I turn and look back, gritting my teeth. They are kissing. When they are done romancing each other, Lucas follows behind me. I walk ahead of him. I am sure he sees a clown when he looks at me. He doesn't care about me that he would kiss Quinn in front of me knowing that I love her.

"Take the rest of the day to nurse your wound," I say to Lucas when we get home. I wish the poison kills him.

After partying ways with Lucas, I walk to my room. Gosh, I have never wished death on anyone but what Lucas did makes me wish he was struck by a bolt of lightning.

“Watch where you are going young man,” says a male voice. I am so occupied in my thoughts that I wasn’t watching where I am going. I look to see who it is and it’s Bab’ Mawande, one of my father’s advisers.

“My apologies.”

“And what are you so angry at so early?” he asks and I shake my head, “What are you angry at Denzel?”

“You know people don’t want nice sometimes. I fell in love with this girl and someone selfish had to ruin things for me. He knew I love this girl, I even told him about it but he made a move on her. The next thing when I react then I am abusing my power when people are the ones who provoke me,” I vent.

“Slow down, young prince. Let’s take a walk then you tell me about it.” He suggests and I follow behind him. I never talk to anyone about my business but since the one person I always talk to has turned out to be a snake, might as well talk to someone wise. Bab’Mawande and I walk out of the palace with me telling him how it all started until what happened today in the palace.

His response is, “I knew that boy would be a problem one day but the king had to take him in out of pity. His parents served the king for a long time.”

“I don’t have a problem with Lucas but I hate that he brayed me. Everything was fine between us until this betrayal.”

He shakes his head, "Some people are just ungrateful my boy. They bite the same hand that feeds them. His parents were betrayers just like him."

"What do you mean and what happened to his parents?"

"Lucas's parents worked for your father. His mother was the queen's servant from another kingdom and his father was a servant in the palace. According to rumours, Naledi (Lucas's mother) tried to poison the queen's mother so her punishment was execution. Pete also offered his life since he couldn't watch his wife die... leaving their son Lucas," he explains.

“Why would she want to poison my grandmother?”

He shrugs, “She died with the secret. Your father took in Lucas because his parents served him well.”

“Something still doesn’t add up.”

“Well that’s all I know and as for that boy betraying you, you should teach him a lesson,” he says.

“I don’t want revenge. I only wanted Quinn but I guess I can’t have her.”

He chuckles evilly, “Boy you are a prince, use

your power for once. Ask for the princess's hand in marriage. The two kings are desperate to bring the two kingdoms together. You would be surprised they are already trying to bring you two together."

"But Quinn doesn't love me."

"Unlike us men, women can grow to love someone. She will be groomed for you and she will learn to love you. Make sure that betrayer Lucas is also there to witness her love you," he says.

"But that is abusing my power. I know she doesn't love me and forcing her to marry me will be wrong."

“Power is meant to be abused, young prince,” he retorts.

“How do you know all this? That if I ask for her hand, her father won’t refuse?”

“I was once in love with a princess. I know how these royal things work. Oh look at that tree,” he walks ahead of me.

So in other words I can have Quinn if I want her. I guess I will follow my heart. It’s time I became a little selfish with my happiness. I am always pouring into other people’s cups so now I will focus on myself and my happiness. I want Quinn and I will get her. She will be my princess, the future queen of Dumazulu and the mother of my children.

KHAPHELA

It's six in the morning and Quinn is not in the house. She is starting to get on my nerves now. What is it with these trips to the river? Are these trips to the river or she is going to see that lover of hers. To think I thought this child is troubled. I thought her mother being harsh on her is the reason she isolates herself but she is busy falling in love with boys with no direction.

I don't know what is going on in my house but all this nonsense ends today. I am sick of all the commotion and chaos going around. It's time we set some ground rules and I am done being nice. I am done listening to people, seers or taking advice from anyone. I am about to do things my way. The Khaphela way and I would

do anything to make sure my family is safe and Matshoba is safe.

I summoned everyone to the living room, including Robert and today I am not in the mood for his advice. I don't even need his seer anymore. The Mandela ancestors will protect us from any harm. I check my wristwatch and times are heading to seven am. Where the hell is Laleti's daughter? She is the only one not here.

"She is here, my king. She went to change her dress," Nandi announces, kneeling in front of me. I didn't see her enter the room.

"Change her dress for what?"

"She was swimming with it, my king," this time her voice a tad lower.

"Tell her to hurry, Nandi!"

"Baba calm down, she is coming," Karen whispers to me. I am not in the mood to wait. I woke people up so I can make an announcement not to wait for Quinn. After a while, she walks in and greets us all. Robert has been yawning nonstop.

"Okay, everyone. I am sure you are wondering why I called you so early today. Firstly, I want to say I am not happy with what has been going on in this house. We are the royal family and we are supposed to lead by example to the community but it seems we are the most messed up family in Matshoba. But it all ends

today. I think I have been too nice you are all forgetting that I am not only your king but your father and husband to you Laleti and Karen.” I say then sit down.

Robert looks confused. I hope he was not expecting me to run this by him. I go on to say. “Schools are opening soon, Khumbulani and Aiden will be going back to boarding school. Everything will go on as normal and I want good grades, not you two playing with girls.

“Laleti, I want you to stop this thing of treating your daughter like you picked her up on the side of the road. I told you to treat Quinn right or leave. This is the last chance and I am not playing. I don’t want to hear your excuses, treat Quinn right or leave my house.

Karen, I need you to start talking to your kids. Talk to all the kids. You are spiritually gifted but I don't see your gift helping the family. I still don't understand how Amahle got pregnant under your nose. You were supposed to notice this, you go to Amahle's room almost every night.

Still, on Amahle, isn't you want to be an adult, Amahle? You will get married, young lady. Things will be done right and your boy will pay what needs to be paid."

"Baba she is sixteen how can you do this to your daughter?" Karen stands up.

I answer, "If she knows a man to an extent of getting pregnant then she is grown. Find the family of the boy and then we will handle the

rest.

Quinn, I know you said you're in love with someone but I want you to break things off with them because you are to be groomed for your husband. A prince – prince Denzel of Dumazulu. It's not negotiable.

Joshua! I don't know what is going on with you but I need you to man up. You are going to be groomed to be the next king of Matshoba. Whether you like it or not boy this is your destiny. I don't care whether you are gay. You are the first male child and this is your responsibility.

I have said what I said. I don't care if anyone doesn't agree with what I say. My word is final.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 29

ROBERT

I don't know what has come over my brother but this is not how to go about with things. I understand that he is exhausted but he will break up his family trying to fix things. I know my brother and I know he cares about his children more than anything but forcing them to do things they don't want isn't love. I don't even understand his sudden change because this is not what we had agreed on. Khaphela and I had agreed to wait for the seer. In fact, I received a call from the seer saying he is coming today but I didn't get the chance to talk to Khaphela since he woke up on the wrong side of the bed.

I listen as Khaphela makes his new rules and tells people what will happen. Poor Amahle will now be married God knows what will happen. She made a mistake and Khaphela is not doing things right. Then Quinn is the next to be attacked followed by Joshua. My heart bleeds more for Joshua. I have friends who are 'different' as the world loves to call it and I wish everyone can understand that this is not a choice. It is not something one can pray away or cast away.

Everyone exits the room after Khaphela is done. I watch him sit down on his seat and sigh heavily. I am sure that was also tough on him but that doesn't mean he did the right thing.

"What happened to waiting for the seer?" I question and he shakes his head.

“People are doing as they please and I am waiting for a man that is not even coming.”

“You could have at least told me first or asked for advice,” I say.

“This is my family, Robert. I know that I asked for your help but I know what is best for my family.”

“Getting Amahle married? Is that what is best? She is a child! I understand that she messed up but Khaphela we all deserve a second chance.” I say and he covers his face with his palms.

“Try spending a day in my shoes, Robert. In my position, you would have done the same.”

Maybe! Maybe no! “Well, only you know what your family is going through. The seer said he is on his way. Must I send him back?” I question.

“Let him come.” He sounds exhausted. I want to talk to him about Josh but today is not the day. I excuse myself. I didn’t even get the chance to brush my teeth, being summoned so early. I pass by the kitchen. I woke up very hungry. I see Karen taking out a plastic and I hide when she looks around. She takes something from that plastic and puts it in the cup in front of her and stirs. I wonder who that tea is for and what was the stuff she put in. When she is done, she sits down and drinks the tea.

Women and their roots. I guess maybe it’s one of those things women drink to make their

husbands happy in bed. I won't dwell much on it. I don't even go into the kitchen, I go to my room to bathe.

LALETI

I went to check on Khumbulani and found him with Amahle and Aiden in his room. I love how the kids are together even though their mother and I fight sometimes. It seems Amahle is crying and they are consoling her. Such beautiful souls. I greet them and then ask them to talk to Amahle. You know we could be shouting at her yet there is more to her story.

I sit on the bed and hold her hands, "How are you, Amahle?"

“I am good, mom.”

“Nana, what happened?” I know that sounds stupid, “Why didn’t you tell your mother or me? You are six months Amahle.”

“I was scared. I know we are not allowed to fall in love with commoners.”

I really don’t know what to say. Amahle is a child but it is done, she is pregnant and no amount of yelling or regret can reverse things. I think this thing of royalty marrying royalty ruins everything. The kids start sneaking around and then they get pregnant in the process. I hug Amahle. Surprisingly, I have never hugged Quinn like this. I wonder if she will let me in. I know she hates me but I will try.

From Amahle's room, I go to Quinn's today the room is locked so I knock. She ignores me for a while but I know she is in there. I asked Nandi and she told me she is in her room. I am sure she is angry about what her father said. I know how she feels because I was once in her position.

"Quinny!" I continuously knock.

"Go away!"

"I am not going anywhere, come open this door. If you don't, I will keep knocking and annoying you." I knock louder and after a while, she opens.

“What do you want?”

“I come in peace, with yoghurt.” I wave the two spoons.

“Come in but I don’t want your yoghurt.”

“Why? You love it,” I sit on the couch and she sits opposite me. She looks sad. She must love this boy, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“You’d never understand.”

I reach for her hand and hold it, luckily she lets me. I cup her hand with mine, “I understand baby. I was once in love with someone who is not royalty. I hate the word commoner by the

way.”

She chuckles, “Me too.”

“I was once in love with this dark chocolate man. I knew there was no future and he wouldn’t take no for an answer so we dated and I fell in love. But unfortunately, I had to leave him for your father. It’s not easy being royalty but this is our fate. I grew to love your father and here we are today.”

“But you left the other man on your own. It’s different. I am being forced to leave the man I love,” she utters, lowly.

“Everything happens for a reason. God knows why you are being paired with this prince. For

he knows the plans he has for you and they are not plans to harm you but to prosper you.”

“But then why did this God bring the other boy into my life? Why did he make me love him so much if he is not for me?” she questions.

“Some people come into our lives temporarily and they come with something or leave something when they go.”

“That doesn’t even make sense mom,” I can see the pain in her eyes but I know it’s just a season and everything will be fine so I go to her side and hug her. She keeps muttering ‘It’s not fair’ I know that very well. Life isn’t fair.

“Breakfast is ready!” Karen announces standing

by the door.

I answer, “Karen you don’t have to make breakfast, we have helpers for that.”

She smiles, “I didn’t make it but breakfast is ready. I know everyone is sad today but we all need to eat.”

I stand up and help Quinn up, next stop Joshua’s room. It takes a little convincing but then he agrees to come to eat. We also call Khumbulani, Aiden and Amahle. Khaphela and Robert are already at the table. I can tell they were not expecting everyone to come. We all sit down and the helpers start serving us.

“Okay let us pray first,” I say and then hear

mumbles from the kids. These little devils. We all join hands then I start to pray until a voice interrupts me.

“Don’t eat the food!”

I open my eyes and look in the direction where the voice is coming from. Quinn is at it again, that hoarse voice like the other day. She adds, “They put something in the food.”

“Quinn!” - Khaphela.

“Don’t eat the food,” she repeats in that scary voice and the other kids get off their chairs.

“Quinn are you...” Karen tries to touch her but

she pushes her away.

“Don’t touch me, witch!”

Lord have mercy. Karen quickly stands back and shuts up. Did she call her a witch? “You are all rotten,” she points at us moving her finger left and right, “You are all witches! Karen and Laleti!” she yells.

“Quinn stop this madness now, what is wrong with people in this house?” Robert steps in. My heart is pounding and I have my fingers crossed. If she says it I am done.

Quinn rubs her eyes furiously then says, “I am going to bed.”

She turns and leaves the room leaving us all stunned. Khaphela calls the helpers and tells them to throw out the food.

QUINN

Afternoon naps are the worst. You wake up feeling like a train ran over you. I don't even remember when I came to bed but I am so hungry. I go to the bathroom, use the bathroom then fix myself up. I look terrible. Afternoon naps suck. I head to the kitchen to find something to eat. I am staving. I wish to check on Lucas but my phone is dead. I will ask Joshua to lend me his old phone.

Where is everybody? I eat then go sit outside. I need some air. While I am still outside, a car drives in. It looks like a cab/taxi. A man who

looks in his early sixties walks out. I stand up and walk to him – maybe he is our visitor.

“Good afternoon!”

“Hello, is the king in?” he asks after waving the driver off.

“Yes, please follow me.” Is my father even in? I try to walk away but he holds my wrist, tight.

“What did you do?”

“What do you mean?” I try to break loose by his grip is tight.

“You messed with someone’s fate. That boy

was supposed to die in the forest. You have ruined his life.”

I forcefully push his hand off me, “What are you talking about?”

“That boy you saved. You were not supposed to do that. His time was up.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 30

QUINN

What is this old man saying? What does he mean I messed up Lucas’s life? What fate is he

talking about? I didn't know that Lucas is supposed to die, even if I did – I was going to help him. I mean I have the power to save him. Why would God or whatever the reason I had that dream show me Lucas is he is not meant to be in my life?

Or maybe this is all my father's doing. Maybe he sent this man to intimidate me. I am not marrying anyone that I don't love. Over my dead body, cows will fly the day they force me to do that.

Before I can question the old man, I hear uncle Robert's loud voice. He is walking toward us wearing the widest smile, "Dlamini!"

I guess he is referring to the old man. They share greetings and ask each other about the

weather. I could use this opportunity to leave but my head is filled with questions. What does this old man mean when he says Lucas was supposed to die? Does it mean Lucas and I were not supposed to meet? Then why did I see him in my dream before meeting him?

“Don’t just stand there,” Uncle Robert’s voice brings me back from my thoughts, “Go inside and call your father. Tell him the seer is here.”

I nod and walk to the house. This is not the royal seer and what do they need a seer for? Since my father is not in the throne room, I look for him in his room. I am mad at him though. He of all people should understand. I also want to ask him to buy me a new phone. I doubt he will agree because that phone was new after I dropped the other one kissing Lucas.

I get to my father's room and knock. He permits me to come in. I slowly open the door and get in. I find him sitting on the couch with his face buried in his palms. He must be going through a lot but that doesn't mean he should force us to do things we don't want. I know he is the parent and he knows best but he was once in love with someone who is not royalty and should understand better.

"Quinn!" he stands up as soon as he notices it's me. He walks to me and cups my face, "Are you okay? You scared us during breakfast."

"What do you mean?"

"You don't remember anything? You don't

remember what you said?" he questions, his face laced with worry. Am I supposed to remember something? Did I forget something?

I clear my throat, "Uncle Robert says the seer is here."

"Go and call everyone to come to the throne room. Quinn are you sure you don't remember?"

I shake my head, "Am I supposed to remember something?"

"It's okay. Go and call everyone."

I nod and walk toward the door then turn when I open it, "Baba can you please buy me a new

phone? I don't know what happened to my phone. The screen broke."

"Quinn you haven't been using that phone for a week and it's dead?"

"Please! I promise to keep the new one safe," I lock my palms together. He shakes his head and goes to his side table, opens the drawer and takes out a white box.

"This was supposed to be Karen's but I will get her another one."

"Thank you! Thank you!" I throw myself in his arms and then rush out of the room. I need to set everything up then call Lucas. I need to check if he is okay. I call everyone and tell them

father wants to see us. I don't know why Karen and Laleti acted as if they have seen a ghost when they saw me.

We are all now gathered in the throne room waiting for my father to join us. The king is sure taking his time because we have been here for more than half an hour. I think only I know that this is the seer because everyone else thinks Dlamini is just a visitor.

My father walks into the room. Carrying that aura of power that screams 'I am the head of this house' then he sits down. Dlamini greets him and then we all wait to hear why we have been summoned. The helpers walk into the room and serve everyone juice but Dlamini turns his down. So does Uncle Robert – a part of me tells me they want alcohol.

My father clears his throat, “This is Dlamini, the seer. He is here to help the family.”

Mom Karen and Laleti choke at the same time and both go on coughing competition as if they are going to die. Mom Laleti stands up, I assume to exit the room but my father orders her to sit couch. One of the helpers gets them water then my father asks all the helpers and guards to excuse us. It takes a while for Karen to stop coughing but eventually she does.

I wonder what that was all about. I look over at Dlamini and he now has his little straw mat laid in front of him. Shakes something that he is holding, I don't know what it is but he shakes it then asks my father to blow on it and then recites the Mandela clan names and ask them

to show him whatever they want to show him.

Should we be here? This seems like the grown-up stuff. I look at Joshua and he shrugs. It seems he is also clueless as I am. Khumbulani seems fascinated by all this. Of course, he would. Amahle looks terrified – I am sure she assumes this is all for her. Well, Aiden is playing games on his phone. He lives in his own world where no one else exists. I wish I could sneak out of the room and go call Lucas. Is he okay? Does his wound hurt? How come he is always getting bitten by snakes? I hope Denzel didn't tell his father that he saw me in Dumazulu. I am barred from their land after all. In my defence, I was at the river. I don't know why I felt the need to go there so early but something was calling me. I think something is wrong with me. I keep wanting to talk to mom Karen about it but I forget.

A loud sound snaps me out of my thoughts and it's coming from the seer. He is making weird noises and muttering inaudible things. I hold on to Josh's hand and squeeze it tight. What is going on? Why is the seer making weird noises? I look at Khumbulani and slap his arm "Stop that!"

He is recording. "Leave me alone."

I snatch his phone from his hand and stop the recording. What goes on in Khumbulani's head? I would love to know what goes on in that big forehead of his.

"There is a dark cloud upon your family, Kumkani. Something is blocking me from

seeing what it is, something is fighting with my spirit so that I may not see," says the seer. Dark cloud?

Uncle Robert asks, "How can we remove this dark cloud?"

The seer answers, "Something dark was done in this house by a person closer than you think. Only they have the power to reverse this and set everyone free."

Why is this old man speaking in riddles? Or maybe my father and the others understand. It's now my father's turn to ask, "Who is this person that did something?"

"Your wife," the seer answers.

I see my father's jaw tense, "Which one, I have two wives?"

The seer goes back to making his weird noise, "The truth will come out and the sun will rise again in the royal house."

The sun will rise again? What the hell does that mean? The sun rises every day. Old people! So one of my mothers did something? I wonder who it is.

"But be careful," the seer emphasizes, "One of the kid's stars was stolen and then have a bad omen hovering above them. The person that can fix it, is the same person that is behind it all."

I am just going to stop listening because this old man is not making sense. I look at my father and I can tell he is angry. He looks like he wants to grab someone by the throat. I would be angry if in his position because in other words, the seer is saying between Laleti and Karen one of them is using witchcraft.

“Can’t you see who could be using witchcraft?”
Uncle Robert asks.

The seer shakes his head, “It’s all dark but don’t worry the ancestors gave you a gift. She will bring peace and happiness to this royal house. She possesses a gift from the gods.”

I wonder who the lucky goddess is. Can these

people be done so I can call Lucas? I don't get to hear what else the seer says but I am brought back from my thoughts by Joshua snapping his fingers in my face. I look at the seer who has his eyes on me. Is he talking to me?

The seer says, "I see great things coming your way. The union between you and the prince of Dumazulu will bring peace between the two kingdoms. I see you sitting on the throne with your husband next to you. The gods have chosen you. You will be the fairest queen of them all and Denzel will be a wise king. Just because he will have you by his side, he will reign successfully until he passes the throne to his son."

I stand up, "I am not marrying Denzel. I don't

care what the gods or the ancestors think. I love Lucas!”

“There is a fault in your stars. You two are not meant to be. You might have saved him but that wasn’t his fate. Bad things will continue to happen until his fate is fulfilled.”

“But that is not fair!” I scream.

“Life isn’t fair child and the sooner you accept that prince Denzel is the one for you, the better.”

