

Loving Beyond The Temple



*A novel
By
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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

Chapter 1

KHANYO

“Do not let Durban change you,” -I think we've all been told something along these lines by our parents when we left villages for big cities. They have changed people, mostly Joburg, it swallowed our fathers back in the 90s. They don't call it “IGoli eligola amadoda” for nothing. Some left and never came back. Instead, an unknown wife would pitch up with a brood of children to report death to the family, only to get a site to bury the so-called husband and return back wherever she came from. Some respected fathers came back looking like hobos, speaking Tsotsi taal with no front teeth and fake silver chains around their necks. Only a few, maybe 8 out of 10, remained the same.

Durban is bad too, but it still has that string of decency and reputation on it. With good people

around you and your head in the right place, you can make it here. You can achieve your dreams and make your parents proud.

I could've turned out okay too, really. I had a shot in this life thing, a good one. But I made friends, toxic ones, and then I started making bad decisions. Really, what were the odds of me and Efe working out? Efe isn't only a Nigerian with shady dealings, he is 35! Nine years older than me! Obviously a man that old and coming from another country must have a wife back home and one or two Emmanuellas.

But because I have toxic friends, Nolwazi told me to give that relationship my all. Efe had money, so I gave him my heart, vagina, kidneys and every piece of me. Guess what Efe did? Efe made enough money, he bought himself a big mansion somewhere in La Lucia and brought his family to South Africa. Look at me now! Ngisele ngedwa ngizikhotha amanxeba avuz' igazi njengenja (I'm left alone, licking my bleeding wounds like a dog.)

My toxic friends have put their busy lives on hold to nurse my broken-ass. I thank God for these hopeless

Queens. We've been together for two years and we are still going strong. I think Nolwazi is the most toxic one, she's the one who's always leading train to the jungle. She came up with the idea of me going to the club and drinking my sorrows away. And well, Gugu being the most connected and monied one, she organized transport and made sure that we are in the VIP section.

I have a chance to hook up with any big shot, just to get myself a rebound, but I've drank more than I can handle. I've been yelling, dancing and opening up to strangers about my personal problems, while my friends hook up and score themselves a few rounds and free drinks.

Before going to the bathroom I swallow another tequila shot. I don't know where Nolwazi and Gugu are, it's now morning and we need to leave. I jump off the bar stool, my feet lose balance and I bump against one of the tables in the front row.

“Wat is fout met jou?” Oh, no! You don't mess with this race. The table shook and all their drinks spilled on the floor.

The tallest one with no front teeth and serial killer ears is already on his feet. Maybe if they were only males I would've been able to negotiate, but they're with their ladies and they're already swearing and threatening to slice my boobs. I'm not getting into a fight with coloured, intoxicated people!

I take off my heels and revive the Caster Semenya inside me. Afrikaans insults follow behind me as I dash out, pushing bouncers out of my way and running out of the building. I cross the road with my eyes closed, cars are hooting at me and I'm sure that I'm getting more insults from the drivers.

Cabs are always parked outside this block of stores and waiting for people like me; those who need urgent transport. Most of these cabs are empty, only the silver-grey one has the driver at the front. I turn to it and bang the window with the front of my shoe.

“Musgrave!” I'm yelling at him. He needs to unlock the damn doors! I have angry coloured drunkards hunting me down.

“Nkosazane,” - It's him, the driver, rolling down the window.

Bakithi, I don't have Nkosazane time! One punch from those people- I lose all my teeth.

Oh, the doors have unlocked. I open the back one and lounge myself on the seat.

So comfortable for a cab!

“123 Essenwood Road, the second building opposite Steers, Musgrave Centre,” I tell him after catching up my breath.

Bethuna, he needs to move! Why so much beard anyway, don't they have salons where he comes from? His afro looks good and well taken care of, but really, it's summer mos.

After so much frowning and staring, he finally starts the cab. I release a sigh of relief and lean back on the seat with my eyes closed. They cannot get me now, bloody coloured fools!

Heh, I wonder if I have enough money to pay for this cab.

“How much is it going to be?” I ask, silently wondering if he'd accept my weave as payment.

I catch a glimpse of him shaking his head through the rear-view mirror and decide to keep my peace. We'll cross the payment bridge once we get to Musgrave.

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“Nkosazane,” says a deep voice somewhere around me. I open my eyes slowly and scan around. Oh, I'm in a car, outside our building.

“We are here,” the man says.

People wear suits so early in the morning? Oh shucks, I need to discuss payment arrangements with him.

“How much is it going to be?”

“R3000.”

LOL. I laugh in French. R3000? Was this a private jet? Yes I'm drunk and I don't have a bright future, but I know Maths.

“That's daylight robbery, R3000 for a mere cab?” I

ask.

He stands, ankles-crossed, with his elbow balanced above the car door. Is he not going to recalculate? This is too much and he knows it.

“If you're not going to pay me at least get out of my car,” he says.

That's even a better option, but he's working for his family, I'm everything but I'm not a bully.

I take off my wrist watch. It's one expensive thing that Efe didn't buy for me. I bought it last year using my savings, I still have the slip in my drawer, just in case someone tries to argue that I bought it with R3 645 at Browns. One of these days I'm going to print copies of that slip and laminate the original one.

“I'm sure you'll get that amount from this,” I hand the watch to him.

I'm not sure if his stare is judgmental or concerned. He takes the watch and pushes it inside the pocket of his dark-grey suit. I must say, I didn't expect him to accept this easily.

He gets inside the car and drives off slowly. I really need to sleep, I'm tempted to throw myself here on the pavement and drift off. Wait...is that a Shembe sticker I see behind my cab? That's not even a cab, it's a C-Class with the NZ registration. Father God, did I hijack a Nazareth man into driving me here? Forget about drunk coloureds, that's nothing compared to what I've done- to what this means. I'm sober in an instant. What if he reports me in his church? I'm sure he's going to take his car to the temple to be cleansed. A drunk woman inside his car?

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THE MANQELES

While most of Enembe residents relocated to areas closer to Mandeni, the Mangeles and few others remained behind and built something out nothing. It's far from everything, government services take longer to arrive, that's if they even get there. But the village has progressed, on its own and by those who reside in it. Even though they're still traditionally built, most homesteads have been roofed with tiles rather than grass, walls are built out bricks and painted.

They still keep their livestock and crop small gardens below their homesteads.

Zakhele Manqele left a huge legacy for his kids. His death came short and shocking. But he had lived, loved and left his mark in this village. His home is the largest, with its high peak aluminum windows, peach painted six-corner rondavels, a capacious eleven-room ranch house standing between them, and the greenish backyard. Unlike most homesteads here, his is fenced by round, white-painted stones that open below the yard for entrance. He was a devoted Nazareth man that married the love of his life inside the church and lived his whole life serving and living by the rules of Nazareth.

Bandlaethu's silver-grey C-Class drives in, around 9:30 in the morning. He's home early, this one always has something to linger around Durban for. They always thought he'd move to the city once he made it out of the university. But surprisingly, he came back home.

“Did they kick you out of the hotel?” Nkonzo teases him. He's washing his car next to his rondavel. He

was the first one to return home after their meeting in Durban Central where they were sealing a deal with one of the biggest printing companies based in Mayville.

“Not really. I cancelled my meeting with Ndlovu Inc,” Bandla says, walking past him to the main house. He has to greet the whole family before going to his rondavel to replay everything that happened to him this morning.

“Mthonga!” His eldest brother, Thakasa, shakes his hand as they bump into each other in the kitchen. They usually call each other using this clan-name, especially Thakasa, maybe he's even long forgotten their names. Keeping up with three brothers and two sisters must be a job and half. Nkonzo comes after him, they're just two years apart, however Nkonzo is taking this life thing less serious than any of them. Bandla is the third born with a stagnant life and strongest work ethic. After three boys Zakhele and MaKhumalo were blessed with a daughter, Mawande. They just married her off two years ago, she was

only 22 but she convinced everyone that she was ready. Sqalo and Phethile are the twins Zakhele left behind at the age of 10. They're 17 now and finishing high school.

In total Makhumalo and Zakhele had six children; two daughters and four boys. Thakasa 36, Nkonzo 34, Bandla 29, Mawande 24, Sqalo and Phethy 17.

“You are home early,” Thakasa says, trying to read Bandla’s closed-off face. It's so unlike Bandla to come back from Durban this early.

“I cancelled my meeting, so...” He shrugs his shoulders and grabs one banana from the fruit bowl.

“And you? I thought you’d be preparing for your trip with your wife,” Bandla enquires, peeling his banana with his eyes on Thakasa.

He exhales and taps his fingers on the counter. That's what he does when he's stressed out; his fingers always have something to do.

“I'll be joining her later in the week,” he says.

Bandla frowns. Nothile has been preparing for this trip for a while now. Their marriage hasn't been easy, their failure of having kids is the main constituent to Thakasa's unhappiness. It's been 6 years since they tied the knot, and one of the reasons why Thakasa got married in the first place was because he wanted to have kids. This trip was going to be their break from everything that's happening- they'd let loose and reconnect as a couple.

“What's the point of her going on this trip without you?” Bandla asks with a frown.

“What's your point of questioning me because you know I'll leave when I say I'm going to leave?” He's right. Only their sister, Mawande, knows how to get through him. Out of them all, Thakasa is the most stubborn one.

“All I'm saying is, don't be too hard on yourself. It will happen when it happens, you don't have to stop being a husband just because you're not becoming a father.” He leaves before Thakasa can defend himself. He does that even when he knows that he's wrong.

“Mthonga I can't do this anymore,” he says before Bandla takes the corner leading to the dining room.

Bandla stops and looks back with his forehead creased. What is Thakasa saying? He can't do what?

“What are you talking about Mthonga?” he asks and takes steps back inside the kitchen.

“I'm tired of trying. I think it's time I accept that I'm never going to have children. Six years is a very long time Bandla. It's time I accept this inability.” This is not him speaking, it's pain.

“Take this trip with your wife, Nkonzo and I will manage together,” Bandla says, trying not to sound sympathetic or hopeless as he is.

“I'll see,” Thakasa says and heaves a sigh. There's hope; he might go to this trip with his wife. Hopefully Nothile doesn't have crazy baby-making plans awaiting for them in Bali because that would push Thakasa off the edge. He's already exhausted, emotionally and sexually.

Bandla proceeds to the lounge where Phethy and his mother are. He greets and joins them in front of the TV.

“Aren't you supposed to be attending your extra Science class today?” he asks his sister, Phethy.

“I'm waiting for Sqalo,” she says.

Makhumalo and Bandla share a look. Since when do they wait for each other? Sqalo even changed schools because his twin sister was clingy and annoying. Sometimes they fight over friends, apparently Sqalo has this skill of attracting cool friends and Phethy always tags herself along his crew.

“It's your birthday tomorrow, you're turning 29 Bandla!” He knows this conversation very well. Once his mother starts reminding him about his age it simply means that he must get a wife. Her and the elders in church have chosen a few possible matches for him. He is just not emotionally there yet.

“You and Nkonzo are going to turn me into a laughing stock,” she mumbles and picks her wool

and resumes her knitting.

It's clear where Nkonzo stands, he's always been vocal about his fear of marriage and that it's not happening anytime soon. But Makhumalo believes that he'll change, the church's eldest men can talk sense into his head, so she makes sure that everyone is religiously grounded.

"I need a nap," Bandla says, getting off the couch.

"Check on Sqalo for me. I've been waiting for hours," Phethy says with an eye roll. This is a habit she refuses to let go. She rolls her big eyes at everyone, even at Thakasa; the Mufasa of the family as many call him- the King of the Jungle.

Bandla uses the backdoor that leads out to Sqalo's rondavel. It's firmly shut, but not locked. As he gets nearer two deep voices can be heard exchanging not-too low whispers.

"Yoh! Arghhh! Mmm!" Moans are coming from the

rondavel. What the heck is Sqalo doing inside their father's premises?

“Sqalo!” Bandla aggressively pushes the door and walks in to his little brother naked on the bed with his best friend, Mpilo. Their genitals are leaking, Sqalo was on top of Mpilo but they jumped as soon as the door shifted. They're on their feet, looking at Bandla nervously.

“What are you two doing here?” Bandla asks, his heart is beating beyond normal, his chest is dry as a desert.

“I...I...I was...” Sqalo's lip trembles and he fails to hold back his tears. He always does this, it's just a trick they all know too well. He cries and gets away with things. But not this time!

“Sqalo you sleep with other boys? What is wrong with you?” Bandla balls his fingers into a fist and clenches his jaws. He's fighting the urge of punching both their faces.

He turns his eyes to Mpilo who's standing like a rained chicken. What is wrong with these boys? How

did they even look at each other like that?

“Get cleaned, right now!” he hisses and storms out angrily.

He stands outside the door and paces around with his fists balled. Why is he even looking out for them? He should be taking this straight to Thakasa who'll call an urgent family meeting between the two families and reprimand these boys.

Mpilo is the first one to walk out with his backpack and tail between his legs. He can't even bring himself to look at Bandla. Sqalo follows out and stands behind Bandla.

“Phethy is waiting for you,” Bandla says without turning his face to him.

He's disgusted!

“Bhuti...” He's nervous.

“Voetsek Sqalo!”

Bandla is just a lighter version of Thakasa. They protect you, come through for you everytime you

need help, but they're not your friend. Nkonzo is the easier one, but maybe not too easy to tell that you love having sex with other boys.

Sqalo disappears before he gets more than just a disgusted look.

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Nkonzo walks in wearing only his short and sandals. He's two shades lighter than the rest of his siblings, with lean shoulders and Satan's poke marks on his cheeks. He's been crowned the most good-looking one, with his killer smile that makes females weak in their knees.

He lowers himself on the bed next to Bandla's feet.

"Why are you so sour?" he asks cheekily.

Bandla exhales and shifts his pillow up to face his brother. Nkonzo gets along with everyone, he's hardly ever involved in the sibling fights. But he cannot tell him about Sqalo. He cannot tell anyone! He'll decide how he deals with him later.

"Have you ever met someone and felt like you've met

them before but you've actually never met?" he asks.

"No," Nkonzo says and stares at him, awaiting for an explanation.

"You mean you've never looked at someone you don't know in the eyes and felt drawn to them?"

Bandla asks.

"Well, a few times but it didn't last. Excuse my language, but this whole soulmate shit doesn't exist. People learn to love, you don't bump into someone and fall in love right away. What you feel there is only attraction- love and attraction are two different things." He knows and talks a lot, that's why they all ask him for advices. He is a Philosophy graduate but works for the family business like all of them.

"I only asked you a simple question Nkonzo, but anyway I was hijacked this morning."

Nkonzo's eyes grow wide and Bandla lets out a chuckle.

"I was forced by a drunk girl into driving her to her place. I think she was running away from other drunkards in a club," he says.

Nkonzo cracks into laughter. Bandla is laughing too, because wow, that girl was hilarious.

“So after turning my car into her cab she offered me her watch as payment. She was drunk but broke.”

Laughter again!

“But this watch looks hell expensive,” Nkonzo says, lifting the watch up.

“I said I wanted R3000 for driving her,” Bandla says.

“R3000?!” Lord, this is getting too hilarious.

“She's the person I'm talking about,” he says.

Nkonzo stops laughing and frowns. What is this one talking about now?

“A drunk?” he asks.

Bandla exhales deeply and nods. He knows how crazy he sounds right now, they were raised better and their future is bright. If he feels like he's ready to love there are elders he'll talk to and he'll choose inkosazane that he can build a family with.

“I'd fall into a sin to see that woman again,” he says.

Nkonzo gasps in shock. This is serious!

“What do you want to see her for? She paid for your “cab”,” Nkonzo teases with a stifled chuckle. The C-Class is Bandla’s favourite car, even they're not allowed to toy with it, for it to be reduced into a cab by a drunk girl is hilarious.

“I want to give back her watch,” Bandla says.

“And?” Nkonzo lifts his eyebrow.

“And what? It's my birthday, I'll take myself out for a peaceful dinner without you all.”

“With her? Makhumalo is going to slice your balls mfana wakithi!”

They both know that if Makhumalo finds out that Bandla even had a thought of entertaining a drunk girl across his mind, hell will break loose.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

Chapter 2

BANDLA

His sister, Mawande, wanted to come all the way from Mangethe to arrange a birthday dinner celebration for him. It's finally his 29th , he's almost 30, and this year he wants to do something different. His whole life has been scripted, the dinner Mawande wanted to host would've been no different from any other dinner him and all the siblings have had for their birthdays.

He'll go to Durban, find that girl and celebrate his birthday with her. It's a stupid idea- that's what Nkonzo has been telling him since yesterday. He's not going to have a future with a drunkard that stays in the city and entertain men for alcohol. They're men and their sexual needs have to be taken care of. But there's a way of doing things. Their father was the most respected man in the village. Thakasa has already followed in his footsteps, now all eyes are on Nkonzo and Bandla. Expectations are very high!

He steps out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel and picks his long navy pant and crispy white shirt. The watch is on top of his bed. It'll be his initial excuse of seeing that girl for the second time. He doesn't have her name or anything tangible, except her address and physical appearance that he hopes to describe to someone who might help.

He dresses up and spends a moment in front of the mirror making sure that his afro is neatly combed.

A younger version of him appears on a reflection of the mirror. While everyone differs in looks, him and Sqalo are just two versions of one another. Sqalo chose not to look like his twin sister and took all Bandla's features. They took their mother's deep set of eyes, but theirs is rarely gray. They have similar body structure, moles below their lower lips and sharper noses. Their speech is rapid, which often leads to stuttering when they're angry. Nkonzo found a Scientific meaning for it, he calls it a disorder of

some sort.

They haven't talked about what happened the previous day. All Bandla said to him this morning was that he needs to pack for a little trip. His class teacher was already notified of his absence. That's the thing about Bandla, he doesn't have a clear communication with the younger ones. He says "jump" and expects you to ask "how high."

"Bhuti, why are we going to Durban?" He's still standing by the door. Bandla's icy glance told him he's not welcomed to enter.

"To celebrate my birthday," Bandla says, dropping a hand lotion on his palm. He massages it on both palms and then rubs it all around his hands.

He sprays the perfume around his neck and then fixes his collar.

Sqalo knows there's more to it than what meets the eye. Bandla said he wanted to celebrate his birthday alone, and now all of a sudden he's dragging him along?

"I will confess right here, right now. There's no need

for me to come with you," he says. Bandla slowly turns around. He's buttoning up his shirt with his eyes intensely fixed on Sqalo.

"You'll confess what?" Deep down he's scared of what this boy could say. He tried by all means to avoid jumping into conclusions. This cannot happen to them. It has never happened to any family in this village!

"Mthonga, I'm gay," Sqalo says.

He shuts his eyes, trying to digest this bitter truth. His heart is about to jump out of his throat. Even the enormous breath he just took was not enough to collect his scattered nerves.

"Sqalo you don't know what you are saying. You are a man, a Manqe! You have a penis between your legs and that's meant to produce the Manqe's grandchildren. Go and fetch your bag, we are leaving in a few minutes." He's done talking about this!

Sqalo stands with his mouth hanging open. Bandla's sharp eye shuts his mouth and sends him out of the room looking like a defeated soldier.

As soon as he disappears, Bandla releases a long sigh and sinks on the bed with his hands over his head. No, this is not possible!

He has to make this boy realize that it's peer pressure messing with his head. A man was created to mate with a woman and produce children.

He's been to hotels and he's done things that always remain behind hotel closed doors. He has the contacts, he just says the word and mentions his preference. This time around it's different, even Efe is a bit confused about his choice.

He cannot explain to him because it'll lead into him exposing his young brother's confused sexuality.

"If I have to pay extra Efe, I will. Make sure she's clean and not older than 23," he says.

"A virgin?" Efe asks.

"No. I want someone who's experienced. Someone who knows how to give a good time," he says.

"You'll send me the location. Consider it done."

He sighs out in temporary relief and hangs up.

Not even in his wildest dreams has he ever thought he'll be hooking his 17 year-old brother with a young prostitute on his birthday. But the sooner he realizes that he's a man, the better. If Thakasa and the elders find out about this it'll be a different story. He could be disowned and cut out from their father's inheritance forever.

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SQALO

He's in a five-star hotel in the north coast of Durban. Bandla's room is next to his but he's been gone for hours. He didn't tell him anything, just that there's someone coming to see him.

There's nothing indicating a birthday celebration here. This is getting more and more uncomfortable for Sqalo.

Mpilo's text beeps in; ***THIS IS GETTING FRUSTRATING. I CANNOT FUNCTION ANYMORE***

They've been keeping a distance. After they got caught Sqalo deleted all their cozy pictures and wiped their chat history. This is the longest they

have gone without seeing each other. Going out together and doing sleep-overs will be impossible now that Bandla knows that they're more than just friends.

He lies back on bed, shirtless, and video-calls Mpilo. His lips crack into a smile when his chiseled yellow face pops up on his screen.

“Aren't you supposed to be in class?” he asks.

“How am I supposed to listen to those teachers? You know what makes my brain function,” Mpilo says with pronounced lines on his forehead.

Sqalo adjusts on bed and unbuckles his belt. He pushes his pant and briefs below his buttocks and lowers the camera to his thickening shaft.

“See the effect of your voice,” he says.

Mpilo exclaims and curses; “Fu€k!”

Sqalo chuckles and wraps his hand around his hard shaft. He brings the phone back to his face and licks his lips.

“I miss you, ntwana. I don't know what Bandla

intends to do to me, but I promise you, I'll never leave you.”

The door shifts open just as Mpilo confesses his love back to him. Sqalo's hand is stroking his shaft up and down.

It's a short, brown skin girl wearing a tight leather pant and cropped top. Her pink and green braids are bouncing just an inch above her round ass. She could be Sqalo's age or a bit older, but she's upgraded her looks to those of a grown slay-queen.

Sqalo's first reaction to the surprise guest is dropping the call before Mpilo sees her. But his pant is still below his butt and his manhood is exposed.

“Shit!” he curses softly and pulls up his pant.

The girl smiles and struts around his bed.

“I'm Ndalo, your partner for the day,” she says and puts her bag on the bedside pedestal.

“Partner for the day?” Sqalo jumps up to his feet and looks at her carefully.

“Yes,” she says and pulls down the arm of her top.

Her firm cleavage pops out. She starts rubbing her palm against her skin while staring into Sqalo's widened eyes.

“Don't be scared. We'll take it slowly. Come back on bed, I saw that your di€k is hungry.” Her top is completely out, now she's unstrapping the bra.

Sqalo is struggling to breathe. His di€k was not hungry for her, it just melted behind his briefs. A woman's body doesn't do anything to him. The only thing he does at the sight of boobs is imagining his own chest having its own pair.

“My brother sent you here?” he asks. His heart is racing. He didn't expect this at all. He thought it would be a beating or any heavy punishment. Not this.

“Don't worry. He sent me to the doctors first and had me checked out. Don't chicken out on me, I'm getting a good pay out of this. Tell me exactly how rich your brother is?” She steps out of her pant. It was a struggle taking it off and Sqalo was shocked to see that she had no panty beneath.

Her hand is running over his torso. He's glued on the same spot, lost for words.

“Have you done this before?” she asks, trailing her fingers down to his waist. His skin is creeping up at her touch.

“Please don't do this,” he begs in a low voice. He's not sure if Bandla planted cameras somewhere in the room and he's watching everything going down.

“Just cooperate with me and I'll take you to the world you've never been to before.” She grabs out his now soft shaft and massages it.

He winces and holds his breath as she moves her hand around it.

“I can pay you double the money Bandla is paying you,” he says and inhales sharply through his teeth. Her hands are soft and somehow his shaft is reacting to her touch as if she is Mpilo.

“R30k?” she asks.

Sqalo gasps in shock. Bandla is paying her R15k? Is that how he spends his money? Paying girls for sex.

Is that how all his brothers are behind closed doors?

“I don't have that kind of money right now.” He lets out a low moan as her fingers draw up his perineal raphe. His pre-cum drops on her palm and she brings her hand to her mouth and licks it off.

She pushes him down on his back. His shaft is hard and bouncing upwards. Mentally he's not into this, but his body wants to release.

“Please give me the back only,” he says, tearing his eyes away from her shaved mound that's exposed to him.

He shuts his eyes and lets the pleasure her tongue is giving him trails throughout his body. It's the braids that keep disturbing his imagination. He wants to massage a shaved head and listen to deep manly groans.

“Fuck. Ntwana!” He starts pulling her braids and thrusting inside her mouth aggressively.

The gasps and coughs draw him back to the room. He opens his eyes and curses again, at the disappointment this time. For a moment he

imagined her being Mpilo.

She's moving up, to take it further.

"I want the back," he tells her.

"Naughty boy!" She comes to his face and smashes her lips on him. Mpilo's picture keeps popping in his mind. They've been together for a year and they promised to never hurt each other. He never thought he'd be forced to cheat on him by his brother who refuses to accept the facts of life.

It swallows his shaft. It's wet and tender inside. Its lips have covered his shaft completely. The girl is twerking on top of him and moaning seductively.

It feels great. He's meeting her thrusts and pressing deeply in her core. It's warm and that's all an erect shaft needs to release.

She tightens her pu\$\$y around him. It's gripping him, his shaft is squeezed in. He lets out a deep groan.

"How is that?" she asks, moving her waist in circles. He's biting his lips and murmuring things he can't make sense of.

“Do you like it?” she asks and gives him that dick-squeeze again.

“Yes!” he bites his lip to suppress a scream.

“Don't hold back, baby boy. Fuck me!”

He pushes his waist up and holds her waist. Then he starts thrusting into her like crazy.

“Ntwana I'm cumming!” He's screaming and pounding in her aggressively.

He sits up and flips her over in the drop of a hat. He gives her last deep strokes before his body tenses up on top of her.

“N..t..w..a..n..a!” He buries his head over her shoulder and lets out a loud groan. His hot cum shoots inside her.

He lifts his head up and finds the girl staring at him. His heart starts racing again. This wasn't supposed to happen.

He rolls off her and lies on his stomach.

“Fuck!” he curses and sniffs over the pillow.

“Are you okay?” she asks.

“Please leave. Tell my brother you are done with me and take your payment,” his voice is breaking.

She kneels next to him and tries to talk. Yes they started things on a low note, but both of them had a good time. Him crying means her service was not great, and that means Efe will cut her payment.

“We can do it your way; whichever way it is,” she says, rubbing her hand on his back.

He turns around, his eyes are bloodshot and teary.

“I said leave!” he says sternly.

“But...” He pushes her off the bed. She lands on the floor and winces out in pain.

“Leave!” he roars.

There’s no time to even clean her wet thighs, she pulls her clothes and dresses up as dirty as she is.

He throws her bag to her and follows her to the door. He slams the door after her and curls up on the floor, hugging his knees.

He lets out a heart-wrenching cry. He asked her not to do it this way!

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BANDLA

They said she'll be in her flat later, around 3pm. She shares it with her two friends. The security guard he found didn't spare him details of what kind of girls they are. He even went as far as calling them prostitutes.

It does raise questions; why would a respected guy like him look for a girl like her high and low, and even go as far as bribing people to release information about her?

Well, he has her name and a bit of her background information. But he needs to check on Sqalo first. Maybe he has changed his mind. Efe recommended that girl, most clients have permanent schedules with her. She's the best there is in Roundas Booty Club. How a 19year old became a sex worker is a question of another day.

He's changed into dark-green Nike tracksuit and

sneakers. He walks to Sqalo's hotel room and finds the door shut.

He thought they were done. The girl only had two hours to spare, she must've left now.

"Sqalo!" he calls.

Silence...

It's not locked, he opens the door and lets himself inside. Sqalo is curled up on the floor, naked. He's a mess of tears.

"Mthonga, what happened? Are you hurt?" he asks with a frown on his face.

Sqalo wipes his face with his palms and slowly lifts himself off the floor.

"Why are you crying?" Bandla asks.

Sqalo lifts his bloodshot eyes to him. He must've been crying for too long, his eyelids are swollen.

"My brother is dead," Sqalo says.

His heart beats drums. He was talking to Thakasa not so long ago and he didn't mention anything.

“Which brother?” he asks.

“You Bandlaethu. You are dead to me. I was born this way, no number of prostitutes you're going to send to have their way with me will change the fact that I'm GAY. I'll never forgive you, from today onwards I only have two brothers.” He sheds another tear and walks to his bed. He slowly climbs on and pulls up the covers.

“Sqalo wait...” He walks towards the bed but Sqalo buries his head. Being disowned by Sqalo is not what scares him, he's scared of what this could do to the family, to Sqalo's future.

“Make sure Thakasa doesn't find out about this. I don't know how you're going to do it, but this gayness is staying between you and Mpilo.” It's just a couple of months before they write their matric finals, then he'll make sure Sqalo leaves and pursue his studies out of the province. For now he has a girl to find and a birthday to celebrate.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

Chapter 3

KHANYO

The look on his face is of disgust, probably because I'm wearing a tight and skinny top. I don't know who he thinks he is. The owner of a building, maybe. Or our father. This man has been trying to tell us how to live our lives and chasing away our male guests since we moved here a year ago. Nolwazi always reminds him that he's not our father nor the owner of the building, he's just a security guard.

"Ntanzi how can I help you?" I ask. It's not everyday that he just shows up at our door, unless if it's for shouting.

"Mr Manqele is here to see you. Should I send him in?" he asks.

I crack my skull trying to remember any Manqele that I know, but I can't remember any.

"He said he wants to see Khanyo?" I ask.

A deep sigh of boredom. He's such an old piece of work. So much attitude in a grown up!

"You gave him your watch and he's here to bring it back. You won't remember because you're always high on drugs."

Mameshane! I'm everything but I don't do drugs. Anyway I won't waste my precious breath on him. He needs to get laid.

"Tell him to come in," I say before turning away and leaving him at the door.

Gugu appears with a towel wrapped around her waist and a bra.

"Who was that?" she asks.

"Your father." I roll my eyes and resume my cooking. Today we have no plans, so I'm going to cook rice and chicken stew and make some salads. We live most of our lives on take-outs and alcohol.

She jumps on the kitchen stool, pours her wine and chats on her phone. She's addicted to them; wine and phone.

There's another knock at the door. It must be the man who wants to see me.

"Gugu get the door, my hands are messy," I say.

As rebellious and wild as I am, I still know my mother's recipes by head. I know my way around the kitchen. If we host a guest, which happens once in a full moon, I'm always the chef. If I'm not too drunk on Christmas, I help my brother's wife prepare lunch for the family.

"Khanyo," Gugu calls behind me.

I grab a dishcloth, wipe my hands and turn around. My eyes pop out of their sockets. It's the suit guy that I gave my watch. The cab, I mean, C-Class driver. Today he's not wearing a suit, he's in a white shirt that hugs his muscles and grey pants. In his hand he has the car keys, phone and my watch.

I didn't think I'd ever see him again. Not to mention to see him inside my flat.

"It's you...hello." I don't know if I'm shocked by his

presence or freaked out. But something is happening, my hands are squeezing the dishcloth for dear life. It's his beard, or that deep set of eyes, or the Nazareth aura he brings.

His lips crack into a smile for half a second then it disappears.

"Hi Nokukhanya," he says.

Gugu and I share a look. He knows my name?
Shembe your child is weird.

Nolwazi's voice breaks into the room; "Guys I found my dildo."

Noooo! Earth open up and swallow me now.

She stops dead on her tracks with a pink dildo in her hand and stares at the man standing in the middle of our kitchen.

"Oh, hello Mr Beard. You guys didn't tell me we have a guest."

Can she at least hide the thing in her hand? The man is looking at her, he doesn't seem to be fazed by the dildo, he's just staring at her like he stares at any

living creature.

“I’m sorry I came unannounced. It was an urgent situation.” He turns his eyes to me. I guess the urgent situation concerns me. Did my watch give him nightmares?

“Urgent situ...?”

“I’m Bandlalethu Manqele, your cab driver,” he says, narrowing his eyebrow to motivate my memory.

I remember him very well. It’s just that I didn’t expect to see him again and I didn’t know his name.

“That’s a nice name,” Nolwazi says. The dildo is still in her hand. Even if he wanted to ask for water, now he won’t. He’ll think we have dildos floating inside sinks.

“So what happens if you eat warm food on Saturday before 6pm?” Nolwazi has no stopper. She’s already made this whole situation awkward with a dildo, now she’s asking him a thousand senseless questions.

I clear my throat, “Guys can you excuse us for a second?”

Gugu grabs the bottle of wine and her glass and leaves. Nolwazi is still staring at Bandla. I narrow my eyes at her, she throws back her head in annoyance and leaves.

There's some relief in my bones, but it doesn't last that long when my eyes turn to Mr Beard staring at me.

"Ummm, so Mr Bea... I mean Bandlalethu, what can I do for you?"

"It's my birthday," he says.

For a second I'm not sure what to say. There are so many people who were born on this day but none of them came to report to me.

But then I'm a human; "Happy birthday to you...
Happy birthday to you...Happy birthday to you...
Happy birthday to you," I sing.

Somebody give me my Grammy award. That was epic, golden buzz kind of performance.

"Thank you Khanyo." He's smiling, for real this time. It lasts more than a minute.

“So you came to tell me that it’s your birthday?” I ask.

“And to give back your watch.” He extends his hand and gives the watch to me.

“But I still don’t have R3000 to pay you for the ride,” I say.

“Maybe you can come and celebrate my birthday with me.”

“Come with you to where? What if you kidnap girls and trade them to Russia as sex slaves?”

“Then you’d be on your way to Russia today. You would’ve been shipped yesterday morning while you were drunk.”

I hate it when people are right. He has a point, it’s too late for me to act like a cautious citizen.

“Why me? Why don’t you go and celebrate with your friends and family?” I ask.

He checks the screen of his phone, for time I guess. Then he looks up, “I will bring you back before 6pm. Your friends will take my car registration number, if I trade you to Russia the police will know how to track

me down.”

I feel like he’s saying the last sentence to mock me. I throw the dishcloth at the sink while my head and heart hold a short conversation.

“Okay, give me five minutes, I need to change,” I say.

“Change into a dress,” he says.

I stop and look back at him with my eyebrow raised. Is he Ntanzi’s son?

“Did you buy me a dress?” I ask.

He’s pushing his luck now. It’s generous of me to go celebrate a stranger’s birthday, and now ‘it’ wants to dictate what I wear.

“Sorry...can I sit on the chair while I wait?” he asks.

“Yeah, sure.”

I should offer him a drink but I don’t think we have anything other than wine and Oros. And I don’t think he’d appreciate drinking from the same glass that we touch after holding dildos.

Two pairs of eyes stare at me as I walk inside my bedroom. It's a two bedroom flat, Gugu and I share while Nolwazi has her own.

"How do you know Mr Beard?"- Nolwazi.

"Is he gone? Why was he here?"- Gugu.