I storm out of the room. I refuse to believe this. If I am not meant to be with Lucas then why do I love him so much? Why did I dream about him? Why did I save him? This is all not fair. I lock myself in my room and take my new phone. I

put in my sim card and then call Lucas. I don't care what the seer says. Lucas picks up after the third ring

Lucas: Hey princess!

Me: Elope with me.

Lucas: I would love to but princess we can't just elope without a plan.

Me: We will figure it out. As long as we are together.

Lucas: Life is tough out there princess. I love you and I know you love me too but our love won't put food on the table. We need to think

this through.

Me: I don't have time to think, Lucas! They will make me marry Denzel and I don't want to. I want you.

Lucas: (Sighs) You know I love you but this is a bad idea. Trust me I know how tough life is. You are used to the good life, princess I won't be able to take care of you yet. Give me some time, please!

Me: Can we meet? I know we are barred from seeing each other but please can I see you, in case something happens?

Lucas: Let's meet by the river at dawn.

Me: Okay.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 31

KHAPHELA

I watch as Robert walks the seer out. I feel like strangling someone. How I wish I had not called the kids in this room. Now they know everything. Now they know that one of their mothers is a witch. I am trying to think who it could be but I can't. Even if I ask them, I know they will deny it. I hate this, I wish the seer had pointed out who it is so I can kick them out of my house. I don't care if one of the kids will be affected. The seer

did say that the gods gave us Quinn.

I look at Karen and Laleti who are sitting in front of me looking like two kids that have been called to the principal's office because they were being naughty. Only if they knew how much anger and disappointment I feel towards them. How can they do this? I love them equally, I take care of them and treat them like the queens that they are but what do they do? They fight, they harass kids and they use witchcraft.

"You may leave," I say trying to contain my disappointment. Why are the ancestors forsaking me? They gave me the throne but still, they are not protecting me from the things that are attacking me.

"Baba I just want you to know that I would never

use witchcraft. Not on our children and not on anyone,” says Karen.

“What is that supposed to mean? Are you saying I am using witchcraft?’ Laleti fires back, “You are the one that knows how to mix things. Maybe you did something.”

Karen claps, “If I did something don’t you think I would have tried to get rid of you? Why be the second wife when I can be the only wife if I knew how to mix things.”

“Maybe you failed! I serve a living God that is beyond witchcraft,” Laleti yells back.

“Enough! Why do you two act like kids? Go to your rooms before I send you back to your

parents and this time don't think I will call you back," I warn. They are even fighting in front of me. They have no shame.

They both leave the room then moments later Robert walks in. Honestly, I am exhausted and I don't want to hear anything or be given any advice. My mind is worried about one thing, the seer also mentioned that I am grooming the wrong person. What does that mean? Does it mean Joshua is not the rightful heir?

"Brother, please! I am exhausted," I stop Robert when he tries to say something.

"Maybe you should take a break brother. Take a break before you lose your mind. I know it is not easy being King. You are not weak for choosing to rest."

I shake my head, “Who will watch over Matshoba? My wives will kill each other, Quinn needs to be prepared for Denzel, and Joshua needs to be groomed. Amahle is pregnant.”

“Let me handle things for you while you rest. Go home and visit our parents, I promise to keep everything in order while you are away. You need a break and there is nothing wrong with that.”

I exhale heavily, “You are right. A week away will do me some good. I will call the elders and tell them that you will be their temporary king while I am away. I trust you and I know you can do this. I think I will do two weeks.”

He shifts closer, hugs me then exits the room. I could use a break. I am tired. I know my father warned me that things would get tough but this is all too much. It's too much for one person to handle. I will lose my mind if I continue like this. I take out my phone and call my mother. It has been long since I talked to her.

Mom: Look who decided to remember me. Since you became king, you forgot you have parents.

Me: In my defence, I am busy protecting my people and my family.

Mom: I know son, being Kumkani is not easy. I saw how tough it was even on your father when he was king.

Me: To think he said to me it's easy as pie.

Mom: (laughing) Even pie is hard to make so there is no such thing. How is everyone and how are my grandchildren?

Me: Everyone is fine. The kids keep asking when we are visiting.

Mom: Tell them they can visit anytime.

Me: Schools are about to open so we will see next holiday.

Mom: Why did you really call, Khaphela? And don't say it's nothing.

Me: I want to take some time off and visit that side. I will explain everything when I get there.

Mom: You can visit anytime. You don't have to ask for permission. Who will watch over things while you are away, if I may ask?

Me: Robert is here and he will keep an eye on things for me.

Mom: No problem son but make sure you warn him not to get too excited. You know how crazy your brother is. You might find Matshoba with a different name.

Me: (laughing) He is crazy but I know he will take this seriously.

Mom: Okay son we will see you when you get here.

Me: Make sure you prepare all my favourites. I want my trousers to be tight when I come back to Matshoba.

Mom: You know I got you.

KAREN

After leaving the throne room, Laleti and I went to our rooms. My heart is beating very fast. I didn't know Khaphela was going to bring another seer. I thought it was going to be the royal seer and I could tell that Dlamini was holding back. He wasn't saying everything he

was seeing. What if he tells Khaphela on the side? Great ancestors help me. The door opens and I sprint on my feet. Laleti walks in. What does she want?

“Oh, so you are using witchcraft now? As if taking my husband wasn’t enough, now you are using muthi on him,” she speaks tabbing her foot on the floor with her hands on her hips.

She better not try me. I might know how to mix things but she is not innocent also, “Or maybe it’s you, Mrs Holy. Maybe it’s you busy hiding behind the bible when you use witchcraft.”

“One day Karen! One day your evil deeds will be exposed and you will be left in the open for everyone to see who you really are.”

I laugh, “I guess that makes two of us, Laleti. You also used something, am I lying?” I ask and see her swallow hard.

“I don’t know what you are talking about.”

I shift closer and whisper, “You know exactly what I am talking about. You are not so holy after all.”

“I was doing it for good!”

“Were you?” I question and she doesn’t respond, “You knew Khaphela was going to kick you out and you used witchcraft, Laleti.”

“I did not use witchcraft! I only saved my daughter okay! I am sure any mother would have done the same.”

I retort, “You gave your daughter to a water spirit. You performed a ritual at the river. No wonder she loves the water so much, she is a Mami Wata (Mammy Water).”

‘Shut up! Shut up Karen, you don’t know what you are saying,” she storms out of the room.

I take a deep breath. Laleti might have done a ritual to save her daughter but my sins are worse. I take out my phone and call Nomasonto.

Nomasonto: What is it now?

Me: Khaphela brought another seer. Things are bad here.

Nomasonto: Sister just throw in the towel. You have tried everything to save that marriage.

Me: Why are you being like this? You are the one who always tells me to fight.

Nomasonto: I don't want to lose my gift too. I am sorry sister but you are alone.

Me: Nomasonto you started this, why the change of heart?

Nomasonto: They took my daughter, Karen. I think it's punishment for all my bad deeds.

Me: Nothando is no more? What happened?

Nomasonto: She drowned in the river. I sent you a text message.

Me: I am so sorry, I was with Khaphela and I didn't see it.

Nomasonto: This is a sign that I might stop all the bad deeds. I am sorry sister but I am washing my hands.

She hangs up. How can she do me like this? She was the one that suggested all this. Okay, I was involved but why is she abandoning me? The ancestors are not punishing her, it was Nothando's time. I need to act fast. Since I can't

touch Laleti and Quinn then I must use Joshua. He has to be the next king. I will make sure of it.

QUINN

I hardly slept, the only thing on my mind is Lucas. I can't believe he is not the chosen one for me. Why are the ancestors so cruel? Why won't they see that I love this boy? I am in love with this boy. I wake up at three am and bathe. I have to try and sneak out of the house without anyone noticing, not even Nandi. I bathe and put on a pink, floral dress that is long-sleeved and above the knees. It's not that cold so I don't need a jacket.

'I am leaving the palace,' I send a text message to Lucas then put my phone on silent. I wouldn't want it ringing on me. I tiptoe out of my room

and make it to the front door. I know everyone is sleeping and who could be up at three? As to how I have the keys, I stole them last night. My father has spare keys for every door of the house.

I make it safe out of the palace and then walk to the river. I don't want to lie I am so scared and it's dark but all in the name of love, right?

'It's so dark, are you okay?' a text message from Lucas.

'I am scared but it's all worth it.'

'I am sorry that we have to do this. You deserve better.' – Lucas.

'You are the one I want.'

"Where are you going alone..."

I scream then quickly cover my mouth. Oh my God, I think I peed on myself a little. Where is this lady going at three in the morning? "Lady you scared me! Where are you going in the dark?"

"Where are you going?"

I clear my throat, "To...to the river."

"I am also heading that way, let's go," she leads the way. I don't trust her but I follow anyway. She is wearing a white dress, I don't know why I

didn't see her coming. We walk and she is quiet. It's a distance from the palace to the river by foot and I am grateful for this lady. I check the time and it's going to half-four am. The darkness is starting to disappear.

"Take care of Lucas please!" the lady says.

My phone vibrates and it's Lucas telling me he is at the river. "How do you know...Lu."

Where did she go? I look around me and there is no one. Why didn't she say goodbye? I am near the river, maybe she was going the other direction. I go to my secret spot with Lucas and find him waiting for me.

"Hey," he hugs me, "Are you okay?"

“Yeah and you. You didn’t get bitten by a snake, right?”

He chuckles and kisses me, “Not this time.”

“I can’t believe we now have to do this to see each other.”

He holds me tight, “We have no choice, ours is the forbidden love.”

“My father is forcing me to marry Denzel. They are going to start grooming me. Even the seer says he is the chosen one for me. The seer is wrong. I want you.”

He doesn't respond, I am sure that must have stung. I break loose from his embrace, place my hand on the back of his neck and lower his face to my height. I kiss him, hungrily. He responds, lifting me and letting me wrap my leg around his waist.

"If they are going to force me to marry Denzel then I want you to be my first."

He shakes his head, "Princess I can't do that to you. Your first time has to be special, not at the river."

"I don't care. As long as it's with you," I unzip my dress and take it off.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 32

QUINN

This is not how I pictured my first time to be like but I am glad it is with the person I love. I am glad that even though we can't be together, he has a part of me with him. The seer said Lucas is not the one for me but then why are my feelings for him so strong? I wish he could take the offer of eloping with me but I guess he is right, we need a plan first.

I am so grateful I carried this throw blanket with me because it sure came in handy. I can't believe I lost my virginity at the river but at least the river is a place I cherish the most so I guess

it's a special place. Although my parents are going to kill me. If they are going to start grooming me for Denzel then they will be expecting me to be a virgin.

The sun is almost up and Lucas is helping me with my dress. I have to go back home before everyone wakes up. Nandi will be mad at me, these days I am always getting her into trouble.

"Are you okay?" Lucas kisses my shoulder and then zips my dress.

"Yes, I am fine."

"Can you walk? It's a distance to your place? Do you want me to walk you home?" He sounds very worried but I lost my virginity not got hurt.

It hurts a little but he is talking to a girl who goes hunting and I have a high pain tolerance.

I turn and face him, "I am fine, Lucas. You should go home. Call me when you get there."

"Okay but please be safe and are you sure you don't want me to walk you home?"

I shake my head, "I will be fine my love."

He leans over and kisses me. I hate that now we have to part ways. I want to spend the day with him. I want to be in his arms for a while longer but as he said, ours is the forbidden love. Why are the ancestors so cruel? Why bring him into my life if it's not meant to be? Why did I dream about him if Denzel is the one for me?

Why didn't they show me, Denzel, since he is the one I saw first? The seer is right, life isn't fair!

"What is this?" I noticed he never takes off this necklace. He always has it on him.

"It belonged to my father, it's the last thing I have of him. I never take it off."

I ask, "How did your parents die? Do you know anything about what happened to them?"

He shakes his head, "I was ten and King Bongani only told me that they were dead. I don't know what killed them because they were not sick or anything."

“Did you get to send them off?”

He nods, “Yes but I was too young to understand anything. When King Bongani said they were gone, I thought he meant they were coming back. Quinn Olga had to explain everything again when I was twelve.”

“I am sorry. I am sure it felt like losing them for the second time.”

“It did but the royal family has been nice to me. I can’t complain. Do you want the necklace?” he asks and I shake my head. Of course, I would love something from him but I can't take this one thing from him.

“It’s a gift from your parents. You said you never

take it off which means it means a lot to you and I can't take it."

He smiles, "You mean a lot to me, princess."

I hug him, I can't take his necklace. I can't even imagine the pain of losing my parents, having to not see them again. I don't think I can survive this world without them. I am sure things must have been hard for Lucas. As much as he says the royal family treated him right but there I no way they would have treated him as Lucas. Even though they became parents to him, they can never feel the void his parents left. I know this because I have two mothers. Karen loves me like her own but at the end of the day she is not my mother and I wish my mother loved me like that and not her. I guess we can't have everything.

Lucas asks me to walk away first. I keep turning and he is just watching me walk away. My heart breaks every time I turn and he waves at me. I want to be with him. I want him, why can't the ancestors understand that?

'I love you, princess.' A text message from Lucas.

'I love you more.'

I wish I could run back to him and kiss him. I walk home and only now I am feeling the distance or maybe it's because I had company going to the river. I wonder who that woman was and where she was heading so early in the morning. And what did she mean by 'take care

of Lucas'

I get home around seven am. Everyone is up and running around as they usually do. I don't know why I am suddenly feeling low. I was happy when I parted ways with Lucas but now my spirit is just down.

"Good morning, princess Quinn."

I hold myself from rolling my eyes. Does this man have to be everywhere? "Good morning Uncle Robert."

"Coming from seeing your lover," he picks out something from my hair, it's a leaf.

“I took a walk.”

“Quinn you need to stop this. I understand you like this boy but you will get him in trouble if you continue like this. You heard that your father said you are to be groomed for prince Denzel. What do you think will happen to that boy if Denzel finds out you were with him?” he asks and I don’t respond, “I know everything seems unfair but you know how strict the royal rules are. If you really care about this boy then stay away from him.”

“But uncle I love him.”

“I know but your future has been planned out and there is nothing you can do. Yes it seems unfair but maybe this is what is right for you,” he retorts.

I nod and head to my room. Nandi tries to talk to me but I don't respond. I lock myself in my room and then run a bath for myself. Life is not fair.

LUCAS

I never imagined I would fall so deeply in love with the princess. God knows I tried to ignore these feelings but I love her. I love her very much. Prince Denzel feels betrayed but it wasn't my intention. I never meant to betray him. I know I am a commoner but with Quinn, it just happened on its own. My feelings for her are just too much.

Everyone is up when I get back at the palace. I

am so going to be in trouble. I hope Quinn also got back home safely. I wanted to walk her home but I can't be seen with her since I am barred from Matshoba and from being with her. King Bongani says he is looking out for me but I know he is just doing it for his son. As much as he treats me like his son, I am not his son and he will always choose Denzel.

"Where are you coming from all dressed up so early?" King Bongani asks as I bump into him in the passage.

"I went for a walk, my king."

"You didn't come for supper last night are you still angry about Quinn?" he questions and I shake my head.

“No, my king.”

He says, “Lucas I am just looking out for you. I know it sounds unfair but I am looking out for you.”

“Okay. I am going to my room.” I walk away and leave him standing. I know he is the king but I confessed to loving someone and he barred me from seeing her. The same person that promised he would help me when I find the woman I love.

I get to my room and to my surprise, Prince Denzel is in my room. He is sitting on my bed and has my sketchbook in his hands. I draw Quinn a lot and she is the only thing in that book.

“Hi, Lucas.”

“What are you doing here?” I ask and he scoffs.

“It’s past seven and I am sure I don’t need to tell you your duties.”

I answer, “My apologies, I went for a walk. I needed some air.”

“You mean you went to see Quinn? Why don’t you listen? Didn’t you hear that Quinn is supposed to be my wife? Why do you keep giving me reasons to hate you?”

“I am not giving you reasons to hate me but I

love Quinn and I am sorry if that pisses you off but she chose me. She wants me, Denzel. Why can't you accept that?" I raise my voice.

"She is the chosen one for me! You should back off because I saw her first."

"I'm sorry but I will back off when the princess tells me to. If you don't mind, I need some privacy." I say and he leaves the room.

Slamming the door behind him. I lock the door and then go take a shower. The princess gave herself to me. I feel bad that I can't love and give her everything I wish to give her.

When I am done with everything I head out. It's going to be hard being around prince Denzel with everything going on. While I am walking down the corridor, something hits me hard in

the head. I fall to my knees and another blow to the head follows. I try to look at the person's face but fail. I lie down on the floor trying to catch my breath and all I can see are their shoes, a woman's shoes. Another blow then it's lights out.

QUINN

"I told you to watch him!"

I wake up screaming and panting. My clothes are drenched in sweat and my face is filled with tears as if I have been crying. I must have fallen asleep after bathing. I take my phone and call Lucas but he doesn't answer. What was that dream? I saw a woman I don't recognize and she was angry at me. She kept asking me why I didn't watch him. I don't know who she was

talking about. 'I told you to watch him' she continuously said.

What could that dream mean? Who was I supposed to watch? I call Lucas again but he doesn't pick up. Why didn't he send me a message when he got to the palace like we agreed on?

'Meet me at the river.' - Lucas

I jump out of bed and put on my shoes. I am now wearing a different dress from the one I was wearing when I went to see Lucas. I call the driver and ask him to drive me to the river.

"Princess I can't let you go alone," argues Nandi.

“Stay and that is an order.”

“I am sorry but I am going to have to tell your father. I don’t want to get in trouble,” she says but I am not scared of my father so I tell her to do whatever she pleases.

I tell the driver to stay with the car near the road while I walk to the river. I can’t find Lucas on our spot but he says he is at the river. I search for him until I hear a male voice greeting me. I turn to see who it is and it’s Denzel. His eyes are bloodshot as if he has been crying.

“Good afternoon, princess.”

“Where is Lucas and why do you have his phone?”

Tears fall down his face, “Lucas is gone.”

“Denzel, what do you mean?”

He hands me the necklace Lucas said his father left him “I thought you would want to have it since you two...”

“What did you do to him?” I scream at him and start throwing punches but he holds both my arms.

“I didn’t do anything. I hate what he did but I didn’t do anything!”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 33

ROBERT

Now I believe my brother when he says being king is not easy. Dealing with people and dealing with Khaphela's kids. I swear Khaphela will find one of his children dead because these kids are spoiled and they are just out of control. Well, at least Karen and Laleti are behaving. I noticed the family no longer gathers at the table like they do when Khaphela is around.

Quinn no longer goes on her trips to the river, she is always locked in her room. Joshua is always with his mother and no longer wants to talk to anyone. Amahle is still very much

pregnant. Aiden lives in his own universe and Khumbulani... I think that boy is special. He is crazy but I think Khaphela should be grooming him to be the next king. He is smart, cares about everyone and loves the kingdom. He would make a great king.

“What are you doing?” I catch Khumbulani outside Quinn’s door. I don’t know what is he doing but he has a knife and a screwdriver that he quickly hides, “What are you doing to your sister’s door?”

“She won’t come out so I am trying to open it.”

“Have you tried knocking?” I ask because he is just applying to fight with his sister. I notice there is a tray of food next to him.

“She hasn’t been out of her room for a while and if she is not coming out then I am breaking her door.”

“Give me that,” I snatch the knife from him. He is not even doing it right. I open the door for him. The room is dark and the curtains are closed. I switch on the lights and Quinn is not on her bed.

I walk in with Khumbulani on my tail. “Quinn!”

She doesn’t respond. I open the curtains and the windows. It looks like they have been closed for ages. Quinn is the tidiest person but her room is a mess right now. I knock on the bathroom door, “Quinn are you in there?”

Still no response. I try the handle and still no response. Khumbulani waves the screwdriver. Well, we have no other choice. I open the door and my eyes land on Quinn who is in a tub full of water. I pull her out, she is not choking or gagging, "Quinn are you crazy?"

"What do you want?"

"Didn't you hear us knocking? Khumbulani no need to cover your eyes, she is dressed." I say.

"I am fine, uncle Robert," she pushes me off her and then stands.

"What are you doing in a tub full of water? Quinn, are you trying to kill yourself?"

“Can I please change? Wait for me out there,” she waves me off. Something is bothering her and her eyes are bloodshot and swollen.

Khumbulani and I go out and close the door. It’s barely closing. I tell Khumbulani to go call everyone and tell them to meet me in the throne room in thirty minutes. We need to set some ground rules. After a while, Quinn joins me and she has fresh clothes on. Is this child eating? She throws herself on the bed and covers herself with the nearest thing.

“Quinn, what’s wrong?”

She mumbles, “It’s nothing.”

“It’s not nothing. Please talk to me. What

happened, did you break up with your lover?”