I don't know who to answer first and I still need a moment to breathe and collect my scattered nerves.

"He's inviting me to his birthday celebration," I say after a moment.

"A party?" Nolwazi asks excitedly.

"I don't think it's a party. Maybe dinner or something. Anyway I need something to wear, preferably a dress," I say.

Gugu is the Gert-Johan Coetzee of this trio. Her and I are the same size, though I'm a bit taller than her but we share most of our clothes. She goes through the wardrobe and pulls out a teal bodycon dress that she wore last year for her date with a certain politician. Nolwazi is two sizes smaller than us, she's 28, she only wears our clothes when she wants

to look like a hobo.

“No bra!” Gugu yells before I disappear in the bathroom with the dress.

“No panty too,” I hear Nolwazi saying before I shut the door. I can’t help but laugh. Yes the man looks and smells rich, but I’m not hooking up with him. I also don’t think he has anything like that in mind. He’s probably married with five kids, if not more. He could be a polygamist too, that’s how they are.

The door shifts open as I draw my eyebrows in front of the mirror. It’s Gugu, she throws a pair of heels on the floor. She’s a sweetheart, now I just need to brush my hair. It’s my hair because I bought it. It could belong to a dead Brazilian granny or stripper, either way I don’t care, they also take things from Africa.

Done! I take one last glance at my reflection on the mirror and smile in satisfaction. I look beautiful for myself, not for him. I may have worn a dress to please him since it’s his birthday, but looking pretty when stepping out of the house has always been a

priority to me.

My mother always said I care more about how my face looks than how my future looks. Which was very much true, but it worked in my favor eventually. I'm amongst a million of unemployed South African youth but I have means of putting food on the table. No, I'm not a prostitute. I do sleep with men in exchange of luxury and money, but that doesn't make me a prostitute. Men also sleep with women for various benefits and nobody attaches any label to them. What I really do for a living with Nolwazi and Gugu is buy and sell beddings and curtains for ridiculously high prices. We have our target market that excludes townships. If we are really broke we join network marketers, which sometimes leads us into scamming people. It's tough out here. Gugu also plan events, Nolwazi and I tag along to help here and there. Other than that, we don't have stable jobs. We wake up and look pretty.

He heard footsteps and lifted his head up. There are furrowed lines on his forehead as if he's been

engrossed into something awful over that phone.

“That was an hour,” he says.

Doesn't he have a wife or sisters? Five minutes is one hour in the women's world.

“We may go,” I say.

He gets off the chair and stands up. My wandering eyes land on his front but I quickly lift them before I look like a freak.

He's staring at me. It's very odd when he does it because he just looks into your eyes, doesn't blink or turn his eyes away even when he's caught. Maybe it's normal to stare at people where he comes from.

I turn to the door, escaping the penetrating stare.

“So how old are you today?” I ask.

“I'm a year older,” he says.

That's a clever, yet very stupid way of answering my question. But I don't care about his age anyway. I make a mental note to send the registration number of his car before we leave. In this country you cannot trust anyone, not even pastors.

It's the same car, my personal cab.

Mthonga3-ZN- I send both to Gugu and Nolwazi.

"Playing it safe?" he asks with a smirk.

I didn't realize he was watching.

"Your instructions," I say.

"The seatbelt," another instruction. I do as told. His car is very comfortable. I'm a girl of first class things, even though I'm a third class citizen.

Ntanzi is crossing the street, heading back to the building, probably to poke his nose on everyone's business.

I roll down the window and wing out my elbow for him to see. He stands and watches as the car drives away. One day this man will sleep and not wake up because of unnecessary stress he burdens his heart with. Or his heart would stop pumping blood and pumps all these news he goes around sniffing. Then his organs would fail, those he gossips to will rush him to the hospital and the doctor would turn out to

be the same man he gossiped about and judged in 1997, and he'd give him wrong medicine.

"He looks like a good man," says Bandla.

A good what? I let out a chuckle.

"If a gossip, dictating and judgmental man is a good one, then I guess he's a good man."

He just glances at me and keeps quiet. I roll up the window, my mission has been completed.

"Where is home?" he asks.

"Bergville," I say.

"Zwelisha?"

I frown, unfortunately he can't see me, he's staring at the road.

"Yes, how do you know?" I ask.

"I guessed," he says.

I don't believe him but I'm not interested in interrogating him. We are heading to the North Beach. It's very brave of me to be relaxed like this, I don't even know where I'm being taken to.

He parks in front of Lingela. I've been here before, once or twice. They serve the best prawns. I wonder if he eats them or we are just here for lamb chops.

We are welcomed by a white waiter who introduces himself as Xavier. He leads us to a table set for two people. Seemingly they have no customers today, the business is down.

"My gosh, it's so empty. People are either broke or not happy with their recipes. I mean it's just the two of us," I babble out, scanning my eyes around the empty restaurant. Even their staff is short, it's just Xavier and two ladies, excluding the kitchen staff that I can't see from here.

"Maybe," he shrugs his shoulders.

"Or they're closing down the restaurant soon." I look around, casting my eyes on the walls. There should be a written notice or something.

"Aren't they supposed to have a notice though?" I ask.

He cocks his head to the side, "Maybe they forgot," he says.

He has a point, even though I feel like he's mocking me between the lines.

We have our starters, marinated mussels, and drinks. By drinks I mean freshly squeezed fruit juice. I feel a low pinch of sympathy towards orphaned bottles of beverages. It must hurt being kept inside freezing refrigerators the whole day. They could have a nice trip down my throat and a warm place in my stomach.

The main course arrives. Our cutlery is wrapped in ribbons, they have blown balloons and turned on soft Jazz music. I guess they knew about his birthday.

Oh, before I forget, we are having roast steak and boerwors. Yes, I came all this way for a boerwors. Prawns are eating themselves in the kitchen.

"I'm 29," he says.

I was lost in a moment. I look up with a slight frown.

“I’m really grown, hey,” he says.

“Oh, yes you are. You are about to turn 30, most of your peers spend their birthdays with their wives and children.” I have no idea where that came from.

But he doesn’t seem offended.

“And I’m spending mine with you. ‘Most’ blends in, ‘I’ stands out,” he says.

Xavier and his colleagues have disappeared. Now it’s just me and him. Something is very odd about this.

“So why did you bring me here?” I ask and raise my hand up. “Don’t say to celebrate your birthday because I’m not your friend.”

“To celebrate my birthday,” he says.

He doesn’t listen, neh?

“I said don’t say that,” I say.

“What do you want me to say.”

“Tell me why I’m here. You don’t know me and I don’t know you. We just had a little encounter while I was

drunk, nothing much.”

“Little encounter? Mmm.” He cuts his meat and eats as if he doesn’t have a question hanging around his head. I won’t get my answer today.

Xavier appears again, with a chocolate cake and two bowls of ice-cream with sweet toppings.

It’s his birthday cake. I smile, I don’t know why. Maybe because he’s doing this all for himself. Talk about independency! He even ordered a cake for himself.

“You eat cake?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say.

He passes the knife to me. I take it and look at him in confusion.

“Cut it,” he says.

Wow. I laugh before saying anything. My birthday is on the 12th of January. I hardly celebrate it, because duh, January is a cabbage month. Unless if I hook up with someone in December and he’s rich enough to

arrange something for my birthday.

“It’s your birthday; make your wish, blow the candle and cut the cake.”

He rolls up one sleeve of his shirt and leans over the cake.

“My wish is for Khanyo to cut my cake,” he says and blows the candle.

What the hell! He doesn’t take birthday wishes seriously. I would’ve wished for five Lotto numbers, rich boyfriend and car donation from Toyota.

“You don’t take life seriously.” I shake my head and cut out two pieces. Mine is bigger than his, I only realize as I sit down. He’ll be strong, men don’t like cakes anyway.

I haven’t been this full in a long time. He asked Xavier to wrap some food for him. He said it’s for his boy.

“Now where are we going?” I ask.

He glances at the screen of his phone.

“I’m taking you back to your flat. Do you mind if we start at the hotel? I need to grab my jacket.”

Laughter is going to choke me. Men still use this line? Are they not supposed to create theirs as the new generation, I mean our grandfathers used this line to trick our grandmothers into their bedrooms.

“What’s funny?” he asks.

“You... you are funny. Anyway I don’t mind, let’s go and fetch your jacket.”

“Thank you,” he says in a convincing genuine voice. I’m not sure if it’s pretense or he missed the travesty in my voice.

The drive is silent. I take the opportunity to fill in my friends who are still in the dark about this trip. It’s funny that I still can’t answer who he is when they ask. Bandla Mangele from where? What does he do for a living? Marital status?

“Are you okay?” he asks.

I shift my eyes away from him. Unlike him, I don’t find it normal to stare at people for long.

“Just thinking,” I say.

“Ingane engakhali ifela imbelekweni, speak,” he says.

I shake my head, maybe it’s not that important for me to know all the nitty-gritty about him.

We get into his hotel room. Time for me to pay back for the boerwors with my body. Life in South Africa! For feeding you a 2cm wors, men will expect your warm, cinnamon-tight cookie in return. I should’ve known.

He sits on the bed and makes a phone call.

“I’m back, I brought you food and a piece of my birthday cake,” he tells the person whose response I cannot hear. His face changes after the phone call, more like he sinks in the depths of dejection. He does take the jacket out of his bag, but he doesn’t put it on, he holds it in his hands and stares at it absent-mindedly.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

He looks at me and snaps out of it. He walks back to

the bed and sits.

There's someone at the door. He releases a sigh before going to it.

It's a young boy who is a photocopy of him. A stupid side of me firstly assumes that it's his son, then I remember that he's only 29, he can't have a son so grown.

"This is Sqalo, my little brother." He looks at him and points at me.

"This is Nokukhanya," he tells him.

"I'm not interested in your prostitutes," the boy says, grabbing wrapped food parcels and making his way out. I always hear about rich kids having no respect or regard for other people. I just had my own experience of that.

"I'm sorry...about that. He...he...he is...is going through... through some stuff." He puts his hands over his forehead in frustration. His chest is bouncing up and down. When I see his eyes turning

red I realize that he's angry and he has a stuttering problem when he's frustrated.

"It's okay, I've been called worse names before," I say, hoping it will calm him down.

I don't trust his type, my uncle had the same problem with his speech. When he got angry words choked him, he'd stamp his foot down and sweat. It always ended with someone on the ground, getting punched. Stuttering comes with a short temper.

I grab his face, he lifts his bloodshot eyes and locks them with mine. I close my eyes and bring his face closer. I kiss him, he responds smoothly, his lips are softer than I expected. He's a Zambuck gang. I push him down on the bed and unbutton his shirt with my lips locked in his. I feel so tiny when he wraps his muscly arms around me. He squeezes my butt and deepens the kiss. I want this to be quick, I don't want it to get too romantic, but there's this bubbly feel his touch gives me. This thing that needs me to inhale his scent and savor the moment. Something that wants to take and keep his taste in me.

“Do you have condoms?” I whisper against his ear.

He came prepared. He snatches a packet and tears it open.

“Khanyo,” he calls my name in a husky voice.

I open my eyes and look at him. I always close my eyes when kissing.

“Please look at me when we kiss,” he says.

“I’ll try,” I say.

He initiates the kiss again. There’s an eye contact that feels like a stare to the depths of my soul. Like he sees me for what nobody else can see. He sees the me that not even I realized existed.

He positions himself between my legs. I’m warm, wet and ready.

The alarm in his phone goes off...

He stops, looks at me, then drops his forehead on my chest with a sigh.

“I’m sorry,” he says in a low, almost-inaudible voice.

He rolls off bed and leaves me there.

I'm not a sex freak or addict, but dude, I'm naked and ready to be smashed for eating the boerwors. He turned me on just to leave me wet and panting on bed.

I fix myself and wait for him. To say that I'm pissed would be an understatement.

That stupid alarm again!

I snatch the phone to switch the damn thing off. It indicates that it's five minutes away from 6pm, more like it's reminding or warning him.

Urghhh!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 4

NOTHILE

They'd been to India a few months after getting married. As a woman who did Cultural & Heritage Tourism, traveling and learning other cultures has always been a fun thing for her. Bali has been on her bucket list for years, but her husband isn't so much into gallivanting strange places and eating foreign foods. Even to this trip, he'd attempted to pull out twice. Thanks to Bandlaethu who kept ensuring him that everything would be under control even in his absence.

As they check in at Villa Pantai Karang, Thakasa is already tired and annoyed. All he's looking forward to is a warm bed. He's famished, snacks and food they served through the entire trip didn't appeal to him, but now it's way beyond his dinner time.

Whatever Nothile has planned to order, he won't be part of it. He drags in his suitcases, leaves them on

the floor and disappears in the bedroom.

Nothile has dashed to the balcony, she's viewing the bright and quiet Sanur. She's been excited about the beach, it's all she talked about. Her bags are packed with ten swimwear that look too slutty for Thakasa's liking.

"Mangeleeee!" Her voice echoes as she struts back inside the room with her cheeks widely spread with joy.

Thakasa steps out of the bathroom in fresh clothes. Even though he finds nothing interesting about these trips, seeing his wife beaming with joy warms his heart.

"There's an outside pool," she beams with a cheerful smile.

She doesn't wait for his reply, she's opening her suitcase and grabbing two pieces of 'nothing.'

"There are people there. Some of them are black. We have to mingle."

Thakasa rubs his forehead and sighs.

“MaNtusi, we just had a 27 hours journey. I need to rest, I’m tired.”

Nothile looks up. She’s disappointed.

“But we came all this way to have fun together,” she says, displeased to the core.

“We’ll be here the whole week. It’s not like they’ll drain up the pool after today.” He turns to plug his laptop and sits on bed. He’s done with this conversation, now it’s up to Nothile if she goes to the pool or stays with him.

Of course, she stays with him. Maybe there could be other fun things to do in the bedroom. She came prepared to get kinky and spicy.

She clears their luggage on the floor and disappears with her bag in the bathroom.

She’s been watching many make-up tutorials on YouTube. Not that she wants to look like a barbie, she’ll just enhance her eyebrows and put a lipstick on. Hopefully Thakasa will be charmed. She squeezes herself in a lingerie, her big tits popping out in a balloon cleavage. Losing weight has been

almost impossible, but she's managed to burn some fats, finally stepping down to size 36. It's such a huge accomplishment.

Alright! She exercises her breaths before strutting out of the bathroom in black stilettos.

Thakasa is on his laptop, responding to the emails. Nothile made clear instructions that while they're here, he's not allowed to do anything work related, except mingling with people this side. But work is the only thing that takes his mind off his stressful life.

"Manqe!" Nothile calls in a displeased voice. She's been standing by the bed for minutes, ankles-crossed, with her hand grabbing her waist sexily.

He looks up, his forehead instantly furrows into a huge frown.

"Hey cutie," – Nothile.

"MaNtusi? Hhayi-bo!"

Her body freezes. This is not the reaction she

expected. It's not how they said men react to a woman in lingerie. They said their jaws drop on the floor and they devour you before you can even spell out the word 'condom', which obviously doesn't apply to them.

"So what do you think?" she asks in a steady voice, even though her chest is pounding.

"You're not going out looking like this," he says with full authority.

"I'm not going to the pool, we are creating our pool, here on this bed."

"Huh?" He sits up.

Nothile massages her cleavage and licks her lower lip. Thakasa lets out a soft chuckle and lies back on the pillow.

"Maybe tomorrow. I'm tired MaNtusi," he says.

Not this again! He always comes up with lame excuses.

"Manqe!e I'm trying here. How am I going to get pregnant if you don't want to make love to me?"

She's fuming but her voice is still kept low. This marriage has tested her in every possible way. She's always making efforts, ignoring signs and sacrificing herself for them to work.

"That's what you don't get Nothile. It's been months since we last made love, we just fuck so that you can have my sperm. You're annoying, pushy and obsessed. I'm tired of this baby talk, I cannot even breathe!" He claps his hands and grunts angrily.

"But you're not tired when you cheat," she says in a low whisper before turning around and heading towards the bathroom.

"What did you say?" Thakasa jumps to his feet and follows her.

"I said you're not tired when you cheat. I'm not stupid Manqele."

His palms start sweating, but he's not selling himself out. He'll deny, swear and die if he has to.

"You are insulting me right now," he says.

"You can sit here and chat to your side-chick, I'll be

out of your hair in a minute.” She proceeds to the bathroom, leaving him grounded on the same spot with a huge frown.

Five minutes later she walks out in a dress and sleepers. She opens her bag and takes out her jacket and cellphone and heads out.

Thakasa is left in misery. He was careful, not even his brothers know about this. How did she find out? He needs to end things with Nomkhosi before this get to his mother’s ears. He’s ended things with her many times in the past but he always finds his way back to her. There’s a part of his heart that she occupies. He cannot define it but whenever he tries to stay away he feels the gap. Their relationship is different. It doesn’t have any rules. It’s out of his normalcy and challenging to venture on. He’s had to step out of his comfort zone so many times. He’s done things he never thought he’d do because of her. But he’s never felt torn between her and his wife. He’ll never sacrifice his marriage for her. He made that clear before they even began, he was never

going to leave or jeopardize his marriage. He was never going to cancel his wife's call just because he's with her.

He takes his phone and types a lengthy text, explaining his reason to call it off.

****You're breaking up with me by a lousy text? I'm not a college student. Whatever shit you gotta say for yourself, you'll come and say it to my face Thakasa****

He reads her response over and over again. Why is he attracted to her again? There are many sane women he can have fun with if he wants to escape his shaky marriage. One thing about Nomkhosi is that she doesn't know her place as a woman. She talks to him anyhow she pleases. Something his wife would never do, no matter how angry she is.

****Okay we'll talk when I'm back in the country****

He sends his reply and clears their chat history. At this point he's not sure if Nothile snooped in his phone or hacked his Whatsapp.

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It's a bit quiet around the pool. People have returned back to their rooms, except for a few couple checking out the place and taking pictures.

Her sister has been sending messages and requesting pictures. The only picture she has is the one they took in a plane. Hers is a dream marriage, that's what her sister and friends think. They don't know about the challenges she's faced ever since the family raised the baby subject.

She dips her feet inside the pool and closes her eyes to allow its coolness to calm her down.

"Hello," the voice says behind her.

Whoever it is, he needs to leave. She's not in the mood to socialize.

"Fusegi," says the person.

Now she opens her eyes and turns around to see this disrespectful person.

It's a dark man with a German-cut and inked arms

peeking from his shirt. When her fiery eyes meet his, he cracks into laughter, revealing a set of pure white teeth.

“What did you say?” she asks, still unaware of the joke.

“I was just testing if you’re a black woman from South Africa, and it turns out you are. Unjani ndoni yamanzi?”

She sighs out in relief and chuckles. He’s too old and too tall for such stupidity.

“I’m good. Couldn’t you just ask if I’m a South African or not? Anyway I’m Nothile KaNtusi Manqele.”

“Married woman?” He smirks and lowers himself next to her. She’s just too tired to chase him away or maintain the married woman identity. So what if she sits with a strange man in a pool? Thakasa doesn’t care.

“Mandulo Nyathi from KwaMashu,” he says and extends his hand for a shake.

“And what made you leave KwaMashu?” she asks.

He laughs, “I’m on a vacation, just to clear my head and spend my money on myself. And you are on a honeymoon, I guess.”

“I’m past that stage,” she says.

“You’re not here with your husband?”

“I am. It’s a long story.” He raises his eyebrow, but she’s not about to open up about her marital problems to a man she just met.

A moment of silence passes, they’re just kicking water and watching couples taking pictures.

“Well, I’m divorced. It was finalized two months ago,” he says.

“I’m very sorry to hear that. Are you coping?” she asks.

“I’m trying. One step at a time. I know I made the right decision, even though adapting to a new life is harder than I thought. But I’m enjoying this new freedom.”

“Freedom, you say,” she chuckles and looks away.

“Yes, freedom. I don’t have to sacrifice my happiness and peace anymore.”

“Good for you. Do you have children?” she asks.

“Yes, two daughters,” he says.

Why can’t God give her the same? Now she doesn’t care about giving the Manqeles a grandson, even if it’s a girl, as long as she proves her worthy as a wife.

“What about you?” Mandulo asks.

Why did she start this children subject? It brings her nothing but pain.

“We’re still trying,” she says.

He frowns slightly before covering it up with his bright smile.

“Are you ready for the headache?” he asks.

“I’m ready for anything that’s going to make me a woman,” she says before realizing how much she’s told this man, yet they’ve only known each other for a few minutes.

“To me you look like a beautiful, humble and

intelligent woman. What makes you think it makes you less of a woman if you're not someone's mother?"

She shrugs her shoulders, "Isn't that what makes a woman complete? You all marry us so that you can extend your families and have children who'll carry your names."

"No, your definitions of a woman and marriage are flawed. A woman alone doesn't have a responsibility to bear children, she needs a man to do so. Even when she meets with a man, children are not guaranteed. You cannot blame yourself for that, you're not Mother Nature, you don't have the upper hand in your life."

She looks at him and frowns. He could be in his late thirties or early forties. But he takes good care of himself, his beard is well trimmed and you can see that he's friendly with the gym. His black shorts reveals his long hairy legs and ankle belt on his left foot. He doesn't make a cut of magazine covers, neither does he make list of African least attractive males. He's somewhere between handsome and

average, however his personality blooms like a flower, and that white smile of his brightens up the world that surrounds him.

“Love is the core of marriage. You see us filing for divorce on daily basis because we didn’t marry for love. We settled for other reasons, when those reasons have been fulfilled it became empty and hopeless,” he says, his deep voice smoothed. His massaging his ring finger with appreciation and gratitude. He has a deep understanding of life and descriptive way of illustrating it.

“True love never ends Nothile KaNtusi. It has its highs and lows, but it always bounce back. It’s a fire that can never be extinguished. It burns inside you forever. It overcomes storms and hurricanes. As long as it’s there at the core of your marriage, it can never turn into ashes.” He looks at her, his eyes haunted with sadness and pity. There’s a part of him that died with his marriage, maybe.

“Unless if it’s not mutual. Sometimes we give our hearts to the wrong people. People who don’t need nor deserve our love. Then it takes us too long to

realize that and we end up getting broken,” he says.

This is too much to listen to. It’s too deep.

“I should go back to my room before I faint because of hunger,” she says, stretching her arms and yawning. She just wants to escape this talk. She doesn’t want it to sink in.

“Well, I have a roast chicken and pap in my room,” he says.

She frowns before she laughs.

“You are lying. There’s no way you could’ve flown food from RSA.”

“Flown? I schooled these Indonesian chefs, they don’t know anything.”

She waits for him to say he’s joking because there’s no way he could’ve done that.

But he’s not joking. He picks his sandals and stands up.

“We are brother and sister this side. Get up,” he says.

She checks her phone. Thakasa hasn’t even checked

where she is. He must be happy to have this privacy. Her heart is torn between going back to their room and bursting him while he's calling his side-chick's, and daring the devil; leaving with Mandulo and enjoying her trip as she planned.

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He's still awake, leaning against the headboard and staring into space. The door opens and his wife finally walks in. Time reads, 1:23 am. He knew that she'd come back, it's how she'd be when she came back that he wasn't sure of. He's been planning and preparing himself for the coming confrontation. The possibility of his family, especially his mother, finding out about this kills him. It leaves him breathless.

She stops by the door, her hand grips on her jacket tightly as she stares at her husband. She lost track of time, just to mention the least of what she lost tonight.

“Manqe...”

Thakasa sits up after taking a sigh of temporary relief.

“MaNtusi please, let’s talk.”

“Talk?” Nothile asks with a frown.

He gets off bed and walks to her. He hasn’t slept a wink.

“The promises I made to you when you agreed to be a part of my life still stand. And they’ll stand forever. I love you my wife. I know that sometimes I become distant. There’s so much pressure from work, at home and...”

“It’s okay, you don’t have to explain. Let me take a quick shower and come to bed, it’s late.”

He holds her arm and pulls her back. Their eyes lock, his lips curve into a smile.

“What’s under this dress?” he asks and pecks her lips.

There’s a way he brushes his beardy chin on her neck that usually turns her on. But today it scares her because she knows what he wants.

“Can I make love to my wife?” he asks, brushing her cheek tenderly while staring into her bulging eyes.

“Maybe tomorrow. I’m tired Manqeale.”

It’s a taste of his own medicine. Even though he wasn’t proposing this from the depths of his heart, but being turned down still stings.

“I’m not cheating on you MaNtusi. You have to believe me,” he says desperately.

She nods and wraps her arms around his waist.

“Okay myeni wami, can I go and take a shower now?”

“I thought you showered before you left.”

She clears her throat and keeps eye-contact, it’s very important right now.

“You know I love water and here we are not paying the bill.”

He chuckles, “Alright, I’ll wait in bed. You’re sleeping in my arms today.”

It could be genuine and it could be just guilt eating

him up. But now they're even, there's no better one in this marriage anymore.

Hands caress her lower body. She keeps her eyes firmly shut and pretends to be fast asleep.

"Ntusi yami," his voice rumbles next to her ear. Him calling her like this in the wee hours of morning under blankets, reminds her of good old times. Times when he couldn't get enough of her, before having a baby became a goal and obsession to her. He'd wake her up with tons of kisses, calls her his 'end and beginning', and make sweet love to her.

"It's me, umyeni wakho, vuka sthandwa sami." Soft lips brush the side of her face. Involuntarily, her eyes opens. His eyes are staring at her gently, like she's the most precious thing on earth this morning.

He takes her hand, entwines their fingers together and draws her face closer.

"Nginamaphutha but I love you. Sometimes I lose my tone when I speak, sometimes I don't think and sometimes I let frustrations take over. But it's all

because I'm scared."

"What are you scared of?" she asks.

"Of losing you. At this point I think you want to have children more than you want to be with me. At first I thought you were doing it for me because I've always wanted kids, but now it has escalated.

Akusekho mnandi, there's no joy anymore. I miss my wife." He lifts up her chin. Her eyes are glittering with tears. This is not how they both wanted things to turn out. Marriage was supposed to be a bed of roses. Nothile wasn't supposed to open a window for the other woman. She wasn't supposed to push him away.

"Let's fix things MaNtusi. Let's go back to how we were. We don't have children maybe because I wasn't blessed with them, or it's just not our time. We have tried everything, I'm tired now."

She inhales deeply and wipes the drop of tears on her cheeks.

"Okay," Her head still screams 'YOU DESERVE TO BE A MOTHER' but maybe she should let loose for a

couple of months and focus on mending her marriage.

He links his forehead onto hers and smiles. He loves his wife, that's without any doubt.

"Mthonga is complaining. He's missing his pancake. You're still taking care of it, right?"

He asks this whenever he's in a good mood. It's just that now...coughs!!!

He touches between her legs. She squeezes her thighs. It just doesn't feel right. Or maybe she's just scared that he might feel it.

He breathes heavily and pulls her closer to his erection.

"I love you, that will never change," he says.

(I've been experiencing eye sight problems the past few days. Please forgive me, I'll be bounce fully in time.)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 5

KHANYO

I find it strange that I don't have Bandla's number and he doesn't have mine either. He gave me a ride, more like I hijacked him into it, then he showed up the next day in my flat and asked me to go and celebrate his birthday, then it was the end of our friendship, fling or whatever it was. He didn't even apologize for making me horny and not offering the service afterwards. He just disappeared, came back after thirty minutes and drove me back to my flat. No explanation, no nothing.

Tell me why do I care about having his number?
What could we possibly talk about anyway?

I vented to my friends and they turned the whole thing into a joke. Like I should've known that men of his type don't engage in sexual activities on Fridays after 6pm. He shouldn't have led me on, period.

“Guyssss,” that’s Gugu’s voice yelling from the kitchen. Today she’s cooking, hopefully we won’t end up in hospitals with damaged intestines.

“It’s dinner,” she yells again.

“Lunch, not dinner idiot,” I say as Nolwazi and I get off bed and head to the kitchen.

My phone rings just as we step in the kitchen. I don’t recognize the number, I step back and lean by the wall.

“Hello,” I answer.

“Makhanyi where in Musgrave do you live?” Holy shit, it’s my brother’s voice. I haven’t spoken to him in months, which isn’t very strange given our relationship. My mother was blessed with only two kids. It could’ve been only one, Ndulo, but God changed his mind after 14 years and blessed her with a daughter, me. Ndulo grew up with his father who was very supportive compared to mine. And I grew up with my maternal grandparents, who continued to raise me even after my mother’s death. I did meet my father twice before he died. He was an

abnormal man with abnormal family. I don't have a relationship with my weird aunts, they only reach out to me if there's a ceremony taking place. We are either too different or too similar. We don't get along.

By the way, I don't have any sob stories to tell. I had a very good upbringing, Ndulo came home every month and gave us money. Even when I finished high school, I enrolled for Journalism at Durban University of Technology and he financially sustained me while I studied. But when my grandparents died two weeks apart, I dropped out and rebelled. Normally we unite only on December as a family; me, Ndulo, his wife and kids. Other than that, we are just siblings scattered in the world and living their lives separately.

Which is why I'm surprised to get his call. And he wants to come to my place? It's strange.

"I will send the address," I say hesitantly.

My brother is a grown man, as I've mentioned that we are a decade and years apart. He's 39, married with kids and living an honest life. He knows that I

drink but around him I don't get to be Khanyo. He's like my elder, and he doesn't take shit mostly.

****I will be there in an hour. Do you need anything?***
He texts back after I send the address.

Yes, I need wine.

****Bring anything*** I respond.

This surprise visit makes me nervous. The brother I know would've summoned me to his house or his father's at KwaMashu. He knows my living arrangement with Gugu and Nolwazi, why would he wants to come here?

"Who was that?" Nolwazi asks.

"Ndulo. He's coming over in the next hour," I say.

Their eyes pop out.

"He's coming here?" Gugu.

"Yes, can we clean a little bit before we eat?"

"Yes, sure. I also need to change into something sexy and put make-up on." Nolwazi still has a crush on Ndulo even though he's 16 years older than her

and happily married.

“He won’t even notice you,” Gugu says.

“Then I’m going to do this dance for him.” She turns around and twerks. They giggle and argue. My mind is running wild. I’m trying to figure out what made him call. He made peace with me and my ways. He’s the responsible one with a stable job, I’m the hopeless rebel with no future.

We arrange the furniture, sweep and clear alcohol bottles. Nolwazi makes it her duty to dish up for him and keep his food inside the microwave. Second wife vibes!

He calls when he’s outside our building, Nolwazi offers to go and fetch him. I don’t mind her, I know that my brother would never see a woman in her, she’s just a little sister.

We sit on the two-seater and wait in silence. Gugu is texting her boyfriends with a glass of Oros in her hand for a change.

Nolwazi is loudly chatting to him as they walk through the door. She's telling him about her non-existent business plans. Ndulo knows that we are a hopeless trio, there are no business plans being put together.

"Long lost sister," he smiles and opens his arms.

He looks different. He's lost some weight and completely changed his style. The last time I remember he was a man of formal wear and suits. He looked, walked and spoke like a Financial Analyst that he is. But today he's wearing pleated shorts, scoop neck T-shirt and sneakers. He looks too casual and carefree for my liking. He looks like a man who'd entertain my friend's silly crush.

I hug him and stand two feet away from him and stare at him. He's looking around, probably searching for any inappropriates and hiding boyfriends.

"Is it safe here?"

I'm not surprised that's the first thing he asks.

"Yes," I say.

“Mmmm.”

He notices Gugu sitting on the couch and smiles.

“Gugu, right?” He extends his hand for a shake and then sits next to her.

“Do you need something to drink?” Nolwazi.

How generous of her?

“Oh yes, please. I left your grocery in the car.” He looks at me. My eyes are widened at his left hand. Where is his ring? Why did he take it off?

“Nice to see you Bhut’Ndulo . I need to make a phone call, Khanyo call me if you need help with anything,” Gugu says before disappearing in the bedroom.

Nolwazi also leaves to make a drink for her future husband. Now it’s just me and him.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

“Ah, Makhanyi, don’t even pretend like you care. You changed your number, I had to call Gog’ Ndlela to get your new number.”

Oh, that! I actually lost my phone earlier this year, I bought a new one and only restored the numbers I could remember. His wasn't one of them, and besides, it's not like we were phone buddies.

"I do care, it's just that I got caught up with life. Where's Emihle and Lulu? Is Thobeka well?"

"The kids are with their mother. They're okay," he says.

Thobeka is now their mother, not his wife?

"Care to explain?" I ask.

He narrows his eyes, "Care to explain???"

Okay, I withdraw my tone.

"I just noticed that you're not wearing your ring. Is everything alright between you and Thobeka?" I ask.

"We separated. It was finalized in July."

Separated? Finalized?

"Divorce?" My voice loses control. What on earth?!

Nolwazi puts a tray of food and juice on the coffee-table.

“Who divorced?” she asks, looking at both me and Ndulo.

Neither of us answers. I still need to process this. We were together on Christmas and they looked happy. Or I imagined them to be. They were my happy couple.

“It’s you?” she stares at him.

I love my friend to death but sometimes she doesn’t know how to stay on her lane.

“Yes, it’s me,” Ndulo says with a shrug.

“Oh my gosh, congratulations. This is great news.”

TF!!!

“Nolwazi please give us some space,” I say.

“Of course, if you guys need anything just shout.”

“Thanks for the food Nolwazi,” Ndulo says.

“Pleasure!”

Can she disappear already? I watch until she disappears in her room. Then I turn to this one...

“You are divorced? What happened?” I ask.

“There was a third person in our marriage.”

Shut the fuck up! My happy couple.

“You cheated?” I ask.

“Is that what you think of me?” he asks.

“No offense, but mostly third parties are brought by men into relationships. And Thobeka doesn’t look like...” Shut up Khanyo! Why are you ignoring the pain in your brother’s eyes? In his voice? The drastic changes in his looks?

“My gosh, I’m so sorry brother. How did that even happened?”

“It happened for years, right under my nose. I trusted both of them. My best friend and wife, signs were there but I ignored them.”

Best friend as in Menzi? God please fetch your children, blow your triumph from the east and fly us up to heaven!

“I need something to drink,” words escape my mouth before I’m even aware.

“I’m not here to burden you with my problems. I’m here to check on you. Are you well? Healthy?”

“Yeah, I’m good,” I say.

“Still not considering going back to university?” he asks.

I give him a look. We’ve had this conversation many times before.

“What is your problem Nokukhanya? Do you want to see a psychologist, maybe?”

There’s a knock! Thank God I can escape this interrogation for a moment.

“Let me see who is at the door,” I say.

But the universe has other plans, Nolwazi dashes out of the room and heads to the door.

“Don’t worry, I will get it.”

Ndulo is staring at her with a smile I cannot describe.

“She has a crush on you,” I don’t know what I’m

hoping to achieve by telling him this.

“I could be her father.” He breaks a chuckle and shakes his head.