Instead of answering me, she wails. I go to her and console her. She cries for some time then finally gets quiet, “Talk to me, what is wrong.”

‘They killed him! They killed Lucas.’

“What do you mean? Who killed Lucas and who is Lucas?” I question and she sits up and wipes the tears off her face.

“Lucas is the boy I was seeing. Denzel’s servant, they say one of their palace maids found him bleeding on the floor. They assume that he fell and hit his head hard but I don’t believe it. Someone knew I was with him and they killed him.”

I rub her back, “Maybe he really fell. Quinn killing someone isn’t an easy thing and who would want him dead?”

“I don’t know but maybe one of the royals was trying to separate us. Maybe Denzel...I know he was angry that I betrayed him.”

“Who told you that Lucas is dead?” I ask.

“Denzel told me. He said since Lucas and I were together then I needed to know.”

I exhale heavily. This is what I was worried about. The royal house will do anything to protect its own. This is why I wanted Quinn to stay away from that boy. I am sure prince

Denzel is innocent in all this and the parents or elders handled everything. I saw it on Khaphela and Karen. Karen got pregnant first but they hid it from everyone including Khaphela. I pull Quinn into my arms, I know this is hard on her but it will pass. I force Quinn to eat the food that Khumbulani had brought her then we join everyone after that.

I still can't wrap my head around that one of Khaphela's wives is using witchcraft. I bet all I have it's Karen, she is the one that knows about medicine and things in that department but again I can't judge a book by its cover. Joshua is the last one to walk into the room and the boy looks like he has been through forty world wars. What is going on with people in this house?

“Josh are you okay?”

He doesn't respond but looks down. What is going on with this boy? I clear my throat, "Okay, what is going on with everyone? Why isn't everyone eating together like we used to?"

No one responds again. It seems they no longer have mouths, "Khumbulani and Aiden, get ready the car is taking you to school tomorrow morning. Amahle I managed to talk to your father and he is letting you stay here so you don't have to live in fear although the uncles visited your boy's family. Joshua, I want to talk to you and Quinn, I know you are going through a lot but your aunt Lano is coming. You know why. Since no one wants to talk, you may leave for your rooms but Laleti and Karen can you stay."

All the kids stand up and go in different directions, “Josh and Quinn! Go get some air, some sun...please!”

They hold hands and head towards the front door. I shift my attention to the witches, “Look, I have nothing against you two but whoever is using witchcraft between you two better stop. Remember nothing stays hidden. One day you will be exposed and as it is Khaphela is being very patient with you two. Don’t push him to reveal how ruthless he can get.”

No response. How does Khaphela deal with these people? My goodness. I tell them to leave. I need to talk to Joshua, his father might not understand what he is going through but I do. Something is not okay with him and I will find out

DENZEL

Honestly, I was very angry at Lucas when he confessed that he loves Quinn. I felt betrayed and all I felt was hate towards him. I hated what he did but I didn't wish him death. When my father told me that he was no more, I couldn't believe my ears. I grew up with Lucas around me, he was like a brother to me. I know I said things out of anger but God knows I never wished death on him. I cared about Lucas and what hurts me the most is that we never got to fix things before he passed away. I wish I had told him that I love Quinn but I was happy for him.

Now I will never get to apologize for all the hurtful things I said to him. I will never get to tell

him my secrets and how much I sometimes hate to be a prince. I will never get to walk around Dumazulu with him like I used to. He is gone and I still don't understand how one can fall and die just like that. My father says it was his time but why him? Not only did I lose my best friend but I also lost a brother. He was more than just a servant to me.

"Prince Denzel we should go back home," that's my new servant. I am finding it hard to get used to him. I am used to Lucas, Lucas would make jokes and wasn't this uptight.

"We will go back now." I am by the river that divides Matshoba and Dumazulu. I don't know why but I am here.

I take out my phone and send a text message to

princess Quinn, 'Hi.'

'Hi.' – Quinn.

'How are you copying? Lucas's death must be hard on you too.'

'Don't act like you are not happy that he is now out of the picture. Don't worry I am now all yours. I am to be groomed for you.' – Quinn.

'Quinn unlike you I grew up with Lucas. I know him better than anyone. I am just as hurt by his passing away. I cared about him too.'

'Well, he is gone. I really loved him, Denzel.' – Quinn.

'I loved him too. I hope he is at peace.'

'Can see his grave?' – Quinn.

'My father had him buried in his mother's village, next to his parents. We can go there when you are free.'

'Okay.' – Quinn.

'Let me go home, I am at the river that divides Matshoba and Dumazulu.'

'I am also at the river near the baobab tree.' – Quinn.

‘Where I can’t see you?’

I guess she was sitting because I can see someone waving from across the river. I type ‘Can I come there?’

She permits me and I find a way to cross the river. I find her sitting on a rock. This is a nice spot. I sit next to her. She sighs and rests her head on my shoulder while playing with Lucas’s necklace then whispers, “I can’t believe he is gone.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 34

QUINN

Denzel and I are still at the river. We are just sitting there in silence. Denzel and I are not close and we don't have anything to talk about. I have never asked him about anything. The only thing we have in common is losing Lucas. Until this day I can't make sense of his death. He fell and hit his head, on what? What was so dangerous in the passage that could kill someone? I guess only God knows this. Maybe the seer was right, this was his fate. Although I don't see why he was brought into my life. What was the reason for us falling in love if I was going to end up losing him?

"Don't fall asleep there," Denzel breaks the silence.

“I won’t, don’t worry,” I chuckle and stand up then stretch myself. He also does the same, “I should go home.”

“Take it easy and get some rest your eyes look tired.”

“I will, it’s just that I wasn’t expecting to lose Lucas so soon. I wasn’t expecting to lose him ever. I know we weren’t meant to be but he didn’t deserve to die. I feel like it’s my fault. Had I stayed away from him maybe all this wouldn’t have happened,” I say wiping the tears that just fell on my face.

He shifts closer and pulls me into his arms, “We all weren’t expecting to lose him so soon.”

Someone clears their throat. I shift away from Denzel to see who it is and it's Nandi. She greets Denzel and then tells me that my uncle is looking for me. I bid Denzel goodbye then follow behind Nandi. Nandi doesn't know about Lucas and me. Only a few people know. It hurts, it hurts that I didn't even get to say goodbye to him. It hurts that he is dead because of me. My uncle warned me that I would get him in trouble but I was stubborn. Even the seer warned me.

I am quiet the whole way home, Nandi is trying to make small talk but I am not in the mood. When I get home I go to my room. I don't care if my uncle is looking for me. I didn't even get the chance to tell Joshua about Lucas. He is always locked up in his room and doesn't want to talk to anyone, not even me. I tried reaching out but he is shutting me out. I really want to be there for my brother but he is not letting me. I also

have my own problems to deal with.

I go to my WhatsApp and play the last voice note Lucas sent me and it makes me cry more. He is really gone and I will never see him again. I lie on the bed facing the ceiling. My father is coming back with my aunt meaning soon I will be married to Denzel, and soon I will be a Bhebhe.

My phone rings and it's Denzel. I don't want to talk to him. I want my Lucas. If anyone was behind his death may he be punished greatly. I am trying to ignore Denzel but he won't stop calling. I take a deep breath and then answer.

Me: Hey.

Denzel: Princess don't tell me you are crying again.

Me: I can't help it.

Denzel: I know you are hurt but I am sure Lucas wouldn't want you to be sad. He would love to see you happy please don't be sad otherwise he won't rest in peace.

Me: It's hard to let go. It's hard to accept that he is gone forever.

Denzel: Please cheer up! What can I do to cheer you up? I would do anything.

Me: I will be fine Denzel

Denzel: I am coming to Matshoba.

Me: You don't have to, I am fine.

Denzel: Okay...

He hangs up and I sink back on the bed. I used to judge how dramatic people get when they lose someone but now I understand. It hurts. The thought of never seeing them. It hurts a lot. I didn't even get to say goodbye to my love.

Someone knocks on my bedroom door and I ignore it. I know it's Nandi. I know she wants me to come to eat or it's about uncle Robert wanting to see me but I am not in the mood. I will eat when I am hungry.

“Princess!” that is Nandi.

“What is it?”

“You have a visitor, may I come in,” she says already in the room. These days she dialled down the barging into my room.

“I don’t want any visitors, tell them I am sleeping.”

“I am afraid they are already outside your room and very insisting,” she mumbles. Why would she bring someone outside my room without talking to me first?

“No, Nandi. I don’t want any visitors. Tell them to go away.”

“I am sorry but I had to come to check on you,” Denzel walks into my room. Nandi uses that opportunity to leave the room. Do people ever listen? I don’t want visitors.

“Denzel I told you I am fine.”

He pulls a chair right in front of my studying table and sits, “I am sorry but you didn’t sound okay. I can’t even imagine the pain you are going through.”

“I will be fine, with time I will heal.”

He nods, "I know but as I said, I wanted to check on you."

Why do I get a feeling he just wants to spend time with me? I know we are both still grieving Lucas but he better not use this to his advantage. We sit in silence, we are strangers after all. I just want him to leave so I can sleep in peace. Someone knocks again and lets themselves in. People are back to coming into my room as they please. I am surprised prince Denzel is still here because my room is a mess. I told the helpers not to clean it anymore. Khumbulani walks in carrying a tray of food. This brother of mine! He brings me food to my room these days. I wonder who will bring me food after he leaves for school.

"Lunch for the future queen of Dumazulu," it's

clear he did not see Denzel. Why would he say that? I clear my throat and signal that someone is in the room with my head, “Oh you have a visitor. Who are you?”

Denzel stands up to shake his hand, “I am Denzel, prince of Dumazulu.”

“Oh! Well I am going to school tomorrow and I need you to watch my sister for me, can you do that?” – Khumbulani.

“Khumbulani get out!”

Denzel retorts, “I will do that, I promise.”

“Good!” he shoves the tray of food in Denzel’s

arms, "She better finish this food."

Is Khumbulani okay? He sure has a loose screw in his head. He exits the room after showing Denzel the 'I'm watching you' gesture. I need a new brother. I need a new family. Denzel comes to sit in front of me. I hope he is not going to force me to eat as my uncle did.

"You need to eat, princess," he says.

"Don't listen to Khumbulani, he has a loose screw in his head."

He chuckles, "He cares about you. I also care and that's why I am going to make sure you eat this. I don't want to get in trouble with you brother."

“Denzel I am not hungry.”

“You don’t have to eat much, you need it,” he smiles. Why is he treating me like a baby? Now he is going to feed me, a whole prince. I take my time to look at him. He is not that bad looking but too bad I still love Lucas even though he is dead.

JOSHUA

“Joshua open this door!”

My mother continuously knocks on my bedroom door. I don’t want to talk to her. This woman doesn’t care about me. I am even surprised that she is my mother, someone who

gave birth to me yet all she wants is to use me. She wants me on the throne. She doesn't care how I get there but she wants me on the throne. She doesn't even care that I am gay. I thought coming out to the family will free me but I regret it very much. I wish I had stayed in the closet. I wish I had pretended like I was doing and left everyone in the dark. My father didn't even hear me out. I thought maybe he would also understand but I was wrong. No one cares about me in this house.

The painful part is that my mother is part of those people. She thinks it's a spirit that needs to be cleaned out. She has been forcing me to drink some herbs and I hate them. They always make me sick. I hate this house. A part of me is tempted to run away but my mother now has people watching me 24/7. She now has people watching me, she is forcing me to drink stuff,

and she is forcing me to eat stuff. I hate my life. Why won't they understand that I don't want to be king?

“Joshua open this door right now!”

Did I mention she has also become violent these days? I get out of bed and go to open the door. I feel sick and I think it is because of all these herbs she has been making me drink. I open the door and she pushes me out of the way getting in.

“What is wrong with you? Do I have to break your door first for you to open the door?” I don't respond. She hands me a bottle with some black stuff in it, “Drink this!”

“What is that?”

“Don’t question me and drink it! It will help you,” she retorts.

“Mom I am not feeling well please stop making me drink these things. Please if you care about me like you say you do then stop this. I am gay not possessed. Please!”

She shifts closer, “I am just trying to help you and if you are sick then I will mix something for you.”

“I don’t want your medicine! Your stupid herbs are the reason I am sick. Please stop this!”

“What is going on and what herbs are you making him drink?” Uncle Robert walks into the room.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 35

ROBERT

“What is going on and what herbs are you making him drink?” I ask walking into Joshua’s room. I knew something was up with Joshua. This boy suddenly doesn’t want to talk to anyone and is always in his room. Not forgetting how he is losing weight. Well, Quinn is also losing weight but Joshua looks sick.

I look at Karen who now has her head down and then Joshua who is carrying a small bottle with some black stuff inside, “Joshua what is that?”

He hides the bottle behind his back and looks at his mother then back to looking at his shoes. I walk to him and snatch the bottle from him. What is Karen making this boy drink? I heard their argument when I was passing by. I inspect the bottle – what is this stuff?

“Karen, what is this? What are you making this boy drink and what is it for?” I ask and she doesn’t respond. You know what, I am done being polite to these people. Khaphela will find one of her wives without a tooth, “What is this stuff Karen!”

“Don’t shout at me Robert, this is between me

and my son. Stay out of our business.”

“Listen woman, I am not your husband that you speak to however you please. I will slap you so hard that you will forget your name. What is this stuff?” I am starting to lose my patience.

“It’s something to help him, he is not feeling well,” she mumbles.

“Then take him to the doctor. Do you know that this stuff could be the reason he is sick? These traditional medicines are not safe sometimes,’ I shift my attention to Joshua, “Is it true that you are sick?”

Joshua looks down and I can tell that he is scared of his mother. I grab Karen by her arm

and shove her out of the room then lock the door. I can hear her yelling from the other side but I don't care. This is about Joshua. I ask Joshua to sit down and I can tell he is not okay, even the way he walks and he is struggling to breathe.

“Josh, what is going on? Please know that you can talk to me about anything. I am on your side.”

He shakes his head and covers his face with a cushion, “I hate my life.”

“Why, what is wrong? Did your mother say something to you?”

“She keeps making me drink her ugly stuff and

now I am sick. Why won't she understand that I didn't ask to be gay," he cries.

"How long has this been happening and Josh why didn't you tell me?"

"No one understands me. They all just want me to be the next king. They don't care how I feel," poor boy. I am sure this must be hard on him and God knows what Karen mixes in these things.

"I am sorry and Josh I understand you. I will always support you. Are you in pain?"

He nods, "My stomach hurts and no matter how much painkillers I take, the pain won't go away."

“How long has your mother been making you take these herbs?”

He answers, “She always makes me take them. Even when we went to her village, she kept forcing me to drink stuff. She started overdoing it when I told her I was gay. She would mix things and force me to drink.”

“Wear your shoes, I am taking you to the hospital and never drink anything she gives you. If she forces you again, tell me.”

I head to the room I am using, change my clothes and then go back to get Joshua. I have seen a case like this and I hope it is not what I think it is. The ancestors help me, I hope I am wrong because I will kill Khaphela’s wife. I drive Josh to the doctor and then wait outside as he

examines him. While waiting, I call Khaphela.

Khaphela: Tired of being king already?

Me: Your family is a lot to handle. I don't wish to be you.

Khaphela: (laughing) It has only been thirteen days, Robert. Man up!

Me: You will find someone dead, I swear!

Khaphela: What happened?

Me: Karen has been forcing Josh to drink some herbs and now the boy is sick. I am not happy, Khaphela. You know how sometimes traditional

herbs are harmful.

Khaphela: I am sure she meant no harm.

Me: She is trying to change him and it is wrong. Being gay doesn't make Josh less of a person. I know you and your family don't understand this but I do and you are not being fair to the boy Khaphela.

Khaphela: Robert put yourself in my shoes, this boy is supposed to be the next king.

Me: Please handle this as a father, not a king. This is your son, do you want him dead to believe he doesn't want this?

Khaphela: Then who will be the next king?

Me: Khumbulani! Please spare poor Joshua.

Khaphela: I hear you. But then I will have to wait for Khumbulani to finish high school and then break the news to him and the family. If I tell him now, I doubt he will focus on school, you know how crazy that boy is. But Robert that boy has a temper, his heart is hard – I don't think he would make a great king.

Me: I have spent time around him and even though he is uptight, he cares about his family. Sometimes being kind is also a weakness.

Khaphela: Okay...please take Joshua to the doctor for me.

Me: We are there. I will tell you the results.

This doctor is taking forever. How long does it take to examine someone? I go and get myself something to drink. When Khaphela comes back, I am going back to my house. I am sure my sweetheart misses me. I have to say women in Matshoba are very beautiful. I would get myself a woman from here but I don't want to be near my brother and his dramatic family. I go back to the benches and the nurses tell me that Joshua has been admitted to the hospital. I go to check on him and he is already in hospital clothes. Is he that sick?

“Hey boy, what did the doctor say?”

He answers, "He says we should wait for the results but he is keeping me here for a while."

"How are you, where does it hurt?"

"In the stomach," he retorts, "Sometimes I just feel tired and struggle to breathe."

"You will be fine, I promise your mother will not let you drink any of her medicine again. I promise, even if it means taking you away from those crazy people."

"Thank you, Uncle Robert," he says with tears glistening in his eyes.

After hundred years, the doctor calls me to his

office. “Tell me you have good news, Doc,” I pull a chair and sit.

“We examined the prince and his kidneys are failing. We are not sure why but...”

I interrupt him, “His mother has been making him take traditional medicine, could that be the cause?”

“Some herbal medicines contain toxic chemicals and heavy metals that can cause kidney failure so maybe that is the cause.”

“How can we help him, Doc?” I ask.

“Kidney transplant is the best possible

treatment.”

“Where are we doing to get a kidney?” I can’t believe this.

The doctor chuckles, “We can put him on the waiting list for donors or one of his family members can donate a kidney to him. They have to go through a test of course to see if they can be a donor.”

“Doctor!” someone yells from outside and the doctor rushes out. They are calling him to Joshua’s room.

QUINN

I wake up screaming. Denzel is still in my room. I don't know why he hasn't left or how I fell asleep but the last thing I remember was him forcing me to eat then he told me to rest. I had another nightmare and this time it was Joshua. Something is wrong with my brother. I can feel it, something is wrong, the same feeling I had the day I lost Lucas.

"It's just a dream princess," says Denzel.

"Something is wrong, I can feel it. Something is going to happen, Denzel."

He cups my face, "Relax, you were just dreaming."

"No you don't understand, my brother is not

okay. I am going to lose him, I am going to lose him just like I lost Lucas. Why am I so unlucky?"

"Okay calm down, do you want me to call someone?" he asks and I shake my head.

"We have no time, I need a candle and matches. I don't know why but I need it. There are candles in my cupboard, please get one for me," I need to calm down. Calm down Quinn, Joshua needs you.

"What kind of a candle, there are different colours?"

"The yellow one, hurry, Denzel!" I yell. He comes with the candle and lights it. I put it on the floor and kneel, "BoMadiba, I need help help with. I

can't lose my brother. Please!"

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 36

QUINN

"Quinn! Are you okay?" Denzel asks me. I am still in a kneeling position and now I am just staring at the candle. What is happening to me? What was that? Why was I asking for Joshua to be saved as if I was talking to someone? Is something wrong with me, what are these dreams? Are the ancestors trying to show me something?

“What is happening to me, Denzel?”

He helps me stand then guides me to the couch in front of my bed and helps me sit. He goes back to the candle and blows it out then takes it back to the cupboard. He comes back to me and sits on the armrest, “Are you okay?”

“Honestly, I don’t even know how I am supposed to feel right now.”

“You can talk to me, what did you dream about?” he asks.

“It’s stupid...I don’t know what is happening to me.”

“Hey, look at me,” he holds my hands, “It’s not stupid. Tell me, what did you dream about?”

“My brother, he was... he was hurt. It is as if he was fighting for his life. I don’t know how to explain it.”

“Okay... I hear you. Do you maybe want us to go check on him?” he asks and I nod. I put on my shoes and we go to Josh’s room but he is not there. I call Nandi.

“My princess you called me.” Nandi bows in courtesy. I told her not to do that.

“Where is my brother Joshua?”

“He left with your uncle, Sonny says they went to the hospital.” She retorts with her head down.

“Is he sick?”

She shakes her head, “Not that I know of.”

“Where is Sonny, did he go with him?”

“No, my princess... your uncle insisted Sonny stays. Did you want something?” she asks.

“Does Sonny know which hospital then went to?”

“I don’t know, my princess,” she answers.

“I am going to follow them and stay here. It’s an order Nandi,” I shift my attention to Denzel,
“Can you please drive me?”

“Sure.”

Denzel leads me to his car. I see he brought his new Lucas. He tells his servant to follow behind, he is going to drive. He brought two cars today. I see it’s not only Nandi who is stubborn, these people want to follow us everywhere. I don’t blame them, it’s their job.

“Relax, I am sure he is fine,” Denzel holds my hand and gently squeezes it.

“I hope so because I can’t lose him. I would die

Denzel.”

I call uncle Robert and ask him which hospital he is in. He tells me and we drive there. I am not familiar with the hospital so it takes us a while to find uncle Robert.

“Uncle, what happened?”

He sighs, “Josh is sick, his kidneys are failing.”

“No! What happened?”

“I will explain everything when he is fine. I think something is wrong Quinn the doctor was called to his room. I hope he is fine – this would kill your father if anything happens to him,” he

says and he sounds defeated as if there is no chance Josh will make it.

I hug him. "He will be fine, the Madibas are with him. It's not his turn yet."

Uncle Robert lets go of me and then looks at Denzel who greets him. Uncle asks, "Where did you come from?"

"I was at your palace, visiting the princess. She asked me to drive her here"

"She is going to be your wife, you will see here all you want." – uncle Robert.

Denzel answers, "I was just checking up on

her.”

A man in a white coat walks toward us and I assume he is the doctor judging by how my uncle rushes to him. Uncle asks, “Is he okay?”

The doctor smiles, “Your ancestors are with him. He is stable.”

Relief! I ask, “Can we see him?”

“Yes, this way,” the doctor shows us where Joshua is. How sick is he that he now needs an oxygen mask? The doctor asks to speak to my uncle then Denzel and I see Joshua.

“Hey, Josh,” I sit on a chair next to his bed, “Are

you okay?"

"I am fine, Quinn. What are you doing here?
Hello Denzel!"

"Prince Josh, how are you?" Denzel waves from afar.

"I am still breathing you can see and Quinn I am fine please don't cry."

I wipe the tears off my face, "You scared me, Josh. Why didn't you tell me you are sick? Why would you hide from me that you are sick?"

"Honestly, I thought it wasn't anything serious."

“What did the doctor say?” I ask.

“He talked to uncle Robert. I hope I don’t have cancer because I can’t die without seeing your babies.”

“You will be fine,” I kiss his hands.

“I am tired.”

“Rest, I will be here okay,” I assure him.

“No, go home and you will come back. Denzel, please take her home for me.”

“I will,” Denzel retorts. Why is he taking orders from my brothers today? Denzel walks to me

and whispers, "Let him rest."

I stand up and kiss Joshua on the forehead then head out. Uncle Robert is still talking to the doctor so I sit with Denzel by the benches. He pulls me into his arms, "He will be fine."

"I know but I am just scared. I can't lose another person."

"You won't," he gently rubs my shoulder.

Uncle Robert joins us. He won't tell me what is wrong with Joshua. Why is he hiding this from me or he doesn't want to talk in front of Denzel? The doctor is keeping Joshua for the night so uncle Robert asks Denzel to go home and he will drive home with me.

“How did you know Joshua is sick?” uncle Robert asks as we drive home.

“As crazy as it sounds, I had a dream about him. I think I am going crazy.”

He chuckles, “You are gifted child not crazy.”

“Gifted? Me? Now that’s crazy.”

“You will understand as time goes on. So you and Denzel are buddies now?” he asks.

“Not really, we are both grieving Lucas.”

Uncle says, "Maybe this is why Lucas was brought to your life. So that you and prince Denzel can have something that brings you together, heal each other and then fall in love."

"If so then that's very messed up because my heart died with Lucas."

"You are young Quinn. I know it hurts but you will move on and prince Denzel is a nice young man. Grieve Lucas but don't dwell much into it. People die and life moves on kid. Life is too short," he advises.

We drive into the yard and before uncle can park the car properly another car speeds in and it's my father's car. He is driving himself today, "Robert where is my son?"

“Calm down, let’s go talk inside.” Uncle Robert whispers.

“No, I want to talk now. In fact, let’s go to the hospital,” he does not wait for uncle to reply, he grabs him by the jacket and pulls him to the car. They drive away at full speed. I wouldn’t be surprised if he didn’t see me. I ask the other driver to park the car nicely, I don’t know how to drive.

I get into the house and I bump into my mother. She smiles, “Hey Quinny.”

“Hey, mom.”

“Are you okay? Have you been crying? What is

wrong?" I don't know if she really cares or if she is trying not to get kicked out of the house since my father promised to kick her out if she is not nice to me.

"Josh is sick."

She gasps, "Where is he? How come we don't know this?"

"He is sick mom and it's bad. I am worried about him."

She hugs me, "Josh will be fine. We will keep him in our prayers okay?"

"What are you two talking about, what is wrong

with my son?" mom Karen speaks from behind us.

I break loose from my mom's embrace and before I can reply to her I feel my body heating up as if something has just taken hold of me. I look at Karen, "What did you do?"

She looks at my mother and then at me, "What...what are you talking about?"

"What did you do Karen?" I scream at her and then close my eyes. Why am I seeing all these weird things when I look at her? Why is she tormenting my spirit with her dirty soul?

"Karen go okay, just go," I hear my mother say then she kneels next to me, "Quinn are you

okay?”

I look at her, “You know about this don’t know? You know why I see and dream about these things don’t you?”

She shakes her head no.

“You know Laleti!”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 37

QUINN

“Mom you know, please tell me because I won’t forgive you if you keep this from me then I happen to find out on my own,” I say. I don’t

know where sometimes I get all this boldness. Sometimes I am scared to talk then the next thing I am calling my mother by her birth name. What really takes over me? I am back to my senses if I can call it that but I can tell my mother is hiding something from me.

“Is that why you hate me?” I ask and tears fall on her face as if that cut deep.

“Quinn I would never hate you. I gave birth to you, why would I hate you?”

“Your actions say otherwise. We both know you wanted me to be a boy, you hate that I am a girl. You hate the sight of me. I am sure if it was up to you, you would kill me,” I say and a sob slips out of her mouth. I am not trying to hurt her but it’s true. My mother hates the sight of me, she

wishes I wasn't born.

"I don't hate you."

"Then why do you treat me the way you treat me? You yell at me, you call me names and you hit me for no reason. What did I ever do to you?"
now I am also crying.

"I don't hate you. I don't know what takes over me but I am willing to fight whatever is making me hate you. We can fix things, baby, please give me another chance."

"Another chance to do what? I am eighteen mom and about to be married off. Do you think everything can just be fine after ill-treating me all these years? How do I know you are not

pretending like you did when you came from your village?" I ask.

"I wasn't pretending, that was me but then something took over... I don't know what is going on Quinn."

"Just stay away from me," I try to walk away but she pulls me back.

"I'll tell you, I will tell you everything."

I wipe the tears off my face, "Here?"

"No, let's go to my room," she leads the way to her room. I hope she is not taking me there so she can kill me without anyone seeing her. I

know she is my mother but this woman hates me. She doesn't even hide that she wanted me to be a boy.

She insists that we sit on the bed. This is the second time she is letting me on her bed. We sit facing each other and she holds my hands. I look into her eyes and for a second I feel sadness overwhelm me. What is this feeling I am getting these days? It's as if I can feel people's feelings, their pain.

I exhale heavily clearing my head and waiting for my mother to explain. My mother takes a deep breath, "Twenty years ago, I was introduced to a young prince named Khaphela Mandela. I was told that I was going to be his wife. Of course, I had a boy I was seeing but I knew there was no future between us since my

mother had already told me that I was being groomed for a prince. I won't lie, I didn't love Khaphela when we first met but as time went on, I grew to love him. He was a very charming young man. Everything was fine, we were happy, we got married and started living together. Months later your father told me he wanted to marry a second wife.

That hurt. I had done everything I was taught. I had tried everything I could to be the perfect wife but then I don't know why he needed a second wife. He then brought Karen, I didn't and still don't hate Karen. When I was being groomed, my aunties also told me that I could have a sister wife so they kind of prepared me for it.

Let me get straight to the point, I got pregnant,

and told your father. He was very happy, we were both happy to have our first child together. A month later Khaphela told me that Karen was also pregnant. I don't want to lie, that also hurt. I knew that you were going to be a girl and I was happy, I didn't care because you are my child.

When I was seven months pregnant, I had to go home it was customary that my mother teaches me how to take care of my first child since I was a new mom. Karen also went to her village. When I was back in my village, I realized that you were no longer kicking and that went on for two weeks. I was worried and had I lost you Khaphela was going to kill me.

One of the girls that were in charge of helping me suggested that we go and see a seer. I don't believe in those things but I had no choice. We

went to the seer and he said I was carrying a dead child, I don't know what that meant but I asked him to do anything to save you. He performed a ritual at the river and made me drink the river water. I swear on my life I don't know what I was consuming but I was willing to do anything to save you.

I went back home and still, nothing had changed but then two days later you started kicking again. Everything was fine, I gave birth naturally and you were the most beautiful thing I have ever set my eyes on. I loved you Quinn but everything changed when I came back to the palace. I started to feel differently about you. I don't know if it was because Khaphela was happy that Karen gave birth to a male child but I just started feeling differently for you.”

I stand up and walk around. I don't know how to make sense of all this. If she loved me as she says how and where did the hate she has for me come from? I face her, "This ritual that was done, who did it?"

"The seer died years ago."

"Could that be the reason I love the water? Do I have a marine spirit?" I ask because that would explain a lot.

"I don't know. All I wanted was to save you."

"Thank you, for saving me," that's all I can say. I walk to the door.

“Quinn please talk to me.”

“I need to take a walk. I don’t hate you if that’s what you are worried about,” I open the door and head out.

Am I spiritually gifted? Are the dreams I have visions? Was that prayer I did today me consulting? What is happening to me? Is that why I feel safe underwater? Was I maybe not meant to survive since I was supposed to die in my mother’s womb? I sit at the back of the house, it’s now dark. I take out my phone and call Denzel.

Denzel: Princess.

Me: Hey Prince Denzel, did you get home safe?

Denzel: Yes, thank you.

Me: That's good. I was just checking.

Denzel: You are crying again, aren't you?

Me: No! Why would I cry?

Denzel: I have Nandi's phone number and if she tells me you are crying you will be in trouble young lady.

Me: (chuckles) Nandi answers to me so she is on my side.

Denzel: But she cares about you so she will tell me the truth.

Me: I am not crying but I am having a rough day. A lot has happened today.

Denzel: I know but it will pass. It is just a phase. Everything has a season, they say to experience hurt you would have first experienced happiness. It's only a season just like there is day and night. It will all pass.

Me: You will make a wise king.

Denzel: What's a king without a queen?

Me: You already have a queen. Didn't you hear I

am to be your wife?

Denzel: I don't want you to be forced to be my wife. I want you to be with me because you want to.

Me: (I clear my throat) Let's go hunting sometime.

Denzel: Your land or mine?

Me: Mine, I am barred from Dumazulu, remember? I will tell you when.

I hang up and then switch on my phone touch, I don't want to scare the helpers. I look around me, there is a knife that has been stabbed to

the ground. On the handle, the knife is wrapped with a red and green cloth. What is this? I remove the knife and throw it away then go back into the house

KHAPHELA

I have failed as a father. I have failed my child. Why didn't I talk to him? Why didn't I ask why he doesn't want to be king? Why didn't I find out more information about him being gay? What kind of a father am I? If it wasn't for Robert my son could have died in the palace. Maybe Robert would make a better king than me.

Robert and I are driving home in silence, my heart bleeds for my son. I can't lose him. I pray the Mandela ancestors watch over him for me.

As for Karen, I want her out of my house. I want her and her herbs out of my house. She almost killed my son and God knows what she was trying to do. I can forgive other things but she messed with my child. When we get home I am the first to get out of the car.

“Brother calm down!” Robert yells but it is falling on deaf ears. I want Karen gone.

“Karen!” I yell as soon as I walk into the house. I want her gone, “KAREN!” I walk to her room. I don’t care if it’s at night or how she will get home. I want her out of my house. I get to her room and bang on the door. “Karen open this door.”

While I am still knocking, I feel something hit me hard in the head. I hold my head trying to look around me but there is nothing or no one around me. My head starts throbbing so hard that I can't even open my eyes.

"Karen," I knock on the door. I close my eyes and catch my breath then the headache just disappears as if nothing happened, "Karen!" I continuously knock. She finally opens the door and she has a towel wrapped around her body as if she was bathing.

"Brother calm down," Robert walks towards me.

What is going on? Am I going crazy? I look at my brother and then at Karen. Robert stands in front of me and places his hand on my shoulder, "Khaphela this is not how to solve matters."

“Wait, Robert...what is going on?”

Robert looks at me confused, “What do you mean?”

“What is Karen doing here?” I ask and Karen’s eyes widen as if she has seen a ghost, “Karen why are you here?”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 38

DENZEL

I smile by myself after talking to the princess of Matshoba. She called to check on me meaning I crossed her mind. I put my phone down and get

dressed. I just took a shower and I have to join my family for supper. Someone knocks on my bedroom door and I permit them to come in. It's Mazwi or should I say the new Lucas as Quinn called him.

"Your father is calling you, my prince," he says with his head down.

"Thanks, I am coming."

He leaves the room, closing the door behind him. I put on my shoes and then head to the dining room because I know that's where my father is. During the day he will be in the throne room. In other words, he is a king by day and a father by night.

“Father you called me,” I sit opposite him. He has his eyes glued to the TV. The last time he found me watching television, he said there was nothing good I can learn from it but today it is him.

“Where have you been?”

I clear my throat and mumble, “In Matshoba.”

“Doing what? What business do you have in Matshoba?”

“I was visiting the princess. Lucas’s death has been hard on her so I was checking up on her,” I retort and he shakes his head.

“And you didn’t think about telling me? What if something had happened to you?”

“Baba I am fine, I just went out. What is the big deal?” I don’t understand why he is like this since Lucas’s death. My father doesn’t believe that Lucas fell. He thinks someone killed him. Crazy right? Why would anyone want Lucas dead? Lucas was loved by everyone in the palace and wasn’t the type that was involved in any drama.

“Tell me next time you leave. I wouldn’t want anything happening to you.”

“Nothing is going to happen to me. Is that why you called me?” I question.

“Princess Rendani is here.”

I groan in annoyance, “Why is she here Baba?”

“I don’t know, your mother invited her.”

Rendani is the princess of Matsa village. That girl is annoying but my mother is fond of her and loves shoving her down my throat. I was happy when my father mentioned that I am to be paired with Quinn. For a moment I thought they were going to pair me with Rendani. I grew up with her and we went to the same school. She is a close family friend.

“When you say mother invited her, does it mean she is here and spending the night?”

My father nods, “And be on your best behaviour. I know you and Rendani no longer get along as you used to but behave.”

“Baba you know Rendani loves getting on my nerves.”

“You are going to be a king, you need to learn how to keep your feelings in check. That means smiling at people who get on your nerves,” he tells.

“What are you boys whispering about?” my mother walks into the room. She kisses my father, old people. She kisses her and then announces that dinner is ready. I stand up and walk out of the room first. I find Rendani fixing the table, we have helpers for that and why is she alone? Where is her family?

I clear my throat, "Hello, princess Rendani."

"Prince Denzel," she bows in courtesy, "How are you?"

"I am good and yourself?"

She folds her arms to her chest, "Oh so you don't visit me anymore? And what happened to keeping in touch?"

"I have been busy, my princess."

"Busy with your soon-to-be wife. Is it true that you are to marry the princess of Matshoba?" she asks.

“Who told you that?”

She shrugs, “The queen, why didn’t you tell me? Or are you sad they didn’t choose me? I know you have a secret crush on me.”

“I don’t have a crush on you.”

“Continue lying to yourself. Where is Lucas by the way?” she asks.

“Lucas passed away two weeks ago, didn't you hear? They say he fell and hit his head hard.”

She puts the plate down, “That is the lamest thing I have ever heard. How does one fall and

die? If he had enemies, I would think someone took care of him. The royal house doesn't play, I know first-hand. But, Lucas was loved by everyone.”

“What do you mean took care of him?”

She looks to see if no one is nearby, “I am from royalty and our parents are not as innocent as they seem. Trust me on that. They would do anything to make sure nothing comes in the way of our happiness. But as I said, Lucas was a saint so maybe he fell and hit his head hard”

What is Rendani saying? Could my father be right that maybe it wasn't an accident but then who would want Lucas dead and why?

ROBERT

It's confirmed, everyone in my brother's house is crazy. The seer should come back and cleanse all of them because they need it. One moment my brother is yelling then the next he is asking what Karen is doing in his house. How does he expect me to answer that? I can see that Joshua is sick and he is having the effects. He has lost his mind.

I look at Karen and she looks puzzled. Did something happen before I got here? Did he maybe slap her, that's why she looks so shocked.

"Karen, what are you doing here?" Khaphela

asks again and Karen doesn't respond.
Khaphela should let her get dressed first then
we can talk, what if her towel falls off?

"Khaphela why don't you calm down? Let her
get dressed then you can question her all you
want." I say.

"Get dressed and come one, NOW!"

I have never seen Khaphela this angry and
Khaphela's kids love things. They are already
peeking and trying to see what is happening.
This is not the right way to solve the matter.
Khaphela should calm down. I get that he is
angry about Joshua but we can solve this like
adults.

“Hurry, Karen!” Khaphela knocks on Karen’s door.

“What is it with all the yelling?” Laleti walks toward us, “Baba I didn’t know you are back.”

“Go in this room and get Karen,” Khaphela commands. I wash my hands, even I can’t handle him when he is like this. Scared to be yelled at, Laleti quietly walks into Karen’s room then minutes later she comes out with Karen who is now crying.

We all go to the throne room. Khaphela dismisses all the guards and helpers and even closes the door. This must be huge.

“Karen, why are you here?” Khaphela asks. Why

is he asking why she is here? She lives here,
where else must she be?

Karen pops her fingers, "I live here."

"Since when?" – Khaphela. Is this man high?
How can he ask such a thing? So he didn't see
her when they were sleeping together?

"I stay here," poor Karen retorts

"And I am asking why you are here?" Khaphela
yells.

"What do you want me to say? I am your wife
that's why I am here," Karen yells back. I look at
Laleti and she shrugs, also just as shocked. Are

we missing something?

“You and I broke up!” Khaphela yells.

Okay, I need to sit down for this. I said it, Khaphela and Karen broke up when he had to marry Laleti then boom Karen is the second wife. Karen folds her arms – I guess that means she is not talking.

“Robert can you please call that seer to come here before I kill this woman!”

I reply, “Don’t order me around.”

“Call the seer Robert. I want him here first thing in the morning, order of the king of Matshoba.

And make sure Karen doesn't flee," he stands up and leaves the room. I have never seen my brother so angry.

"Karen what did you do?" I ask and she just cries, "I warned you, you and Laleti. I warned you that nothing stays hidden forever."

They both look down and don't reply. I forgot they are mute. I stand up and leave the room. I go to the room I am using. It's been such a long day. I just want to sleep and prepare myself for tomorrow. I have a feeling nothing good will be said.

Before I go to bed, I call Dlamini.

Dlamini: Timing, Madiba. You can't just call

someone at night.

Me: (Laughing) It's just after nine. I will hit the pin in the heart, we need you again at the palace.

Dlamini: A lot is going on in that house and the truth will kill your brother.

Me: I think he can handle it. He is summoning you at the palace again,

Dlamini: Madiba you know I am a very busy man.

Me: I know but please do this for my brother.

Dlamini: Fine, I will be there first thing in the morning.

I hang up and sleep. I am very exhausted. Someone screaming wakes me up. I check the time and it's past one in the morning. Sleeping next to Quinn's room is the worst especially now that Joshua is not around meaning I am the only one who can hear her.

I get out of bed and go to her room. It seems she is having a nightmare. I shake her awake, "Quinn wake up!"

She keeps mumbling inaudible stuff. I swear if she doesn't wake up I will pour water on her, "Quinn!"

She wakes up panting, "Mom Karen!"

“What about her?”

“Go to her room? She is not okay?” she screams.
Haibo this child. I rush to Karen’s room with
Quinn behind me and Karen has hanged herself.
I get the chair and Quinn holds her feet so that
she does not hang as I undo the rope.

“She has a pulse, thank the spirits,” Quinn sighs
in relief after checking on Karen.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 39

ROBERT

Talk about chaos in the royal house and this is exactly it. So Karen has something to hide. Why else would she try to kill herself? We are really grateful for Quinn in this family because how were we going to explain this to her family and the people? Not many people know about what goes on in the royal house but I know people were going to blame Laleti.

Khaphela, Quinn, Laleti and I are in the throne room. I can't believe we had to call the doctor at two in the morning. As much as Karen still had a pulse there was nothing we could do so we called the doctor and we have two guards keeping an eye on her. We don't trust her - she could try it again.