I’m glad he sees it that way. After what he’s been through, I don’t want him to turn into Nolwazi’s blesser.

There’s someone here. His presence is heavily felt. My heart starts pounding as my brother slowly turns his head and looks at him.

I know by Nolwazi’s silence that it’s someone we didn’t expect or need at this moment.

I turn my head as well. My senses didn’t lie, it’s him in his bushy-bearded self.

Why is he here? Today out of all days?

“Eita!” Ndulo says, looking at him from head to toe. He’s never met any of my boyfriends, sex partners or blessers. He knows that I’m not a good girl but he’s never caught me red-handed with a guy.

Bandla clasps his hands together and bows his head.

“Mhlonishwa,” he says.

My lips crack into a smile. He’s so cute, humble and respectful. Ummm...I mean, what is he doing here? I quickly pull myself together and frown at him.

Nolwazi clears her throat, “He is here for the curtains.”

“Curtains?” I ask.

There’s a look she’s giving me.

“Oh yes, the curtains. I’ll fetch them,” I say.

Both him and Ndulo are confused. I get off the couch and hurry to the bedroom. I hear Nolwazi explaining to Ndulo that we sell curtains and Bandla is one of our regular customers.

I’m curious to know what he’s here for this time. Is it his second birthday? And this thing of him coming in unexpectedly has to come to an end. I don’t even know him that well.

I take two different designs that he can choose from. We only have kitchen curtains left. Nolwazi’s plan

sucks as usual. He probably doesn't even need curtains.

"Mr Manqele we have these two designs, as you know we only sell high quality, the fabric used here comes from India," Nolwazi explains as she shows the curtains to him.

He's just stunned. He keeps stealing glances at Ndulo and I.

Lord, he thinks that him and I are something.

"This is my brother, Mandulo Nyathi." What the fuck am I explaining myself for?

His eyes melt with relief. He takes the curtains from Nolwazi's hand.

"How much are they?" he asks.

"You're a regular customer and you don't know the price?" Ndulo asks.

Nolwazi jumps into rescue, "They differ in prices. These go for R2000, but because he's our regular he'll take them for R1500."

Whaaaaat? That's daylight robbery. He didn't even

want curtains, he's here for me.

"I lost your banking details, please provide them so that I can make an EFT," he says.

I'm dumbstruck. I didn't imagine the third time we meet to be this awkward. Mandulo will be here till late. He doesn't have a wife waiting for him at home. And we still need to catch up, a lot has happened since Christmas.

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THE MANQELE HOMESTEAD

Thakasa just arrived with his wife. His hand doesn't leave hers. He looks happy for a change. Even in pictures it shows that they had a great time in Bali. It's definitely what both of them needed; some time out to reconnect.

"I have to help Ma in the kitchen," Nothile says, untangling herself from his arms.

"Phethy is in the kitchen, helping her. Go to our room

and rest, please,” Thakasa argues.

“I’m just going to help them with a few things and then go,” she says, giving him an assuring look.

He’s not pleased but he cannot stop her even if he likes. He stares at her until she disappears.

“So the spark has been rekindled?” Nkonzo asks, bringing him back to the room.

“I have never loved her less. It’s the focus that shifted, not my heart,” he says.

“The focus shifted to who?” Nkonzo asks with his eyebrow raised.

He ignores that question and asks about Sqalo.

“Why is he still not back at home?”

“He’s probably with Mpilo and studying,” Nkonzo says.

“He should stick with that boy. He’s a good friend, they’ll ace their exams,” he says.

“I called Mawande last night and she didn’t sound okay. Do you know what’s going on with her?”

“How should I know? I wasn’t in the country the entire week. You should be telling me what’s going on. Did you speak to her husband?”

“He wasn’t home,” Nkonzo says.

“Where was he? He cannot leave my sister alone at night.”

Nkonzo lifts his hand up, “Hey, you cannot dictate how he runs his house. We only need to check on our sister, if she has complaints then we can intervene.”

“I have to go somewhere tomorrow morning, maybe we can go to her later.”

“That somewhere is more important than our sister?”

“It’s important for me and my marriage.”

Nkonzo stares at him but he doesn’t explain any further. He’s never been thoroughly transparent with them. Maybe because he has to maintain the good brother picture. He has to be a role model, he cannot break and give them a flawed picture. He has to be

perfect.

There's a car driving in. Nkonzo peeks through the window and sees that it's Bandla.

"He's back early. Maybe he got rejected," he says.

"He's seen someone?" Thakasa asks.

"I think so, but we'll have to wait and see how it all goes."

Bandla walks in with curtains. Their eyes widen in shock. Their mother and Nothile take care of such things. This girl is sending gifts already? Or it's part of umbondo?

"Where did you get curtains?" Nkonzo asks.

"I bought them, out of will. Her brother was there, so her friend pretended as if I was a customer looking for curtains," he says.

It's not a joke, there's nothing funny about it, but there's a huge laughter erupting.

"Who is this girl?" Thakasa asks. He's also laughing

but he has control.

Nkonzo has his legs spread out, he's choking in laughter.

"You won't know her and there's nothing to tell for now," Bandla says.

Thakasa gives him a look. Bandla is not secretive, this is the first time he's holding details about his private life. It could be that it's something serious or something too wrong.

"MaKhumalo the responsible son is home," Nkonzo yells.

Bandla throws the curtains on the table and sinks down on the couch with his hands over his head. He just wanted to see her, even if it was for a few minutes. A hug would've been enough.

Makhumalo appears, wiping her wet hands with a cloth.

"Look Ma-K, he bought curtains," Nkonzo leads her to the table and shows the curtains.

Bandla looks annoyed. He drove all the way to

Durban for lousy curtains!

“My boy, you bought your mother curtains? I wish others can learn from you. You’re the responsible and handsome one.” She kisses Bandla’s cheeks and takes her curtains and leaves happily.

“Is this a part of umbondo?” Nkonzo.

“You are annoying,” he says and looks at Thakasa.

“How was the trip?” he asks.

“It was worth everything,” Thakasa says.

“But you didn’t bring curtains, irresponsible boy,” - Nkonzo.

Bandla gives him another look. He’s single and miserable, that’s why he laughs about everything under the sun.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 6

THAKASA

He left the office around breakfast time and went home. Not because there was an emergency or he forgot something. He decided to pop in and check on his wife. There's a bunch of flowers and a gift bag lying on the seat next to him. He's driving slowly, in silence, and listening the agony in his heart. He didn't keep the promises he made to himself. He's been trying to bring himself to make that phone call to meet up with Nomkhosi face to face as she requested, but he always ends up making excuses. As it stands, him and her are still together. His fear is that his wife might find out about this. They're in a good place now. He doesn't need Nomkhosi anymore, being home with his wife is enough. It's the thought of meeting with her and falling into temptation instead of ending things that scares him.

He parks below the main house, takes off his sunglasses and steps out of the car holding his wife's gifts. His mother is knitting on the veranda, when she sees him approaching she stops and stares at him.

"Mntungwa!" he greets with a smile.

"What did I do to deserve such beautiful flowers?" she asks, adjusting her glasses.

Thakasa laughs, "Your generation knows nothing about flowers. Baba only brought you Tofolux and beads. Why would I scare you with flowers? I still love you very much."

"I wonder what makes you children think our times were boring. Your father was more romantic than any man in this village. Look, you're here to give your wife flowers but your shirt is not even tucked properly. Whose child are you?"

Thakasa ignores that remark and walks inside the house laughing.

He finds his wife standing in the middle of the dining room as if she's been electric shocked.

“MaNtusi,” he walks to her and gives her a light peck on the cheek.

She only nods in response.

“Are you okay? Why does it look like you’ve been crying?” He’s checking her out and panicking. His eyes land on a white tube squashed in her hand. He knows what it is, they’ve used tons of them in the past.

“MaNtusi I thought we had an agreement. It will happen when the time comes. The more you test and cry your eyes out is the more I feel like a failure. You’re hurting me by doing this.” He puts flowers and the gift bag on the dining table and snatches the pregnancy test tube from her hand.

“This pressure you’re giving us is not necessary.” He’s annoyed but he’s trying not to show it. He heads to the bathroom to throw it in the bin, only for his eyes to glance at it and notice something strange before he does.

He stops dead on his tracks and lifts it up, his eyes narrowed. Two lines? He turns around quickly and

runs back to Nothile.

“Sthandwa sami did you see this?” he asks, almost out of breath.

He’s overwhelmed with fear, joy and sadness.

“I’m pregnant Manqe!e.” She’s still shocked. This is what she’s been praying for. It has happened. She’s becoming a mother. It just doesn’t sink in. Why now? Out of all times, now.

Thakasa falls down on his knees, holds her leg and buries his head on her trembling legs.

He keeps saying; “Thank you...thank you.”

Nothile lifts him up. They hug for what feels like eternity. Thakasa is not an emotional person, this is the first time she’s seen him this bare and emotional.

“You’ve made me a man amongst men. I don’t know how I’ll ever thank you MaNtusi because loving you is not enough.” He holds her shoulders and looks at her with teary eyes.

“No, thank you and the resting elders for trusting me to carry one of your own.” God knows how much she

wishes it to be true. It has to, otherwise it's the end of her marriage- of her life.

"If it wasn't you, who was it going to be? You're the only Mrs Mangele that Thakasa would ever bring. There is no one else, there can never be." He brings her face closer, wipes tears ruining her pretty face and kisses her like the world is coming to an end.

He finally breaks the kiss and stares into her eyes. He's the happiest man in the world.

"There can never be, you said?" Nothile says with a smile. Seeing her husband overjoyed like this gives her the satisfaction she's been longing for. Now it feels like she's satisfied her duties as his wife.

Whatever happens, Thakasa has to be the father of this baby. At all costs. He was just exhausted, being a father was still in his dreams.

"MaNtusi I chose you in broad daylight. You are my end and beginning. In my heart you rule."

"But I don't rule your body," she says.

He swallows hard. She surely knows how to spoil a good moment.

“That’s not true,” his voice is not firm as he says.

She turns her back on him and opens the gift bag he brought. It’s a diamond bracelet and a pair of matching earrings.

“She’s tall, fair in skin and full figured, even though she’s slimmer than me. Is that what attracted you to her? That she was slimmer?” she asks as she fits the bracelet. Her tone doesn’t match the question.

It’s not hearsays or suspicions, she knows Nomkhosi.

“One day I came to the office to the bring you lunch. Other brothers were in Cape Town, it was a rainy Friday so I thought I should surprise you with warm food. She was sitting on your lap inside your office, Manqele. You had your arm around her while feeding her strawberries.”

His chest tightens, restraining him from sufficient breath. He was caught red-handed! Nomkhosi has been to his office when his brothers are away. How could he be so careless?

“Is she still in the picture or it’s someone else now?”

She's so calm. It's unsettling and nerve-wrecking.

"I was emotionally drained MaNtusi. It wasn't my intention to go that way, I felt cornered here at home," he says.

"Thakasa!" His name as it's written in his ID?! Shit is going down. His eyes pop out of their sockets.

"I asked if it's still her or someone else," she says.

Heavy breath!

"It's still her. But I told her we should stop. I only turned to her because I was missing you MaNtusi. She didn't make me feel useless," he says.

"And I made you feel useless?" Still calm and appreciating her flowers.

"Indirectly. You turned your back every night if the pregnancy test came back negative. Even in the bedroom, it felt like we had a duty to do things, there was no fun anymore."

"Mmmm," she turns around swiftly. He holds his breath and looks at her. He's ready for his punishment, whatever it is.

“I want whatever happened between the two of you to end, for good. If something like this happens again I’ll tell Ma and the elders will be involved. If you have a problem with me, you talk. You don’t cheat.”

“I’m sorry sthandwa sami. It won’t happen again.” He holds her hand to test waters.

She sighs and kisses his cheek.

“You’re supposed to be at work? Didn’t you say you have a meeting in Stanger?”

He’s relieved. He’s been forgiven. Now the first thing he must do when he leaves is to call Nomkhosi and end things for good.

“I wanted to see my beautiful wife,” he says, kissing her lips smoothly.

They walk out of the house holding hands.

Makhumalo looks up and stares at them as they giggle, making their way to her.

“Hello Gogo,” Thakasa says.

She frowns, “Gogo?”

Him and Nothile share a look and a smile.

“She is pregnant, you are having your first grandchild.”

Cotton drops into a basket. She wants to sing and dance, but her knees won't allow her. She can only ululates and waves her hands up in joy.

It's a dream come true.

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He recites a small prayer before he climbs out of the car and makes his way inside the flat that Nomkhosi wanted them to meet in. This is goodbye, he has to make it sink both to himself and to her. He cannot lose his family over her. He's complete now, happy even. It was good while it lasted.

He walks in to her pacing around the room. She's wearing a formal skirt suit and black heels. Her curly weave is bouncing as she moves. She's beautiful, elegant and level-headed. When she's in the room the whole of it smells like her. She has a signature, it draws you in.

He knows her fierce side and he got used to it. He loved it, at times it turned him on. But sometimes it scared him, like today. She'll bite his head off, that's written in her eyes. He's done this so many times before. It has made him look like a teenage boy who doesn't know what he wants in life. Funnily, everytime when he wanted her back he'd just make a phone call and ask to meet. He didn't need to go down on his knees and ask for forgiveness. In some way, she's attracted to him. She is content with what they have going on. And he's here to end it, for good, because it doesn't benefit him anymore.

Yes, he's a dog and he knows it.

"Thakasa," she calls him by name. Unlike his wife who always respects him and refers to him by his surname, this one calls him whatever she wants. Hence he said 'there can never be another wife', even if he was a polygamist, Nomkhosi is not a Mangele wife material.

"Hi Nomkhosi," he says and takes a deep breath to collect his nerves that are all over the place.

She walks to the bed, sits and crosses her legs. She's a bomb waiting to explode. He feels cold and sweaty at the same time.

"I waited for your call. Why are we breaking up this time and how long are we going to be apart? Don't you get tired of this childishness Thakasa?"

He hates being shouted at. The only woman who can shout at him is his mother or Mawande. Even his wife doesn't shout at him.

"Don't raise your voice at me. I'm not your child," he scolds her.

"Then act like an adult. Why the fuck am I here today?" she asks, waving her hands up.

"I cannot see you anymore," he says, his voice losing the anger.

"Tell me something new." She rolls her eyes and folds her arms.

"My wife knows, she saw us," he says.

She doesn't care. He's scared of his wife, she learnt that from the beginning of their relationship.

“I don’t want to lose my wife over nothing,” he says.

She raises her eyebrow, “I’m nothing?”

“To me you have no significance. I needed you because I wasn’t happy at home. Now I am, my wife is pregnant and we are in a good place. I don’t need any distractions.”

She shuts her eyes. Her hands are trembling. Not that she didn’t know that his wife came first, but to be called a distraction hurts. There must be another way to define what they have, or had.

“I was only a distraction for your infertile wife?” she asks.

Both of them are angry now. How dare she calls his wife infertile?

“Nomkhosi I only needed you to release stress. Oh well, and sperms. I don’t love you and this was bound to end anytime me and my wife became okay. And she’s not infertile, even if she was, it would’ve been none of your business.”

Her lips tremble. She’s not fierce and disrespectful

anymore. She's breaking down. The whole queen!

"I've never given you any hope. I've never lied to you. I'm a married man, we both took risks," he says.

"How Thakasa? How do you do it? How do you take someone's heart, step over it and crush it? What makes you think I don't get hurt?" she asks in tears.

His chest tightens. He doesn't want to feel this way.

"I never asked for your heart Nomkhosi. You knew what we were doing," he says, clenching his jaws and trying not to look at her tearing eyes.

"I know you didn't ask for it but I love you. I so stupidly love you Thakasa. You think I didn't want out? I did, but my heart wouldn't allow me. You crushed my soul, took my pride and left me suffocating in unreciprocated love." She pulls his arms and forces him to look at her. He needs to see the pain he's caused her.

"I had pride before we met. I knew who I was as an individual. There was no human being that made me feel complete until you came to my life. I was alone and complete before you. Bring back my pride, leave

me complete, put me back together and then leave.” She’s never cried in front of him or any man. She always takes their break-ups with a full chest. She doesn’t break, that’s what attracted him to her. She was strong, level headed and confident.

“My pride back Thakasa!” She’s yelling and pulling his shirt. He didn’t imagine it escalating to these lengths. She’s going crazy.

Two of his shirt buttons burst. She’s screaming and crying. Soon there will be security guards knocking on their door. It’s getting chaotic.

He grabs her neck and kisses her. He shuts his eyes and gives it his soul. He’s trying to savor this last kiss, this last moment. He pushes her down on bed and continues to kiss her. She’s not responding to his kiss, she’s still crying, but he sucks her salty lips anyway. His moans and her cry collaborate into a sorrowful tune.

Her skirt has gone up, leaving her bare thighs to his exposal. He caresses them, his body has reacted to

familiar sight. He's hard and thick. He squeezes her thigh and sends his hand upper.

"I'm pregnant Manqele," – the voice says in his head. It's his wife's words this morning. He stops immediately and looks at Nomkhosi who's stopped crying.

"I have to go," he says.

She holds his arm and starts crying again.

"Please Manqele, I'm begging you. Don't do what my father did to me. Don't leave, I'll respect your wife and space. I'll only do whatever you tell me to do."

He removes her hand slowly, takes a deep breath and walks towards the door. He doesn't want to look back. He doesn't want the image of her looking desperate and crying to be the last image he has in his mind. He wants to remember the beautiful, unbreakable and fierce Nomkhosi.

But he does, their eyes meet, a sharp pain stabs through his heart.

"Goodbye Nomkhosi." He swallows back the pain,

keeps his shoulders broad and walks out.

It's over, for good this time, there will be no turning back.

There's a knot sitting below his stomach and a lump that keeps rising to his throat. His eyes are foggy, if he runs into traffic cops they'd definitely put him under arrest. He's not speeding, he's racing. He needs to be somewhere he can be alone and in touch with his feelings.

He doesn't even park his car properly. He climbs out with the chest of his shirt opened like he's been fought. He looks like a mess.

"Sir...Sir...Sir," Nomvelo, the receptionist, keeps calling. She has a few messages for him.

He doesn't turn his head, he walks straight to his office and shuts the door.

Bandla and Nkonzo come out of their office rushing.

"Why are you yelling?" Nkonzo asks Nomvelo with a

frown.

“Oh sorry Sir, I was trying to get Mr Manqele’s attention. But it looks like he’s not in a good space.”

Not in a good space? How? Makhumalo called and broke the good news to them. He’s becoming a father, he should be the happiest man in the world.

“I will check on him,” Bandla says.

Nkonzo returns to their office as he rushes towards Thakasa’s office.

The door is closed but not locked. He only knocks once and lets himself inside.

“Mthonga I hear that you are not...” He stops and frowns.

His shirt is unbuttoned- some buttons are missing, as if someone grabbed him forcefully.

He’s leaning back on his chair with his eyes firmly shut. Tears are rolling down his cheeks but he’s not sobbing.

Bandla sits on the guest couch and stares at him silently. Seconds turn into minutes and minutes fly.

He's still sitting in the same position, tears are dropping down to his vest silently. He's not making a sound, neither is Bandla. He's giving his brother space to go through whatever pain he's going through.

They sit like that. Bandla is watching him, wondering and praying whatever it is not that bad.

After a long while he pulls the handkerchief out of his pocket, wipes his face and opens his eyes.

"Mthonga what's going on?" Bandla asks with concern.

"Please tell Nkonzo to email me the report from Stanger and take my messages from Nomvelo. I want to be alone," he says.

"But..." He lifts his bloodshot eyes and Bandla keeps quiet.

"You have a meeting in an hour, go and get ready," he says.

Bandla sighs and leaves. The door is shut and locked behind him.

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NOMKHOSI

Ndondo's car pulls up hastily and stops in the parking area. She climbs out in tight jeans and pencil heels, locks the car and hurries inside the building. The lift is taking too late, she climbs the stairs with her heart pounding out of her chest. She had to speak to the security guard that was with her. She was hysterical. Clearly something bad happened to her.

"Khosi!" she yells, running towards the door of Andiswa's flat. She moved back to the house to be closer to home. Snalo has moved in but she also loves staying home with her father. Most of the times it's empty, unless if Nomkhosi occupies it for her personal reasons.

She forcefully pushes the door and walks into Nomkhosi curled up on the couch and sobbing.

“Babe, what happened?” She rushes to her in panic. Her eyes are now swollen. She must’ve been crying for hours.

“What did he do?” Ndondo asks, rubbing her shoulders.

It can be only Thakasa, that’s the only man who can break her friend like this.

“He broke up with me,” Khosi says through hiccups.

This is not something new; their break ups. However it’s the first time Khosi cries over it.

“My friend please, I’m begging you, stop wasting your time with this man,” Ndondo says. This makes her angry, she’s never been fond of this Thakasa guy and her hatred for him has grown. She feels sorry for both Khosi and his wife. He’s just a piece of shit. One day they’ll meet and she’ll tell him this. Nobody messes with her girl like this!

“I...I’m...I’m pregnant.”

Ndondo freezes. She said she’s what? No ways.

“Khosi be serious,” she says, her eyes widened.

“My child will grow up like me Ndondo. He made it clear that he’ll never jeopardize his marriage and he’s never felt anything for me.”

This...she needs to sit down and let it sink in. Pregnant for Thakasa, a married man out of all people.

“You knew he was married Khosi. Why didn’t protect your womb if you couldn’t protect your heart?” This question rubs salt to a fresh wound but it needs to be asked.

“He didn’t reach his break with a condom on,” Khosi says.

“That was not your problem,” Ndondo.

“I need a shoulder to cry on, not a lecture. Get me a drink, something strong.”

“Khosi you are...” She lifts her hand before Ndondo starts with another lecture.

“Please don’t, get me a drink, that’s all I asked.”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 7

KHANYO

Head leans over my shoulder, creeping up my skin with loose braids. It's too late for me to close the laptop, she's seen my little investigation, and knowing how she is, this is about to turn into a big deal.

"I just wanted to know who he is and what he does exactly," I defend myself before she can say anything.

"Why do you care?" she asks, throwing her leg over the couch and jumping over to sit.

"I don't care, I'm just curious," I lie through my teeth.

"Hun, let me break the news to you. He is a Nazareth, that means he lives by certain religious rules. You're not going to fit in, remember you are a heathen. Not only are you not a virgin, you cannot kneel unless you're giving a blow job, you wear trousers and

weaves, you drink alcohol, you..." Oh, Jesus Christ! I cover my eyes and scream.

"I know, I know, I know. Can you shut up now?" I swear this girl studied Annoyology.

"Don't catch feelings ya. What did you find? Is he a lawyer?"

"No, he works in a family business. He's quite successful and educated. He has a BCom Honours. And there's no history of relationships," I say the last part more ecstatic than I intended.

"He's not stupid. Why would he publicize his private life, especially before he's married? Some people have what they call a reputation," she says, quoting with her fingers. Usually she doesn't care who is seeing who, and it's always good if the person is loaded.

"Nolwazi why are you so against him?" I ask with a frown.

"Because you're falling in love with him and you are two worlds apart. I don't want you to get hurt."

“I’m not falling in love with him. He hasn’t said anything to me,” I say in defense of nothing.

“Girl, I’m warning you. Chow his money and his dick, but keep your heart out of it.” She grabs the packet of Lays I was snacking on while investigating and leaves.

My heart is standing over my brain and screaming at me; “Call him!”

His number is linked to his Facebook account. He’s one of those people who share meaningful posts and only one picture of themselves throughout the year. The boring type that thinks Facebook is a boardroom. I share jokes, sex tips and troll my enemies with my posts. It’s the platform for that.

I can call and ask why he came here that day when my brother was here. That doesn’t raise eyebrows, in fact it makes sense more than Nolwazi’s colorful braids.

I need to be outside, getting some fresh air while I make this phone call. I stand in the balcony and

press the call button. If I die, I die.

It's ringing, I'll count to five, if he doesn't answer I'll wait for him to call back and say I don't know who called him, it must've been a coincidence.

"Khanyo," he answers on the fourth ring.

My chest dries up. How did he know it was me? I'm confused.

"You have my number?" I ask.

"Yes," he says.

What the fuck! He had my number all this time.

"Then why didn't you call me?" I lose my temper, my voice rises.

"I didn't want to invade your privacy before being let in," he says.

This got to be the most lame excuse I've ever heard. He's invaded my privacy twice, arriving at my place unannounced and dragging me to expensive hotels only to eat wors and ice-cream.

"Okay, let me not invade your privacy either. Bye!" I

drop the call and activate flight mode.

I storm back and head to the kitchen to pour myself a drink.

“And now, what happened?” Nolwazi out of nowhere. She makes no sound when she walks, you’d swear she’s a spy or cat. I wish Bandla can teach her one thing or two about respecting people’s so-called privacies.

“He has my number. He had it all this time but not even once did he call me or text,” I tell her and take a long sip of my wine.

“I also have your number and I don’t call you,” she says.

She’s unbelievable, yazi.

“Are you also a Nazareth? Do you have a Greek nose? Do you stutter and blink rapidly when you’re angry? Do you stare at people?” I get inside the bedroom, “Do you drive a C-Class? Are you Mthonga the third?” I ask the last one before closing the door and throwing myself on bed.

The idiot is laughing back in the kitchen. Why am I angry again? Because he didn't call me with his phone? His airtime? Being a SAB registered drunk can be dangerous sometimes.

The sun is setting down when I wake up. I wake up with a sore heart and instantly remember that I was upset with Bandla over nothing. The smell of burning phuthu invades my nostrils. Gugu is still not back and the hopeless chef is trying to cook dinner. Phuthu out of all things she could've attempted to cook! Phuthu needs a pro, someone with cattle-herding background and street-fighting credit. I cover my mouth and rush to rescue the poor phuthu.

Gosh, she's sitting on the stool with earphones tucked in her ears. How does earphones hinder one's sense of smell? Wonders shall never end.

"Seriously Nolwazi, are you trying to burn us?" I ask, rushing to the stove and switching it off.

The phuthu is ruined. It's burnt beyond recognition.

"It's burning?" She's only panicking now.

We are eating bread again for dinner. At least Ndulo brought cheese and all the necessities.

“I have to throw this pot away,” she says with her nose covered.

“Hhayi bo, this is not a Jenner-Kardashian household. You’ll scrape the pot and wash it,” I say.

“No ways, I just did my nails yesterday,” she argues, flapping her eyelashes.

I let her be, I know that Gugu will find a way to make her wash it.

My phone is still on fight mode. Maybe Ndulo tried to call and didn’t reach me. So much for his only sister! He needs me now more than ever. It makes me feel bad that I had to find out about divorce two months later. This teaches me to be more in touch with my family.

I have some text messages from Bandla. He was asking me to turn the phone on so that we can talk. He must’ve given up hours ago. A part of me wants

to call him and settle the stupidity out. But then why are we even acting like a fighting couple? I overreacted, now I'm over it, he should do the same.

Nolwazi decided to take us out to Nandos instead of ordering pizza. It's just me and her, Gugu is gone with her high profile people. Sometimes she leaves for weeks. That one has standards, she knows people who know people in high places. Her pu\$\$y has taken her to Dubai, New York and Cape Town. Nolwazi and I only attract the local rich ones, not the national rich ones. The ones we mingle with are financially struggling according to the ones Gugu mingles with. Funnily because she's not the beauty of the trio, Nolwazi is. Maybe Nolwazi is what they call the beauty with no brains. Her and I are on the same boat. We cannot accompany a politician to an important meeting. I mean, what could we contribute to first class conversations?

"My aunt is sick, I need to go home this weekend," she says through the meal.

“Is it her usual diabetes?” I ask.

“No, they say she’s been throwing up the whole week.”

“Maybe you should take her to the doctor.”

She nods and continues to text. I can see that her mood has changed. Her aunt is the only parent that she has, in a true sense of speaking. Her father is a drunk, he doesn’t know whether it’s 2020 or 1990. Sometimes he asks Nolwazi whose child is she. Her mother is also alive, she remarried and her focus shifted to her new family. She lives somewhere in Soweto, hardly ever comes home. Luckily Nolwazi’s father had a loving sister who didn’t hesitate to take Nolwazi in and raise her as her own from the age of 11.

We finish the rest of our food in silence. I know that I complain when she talks a lot but the quiet Nolwazi depresses me. From here we are going straight to bed, to be wrapped in own thoughts and misery.

Crossing the road I notice a familiar Mercedes

parked in front of our building. According to my sources this person is fully based in Mandeni, he drove all the way here so late? My heart is pounding against my chest. Why did I pull that stunt? It would be more hard to explain myself in person.

“Nolwazi you have to tell him that I’m not around. I’ll hide somewhere until he leaves.”

As sad as she is, but seeing me shaking in my boots because of a man I provoked cracks her up.

“So I must lie to a Shembe son and get cursed? I still appreciate my life Khanyo. Go and face your demons, remember to always leave a room for disappointments, we don’t want a repeat of happened with Efe.”

I’m not even listening to her. I’m listening to my pounding heart. My dress suddenly feels too short, like I must keep pulling it down. It’s just below my buttocks and body-hugging, exposing all my assets as they are.

He’s seen us coming. He opens the door and stands by it with his ankles crossed. He’s in a beige suit,

dark green tie and a white shirt. I don't want to drool too much, he's started with his staring, my knees are kissing each other. I feel like his eyes are glued to my exposed thighs, but as usual it's just a plain stare with no hint of emotion.

"Bandlalethu," Nolwazi greets, waving her hand with a smile on her face.

He smiles back and returns the greeting. She leaves me standing next to the car with my hands pulling down the corners of my dress like I wasn't aware of its length when I dressed up.

He walks around the car and opens the passenger door. I don't ask questions, I get inside and wait for him. He settles on his seat, then looks at me. I pretend to be focused on people across the street.

"Are you well?" he asks.

"Yeap," I nod.

Awkward silence follows. I'm pretending not to be affected by his presence. He's either collecting his

thoughts and how he'd construct them out, or threatened by my unreadable face.

"The call earlier...I was happy to hear your voice, thank you."

I'm not letting the smile creep out. I just nod and keep my eyes away from him.

He touches my arm, runs his fingers on my skin briefly, as if he's contemplating whether to hold it or not. Then he pulls his hand away, but the effect of his touch remains with me.

"Khanyo why did you kiss me that day?" he asks.

I'm caught off guard. Is this even a question? I turn to look at him and find his eyes deeply set on me.

"Because you were angry," I say, shrugging my shoulders.

This is almost the whole truth. I freaked out when I saw him that angry and rescued him with a kiss. It makes sense to me.

"You kiss every angry person you meet?" he asks.

"Yes," I say.

He chuckles and shakes his head. I gave him exactly the answer he was looking for, if he wanted to know anything he could've asked me that day. Now I have to revisit, revise and analyze a kiss that happened weeks ago.

"Can you make compromises?" he asks.

I'm not sure how to answer this one because I don't know the motive behind it.

"It depends on who I'm compromising for and what I'm compromising."

"Would you compromise for someone like me?"

"Compromise what?"

"Anything," he says.

This is such a complicated question. And he's not giving me the grounds of this conversation. Maybe if he elaborated more I'd have a clue of what I'm agreeing to.

"I don't know how to answer that," I say.

"You know a lion can never eat grass and a cow can never eat a buck. Animals don't have situations

where they have to compromise and adopt foreign styles to survive. But we are human beings, sometimes we have make compromises, adjustments and changes to accommodate other people.”

“Yes, I know.” I nod whereas I don’t understand a thing he just said. Lions don’t eat grass and people accommodate others? Can’t he be upfront with whatever it is.

“At home we are six, two girls and four boys. My father is late, it’s been 7years since he passed on. Makhumalo, our mother, is all that we have. My eldest brother is married, he’s expecting his first child. The second one is four years older than me and just living his life. There’s a girl that comes after me, she’s 24 and married. Then Sqalo, you met him at the hotel, he has a twin sister, they’re finishing high school.”

“That’s a very big family,” I say.

I grew up in a family of three. It was just me and my grandparents. When they died Ndulo, his wife and

kids became my family. I'm not used to a lot of siblings, I don't have a big circle of friends either.

"Compared to other families in my area, we are not that big," he says.

"It's big. Your mother gave birth six times," I say.

"Five times!"

Same difference. His mother should've prevented, that's too many afro-headed children in one family.

"I also want six children, or more," he says.

I laugh. Is he living in the 80s?

"You think women like your mother still exist?" I ask.

He doesn't answer that even though he heard me.

"Are you busy on Sunday?" he asks.

"No," I say.

"Can you spend the day with me?"

"You have my number, I'll wait for your call."

Strangely, it doesn't even bother me how he got my number. All I'm worried about is what I'm going to

wear on Sunday. It'll be hard if Gugu is not back, I'll be a complete flop. She's my stylist, and presently I feel like I need to do something with my wardrobe.

"Can I have your blessing to leave? I don't like driving at night," he says.

The way he speaks to me, with utmost respect like I'm the most decent person on earth, ignite feelings I never thought existed in me.

"Okay, drive safely," I say.

He leans back on the seat and releases a low chuckle.

"Thank you Khanyo," he says.

I guess this is it for today. I open the door, ready to leave and replay our conversations in my head. But a hand grabs my arm and brings me back inside the car.

"That's how you say goodbye?" he asks.

"Yes," I say with a slight frown.

"Can I also say goodbye my way?"

My silence is a yes. He pulls me closer, his cologne hits my nostrils as he wraps me in his arms and rests his one hand behind my neck. He locks my lower lip in his and sucks it slowly. I kiss him back, our eyes are locked for the first minute. There's something beyond his eyes, maybe he sees it in mine too. It's like there's a world of mine That's hidden behind his eyes. When he shuts them, I shut mine too. His tongue swirls inside my mouth, I capture it and suck it. He moans and lowers his hands to my behind. The heat between our clothed bodies has warmed all my body parts. His breaths are getting heavier, his hand behind my neck is pressing me against his face harder. It's getting deeper and deeper. I have to be the first one to break it, before things go any further. We are in the parking area, as Nolwazi said, he has a reputation to maintain.

"Khanyo," he lifts my chin and forces me to look at him. "Please take care of yourself for me. I'll also do the same for you."

"In what way?" I'm confused.

“In whatever way you think I deserve.”

I exhale heavily and nod. I still don't get it but I'll figure it out, I still have days.

“Thank you,” he says.

“See you Sunday then.”

“You're not even taking money for a cold drink?”

Huh? If there's money for anything I'm definitely taking it.

He pulls a black wallet out of his pocket and takes R200 and passes it to me. This is too much for a cold drink but I'm not the type that feels bad for taking people's money. Even if I did nothing to deserve it. I don't feel poor and cry; “I'm not a charity case.” In fact, I'm a charity case. I want everything I don't deserve nor worked hard for. I can even sit at the side of the road and take donations from strangers.

“Thank you very much,” I say, folding the note in my palm.