Poor Quinn now has to be involved in matters like this and her having to witness that must be

hard on her. She is just a child after all. I think we should let her go to bed because she is almost falling off the chair. It's clear she is sleepy.

"Quinn you can go to bed," I say. She looks at her father and then at me, Khaphela nods - I guess that is a signal that she can go. She stands up and exits the room.

"What is going on, why is Karen trying to kill herself?" Laleti asks. I see she has been itching to ask.

"I don't know, I was woken up by Quinn screaming and had to go check. She was the one that lead me to Karen's room otherwise we could have found her dead in the morning," I answer since the king is not interested in

talking.

“Is it about bringing the seer? Is it why she wants to kill herself?” – Laleti.

“Laleti go to bed, I need to talk to my brother?” This is the first time Khaphela is talking since we all woke up. Laleti doesn’t protest, she stands up and leaves the room. Let’s hope she also doesn’t try to kill herself.

“Are you okay brother?” I ask Khaphela. I noticed that he has been a little different since we came back from the hospital. Something is bothering him.

“How did I get here? All this chaos around me, two wives. How did I get here?”

“Khaphela are you okay – do you maybe also want to be checked up?” I am getting worried. It seems everyone is losing their mind today.

“I think I am going, crazy brother. How did I marry Karen? Why isn’t everything making sense? I swear I remember telling her that I was to marry Laleti. I told her that there was no future between us. I am so confused right now. How did we get here?”

I move from the chair I am sitting on and shift closer to him, “Are you saying she might have used something on you, witchcraft maybe?”

“I don’t know Robert but it is as if all this while I had a blindfold on and now I can see perfectly.

Am I going crazy?”

I shake my head although I think he is, “Maybe you should go and rest. The seer will be here first thing in the morning. I will handle Karen and make sure she doesn’t try to kill herself.”

He gets up and leaves the room. Two weeks of resting have been replaced by eighteen years of stress. Imagine being with someone for eighteen years only to find out they were using witchcraft on you. The worst part is that kids are involved in all this – innocent children.

Will Khaphela be able to love the children when the truth comes out? Josh will die, already he feels like he is a mistake and this will kill him. Dlamini was right, this is too much for my brother. I head to Karen’s room and find the

doctor getting out - ready to leave.

“How is she?” I ask the doctor.

“She seems fine, she just needs a little rest. No damage was done, you guys were quick. I gave her something that will help her sleep, she should be fine in the morning.”

“Thank you, I told the drivers to take you home. Thank you for coming at short notice and so early.” I walk him to the car and then go back to Karen’s room. She is sleeping. I tell the guards not to let her out of their sight and to call me if she does anything out of the ordinary. We don’t want her brewing her things to worsen the situation.

I go to bed although now I am the one worried as if this is my family. If I leave this house they won't see me for the next ten years because I can't deal with so much stress. I would explode.

I wake up at six am. I bathe and then check on Dlamini. I wouldn't want him bailing out on us last minute. I wonder if we should go check on Joshua first or handle the Karen issue. When I am dressed up, I go to Quinn's room to check on her.

"May I come in?" I knock and she permits me to get in. She is sitting on the couch and her bed is made. She is already dressed, "And where are you going so early?"

"I couldn't sleep so I decided to get ready to go check on Joshua."

I sit next to her and hold her hands, "Please don't tell Joshua about his mother. Let's wait for him to get better."

"I won't tell him but uncle why was mom Karen trying to kill herself?"

"I don't know baby but we will find out today when she is fine. You go check on your brother and make sure he is safe. Your father and I will follow a little later." I tell her and she nods. Smart kid, "Eat first, you are losing weight."

"I am not losing weight uncle, I am getting fit."

"Whatever you want to call it but go and eat. I know you were mourning your lover but it's time

to move on okay?" I say, she nods again.

I am also hungry so Quinn and I go to the kitchen to make breakfast. So this is what being a father feels like. Maybe I should also settle but then the drama that comes with settling and kids makes me have second thoughts.

Dlamini shows up around eight am. I wonder what time he left his place. The car that went to get him, drives in the time when I am walking Quinn out so we both wait for Dlamini to get out of the car.

"Mandela I am not happy, I have things to do," says Dlamini walking toward Quinn and me.

"My apologies, I know you are a busy man."

“Good morning,” Quinn greets him.

“The gifted one, you saved your mother. The Mandela family is lucky to have you.”

“Leave me alone with the gifts and fates,” Quinn walks to her car.

Dlamini smiles and shakes his head, “This one will be the reason the king has a heart attack. She is hot-headed.”

“She is just a young girl doing what that children her age do. Let’s get you something to drink before my grumpy brother sees you. You will need it.”

QUINN

I couldn't go back to sleep after Karen's saga. She seemed like the only person that had her shit together in the palace, why would she try to kill herself? Is her gift now too much? Is it weighing on her? Are the dreams too much? Am I also going there? This gift thing is scaring me and I don't want anyone mentioning it.

"Prince of Matshoba!" I walk into Josh's room with balloons and a basket of fruits and all the nice things he loves.

"Princess, the fairest of them all."

I laugh hugging him, "You are better... look at

you talking too much.”

“I do feel a lot better. Maybe I just needed some time out of the palace.”

“I am glad you feel better. I brought you all the nice things you love.” I say and put the basket on his lap.

“Are you okay? I know I have been shutting you out but I am getting better now, how are you? How is your boyfriend?”

I pull the chair and sit, “Lucas died two weeks ago. They say he fell and hit his head hard. I lost him, Josh.”

“I am sorry.”

“The seer warned me but I was stubborn. I feel like it’s my fault he is dead.” I say and fan myself. I don’t want to cry in front of Josh. One of us has to be strong. My phone rings and it’s prince Denzel.

“You can get it,” says Josh. I leave the room and go to answer the phone.

Me: Good morning, prince Denzel.

Denzel: Good morning, princess. How are you today?

Me: I am good. I am already at the hospital with

my brother.

Denzel: Actually I was calling to ask about him, how is he?

Me: He seems better but I still don't know what is wrong with him.

Denzel: Can I come to check on him too?

Me: No, there is no need.

Denzel: He is not the only one I want to check on. I also want to check on you.

Me: Fine it's not like you will listen even if I say don't come.

Denzel: (Laughing) I am sorry for being annoying.

Me: Do me a favour and steal some guavas in your yard for me.

Denzel: I got you.

I hang up and go to get myself some water then join Josh. I tried asking the doctor what is wrong with Josh and he said he talked to my father. The doctor kicks me out of Josh's room when visiting hours are over. He wouldn't even give me ten minutes. Luckily Denzel is on his way. To my surprise, he shows up with some girl, by her clothes I can tell she is royalty.

“Hey,” Denzel hugs me then the girl also hugs me, ‘This is Rendani, an old friend of mine, I told her to stay but she said she wanted to meet you.”

“Hi, Rendani.”

She folds her arms, “So this is her? I still think I am prettier.”

“Rendani!” Denzel then shifts his attention to me, “Rendani loves playing around. I am sorry she is crazy don’t mind her.”

Lord Rendani’s perfume. I try to run out when I feel the urge to vomit but end up vomiting on the floor. Denzel rushes to me, “Are you okay?”

Rendani folds her arms, “Pregnant already?”

“No, I have never...” Holy spirits my father is going to kill me.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 40

LALETI

I knock on Karen’s bedroom and then let myself in. I can’t believe she tried to kill herself. I get that things are crazy in this house but to an extent of wanting to take her life. The two guards are still in her room and watching her like a hawk.

“Morning,” I greet her but she doesn’t respond. I

brought her food. She needs to eat before we meet the so-called seer. Today is the day that we could lose it all. The seer will reveal everything and I know Khaphela won't spare us. "Karen you need to eat something."

"What is the use, I just want to die."

"Don't say that. How can you say that when you have three children? How do you think they will feel if they heard you say that? I know today we might get exposed but whatever we did was for our children," I place the tray of food on her lap.

"Don't say we, your sins are better than mine. I deserve to be killed. My children will be fine. They have you."

“Stop being crazy Karen and eat. You will watch your children yourself.” She is being selfish right now. How can she want to die? Who will help Amahle with her newborn? I also have my problems, Quinn is going to be married soon and she needs me.

The door opens and it's Mandisa, “The king is calling you, my queens.”

“We are coming.” I say then shift my attention to Karen, “Please eat before we go.”

She shoves the tray back in my arms, “Let's go.”

She gets out of bed and puts her shoes on. Did she even bathe today? Why is he acting like this? What did she do? Is she the one using

witchcraft in the palace? Khaphela will lose it. It seems we might both end up losing the one thing that has been making us not get along all these years.

I hand Mandisa the tray of food and then follow Karen to the throne room. Oh God, the elders are here. When were all these people called? Khaphela, Robert and the seer are already there. Did they have to call all these people? Couldn't we solve this as a family? Now everyone will know our bad deeds.

We greet, I greet to be precise – Karen is a walking zombie today. We sit in the middle of the room. God if you save me today I will never sin again.

Khaphela clears his throat, I lift my head to look

at him and I can't even recognize him. Khaphela is the most soft-hearted person I have ever come across but right now I can barely recognize him. He must be angry and disappointed in us.

"Today I won't say much but I called you all so you can witness this day with your own eyes and not say I chased anyone out," Khaphela's tone is firm yet laced with pain. He must be disappointed in us, "I will give the floor to Karen. I suggest talking by yourself."

I swallow hard and look at Karen who is staring into blank space. Tears fall down her face but she doesn't even wipe them off.

"Talk Karen!" Khaphela yells, "Don't make the seer speak your disgusting deeds!"

Karen wipes the tears off her face, "Fine, I will speak but first I want you to know that I did it to save myself. Anyone in my position would have done the same. I was just trying to save myself. It's not fair that the royal house gets everything they want. We didn't ask to be commoners.

Twenty years ago I fell in love with a young prince. He was my first love and my everything. He promised me the world and I fell for it. I knew I was just a commoner but he promised me that one day I would be his queen. The spirits know that I love Khaphela, I even gave myself to him.

The ancestors chose him for me. If he wasn't meant to be mine then why did the ancestors make me meet him? Why didn't they give me

someone if he wasn't the one for me? Khaphela and I were happy, were in love but the royal house wouldn't accept me because I was a commoner. I didn't ask to be a commoner and who said commoners are not people?

I thought everything was fine, I thought Khaphela and I were happy until he came to me and told me we had to separate. He told me that there was no future between us and that he was to be groomed to be the next king. He told me that he already had a queen chosen for him. That was not fair. How was I supposed to just move on when I had given him all I could? I had already given myself to him only for him to move on and be with his chosen wife.

To make matters worse I was already pregnant with Josh. Yes, I got pregnant first and Josh is

not younger than Quinn. He is the first child and the heir of Matshoba. Of course, Khaphela didn't know that I was pregnant – I went to the royal house and they chased me out without hearing me out. I am sorry but how was I going to raise a child by myself? My mother was going to chase me out of the house so I had to take matters into my hands.

I sent word to Khaphela's mother that I was pregnant and that I didn't want anything but to say goodbye to Khaphela. Khaphela came to me talking about his new wife and how beautiful she was. What about me? Was I no longer beautiful to him? That very day is when I did it all. I had always had a gift from my ancestors. I knew how to mix herbs so I mixed something that made Khaphela love me and I did a ritual that as long as the knife was stabbed to the ground, and stuck there so will

Khaphela be on me and he will always love me.”

Everyone gasps in the room. I can't believe she really did that. I look at Khaphela and his hand is covering his eyes. This must be hard on him. One of the elders asks, “Then what happened? Talk woman.”

Karen continues, “Khaphela married me and he loved me very much. I was months ahead of Laleti but he didn't know and loved me regardless. Things changed when Laleti gave birth to Quinn. That child possessed a gift that was fighting with my spirit. I tried numbing it but couldn't. I was scared of getting exposed so I thought if I eliminated the completion then things would be better.

I know Khaphela loves his children more than

anything so I made Laleti hate her daughter. I knew that if she continued to abuse Quinn, Khaphela will chase her out leaving me as the only wife. But again I failed on that because Laleti prays. I kept pressing and making different herbs trying to get rid of Laleti until the ancestors took away my gift.

Even though I lost my gift, I still knew how to do things and they didn't completely abandon me. I also had help. As much as I wanted to get rid of Laleti, I noticed her daughter is very fond of me which ruined every. I am very sorry but I thought I was doing what is best for me."

"Doing what is best while hurting people?"
Khaphela yells. "How can you stoop this low Karen? So what happened to the ritual that was supposed to make me love you?"

Karen shakes her head, "I don't know."

I can't believe this. I wish I could slap her but I can't do that in front of the elders. So she is the reason I hate Quinn so much. How can she do that to me just for a man? I swear if I had found this out, I would have gladly left Khaphela. I have lost eighteen years of my child's life because of this woman. How can she be so cruel putting everyone under her witchcraft?

Karen kneels, "I am sorry Khaphela please whatever you do, please don't take my children away from me."

Khaphela replies, "You are never to see the kids again, especially after you almost killed Joshua."

I want you to pack your bags, leave the palace and never show your face in Matshoba again. Keep in mind that I am only taking it easy on you because you are the mother of my children.”

“Khaphela please don’t take my children from me. At least let me have my children.”

“You will never see those children ever again,” Khaphela then calls the guards to help Karen pack and escort her out. Khaphela then shifts his attention to me, “What about you, do you have any confession?”

I don’t know if I should say this. What if he sends me packing too? I can’t lose my children. I will die with my secret. I would rather be exposed by the seer than confess. I have

already confessed to God and I leave it all in his hands but I am not saying anything.

“If you have nothing to say then you can go,” Khaphela waves me off. I stand up and exit the room.

I rush to my room and say a silent prayer that the seer doesn't expose me. I wonder what they are going to talk about. What if Karen does something worse now that she has nothing to lose? I kneel and pray for my family. I hope nothing happens to us.

I still can't believe she has been using witchcraft. We have been eating her food and God knows what she has been feeding us all these years. I am really panicking. What if the seer exposes me? I get out of the room and

head to the throne room. I am just going to say it out if he kicks me out then that's it.

"I also did something," I blurt out. Everyone stops what they are doing and shifts their attention to me. "When I was pregnant with Quinn there were complications so I performed a ritual to save her. I swear my king I was just trying to save our daughter."

"Go to your room, Laleti," Khaphela replies.

I kneel, "Please don't kick me out. I swear I was saving our daughter."

"I know, you told me about it years ago. You sleep talk when anxious about something. Go to your room."

I stand up and exit the room. What does that mean? Does it mean he is not angry at me? I call my mother as soon as I get to my room.

Me: Mom he knows. Khaphela knows about the ritual.

Mom: Relax Laleti and tell me what happened.

Me: He now knows, I had to confess mom. I don't know what will become of my life now.

Mom: What did he say?

Me: He told me to go to my room and that I sleep talk when anxious.

Mom: Then it means he knows and you should stop worrying. Relax and thank God that he forgave you.

Me: Karen has been banished from Matshoba. She was using witchcraft on everyone in the palace. Do you know that she did something to me that's why I hate Quinn – can you imagine?

Mom: Some people would do anything to win and I hope you learnt something. Nothing stays hidden and no evil deed goes unpunished. You might get away with it for years but one day the truth will come out. Take this as a second chance to mend things with Quinn and always pray for your family. Sometimes we ignore our ancestors but those are our people. I am not saying don't pray to God but we knew God

through the whites when we were colonized.
Don't forget our African ways.

Me: I hear you, mom.

I hang up and throw my phone on the bed. I hear a scream and then rush out of the room. One of the helpers is standing outside Karen's room. I rush there to check and she hanged herself again.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 41 (not edited)

QUINN

My father is going to kill me. Holy spirits I hope I am just vomiting because Rendani's perfume is too strong or that the hospital is making me sick. I can't be pregnant, my father would have a heart attack. Already he has a lot going on and this will kill him. I can't be pregnant, how will I raise a child alone and not only is the father gone but the father was not from a royal family and it messes up everything.

Luckily the nurse doesn't shout at me for vomiting on the floor or maybe she is scared to shout at the princess of Matshoba. Denzel leads me to the benches and helps me sit. Rendani has her arms folded as if she is waiting for me to confirm that I am pregnant.

"Drink some water," Denzel hands me bottled water that he was drinking.

“Thank you.”

“Are you pregnant?” Rendani asks.

“Rendani please go wait in the car and not all people that vomit are pregnant. Please go to the car,” says Denzel.

“I am just asking, why else would she vomit and we came here to see prince Joshua so I am not going anywhere.” Rendani sits next to me. She is very stubborn, I feel sorry for the prince that will wed her.

I need to talk to Denzel alone. I am not close with this Rendani girl so I can't have her knowing my business. I shift my attention to

Rendani and try to sound as polite as possible, “Can I please talk to prince Denzel? I promise we won’t take long?”

Rendani replies, “Then find somewhere to talk. I am not going anywhere.”

I stand up and ask Denzel to follow me because princess Rendani is not having it. Where is her helper anyways because Denzel brought his Lucas? He is standing a little far from us but his clothes are making it hard for him to blend with the crowd. I don’t know why all royal guards dress like this. But Lucas dressed differently – he wore his clothes.

Denzel and I get outside and I say, “My father is going to kill me.”

“You are pregnant?”

“Well...I am not sure but Lucas and I didn't use protection?” I whisper and he shifts closer.

“You slept with Lucas? Why would you do that? What if someone found out – do you know how much Lucas would have been in trouble.”

I snap, “Well he is dead and I could be carrying his seed. Denzel my father will kill me. What do I do?”

He exhales heavily. Honestly, I was expecting him to say it's not his business and I shouldn't have slept with Lucas but he replies, “Let's first make sure that you are really pregnant.”

“How?”

“Buy a pregnancy test, follow me,” he leads us to his car, it seems he has the keys. I wonder if his guards will follow if r they will stay with Rendani. Denzel opens the car door for me he is quite a gentleman. We drive to the nearest pharmacy. I am trying to keep it together but I am going crazy. I can already imagine how disappointed my father will be. Laleti will kill me, she will use this opportunity to kill me.

Why didn't I think of taking precautions? Why didn't we use protection? How will I be able to raise a child on my own? The ancestors are very unfair, they didn't approve of my relationship with Lucas yet they let me get pregnant. Okay, I need to relax. It could be a false alarm. Maybe I

vomited because of Rendani's strong perfume.

I am in the car waiting for Denzel. He went into the pharmacy to buy the test. I am in the car losing my mind, it feels like Denzel has been gone forever. I scream when my phone rings. I almost had a heart attack, I swear. It is my uncle Robert. I clear my throat and answer the phone.

Me: Uncle!

Robert: Hey, how is your brother, your father and I are on our way to the hospital.

Me: (swallows hard) Josh...he is.., he is fine. Did you say you are on your way to the hospital?

Robert: I am pretty sure I did not stutter.

Me: I am asking because I am currently not at the hospital.

Robert: I am sure you are with Denzel. Admit it, you are warming up to him.

Me: He is a nice person.

Robert: Then give him a chance after all you two will be married soon.

Me: I will call you back uncle.

I hang up when I see Denzel walking towards the car. I am surprised he is still interested in

me after all the betrayal.

“I got it, when do you want to do the test?”
Denzel asks.

“My father is on his way to the hospital. Can we get Rendani and get out of here. I am scared she might mention me vomiting and my father will get worried. I don’t want him asking the doctor to check on me.”

“Don’t worry about Rendani, I will ask Mazwi to get her out of the hospital. I will meet her back at the palace. Where do you want us to go?” he asks.

“Can we please go to your house or I am still barred. I want to be somewhere where its’ safe

to do the test. I don't want anyone to know about the test."

He nods, "You can come to my place - my father will understand. I will talk to him."

"Thank you."

He reaches for my hand and squeezes it, "Whatever happens know that I have your back."

"Where are my guavas?"

He laughs, "In the back seat, enjoy!"

I stuff my face with guavas trying to calm

myself although I know that I am dead.
Khaphela and Laleti will not spare me. I loved
Lucas but I don't want a child, not yet.

We get to the palace and Denzel leads the way
to his room. We are avoiding bumping into
anyone. I don't want anyone to know I am here.
I will do the test and then go home. We make it
safely to Denzel's room, he shows me the
bathroom and waits in his room.

"Now we wait," I join Denzel in his room, "I am
scared Denzel. What if I am pregnant?"

"It'll be fine, babies are a gift from God. We lost
Lucas and he was replaced."

"Easy for you to say, you are not the one

embarrassing your family. My father will murder me.”

He chuckles, “He will be mad but you are his daughter and he will forgive you at some point.”