I'm happy about the money but my heart is sore as I

climb out of the car.

“Have a good night Khanyo,” he says.

I nod and force a smile. My heart is breaking, he’s leaving and Mandeni is too far.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 8

BANDLA

As the clock hits 6pm Phethy and Nothile head to the kitchen to start cooking. The whole family is gathered in the lounge, Nothile's pregnancy is still the highlight of the week. Brothers are happy for Thakasa, Makhumalo is happy to have her first grandchild, she shared the news with everyone at the temple today. She's ordered more wool, there are so many blankets she needs to knit. And clothes as well, even her own kids wore jerseys she knitted with her own hands. Nkonzo keeps reminding others how friends would tease their jerseys when they were young. It's a jab to MaKhumalo's skills and she's not taking it well.

"I didn't know I was clothing kids who'll grow grey hair without wives." This isn't going to him alone, Bandla also feels the heat. Thakasa is married, so is Mawande and she's only 24, Sqalo and Phethy are

still young. He always consoles himself by looking at Nkonzo, he's older than him, 34, and still not married. He's almost 30 too, but it's not that bad, right? And he's fallen in love, even though it's outside the temple. Now he can picture himself being married and having his own family. It's still a blur picture for now, but it's something to sleep on.

"I don't need a wife. My father's wife is here, doing my laundry and cooking for me," Nkonzo teases with a grin. He knows that he's about to receive threats. His mother can even wish death upon herself, just so they can suffer the consequences of their bachelorhood. She's that dramatic.

"One day I will die and you'll feel like the world has turned against you. In fact, I cannot wait for that day," she murmurs, grabbing her cotton basket and leaving.

"You'll give her a heart attack," Thakasa says across the room, sitting on his brown leather chair. He's said little to nothing since they came back from church. He hasn't opened up to anyone about his breakdown in the office and they've chosen to let

him be. He knows where to get them when he needs them.

“Tomorrow I’ll go to Mangethe, I haven’t seen Mawande in a while,” Bandla announces. It’s not just that he misses his sister, deep down he feels like something is terribly wrong with her. She keeps saying nothing is wrong over the phone, but he knows her like the back of his hand, she kicked him out of his ‘last born’ position back in 1996. They didn’t get along as kids, he didn’t like her because he felt neglected and overlooked because of her. He was only 4 years, going to 5, when she came. It was the end of his golden days, he had to tag along with Nkonzo who was 10 and troublesome. The first daughter of the family had arrived and taken all the attention. It was always Wande this, Wande that. And he was just there, floating in between.

But their relationship improved as they reached their teens. He’s learnt a lot from her. She’s like their second mom, even Thakasa turns to her when the going gets tough. She got married too soon, at only 22, all of them were against it. But Makhumalo was

on board, and it made things easier and acceptable that Nyezi was a Nazareth that came from a good family.

“You’ll pass our regards to her, Nkonzo and I had planned to visit her but something came up,” Thakasa says.

“Talking about things coming up, I will go to Durban from Mangethe and only come back Monday morning,” he says.

Both Thakasa and Nkonzo raise their eyes in question. He doesn’t want to count his eggs before they hatch, and there’s so much that him and Khanyo still need to iron out and work on.

“Is it the curtain girl?” Thakasa asks. He doesn’t have a clue, this time he’s in complete dark. But that’s not something he worries about- his brother’s affairs.

“Yes,” Bandla nods.

“Why don’t you propose and make things official?” He hasn’t pictured Bandla getting into a serious relationship with someone from another religion, or no religion. It has never happened at the Mangeles.

They marry their type, women who'll fit in and follow in MaKhumalo's footsteps.

"Makhumalo would have a fit seeing her drunk makoti for the first time," Nkonzo blurts out.

"Drunk? What do you mean?" Thakasa with a frown. He's looking at both of them.

"Oops, I didn't say anything," Nkonzo lifts his hands apologetically and walks out of the room laughing.

"You're seeing a drunkard?" Thakasa asks, turning his eyes to the unfazed Bandla.

He collects his phone and charger, intentionally ignoring the question. He's not ready for the judgement yet.

"Tell Phethy to call me when dinner is ready," he says, heading towards the door.

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He hasn't been able to reach Khanyo over the phone since Friday night. He's thought about calling one of her friends but decided otherwise. He doesn't want

to look like a creepy man who steals people's numbers.

His sister puts a plate of food in front of him and sits on the opposite couch.

"Uyoguelwa masunomfazi. Don't worry, I didn't cook with Knorrox cubes," she says, crossing her legs and staring at her brother.

"Maybe even when I do have a wife she won't kneel, life is unpredictable," Bandla says.

Mawande picks her juice and takes a loud, irritating sip that used to set her mother off.

"Wande you still do this? I feel sorry for Nyezi," Bandla says with a chuckle. His face is starting to melt, for a moment he's pushed back Khanyo's unavailability and focusing on his sister.

"He's a stranger, at least he doesn't deal with me everyday," she says waving her hand like it's nothing, but the sadness hovering her eyes is perceptible.

"Is it work?" Bandla asks.

"I don't know Bandla. At first I thought there was

someone else but I hired someone to keep an eye on him and he assured me that he's not doing anything funny."

"Wande! You hired a person to stalk your husband?"

"He was acting funny, what was I supposed to do?"
She shrugs her shoulders and takes another sip.

Bandla shakes his head in despair. He digs on people too, but he's never gone far as hiring people to stalk others.

"Why don't you talk to him?" he asks.

"He says everything is alright. You know him, he doesn't talk much."

"This is not like him yazi. If he's seen another woman he can come home, sit you down and tell you like a man."

"Sit me down?" She breaks a loud laugh that hits the ceiling.

"He can take another wife, you know it's accepted," Bandla says, holding back his smile. He knows his sister would never allow polygamy, she made that

clear before the wedding.

“Then he can kiss me goodbye,” she says, spanking her hip with a look of disgust on her face.

“There’s no divorce in Nazareth. You’ll be his wife till death do you apart. Anyway I’ve heard enough of your depressing marriage now, there’s something I need to tell you.” He puts the half eaten plate on the table and sits back on the couch.

Mawande is curiously staring at him.

“I’m in a relationship,” he says.

“With who?” She frowns.

“A drunk girl I gave a ride while she was being chased from the club in Durban.” He’s detailing it like this on purpose. If there’s anyone they can talk to with no fear, it’s Mawande.

“Lord, what is wrong with you Manqele boys? If it’s not Thakasa, it’s you.”

“What did Thakasa do?” he enquires with a frown.

Mawande waves that question away. She didn’t mean to say it loud, her brothers trust and confide in

her. Her job is to listen and give advice, not to judge.

“Tell me more about her, I want to decide if I like her or not,” she says.

His face lights up. Love is written all over his eyes.

“She likes rubbing her lips together. She doesn’t like being stared at for too long. She talks with her heart, mostly, not her brains. You know those are the most honest people, they don’t filter or construct their words to suit the next person. She’s left-handed and she has a funny walk. But she doesn’t know that.” He chuckles at the imagination of Khanyo’s clumsy walk.

“She has those Gogo’s child tendencies, I don’t think she was taught about life without being made special. She’s not a responsible person and she won’t be, as long as people close to her are okay with it. I was surprised to find out that she has a grown brother. You know I’d kick your ass if you started living like a wild animal, right?”

“Hey, this is not about me. You’re telling me about your girlfriend.”

“Yes, I was telling you that she has a Gogo’s child

tendencies. But she's not that bad, we can work around it. The only thing I'm worried about is that she might get cold feet when we have to face the reality of our future."

"But she loves you, that means she's ready to face storms with you."

"No, she hasn't told me that she loves me," he says.

Mawande frowns, "But you said she's your girlfriend?"

"She is my girlfriend," he says.

She raises her hand up in defeat and sips her juice. Her brothers are getting complicated by the day.

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It's close to 13h00, he's been driving around and shopping little things he doesn't need, hoping that she'll eventually switch her phone on. But her phone is still off. Yes, he may not mean that much to her, but when you make a promise to someone you keep

it, no matter how useless you think that person is. He's arranged everything, booked a private table for their lunch and a beach guest house where they'll spend the night. The sun is setting down and she hasn't even texted to give him an excuse, that would've been better than being made a fool.

Maybe he should do what he does best, pitch up unannounced and find out what's going on.

His fingers are crossed, it'll raise suspicions if he meets with her brother again. He doesn't want to be in that awkward position, or for him to feel like he's being disrespected. Luckily, it's Ntanzi on duty, as much as Khanyo hates him and thinks he's against their happiness with the girls, he's very fond of him. He's doing what any concerned uncle or father would do. To him they're not just tenants he's guarding a building for, he sees daughters in them.

"The other one just arrived today, at least she's not drunk. It will be too late when they open their eyes, one of them would be dead," he says, getting into

details like usual and shaking his head in despair.

Bandla thanks him and heads towards the lift. The day has already been ruined. It feels like a knife went through his chest and stabbed his heart a hundred times. Maybe he raised his hopes up before they got on the same page. He didn't leave any space for disappointments.

The door is open, one of them is in the kitchen and singing softly. He knocks at the door with his one foot in. It's Nolwazi, she sees him and smiles.

"Bandla, come in," she says.

There are alcohol bottles lying near the sink, a half glass of red wine and dirty plates scattered around.

"It's a bit of a mess, I just got here and it looks like the weekend was crazy for my friends," she explains in embarrassment. He arrived while she was starting to clean up.

"I'm here to see Khanyo, I've been trying to call but her phone has been off since Friday."

“Ummm...let me try to wake her up,” she says, rubbing her neck. “Please have a seat in our tiny lounge.”

His heart has sank to his feet. This is what he deserves from her? She didn't see in him what he saw in her. That kiss didn't mean anything to her? He saw the world in her eyes and thought she was seeing the same in her.

Nolwazi stands outside the bedroom door and tells her to go back to sleep.

“Didn't you say Bandla wants to see me? Move out of my way.”

“You're drunk Khanyo,” Nolwazi hisses through her teeth and tries to push her back. But she's smaller than her, she flips her to the side and walks out. She's dressed close to nothing, her belly button is out of the crop top she's wearing, the short pant reveals half of her buttocks.

“Bandla,” she says before hiccups choke her.

She falls back and lands flatly on her butt before reaching to him.

“There was a celebration at Gugu’s uncle, he forced them to drink. Well, not literally, but you know how uncles are,” Nolwazi explains.

Khanyo has fallen asleep right on the floor.

“You can wait if you want to,” Nolwazi.

“No, I will leave. Thanks for letting me in.”

She nods and walks him to the door. It’s easy to tell that she’s lying about the whole celebration thing.

Khanyo decided to party from Friday to Sunday. The promise she gave to Bandla was just a joke. He doesn’t mean anything to her- she kissed him because she kisses every angry person she meets.

Those were her words and he chose to laugh at them.

He cannot go back home, he needs to be alone.

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KHANYO

This cannot be happening. I was coming back from Gugu's man's houseparty Saturday night. I was coming back and staying sober for my date yesterday. I was going to respect him and dress up decently. I didn't do anything funny, except drinking. I didn't kiss or sleep with anyone. I haven't hooked up with any man since he spent his birthday with me. I swear to God, this is a mistake.

"What did he say?" I ask Nolwazi.

"He was broken," she says.

Oh no, I'm broken too. I need to make this right. I want a chance to explain myself but he's been ignoring my calls since morning. He hasn't responded to a single text that I sent.

"Gugu can you get someone who can drive me to Mandeni?"

"You're crazy. You cannot go there, he lives with his family."

“Please, I just want to tell him that I’m sorry.”

She looks at Nolwazi. I know what they’re thinking, I said I don’t have feelings for him yet I’m losing my mind over him.

“Mandeni is large, how would you know which one is his home?” Nolwazi.

“He comes from Enembe, everyone knows one another in the rurals,” I say.

“And what are you going to say if you find his mother, not him?” Gugu.

They’re stressing me out with their questions. They should be helping with solutions.

“I’ll say he ordered curtains,” I say.

They don’t approve but there’s nothing they can do to stop me. I’m going to Mandeni, I’ll give him my side of the story whether he likes it or not. Even if we don’t see each other again after today, at least we would’ve parted on good terms.

Gugu’s friend came through with his old Tazz. I had

to pay for petrol and buy him samp and beef. It was just a waste of samp, I'm not even sure we'll reach Mandeni. If traffic cops don't stop us and ban this car from the road, its brakes will totally stop working and we'll crash into other cars and die.

I have directions, my problem will start when I reach this Bhudula shop, who am I going to ask for directions? It's getting late, you'd swear the driver is still doing his Learners.

"I'm hungry, please drive through the garage so that I can buy some snacks," Gugu says.

I would've lost it with this friend of hers if she wasn't here. He turns to Total garage and fills up while Gugu goes to get snacks. The clock is not working with me on this, it's ticking towards 4:30pm. My fear is arriving there and finding everyone gone to sleep. I can't bother people at night for mere curtains, they'll think I'm a criminal or a drug junkie.

We've turned the corner to join Enembe Rd when this Musa guy spots a tavern and cries of thirst.

“I have to grab two beers, to wash down the dust in my throat.”

Sigh! I lean back on the seat and make peace with the fact that I may have come all this way for nothing. He’s parking at the side and hurrying inside the tavern for his beers.

“I thought you’d get me help from a sane person,” I say to Gugu.

“Relax, we are almost there,” she says.

It’s not easy for her to understand because she’s not in my shoes. How can I relax when the person has been ignoring my calls? He’s not even interested in what I have to say.

Musa comes back with his Castle. He’s followed by a man in rags with missing front teeth. He’s made a Mandeni friend already?

“This man is a neighbor to the Manqueles, he’ll help us,” he says.

This is a relief, at least there won’t be any stops now.

The man starts telling us about his life in Durban. He says he was a manager in one of the factories in Umbilo. According to him he was quite big, he used to appear in newspapers and on TV. People like him would make you wish you were deaf. But his stories has made our journey easy and short.

“You are looking for that homestead, leave me here and join that small road.” He’s pointing at the ridiculously gigantic homestead, I feel my stomach turning.

“There are no dogs?” I ask him.

“No, they don’t keep dogs.”

That’s minus one trouble. Imagine being chased by dogs from your ex’s...well.

“Your queue, madam undercover,” Gugu says.

Phewww! I didn’t think this through. In fact, it’s the most dumbest decision I’ve ever taken. What if he’s not home? I cannot leave a message, they don’t know about me, they probably never will. The quiet yard alone looks scary.

“Go on, we’ll park here and wait for you,” Musa says. He has a very ugly voice.

Breathe in. Out. This is it, there’s no turning back now. I take a bag of curtains and climb out of the car. You’d swear I was walking by foot, dust got my shoes even though I was in a car. My dress is long enough, my knees and shoulders are covered. I hope I won’t be getting any funny looks from his family.

My phone vibrates:

****Do not jump over those white stones, enter from the bottom of the yard!!**** Gugu.

Am I going to die if I jump them? What do they stand for? Anyway I’m going to obey, I’m just a curtain seller doing business, nothing much.

There’s no one in the yard, not even a child playing. My chest is beating drums again. As I walk in the yard I spot his car, relief washes all over me, not for long though. I just saw a man walking towards the brick house standing between rondavels. I didn’t see his face but I swear he’s the most scariest Shembe

man I've ever seen. But my heart tells me to keep moving, to do this.

I stand outside the door that a scary man disappeared into and exercise more breaths. Then I knock, a several times before a lady's voice answers.

"I'm coming!"

Phewww!

Breathe Khanyo, it's about the curtains.

"Oh, sawubona Sisi,"- It's a lady in a baby blue dress, head wrap and diamond earrings. She's a wife, that's out of question. I swear she's never grown a pimple on that skin. She's beautiful, traditional in her own elegant way and welcoming with her perfect smile.

"Hi, my name is Khanyo. I'm looking for Mr Bandlalethu Manqele, he ordered curtains last week," I say.

"He ordered more curtains?" she frowns slightly.

Is she suspecting something? I need to stick to my story.

“Yes,” I nod with a straight face.

“I’m sorry to keep you standing, please come inside.”

We pass a squeaky clean kitchen with built-in cupboards and shining pots cooking on the stove. There’s so much space, it could’ve been doubled into two rooms. I hear multiple voices holding a conversation and feel my stomach turning once again.

“Bhut’ Bandla, Khanyo is here with your curtains,” she says.

His head rises first. Our eyes meet and I swear his almost pop out. He’s sitting next to a big woman wearing glasses, there’s Sqalo next to her. The man I saw entering is sitting on a leather chair, he has a calm face than I imagined. The other one has dimples, he’s lighter than anyone in this house. As soon as my eyes locked with his, he smiled and glanced at Bandla who’s about to faint on the couch.

“You’re the one who sells beautiful curtains?” asks the big woman I assume is Makhumalo.

“Yes, it’s me,” I say.

“Don’t stand there, come and sit while MaNtusi prepares a drink for you.” She turns to Sqalo, “Why are not taking the curtains from her? She’s delivered them, now she has to pack them?”

Sqalo drags his feet and takes the bag from me. Well, I’ve made my presence, he got the message, it’s pretty clear on his face.

“I don’t mean to be rude, but I have to go, my friends are waiting for me down the road. Bandla thank you for your support again,” I say.

“No, thank you for selling beautiful curtains to my brother,” says the one with dimples to me and turns to Bandla. “Have a client care, walk Khanyo out and tell her to keep selling beautiful curtains.”

I feel like he knows something about me that I don’t. The eldest one on the chair is just playing with his ring and staring at me with his calm face.

“Thank you my child,” Makhumalo says as I pick myself up to leave.

Bandla also gets up and walks behind me.

The wife is in the kitchen, preparing a plate of biscuits and juice.

“You’re leaving already?” she asks in shock.

“I’m in a hurry, I’ll stay longer some other day.”

“I hope so, have a safe journey.”

I smile and head out, followed by Bandla.

“How long were you planning to ignore me?” I ask once we are in a safe distance from the house and turn my head to face him. He still looks like he might have a heart attack any minute.

“Khanyo,” he sighs deeply and looks at me like I’m the most craziest person he’s ever seen.

“You know why I’m not speaking to you. You shouldn’t have come here, I was going to call you when I’m okay,” he says.

“And when was that going to be? If I call and you don’t pick up I’ll come here again.” It sounds like a threat but I don’t mean it that way.

“Khanyo!” He sighs again and puts his hand over his forehead.

“You’re leaving me with no choice. I made a mistake, and that was to drink heavily throughout the weekend. But I didn’t do anything else, I swear. I took care of myself, in a way.”

That seems to surprise him a little bit. Did I explain myself too much?

“I’m sorry Bandlaletu,” I say.

This is the most genuine apology I’ve ever given anyone.

He releases a heavy breath, rubs his face and looks at me. His face has softened.

“How did you get here?” he asks.

“Gugu asked one of her friends to drive me. The car is parked down the road.”

“Please give me 10 minutes, I’ll be with you.”

“You’ll be with me?” I ask.

“Yes Khanyo, I’ll be with you.”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 9

KHANYO

Sleeping here wasn't part of the plan. I didn't bring anything, not even a toothbrush or underwear. I only have my bag that's filled with make-up and ladies personal necessities. I thought we'd talk, iron things out and then I'll return back to Durban with Gugu and Musa. But he had other plans, his 10 minutes turned into 5. I don't know what lies he told his family, but we are here, in a place called Hlomendlini, spending a night in a two-bedroom house that I don't know.

It's clean, there's a bed and two-seater couch. It's either someone lives here or pops in frequently to take care of the house.

He walks in, coming from the kitchen, carrying a large plate of roasted meat and rolls. He bought the meat on our way here, I'm starting to think he's a

carnivore. I don't know what that means, but he loves red meat. Maybe one day when I'm rich I should buy him a whole cow and let him eat it alone.

"One day I'll cook for you," he says.

I just smile and watch him cutting the meat. This is the first time I've ever been in a relationship without giving consent. We are in a relationship, we've already had our first fight, but neither of us has said anything about love.

"How did you know where I live?" he asks with a ghost of a smile peeping and refusing to come out.

"I can ask you the same. How did you know where I live?" I ask.

"Lapho kukhona uthando nendlela ikhona. I don't know if that saying applied to you as well," he says. (Love paves the way)

I feel like this is a tricky one. I know the answer, he knows it as well, but not now. I pick a piece of meat and throw it inside my mouth so that it can be occupied with something.

“Angazi,” I say with a full mouth.

“Don’t worry, you have the whole night to give me an answer,” he says with a smirk. “Anyway you look beautiful.”

Someone is blowing hot air on my face. I say a low ‘thank you’ with my eyes penetrating the floor.

There’s a nest of butterflies in my tummy, I feel dizzy like it’s the first time I’ve ever received a compliment.

“But sometimes I wonder if you know that,” he says.

Blushing paused! I lift my eyes to him, he’s staring at me, there’s no smile on his face.

“Do you know how beautiful you are?” he asks.

“Yes, I know.” That’s what mirrors are for, for us to know if we’re beautiful or not.

“Then why do you behave this way?” This is about me drinking.

I thought we talked about it.

“I said I’m sorry Bandla,” I say.

“This is not about me. You cannot drown yourself in

alcohol, put your life in danger and be sorry to Bandlalethu. I'm not going to die on your behalf."

Oh, wow! And I thought he didn't have the bone of judging people in him. Don't all religious people think they're holy and better than everyone?

"Who do you think you are to..."

"I'm Bandlalethu Manqele," he cuts me short. The nerve!

God turn that knife in his hand to his chest. I fold my arms and glare at him.

"You're not my father," I break unpopular news to him.

That seems to have rubbed him the wrong way. His face darkens, he blinks ten times in five seconds.

"You...you...are making things harder than I...I...I thought." After struggling with his words for a minute his speech picks a rapid pace. "Love shouldn't hurt Khanyo. I don't know about you but I think about you everyday. I don't do things I know can hurt you, I meant it when I said I'll take care of

myself for you. Not because you're my mother or I take orders from you, but because I want us to work." I almost didn't hear half of what he just said. He pushes the plate to my lap, wipes his hands with a serviette and walks out.

That's it? He's angry because of this small argument and walking out on me?

My appetite left with him, I endure a few pieces of meat and take the plate back to the kitchen. There's a microwave, I put it inside and fill a glass of water and drink. He didn't even close the door when he left, what if the criminals of this place attack me? The name itself explains a lot- Hlomendlini.

Oh, his car is still here, that means he took a walk to get away from me. Maybe I overreacted, I don't know, with him it's easy to be the wrong one because he has a calm nature. He can offend you in his low moderated voice and you'd still feel like you were wrong for being offended. I must take a bath and mentally prepare another apology.

Almost an hour has passed and he's not back. His phone is here on the couch, it's dark and quiet outside. I know in his head this is okay because I drink, go to night clubs and dare the devil with my life. But I'm scared; I'm in a strange place, I'm sober and I don't know anyone around. Everytime I try to close my eyes I hear footsteps or see a shadow passing by the window. I know it's probably just my imagination but I'm quivering in my boots.

I attempt to close my eyes and the door shifts again. But it's for real this time, there are footsteps coming in.

I sit up, hold the blanket to my chest and prepare myself to pick anything around me and defend myself from whoever it is.

Nx, it's the afro-head. Waste of my fear!

I slide back under the blanket and lie down.

He does his things silently for almost ten minutes,

going in and out of the bedroom. Then eventually he comes to bed, pulls the blanket and slips next to me.

He places his hand on my waist. I stay dead quiet and wait for him to give me another calm lecture.

“Khanyo,” he releases a heavy breath. “I have concerns. Actually I’m scared,” he says.

“What are you scared of?” I ask with my back turned. I’m not ready to face him yet. This thing is complicating both my life and his.

“That I’m doing all this for nothing. All the risks. You won’t come through for me,” he says.

“Bandla I cannot be a perfect girlfriend over the night. I’ve never shared my life with anyone, I do what works for me and makes me happy. So excuse me if I take time to adapt to this relationship, I’ve never been a fast learner.”

A moment of silence passes. My words replay in my mind. I have called myself his girlfriend and defined this as a relationship. Jesus Christ!

“Please turn around and look at me,” he says after a

moment of silence.

I release a sharp breath and turn to face him. He's not just another man I'm sharing a bed with, he pulls me closer and engulfs me in a tight hug. A hug that makes everything seems possible.

"We are going to work, right?" he asks.

I've just melted like a banana under the scorching sun, all I can give him is a nod.

"I'm in love with you Khanyo," he says.

I let his words replay, sink and find a place in my heart.

Yes, he's said it. Finally, his actions have a definition- love.

He lifts my chin up, I look down but he's seen it.

Damn, what's wrong with me?

"Why are you crying?" he asks.

I'm not crying, I have tears in my eyes, there's a difference. He's too genuine with me, it's scary. I've never experienced something like this before.

“Why are you in love with me?” I ask after he wipes my cheeks with his hand.

“I don’t have a reason, I just love you,” he says.

“Well, I have a reason...” He raises his eyebrow and I take a pause.

Can’t he let me finish?

“A reason for what?” he asks.

“For loving you,” I say with a silent ‘duh’ at the end.

He cracks a loud laugh, cups my face and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Alright, I just confessed, not even three hours after pulling the Zulu girl ‘angazi’ stunt.

It’s been only three weeks and a lot has happened since the morning I hijacked a C-Class with a Shembe sticker and NZ registration. Maybe we should get the formalities out of the way before we go on.....

My name is Nokukhanya Mayise, I turned 25 in

January, and so far I haven't built anything on my name. I'm not even trying to. My mother passed on when I was 15, we were close even though we didn't live together. I was practically raised by my grandparents who died before I turned 20. I was already a party animal then, but I had my limits. I was in DUT, about to begin my third year in Journalism. I only attended two weeks of the first semester and dropped out. There was no solid reason, I just felt like I was on the wrong path, not just academically, everything felt wrong, it still does, and I felt like I needed to quit. I'm not financially dependent on anyone, but I know my brother would put his life on hold to come through for me.

Am I addicted to alcohol? Yes. Why do I drink? It gives me peace. How? It helps me escape the strange world that keeps threatening to take over my life everytime I go to sleep. Seeing old people I've never met in my life and having sob conversations with them in my dreams. My life is, or was okay before they started bothering me about their sorrows, dark pasts and tears. Wouldn't you drink if

someone showed you graves everytime you closed your eyes to rest? I thought they'd have given up by now, but no, they still haunt me every chance they get. So I drink, both for their problems and mines.

I don't expect anyone to understand me, and nobody has ever attempted to try, until now.

"If there's a mountain, I'm climbing it with you. I'm burning bridges with you and jumping fences. You chose well Sisi, a Manqele will treat you like a queen. But you have to behave like a queen too."

I roll my eyes, he's so full of himself, but it doesn't make him less charming. I pull his arms to wrap around me. Queens deserve to be cuddled throughout the night, right?

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NOMKHOSI

30 years of age, a stable job, own apartment and a car. That's almost how everyone pictured

themselves in their 30s; having most of your goals achieved and financial freedom. It doesn't make sense that something silly as love would destroy that sense of stability. It would crush you and make you feel worthless regardless of everything you've achieved in life.

He was wearing a ring when they first met after being hosted by a mutual business partner in a formal business dinner. His eyes were on her throughout the dinner and no matter how much she tried to ignore his intense stare, it had a butterfly effect on her.

His deep voice caught her off guard as they both headed to the parking area. He'd been keeping a close eye on her, it wasn't a coincidence that they both left at the same time.

"Is it okay if I say MaShoyisa?" he asked, walking behind her like a spy.

Awestruck and caught off guard, she stuttered; "Ummm...yeah..it's okay."

He picked his pace, reached her and walked beside

her. His cologne, intense aura and deep voice! Everything about him spoke money, power and dignity. Everything that she was looking for in a man- except the ring that was on his finger.

“I had another event to attend, the plan was to show face here and leave shortly. But there was this flower that kept saying ‘stare at me.’ Tell me, what do you bath with?”

Her face blew hot. Everything about him made her knees weak, except the ring. He knew how to sweeten his words and get her blushing like a newly wedded bride.

“I don’t speak to strangers,” she said, ignoring her thudding heart.

“It’s Thakasa Manqele. A handshake would be nice while you formally introduce yourself as well,” he said with his hand extended.

With a secret eye roll, she held his hand and shook it.

“Nomkhosi Nsele,” she said.

He already knew her name, he’d enquired about her

after noticing her the first time. He held her hand firmly, kept his eyes on hers like there was a magnet glued in them.

She tried to pull her hand back but he held it tighter. So typical of a Zulu man like him!

“Can this be not the last day that I see you Nomkhosi?” he asked.

She blushed but quickly hid it with a raised eyebrow.

“I don’t think your wife will appreciate that,” she said, looking at his left hand.

“It’s me who wants to see you, not her.” His answer stunned her. He wasn’t even going to try to spin her the story of a divorce process?

“Oh,” that’s all she said.

Words failed her, which was very unnatural of her in situations like that.

“Give me a date, time and address where I’ll pick you up, and I’ll let go of your hand,” he said.

On any other day that would’ve annoyed her because he was using his masculine power; holding her hand

and restricting her movements. But that day she melted in the hand of a married man and gave him a date.

A date that changed her whole. That has led to this moment of worthlessness, swelling stomach and abandonment. Morning sickness and cravings have kicked in. She's approaching her seventh week and her bun is starting to grow and show itself. Breaking the news to her mother would've been easy if she had the right to claim Thakasa as the baby's father. But just like her father, he's turned his back on them and went back to a woman that owns his heart.

Knowing how her family is, mostly her brothers, a war is going to break between the Ngidis and Manqueles. They'll force Thakasa to take responsibility of his actions and probably kill someone. The last thing she needs right now is to compete with a pregnant wife. She's tried that in the past and she always came last. There were times when she felt like Thakasa had feelings for her. Those moments when she'd wake up in the middle

of the night and find him staring at her. It was weird, yes, but there was something in his eyes that stripped coats of fear and doubt off their hearts. The long, tight hugs that he'd randomly give her before they parted ways. Sometimes it felt too deep and too genuine to be 'nothing.' Doubtlessly, she'd fallen in love with him from the onset. He was married, yes, but there was that 'BUT' of faith she held onto.

“Are you going to keep stabbing the poor salad with that fork or you're going to tell me what's wrong?” Phumzile asks.

That's the thing about her mother, she can be difficult for no reasons.

“How am I going to tell you if you're already biting my head off?” she asks.

“Nomkhosi, you know you can talk to me anytime. It's just that Ngidi has been giving me a lot of stress lately. I don't understand why he keeps waking up by dawn and going to the rank. Ndlalifa is in charge now. He's old, he should be sitting at home and

letting me take care of him.”

“Nice life problems,” Khosi mumbles before sipping her milkshake. If it’s not Ndondo telling her about her nonexisting problems with Ndabuko, it’s Maqhingana crying about Andiswa refusing his gifts, or Snalo complaining about Mondli spending less time with her. Nobody has real problems around her, yet they complain every chance they get.

“What’s wrong?” Phumzile asks again.

She exhales, “Mom I’m pregnant.”

That’s not something she expected at all. But her baby is grown, she’s taken care of herself and achieved a lot of things in life. In fact she’s surpassed her expectations.

“I don’t know if we, African mothers, say congratulations if our daughters get pregnant before marriage. But congratulations my baby, you’ve made me proud, I’m not complaining. How far are you?” she asks.

“Six weeks,” Khosi says.

“I’m having three grandkids in one year. That’s a blessing.”

It’s fulfilling seeing her mother this happy, but unfortunately it’ll be short-lived, she has to tell her the truth of her baby’s life.

“It doesn’t have a father,” she says.

Phumzile chokes on her drink and looks up with a frown.

“What did you say?” she asks.

“I don’t who the father is. I cannot remember, it happened while I was drunk.”

“Yey, yey, weNomkhosi! What are you trying to say to me? Since when do you drink like that? So you opened your legs for men you didn’t know? What are you going to tell the child?”

Tears burn her eyes but she blinks them back and swallows the lump forming in her throat.

“I’ll take care of the child by myself,” she says.

“Oh, Miss Independent. You’ll be a father and a mother all at once? You think that works, huh?”

Maybe you should try to sit me down and ask me how it's like to raise children single-handedly."

"I don't have a choice, mom. I messed up and I have to take responsibility for it."

"Well, good luck. Now take me back home, I have a husband to cook for."

That started well and ended horribly. But she expected it, she'd also react the same if her daughter told her she's pregnant and she doesn't know the father.

Two people had fun together, but only one is suffering the consequences of their actions. He's probably with his wife, massaging her feet and showering her with love. Everything is good, he's moving on with his life like nothing happened.

****I DON'T PRAY THAT MUCH, BUT TONIGHT WHEN I DO, I'LL BE ASKING GOD TO MAKE YOUR LIFE MISERABLE , JUST LIKE YOU MADE MINE. I HATE YOU THAKASA, UYINJA!****

This is the last message she sends him. She has to deal and make peace with everything. As soon as it delivers, she blocks him and deletes his contact details.

It's done.

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THAKASA

Nothile comes back from the bathroom and finds him staring at his phone. He was out of it when she left to pee, their bedroom life has improved since their trip to Bali. She gets in bed and wraps her arms around his waist. He reads whatever it is on his phone and then pushes the phone under the pillow and pulls his wife to his chest. He's wrapping his arms around her tighter and tighter. His pounding chest is pressed hard against her full breasts.

"I love you sthandwa sami," he says, his head buried on her neck. "I'm not a bad person, please forgive

me for everything I've done to you. It wasn't my intention to hurt you."

"Manqele I forgave you. Let's just move on, I don't want to talk about it," – Nothile.

His grip tightens around her neck, "I don't want you to remember me like that. I want the good times to be the highlights of us. Ngiyakuthanda."

"Manqele I..." Her legs are pulled apart. There's a hard rod sliding between her thighs. With no warning or whatsoever, it penetrates her soft walls and thrusts inside her. It helped that she was still moist from their last round, he's pounding her with little to no mercy. His moans deepen with each stroke, his grip is still tight around her neck but she'll survive.

It doesn't take long for him to reach his breaking point. This one belonged to him, it was to satisfy his temporary need and less about her. He needed her, not the other way around.

"I cannot pull out baby, I'm sorry," he whispers before last rapid thrusts that almost tear her core apart. Then he groans like a bull and releases

himself inside her.

Before she can comprehend his last confusing words, he's on her face and sucking the life out of her lips. She loves this beastly, needy side of him. It's going to be a long, lit night.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 10

KHANYO

I feel violated. I'm angry and exhausted, both emotionally and spiritually. This was supposed to be my night. Mine! They weren't supposed to come and rob me of my special moments. It was my first night with him, it was supposed to be the best time of our lives but he had to spend it guarding me. I don't know how many times he had to wake me up from the floor back to bed and from the door while I sleepwalked. At least Gugu understands, she made it her duty and chose to share a bedroom with me over Nolwazi so that she can keep an eye.

I need a drink, anything to relieve me from this depressed mental state, but I know that there's no alcohol in this house. I doubt he's ever bought alcohol in his life, unless if it was for a ceremony.

I was hoping to find him asleep, it's been a really rough night, but he's woken up. He's staring at me as I make my way to the bed from the bathroom. He has sexy post-sleep eyes, and that broad chest, I can lie on it throughout this cold morning. I climb on bed, rest my head on his arm and pull up the blanket. He wraps his arm around me and kisses my cheek. It's my first morning kiss.

"How are you?" he asks.

"I'm good," I say what we both know that is a blatant lie.

"Do you always have those heavy dreams or it's something you got in this house?" he asks.

"I've been having them for years. It's my life." I cannot control the misery in my voice.

"Do you mind sharing what you dream of?" he asks.

"Old people, graves, herd of cows and dead bodies," I say.

"Have you consulted about it?"

Consulted? As in me going to kneel in front of a

sangoma and chanting 'Makhosi' while they throw bones and speak to invisible beings? That's not my thing, I'd never do that, zangomas are scary AF.

"I don't think that's necessary," I tell him.

He holds my hand and pops my finger joints. It hurts a little, but he's enjoying it so I let him be. I love these little things he does to me.

"I think it's necessary for you to get to the bottom of it. Maybe there's a message being sent across, I don't know, but dreams have meanings my love."

It still feels surreal, I look at him with a smile and ask him to repeat his last words.

"My love," he says with a chuckle.

I think I love him more than my head intends to.

"So, when are we going to the doctor?" he asks.

"To do what?" I'm confused. We were talking about consulting a sangoma just a moment ago, now it's the doctor.

"Have you never heard them say; 'Know Your Partner`?" he asks, tightening his hand on mine.

This is about HIV, right? I'm not even offended, I also wouldn't trust a person like me. What if I drank, slept with ten men without a condom and got infected? Oh wait, what if I drank HIV from a beer or cocktail? What if it was lying on the dance floor and I got infected while dancing?

"Khanyo, I also have my short-comings. This isn't just about you. It's about us, both you and I. Maybe we can test today before you leave," he says.

"I don't mind, as long as you're paying the bills," I say.

"How do you take me? I'll never make you pay for any bill."

Even if I went to Toyota and.....never mind. I plant light pecks on his chest and trail my fingers over his smooth skin. I want to snap a picture of this moment, send it to Efe and thank him for leaving me. He was like a dark cloud, as soon as he got out of my life there was a light. I nearly got depression over an ugly man who eats Jollof rice and Indomie noodles. By the way, he had dry ankles.

"You're beautiful my love," he says randomly.

I stop counting hair on his chest and look at him. He's staring as usual.

"Thank you. You're also not that bad," I say.

He chuckles, "Well, that's better than what most people say."

"What do they say?" I frown.

"That we are ugly, only Nkonzo is handsome. The one who wouldn't let you breathe yesterday."

Those people don't know me. How could they say such a thing to this beautiful.....soul? Is it because Nkonzo is lighter than them and he has dimples? And who the fuck still measures beauty by complexion in this century?

"You're not ugly babe. You are dark and handsome. Look at what you got this morning because of your looks?" I point at the gorgeous queen lying on his chest.

He breaks into laughter. I love the relaxed, happy side of him.

"I don't care about how my looks are defined. As

long as I'm clean and presentable. But you're right about one thing. This..." He lifts my face and kisses my lips. His are so tender, and he's a good kisser, I don't want him to stop.

I throw my leg around him, grab his neck and deepen the kiss.

He's breathing heavily and touchy-touchy when we break the kiss. His front is thickening behind his short and pressed hard against my thigh.

"Babe," he grabs my face again. This time his lips work on my neck. Neck is my soft spot, his tongue is giving me tingles and moisture between my legs.

"Please help me, even if it's a hand job," he whispers against my ear in a husky voice.

I didn't expect him to settle for that less, but he knows what might work for him. I remove the blanket and pull down his short. His shaft springs out, hard and thick, with a drop of pre-cum around the head.

I wipe it with my palm and rub his shaft all around. I expected another bush, but luckily he's not too hairy down here. He's massaging my breasts while I give his shaft hand strokes.

"Babe I want to do it myself," he says.

Is my hand game too weak? Nobody has ever complained about it before.

"You'll also play with yourself," he says.

Now that's very naughty of him. I'm sure that's not what they are taught in church.

He's taking my panty off before I even agree to it, and kicking out his short and throwing it on the floor.

Now we are both in our birthday suits. The blanket is also thrown to the floor, it's a cold morning but with him naked next to me I don't feel much cold.

He opens my legs, kneels between them and sits on his feet.

"It's clean babe," he says, looking at my exposed core with his hand wrapped around his shaft.

It's one of those compliments that you let pass. I

cannot say thank you on behalf of my cookie, that would be weird.

I pick my nipple and play with it while the other hand massages my mound. He's staring at me, not at what he's doing.

I slid one finger between my moist folds and it comes back dripping wet. The sight of his naked body and hard shaft affect me as much my body affects him.

"Rub the clit babe," he instructs with a moan, his hand stroking his shaft rapidly.

As instructed, I rub my swollen clit and moan at the pleasure spreading across my whole body. My eyes shut, I drift to the world of my own and let my hand deliver the much needed pleasure.

"Don't close your legs Khanyo," – the voice snaps me out of my zone and reminds me of the company I have in this room.

He doesn't understand the feeling that firmly shut thighs give me. I cross my legs and continue stirring my core with my fingers.

Then strong hands grab my legs apart, forcefully. Damn, I was so close to the orgasm. This toe nail of Satan!

“Don’t hide it from me,” he says in a voice I cannot recognize.

“Bandla fuck off!” I close my legs again, my clit is aching, I need this release and I need it immediately.

He grabs my legs apart, again. This time he lifts them up to my chest. I cannot defeat his power, now all I can do is cry. How can he lead me into doing this and then deprive me of the ending?

Then I see a foil packet slid between his fingers and his teeth tearing it apart. His other arm is still restricting any movement from my legs. I know he cannot put on a condom using only one hand, I’m just waiting for him to remove his arm and then I’ll continue with what I started.

“Don’t move,” he says before sitting back on his feet and inserting the condom.

This is my chance, I just need a quick clit-rub then all my problems are over.

“Khanyo don’t touch that cookie,” he says with so much authority and entitlement over something that’s not his.

I’m stunned. Since when do I need permission to touch myself?

He lies between my legs and pulls one leg over his arm.

“I’m sorry, I cannot watch your little fingers playing with my cookie,” he says.

The entitlement that he has! Now my fingers are little...oh yes, compared to the rod sliding in my core, they’re very little.

“Please be gentle,” I beg. His energy seems to be too high for my liking.

“Khanyo I’d never hurt you.” His response weakens my knees as usual. Our lips lock in an intimate kiss while he slowly inserts himself.

Once he’s fully inserted, he pauses and cups my face for another steamy kiss.

“I love you, okay? You have my everything. Heart,

body and soul. Please don't let me down, I have big dreams about us."

"Bandla I love..." He pulls out and thrusts back in again. My voice dries in my throat. My world trembles, I wrap my hands around his waist and meet his thrusts.

"Babe I'm coming, hit right there," I scream, my movements freezing beneath him. Nobody can call me a chicken or two-minutes noodles. I'm a woman, the most important being of human species.

He's hitting the right spot, I explode and collapse beneath him. He keeps moving, his moans filling up the room as his shaft fills my core.

Something warm latches on my nipple. I open my eyes to find him sucking me like a little baby. His strokes are now slow, he's moving in a cycling rhythm.

"Faster babe," I beg.

This is very selfish of me, I know it, but I want to see

how he looks like when he nuts.

“No babe, this still feels so good.”

I push him and turn over him. Luckily, he doesn't fight me. He lies on his back, I climb on top and cross my hands on his chest.

“You know Manqele, I wanted your cum so badly in my mouth.”

He swallows nothingness. I move my waist around, spelling an O inside my core with his shaft, just to help him mark his territory. He's grabbing my butt, moaning and grinding his teeth.

“Do you want to nut inside my mouth?” I ask.

I think he's about to pass out right now; that loosely opened mouth and faint look on his face.

“Do you?” I ask.

When he opens his mouth to answer I twerk on him, my ass loudly slamming against his upper thighs.

He grabs my waist and attempts to sit up. I push him back and ride the Nazareth out of him.

“Fuck!” the Nazareth has been unnazarethad. He’s cursing, his fingers are digging my waist. His thrusts are disturbing my rhythm. I let him take the lead, when his face muscles start tensing up I move again.

His last cry and my name slipping out of his mouth before he explodes and trembles will be the picture I’ll never forget.

I kiss his sweaty forehead and roll to the side and watch him catching his breath.

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THAKASA

Nothing seems to be in place this morning. He’s already grumpy and annoyed by Bandla. They’re running a company, not a spaza shop. He can’t just decide not to come to work because his girlfriend is around. If that was the case then he would be missing work everyday because he has a wife at home.

He walks in his bedroom and finds his wife lying in bed, smiling at her phone. His clothes are not ironed. Is his lunch even packed?

“MaNtusi, it’s 6:48 and I’m still not ready for work,” he says, his voice not matching the flame of anger inside him.

“And why are you not ready Manqele?” Nothile asks, placing her phone on her chest and staring at him.

“Where are my clothes? My lunch?” he asks with a hint of annoyance.

“I believe your clothes are in the wardrobe. You can decide what you want to eat today and make it. I told Ma that I’m sick.”

“But you’re not sick, you’re on your phone and grinning like a Cheshire cat.”

“So what? You’re going to tell her that I’m not sick?”

That.....he’d never do that, especially not now, and she knows it.

“Not only did you cheat on me. Now I have to put up with you having sex with me while thinking about

your girlfriends. After I satisfy your fantasies with my body I have to wake up and prepare you for work?”

He rubs his forehead and exhales heavily. He didn't mean to, Khosi's message hit his nerves the wrong way. He didn't want to be harsh with her. What they had, when they had it, meant something to him. It highlighted his life in a certain way. But he needed her to understand that it was really over, that it had to end for good. He thought he'd be okay knowing there was no woman out there, who had his best wishes and unconditional love for him. He thought he could live happily knowing that she felt nothing but hatred towards him.

But seeing her that broken left a wound that can never heal in his heart.

“I wasn't fantasizing about anyone,” he says.

Nothile raises her eyebrow, “Oh, you usually pull out when having sex with me?”

Silence!

“You didn't even use a condom with her?” she asks.

Heavy breath. More silence.

“From next week I need a helper. No, actually you need a helper, someone who’ll do your laundry and iron for you. I’ll help with lunch because I don’t want Ma to suspect anything and I don’t want you to eat food prepared by a stranger. But I’m releasing myself from most wifey duties, I want to enjoy my pregnancy.”

“If you want me to hire a helper it’s okay. But don’t do it to punish me, I made a mistake MaNtusi, I’m sorry.”

“And I forgive you Duyaza, now choose a shirt and go iron, it’s late.”

He heaves a sigh and stands motionlessly at the end of the bed. Nothile picks her phone, scrolls down and laughs at the memes.

Another sigh! He goes to the wardrobe and grabs the first shirt he sees and walks out.

Phethy is in the kitchen, listening to the music she’s

not supposed to listen to and cursing along with it. God knows why she's not going to school today.

"Tutu are you busy?" Thakasa asks.

Phethy removes her earphones and looks at him with her eyes bulging out thinking he heard her cursing along with Cardi B.

"Bhuti were you speaking?" she asks.

"I asked if you're not too busy, I need my shirt to be ironed while I make lunch," he says.

"Oh, why? Is Sisi sick?" she asks.

"Yes, she has a headache," he says.

"That's sad. Maybe you should send a car and I'll accompany her to the doctor," she says.

"That won't be necessary," he says.

"But Bhuti I....."

"Tutu!" He gives her a look to let it go, leaves the shirt over the chair and goes to the fridge.

With a secret eye roll, Phethy picks the shirt and puts her earphones back on.

“Put this pussy right in your face
Swipe your nose like a credit card
Hop on top, I wanna...”

A hand grabs her arm, she turns to Thakasa’s dead glare facing her.

“What are you saying?” he asks.

“Ummm...it’s just a song, sorry.”

He let's go of her arm and clicks his tongue in annoyance. What a fucked up morning!

(If you are in PTA you're invited to join The Beloved MaShenge and Ndabuko Her Yardner review with me as a guest in Menlyn from 12pm.)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 11

THAKASA

Bandla chose not to come to work. He hasn't commented on that, he decided to let him have his fun, once he's done living in a bubble he'll discipline him. He's not really surprised, with a girl like the curtain-girl his brother was likely to get confused and think with his dick. He sees a lot of himself and Khosi in them. It's a kind of a relationship that puts a lot at stake. A relationship that might shake and challenge the family. His biggest fear is that Bandla seems to have fallen deeply in love with her. He knows how hard it is to reverse feelings because they shouldn't be a part of who you are. The curtain girl is not a part of who they are and what they stand for as the Manqueles. And one day Bandla has to put her through what he put Khosi through, and maybe he won't be strong enough to handle it.

He was looking forward to a long bath, warm food and some alone time in the ancestral rondavel where he can listen to his inner thoughts and reconnect to self. He needs that Thakasa moment and tranquility.

But the first thing he bumps into is a strange, chubby young girl with blonde short hair. Her eyes widen when she sees him walking in as if she's just seen a ghost. She steps backwards until her back is against the counter, her hands are shaking but she's trying to hide it.

"Ummm...Mr Manqele, welcome home...would you like anything to drink?" she asks as if she's been rehearsing the question all day.

It clicks in his mind. The helper! Was it not his decision to make? Didn't he have until next week before he finds her?

"Who are you?" he asks, his voice harsher than he intended.

"I'm Zolile, the new helper."

He releases a low sigh, shakes his head and leaves her standing by the counter with her trembling hands

balled into a fist. Nothile is pushing him and she's pushing him too hard and too far.

He throws his bag on the couch without greeting and takes off his tie and walks to stand by the window.

"Are we statues?" MaKhumalo asks, irritation reeking in her voice.

Nothile is sitting next to her with her legs crossed. Her hands have long red claws- those fake nails the like of Khanyo and Khosi renew every second week.

"Is Bandla back?" he asks, purposely skipping the greetings. The sight of his wife irks him. Not because of the physical make-over, he knows that his mother can put an end to it anytime, what really grinds his tip is her new behavior. It was her obsession over the baby that pushed him to Khosi. He had to break Khosi's heart and let her go. That tore a part of him apart, if not the whole of him. And now she's sitting there and acting like it was all his fault. He's in pain too. He gave up something that meant something he cannot put into words. He's

hurt someone to stay in this marriage. He's made a sacrifice.

"No, he called saying he'll be home late," MaKhumalo replies.

Him and Bandla need to have a conversation, this thing of his is getting out of hand. There's a code of conduct, one doesn't skip work and goes MIA because of a woman.

He reverses his words for later, when Bandla is home, and he glances at his wife. They're nowhere near to what they used to be. The pregnancy hasn't brought the happiness they thought it would bring.

"About what we talked about this morning, I found a girl who needed a job and decided to hire her before she goes else where. Her name is Zolile Ngubane, I believe you've met her in the kitchen," Nothile says.

"I saw her," he says, unable to hide the irritation in his voice. He wants no chubby shortie touching his stuff and cleaning after him.

"You forgot to tell your husband that we went to those places where they massage people for money

and we had a full body massage,” Makhumalo says.

“What?!” Thakasa turns his eyes to Nothile. His face is darker than usual. Anger is steaming out of his eyes and burning through his piercing glare. The day cannot get any worse. Nothile is determined to take this to the next level.

“It was just a fun girls’ time,” she says with a secret eye roll.

“My mother is a girl to you? So today you decided to get naked for strangers, let them touch you all over and then bring another one to my father’s house without telling me?” He’s fuming.

MaKhumalo adjusts her glasses with a slight frown creased on her forehead.

“You need to calm down. There’s no need for all this. Your wife is carrying your child, let her relax and do whatever she wants. She’ll take these nails out before Saturday,” she says and looks at Nothile with a warm smile and rubs her hand in comfort. She’s carrying her first grandchild, that means the whole world to her. So what if she did her nails and had a

massage? This girl has done so much for this family, and she just loves her, they have a lot in common. She's a true Manqele makoti.

"Mother, stay out of this!" Thakasa says with his hand raised and glares at Nothile.

"We need to take a drive, later." He unbuttons his collar and leaves using the back door.

He's done being guilt-tripped and walked all over. He's willing to be weak, imperfect and susceptible to sin.

If Nothile doesn't want to be his wife, he'll allow her to be what she thinks she wants to be.

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KHOSI

It's a big deal- she's pregnant and the baby doesn't have a father. Of course, she's disappointed her mother and Ngidi. Actually, the whole family. She's better than this. Maybe if it was Snalo they would've

understood, she's reckless and irresponsible. But Khosi is the matured and responsible one. She's the one who speaks sense and puts others on the line. That's why her mother cannot come to terms with this new reality. But calling her brothers to gang up on her was a bit low, wasn't?

She's sitting on the kitchen chair, stirring her milkshake with a straw while enduring their piercing stares.

"I wasn't sober when Andiswa and I smashed, but I still remember exactly what took place and how. I just wish she'd let me in and allow me to treat her like the mother of my child. I mean, whether she likes it or not, her and I are about to become a little family. And I'm the head of that family," – Maqhingana.

Trust him to twist and make this about himself. His problems are not that big, his presence is nauseating to Andiswa, which is very normal in some pregnancy cases. They'll be fine once she's given birth. About them becoming a family- maybe he's jumping the gun, for now. They're nowhere near being in love with one another.

“Khosi don’t fuck with us. Who made you pregnant? And don’t you dare tell me that little tale you told Aunt,” Ndlalifa asks. He’s aggressive, insensitive and judgmental.

“I don’t know what you want me to say,” Khosi says, shrugging her shoulders.

“Who is the father of your child? He needs to take his responsibilities, why are you protecting him?”

“I said I don’t know. Why does it bother you? I’m old, I can take care of myself.”

“This is not about you Nomkhosi. The baby deserves to know its father, you know how hard it is to grow up with one parent. Be fair and own up to whatever it is.”

She told herself that she was done crying. But they keep reminding her about this. The baby needs to know his or her father. It’s not fair, but what choice does she have? It’s better not to know your father than to deal with his rejection. If Thakasa had to choose between her child and his wife, he’d surely choose his wife. He did that already; when she told

him about the pregnancy he left right away.

“He needs to pay for the damages. We don’t want thin cows, they must be fresh and fat. He must compensate for this Hypoderm beauty and Bio-Oil fresh legs,” Maqhinga says and receives a dead look from Ndlalifa.

“Excuse us for a moment,” he says in a displeased tone. Maqhinga shrugs his shoulders and walks out.

After releasing a deep sigh, Ndlalifa pulls a chair and sits next to Khosi. They have a lot in common, mostly their stubborn nature. They’re not as close as Maqhinga is to Snalo but they do get each other. He understands her to some extent, because sometimes her character reflects his own.

“Why are you not telling us?” he asks, holding her hand. They’re everything but they’re not liars. It’s pretty clear that whatever it is that she’s hiding from everyone is hurtful.

“I’m not going to disclose his name Ndlalifa. I know how you all are. I don’t want anymore drama,” she

pauses and breathes heavily. “He’s a married man and he doesn’t want anything to do with me. I knew he had a wife but...”

Oh, hell no! This is not what he expected.

“But you were hoping that he’ll leave his wife for you?” he asks with a narrowed eyebrow.

“Not exactly, but I thought he’d have a backbone to keep it going. I’m trying to be strong but I miss him,” she says.

He expected anything but not a married man for his sister. Really, out of all people Khosi chose a man who’s already committed to someone else.

“Married or not, he needs to take his responsibilities and his wife needs to know that he cheated and created a child outside the marriage,” he says.

“Please respect my decision Ndlalifa. I will raise this baby alone. My mother did it, I can do it too.”

He tried, they all did, but she’s made her decision and they have to let her handle her life the way she sees fit.

“Do you want me to go with you to the doctor? You need to make sure that the baby is fine,” he asks.

“Yes, but isn’t it weird to go with a brother to a pregnancy check-up?”

“Everything about you is weird. Get ready, I’ll be back in thirty minutes. I left my wife and son in bed, Aunt called us early in the morning crying about you.”

“She’s dramatic,” Khosi rolls her eyes and sips her milkshake.

“She’s scared that you’ll go through what she went through raising you and the twins. Let her deal with this in her own terms, she’ll come around. But you also need to tell her the truth.”

“I will, just not now,” she says.

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THAKASA

It was a long, silent drive and now they're here in Flamingo Heights. It's a three-bedroom house with a high fence and double garage. He's opening the door and going around like he's been here many times before- he's familiar with the place.

"Manqele where are we?" Nothile asks.

"My house, Flamingo Heights." He walks in, takes his jacket off and throws it over the kitchen chair.

She's following his lead, taking in the interior of the house and silently asking herself a million questions.

"You have a house in Flamingo Heights?" she asks.

Grabbing a bottle of water out of the fridge, he glances back at her and nods.

"Yes," he says.

Nothile chuckles out in disbelief. A whole house and she knows nothing about it!

"This is where you kept your bitches?" she asks.

“Yes,” he says, without a single pinch of remorse.

“And you thought it’s okay to bring me here? To the same house that you’ve been entertaining girls in.”

“It was one girl, but never mind, today I’m going to entertain you since you’ve decided that you want to take her position in my life.”

“Wow, just wow! So she had a position in your life?”
Maybe she’s not strong as she thought. She can no longer handle this as she wanted.

“Grapes or strawberries?” Thakasa asks, little bothered by her trembling hands.

“Thakasa,” she calls softly before pulling a chair and lounging herself on it exhaustedly.

“Why would you bring me here?” she asks.

“Because you no longer wants to be my wife. You want to be someone you don’t know, someone that you’ve never met and can never be like. Now, do you want grapes or strawberries?”

“Grapes,” she says before burying her head in her hands and controlling her breaths. No, no, no. She’s

not breaking down. She's going to handle this with a full chest.

A hand grabs the back of her neck and lifts her up. Cold lips smashes against hers, deeply sucking her lower lip and gripping the back of her neck tightly.

"Mmmm," she moans out of breath and pushes him back. It feels like her lip is swelling.

"If you want to be a side chick Nothile then you'll have to do it properly." He bites her earlobe and watches as she flinches.

"You're not going to guilt-trip me and walk all over me, MaNtusi. And please don't start something you cannot finish," he says in a low whisper against her ear.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Nothile asks.

"I didn't make any mistake when I married you. Don't try to be something you are not. You're not her. You're so different from her, I wouldn't mistake you two even in my deepest sleep."

"You know her that well?" she asks.

“I know you that well,” he says.

She lets out a chuckle and tenderly massages his beard.

“If I was you I wouldn’t be so sure.” She picks a grape, throws it inside her mouth and gets off the chair.

“Are we spending the night here?” she asks, suddenly okay with everything.

“No, just fucking and going back home. There’s no one around, there’s no need for that long dress.”

She gasps in shock and quickly pulls herself together.

“Just fucking?” she asks.

“That’s what unmarried people do, isn’t? Since you released yourself from wifey duties we’re going to fuck, hire maids and go out anytime we want,” he says.

Deep breath. In...out! She steps towards what looks like a dining room, exercising her breaths.

“Did you love her?” she asks.

“I love you,” he says.

“That’s not what I asked. Did you love her or not?” she snaps, turning around to look at him.

“I can only love you, you know that,” he says.

“Yet you bought a whole house to be able to spend time with her.”

“It doesn’t make any difference, we broke up and I’ll never see her again.” He quickly clears his throat before his voice breaks completely.

“So you’re keeping memories here?” she asks.

“No, I have no memories of her.”

A deep, penetrating stare is exchanged. She’s never doubted his love for her, that’s why she’s still here. And she loves him, that’s without any doubt. But something has shifted. Or it has been unveiled. And he cannot confront it, not for her or himself. It has to stay like that, buried and ignored.

“You have to pay Zolile a full month salary before she goes.” She picks her purse, puts it under her arm, grabs the car keys and heads to the door.

“You’ll find me in the car when you’re ready to leave,” she says before walking out.

He stands where he was and watches her go. He doesn’t move nor breathe a word until she disappears. Then he releases a long sigh and looks around. There are no physical memories but this house do have a lot of memories.

This trip may have got him his wife back, but this is far from over.

The drive back home is another silent trip. He keeps glancing at Nothile and inhaling sharply. There’s so much to talk about but they cannot talk about it. Not now, and maybe not forever.

It’s a bit dark when they get home. Bandla’s car is parked outside, meaning he’s finally came back from kwaNhliziyo Ngiyise.

“When are we going to the doctor for a check-up?” he asks.

“Next month, first week,” Nothile says.

“You’ve already gone to the first check-up without me?” He’s awestruck. They didn’t talk about it but he expected her to include him in everything. He’s the father of this baby.

“Yes, everything is fine. Pictures are in our photo album.” She unbuckles her belt and opens the door.

“MaNtusi,” he calls.

She pauses and looks at him.

“I love you,” he says, his eyes clouded with sudden fear.

“I love you too Manqele. I just need to rest and think things through.”

He nods and spends the next five minutes inside the car. Why can’t they be happy? She’s pregnant now, this is what they’ve been praying for, right?

From the car he goes straight to Bandla’s rondavel. He needs someone to talk to, Mawande is too far and lately she’s been dealing with a lot in her marriage as well.

“What if someone saw you?” Bandla is shouting at someone inside. It’s unlike him to randomly raise his voice at anyone.

“I don’t care,” Sqalo responds, with his voice raised as well.

“You know if Thakasa finds out about this you’ll be...” He doesn’t finish, Thakasa is standing by the door and staring at them.

“If I find out what?” he asks.

Bandla looks more frightened than Sqalo. Thakasa walks in and looks at both of them, silently wondering what the secret could be.

“He’s going to UJ,” Bandla says.

Sqalo frowns, “UJ?”

“I thought you were going to UKZN with Phethy,” Thakasa says.

“Not anymore. He changed his mind. Please excuse us Sqalo, go clean yourself,” Bandla says.

Clean yourself sounds a bit weird but he has enough problems than to interprets his brothers stupid

fights.

Bandla gives him a look before climbing on bed.

“If you’re here to shout at me about missing work...”

“No. I cheated on my wife,” Thakasa.

Bandla sits up. His eyes popped out in shock.

“You did what?” he asks. Not that he didn’t hear him the first time, there must be some mistake.

“I cheated,” Thakasa says, sitting on bed and heaving a sigh.

“With who? When? Why?”

“All that doesn’t matter. I broke two women’s hearts and I don’t even know who I am under this Thakasa Mangele name. Along the way I’ve lost myself, the problem is I don’t even know when and which part of me was lost.”

“What do you mean Mthonga?” Bandla is confused. His brother is supposed to be happy. This is his moment, they’ve been praying for it for years.

“Nothile forgave me even though she’s hurt. But I

don't know how genuinely I deserve her forgiveness. I don't know if I'm really sorry it happened. I don't know if I had a chance to go back and re-do things I wouldn't do it again," he says.

Bandla is lost for words. Where does this leave his brother's perfect marriage? Why is he not regretful?

"I'd die for my wife, I'd choose her over anything and anyone. The problem lies between me and myself. I feel like I'm not giving myself the best shot at life, like I don't choose myself in most cases because it doesn't make any sense."

"Are you in love with the other woman? What's going on?"

"I cannot love another woman. You're not getting my point Bandlalethu. This is not about another woman, or anyone. I'm talking about Thakasa, but you wouldn't understand because you've never lived a day in my life." He gets up, fixes his collar and heads towards the door. "If you pull another disappearing stunt I'll give you a written warning."

"What?!" – Bandla exclaims in shock.

He walks out and bangs the door behind him.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 12

KHANYO

I've been nervous on his behalf, Nkonzo kept calling and telling him that the big brother is furious over his absence at work. I don't know his family but I understand how strict its kind can be. But surprisingly it didn't go badly as I thought. His brother threatened to give him a written warning and his mother is still head over heels about her coming grandchild. He's now in his room and planning our next sneak out. The only time I get this happy is when there's an announcement of alcohol sale.

"Is Mr Beard behind that smile?" Nolwazi asks, standing in front of the mirror and editing her face.

"Yes. Actually, my boyfriend," I say.

She gasps, "There's a title to it already? Khanyo are all screws tight in your head? Do I need to call the mechanic with a screw-driver to help you with loose

screws?”

Both Gugu and I break into laughter. Trust her to blow everything out of proportion even where there's no need.

“I know what I'm putting myself into. So guys, listen up, we have new house rules.” They both stare at me with their eyes narrowed.

“No heat on Saturdays. We'll cook food Friday before 6pm, keep it in the fridge and iron our clothes. On Saturdays there'll be no warm showers, no microwave, no shoes, no....” Nolwazi chokes down a laugh before I can finish. Gugu joins in the laughter and spans her hand.

“How many orgasms did he give you?” she asks, still laughing.

I roll my eyes, “You two better obey the rules, otherwise I'm sprinkling ichibi over you.”

“Girl you have it so bad. But you need to be careful, you may have to sacrifice your life and happiness to live up to his standards and expectations.”

“I know Nolwazi. I can’t say I’m ready to deal with that reality but I want to meet him half way. I want us to work, he’s a really nice guy.”

“I hope he has no wife,” Gugu says.

“Nope. Only the big brother, he has a beautiful pregnant wife.”

“Is he available?” Gugu.

I’d expect such question from Nolwazi.

“I just told you that he’s married,” I say.

“A committed man brings no drama. And he’s rich, so it’s two birds with one stone.”

“He didn’t look like that type. He’s more like the father-figure type that wants everyone home before 6pm and judges everyone who get involved with his brothers.” I also sound judgmental; the man hasn’t said anything to me. But I’m allowed to have a perception, right?

“That’s why I only like Mandulo,” – Nolwazi.

I give her a look. Doesn’t she give up? My brother is still healing from the divorce, the last thing he needs

is a slayqueen throwing herself at him.

Speaking of that soul, I need to see him tomorrow and talk to him about what Bandla suggested. I'm just giving it a try, I've never turned to a sangoma for anything in life. If Mandulo agrees then we'll both consult one and see how it goes.

"I think he needs a shoulder to cry on," Nolwazi again, she doesn't give up.

"And you're the shoulder, right?" Gugu asks.

"You guessed right, I'm a perfect shoulder for him to cry on. He's tall, up there, and dark with muscular arms and sexy beady eyes. He's like my own Dwyane Wade, you know. I don't even need to guess that his dick game is on point."

Jesus Christ, this girl! We are not talking about a random man here. Now I have to think about my brother's di...no, I can't.

"Where are you going?" she asks between the giggles.

I give her my middle finger and go to my bedroom.

Both Gugu and her have plans for the night. My life is slowly getting boring, I've turned down many potential dates and night sponsors just so I can be alone in bed and chat to Bandla.

He calls a few minutes after I sent him a text that I'm finally in my room, alone.

"So you're sleeping alone?" he asks.

"No, you'll be with me spiritually," I say.

"That's not enough. I want to be there physically. I need you in my arms, right now."

"Is everything okay?" I ask.

There's a deep breath and some silence.

My heart breaks before I even hear it.

"Is it about us? Did they find out?" I ask.

"No, Khanyo. It's my brother, the youngest one. He...he..." Deep sigh!

There's a drum beat in my chest. Sqalo is dead? Such a young, rude boy.

“He loves other boys. He’s gay Khanyo,” he says.

God knows I nearly died of a heart attack. Why is he making a bottle store out of a cider? I mean, this is not a big deal. It’s not even a deal, it’s what it is, facts of life.

“You scared me. So what’s the matter? Is he struggling with it mentally?”

“Khanyo he’s gay. Sgalosamathonga is GAY. If any of my siblings or elders find out it’ll be the end of him being a Manqele. He’s a young, brilliant boy. There’s a lot he still needs to achieve in his life. But...it...it...” I know this moment very well. I wasn’t trying to act dumb, I just didn’t see it this way. Sometimes I forget that some people still haven’t accepted LGBTI as part of our community.

“Babe, it’s going to be okay, breathe,” I say.

“I’m only trying to protect him. He doesn’t know what is at stake, at least I can handle the heat when the truth comes out about us. His story is different. And you will allow me to marry you, right?”

Marriage? We are discussing that now? Gosh, we

haven't even dated for a month.

"Bandla that's a difficult question," I say.

He probably expected an answer, yes or no, right away.

"I'm not saying you'll marry me tomorrow, I know I still have to prove myself to you and go through trials and tribulations. But am I a cut of what you'd like to have as a husband?" he asks.

"I've never imagined myself having a husband. I don't even know what I want my husband to be like. All I know is that I love you, you make me happy and I want to make you happy too," I say.

"I'm fetching you tomorrow after work. Make me happy by dressing up decently. I know I haven't brought you any dresses," he says the last part out of mockery. I said the exact words to him on his birthday.

"Where are you taking me? I'll be with my brother during the day, discussing the dream thing."

"I won't tell you. Just be dressed and ready around

5pm.”

I hope it's not another boerwors and ice-cream lunch in a restaurant. He should let me pick the restaurant and make the order, I have a more sophisticated taste than him.

“Girl, we are leaving,” Gugu says, peeping through the door.

I just bid goodbye to Bandla, but we're still going to chat on Whatsapp, I need to lend these girls my attention for a few minutes.

Nolwazi is dressed like an escort. Most of her skin is out. She's wearing a lacy top, short leather pant and knee-length boots. Her make-up is on point as always. Strangely, I'm not even tempted to jump into the bath and ready myself to go with them.

Gugu looks a bit formal in that jumpsuit, black stilettos and neat bun.

“We'll be sharing a table with the Minister and his team,” she says.

“That doesn’t mean I want Mandulo any less. We’re just rubbing shoulders with people in high places, you know I want to get a seat in parliament next year,” – Nolwazi.

Gracious Lord, this one is too ambitious. A phone beep cuts my laugh short- R3 000 payment has been made into my savings account. Just as I wonder about the sender Bandla’s text comes through;

FOR THE DRESS. LET ME KNOW IF IT’S SHORT.

“Guys!” I scream, I can’t help it. I’ve received bigger amounts as token of pussy appreciation, but this is the first time I’ve ever been given money for the dress. A mere dress! I mean, I can get ten dresses, even double that, from this money.

“Talk before I get a heart attack,” Nolwazi.

“Bandla just sent me money to buy a dress. R3 000, imagine!”

Their eyes widen. It’s unbelievable, I know.

“You can get a dress and a few jeans from that amount.”

Oh well, I'm not sure about the jeans.

But why don't I test waters...