“Maybe.”

He holds my hand, “Relax princess, stressing will not help with anything. You need to prepare for anything. Even if you are not ready to be a mother if you are pregnant then you will have to accept it.”

“Shouldn’t you be angry at all this? I could be carrying a reminder that I betrayed you.”

He answers, "Life is too short princess, I let anger control me, I didn't even get the chance to make things right with Lucas. I was so mad and look now he died angry at me for all the bad things I said."

"I am sure he knows you didn't mean it."

He sighs, "I hope so and I hope his soul is at peace. You should go check on the test."

"I am scared – please check for me?"

He stands up and goes to the bathroom. Please if I don't get pregnant I will never sleep with a boy again. Please God I only did it once. Denzel comes out of the bathroom carrying the test in his hand – does he know I peed on that thing?

His facial expression says it all but I ask anyways, "Am I pregnant?"

He nods, "You are."

Tears fall down my face. I am done, they should start planning a funeral for me. How can I be so careless? I was supposed to lead by example. I was supposed to be the role model my siblings look up to but here I am, pregnant.

Denzel sits next to me, "Hey don't cry. You are not the first person to make a mistake."

"You don't understand, how will I explain all this?"

“Then don’t, you are going to be my wife soon so just go with the flow and they will think the baby is mine,” he suggests.

“I can’t do that to you Denzel, not after the betrayal. How will I be able to sleep at night?”

He holds both my hands, “You already know that I care about you. I love you Quinn and if it means accepting you with this baby then so be it and this is not just any baby. It is Lucas’s seed...our Lucas that we loved dearly.”

“But we have never slept together, it’s not fair to you. I can’t do that.”

“What if they make you abort it? Is that what you want? I doubt you are even three weeks. Let

me handle this,” he insists and I shake my head.

“I made the bed so I will lay in it. I put myself in this mess and I deserve everything that is coming my way.”

The door opens, both Denzel and I stand up. It is the Queen of Dumazulu. She looks at the pregnancy test that is on the floor then at me. She picks it up and I am sure she is checking if her eyes are not deceiving her. Why do they keep touching it - I peed on that thing.

“Denzel what is this?’ The princess is pregnant, are you kids crazy? You are not yet married and she is pregnant?”

“Mom I can explain please calm down.”

“Don’t tell me to calm down, come here,” she grabs Denzel by his ear and drags him out.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 42

BONGANI

“Olga, what is it now?” I ask when I see her dragging Denzel by his ear. Before I can interrogate her further, Quinn also walks into the room – she looks like she has been crying. What now? What did Denzel do? I am not in the mood for any drama – the villagers are already stressing me and it’s not even noon.

“Mom you will break my ear!” – Denzel.

“Olga let him go and tell me what is wrong?” I ask calmly. I am exhausted and not in the mood for any yelling.

“Good morning, my king,” Quinn bows in courtesy.

“Morning princess, what brings you here? I didn’t know you and Denzel are still friends.”

She doesn’t respond but looks down. Denzel manages to break loose and says, “Not in front of the princess, mom.”

Olga shouts, "Watch what you say because I might kill you in front of her."

"What is going on? Are you two going to keep exchanging threats in front of me?"

Olga folds her arms, "The princess is pregnant, your son couldn't even wait for the wedding," she slaps Denzel on the arm.

"Mom stop hitting me please."

"I will do more than hit you today. Couldn't you hold yourself? Is this how I raised you?" Olga continuously throws slaps at Denzel.

"Olga stop and let the kids explain." I am really

not in the mood for all this. I am exhausted. If the princess is pregnant and these two want to be adults then we will let them be adults. They will learn that there is more to life than just sleeping together. I shift my attention to Denzel, "Don't you know how to use protection?"

He mumbles, "I am sorry."

"Saying sorry does make things right and when did this happen because..."

Denzel cuts me off, "It happened a while ago. I am sorry."

"Quinn, what do you have to say for yourself?" I ask, "Do you know how disappointed your father will be?"

Quinn says, "He will kill me but Denzel has nothing to do with all this, he is just protecting me."

"Of course, I will protect you, you are to be my wife and we will take the fall together. We are both to blame," Denzel shifts closer to Quinn, "We talked about this, we do this together."

Quinn mumbles something but it seems they can hear each other. These kids. "Hey! So now you want us to watch you argue?"

"I am sorry father. I will take responsibility for my actions."

I exhale heavily, "Well, she was going to be your

wife anyways but I will run this by the elders first. You two may go.”

“You are just going to let them go?” says angry Olga, “Your son deserves five slaps!”

“Denzel go please I am not in the mood to shout,” I say and he takes Quinn’s hand and then they exit the room.

“I am not happy Bongani,” says Olga as soon as the door closes, “How can you let them get away with such abominations? How will we explain this to King Khaphela? See what I mean when I say you give Denzel too much freedom.”

“It’s done Olga, there is no need to complain about it.”

“Why are you so calm and isn’t this the same girl that made Lucas and Denzel fight?” she asks with her hands on her hips.

“She is the one. I don’t know what happened but for some reason, the princess and Denzel have been close since Lucas’s death.”

She shouts, “How do we even know that it’s not someone from her village that hurt our Lucas? I don’t buy the story of him falling. Someone hurt that boy and for this Quinn girl to move on so quickly is suspicious.”

“Why would Quinn harm Lucas when she claims to have loved him?”

“I don’t know but one day the truth will come out. Lucas’s blood will not just be spilt in vain,” she says before exiting the room. I sigh and bury my face in my palms. I also think Lucas was murdered. I feel like I failed that boy. I was supposed to take care of him but I failed. I made a promise to his parents that I will take care of him but failed.

I tried consulting about his death but the seer said it was his fate. I don’t understand what that means. How can someone’s fate be death? Was it not enough that his parents were taken from him?

To think Lucas’s death stressed me, now I have to deal with Denzel and Quinn. Did Lucas’s death make them grow closer? Denzel has been spending time with the princess a lot these

days. How will I explain this to King Khaphela?
These naughty kids will be the death of us.

JOSHUA

I smile when uncle Robert and my father walk into my hospital room. I have to admit, I am enjoying the attention. I am enjoying being pampered.

“Son,” my father squeezes my hand then sits on the chair next to the bed, “How are you feeling?”

“I feel better, Baba. Thank you!”

“You even look better, look at you smiling so widely,” says Uncle Robert who is standing

close to the door.

“I am not smiling uncle Robert. Where is my mother? She hasn’t come to see me.” Uncle Robert looks down. I look at my father and I am only realizing now that his eyes are bloodshot. Is something wrong with my mother? Why do they look so sad? Did something happen while I was away?

“Baba what’s wrong?” I ask and he shakes his head, “Please tell me, did something happen?”

My father takes both my hands, “Your mother...your mother is no more son.”

I chuckle, “Is this a joke? Mom was fine when I last saw her, how is she gone?”

“She is gone, Joshua. She hanged herself.”

I shake my head, “No! Mom would never leave us, she promised.”

“I am sorry, it was a shock to all of us,” father answers.

“No! How can she do that to us? How can she be so selfish? Why would she leave us? Why would she do this to us?”

He stands up to hug me. How can my mother kill herself? That is very selfish of her - what about us? We also need our mother. I will never forgive her for this. She made me sick and now she has killed herself. What is even the reason

for hanging herself?

I break loose from my father's arms and ask, "Why did she hang herself? Did something happen?"

He shakes his head, "We don't know."

I don't believe that and why does it seem like all this is practiced? I know uncle Robert and he is not the type that goes quiet, not even when something happened, "Uncle Robert you are the one that was in charge of the palace, why did my mother kill herself?"

"I don't know son. She tried it two times, the first time Quinn saved her but the second time we were late. I am sorry."

“Well, maybe that’s what she wanted. She made up her mind to leave us so we shouldn’t be sad,” I fold my arms.

My father stands up, “Hey don’t say that. She was your mother and she loved you.”

“That woman did not love me. All she wanted was for me to be the next king. Her herbs are the reason I am here. I know you tried to hide it from me but I know. I know that my kidneys are failing,” I say. The nurse told me after I begged her of course and this is all my mother’s fault. God knows what will happen to me if I don’t get a donor.

Uncle Robert shifts closer, “Don't let anger

consume you. She was your mother and I know you loved her too. I know you are angry but remember the good times.”

“There are no good times. At least now that she is dead she will not force me to do anything,” I answer although I don’t mean that. I have become so good at hiding my feelings over the years. I am saying this with a straight face but deep down I am screaming. How can she leave us?

QUINN

“Denzel, why did you do that?”

“Shhh,” he closes his bedroom door then turns on the television and turns up the volume, “Not

so loud, Quinn.”

“Why did you do that? Now you will be punished for something you didn’t do.”

He shifts closer and holds both my hands, “I told you that I have your back. Starting today that baby is ours. Whatever happens, we will go through it together.”

“It’s not fair to you.”

He answers, “You did not force me to do anything. I want to do this.”

“Thank you for everything Denzel. It’s not an easy thing to accept someone else’s child.”

He smiles, "It's easy when it is the person you love. Stop worrying okay?"

I nod. He kisses me on the forehead and hugs me. My phone rings on his bed and I go to get it

Me: Amahle!

Amahle: (crying) she is gone Quinn, mom is gone.

Me: Mom who?

Amahle: My mother! She hanged herself again.

The phone slips from my hand and I cover my mouth with my hand. No! Not Mom Karen, she was fine, “Are you okay?” Denzel asks.

“My mom just died. Not my biological mother, Joshua’s mother.”

He hugs me, “I am so sorry.”

I close my eyes and rest my head on his chest. Maybe uncle Robert was right, I am warming up to him.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 43

QUINN

THREE WEEKS LATER

A lot has happened in the palace in the past few weeks. We buried mom Karen, Joshua got a kidney donor (his mother) Khumbulani is now the crowned prince, Amahle is due in a couple of weeks and I am pregnant and still hiding it. Denzel and I agreed to wait until everyone is fine. Everyone has been stressed lately. Mom Karen's death hit us hard, us the kids. We loved her so much and for me, she was very special. She held my hand all those times my mother pushed me away.

But, I am glad that we sent her off like the true queen that she was. Her family also came to Matshoba but both families agreed that she

should get buried in her village. For once in our family, everything was fine until last week when Aiden got sick. He just came out with a skin disease that no one can explain, not even the doctors or seers.

Now no one is allowed to see him, they are keeping him in quarantine in one of the palace rooms and only a few people are allowed to see him. We can't have anything happening to him, we just go Josh back and we can't lose Aiden.

"Good morning," my mother walks into my room. Ever since mom Karen died she has been suspiciously too nice to me and I have to admit, I am loving the attention.

"Morning mom."

“I am about to make breakfast, do you want to help me?” she asks and I cover my head with the bed covers. I am very lazy these days, I don’t feel like doing anything. I haven’t even been to the river in ten days. That is not like me – well, maybe it is because I am now pregnant. My funeral is next I am just waiting for everyone to calm down so I can tell them. I am not the one telling them, King Bongani said he will handle everything. I feel bad that Denzel is accepting this child as his own. I know that Denzel loves me but this all feels wrong.

Speaking of Denzel we have been spending a lot of time together lately. We go on walks and he buys me stuff. I think I am starting to like him.

Okay, back to my mother, she pulls the blankets off me, “Come on... get out of bed. You are going to be married soon and I need to teach you a thing or two in the kitchen,”

“Mom I know how to cook.”

“But I want to teach you something so get out of bed, fix yourself up and let’s go to the kitchen. That is an order from the queen,” she utters firmly.

“That is not fair, you can’t pull that card on me. I am your daughter.”

She kisses me on the forehead, “Get out of bed.”

I wait for her to leave the room and then get back in bed. This is how lazy I have become. After about thirty minutes, Nandi knocks and goes into my room. She is now scared of me, she is not my favourite person lately.

“What do you want?” I ask before she greets me.

“The queen asked me to wake you up.”

I reply, still under the covers, “Tell her I am up.”

“She says we have visitors from Dumazulu so we need to prepare.”

I am up. I sprint to my feet. Please don't tell me today is the day they come and say everything.

My father is going to kill me. I have tried to prepare myself for this day but I just can't seem to be ready for the disappointment that will be on my father's face when he finds out that I am pregnant.

"Are you okay, my princess," Nandi asks when I start pacing around the room.

I am not okay, I will be joining mom Karen soon. My father will tag team with uncle Robert in killing me. Uncle Robert warned me about being careful. I am also scared that uncle Robert might put the pieces together – that man is a good investigator.

"Do you need anything?" Nandi asks.

“No, you may leave and tell my mother that I will join her soon. Thank you, Nandi and please close the door on your way out.”

I can tell she wants to protest but she nods and exits the room. I get my phone and call Denzel. Why didn't he give me a heads-up?

Denzel: (yawning) Good morning, princess!

Me: Are your uncles are coming to Matshoba today?

Denzel: I am not sure, why do you ask?

Me: Nandi told me that we have visitors from Dumazulu and I assume it's your uncles.

Denzel: Maybe they were going to tell me when I woke up but you shouldn't be worried about anything. My father will handle it all.

Me: I am scared, I don't even want to be in Matshoba today.

Denzel: Let me come pick you up then we can use this opportunity to see where Lucas was buried. You need to see him, talk to him and tell him about his baby.

Me: I don't know why I didn't think of that. Let me bathe then you can pick me up at nine am before everyone comes. I will try and sneak out.

Denzel: Okay, see you soon.

The door opens and my mother gets in. I am still in bed but at least now I know that she won't yell at me. She shakes her head and comes to sit next to me on the bed. She holds my hands, "What is going on with you lately?"

"Nothing, why do you ask?"

She cups my face, "You can talk to me, Quinn. I have noticed you are not yourself, you hardly eat, you hardly go to the river because you love the river and you are very lazy these days."

"I am always lazy."

"No, something is wrong and I can tell. I am your mother, remember? What is wrong? I

promise I won't judge you, I will listen and advise you where I can," she says. I don't know if I should trust her. I want to tell her but I am scared she might tell my father.

I take a deep breath, "A while ago, I fell in love with a boy who was a servant. I was very much in love with him, he made me happy. We knew that we couldn't be together but we loved each other regardless. I slept with him..."

She gasps but then nods and tells me to continue. I feel like she already knows where this is headed. I add, "I slept with him and he died that day. I don't know if he was killed or if he really fell and hit his head hard as they say but he is dead now. I found out three weeks ago that I am pregnant. It is also the reason why we have visitors today. Denzel agreed that he will

raise the child as his own. I told him that it was a bad idea but he says he loves me and wants to do this for his servant because he was very close to him.”

“Quinn, you are pregnant?” she asks.

“You said you are not going to judge me.”

She answers, “I am not judging you but being pregnant with a servant’s son. I don’t know but are you sure Denzel can handle this?”

“He loves me mom and I am starting to like him too. But, please let us keep this between us. No one can know, promise me you will keep this a secret?”

She nods, "Of course, I will keep it between us but I want to talk to Denzel."

"Why?"

"Because I am your mother and I need to talk to him," she pinches my cheeks, "I want to see him."

"Okay."

She lifts my pajama top as if she does not believe that I am pregnant, "I can't believe I will have two grandchildren soon."

"That's a sign that you and your husband are getting old."

She playfully hits my arm, “Who are you calling old?”

“Sorry, you look twenty,” I get out of bed to go bathe but she pulls me back and hugs me.

“I know that you will be married but this will always be your home and if things get hard where you will be, come home. I don’t want you to be as I did with your father. I love him but I wasn’t at peace in this house the past years.”

I nod, “I hear you.”

“And know that you can always talk to me about anything. Anything you want to talk about,” she kisses my forehead.

“Why does everything smell bad?”

She laughs, “You will get used to it don’t worry and we should take you to the doctor.”

“Okay now let me go so I can bathe.”

She kisses all over my face, “No wonder you are so light and pretty these days, it’s the pregnancy.”

“Shhhh, it’s our secret.”

She smiles, “It’s our secret.”

DENZEL

I am standing outside the car, waiting for Quinn. I am parked a little further away from her house, I don't want anyone from Dumazulu seeing me because I also snuck out. I gave Mazwi a head up though that I will be going out, I don't want him going crazy looking for me. I told him to stay out of plain sight so that no one asks about me.

I smile when I see Quinn walking up to me from a distance, she is very beautiful. Her lips curve to a smile and she waves from afar. She walks closer and throws herself in my arms.

"Somebody missed me," I say holding her tighter.

“You are the only thing that smells good around me so I always look forward to seeing you.”

“I am one lucky guy,” I say and she looks up wearing a smile. Quinn is so short.

“I am the lucky one. I have you, the most understanding soon-to-be husband in the world. The way you just accepted Lucas’s baby and I is out of this world.”

He touches my still flat stomach, “It’s our baby now and I told you I love you. I mean it, I want you and this child to be part of my life.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you want us to go now?” I ask and she shakes her head.

“The sun is nice today, let’s wait for a little,” she stands with her back against me. I hug her from behind and then lean on the car. We stand like that for a while. I lean and whisper in her ear, “What is on your mind.”

“We are going to be husband and wife soon, that’s weird.”

I laugh, “What makes you say that?”

“We are going to sleep in the same bed and you are going to see me naked.”

“We are also going to create memories and be a family. I am not marrying you just to sleep with you,” I retort.

She turns to face me, “You will make a wise king, Denzel.”

She wraps her arms behind my neck and we glare into each other’s eyes. I want to kiss her but the last time I did that she almost bite my head off. I am going to do it anyways. I lean and kiss her, but surprisingly she doesn’t push me.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 44

QUINN

The drive to Lucas's village is quiet but not the awkward kind of silence. Denzel has one hand on the steering wheel and the other one is locked with mine. Denzel makes me feel tiny and I am loving it. I steal a glance at him and smile. This man is going to be my husband soon. I wonder what is going on back at the palace. I am sure my father is angry and throwing a fit. Well, at least I gave him time to breathe before breaking the news to him.

Denzel kisses the back of my hand, it is the hundredth time now, one would swear he just enjoys hearing me giggle. I am still trying to figure out what Lucas's purpose was in my life. Why am I meant to end up with Denzel. Why did

the ancestors show Lucas to me? They even let me bed with him only for him to die and leave me.

I wish I can meet up with Dlamini and ask him a thing or two. I steal a glance at Denzel once more, he is a handsome prince.

“Say what’s on your mind?” he catches me staring at him. I shake my head and look away, “Come on now, don’t be shy. What is it?”

“It’s nothing prince Denzel.”

“It’s not nothing, you are thinking of something and I want to know it,” he insists.

I clear my throat but I am failing to say it, it's embarrassing. How did I tell him that I think he is handsome, "It's nothing."

"Since when are you shy? The Quinn I remember and know is a fierce woman I met while hunting."

"Well, she wasn't pregnant and always tired back then."

He kisses my hand again, "Please tell me."

"I think you are handsome and don't reply, just drive and pretend I said nothing."

He laughs, "That is the first, no one has ever

told me that but that you, my princess.”

“Drive okay, eyes on the road not on me.”

“Why are blushing so much?” he questions. I am sure I am turning red. I don’t know why I am feeling like this but but it started after the kiss. I need to stop smiling because I am saying goodbye to Lucas today. Today I am starting a new chapter and leaving the past in the past. I loved and cared about Lucas but he is gone. As Denzel said, we got ourselves a new Lucas, the child I am carrying.

“This is how far the car can go, the rest of the journey we go by foot.” Say Denzel parking the car under a tree.

Lord help me I am very lazy today but I have to do this. I get out of the car, at least it's not hot - I would faint. Denzel holds my hand and then we start walking. This place is different from my kingdom, it's more rural. Denzel is telling me about Lucas's parents – stories he heard about them to be precise. Sadly, they had to be killed. Such a fate is very unfair.

“Wait, can we rest I am very tired,” I say to Denzel. It is a long walk and I am very lazy these days.

“Do you want to hop on my back?”

“No, I can't let you carry me. I am sure you are also tired.” I reply. I want to sit down.

“Have you seen how tiny you are? Get on my back and I will carry you.”

“Are you sure?” we have been walking for a distance and I don’t want anything happening to him, what if he faints on me?

“Hop on my back, Quinn.”

I smile but quickly hide my smile, “Fine but tell me when you are tired.”

He carries me on his back and we continue walking. He is right, we are almost there – I can see other tombs from where we are. From the looks of it, him and Lucas were closer than I imagined. I think now I understand why he felt betrayed. I believe that whatever he said to

Lucas, that was spoken out of anger.