IT WILL BE MORE THAN ENOUGH. I WILL GET A DRESS, LEGGINGS AND A FEW JEANS FROM THIS MONEY- I send the message and wait with the phone in my hand for his response.

I wait and wait and wait....just as I'm about to fall asleep, his message comes through;

HAVE A BEAUTIFUL NIGHT MY LOVE.

That's the message! There's no comment on me buying leggings.

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I've been to this house a few times in my life.

Mandulo grew up with his dad, he was a good man but I didn't like being around him. It felt weird

because I didn't have a father, so I limited my visits, I'd see my brother when he came to Bergville. I think he's moved back here because of the divorce.

Maybe his house suffocates him with all the

memories of him and his wife.

The yard is taken care of but you can tell that nobody has lived here in a long time. His car is parked just below the front door.

The taxi leaves me outside the gate. It's not locked, so I let myself in and yell his name.

He steps out of the house, topless. He's only wearing a short and push-ons. He's really living like a divorced man now. I can smell burnt eggs all the way from here.

"You came all the way here in high heels?" he asks, bursting out in laughter.

"I have class," I tell him.

"You didn't finish your classes but you have class?"

I roll my eyes till they touch my brain. Are we ever going to get over this? He's becoming an annoying brother. Every family has that classy, glamorous aunt who never went to school. I'm that aunt.

"What did I do to deserve this visit?" he asks, leading

me inside the house.

“You prayed right. Why are you burning eggs? Whose lipstick is on the couch? The sun is up, yet the windows are still closed. Who are you seeing? Is it not too soon?”

“Makhanyi, Jesus Christ! Are you hung over? Your attitude tells me you are, I think I have a beer in the fridge,” he says.

My eyes widen. Not because he thinks I’m hung over, but because he’s offering me a beer. Where is my brother? The responsible one who does everything according to the book?

“Are you okay? You scare me when you suddenly become a nice brother,” I ask.

He bursts into a fit of laughter.

“Fine, I’ve changed my mind. There’s no beer for you, go and make Oros.”

What?! He’s not serious.

“You’re kidding?” I ask.

“Yes, I’m kidding, khi-khi-khi. Now go and make Oros,

I think I have muffins and biscuits there.”

He’s boring with capital B. But I do need a drink and something to bite on while I discuss my dreams with him, so Oros and muffins it is.

He has the nerve to sip an icy cold beer while forcing me to drink a bitter Oros.

“So what’s going on?” he asks.

“I’m still having those bad dreams,” I say.

“Oh,” that’s all he can say. I don’t think he’s ever known how to be as a brother. I know I’m not an easy person to brother, but there are things he should know and explain to me as the older one.

“So Bandla suggested that I consult a sangoma and find out what’s really going on,” I say.

“And who is Bandla?” he asks, his eyes narrowed.

“The curtain client, he’s my boyfriend.” I try to keep a straight face but the look he’s giving me is sending me into a fit of laughter.

“Is he not a Shembe man?” he asks with that slight frown on his face.

“He is. Please don’t ask more questions because we’re also still trying to figure it out.”

“Well, good luck with that. Make sure he always remembers that you are your own woman, you have your own beliefs and values.”

Trust me, Bandla knows that very well and he respects me. But I love that this tall, divorced one cares this much about me.

“So, about the sangoma thing, do you think I should consult?” I ask.

“I don’t know. But it wouldn’t hurt to try, right? I’ll come with you, I also need answers about my life.”

Seeing him like this hurts. I never thought I’d see him this broken because of Thobeka. He gave that woman everything he had. If I remember correctly the last two years of her nursing course were paid for by Mandulo. And Menzi was like a brother to him, why did he stab him at the back like this?

“Are they together?” I ask and realize how personal and maybe insensitive my question is.

“Yes,” he says.

Damn, that must hurt even more. It’s official, I hate Thobeka with everything in me. In fact, her and I need to have a little face-to-face talk.

“Nolwazi thinks you’re her Dwyane Wade,” I say just to cheer him up.

“Who is that?” he asks with a chuckle.

“An American basketball player,” I say.

“Some things are better appreciated from a distance, Makhanyi. Life is not black and white, and people are not transparent like a glass.”

Well, he needs to tell this to Nolwazi and see if she’ll listen to him. He’s her Dwayne Wade and that’s it!

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I still can’t get over how good I look in this dress. I’m not crying over the R650 I spent buying it. The

designer had exactly my body shape in mind when he designed it. It was made just for me.

“What if he’s taking you to Nhlankakazi?” Nolwazi asks.

Her and her peas-size brains! Why would he take me to Nhlankakazi? It doesn’t make any sense. He’s obviously taking me to a fancy restaurant.

“Shut up and help me put these shoes on,” I say, sitting back on bed and taking the box of my new heels that I got at The Fix.

“He should pay the beauty fee every week. He can’t be staring at all this for free,” she says while pushing the shoe in.

“That means I’ll have to pay a good diϕk fee as well, and I can’t afford it,” I say.

“Is he really good? He looks like the boring type that praises God during the deed.”

“What?” Lord have mercy, your daughter doesn’t know what she’s talking about.

“Does he muff?” she asks.

“No, but it’s only because I’m allowing him not to. When I want that beard between my legs, I’ll get it,” I say.

“And if he says no you’re going to live your whole life without the kothakotha?” she asks.

“That won’t happen, he won’t say no. But even if he did, I wasn’t going to leave a good man over kothakotha,” I say.

“Why don’t you ask him straight? ‘Bandla are you ever going to lick my cookie jar or I must buy a clitoral pump?’ Easy as that.”

We’ve only been intimate once but asking wouldn’t hurt and it would be fun to get his reaction.

“Let me call him and ask because it’ll be too awkward to ask him in person,” I say and we both break into laughter. She really is a bad influence, but I wouldn’t love her any other way.

“Hey my love, I’m almost there,” he says.

I know that he’s lying, he’s still with whichever brother in town. He’s been saying he’s almost here

for over thirty minutes now.

“That’s not why I called,” I say.

Nolwazi covers her mouth and giggles behind her hand. I scold her with a look and step towards the window.

“Is everything alright?” he asks, panic evident in his voice.

“I just want you to ask something sexually,” I say.

He clears his throat. There’s a shifting movement and someone’s voice chatting in his background.

“I’m listening,” he says after a moment.

“Are you ever going to lick my cookie jar or I must just get myself a clitoral pump?” I ask.

Silence!

If he breaks up with me it’s all on Nolwazi. I swear I’m going to make her life...

“Maybe you can tell me what to do differently next time. It was my first time with you, I’m still learning your body and getting to know what you like the

most.” He’s bruised from the tone of his voice. Men are such babies.

“Bandla, I didn’t mean it that way. You made me happy. I was satisfied, I promise. Nolwazi and I were arguing, she thinks that...”

“Bitch don’t you dare!” Oops, I forgot that she was in the room. She has this threatening look on her face that makes me swallow back my words. I’m not a traitor, I wasn’t telling lies, she told me to call and ask.

“We’ll talk when we come back from my sister’s house,” he says and drops the call.

Sister’s house? I thought he was taking me out in a fancy restaurant or something. How is his sister like? I don’t want to be put on the stand and grilled with questions like I forced him to love me.

I’m not feeling good about this at all.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 13

NOLWAZI

Gugu is spending the night out, again. No, she's not going out for drinks or to party. It's one of those formal dinners with big shots. When it comes to money Gugu doesn't play small. There's a tender she wants to secure, that's why she keeps pitching up in these meetings and mingling with the ministers. Her big break is coming and it's coming sooner than anyone expects.

She leaves in a formal black suit, looking like an elegant business woman.

"Bring pizza when you come back," Nolwazi. If there's a hopeless person on earth, she's the most hopeless of the hopelesses. At least Khanyo has her Nazareth boyfriend who introduces her to his married sister within three weeks of dating. Without even realizing it, she's changing for Bandla. She's always in a dress when he comes around. She's now

watching how much she drinks and when. The girl even turns down potential sponsors because of him. Is that what love does to people? You just become submissive?

There's a knock at the door.

"What did you forget?" Nolwazi yells as she moves her feet off the coffee table and sitting properly on the couch. Gugu can be a boring aunt at times.

The door opens, footsteps come in. They're not Gugu's, that one left in stilettos and these are boots steps.

"Hello," a deep voice says.

Her eyes widen as she meets Mandulo's. Her own Dwayne Wade! Why didn't she put on her matric dance dress? And her hair, oh shucks!

"Ummm...Ndulo...hello," she stutters, running her fingers through her hair and mentally yelling at herself for looking so unorganized.

He smiles, there's a twinkle in his beady eyes.

Lord, she's staring. He always smells manly and expensive.

"I heard that you'll be home alone so I thought I should pick you up and go have dinner with you. I'm also bored," he says.

She jumps to her feet. This is not a dream, he's here in front of her and proposing.

Well, proposing that they go out for dinner.

"My gosh, please give me a few minutes. I need to change, comb my hair and put make-up on."

He frowns slightly and then chuckles.

"You look fine to me. It's not like we're going far, I made a reservation at St Clements," he says.

Still, she needs to look good for him.

"Just a few minutes," she says, indicating with her fingers and rushing towards the bedroom before even offering him a seat.

Revealing or covering? Maybe a simple jean and a

strapless top.

Urgh, that's too dull.

It's been over five minutes and she's still stuck in front of the wardrobe.

Okay. A high-waist skirt, pencil heels and white shirt. A financial analyst would date someone who looks like this, right? She applies a berry nude lipstick and draws her eyebrows.

Fifteen minutes later she walks out of the bedroom looking like a dream.

"Aaaaand?" She gives Mandulo a 180 turn.

He laughs, "You look beautiful, now I feel like I could've taken you to a better restaurant."

"Next time," she winks and leads the way out.

It's really a short drive, she was still enjoying Mandulo's sexy driving skills.

Like a gentleman, he opens and holds the door for her. See why she's attracted to this man. Young boys know nothing about treating a lady of her class.

“I chose an outdoor seating, I don’t know if I should change it,” he says.

“No, it’s not that cold.” And if it does get colder you’ll cover her in your arms, sir.

The waitress leads them to their table and provides them with menus.

“Am I allowed to drink a cocktail?” she asks, staring at the drinks section.

“No,” Mandulo says.

She rolls her eyes secretly and opts for a juice. It’s just for today, he’ll have to accept her for who she is. She drinks and that’s that. They both make their orders and the waitress leaves them to their privacy.

“So why are you crushing on a broken, divorced man?” he asks with a smirk.

“You weren’t divorced when I developed a crush on you. And you’re not broken, you just need me,” she says with a wide grin.

He shakes his head and laughs. He’s flattered, no lies. But he also needs to be an adult- a big brother.

“You know what I think?” he asks.

Nolwazi narrows her eyebrow and stares at him.

“At your age I think you should be looking for a sane, fully functioning man. Not someone else’s left-overs. Being involved with a broken man whose wife cheated on with his best friend will give you grey hair. I’m not a right man for you, or for anyone.”

The waitress appears with their drinks, putting a pause to their conversation.

As soon as she leaves, Mandulo looks at her with a ghosting grin.

“I feel like you and Makhanyi don’t want to grow up. Six years from now you’ll be 30. That’s when you’ll realize how hard life is.” He takes a sip from his glass and lifts his eyes to her. She’s been staring at him and not saying a word.

“30 to 40 kuyanyiwa. It’s hard. Friends stab you in the back. Some are struggling with depression, cancer, debts and lost. There are divorces left, right and centre. Kids are growing up and the world is getting dirtier and not good for them. You wish you’d

sorted out some aspects of your life earlier, when you still had time, and right now the time is not on your side.”

“Are you trying to scare me?” she asks.

“No, these are facts. 20 to 30 is a phase of preparing yourself for real adulthood. But you guys are playing, and it doesn’t make any difference. Makhanyi dropped out of university because she didn’t want to graduate, find a job and become an adult. But she’s growing up anyway, years don’t stop because one refuses to be a responsible person. Soon she’ll be 30, kids who are in high school now will be in your position and these men you’re all entertaining now will be looking for fresh blood. You’ll be miserable 30 year olds, with no education, no businesses, no jobs, no cars, no houses and no money.”

Her eyes drop to the juice in her hand. She exhales heavily and sips slowly.

“Fun isn’t forever. You have to own something in life Nolwazi. You still have time. I’m not saying don’t live your youth years, I’m saying secure a future while at

it,” he says.

“I failed six of my modules in the second year, NSFAS won’t fund me anymore. I don’t think I can afford the tuition fees, accommodation and still take care of myself and my aunt. I don’t have a job, the hustling doesn’t give us much money.”

“If you had someone paying the tuition fees you’d go back and further your studies?” he asks with his eyebrow lifted.

“Yes, I would,” she says.

“When applications open, send yours and register those modules you failed. I’ll take care of the finances but please give it your best shot. I don’t want you to end up in the streets. And I have a request, just one.”

“Okay, what is it?” she asks.

“Tell your friend to finish her studies, even if it’s online. I don’t want any man to have a financial hold over my sister.” That’s undoubtedly Bandlalethu. He doesn’t trust him, but who can blame him? Men are like that, they like it when you’re financially

dependent on them.

“I can do that, but it’ll take time and a lot of convincing. We are not the educational material,” Nolwazi says.

“And what material is that?” he asks.

“The type that wears glasses, speaks English 24 hours a day and drinks water with cucumber slices and shit,” she says.

He chokes in his drink and breaks into a fit of laughter.

“You really have a strange, stereotypical observation,” he says.

Licking the sauce off her fingers, she asks him; “So you’re not my Dwayne?”

“Study first, get a job, make money, date a hunk and break a few hearts. Reach your 30s and meet new people. I think I’ll be around 45 with grey hair, then you’ll decide if you still want me or not,” he says.

It’s not a fair deal but he’s not rejecting her, right? That’s something to take home and celebrate.

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KHANYO

I dressed to kill only to meet his sister. Hearing how well he speaks of his sister I think her approval matters more than anyone's. I just don't understand why they allowed her to marry at 22. When did she enjoy her youth years? There's time for everything and I don't think getting married at 22 is one of them. Date different guys, go to clubs, steal cosmetics at Clicks and spend a few nights in a cell. Just have fun, create memories before committing your life to someone else.

And why would I own a gigantic homestead at 24? I swear this girl wants to die young. She skipped many stages and jumped straight into womanhood.

He takes my hand and we head towards the door of a bigger brick house with an opened door.

"Sikhulekile bo kwaMyeza," he says, knocking on the

door.

Ayy, there's something depressing about this Myeza homestead. I was welcomed by a shadow through the gate, now there's this uneasiness on my shoulders. I don't want to be here, period.

A girl almost my age, but bigger and taller than me, stands in the middle of the door with a smile plastered on her face.

"Mthonga the third," she says, throwing her arms around Bandla.

I stand aside and watch them going crazy over one another. At least she doesn't look too rural, she has class, just like me.

"I love your earrings." Oops, that came out by mistake. Now she'll think I'm weird.

Bandla takes my hand, "And the earring lover is Khanyo Mayise."

"Is it the one you brought here last week or another one? I'm not good with faces and names," she asks.

I swear, I'm going to strangle a bearded man to

death.

“You did what?” I ask, turning to him with a frown.

“Oh, you didn’t know? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to...”

“Wande, you’re not on my will. Even if I die you won’t get a dime,” – Bandla.

She cracks into laughter. My heart is still pumping hard, but seemingly they’re just teasing each other as siblings at my expense.

“Khanyo please kill him, it’s minus one trouble for me. But get inside first, I cooked a feast for you two,” she says.

“This one doesn’t eat meat, I hope it’s just vegetables,” Bandla says.

I can’t believe I’m ‘this one.’

“I eat meat, don’t lie,” I say.

He chuckles and tickles me.

“Stop,” I whisper, yanking his hands off me.

What is his sister going to think of me? This one is now acting like a kid. We have all the time in the

world to tickle and hold one another, just not now, not when his sister is seeing me for the first time.

“Am I going to get a chance to introduce myself to her or you’re going hold her till forever?” she asks.

“I’m going to hold her till forever,” he says and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Someone is blowing hot air on my face. I feel so stupid in love with him.

“Okay, I get it, you two stop now. Khanyo come and help me in the kitchen.”

Am I not a guest here? I remove this one’s hand off me and follow her to the kitchen.

So many dishes! Indeed she’s cooked a feast.

“Because of your boyfriend I couldn’t even introduce myself properly. I’m Mawande KaManqele Myeza. You’ll meet my husband in a few minutes, he is still dressing up for his brother-in-law.” She looks at me like she’s reading my face and analyzing if I’m good for her brother or not.

“So you’re ready to date a Nazareth?” I didn’t expect this question.

“I guess I am,” I say.

“You know he’s in love with you and he’s going to marry you and you’ll be stuck with him forever?”

Now she’s stressing me. Yes I know all that. I haven’t given it much thought and...can’t I just enjoy the moment?

“Do you think you love him enough to stand with him through and through?”

“Yes,” I say with no thought given.

“If he’s too angry he cries,” she says.

Now this is funny. I cannot imagine him crying.

“If you want him to cry, provoke him and speak while he’s stuttering and trying to explain.” She’s laughing. It looks like they enjoy seeing my man cry.

“Does he fight when he fails to speak?” I ask.

“Yes he does, but it rarely happens. He’s a quiet person by nature. The most calm from my mother’s

womb,” she says and passes two bowls to me. “I’ve never seen him this happy. You know he drove all the way from home to tell me about you. Have you told him that you love him?”

Bandla! Did he really discuss me with his sister that much?

“Yes, he knows,” I say.

“Amen!”

I laugh and shake my head. Their relationship is strange, yet cute.

I help her set the table. Bandla is talking to someone, I guess Mawande’s husband. She’s not bad as I thought. I know the married type to be judgmental and annoying. But she’s just a young wife with a lot of jokes and a strange connection with her brothers.

I take a seat while she goes to call them to the dining room.

Bandla is walking at the front, behind him is a frail looking man who could be in his late twenties. My

eyes are on him, he's saying something to Mawande. They sit next to each other and Bandla comes to me.

"Are you alright?" he asks.

I tear my eyes away from the man and look at him. His eyebrow is raised, I quickly nod my head and stare back at the man.

"Khanyo, this is my husband Nyezi Myeza. Love, this is Bandla's personal person. The one who's driving him crazy," – Mawande.

Nyezi looks at me and smiles. Our eyes meet for the first time and there's this strange connection that I have with his inner-self, the core of him. His end is just around the corner.

"Nice to meet you," he says and looks at his wife.

He lifts his arm to the table, which gives me a look under his arm. There's a red mark indicating exactly where his pleurisy is located. It's on his left lung. I see him struggling to breathe in what looks like an office...

"Khanyo!" Bandla's voice brings me back to the room.

I cannot get the flashbacks out of my mind. Why can't Mawande see that her husband is sick? It's evident in his eyes. I don't know him but I know that he doesn't have much time left. He's leaving.

"I want to leave," I say, turning my eyes to Bandla.

He frowns, "You want to leave?"

"That's what I said. Now Bandla."

"Did I say something wrong?" – Mawande.

I grab my phone from the table, give Bandla the last look and walk out.

See, this is why I drink. I cannot tell anyone about what my head thinks and sees, they'll think it's Savanna from last week speaking. Worse, I cannot even help him. And I'm not even sure that I'm mentally okay. I need psychological tests to be ran on me before I pay attention to the nonsense in my head.

Bandla comes out of the house after five minutes of me standing by the car and seeing shadows.

“What’s going on my love? What did Mawande say to you?” he asks, coming to me and holding my hands.

“Talk to me sthandwa sami.”

“I just want to go home,” I say.

“You didn’t like her?” His voice drops.

He sounds disappointed, hurt and offended.

I let out a sigh, “Bandla I don’t want to be here.”

He stares at me and says nothing.

“You won’t understand, I’m not a normal person, I see things and hear voices. Right now I need a drink, I saw your sister’s husband’s lung.”

He frowns and takes a step back.

This is exactly why I don’t talk about these things, because of this reaction.

“You saw his lung?” he asks.

Clearly, he’s seeing a madwoman.

“I need a drink,” I say, opening the door and getting inside the car.

He walks back inside the house, I don't know what he's telling them- maybe that I've lost my marbles. I wait in the car, wiping pouring tears and trying to forget what I saw. I've always doubted my sanity, but today was the worse day of my life. Mawande is still so young, this cannot be happening to her. God please let all this be in my head.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 14

KHANYO

We're at KwaHlomendlini once again. But today it's different, we haven't spoken since departing Mangethe. I slept half through the journey and woke up to dissolve in my misery. I think he's angry, I'm not sure, but me leaving his sister's house so hurriedly has wounded him. He didn't even tell me we were coming here, I thought he was driving me back to Durban, but it's late so I don't mind spending the night this side.

He clears his throat by the door. I lend him my attention.

"The shower is not working. Is it okay if I boil water for you?"

I didn't grow up in the city, this shouldn't even be a question, I understand and I'm used to it.

"Yeah," I nod.

He disappears back in the kitchen, leaving me sitting on bed with my phone in hand. I've been trying to tell Gugu what happened earlier, she has a better understanding and matured way of handling things, but today she's just useless as Nolwazi.

A few minutes later my water is ready, I leave him changing the bed and go take a bath. I cannot get Nyezi's picture out of my mind. My heart goes out to Mawande the mostly. She cannot be a widow at 24. I pray and hope none of it was true. Why would God, or whoever it is, show me something and not give me a solution of how I can help? Maybe I should bring this up tomorrow when Mandulo and I go consult a sangoma. If they're really what they say they are, he'll be able to help me break down these visions, flashbacks and dreams.

I find a T-shirt and put it on. He's gone to take a bath as well. We've never given each other silent treatment this long. Maybe I should tell him exactly what happened because in his mind I hate his sister. I feel bad about leaving her dinner on the table, she'd

outdone herself for us and I didn't even taste a piece of meat.

He walks in, wearing a vest and short. He's avoiding eye contact, I guess he's still worked up.

"Bandla," I call, shifting and creating space for him next to me.

He throws himself in bed, faces up at the ceiling and blows out a sigh.

"Are you not hungry?" he asks, not looking at me.

"No, I'm not," I say.

"Okay, let's sleep."

I'm awestruck. I thought he'd give me a chance to talk. I was shocked, I still am, I don't expect him to add more to my stress.

"So we are just sleeping?" I ask.

"Khanyo what do you want us to do? You don't speak to me. I know maybe I rushed you, it was too early for you to meet my sister and be all friendly. But to leave like that..." He exhales heavily and shifts nearer, closing the distance between us. His arms wrap

around me. It's weird because I thought he was mad at me.

"My heart is broken. She's my sister, I love her and she's important to me. I was really hoping that you'll like her. But if it's me who was wrong, please forgive me. And if it was her, I apologize on her behalf," he says.

"Nyezi has blood clots in the arteries of his left lung," I blurt out. The last thing I want is for him to think I have something against his family.

He's frowning. I wish there was a better way of explaining it.

"I have this thing of getting flashbacks and pictures of things I don't know. It's scary, I don't know what it means, but yeah, it's my life," I say.

"You are a clairvoyant?" he asks, eyes widen.

"A what? No, no, no. I'm not sure if it's real things, I've never been mentally assessed, not that I'm stupid or anything," I explain and realize I'm just babbling like a fool.

He pulls me closer and embraces me tightly. I release a long sigh and silently listen to his heart beating against mine. Even though he doesn't understand, he's not judging me.

"What does your brother say when you tell him about this?" he asks.

"He says 'Oh'," I say.

He breaks a chuckle.

"Do you want my advice that isn't 'Oh'?"

"Yes."

"Consult."

I feel like everytime he gives an advice it's consulting a sangoma. I was intending to do that anyway. I just hope clarity will be given.

"I'm seeing a sangoma somewhere in Umlazi with my brother tomorrow. If they're what they say they are, they'll give me answers," I say.

"Have faith, it open doors. Anyway I have to call Wande and find out what's going on. She hasn't told us anything about Nyezi being sick."

“What? No, you can’t. She’ll think I’m insane.”

Imagine her finding out that I think I saw her husband’s lung. Do I have eyes or X-rays? Hhayi-bo.

“What if you’re not wrong?” he asks.

“No, Bandla, just no.” I mean it, I want no woman to cry because of me and my weird visions.

He nods hesitantly. I kiss his lips and crack a smile of guilt.

“I’m not going to let you sleep without eating. There are pies in the freezer, I need a few minutes. Do you want coffee?” he says, getting out of bed.

“No, water is fine.”

I’m not really hungry but a pie won’t hurt. And I like being served, just like those women who have club cards at Gogo Nomzwezwe. I go through my chats while waiting in bed like a queen. There are pictures of Nolwazi and Mandulo out in a restaurant. This cannot be true! I trusted my brother, Nolwazi is even younger than me, she’s only 23 years old for fuck

sake. That's almost two decades younger than Mandulo.

He picks up as I'm about to drop and send a furious message.

"Makhanyi where are you? Nolwazi says you're still not back?"

Huzzah, who made this call? Me or him?

"Your girlfriend told you that?" I ask.

He laughs out loud.

"Nolwazi, your friend, told me," he says.

"Yeah, is she not your girlfriend? I just saw pictures of you and her in the restaurant all over each other," I say.

"Relax wena baqwe kati laserank, I'm no where in the position of being involved with someone. Let alone a 23 year old that would expect me to go to parties with her and pose for Facebook couple challenges," he says, biting my head off.

Relief washes all over me. It would be very awkward to have a friend of mine sleeping with my brother.

“Oh, so what was dinner about?” I ask.

“None of your business. Where are you?”

“I’m at Hlomendlini,” I say.

“Who do you know there?”

“Bandla,” I say.

“Fuck. This is getting...” he stops, I hear a sigh, then he wishes me a goodnight and ends the call.

Well, that went south instead of north, but we’ll talk about it tomorrow. I’m relieved he’s not acting on Nolwazi’s stupid crush, but I don’t know how long he’s going to a brother and not a typical man about it.

This one keeps texting while we are eating. I don’t know if he’s violating our agreement and telling his sister about what I said. I don’t want people to look at me weirdly and I don’t want to depress them over nothing.

He finishes his pie and gulps a whole glass of water at one go. I'm stunned!

"Remember you called me last night, what were you saying?"

Lord, I hate people who do this. If I ask you something by text, respond by text. Don't ask me things I said over the phone face-to-face, I don't have face-to-face airtime.

"I don't remember," I say.

His stare is burning my cheek, but I keep my eyes on the plate and ignore him.

"There was Nolwazi involved, which is the part I don't understand. How do you involve a third person in our bedroom life?"

I can't believe he's scolding me so calmly, yet making me feel like a stupid little girl.

"Nolwazi is my friend, she's like a sister to me, we talk about everything," I say, shrugging my shoulders.

"But she's not my friend, to me it's just an invasion of privacy and I don't like it. If I wanted people to

know about what I do in the bedroom I'd go into the porn industry or have public sex. If you have complaints, talk to me and let's see how we come with the solution."

I really didn't expect it to blow up like this. Girls talk, everywhere in the world. I believe he also talks to his brothers about sex. There was no harm intended, really.

"I'm sorry if you felt that way. But trust me, the conversation was just a joke. You know the stereotypes around your religion, she was just curious, that's all."

"I'm a man of faith, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid or outmoded."

"Okay, I hear you Bandla. Can we move on from this?" I ask.

"Not before you ask me what you were asking over the phone yesterday." He takes the plates and goes to the kitchen, leaving me with my mouth hanging open. We just discussed what I asked over the phone, what more there's to discuss?!

He comes back and gets in bed. The look he's giving me tells me that 'we are picking up where we left off'.

"So what was the question Nokukhanya?" he asks.

God take me now!

"I'm no longer interested," I say.

"Unfortunately, I'm still interested."

Lord, bring your floods, the ark is built and ready.

"Now you can't speak?"

Alright, he's digging it.

"I asked if you'll ever suck my cookie jar," I say.

"There's a part that you're leaving. It wasn't just that."

"Or I must buy a clitoral pump." There, I've said it.

Why is he giving me that look? He told me to ask. Then he starts laughing, he's so weird.

"The pump pumps?" he asks.

Pumps? God I cannot deal with this man.

“Let’s sleep Bandlalethu,” I say.

He closes the inch distance that was left between us and locks his hand in mine.

“We tested, right. So are you on the pill?” he asks.

If this is his way of asking me to go raw with him, then he’s mistaken.

“I’m not having sex without a condom, never!” I say.

I can see the disappointment but he doesn’t argue me. It wouldn’t have helped anyway. I’m not trusting the contraception, many people have fallen pregnant while on the injection and pill. Double protection or go sing ‘Ameen’ at the temple.

“What do you mean if you say ‘never’?” he asks.

“I mean just that, I don’t want to fall pregnant.”

“Ever?” he asks.

“For now that’s what I think.”

“You’re just having fun?”

I cannot answer this question because he’ll understand it in his own twisted way anyway.

“You didn’t answer my question,” I say.

“I didn’t?” he asks.

I raise my eyebrow, he’s playing dumb.

He exhales and lets out a short chuckle.

“There’s nothing I wouldn’t do to make you happy,” he says.

Did he need to make me blush? I plant a light peck on his lip and up on his nose.

“I love you Bandla-lami,” I say.

He laughs, “Own me, I’m yours.”

Well, well, well. It’s thick and hard down here. I stroke it a few times, making sure my eyes are observing his reaction to my hand. His mouth is slightly open. His hand is tenderly brushing my head, I guess he’s enjoying it.

“Do you like it?” I ask.

“Yes,” he nods and inhales sharply through his teeth.

I remove the blanket and squeeze myself between his legs. I cannot give a head with my clothes on, I

strip naked before taking him on.

His shaft is bulging behind his short and begging for freedom. I surrender to its demand and pull down his short. I plant a wet kiss and press my tongue on the tip. He releases a low sound I can't make sense of as his stomach tenses up. I open my mouth, dart over the head and tease across the slit of his urethra. As I plunge all of it down my throat he's cradling my head like a mother to a baby. His moans are fulfilling, I know I'm doing it right, not that I doubted my skills in any way. I cup his balls, lick and suck them. My tongue swirls around the veins popping out of his shaft, again I'm pressing it against the tip. Inch by inch, I hunch down his whole shaft until it reaches my tonsils. He lets out a deep groan and grips the base of his shaft with one hand and grabs the back of my head with the other.

"Ulubambo lwami Nokukhanya," he says with a groan. (You're my soul mate.)

It seems like I have unleashed the monster, he's

ripping my throat apart. Eventually his hand leaves my neck, I sit up, out of breath, and cough a few times.

I'm still dizzy, he pushes me down on my stomach with one hand and lifts up my behind.

Something warm licks my wet folds, out of panic, I nearly jump and fall off bed. It's his tongue!

"This is what you wanted, right?" He's spreading my butt cheeks and sliding his finger through my folds. His tongue penetrates through them and swirls around my flesh. The strokes of his tongue and the licking sounds he's making as he licks me fans the burning flames of lust within me. I want him inside me, I'm crying and begging for it.

"Bandla please fuck me." I'm a quivering mess.

He rubs my clit with a finger. It's not enough, I let out another cry of desperation.

"Are we exclusive Khanyo? Is anyone ever going to touch here or it's mine? Mine alone?"

"It's yours baby, I swear, it's yours!"

A kiss lands on my butt cheek, then he climbs off bed and takes something, somewhere. I remain on my knees, impatiently waiting for him to put the rubber on.

I feel his tip massaging my clit and let out a dramatic scream. Yes, baby!

“What did you do to me Khanyo?” He’s pushing in.

I moan in pleasure and move my ass backwards to help him fit in.

“I’ve never loved anyone the way I love you... I’d do anything to have you in my world...in my arms every night.” He pauses and leans over to plant a kiss on my back. The first strokes are slow, passionate and fulfilling intimately. Then he deepens his strokes and increases the pace.

The world before me swirls around in the haze of trophies and lights.

The last name I call out is God’s, before a wave drags me to a different planet.

I'm turned over, legs spread to either sides of bed and arms pinned above my head. He's groaning and having his way with my core, on top. Some parts of his beard are moist, his whole face is covered in sweat, veins are throbbing against his forehead.

"I want to stay with you," he says with his eyes closed.

I wrap my legs around his waist and trap him in.

"I don't...I don't want to stay at home...I want to stay with you, please!" He buries his head over my shoulder and thrusts in harder. "Khanyo you're killing me, what am I going to say at home? You're killing me!" His pace is crazy. I feel my core heating up as he slams in repeatedly, with no mercy.

"My love!" he cries out and tenses on top of me.

I watch him as he rolls and falls to the side, out of breath. His facial muscles are squeezed in as if he's sucking a lemon or trying to swallow a bitter pill. He has so many veins on his arms that I didn't notice, or they're pulsating now because his body has been flooded by a tidal wave.

After a moment he opens his eyes, his face calming down but his eyes still filled with indescribable lust.

“Thank you,” he says.

I wink and smile. Where has he been my whole life? That ‘thank you’ was worth more than any amount of money I’ve been thanked with for sex. He loves me, that’s what he says and a big part of me believes him. But it’s not much about that; being loved and to love. It’s about how the whole relationship makes me feel. The little things he does and says that make me feel good, enough and worth of anything and everything.

I’m not letting this one go. Everyone will have to adjust.

“You’re moving in with me?” I ask.

He frowns, “Huh?”

SMH. I’m just waiting for the day he promises me an airplane. I want a convertible one and he’d give it to me by fire, by force.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 15

BANDLA

He couldn't have his girlfriend travelling to Durban by taxi so early in the morning, so he called Thakasa's driver who had other morning errands to run and asked him to drive Khanyo back to Durban. It's hard to see her leave because there's quite a distance between them and he's not sure when he'll be seeing her again. But the memories they created are here to keep him warm. He's whistling as he walks in to grab whatever Makhumalo has prepared for his lunch and then he'll rush to work before Thakasa bite his head off.

"This is my house, not a kraal," Makhumalo says, standing in the middle of the kitchen. The sun is not even up but someone is already annoyed.

He stops whistling, "I'm sorry. Good morning."

With a disgusted once-over, she takes his lunch out

of the fridge and packs a few fruits.

“This is the second time you sleep out without telling anyone,” she says.

“I tell Nkonzo, nevertheless, I’m old Ma. I can take care of myself.”

“Yes, you’re old, but your status is that of a boy. While you’re still under my roof, unmarried, you’ll let me know when you leave, where you’ll be at and how long you’ll be gone.”

“I was at Hlomendlini,” he says with a dismissive shrug, hoping there will be no more questions to follow.

“With who?” Makhumalo asks, her eyes narrowed.

“Nokukhanya Mayise,” he says.

“So these disappearances have everything to do with a girl. What kind of a girl is that? Doesn’t she value herself?” she asks, throwing her hands up.

Bandla sighs and opens his lunch box to check what he has today. He cannot go back and forth with his mother, it’ll just ruin his promising, bright coming

day.

“Which church does she go to?” Makhumalo.

“She’s not a religious person. Why don’t I have any meat?”

“What kind of a person is she?” She’s not letting this one go. Yes they’re old, but as their mother she has to make sure that they don’t involve themselves with the wrong people. Thakasa turned out right, he’s left marks for the younger ones to step on. She has high expectations of her sons.

“Ma, I’m late for work,” Bandla says. He needs to escape, not necessarily because he doesn’t want her to know about Khanyo, but because he knows exactly the reaction he’s going to get and it’s not something he wants to deal with now.

“Alright my boy, do me one favor ke. Do whatever you do with that girl, wherever you do it and keep it there. I want no girl that lacks morals and self respect in my house, ehamba izeneka nje!”

“You don’t even know her,” Bandla says in shock.

“I know enough. If she was worth anything, you’d have done things the right way.”

“Newsflash MaKhumalo, I love her and she’s going to be your daughter-in-law.”

She breaks a chuckle and claps her hands.

“WeNtombi kaLobengula! Take your food and go Bandla lethu, stop dreaming.” She dries her hands with a cloth and walks away.

Bandla is left stunned. Just like that, Khanyo is a bad person. He hasn’t even sat her down and told her about her- the real type of a girl she is and how much she means to him. He thought he was mentally prepared for this but now it hurts more than he anticipated.

“That didn’t go well, did it?” Thakasa asks, looking rather pleased by the whole thing. He adjusts his collar and buttons up his blazer.

“I have to go to Gingindlovu before coming to the office and getting ready for my meeting in Quarters. Do you know why? Because someone decided to use the company driver as his girlfriend’s chauffeur,” he

says.

Bandla just peels a banana and keeps quiet.

“Don’t put your heart into someone that cannot build a family with you. Baba always told us that, it’s one lesson he emphasized more than others. You cannot pick a woman from the streets and think you’ll dust her off and turn her into a wife and a mother of your children.”

“I’m not you Thakasa and mostly, I’m not my father. I was always going to be with a woman that I love,” Bandla says.

“I’m also with the woman that I love. You just have to make sure that the woman you love is the right one for you, the family and the legacy. A woman is the backbone of the family. You choose the wrong one, the family falls apart. And we don’t want that, Duyaza and Makhumalo worked hard to raise us and build this family.”

“Well, I’m sorry you and your mother think the woman you haven’t met isn’t right for the family. Unfortunately, I’m going to follow my heart. I don’t

want to end up miserable and short-tempered.” He grabs his lunchbox and makes his way out, leaving Thakasa rankling with anger. He may have a savorless way of putting words, but he’s always looking out for the family. He’s put them above everything. He’s lived his life for them to observe, learn and understand what it means to be a Manqele. He knew from the age of 16 what his responsibilities were and how his life was supposed to turn out. When he met Nothile he knew that he’d found a good thing- a good wife. He wasn’t looking for his mother in her, at least not wholly, but there was an element of MaKhumalo in her that attracted him. ‘If she had what the woman that raised him had, she was capable of extending the family and taking it to the next level.’

And Nothile has done that. She’s looked over his mistakes, there’s a little Manqele prince or princess growing inside her, she’s making sure that everybody is fed and the houses are clean.

“Manqele,”

He blinks out of his misery and looks behind him.

She's standing with a look on her face- he forgot something. There's his charger in her hand.

"Maybe you need to buy one that's going to stay in the office because, wow." She hands the charger to him with a slight head shake.

He takes the charger and doesn't let go of her hand. Khosi expressed time to time how much it angered her when he held her hand and didn't let go of it. But he can't let go of the habit, he just holds their hands possessively and stares at them until he sees the bottom of their souls.

"Ngiyabonga," he says and continues to hold her hand.

Unlike Khosi, she doesn't mind him holding her hand. She's never read much into it- nothing about him 'using his power to control her.'

"You're welcome," she says, her lips cracking into a lazy smile.

A brief moment passes with him staring at her and not saying anything.

Then he asks; "Can you come to the office around lunch time?"

"Yes," she nods.

He puts his hand over her cheek, remorse and sadness slitting through his eyes and conscience.

"I want to spend some time with you and our little one here," he says.

Well, this opens the pregnancy talk that they've never had. This baby came at the wrong time, when they were at odds and fighting inner and outer demons.

"Are you hoping for a girl or a boy?" she asks.

"I'm hoping for a healthy baby, and to have my wife next to me," he says.

She leans on his chest and wraps her arms around his waist. He embraces her on the shoulders, his heart loudly beating against his chest.

"I love you MaNtusi, just like I did 6years ago. How can I make things right? How do we go back to where we were? I want to be a husband and a good father to our child." His chin is resting on top of her

head, his eyes are firmly shut. Phethy frowns at the door and slowly steps back before she disturbs a moment.

“Be present where your heart is,” she says.

It’s such a complicated answer or statement.

“But I’m here with you,” he responds in a gruffy whisper.

“Yet I feel like I don’t know you.”

“At times I don’t know myself either. It feels like I threw myself under the bus and I want to get up but I can’t. There’s this force holding me down in place, in a good way, but the weight on my shoulders is getting heavier and I want to break free.”

She lets go of his waist and looks at him with widened eyes.

“No, no MaNtusi. It’s not about you or us or our marriage, just everything in my life,” he says.

Oh, that’s some relief!

“Talk to me, or your brothers, or Ma.”

He shakes his head, "I don't want to throw my burdens on anyone, especially not you and my brothers."

"Okay let's cancel lunch, I'll book you into a psychological counselor," she says.

"MaNtusi, I'm not crazy!" His eyes widen. Psychological? Counseling? He's not mentally disturbed, why would he need...?

"You'll go there, that's if you're serious about wanting to save this marriage, I want an emotional present husband. Dr Mhlongo is a professional trained counselor that listens and helps people deal with their mental challenges," she says.

Why did he bring this up in the first place? He blows out a sigh.

"Alright, I'll go but I still want to spend time with you before coming back to everyone."

That's another thing they need to discuss in future; living with everyone. He's bought a house to be with his side-chick, why can't he do the same for her? She's always wanted them to move out but stopped

her thoughts because it wouldn't be fair to MaKhumalo. She thought maybe Nkonzo or Bandla would get married then she'd move out knowing that someone is taking care of MaKhumalo and the younger siblings.

"Maybe I should reserve a table in a restaurant," she says, her eyebrow raised at him. He doesn't like restaurants, or going out altogether.

"I want a private seating," he says.

It's better than calling the whole thing off. She smiles and stands on her toes and kisses his lips.

"Yo, ngeke phela!" someone complains at the door.

They both turn their heads to the voice and see Phethy standing with a bored look on her face. She's been standing there for a looong time, trying to grant them some privacy.

"I'm late for school, my lunch is there inside the fridge," she tells them.

"Is the fridge on top of our heads, maybe?" Thakasa.

Nothile gasps and playfully hits his chest.

“Phela I don’t want to traumatize myself, I have a test later today,” Phethy says, making her way inside the kitchen and grabbing her lunch from the fridge.

“Good luck on your test,” Nothile says.

“Thank you, sisi,” she says and hurries out the door before witnessing more of their canoodle.

“Were you ever that innocent?” Nothile asks, turning to Thakasa.

He chuckles, “What do you mean? I’m still innocent.”

“You can lie for Africa!” she says, flapping her eyes.

“Hhayi bo, what did I do? Anyway...” He pulls her closer and covers her ear with his hands and whispers, “No panties allowed later today.”

“Manqe!e!” she gasps.

“Send me your Dr’s details and time of appointment, bye!”

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KHANYO

Okay, this is a weird house. I come from the rural areas, I know traditionally built rondavels, but this one looks like an old zoo hut with all the bones and dead animal skins. My educated brother has been coughing ever since we walked in. The man doesn't care, he's burning impepho and lightning scented candles. We bought the white ones, he instructed us to hold them in our hands and connect with our spirits, whatever that means.

"Yoh, hhayi!" I've been exclaiming ever since. He's taking his precious time, I swear if I had to rate his service to his bosses- ancestors, I'd give him one star for letting us in and that would be it.

"So you have finally taken the decision?" he asks and raises his eyes to me.

"Yes," I say even though I don't understand clearly what his question implies.

"After 8 years of running," he breaks a chuckle and pulls a sarong and wraps it over his shoulders.

I don't say anything. I'm waiting for him to ask straightforward questions like why am I here and who's sitting next to me.

"So what brings you here?" he asks with a grin on his face.

What's amusing him so much? I hope Nolwazi didn't draw me eyebrows that look like shields on the coat of arms.

"Well, I've been having weird dreams since I was 17, if I'm not mistaken. Then over the years I started seeing things that aren't really visible to the naked eye. Just yesterday, I was visiting my boyfriend's sister and saw a shadow in the yard and her husband's lung clotted with blood."

"What do you see in your dreams?" he asks.

"Old people that I don't know, blood and graves near a place that looks like a train station. It has a board but what's written on it doesn't show clearly," I say.

He nods and releases a loud groan. Then he starts throwing his bones and narrowing his eyes to read whatever they're telling him.

He looks at me, hopelessly.

“Unfortunately my ancestors won’t allow me to help you. Go home and connect with the spiritual person inside you. They only showed me a rondavel, white-painted with broken window on the left and grass roof,” he says.

I still have a frown on my face. One, because he’s being a useless dead-ass sangoma, and two because he’s describing my late grandmother’s rondavel back home. I broke the window when I was drunk the other Christmas.

“Buy a white candle and a metal water basin. Sleep in there, light your candle and keep clean water from the waterfall in a basin. I don’t know how long it will take you but when it comes, pray over that water, pray hard and ask for clarity. You’ll never touch any medicine or salt, you pray to clean water and heal people, it’s your gift.”

What the hell? I don’t know how to pray. Sometimes I forget a mere verse of Our Father.

“Who must I pray to?” I ask.

“God, your ancestors, Mother Nature, The Spirit of Water and whoever your spirit leads you to.”

Kodwa nkosi yami, who is Mother Nature? How do I even start praying? Can't I take a few praying classes maybe? I know my brother would pay tuition fees and extra lectures.

“Please do something about the blood. Your great-grandfather killed your grandmother with a spear. Her wounds were never washed. Also, the weapon was never extricated. If someone dies by a weapon at home, something is done to prevent it from repeatedly striking back and wounds are washed and smeared with umswani.”

Whoah! We need to slow down and take a step back.

“How is that all Khanyo's problem? Here is Mandulo, he's older than me and those ritual things are his duty, not mine,” I ask.

His eyes run to Mandulo and come back to me.

“His father paid for him, he was traditionally sent out of the Mayise ancestors and acknowledged as a Nyathi. He can help you, but it's not his duty, it never

was. You had duties and responsibilities before you even came out of your mother's womb Nokukhanya Mayise."

Wow! Why did I meet Bandlaletu? If I hadn't met him I'd still be drinking everyday and not dealing with this drivel. I hate being sober with all my life.

"Please excuse us, I'd like to have some privacy with your brother," he says, looking at Mandulo with pity.

I hear him exhale heavily next to me. I can tell that he's freaked out, by this man requesting privacy with him and just being inside this weird rondavel.

I'm not happy with his answers and lack of determination from his ancestors. I can say they're lazy, why couldn't they help me? My brother is going to pay this man good money for doing nothing. I take my shoes at the door and go to the car outside the gate.

I need to talk to the man that advised me to come here, maybe hearing his voice can calm me down.

“My love,” he answers.

I quickly pick somberness in his voice and ask if he’s okay.

“You were right,” he says.

“About what?” I ask.

“Nyezi is sick. I told Wande about what you said, I’m sorry I couldn’t keep such from my sister, so she went to their family doctor and asked for Nyezi’s medical records. They call it pulmonary embolism, he’s been going in and out of hospitals while claiming to be at work. However, his mother suspects that something was done to him during a family gathering, he has struggled with idliso twice in his life,” he says.

My hands are trembling. I freak myself out. Who the hell am I? This means I’ve been seeing real things all this time. But now I need to put fear aside, Nyezi is important to Bandla, I can hear the sorrow just from the way he breathes over the phone.

“I can help him, I just need time,” I blurt out, tears running down on my face. I have failed so many

people, some passed on, some are living with permanent illnesses because I was cuddling bottles instead of helping them. Hell is exactly where I'm going after life.

"What do you mean you can help him?" he asks.

"I'm going home, I'll pray for him and do everything in my power to heal him. His illness wasn't brought to my attention by mistake. I swear Bandla, I'm not going to let Mawande become a widow, I know how much her happiness means to you."

"Where are you right now? I'm coming to Durban."

Oh my goodness, what is becoming of my life?!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 16

KHANYO

Mandulo is in my room for the first time. I don't know what the sangoma told him when I was gone but he looks like his world was crushed. I'm scared to ask, maybe he needs some space. He asked to lie in my room for a while before driving to KwaMashu.

I'm waiting for Bandla, he said he's parking outside, then I'll start packing and preparing for my journey back home. I haven't told Gugu and Nolwazi anything. I know they'll freak out, it's so sudden and confusing.

A text comes through. He's at the door. I put my hlibhas on and go open for him.

He crushes my ribs in a tight hug.

"My love, what's going on?" he asks. I'm still in his

embrace and struggling to breathe.

“I’ll explain, let’s go sit first,” I say.

He lets go of me, but grabs my face for a quick kiss before walking in.

“Juice?” I ask.

“No, you.”

So weird and unnecessary! I laugh and shake my head.

He sits and puts a cushion on his lap.

Can I be a cushion?

I sit next to him and release a sigh before I begin.

He’s not shocked that much about the healing gift thing and that my visions have been real. But moving back home has caught him off guard.

“Who are you going to stay with? For how long?” he asks.

I shrug my shoulders, “I don’t know Bandla. All I

know is that I have to do this to be able to help Nyezi and others that are yet to come.”

“What about me Khanyo? How must I live without you? Am I allowed to at least visit you?”

“I don’t know Bandla, we’ll talk.”

He gets on his feet and paces around the small passage behind the couch. He’s making me dizzy.

“If this is an initiation of some sort then it means you could be gone for months and I won’t be able to see you,” he says with so much frustration and rubs his face furiously.

“And it could be just weeks, I don’t know what I’ll be doing but I know that I have to do it,” I say.

“Khanyo I just found you. I know that I wanted you to get answers, and I’m grateful that you want to do this to help my sister, and I’m happy for you. But I don’t want to live without you. I’m scared you might leave forever and I just can’t...please babe.”

My poor love, I go to him and wrap my arms around his waist. He’s freaked out; fear is haunting his eyes.

“Don’t stress, I’ll be back before you know it. You’re the reason why I want to do this and the reason why I’ll fight to come back soon. I love you Bandla, what makes you think I’ll let go of all this?” I run my hands over his chest and tease his manhood by moving my waist in circles.

He grabs the back of my neck, locks my leg between his legs and kisses me like it’s the last day we’re together in this life time.

His hands travel down my back and grab my butt. He’s pushing his erection to me and battling my tongue inside my mouth.

I hold his neck and pull him down to the couch with me. Our breaths are escalating, his hands are all over my butt, he’s getting really warmed up.

Someone clears his throat. He stops, more like he freezes, and slowly turns to find Mandulo standing and staring at us.

Fuck, I thought he was asleep.

“Hey brother,” I say, just to put an end to the awkwardness.

Bandla’s hand is over his forehead. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone looking this scared and ashamed of being caught kissing. Merely kissing!

“Here to buy more curtains?” Mandulo just had to kick the dog when it’s already down.

“I’m sorry, Khanyo didn’t tell me that you are here. I’m not trying to disrespect you or anything, I swear. Please pardon me, I’ll go.” My eyes travel to the front of his pant, he’s not aware of how big and protruding his erection has become. I know Mandulo has seen it as well, judging from the mockery on his face.

“No, it’s fine, I was leaving anyway,” he says.

Bandla is still frozen on his spot. I don’t know if I should jump in and save the day or let him handle it.

“Ngiyaxolisa bhuti,” he repeats his apology.

“No, it’s all good Mr, do as you please.” He looks at me, “Call me when you’re done packing.”

He pushes his hands in his pockets and leaves. He knows that I'm dating Bandla, even though he has an element of a black brother regarding it but he's still cool with me growing up. What he just did was only to make Bandla uncomfortable, which is the last thing I need right now.

"Eish Khanyo!" He sits on the couch and buries his face in his hands.

I don't think I'll be getting a goodbye sex today. Thanks to the divorced, fake Dwayne.

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THAKASA

There's a sealed bottle of water in front of him and a box of tissues by the far end of her desk. Just in case he cries, really, this woman wakes up to listen to people's problems!

She's staring at him with a warm smile curving from her lips. Yes it's welcoming but he's still cold as ice.

“You can start by telling me about yourself. Share what you think is important,” she says.

It’s an opening, a better one than he expected, he thought she’d ask him straight what his problem is.

“I’m Thakasa, 36, and I have been married for 6 years. I’m the first child in 5 siblings. I’m a project accountant by profession and the CEO of Mthonga Holdings, which is a family company. I’m a Sabbath-observer, I was raised in a Nazarite Church, so I’m a man of faith and teachings of Shembe.” That’s all he can say is important for now, he shrugs his shoulders and leans back on his chair.

“Tell me about your childhood,” she says.

He heaves a sigh and reaches to the bottle of water. He needs a sip, just one, nothing much.

“I grew up in a financially stable home but I wasn’t spoilt. I was a normal older child, looking after my siblings, the two that come after me, and making sure they behaved themselves.”

“Did it come naturally that you had to look after them or it was your given duty as the older one?”

“It was my given duty and I didn’t mind,” he says.

“You still don’t mind?”

He chews his bottom lip and thinks about it for a few seconds.

“No,” he says.

It’s not convincing enough.

“You’re married. Do you have children?”

He smiles, “I’m counting down months before I hold him or her in my arms.”

“Wow, congratulations. Let’s say your first child becomes a boy, are you going to raise him the same way you were raised? To have responsibilities and duties to look after your other children.”

“Definitely no,” his answer is quick and surprising even to him.

“What would you do differently?” she asks.

“Everything. Don’t get me wrong, I love and respect my father. And I love my mother, she’s my queen, but sometimes I feel like I’m her husband.”

“Your thoughts are valid, always. Don’t let anyone make you believe they are not, no matter who they’re directed to, even if it’s your mother.”

He nods and exhales in relief. Now he feels safe and regarded as a normal person.

“I got married a year before my father passed away. I loved Nothile, I chose her myself, but the process of everything wouldn’t have been the same if my parents didn’t want grandchildren. So I married her to avoid premarital sex and having children out of wedlock. It was just hush-hush, we got married within 5 months and started the baby-making process.”

Dr Mhlongo chuckles, amusement reaching up to her eyes.

“Are you religiously not allowed to say the word ‘sex’ or you just prefer calling it that way ‘baby- making?’” she asks.

“I thought it was sex until my wife got obsessed with the idea of becoming a valid wife, then it was just baby-making. Well, so...I cheated,” he throws his

hands up and sips water again.

Dr Mhlongo is stunned but her profession doesn't allow her to be a woman in situations like these. She has to keep a calm face and try not to sound judgmental or holier than thou.

"Then the woman you cheated with made you feel loved and appreciated without expecting you to fulfill any duties?" she asks.

"There were no obligations and no pressure. She'd put me on her lap, cradles my head like my mother used to before Nkonzo came when I was 2, and she'd ask how I feel, how my day was and what's on my mind." He takes a small sip of his water before he continues.

"With her I was never the responsible one who takes lead and does everything right. I don't know if she allowed me to be silly and free, or I felt like I could be silly and free with her. There's a part of me that misses her a lot, but then again, it's not right. I have a wife and a family to lead. I cannot teach my siblings that it's okay to be selfish and put your

feelings first, even though they may break the family and hurt your mother.”

“Are you in love with her?” Dr Mhlongo asks after observing his facial expression.

“I wouldn’t know how to define that. I really had a short time in exploring love, only a few months then I was married. From marriage it was generating grandchildren- that’s how it felt like as time went by ‘generating’. Then my father died a year later, I had to step in his shoes and take care of his wife, company and children. As years went by, his brothers, there were two of them, also died. All the ceremonies and rituals and anything that needed to be done became my responsibility. I went to courts fighting my uncles’ side-chicks over inheritances, made sure Nkonzo stayed in line and married off my 22year old sister. I’m approaching 40 and I feel like I want to stay afloat but there’s a force of gravity holding me down and I’m not fighting because I feel like drowning is okay than to gasp for air in a foreign world. Do I even make sense?” He looks at her, desperation dilating in his pupils. He has to make

sense. She's trained to understand everything and give answers. It's her job, what Nothile paid her for.

"You make sense, why do you always doubt your thoughts and feelings? It shouldn't matter to you if you make sense or not, as long as you speak what's on your mind and heart."

With relief, he nods and leans towards her desk.

"Are we done or you still want to ask questions?" he asks.

"This is not an interview. Do you feel like we are done?"

"Yes. So what do you think I must do?"

"Give your feelings a shot and validation. I think our next appointment will be in two weeks, I hope you'll have given your thoughts a consideration by then. Thank you for opening up to me Thakasa, it's the first positive step."

"See you then, I have to go, I have a date with my wife," he says, getting off the chair and straightening his shirt.

He feels a bit lighter than how he was when he walked in. He calls Nothile as he gets inside the car and tells her to get ready.

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He was fine on their way here, to Dolphin Coast. Knowing that they had a table booked where there'd be no people staring at him while he eats made him look forward to this outing. But now that he's here and there's already a red-haired boy on their backs asking them about stupid drinks he's rethinking his decision. He's not a comfortable person in public places, but sometimes he has to put down his guard and do what makes her happy.

"So how did it go?" she asks as soon as they're settled on the table.

He glances at the waiter who's putting cutlery on their table and looks back at Nothile with a displeased face.

She wants to roll her eyes at his pettiness but she ends up smiling and holding his hand over the table.

“Akasizwa nokusizwa, uhambe kanjani?” (He doesn’t even hear us, how did you go)

“It wasn’t bad,” he says.

She narrows her eye. Is that all he’s going to tell her?

“What did you talk about?” she asks.

Confidentiality!!!

“Childhood, life and everything you can think of. Are they going to serve us or what?” He looks around, searching for any waiter on sight, fortunately he sees no one to scold.

“I love you,” she says.

Her words catch him off guard, his eyes drop to her hand and he holds it.

“I love you too MaNtusi, and thank you for today. I wouldn’t have thought of it, this proves how much I need you by my side, you’re a good woman and a beautiful wife.” He lifts her hand to his lips and plants a soft kiss on it.

“Did you book a room?” he asks.

“You didn’t say anything about booking a room,” she says, suppressing her smile.

“It’s not a show-stopper, we can go to the office or...my house, that’s if you’re okay with it.”

“No, I’m not okay with it, I’ll book a room,” she says, taking her phone out of the bag and scrolling.

His eyes drop in disappointment. It was a stupid suggestion, they haven’t really discussed what’s going to happen to the house, but he was hoping that she’ll consider it. And maybe, just maybe, they’d use it as their second home. He can renovate, repaint the walls and buy new furniture if that’s what it’ll take for her to see it as his house, not his side-chick’s fuck corner.

As he raises his eyes to the waiter who’s putting their drinks on the table he notices a familiar face. His heart starts racing. She’s sitting at the table outside with two other ladies in Durban July dresses. One with ass-touching weave and another one with dreadlocks.

“Are you okay?” Nothile’s voice snaps him back to

their table. Her eyes are on his hands that he didn't even realize were trembling.

"I'm o-ka-y," his voice cracks out. He balls his hands into fists but his face is selling him out.

As Nothile turns to their direction two of them have turned to stare at them as well.

The slim one with blonde dreadlocks stands up and makes her way inside, to the bar.

"Who are those?" Nothile asks, she hasn't seen Khosi's face yet.

"I don't know their names but I think I've seen them somewhere." Shit, he may have never met them in person but he knows exactly who they are because Khosi used to describe them exactly as they are.

The sister that Khosi used to joke that she has bipolar is making her way to their table with a bottle of wine in her hand.

He wants to hold his wife's hand tightly but he's somehow more scared of the moment his eyes will directly meet Khosi's. He didn't expect to bump into

her anytime soon, let alone when he's with his wife.

"Surprise, surprise!"

Shwele! This sister really has bipolar. Explain that grin on her face, and the bottle of wine, really?

"I'm Snalo, we met at the conference in ICC a year ago."

No, they've never met.

But he cracks a smile and holds her stare.

"This is for you and the wife," she says, putting the bottle on the table.

Nothile smiles, "This is very nice of you. But the wife is pregnant and we don't drink wine."

"Oh, you are expecting? Congratulations. This reminds me of my old friend's story."

So much for a private dinner! Nothile is interested in the friend's story and Snalo has found a seat at the edge of the table.

"So my friend was dating this ugly, spineless motherfu£ker who had a woman, a straight one. He

was her first true love and she really loved him despite him breaking her heart every now and then. Then, boom, she fell pregnant. Guess what the asshole did? He dumped her and walked out on her after finding out that she was pregnant. He went back to his woman and carried on as if nothing happened.”

Nothile releases a sigh and shakes her head. This is unbelievable, she can imagine the pain her friend must’ve gone through.

“Did she cope, mentally? I can only imagine what she went through, dealing with pregnancy and rejection all at once.”

“My friend was a strong woman,” Snalo says and unwraps the knife in front of Thakasa.

“This one is not sharp, it cannot slice anyone’s useless balls.” The smile on her face doesn’t obverse the words coming out of her mouth. She’s not normal at all.

“I don’t have balls between my legs, I have them on my chest. I’ll drink this bottle on your behalf, enjoy

your dinner and stay lovely,” she says, picking her bottle and waving at them with a smile.

When she’s at a distance Nothile turns to Thakasa with a slight frown.

“That was awkward but funny,” she says.

“I don’t want to be here,” he exhales and pushes back his chair. “Make it take-aways, you’ll find me in the car.”

“But we came here to...”

He’s on his feet with his phone and car keys in hand, his look tells her what he just said stands. They’re leaving, it’s final.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 17

THAKASA

He heard it in his head, or was it in his ears, but he remembers the words 'Manqele I'm pregnant'. This cannot happen to him now. He's trying to fix things with his wife and take care of his mental health. This will ruin everything he's been fighting for; his reputation, marriage and family. His imperfections will be for everyone to talk about and judge. His father was a great man, surely he's turning in his grave right now, he's let him down. His mother will have a fit- a whole child out of marriage, with a woman that wears fake hair, that has a nose piercing and posts half naked photos of herself on social networks.

He parks in the yard, he might need to drive somewhere later, then he looks at Nothile. She's still angry about dinner, it was just this once, he'd agreed

to it and all of a sudden he wanted out. It doesn't make sense to her, she thought there was a progress this morning.

"I will make it up to you," he says, trying to hold her hand.

She yanks his hand off, "I don't care anymore Manqele."

He exhales and buries his head on the steering wheel while she climbs out and aggressively closes the door.

He has to call and ask to see her- Nomkhosi. He needs clarity; what is going on? How did she get pregnant and how far is she? If she is really pregnant he knows without any doubt that he's the father. Despite him being married and unavailable at times, she was faithful to him, just like his wife. If there was someone else in the picture he wouldn't have stuck around for that long. Even though he never said it, he didn't want to share her with anyone. He wanted her to be available whenever he needed her. He owned her without any official stamp of ownership. It came

naturally and she just rode the boat, wherever he sailed it to.

He's never tried to reach out to her by any means. He was determined to cut all ties and focus on his marriage. He also didn't want to take the risk of communicating with her because he knew exactly how it would've ended...with him back in her arms.

None of his messages go through, the call automatically rejects before ringing, this means she's blocked his number.

Another sigh!

He's feeling hot, he turns on the air-conditioners and sits in the car for a while. Wrapping his head around the possibility of this new reality is hard. He may be tied to Nomkhosi for the rest of his life. What about his wife? They are trying to rebuild their marriage and trust one another again, and now this!

Bandla's door is opened, he must've extracted

himself from the noise that comes with TV soopies that air at this time. He makes his way to the rondavel, he'll deal with Nothile's dinner tantrums later, right now he needs to get to the bottom of what Snalo said in the restaurant. A huge part of him believes that the 'friend' she talked about was Nomkhosi.

Bandla frowns when he sees him walking in.

"Romantic party has ended already?" he asks.

They didn't hatch out the fallout they had this morning, like most siblings, when one speaks and the other one responds, the fight is automatically over.

Thakasa lowers himself on the bed and heaves a sigh.

"Please borrow me your phone, I want to call someone."

"Why don't you use yours?"

"I'm blocked."

He's drowning in sorrow, him and Khanyo didn't even

get proper time to say goodbye as her brother was around. He needed a laugh, and this is a good one.

“You are blocked by who?” He’s still laughing.

“Are you going to give me the phone or not?”

Thakasa. He was gifted with all senses except the humour one. He doesn’t get most things people find funny, whether they’re about him or anyone.

Bandla unlocks the phone and hands it to him. He takes the phone and heads to the door, he’s not going to make this call in front of him.

“Don’t finish my airtime,” Bandla says before he walks out.

He walks back to his car, gets inside and closes the door. He shuts his eyes and recites a silent prayer before he dials her number.

It’s going through, thank God!

“Hello,” that’s her.

He holds his breath for a minute, failing to get words out his mouth.

“Who is this?” she asks.

Knowing her, she’s about to drop the call.

“Please don’t drop, it’s me,” he says.

Silence...

“Nomkhosi,”

“I blocked you Thakasa. Do you want to know what that means? I don’t want to ever speak to you again,” she says furiously.

“I saw your sister,” he says and clears his throat.

“Can we meet and talk?”

“No!”

“I just want to know the truth.”

“What truth?”

“Did I miss anything the last day we were together?”

Again, he holds his breath. What if it’s true?

“Thakasa I don’t need you anymore. My mother raised me and my sisters single-handedly. But don’t think you’re going to run away now and come back

after 18 years to claim my child.”

Oh, hell no! It’s true.

“You’re pregnant?” His chest has dried up instantly. He looks around for a bottle of water, he always has one in the car, but strangely today there’s none.

She exhales audibly, “Thakasa is there anything else? I want to take a bath and sleep.”

“Can I see you? We need to talk immediately.”

“Tonight?” she asks.

“Yes, please unblock me so that we can communicate while I’m on the way, this is my brother’s phone,” he says.

“Thakasa I’m not your...” – ‘His fool’. He’s heard this many times before. But this time it’s different, he only wants to talk and to see her tummy. Nothing more, nothing less.

“One and a half-hour to two hours. We’ll just talk, nothing else, trust me,” he says.

“Fine!” she drops the call.

He walks in to a big argument about TV characters between his mother and Phethy. He greets above the noise and goes to his wife. Their fights are always private, he knows that she won't show him any vexation in front of his family.

"Sthandwa I have to go somewhere," he tells her.

She looks at him with a frown, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going to Durban, I'll probably come back after midnight. I'll explain everything in the morning." He lifts her fingers and brushes them while observing her reaction.

"Can I come with you?" she asks.

"No, you have to rest MaNtusi, you're carrying my precious baby."

"Okay, wake me up when you come back."

Phewww! He kisses her hand, relieved to the bone.

"Why does it look like you're going somewhere?" MaKhumalo asks.

He glances at Nothile, she smiles warmly and shrugs her shoulders.

“I have to go to Durban, it’s urgent and work related,” he says.

Nkonzo frowns, “Related to which work?”

He kisses Nothile’s cheek, says goodbye and leaves. This one is between him and his wife. How he’s going to tell her the truth of this trip is still a mystery, there’ll be no running away or keeping this one under the carpet.

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One hour and forty-two minutes is all he took driving here. He’s been waiting in the car for almost ten minutes. She sent a text, saying she’s coming. He doesn’t know her as someone who stand people up and break promises. The clock is ticking close to 11pm and he still needs to drive back home.

I’M STILL WAITING- he sends a text.

Just as it delivers, there’s someone at the window.

It's her...his heart starts racing again. They can never go back to how they were, not after everything he said to her the last time he saw her.

Damn, he forgot the most important thing, water!

She gets inside the car and closes the door. His eyes travel all over her body but he can't see a thing because of the plush robe.

"I have 5 minutes," she says, turning to look at him.

She looks incredibly different. Her skin is peaches and cream. He could stare, touch and lick her face all over. Her Bantu knots look a bit messy, yet she looks like a goddess with them.

He's staring, something she used to say is weird and uncomfortable.

"4 minutes Thakasa!" she warns.

He releases a shallow breath.

"I wasn't aware of the situation until today when your sister came to threaten me and my wife," he says.

"But I told you Thakasa and you left. You looked at me in the eyes and left! I begged you to stay, for the

sake of the baby if not for me,” she says.

He wasn't himself, a part of him was gone, but he's surprised by his insulated listening as well.

“How well do you know me Nomkhosi?” he asks.

“I don't know you beyond the sexual level,” she says.

That hurts a little, but he's not here for her validation, right?

“How did it happen? I thought you were on the pill or something.”

“It happened this way; you called me to your house, asked me to get in bed with you and had sex with me without a condom because ‘it caps you and hinders your orgasm’.”

He gobbles up an enormous breath and taps his moist fingers on the steering wheel.

“How far are you?” he asks.

“Two months,” she says.

Wow, this makes Nothile's baby his second and hers his first. Nothile won't take this well, it's going to

unpin the last nail of the marriage he's trying so hard to make like his parent's- successful.

"As you've always known Nomkhosi, I'm married. This complicates everything. Whether I like it or not, my wife and family have to know. I'm not going to abandon my first child, my blood. I'd never do that," he says.

It's just so...how did she fall in love with this man again?

Heart remains the most stupid organ in the body.

"Can I see it?" he asks.

She frowns, "See what?"

He lowers his eyes to her tummy.

"I must show you my stomach?" Her eyes widen.

"I know everything about you," he says and realizes how sensual that came out.

He's a married man, he shouldn't be knowing everything about another woman's body.

He tries to look away as she takes the robe off her

shoulders but his eyes keep going back to her. She's wearing only a bra beneath, her swollen breasts are popping out of the cleavage and looking luscious.

There's no baby bump yet, but knowing her body as well as he does, he can notice the changes.

"Did you see the doctor?" he asks with his hand tucked on her tummy. He's scared, his life is about to change, but his heart has swollen with joy. He had given up, he thought he was shooting blank and now he's about to welcome two little humans that have his DNA running through their veins.

"Yes, twice, my brother went with me," she says.

There's a punch below his stomach. He's missed both his babies first doctor's visits.

"Do you have any pictures?" he asks.

"Ultrasound scan? Yes, I'll send them to you on Whatsapp," she asks.

He can't bring himself to remove his hand from his baby. Even if it's through the mother's skin, he wants

him or her to know that he's here and he'll always be.