I know we speak what we feel but he was betrayed by his servant and I am sure that must have stung. After about ten more minutes of walking, we finally get to the tomb. He first shows me Naledi's tomb (Lucas's mother) and then he shows me Pete's tomb (Luca's father)

I don't know if one is allowed to compliment a tomb but their tombs are very beautiful. Denzel says he will give me time to talk to Lucas. He says he is going to find somewhere to sit. I exhale heavily, this feels surreal. I cannot believe that Lucas is gone and I will never see him again. I cannot believe that he is in there, probably rotten. Honestly, I can never understand how God works.

I kneel, I am tired of standing. "Hey, Lue."

I don't know what to say, I have never talked to a tomb before. I don't even know why I am greeting him because I know very well that he will not reply.

"I am sorry for not attending your funeral. I was angry, I was angry at myself and I was angry at the ancestors. They knew that I love you and still took you away from me. For a while, I felt guilty that you were gone. I felt like it was my fault that you were gone but now I am glad I met you. Even though the seer said we were not supposed to meet, at least I met you before you died and got to experience the love you showed me.

I am not ready to be a mother but I will be a

good mother to this child. I promise to take care of our baby with all I have. And you don't have to worry, I am not alone. Denzel has my back. I know he will take care of me and our baby.

Lucas I loved you very much but I think it is time for me to move on. I am not completely forgetting you, not that I could but I have to move on with my life and I will always love you."

I take off the necklace and place it on his tomb then stand up and go to Denzel. He pulls me into his arms and lets me cry my heart out. This is goodbye.

"Where is the necklace?" Denzel asks as we

drive back.

“I left it on the tomb. I can’t have it, I need to move on from Lucas.”

He squeezes my hand, “You can still move on even with it but if you felt that is what is best for you then I support it.”

“You seem to support a lot of things, prince Denzel”

He chuckles, “Only when it comes to you, I have a weak spot for you.”

“Lucky me.”

Denzel drives us to Dumazulu and sneaks me into the palace. I am sure the guards see us but then mind their business. I have lunch then he takes me back to Matshoba. I feel a lot lighter now that I have seen Lucas's resting place. I hope he is at peace.

Denzel leaves me at my house around two pm. At least his uncles are gone, I have to prepare myself to be yelled at because I know my father will not spare me. I get into the house and it is quiet. I rush to my room because I am not ready to talk to anyone. I close the door and sigh in relief.

“Hi.”

“Dad!” is he trying to give me a heart attack? He should've sneaks up on me like that, “What are

you doing in my room?”

“The last time I checked this is my house and I can do what I want.”

I hate it when parents pull that card. It is his house but this is my room and my private space. But of course, I can't say that allowed so I look down and wait for him to speak.

“Where have you been?”

“I was with prince Denzel, we took a walk,” I answer still looking down.

“Come sit with me.” I hesitate but walk to the bed and sit next to him. He holds my hands and

says, "We had a visit from one of Denzel's family members."

"Oh." That is all I can say. Why he is calm or maybe he is taking it easy on me? He does not look angry though.

"They are ready to unite the two kingdoms and I am sure you know what that means."

I nod, I know I am supposed to marry Denzel but I am surprised they did not mention I am pregnant. My father holds my hands, "Quinn you know I love you and I would do anything to make you happy. I want to know if you want to marry prince Denzel or must I cancel everything."

“You can’t cancel, this is the truce you have always wanted.”

“I care about you, Quinn. I know I said you will get married to Denzel whether you like it or not but I am not giving you the chance to choose. Are you still in love with that boy who is a commoner?” he asks. I hate the word commoner but now is not the time.

“He died Baba and I think I am starting to like Denzel so I wouldn’t mind marrying him.”

“Are you sure?” he questions and I nod, “I don’t want to push you into doing something you don’t want to do. I know how upset you were when I mentioned it.”

“I was upset but I have moved on from it. I want to marry Denzel.”

He smiles, “If you say so and we are not selling you. We love you and this will always be your home.”

“I know and thank you.”

He kisses my forehead and leaves the room. I guess we are not touching the pregnancy subject. I follow him out, maybe I should tell him that I am pregnant.

“Baba there is something I want to tell you.”

He sighs, “They mentioned it and honestly I

don't know what to say about that. I am disappointed, Quinn."

"I apologize."

"It's okay, I am not angry but I wish you had waited a little longer," he says before walking away. He is disappointed in me. Before I can back to my room, I see Dlamini coming out of Aiden's room. I walk to him.

"Good afternoon, how is my brother?"

He exhales heavily and shakes his head, "He is very sick and I don't know what to do anymore."

"Will he get better though?"

“I don’t know but I hope he does. Where are you coming from, I asked for you and they said you are not around?” he asks.

“I went to say goodbye to someone. Why were you looking for me?”

“Maybe you should consult and ask how we can help Aiden. Before you say anything, you have a gift and don’t doubt it. You could save your brother,” he says.

“I will try but I have a question. You said Lucas and I were not supposed to meet, why? Why did I fall for him if it wasn’t meant to be?”

He answers, “I don’t know child but what I know

is that his fate was to die in the hands of the wicked.”

“He was murdered?”

“That was his fate,” he walks away then stops and turns, “His purpose in your life was to give you the Kumkani you are carrying.”

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 45

QUINN

Whenever this old man called Dlamini speaks, I am left with questions. Whenever he speaks, I

become more confused. At first, he said I wasn't supposed to meet Lucas then now he says that Lucas's purpose was to give me the 'Kumkani' I am carrying. What does that mean? Will this child be the next king after Denzel? Why won't he tell me everything instead of confusing me?

I run after Dlamini. I need answers, "What do you mean Lucas's purpose was to give me the Kumkani I am carrying?"

"I mean exactly that."

"I don't understand, please tell me what it means," I plead.

"Quinn you can communicate with the

ancestors, why not ask for the answers that you seek? You are favoured by the ancestors, trust me if you ask them, they will answer all your questions.”

I retort, “It’s not that easy Bab’Dlamini. I don’t know how to go about this gift and I don’t know anything.”

“They will show you the way just open your heart and let them lead you.”

What the hell is that supposed to mean? This old man should just tell me what he knows. Okay, I need to calm down, “I hear you but can you please tell me why Denzel is the chosen one for me?”

He smiles and asks me to follow him because he is tired of standing. We go outside and sit on the benches near my mother's garden. We sit down and Dlamini smiles looking around, "This place is so nice and soothing."

"It just looks colourful to me."

He chuckles, "When you grow old, you start to get fascinated by little things."

"Please tell me about what I asked."

"When I was fourteen, I lost my parents. They were in the fields when it started raining, there was so much rain that it flooded the whole village and my parents died that day. I was angry at the ancestors for ten good years – why

would they take the only family I have? Why didn't they take me too? Who was supposed to take care of me because I didn't have any relatives, not that I knew of? Ten years I hated the ancestors and cursed them for forsaking me," he says.

"I am sorry Bab'Dlamini for losing your parents but what does that have to do with me and what I asked? I don't mean any disrespect."

He chuckles, "You kids now have a way of disrespecting elders in disguise. What I am trying to say was that after my parents died, it opened my eyes to the real world. Growing up I was very spoilt and didn't appreciate what I had. I used to think my parents abused me by making me cook, and teaching me how to wash my clothes and how to behave. Imagine how I

would have survived without knowing any of that.

What I am trying to say, little one is that everything happens for a reason. If my father hadn't died then I wouldn't have moved to Mpandeni where I met my grandfather and discovered my gift. Some people are just in our lives for a purpose and once their purpose is fulfilled then they have to go. It's not everyone that we must have around us in this journey called life. Some come and go but leave a part of them with us and take a part of us with them.

And then, some people just have a terrible fate. As unfair as it sounds, that is life just like there is day and night, good and evil. I don't know why it is like that but that is how things are.

I know you question why the ancestors brought that boy into your life. They didn't bring him to your life, they brought you to his life. You showed him love that he had never experienced and that was your only purpose in his life. As to why he is dead, that was his fate. Although you delayed it, you didn't change it. Eventually, you were going to lose him whether murdered or not."

"Was he murdered?" I ask.

"I don't know but his fate was for him to die by something."

"What about this innocent child that I am carrying, now the child will grow up without a father because the ancestors felt like taking his father," I say.

“My grandfather once said to me ‘the Lord knows the plans he has for us and they are plans to prosper us not harm us’ Little one it might seem unfair now but God sees beyond us, his ways are not our ways. There is a reason why that boy wasn’t meant for you.”

“But what about the baby I am carrying?” I yell.

“Just like his mother, he will be the fairest of them all, a wise king that will bring peace and unity to all the kingdoms around him. He might not be a Bhebhe but there is a reason why King Bongani spared that child. Lucas was also supposed to be killed with his parents.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Because I knew Naledi and just like your mother Karen, she was not a good person. She was a bitter and jealous woman to an extent that she tried to poison the queen’s mother (Olga’s mother) hence her execution. I know Lucas was innocent in all this but his bloodline was already tainted,” he answers.

“What about my child, is there a fault in his star too?”

He shakes his head, “The problem is that you want me to tell you what you want to hear. I already told you that this child will be the fairest of them all just because of your pure heart. You have unknowingly broken the generation curse and Dumazulu will be blessed because of this child you are carrying. That was Lucas’s

purpose. Seeing Lucas in your dream was just the ancestors leading you to prince Denzel. You two will bring Dumazulu and Matshoba back together just like it was before. Lucas was never going to marry you and you know it. You are royalty and you marry royalty, those are our ways. The ancestors are never wrong.”

“The ancestors are confusing sometimes.”

He laughs, “You kids are the ones confused. You watch a lot of television and start thinking you are invincible. No matter how much technology we get, culture will always be culture and we will always go back to our ancestors because those are our ways. What you had with Lucas wasn’t love princess and you know it. You were happy that you were doing something that you are not allowed to, I

have noticed you are hot-headed.”

“I am not hot-headed.”

“Then why fall in love with a commoner when you know you are not allowed to? You kids love saying ‘rules are meant to be broken’ but that doesn’t mean it's right. You broke the rules and Lucas paid for it. Keep that in mind next time you want to be rebellious,” he says.

“Just go Bab’Dlamini. I heard what you said, it was Lucas’s fate to die.”

He laughs standing up, “The other problem is that you hate the truth. Go talk to the Madibas and get ready to be the queen. Good things are coming your way, happiness will be your middle

name. Denzel has a good heart and will be a great king - with you by his side.”

“Thank you, Bab’Dlamini for answering my questions.”

“Now go get me a beer before I go,” he says. I bet my little toe, this man and uncle Robert meet through alcohol.

After giving Bab’Dlamini his beer, I go and check on Aiden. I am not allowed to be near him so I can only see him from a distance. To think I would find him sleeping, this boy is playing video games. His skin looks terrible, I wonder what sickness it is. I greet him and ask him how he is then go to my room. I receive a call from Denzel.

Denzel: Still in one piece over there?

Me: I should be asking you after what your mother did the other day.

Denzel: She only gets like that when she sees people. When we are alone, we get along fine.

Me: I'm fine, my father is disappointed but I am fine.

Denzel: Everything will be fine, don't worry. Did you hear we are getting married soon?

Me: My father told me.

Denzel: Do you want to marry me?

Me: Honestly, I do but I would also love to get to know you more.

Denzel: How about we do dinner sometime?
Where are my manners. Princess Quinn, would you please go on a date with me?

Me: I would love to, prince Denzel.

Denzel: I enjoyed the kiss, thank you for not slapping me.

Me: I would never and I also enjoyed the kiss.

Denzel: So when are we going on that date, my princess?

Me: Even tonight, I can ask my mom to cover for me while I sneak out.

Denzel: Or you can just ask her if you can go out with me. It is better than sneaking out.

Me: She will want to meet you first.

Denzel: I understand and I will meet her if it's okay with you.

Me: Not on the day of our date. You two should set your own date.

Denzel: Fine but don't sneak out, we have already messed up and can't afford to be in the

elders' bad books.

Me: Fine, I will ask for permission to go out.

Denzel: That's better. My father and the elders asked to see me, I hope I am not getting more slaps.

Me: (laughing) I will keep you in my prayers.

Denzel: I meant to ask, are you spiritually gifted? The other day when your brother was in the hospital....

Me: They say I am but I don't know. I am still getting used to it

Denzel: Okay. Let me go, I love you princess.

I hang up and put the phone on my chest. I am sleeping facing the ceiling. Prince Denzel is making me feel warm inside. I think I am falling for him and it's different from how I felt with Lucas. I feel like I loved Lucas more than he loved me and with Denzel he loves me - making it easy to love him back. Today I leave the past in the past and open my heart to Denzel.

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KUMKANI

CHAPTER 46

QUINN

I am in the water, I love the water. I am in our river, I dip myself and calm my mind. It has been long since I came here and I missed the water. When I feel that I am satisfied, I get out. I look around me and the place looks different. It is as if I am no longer in Matshoba. I look around me and I think I know this place, we used to play here when we were young.

“Nandi it’s not funny,” I say. I was with Nandi and the guards, where did they go? I put on my dress and walk around. I keep calling Nandi but I can’t see her. I don’t know why I am calling her but I keep calling her.

One moment I am in the forest then the next I am standing by the gate of some house. The gate is made of thick sticks. Surprisingly I also recognize this gate. This is mom Karen’s home.

I open the gate and walk inside.

“Hello! Is anybody home?” I walk toward the hut where granny (Karen’s mom) used to make her reed mats, “Mom Nomasonto! Gogo!”

No one is answering so I continue to search for them. I see someone standing under the mango tree. Why is she ignoring me? I walk toward the woman, I can only see her back. She is wearing a long blue dress.

“Hello!” I say then gasp when I see who it is, “Mom Karen? Is that you?”

She points at the tree.

“I thought...wait we buried you. How are you here?”

She continuously points at the tree so I ask, “Do you want mangos?”

There are no mangos but I don't know what to do or say because her eyes are on the tree and she won't look me in the eyes. I ask again if she wants mangos but she shakes her head and then looks at the hoe that is next to her.

“You want me to take the hoe?” why is she not talking? It would be better if she used words. She nods and then points at the tree again. I pick up the hoe and look at the tree. Does she want me to dig? What does she want? “You want me to hit the tree? I don't know I am lost.”

She frowns this time and points at the ground next to the tree. "You want me to dig next to the tree?"

She nods so I do that until I hit something. It's a metal thing. I kneel and dig around the metal thing with my hands. It looks like a rusted container of something. I notice that it has been sealed with a plastic lid. I open it and inside is a small glass container. It has water and something disgusting inside.

"Mom Karen, what is this?"

I look at her and she has tears on her face, "It's Aiden's umbilical cord stump."

“Why is it here?”

I quickly stand up when I notice that she is gone. I keep calling her but I can't find her anywhere. I look everywhere, around the house but she is gone.

“Mom Karen!” I scream and wake up. It was just a dream. I fell asleep after talking to Denzel on the phone. Joshua storms into the room.

“Are you okay, I heard you scream?”

“I am fine and you should be in bed, healing.”

He sits on the bed next to me, “I am fine now. You all can stop treating me like a dying

person.”

“You better enjoy all the attention because after this, you are on your own.”

He holds my hand, “Was that a nightmare?”

“Kind of, I saw your mom. Weird right?”

“It’s not weird and I heard you are spiritually gifted. Maybe she was trying to tell you something.”

“First of all, you guys should stop saying I am gifted and what could she be trying to tell me? She kept pointing at the ground then I jug up something disgusting.” I answer.

“Just tell Dad about it, maybe it needs the seer.”

I throw myself back on the bed, “I am tired of seeing Bab’Dlamini’s face.”

“Just tell Dad. Aiden is sick maybe this might help.”

I sit up, “Fine and how are you feeling? Is your wound healing?”

“I told you I am now fine. I am glad I no longer have the pressure of one day leading Matshoba and I just came back from mom’s tomb. I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for her kidney.”

I squeeze his hand, "You did well. I am sure she was also happy that you visited her."

"I hope she understands that I wanted to fully forgive her before going to her tomb. I almost died Quinn, imagine what would have happened to me if uncle Robert wasn't around. I was very mad at her but now it's in the past."

"I am glad you forgave her. Can you get me something to eat please?" I give him puppy eyes.

"You have become so lazy, go get your own food."

"Oh, you don't want to get my baby food. I will make Aiden the godfather of my child," I say

getting out of bed. I told him that I was pregnant while he was still at the hospital.

“Fine! I will get you something to eat. Geez you are so manipulative and go tell Dad your dream while I make you food,” he pulls me out of bed then we go out. I head to the throne room to look for my father. Luckily I find him alone.

“Baba can I please talk to you,” I bow in courtesy.

He sighs and signals that I sit down. I am sure he is tired of all the drama going around, “What is it?”

“I know this might sound weird but I had a dream. Mom Karen was in it too. It all started

when I was in the water then I was in mom Karen's house. She kept pointing at the ground then she asked me to dig and I took out something. When I asked what it was she said its Aiden's umbilical cord stump. I don't know what it means but I thought should tell you."

He stands on his feet, "When did you have this dream?"

"Now, I just woke up."

"Go tell your uncle to call Dlamini. I think it's a sign of how to save Aiden. Call your uncle!" he orders.

"Okay."

“You are coming too, you need to show us the place just like in your dream,” he states.

“Baba I have a date tonight and I am hungry,” I mumble.

“Hey don’t mumble at me, we are going to Karen’s village. Call your uncle.”

I leave the room and call my uncle. Since when does he take what I dream seriously?

Surprisingly Bab’Dlamini is still in the palace and drinking with my uncle. I deliver the news and they go to meet up with my father. I use that opportunity to go change. And, to tell Denzel that I might not be able to see him today.

“May I come in, my princess,” Nandi knocks on

my bedroom door. I am fixing my afro.

“Yes!”

“This came from you, my princess,” she hands me a small basket that has goodies inside, “And your father is calling you.”

“Thanks, Nandi and here’s a chocolate.”

She shakes her head, “It’s your gift so I can’t take it.”

“This is too much for one person. Plus this is me making it up to you for yelling a lot lately.”

She bows, “Thank you, my princess.”

I call Denzel. The gift is from him.

Me: Aren't you full of surprises, prince Denzel?

Denzel: What did I do now?

Me: Thank you for the gift and I love the chocolate. Mostly the cute teddy.

Denzel: I am glad you loved it there's a plastic of guava inside. I know you love them but I put two. We don't want you to get constipated.

Me: (laughing) I don't eat them a lot.

Denzel: You do.

Me: How did the meeting go?

Denzel: It went well my father wanted to bless me with cows to marry the love of my life. He is not letting me use the ones that I already own and the elders were just being the elders.

Me: I am glad everything went well. Let me go we will talk later.

I hang up and go to my father. We are leaving for mom Karen's village. I try to ask my father to stay but he says he needs me. We get to the village just after sunset. Even Nomasonto is surprised by our arrival. I leave my father talking to Nomasonto and walk toward the tree

thinking about my dream. The hoe is on the ground just like in my dream. The only thing missing is mom Karen. I take the hoe and dig the ground until I hit a metal.

“Don’t touch it,” Bab’Dlamini yells walking towards me. My father and uncle follow, “Is this what you saw in your dream?”

“Yes, mom Karen showed it to me.”

“I will take it out, you are with child and I am scared for you to touch these kinds of things.”

Now everyone is watching, even granny (Karen’s mom). Bab’Dlamini takes out the rusted container and inside is that disgusting thing in water. He looks at Nomasonto, “Do you

know how to reverse this?”

Nomasonto shakes her head, “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

“You and your sister did this and put Aiden’s umbilical cord stump here. Do you want Aiden to die?” – Bab’Dlamini.

My father locks his palms together, “Please fix this! I don’t want to lose my son. Aiden’s skin is rotting. I won’t be mad at what your sister did but fix it.”

Nomasonto nods, “I will fix it.”

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 47

QUINN

Luckily, we are not sleeping in mom Karen's village. Right now we are on our way back to Matshoba. Nomasonto said she needs to see Aiden to help him. Nomasonto is also spiritually gifted. You know I still don't understand how and why mom Karen put Aiden's umbilical cord stump in a bottle. Did she do something to Aiden? Is that why he is sick? But, why would she do that to her son?

I have so many questions but unfortunately, Bab'Dlamini is too busy to answer any of my questions. Also, why wasn't anyone shocked that we found that thing buried in their yard? Does it mean they knew? They knew that mom Karen did this. Why would she bewitch Aiden?

Karen was an amazing person.

I think I must have fallen asleep in the car because my father woke me up to go to bed. I am exhausted so I go straight to bed.

I wake up when the sun is up. Gone are the days when I used to wake up at four am. Now I wake up at eight am. I get out of bed and go to the bathroom. I only brush my teeth and wash my face. I will bathe later right now I need food. I get my phone and I have a good morning text message from Denzel.

‘Good morning, future husband.’

‘Somebody is in a good mood. How are you?’ – Denzel.

'I am good and I am in a good mood. I just feel lighter as if a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. Visiting Lucas's tomb helped. I am now at peace.'

'I am glad it helped. You needed that.'

'Yeah, it did. Let me go make myself something to eat then I will call you.'

'Okay sweetie, take care of yourself.' – Denzel.

I put the phone in my gown pocket and then go to the kitchen. My father is in the kitchen. He is alone, I am sure he chased out the helpers and guards. He is sitting staring at a blank space. I am sure this is all too much for him. He hasn't

had a break this year – it is just chaos after chaos in the royal house.

“Good morning,” I open the fridge and take out milk then go to the cupboard to get cereal.

“Hey, Quinny. I didn’t see you walk in.”

I fix my breakfast and put back the things then pull a chair and sit, “Hungry? Do you want some cereal?”

“I don’t eat these things but thank you.”

“Baba are you okay?” I ask and he exhales heavily. I reach for his hand and squeeze it, “Aiden will be fine.”

“It is not only Aiden. A lot has been going on in this house.”

“Everything will be fine. Bab’Dlamini told me that everything happens for a reason, that it’s only a season and it will pass,” I tell him.

“Since when do you and Dlamini talk?”

“I saw him yesterday when he was coming out of Aide’s room. At first, I didn’t understand why some things happen in our lives until I realizes that things need balance. You cannot always be happy, there will be a time when sadness will take over. Just like it will not always be day, night has to come too. Both of them come for different reasons even though we sometimes

cannot understand them,” I say and my father squeezes my hand.

“You have grown so much and I am glad you learnt something from Dlamini. I will try not to stress too much- as you said, everything happens for a reason whether good or bad.”

When I am done eating, I put my bowl in the sink. I will wash it later. I go back to sit with my father. I know this is adults' business but I want to ask something. I clear my throat, “Baba why did we find Aiden’s umbilical cord stump in that bottle.”

“It turns out Karen put it there and that is the reason why Aiden is sick.”

I say, "But why would she do that to Aiden? He is her son."

"Even I don't know why she would do that but Nomasonto and Dlamini said they can help get Aiden better."

"I hope he gets better too, Amahle will be devastated if something happens to Aiden, we also would be devastated." I stand up and go to the fridge to get grapes. I offer my father some grapes but he turns them down. I wonder if he even eats during the day because we now only see him eat supper. My father and I go quiet for a while.

"But father I don't understand, why would mom Karen make Aiden sick? And, she was an amazing person. She is the only person I turned

to whenever my mom pushed me away or called me names. She was the mother I had always wanted.”

He reaches for both my hands, “Karen was not a good person. Yes, she cared about you but it wasn’t because she loved you. It was for her. She was just using you.”

“That’s not true, she loved me.”

He shakes his head, “It was for her benefit. She just loved that your mother and you were not getting along. I am not trying to turn you against her but I just want you to know that she wasn’t the person you thought she was. You know we live in a world where people can smile at you and wish you well yet they are the reason you are in pain in the first place.”

“What does that mean?”

He answers, “It means that it is not everyone that is in your life or anyone that smiles at you that wishes you well. Do you know the saying ‘keep your friends close and your enemies closer’ It is not just a saying but your biggest hates are sometimes the people around you.

They pretend to like you just to get information and confirm if what they are doing is working. I know you and Karen were close but she was just doing it to hurt your mother. She knew that it would hurt your mother if you and her were close. She is the reason you and your mother were not getting along.”

“No baba, mom Karen was the sweetest person I have ever met.”

“The devil doesn’t come red and with horns, he comes as the person you trust the most. And people lie, they pretend to love you when it is all just a lie,” he adds.

“Okay, maybe she hated me because of my mother but what about Aiden? He is her child – why would she do that to him.”

He shakes his head lightly, “Jealousy can turn one bitter to an extent where one would do anything to get what they want. They don’t care if it means hurting others but as long as they are fine on their side. Jealousy can turn one into a witch. It is not everyone that smiles at you wishes you well.”

One of the guards walks into the room and tells my father that he is needed in Aiden's room. He leaves me in the kitchen. I can't believe Karen never cared about me. I think I now understand that singer that said it is better to trust a stone than to trust a person.

DENZEL

It seems I am being summoned a lot to the throne room these days. The family is preparing to go pay lobola to the Mandela family. I cannot wait for Quinn to be my wife. I cannot wait to create memories with her and love her with all I have. I love that girl and it is as if my love for her grows each day. I cannot wait to wake up with her in my arms.

“Baba you called me,” I greet him and then wait to hear what he wants.

“Are you busy? I want us to take a walk.”

I answer, “I am not busy.”

He stands up and asks me to lead the way. We head out of the palace, he tells the guards to follow behind. I know he wants to talk about something when he does this. I hope I am not in trouble.

“Do you have anything you want to tell me?” my father asks. He loves walking with his hands behind his back.

“No, why?”

“I think it's better if you confess yourself. You wouldn't want to anger the Bhebhe ancestors when the truth comes out,” he says and I swallow hard. What does he mean to anger the ancestors? I didn't do anything.

“But I didn't do anything, why would the ancestors be angry.”

He stops walking and asks, “The child Quinn is carrying is not yours right?”

“The child is mine.”

“Denzel don't take me for a fool. You and I know

that you have never bedded a woman. You told me that you wanted to wait since also your woman will be pure.” I didn’t think he would remember that.

“I changed my mind, Quinn and I were caught in the moment and we did it.”

He scoffs, “When? You and Quinn started getting along after Lucas died. That child is Lucas’s isn’t it?”

I look down and don’t respond. He adds, “Are you sure you want to marry a woman that is carrying another man’s child?”

“I love Quinn and I am willing to accept her with the child. Even if that wasn’t Lucas’s child, I was

still going to accept her like that.”

“If you say so but you do know that child she is carrying could be the future king of Dumazulu if it’s a boy?” he asks.

“I know that and I did think about it.”

“Did you? If he is the future king then he is not carrying the Bhebhe legacy,” he says.

“But he will be carrying the Bhebhe surname. Baba the ancestors put this child in our family maybe this is their will.”

He sighs, “Maybe but the elders will not agree to it.”

“The elders don’t have to know as long as we introduce the child to our forefathers, I think that is enough. Remember when you said some secrets are meant to be known only by the royal house? Only me, you and Quinn can know and keep this amongst us.”

“You love this girl, don’t you?” he asks.

“With all I have.”

“Fine, you can marry her,” he walks ahead of me.

(My honeys our story is drawing to an end. After this story mama is taking a break from Facebook. I will be writing on WhatsApp only. Check the post below for details on how to join

the WhatsApp story. Don't be left out)

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 48

QUINN

It all feels surreal. I am now a married woman. People from Dumazulu came for the lobola negotiations and everything was a success. I thought my father was going to give them trouble but everything went well. To think my mother would give me a break since it was my day but she had me wake up at three am to prepare and had me on my feet the whole day.

Aunty Lano wouldn't stop with her teachings, I wanted to pull my ears off my head. She only had two weeks to groom me. She said children

nowadays like to follow the Internet so she will only teach me the basic stuff. For example how to behave in front of my inlaws and how to treat my husband. My mother had already taught me other things.

Never did I imagine that one day I would fall for prince Denzel as I have now. I am in love with a man that loves me back. As much as I didn't want to leave home, I am enjoying being in Dumazulu. Yup, I am a Bhebhe now. Denzel and I had our traditional wedding and I was introduced to the Bhebhe ancestors.

Denzel and I stay at the palace with his parents. I am glad that his parents love and accepted me even though they know about the baby. His mother loves me and she is happy to have me around. According to her, she was tired of being

the only female in the house, excluding the helpers.

I am enjoying staying at the royal house, it's been a couple of weeks but I sometimes miss home. I miss my siblings. Speaking of siblings, Amahle gave birth to a beautiful baby girl whom mom named Minenhle.

As much as mom Karen was a bad person, I wish she was around to see her first grandchild. I am sure she is watching and happy that Amahle did not dump the baby as she wanted to.

Joshua is still Joshua, he says he is taking a gap year trying to figure out his life, whatever that means. I am just happy that our family has finally accepted him for who he is and that they

are trying to meet him halfway. I know they don't understand this being a gay thing but at least they are supportive.

Khumbulani is still crazy - my ever-happy brother. He is being groomed to be the next king Matshoba and he is excited. I hope he leads the people well when his time comes.

Aiden is fine now. I don't know what Nomasonto and Bab'Dlamini did that day but after a week he started healing then his skin got back to its normal state. I respect witchcraft - I never knew that people can mix things and people get affected.

Then there is me, three months pregnant, married to a wonderful man and still struggling to accept my gift. Honestly, I don't know how to

go about it but Bab'Dlamini said I shouldn't worry and that when it is time, everything will be clear.

"The water is so nice, I didn't want to come out of the tub," I walk into the bedroom. Denzel is already in bed and he is reading something. His reading glasses suit him like a glove.

"I almost came to look for you because you were taking forever."

"You know I always take forever to finish bathing," I sit in front of the dressing table and start moisturizing my body. Would you believe that I have been with Denzel for two months, sleeping in the same bed and not once has he tried to sleep with me? I think it is because I am pregnant.

I wear my night dress and then join Denzel in bed. He puts his book down, takes off his glasses then puts them on the side table. He then ask, "How was your day?"

"My day was great, your mom taught me how to make fudge. How was your meeting with the villagers?"

So King Bongani is starting to attend meetings with Denzel so that he will see how things work and he also attends meetings with the elders. He is a busy man these days but of course, he is never too busy for me. He takes me out every chance he gets and spoils me a lot.

Denzel says, "The meeting went well although

we couldn't help all of the villagers. They were complaining about the hospitals being far and that it is difficult for those who have no donkeys to get there. They suggested we get them public transport. The roads are terrible on that side so we can't help with that. But, we agreed to build them a clinic. It will take a while but it's better than not having one at all."

I lean over and kiss him, "You look handsome when serious. I am glad you were able to find a solution for them."

"Yeah, me too. Where is that fudge you made?"

"It's here but first give me a kiss," I bite my lower lip.

He leans over and cups my face. He kisses me, sucking my top lip. He places his hand on my back and pulls me closer to him. The kisses are slow and unrushed. I lay back on the bed, and he gets on top of me and then resumes kissing me.

I can feel his manhood pocking me. I also want him just as much but I don't know if it's allowed for us to do it while I am pregnant. But I am his wife so it should be allowed. After all, he is the father of this child now.

I feel his hands go under my night dress then he starts carrying my thighs while shifting the night dress up. I want him to quench this thirst I am feeling.

He glares into my eyes and says, "Should we do

it?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?" he asks and I nod. He then whispers in my ear, "Do you want to know a secret?"

"What is it?"

He murmurs, "This is my first time."

He doesn't wait for me to respond, he smashes his lips on mine and makes love to me. For a moment we become one it is as if we have one heartbeat. For someone who claims this to be their first time, he is good.

DENZEL

Today I am smiling by myself. I am glad I waited. I am glad that it got to be with the love of my life. I cannot imagine myself doing it with anyone that is not Quinn.

"You look happy today," says Bab'Mawande when I bump into him.

"What can I say, my woman, makes me happy."

He laughs, "Look at you talking like a man. I am glad that boy is gone and won't get in between you and the princess."

"Lucas was like a brother to me, I wouldn't wish death on him."

"I thought that is what you wanted. You did say that he is a pain in your life. I did you a favour," he answers

Are my ears deceiving me? Did he just admit to killing Lucas, "Bab'Dlamini how can you do that? How can you kill a person?"

"I was helping you. You should be thanking me."

"I never said kill him and I was hurt that day. Lucas can't just die in vain. You should be punished."

We are in the throne room, discussing Mawande's issue. It turns out he is not the one that did it but he asked someone to kill Lucas.

"Mawande why would you do that, that boy was innocent." father asks. He looks disappointed but I am furious.

"I thought I was helping the prince. I wasn't planning on killing him, the plan just went wrong. I apologize my king and queen. I also apologize to you princess Quinn." - Mawande.

I yell, "Apologizing won't bring back Lucas. You should be killed too."

Quinn stands up and walks up to me, she takes my hand and leads me out. We go to the garden.
"You need to calm down my love."

"Lucas is dead because of me, how can I calm down when I just found out that my best friend is dead because of me?"

I cup his face and make him look at me, "None of what happened is your fault. It was his time to go. As for wanting Mawande to be killed, don't do it. You don't want his blood on your hands. Baby two wrongs don't make a right."

"He can't just get away with it.'

"Just because you have the power doesn't mean we should play God. Let God deal with him

according to his will. And, it's not your fault Lucas is dead, it was his fate," I hug him.

KUMKANI

CHAPTER 49

SEVEN YEARS LATER

JOSHUA

Home sweet home! It's nice to be back home after four years. I cannot wait to see my family and Quinn, I miss her so much. We do talk here and there but she is always busy. I understand because she is now the Queen of Dumazulu. Yup, Denzel is now the king. I am sure you are wondering where I was for the past four years.

Seven years ago, after my family had accepted that I am gay, my father let me do a course in fashion design. It was a three-year course then I got a job at a fashion house in the city. It was hard to leave my family but I had to follow my dreams I worked for eight months at HN fashions – I worked as a fashion designer meaning I was the one sketching designs for clothing, footwear and accessories. Everything was fine until one day when the boss called me to her office.

Honestly, I thought she was calling to fire me. Turns out I was wrong. The brand Louis Vuitton had seen my designs and wanted me to work with them. To say I was happy is an understatement, a whole me was going to design for Louis Vuitton.

It was a huge step for me but again I had to stay true to myself. My family knew that I loved them but I had to take the offer. My boss was sad but she said it was not fair if she refuses that I go and that I was destined for greater things. So I moved to Spain, and that's where I met the love of my life, Miguel.

I brought him to Matshoba with me. I want to introduce him to my family and I want him to see that I was not lying when I told him that I am a prince. I hope he loves my crazy family – I wish my mother was alive to see how happy I am when I am myself. I am happy that I no longer have to hide or pretend to be something I am not.

“We are almost there,” I squeeze Miguel's hand. I don't know what he is worried about. My

family will accept him. Even if they don't like him, they will accept him for me.

“Will they like me? I don't even know anything about your culture.”

“Relax, they will love you. I have the most loving family ever. You will see for yourself.” I drive into the palace. This place has changed a lot – the house is now painted in a different colour. I hope they didn't touch or change my things while I was away.

Minenhle is the first person I see when I get out of the car. I wonder if she still recognizes me. But I talk to her on the video call. Amahle and her baby still stay with our parents. Khumbulani now stays with his wife and I heard Aiden moved to the city. He did an I.T. course and left

for the city. I bet all the money in my account he is out there hacking systems and is up to no good.

I open my arms and Minenhle comes running to me. I think she knows my voice more. I pick her up and spin her, "Hey you! What is your mother feeding you? You are so heavy."

She hides her eyes with her palms. She is a shy kid, "Gogo makes cakes for me."

"I also want the cakes, steal some for me, okay?" I say and she nods, "This is Miguel, my friend."

Miguel shifts closer, "Hey....what's your name?"

Instead of answering she giggles and covers herself. I guess according to her when she can't see, the other person can't also.

"Welcome home, my prince." Sonny bows in courtesy. I see it's not only the palace walls that changed but also the people too. Sonny (who was my servant) looks different – he even grew a beard. I greet him and then ask him to help with the bags. Minenhle won't even let me put her down.

"Oh my God you are a prince," says Miguel,
"Babe I thought you were joking."

"Why would I joke about being a prince? I could be rich had we made a bet. Let's go inside," I lead the way. The helpers have already taken our bags in.

KHAPHELA

I am standing at the highest mountain in Matshoba. Everything looks good from up here. It feels like yesterday when I was standing here with my father. I remember how nervous I was when he told me that one day I will lead all the people in this land. The past seven years have been easy on me. I now understand when Dlamini said 'the sun will rise again.

Indeed the ancestors remembered me, I am a happy man. I am a happy father. I am a happy grandfather. I am a happy king. Everything is going well in Matshoba and I think it's time for me to step down as king. Khumbulani is ready and I was wrong about that boy. He will make a wonderful king with his wife beside him.

Khumbulani married princess Rendani. That child is something but Khumbulani is also crazy so they get along fine.

I am more worried about Aiden. That boy does the craziest things. I talk to him once in a while but he doesn't want to come home.

"My king, prince Joshua just arrived at the palace," one of the guards announces.

I didn't know Joshua is back. He did not call. I head back home. I am glad that he turned out fine and I am proud of everything he has achieved. I am proud that despite what was said, he stayed true to himself. I still don't understand the being gay thing but he is my son and I will always support him when I can.

We drive to the palace. I wonder where Robert is. He just disappeared on me. I last talked to him a year ago. I think he meant it when he said he will not come to see me for the next ten years because my kingdom stresses him. He should try being a king and he will understand.

I walk into the dining room. Joshua is with a man I don't recognize. He stands up and comes to greet me, "Hey dad!"

"Look at you, what are you eating in Spain, I want it too."

He laughs, "I am just happy."

"I am happy to see you, a whole four years not

coming home?”

He answers, “I am always busy with work. I want to introduce you to someone.”

We walk to the young man he was with, “Miguel meet my father. Dad this is Miguel, my boyfriend.”

Okay, I did not see this one coming but I smile and shake the young man’s hand, “Hello young man and welcome to our home. Be at home.”

“Thank you sir!” – Miguel

Things must be serious between Josh and Miguel for him to introduce him to us. I leave for

my room when I find Laleti reading a magazine. We now use the same bedroom.

“Don’t you get tired of reading,” I sit with her on the couch.

“It’s the same as asking if I get tired of breathing.”

“I want to step down as king. I want us to spend some time together,” I say.

“Baba we spend time together.”

I take her hands, “I feel like I need to make it up to you. You went through hell with Karen and then for the past seven years, I was busy

grooming Khumbulani and trying to handle everything. We need some time alone. Let's go on a trip, anywhere you want."

"Aren't we a little old for that?"

I answer, "They say life begins at forty and I feel like we never got to enjoy our marriage. The kids can take care of themselves so let's go."

"Okay."

QUINN

"Lucious wear your shoes!" I yell and he continues running around the room. This boy never listens to me. I wonder where he got all

this naughtiness because I am not like him and Lucas seemed like a calm person. Lucious is six now and stresses the heck out of me. He never listens to anything I say.

The past seven years have been the best of my life. I have a loving family and a husband that adores me. Denzel is the best thing that ever happened to me. I never thought I will fall so deep for him. He makes me happy and loves Lucious as his own. I thought he was going to change as time went on but he proved me wrong.

Two years ago, King Bongani stepped down as king so now Denzel is the king of Dumazulu and I am his queen, of course. I thought Denzel was going to get busy and not have time for me but my man tries everything to make sure I am

happy, he takes me out and even go on vacations. Even the elders cannot change his mind when it comes to spending time with me. Denzel would rather cancel a meeting with the elders only to go spend time with the family. I love that he is both a king and a father. He shows up for both.

“Lucious wear your shoes before I slap you.”

She sticks his tongue out and continues running around. I warned him about playing in the house but he never listens. He is very naughty. Denzel walks into the room carrying Leon. He puts him down and then kisses me, “Are you done?”

“Not yet but I will be done in ten minutes. Leon go pee, I don’t want stories when we are on the road.”

Leo and peeing are best friends. Two minutes he wants to pee, and every time we go somewhere, we make stops for him. Leon is my five-year-old son by the way. A duplicate of Denzel. You carry them for nine months and they come out looking like their father.

We are getting ready to go to Matshoba today is Khumbulani's ceremony to be crowned Kumkani of Matshoba. I know he will do a great job, let's hope he won't marry a second wife like my father.

"Lucious if I catch you, I'll smack your bum!"
Great now he is playing with Leon. "Love a little help here!"

“Lucious wear your shoes or we are leaving you and Leo go put the ball in the playroom,” – Denzel. Leon and Lucious stop what they are going and leave the room.

“Do I speak Greek to them?”

He replies, “It’s because you shout, they think it’s a game.”

He places his hands on my waist and kisses me, “Kumkanikazi wami.” (My queen)

“Kumkani wami (my king)

“I love you,” he kisses me.

“I love you too.”

“Thank you for always rooting for me. I wouldn’t be the Kumkani I am today if it wasn’t for you, camagu (thank you),” he pulls me in his arms and holds me tight. Indeed is a wise Kumkani and it’s all him – I just participated.

THE END

(Ahh what a journey. I hope you enjoyed it because I did. Thank you for the support my honeys, those who like the posts, comment, participate in sponsorships, join the WhatsApp stories, buy pdfs and hard copies. Thank you for the love and support till we meet again.