"Nomkhosi," he says and clears his throat.

This is hard, but necessary.

"I didn't want us to be done but we had to, because I've given someone a ring, promises and my heart. So I had to be harsh, it was better that way; with you hating me and wanting nothing to do with me. My intention of coming into your life was not to leave you with scars, but I did anyway and it haunts me everyday."

She shakes her head, "Don't even start Thakasa! Are we done here?"

"No, we are not done. I'll speak to my family, it'll be hard for them to accept what I did but they'll have no choice, it's my baby, one of them. Please don't block me, alright?"

She rolls her eyes, "Fine."

A kiss? A hug?

No, he's someone's husband. He'll just sit here and watch until she disappears. The baby will change a

lot of things and he doesn't want to worsen the situation by jumping between two women again. He'll get a kiss and a hug from his wife, that's if she'd be still talking to him after finding out about this.

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Nothile wakes up to him sitting on the edge of bed. He didn't wake her up when he got home, he needed time to group his thoughts and think of a way forward. He hardly slept, not knowing what the future holds for his marriage freaks him out. The possibility of it falling apart and his father's name being disgraced! He's been experiencing chest pains throughout the night.

She goes to her first morning bathroom visit and comes back to snuggle on her husband.

"You didn't wake me up," she sulks.

"You looked too peaceful for me to disturb."

She shakes her head slightly. She's not satisfied with

his answer but she can't complain because she had a good sleep.

"So what was it about?" she asks.

A deep sigh!

"MaNtusi please don't leave me."

She frowns, "What's going on?"

He holds her hand reluctantly and looks at her in the eye.

This time he's taken it too far. A baby with another woman before her own!

"I went to see Nomkhosi," he says.

She pulls her hand and exhales heavily.

"Snalo, the girl from yesterday, is her sister and she was talking about her. I wasn't aware of the pregnancy until yesterday," he says.

"Thakasa!" Shit is going down, did she just call him by name?

His eyes widen.

“You made her pregnant?” she asks.

“It was not meant to happen, I swear.”

“But it happened, right? So what are you going to do now? Take her as the second wife?”

He’s already struggling with one wife, how much more when there are two of them? And besides, his mother would never accept Nomkhosi.

“I want to be a father to my child,” he says.

“And be a boyfriend to its mother?”

Silence...

“Answer me!” she yells.

People are going to hear this and wake up.

“No,” he says with a sigh.

“Well, then I’ll communicate with her regarding everything, not you.”

This one is a shock. He slept with Nomkhosi, he’s the father and whatever it is that needs to be done has to be directed to him.

“That’s the only way this is going to work. But if you want to play happy families with her, exclude me from all this. The only thing I’ll need from you is a house, financial support and presence to the baby’s life.”

“You’ll leave me?” he asks, alarmed.

“Yes Thakasa, I will leave you to be with your little family.”

She knows that cannot be an option for him. It’ll destroy everything he’s sacrificed his life for and break MaKhumalo’s heart.

“Okay,” he says.

She raises an eyebrow, “Yes to what?”

“I won’t communicate with her, but MaNtusi I want to go to check-ups with her, I don’t want to be disconnected from my child. It’s innocent from all this,” he says.

“Firstly I will confirm if it’s your baby then we’ll plan a way forward,” she says.

What the hell?!

“Of course it’s my baby, I’m the only man he’s been with in...” Okay, time is not important and not worth revealing. “I’m the father MaNtusi, I know.”

“Clearly you don’t know women. She’s doing the paternity test before this whole thing is announced to the family and that’s where it ends.”

Great, another thing to make Nomkhosi, the mother of his first child, hate him.

“Send me her number before you leave for work, I want to meet with her this week,” she says.

“Alright,” he says with a sigh.

She glances up at the wall, “It’s still 5am, let’s cuddle before you wake up.”

A cuddle is not going to fix anything and it’s the last thing he wants to do. But he gets under covers and holds her.

“Yesterday you instructed me to wear nothing beneath the dress and backed out on me.” She runs her hands over his chest and steals a quick kiss on his lips.

“So, how about you make up as you promised?” She kisses him again, deeper and longer this time.

He responds to the kiss and massages her curvy parts to boost his erection, however his mind and heart are absent, he cannot feel it.

Another kiss...she rides over him and deepens it while pushing down his shorts to sneak her hand in his manhood. He's still soft, she massages him and plays with his balls. His shaft starts hardening to her soft touch.

Her lips trail down to his neck, he releases a low moan and grabs her butt.

She's got him!

“Keep your promises Mthonga,” she whispers in his ear.

He grabs her face and onslaughts her with a kiss. He's fully erect and pressed to release himself. He flips her over and removes her underwear.

He taps his fingers on her clit and tenderly bites her neck. She's dripping wet, it could be his touch or just

that she woke up horny.

He slowly inserts himself, once he's fit in perfectly he lifts her leg to his shoulder and explores her mushy corners, moving his waist around and pushing deeper in.

She moans out in pleasure, "Manqele I love you."

They have to make it work...sacrifices will be made.

"I love you too," he whispers in a husky, sexually strained voice.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 18

KHANYO

I grew up here, I've been only in Durban for half a decade, but yeer! The first thing I hear when I wake up is birds chirping and cows having sex? I miss my crazy friends and the taste of wine in the morning, but mostly I miss my Nazareth man. He's been so down over the phone, this happened when we just met and getting to know each other. I've been fighting temptations. Thoughts of going back to Durban have crossed my mind but I had to remind myself why I came here in the first place.

I've been trying to pray, to ask God and my elders for clarity and power, but it seems like my vocabulary is not enough for God yet. I don't have all those fancy names and nicknames people use to praise Him. At least I can praise my ancestors and call out my grandparents using the clan praise names.

OPhakathi, oSomthenga, oNselenduna! I connect

easily with them, it's easy to feel their presence and sense of protection from them throughout the night.

But I'm not there yet, dreams still come blur and leave me with unanswered questions. I need to do something differently today. Firstly, I need to switch this phone off and keep my head clear of social media. Bandla has to hold on for me, I'll be in his arm soon and it'll be forever. Secondly, I'll go to my mother's grave and offload everything in my heart to her. My heart needs to be light and free of grudges. Then I'll attempt my first fasting. Lord be with me, the fruits Mandulo brought yesterday look so fresh and juicy. I have to close my eyes and pretend as if the plain water I'll be drinking the whole day is Merlot. They say fasting gives you praying powers, you can never understand with the above man, he listens to you better when you're hungry.

First things first; phone has to be switched off and put away. I send my girls texts, informing them about my unavailability. Mandulo is coming later so there's no need to inform him. The last and hardest

person to inform is Bandla. Cutting communication will furtherly push him to the misery corner, but I don't have any other choice.

It's ringing, I'm nervous but looking forward to hearing his voice one last time.

"Hey Mthonga," I greet as he picks up.

"My upper lip has been twitching, I guess it was a sign that I was going to smile so early in the morning. My love, how are you?" he says.

The smile on my face spreads to my ears. He sounds better than yesterday.

"I'm good babe, how are you?" I ask.

"I'm trying to be okay. I just got to work and my brother is in one of his shittiest mood. I needed this call to brighten up my day," he says.

"Is everything alright with your brother though?" I ask. He usually talks about Nkonzo, Mawande and Sqalo. He doesn't speak much of the young sister and eldest brother, like there's nothing to tell about them or he doesn't know them too well.

“I don’t know, I think he’s going through personal things that he can’t share with us. He’s not an open person, so we just endure his outbursts and help if he says he needs help,” he says.

I’ve only seen Thakasa once but I can also conclude that he’s one of those gloomy, desolate brothers who act like their grandfathers.

“Let’s hope he’ll be okay as the day goes by. Anyway I called to tell you something, I’m not sure if you’ll like it,” I say.

“What is it Khanyo?” he asks, already sounding hopeless.

“I’ve been trying to connect with God and my ancestors but I’m not winning. So I want to try it with a clear head, I have to stay in tune with my spiritual self and keep the outside world out of touch.”

“I don’t hear you. What are you trying to say?” he asks.

Phewww! This is harder than I thought.

“I won’t be available on the phone for a couple few

days," I say.

Silence....

"Bandlalami," I call his name desperately.

It may affect my journey if I cut communication with him while we're not on good terms. I need his emotional support, my heart needs to be in one place, and that place is here at the Mayises.

"Okay Khanyo, please send me your recent picture or video before you disappear," he says.

Disappear is not how I'd describe it but I understand it's how he sees it.

"Are you angry?" I ask.

"No my love, I know you wouldn't just exclude me from your life for fun. I just miss you, that's all."

"I'm coming back soon, just hold on a little longer. Have you spoken to Mawande?" I ask.

"Yes, Nyezi is still acting strong and going to work. The doctors say it can be treated but his is one of those complicated cases that need intervention of specialists," he says.

My heart sinks. I know that doctors and their western treatment won't be able to help him. I can help him and I'm the chosen one to do it. Time is not on my side, it's ticking away and I need to act.

"Khanyo don't worry too much, he'll be fine. He's fought so many things in his life, he'll triumph again," he says.

I inhale an enormous breath to release the tightness in my chest. I need to pray the right way, and I need to do it fast.

"I really hope so, hey. So what kind of a video do you want? I can strip and twerk for you."

He laughs, "I'm at work. Send a decent video, I don't want to be caught in a compromising situation because of a woman who's thousand miles away."

"You're a chicken. I'll send the video before packing this phone away. I love you babe, okay?"

"I love you too sthandwa sami. I wish nothing but the best, when you come back I'll throw you a mother of all parties," he says.

Boring! I know there will be no alcohol in that party, but they say it's a thought that counts, so yay!

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I've been snacking, lunching and deserting on water the whole day and I've been fine with it. But my brother had to mess with my salivary glands by bringing a large Panarottis pizza and cashew nuts. Now I'm wondering if a slice of pizza can mess up my fasting, I mean one slice, just one.

"Stop staring at the fridge, you're fasting," he says.

"You're the temptation I've been praying so hard against. Why did you come here?"

"Sitting home will drive me crazy. I'm even thinking about going back to work, I need to keep my mind busy before I lose my sanity."

I've been curious about the private conversation he had with the sangoma. There's something going on, which is not a divorce.

"What did Makhosi say?" I finally ask.

“A lot,” he says with a sigh.

“I’m not busy.” I pull a chair and sit next to him.

Maybe I can pray for his problems too.

“Emihle’s life is at risk. She’s not my biological child, so there’s this battle between my ancestors and Menzi’s.”

Shut the front door!

“Emihle is not your biological child?” This doesn’t make any sense. Emihle was born before him and Thobeka even got married. I would’ve understood if it was Lulu because she’s the younger one.

“No,” he says.

“How long have you known this?”

“Makhanyi!” He gives me a look like I’m being stupid for asking.

I guess the sangoma revealed this to him. How much more pain does my brother need to go through because of Thobeka?

“So she cheated on you before you two even got married?” I ask in shock.

“And Menzi was my best man,” he says and chuckles.

“How are we even sure that Lulu is your child?” I ask.

“DNA test showed that she’s mine. She tested my kids’ paternity behind my back, together with her boyfriend. When Menzi asked my daughters to sleep over his house he wasn’t being a friend, he was bonding with his daughter.”

“Brother, I’m so sorry. I can’t believe Thobeka is wicked like this. I hope she’ll be watching her back because when I leave this place and I’m hunting her down.”

“I just wish I can live my life from scratch. Sometimes I feel so stupid and worthless. I did everything for Thobeka, even her mother’s funeral, I was the one who paid for everything. I ask myself everyday, what did I not do for her? Her and Menzi could’ve stopped after the wedding, but they didn’t, clearly there’s a place I didn’t satisfy for her.”

“I’ve cheated so many times in my life, not because...” Okay, that look! I stop before the look turns into a slap. I was trying to make him

understand that there's nothing wrong with him, it's Thobeka's borehole of a vagina that can't be filled.

"Manje uHwanqa uzimisele ngaye vele?" he asks.
(So you are serious about that hirsute man)

"Don't call him Hwanqa. His name is Bandlalethu and I love him," I say.

"I think I like him. He's good for you. But that doesn't mean he can do as he pleases, I want lobola."

Speed kills! I just started dating this guy for Christ' sake.

"Hold your horses, we are not getting married, just dating," I say.

"Date while cows are lowing inside the kraal, it's romantic that way."

I roll my eyes, he's such a bore yazi.

"Did you call your aunts?" he asks.

I have aunts? Oh, my father's sisters. Sometimes I forget they exist.

"No, why would I call them?" I ask with my nose

wrinkled up.

“Because you want your journey to open, so you need their blessings. Even if you call one and let her know that you’re doing something like this, I think it will release some knots. Family is family Makhanyi,” he says.

There’s so much sense in what he’s saying. I need to call my aunt and iron things out.

Aunt Hlubi must’ve changed her number, it doesn’t go through. I try Thenjiwe and it goes through.

“Nokukhanya that’s you?” she asks excitedly.

“Yes Aunt it’s me, how are you?”

“Beside constantly aching joints, I’m fine. I’m so happy and surprised to get your call. I was thinking about you just a few days ago.”

Yeah right, you thought about me but didn’t call me.

“Aching joints? How old are you kanti Aunt?” I ask, laughing. The last time I saw this woman she was a Khanyi Mbau of the family, whiter than everyone with

heavy eyelashes and mounds of make-up.

“I’m turning 40 soon,” she says.

I nearly say ‘asikho esiguga namagxolo’ but then I remember why I called.

“I called to let you know that I’m home in Bergville, trying to follow my spiritual journey. I’ve been having weird dreams since I was 17 and the sangoma advised me to follow them and stay in tune with my spiritual self because I have a healing gift.”

“Hhayi-bo Nokukhanya, that’s scary. Are you becoming a sangoma?” she asks.

“No, I’m not. I see things that normal people can’t see, pray about them and heal with prayer.”

“Yuu! So what do you need me to do?” Oh, she thinks I want money.

“Nothing. I was just letting you know. You’re still my family even though I feel like you and Aunt Hlubi don’t treat me that way.”

“Why do you say that?” she asks, pretending to be shocked.

“When did you last call me? Before Gogo’s funeral. When my father died what did I get as his child? Nothing, you all distributed his things among yourselves and your children. Your kids don’t speak to me because you taught them that I’m an outsider. I feel like a visitor in my own home, that’s why I never come to visit. And I hate that Aunt Hlubi’s boyfriend moved to my father’s backroom and threw away his music equipment.”

Well, I’ve just said more than I intended. Today I let my heart speak, I was keeping some things to myself because I felt like people will think I’m selfish if I voice them out.

“Nokukhanya I...I... that’s not how it is. You got it all wrong,” she says.

“What exactly did I get wrong?” I ask.

A loud sigh!

“Baby can you come home? We need to talk face to face. I don’t like how you think of us because that’s not how we are. We love you, you are Mbongeleni’s daughter, our brother’s only daughter.”

“I’m not sure when I’ll come, I still have a lot of things to do spiritually,” I say.

“I’ll pray for you and ask my brother to look down on you.”

I don’t think she knows how to pray, Aunt Thenjiwe is an older version of the drunk that I was a few weeks ago.

“Thank you Aunt, I’d appreciate it.”

I feel lighter, like a huge weight has been shed off my shoulders.

Mandulo leaves before the sunset. I planned to have a prayer session at 7pm, then sleep and wake up at 12 am to pray again. But it’s not even 6pm and I have this burning thing in my chest. I want to scream at God, cry for mercy and ask my ancestors why they’re forsaking me. What haven’t I done right the last three days? I even brew instant traditional beer and cooked food for the altar. What do they want from me?

I'm not getting on my knees and I'm not begging today. I want what I want and I want it now. Is He not God of righteousness? Who makes wars cease to the end of the earth? Who breaks a bow and cuts the spear into two? Who burns the chariots with fire? Is that not Him?

"Now show yourself!" I scream.

"I have inclined my ears to your sayings, I've been reading the Bible over and over again. I have not let your sayings depart from my eyes; I have kept them in the midst of my heart because you said they're life to those who find them and health to their flesh. You said 'All you who are weary and burdened come to me, and I will give you a rest.' Now here I am Lord, with all that I have and all that I am, show me the light. Stay true to your word! Keep your promises."

I turn to the candle, it's still burning. I blow it off and stand in the middle of the rondavel with my hands on the hips.

"So vele nizongiyekela nje?" I'm asking the Mayise

forefathers. They're too relaxed. I brew traditional beer for them, they drank with their heaven friends, got drunk and forgot about me? No, that's not how we roll. I'm not letting them, God or anyone, turn their backs on me.

"Hey, wake up! Wake up boPhakathi. I'm not crying myself to sleep anymore. I'm not turning to the bottle for consolation while you're all lying comfortably in your graves. I have people to help, this gift was given to me by you. Either you take it back or help me. This is the last time, the last Bab'omkhulu. Are you seriously going to treat me like an outsider? A true orphan that I am? Yey ningazodlala nina, hawu!" I walk out and close the door behind. I'm not sleeping in this rondavel, they know my bedroom.

I had a prayer planned for 7pm, a proper one where I'll beg God and praise my ancestors for dying, but my eyelids are growing heavy. I need to rest...

~I've never seen such a fast granny. Today I can see her face, she said she's my great-grandfather's mother and told me a little bit about herself. She said I must call her Gog' MaSibiya. I still don't know where we are heading, we are following the railway by foot.

"Gog' MaSibiya can we stop and drink water? I'm thirsty," I ask.

She raises her hand up in disagreement.

I heave a sigh and pick my steps.

"You said you have somewhere to go, so it's important that you fetch my spirit and my husband's from where those white people buried us," she says.

I did say I'm in a hurry. There's a person I need to help but I couldn't do it because I had to take this trip and bring back my great-grandfather's parent's spirits home.

"We are here...please wash and smear my wounds before you proceed with other rituals." She's standing next to two old graves that are isolated from the rest.

“My husband is on the left...I forgave him, so shall you.”

“You forgave him for what?” I ask, turning my head from the large board written-Tinley Manor- to look at her. She’s nowhere to be seen. I scream her name at the top of my voice. I still have questions to ask.

“Gogo!!!”

Nothing.

She’s gone.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 19

KHANYO

Tinley Manor!

Finally I know where they were buried. I prayed right and got answers. My gift is real. I'm fetching their spirits, cleansing the blood and extricating the spear from the Mayises. That will purify our alter and open things up for me. I'll be able to pray and help Nyezi, right? That's all I wanted. That's why I came here. I'm doing this for myself more than I'm doing it for Bandla. Healing Nyezi will heal me from all my imperfections and failures of the past.

I have to communicate with my brother, so that means the phone has to come out of the bag. The slutty side of me wants to call Bandla first and ask how my dick is doing, but I'll have enough time to call him today, I need to deal with real matters first.

“Makhanyi I’m driving, what’s up?” Mandulo picks up.

“I know where they were buried. We have to fetch them tomorrow and do the rituals this week.”

“Whoah, slow down. We need to involve the elders, you know how busy your Mayise people are, it’ll take them days to come. And I think we’ll need traditional beer, proper one, and goats for umswani.”

“Urgh! Can’t you make all that happen before the week ends? You know I have to go back to Durban and try to help Nyezi.”

“No, we have to do it the right way. Please stop panicking, everything will be alright.”

Sigh! It doesn’t feel like things will be okay. It’s like I’m running out of time and I need to act fast, but he’s right about doing things the right way. He’s a Nyathi, I need a Mayise elder to come with me and show me how these things are done, traditionally.

“Alright, if you come this side please bring me La Mer body lotion from Woolworths, Chanel perfume and...”

“Makhanyi you don’t use those expensive things, you don’t afford them. If you need cosmetics I’m going to get them from Beauty Zone and I’ll get your usual Camphor lotion and Shield roll-on. Anything else?”

Mxm! He’s the most boring man I know.

“Sanitary pads,” I say, rolling my eyes.

“Kotex? Libresse? Always? Makhanyi I don’t have the whole day,” he asks, impatiently.

“Kotex, super plus wings. Don’t forget snacks, ice-cream and cheese.” It’s not everyday that I ask him for things. I’m a very good sister to have.

“You’re blessed,” I tell him.

“No, you’re blessed to have me as your brother, not the other way around. I’ll see you later.”

“You’ll sleep over?” I ask, already excited to have someone to annoy before bed.

“Yes, cook proper food there.”

Oh yes, I will! I don’t like cooking but when I do get a chance I give it my all. We are going to have a three course meal to celebrate me. Yes, me. I must

defrost the meat and make the most important call of the day before the cooking starts.

It rings unanswered.

I try again, this time someone he picks up

“Am I dreaming?” he asks.

“No, you’re not. What made you think I can really stay away from you?”

“I’m flattered. This means my nyanga really works, phela wena ngikubiza okhambeni,” he says. (I’m casting a spell on you by muthi)

“You’re welcome to do it over and over again. Anyway, I have good news. My dreams are getting clear, I think I’ll be back sooner than I thought.”

“That’s great news sthandwa sami. So I’m now allowed to come and see you?”

Ummm....that!

“No, babe. I want to finish this journey without being in sexually contact with anyone.”

“That’s what you think I want if I want to see you?”

Oh gosh, I've offended him

I forget how analytical he is.

"Not at all, but I know that I won't be able to behave myself around you," I say.

"I guess I'll have to stay patient, but it's so hard. My mother is not making my life is easy either. I've been thinking about finding my own place but I don't want to look like a rebel."

"What did she do?" I ask curiously.

"We are always arguing. She wants me to live my life according to her rules."

"Like you marrying in church?" I ask.

Silence...

Wow, this is exactly what Nolwazi feared.

"Does she know that you're my boyfriend?" I ask.

"Now she knows. Everyone does. They just need to accept it."

For their sake I hope they accept it fast because when I go back I'm going to be everywhere he is. I'm

going to bring him lunch at work, show up to functions with him and post him as my boyfriend.

“Don’t let it bother you, I love you and that’s all that matters. I’m not breaking up with you and I’m not marrying someone who is not you,” he says.

My heart swells in pride and joy. I feel so blessed that MaKhumalo loved me so much and bore me a boyfriend.

“I still don’t know what I did to deserve your love. It’s like waking up to a dream everyday. Are you sure what you have for me is love?” I ask.

“Do you want a cardiologist to slice my heart open so that you can see your name written in there?”

“Yes,” I say.

He laughs, “You want me dead? Huh?”

“Of course not, I don’t want to be an orphan.”

He laughs harder. When he’s a happy soul he is an extra happy soul. I like how he laughs, in a titter, like he shouldn’t be laughing but he’s laughing. He bursts and holds it back but continues to laugh anyway.

“I’m your parent now?” he asks.

“Whatever a girl with a dead lover is called, I don’t want to be that,” I say.

“And you won’t be sthandwa sami. God will keep us longer so that we can love and teach our grandkids the meaning of true love and happiness,” he says.

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MAWANDE

She was going to be a housewife, at least that’s what her in-laws hoped for, but 6 months into her marriage Nyezi bought a building and told her to turn it into whatever she wanted. After months of drafting down ideas she finally decided to turn the building into two sections, the upper one being a coffee house and the basement and outer space all forming a cozy Cafe. She wasn’t hoping for crowds as it was situated at the side of the road, next to the

garage, a place nobody would consider to start a business. But it's been surprisingly doing well despite her not being hands-on.

Today was one of those days she felt too bored and decided to go and shadow the manager of Wandes Express. Time just flew out of the window, before she was aware it was time to close up and she'd been there the whole day.

Nyezi is not a typical black husband that expects the wife to be home by 4pm, cook supper and serve him. But today there's a punch in her conscience, Nyezi is not well, he shouldn't be coming home to an empty house and fixing food for himself.

She walks inside the house sweaty and calls his name.

"I'm home babe," she yells, heading to the kitchen before wasting any more time.

And then? What happened here? Pots are on the stoves, there are covered bowls on the counter and plates stacked and ready to serve.

“Nyezi who cooked?” she yells, opening all the pots with her eyes widened.

They both share the love of oxtail and steamed bread. He’s made some salads as well. Nyezi cooks once in a full moon, if Mawande is too tired he’d rather go and buy food. This is really a good surprise and it means he’s feeling okay today.

“I cooked. Do you think the steamed bread is well cooked?” he asks, coming behind in her kitchen apron. He’s handsome, with his tan flawless skin and bushy eyebrows. He’s not a musclebound but he’s been gaining bits of weight since he got married and invested his little muscles into the gym. He’s a germophobe; always in his best, cleanest look and smelling good. Any space around him is always squeaky clean and smelling fresh.

“I don’t know,” she laughs. “How long did you cook it?”

“10 to 15 minutes,” he says.

Her eyes pop out of their sockets.

He chuckles, “I’m kidding. I cooked it for about an

hour or so.”

“Oh, that’s a relief. I think it’s okay. Your oxtail looks delicious, thank you for cooking.”

He hugs her and kisses her lips. Nobody knew they’d be here today. Most thought he rushed himself, marrying a 22 year old when he was also young himself. But he’s proved them wrong, he’s more of a man than any of his uncles.

“I ran a bath for you, go and freshen up. I will set the table.” He plants soft kisses all over her face and spans her.

“Oh, you were softening me up by cooking?” she asks with a raised eyebrow and a smile.

“No, I needed to remind you how much I love you. I appreciate your support and how you always want what’s best for me.” He holds her left hand and stares at the ring he gave her two years ago.

“This or the vows or anything, must never stand in the way of your happiness. I want you to be happy, always. I don’t care where in the world you go, who you are with and when, the most important thing to

me is knowing that my Mawande is happy.” He lifts her hand to his lips and kisses her ring finger.

“Your husband loves you more than anything in this world. This was just to show my appreciation, the two years I’ve spent with you have been the most golden years of my life. If I could, I’d live them over and over again.”

She smiles with tears glittering in her eyes and pulls him for a kiss.

“I love you too, myeni wami. Did you feel any pain today?”

He shakes his head, “No.”

“Let me take a bath, indulge in this delicious meal and thank you properly.”

“Thank me properly?” He bites his lower lip and lowers his eyes to her curvy bottom.

“Today we are making babies,” she says and walks away, swaying her hips to the sides.

Before jumping into the bath there’s a text indication

in her phone. It's from her eldest brother, the most troubled one. Being a sister makes her a site for them to dump all their problems. She was only 18 when she began her sisterly duties. Sometimes it gets heavy even for her, but she has to be there for them. All of them. She knew about Sqalo's sexuality when he turned 14, found out about Nkonzo's obsession over Thakasa's PA two years ago and Thakasa's side-chick a day after he met her for the first time. Bandla was the only normal brother she had, but not anymore, he has his shenanigans as well.

WANDE I MESSED UP- it reads.

Lord, what has he done now?

She dials his number and calls.

"I'm sorry to bother you at this busy hour, I just needed someone to talk to," he says after picking up.

"You know I'm always available for you. What did you do this time?" she asks with worry.

"Nomkhosi is pregnant with my baby," he says.

“No ways!”

“Nothile doesn’t want me to communicate with her, so she’ll meet with her and discuss a way forward.”

Who can blame her? At least she didn’t pack her bags and leave.

“She’s your wife, maybe you should respect her, if it was me I would’ve left,” she says.

“I know Wande. My problem is that she wants to test the paternity of the baby, that’s going to destroy everything between Khosi and I,” he says.

“I thought you said there is nothing between you and her.”

“Yes, there’s nothing but...”

“There’s no but Thakasa, you’re either in love with her or you’re not. If you’re not in love with her as you claim, then it won’t be a problem if your wife acts as a go-between.”

“I hear you, I hear you!” he says and exhales heavily.

“Anyway I’m happy to become an aunt to two girls.”

“Two girls?” he chuckles.

“Phethy and I need back up. We can’t be outweighed by boys.”

“Let’s hope your dreams will come true. Thanks for listening, please send my regards to Nyezi, tell him to recover fast, I want us to go to Mnqamlezweni.”

“And where is that?” she asks.

“It’s a men’s secret place.”

“Anibhori kanje! Let me bath before my dinner dries up. Please take care of yourself Mthonga, that’s all I ask from you.”

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Dinner was cozy with a few kisses here and there. His dinner, his dishes! He said when Mawande wanted to wash dishes. So she used her time to ready herself for a proper ‘Thank You Myeza.’ When he walked inside their bedroom he found her naked in bed. Although the pain in his upper limb had resurfaced, he managed to lift her, wrap her legs

around his waist and give her a kiss to remember. She laid her on the bed and kissed every part of her body.

He pushed through sweat and pain to make the night memorable. Each stroke came with a moan that Mawande mistook for pleasure. Her toes curled up as he stroked the right corners of her core and she exploded in a timid wave. Then he kissed her sweaty forehead, rolled to the side and caught up with his shortened breaths.

The pain was excruciating and hard to persevere. Mawande lifted her head to him squashed next to her, his breaths coming out heavy and short, his hand holding below his ribs.

“Babe are you okay?” she asked.

“I’m in pain Wande.” It was the first he’s ever came out so bold and said he was in pain. He’d been a man about it all along; putting on a brave face and locking his tears in his eyes.

“Do I need to call an ambulance?” she asked in panic.

“Please clean me first and then put me in that white shirt you bought me on my birthday last year. I don’t want to go to the hospital looking disheveled,” he said.

She hurried off to the bathroom and took a towel to clean him up. Knowing the stickler her husband is, she brought his lotions and body spray and embossed him.

“The ambulance will be here in a few minutes. I’ll call Ma and let her know.”

He held her hand before she could make a phone call and stared at her. So deeply that it felt like their souls connected through their eyes. His first love, her first love.

“Please kiss me,” he said, a tear dropping out and rolling down his cheek.

“Nyezi you’re scaring me now. You are not leaving me, are you?”

“No, I’m not. Come on, kiss your husband,” he said with a chuckle.

She believed him and went for a passionate, soul kiss.

The ambulance arrived just a minutes after his mother walked in with tears running down. She's always been dramatic.

"Please hold my hand," he asked before the ambulance took off.

He looked better than he was when Mawande called the ambulance, but they insisted on him going to the hospital and getting a proper check-up.

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It's been over 30 minutes. They haven't got any update. They don't know if he's being admitted or they're taking him back home. His mother has been praying and making calls to fellow church members and asking for prayers.

Finally, the Indian doctor is back.

"Mntanami, hurry and tell us what's going on with my son? Is he coming home with us or makoti has to

sleep here with him?" Mrs Myeza asks.

The doctor clears his throat, his eyes are running off...this is not a look they want.

Mawande stands up immediately.

"Where is my husband?" she asks.

"He was responding well, his blood was starting to flow normally from his heart to his lungs. However it seemed to have clotted and clogged in his artery. We tried everything in our power but..."

"But what? Where is my husband???" she screams.

"I'm sorry, Mr Myeza is no longer with us."

No, no, no!

Nyezi cannot do this!

He cannot leave her like this.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 20

Nkonzo's light turns on. He springs out of the door half-naked and runs towards the big house where Phethy and MaKhumalo sleep. The phone is still put against his ear, he can hear his sister's piercing screams in the background.

His knock is that of an apartheid policeman, he bangs the door with his fist and yells for his mother to open.

It doesn't take long before Phethy opens the door wearing only her panty, she looks at him frightened.

"Why are you knocking like this? What happened?" she asks, opening the burglar-gate with trembling hands.

"Where is Ma?" Nkonzo asks, pushing the burglar-gate and rushing in.

MaKhumalo is already in the kitchen, tying her robe and sweating. Something is up. This chaos takes her

back to the day her husband died, when Thakasa ran to her bedroom, screaming her name and crying.

It can't be one of her kids!

"Where are your brothers?" she asks Nkonzo, her heart pounding hard against her chest.

"It's Nyezi..." Nkonzo says and fails to put it in words. They have to read between the lines.

"Oh, my Wande! What happened to umkhwenyana?" She pulls the chair behind her and sinks on it. It makes no difference, Nyezi is like a son to her.

"His mother just called from the hospital. He's no longer with us."

Phethy gasps in shock, "OMG!"

"Please wake up Thakasa and Bandla, we need to go there now," Nkonzo says to her and looks at his mother. "You'll come tomorrow morning."

He opens the fridge and takes out a bottle of water. They were all close to Nyezi, he spoke to him not so many days ago over the phone and he said he was okay. He was good to their sister, he surpassed all

their expectations and wiped off their doubts about Mawande marrying at 22. Nyezi out of all the Myeza people! Why not his useless brother, Bhambatha, who drinks like a fish and mugs people?

Bandla is the first one to walk in. He's heard it from Phethy, but who'd really believe anything from that weirdo, he needs to hear it from his mother.

"Ma, what's going on?" he asks, his eyes darting from Nkonzo who's gulping down a bottle of water to his mother.

"They say Nyezi has passed on," MaKhumalo says.

No, no, no! This can't be true. Nyezi is the reason why Khanyo accepted her gift and gave up everything to serve and honour her spiritual being.

And his sister?! She's only 24 years old for goodness' sake.

"How?" he asks, confusion and pain reflecting in his eyes.

"They say blood clogged his artery and his lungs

failed,” Nkonzo.

“It doesn’t make any sense. Khanyo was getting close, couldn’t he hold on a little longer? Help was on its way.” He buries his face and releases a deep sigh.

“This is about your sister, not your jezebel,” MaKhumalo says, throwing a dagger at him.

He lifts his head up, “Don’t call her that. You don’t know her.”

“I don’t go around knowing every floozy I have no business with.”

“Ma, I don’t like you talking like that about Khanyo. I don’t expect you to like all my choices but I expect to respect them and respect me.”

“Hey wena, don’t speak to me like I’m your friend!”

Thakasa walks in with a huge frown plastered on his face. He had a rough day at work, a heavy conversation with Nothile before bed and now he’s waking up in the middle of the night, not only to the news of his brother-in-law’s death, but his brother and mother at loggerheads as well.

“Can you two stop? My sister is surrounded by a dark cloud and you are only concerned about who is sleeping with who.” He clicks his tongue and goes to Nkonzo in the lounge. He doesn’t speak to his mother anyhow, but sometimes he takes no prisoners and lets everyone have it.

“Are we going there right now?” he asks Nkonzo who’s standing like a statue in the middle of the room.

“We have to. Mawande needs her family right now. Yazi we could’ve fought harder to stop her from getting married, now look, she’ll be scarred for life. Losing a man who gave you a ring, welcomed you to his clan with a cow and sprinkled inyongo over you to introduce you to his ancestors is the pain nobody can ever recover from.” He inhales sharply and shakes his head thoughtfully. “What if they want Bhambatha to inherit his brother’s role? They won’t let her come back home,” he asks.

“That’s never going to happen. If they want their lobola back I’ll give them, I married Mawande to Nyezi, no any other fool,” Thakasa says.

“So what’s going to happen to her? She can’t stay alone in that gigantic homestead,” Nkonzo asks.

He exhales and shrugs his shoulders. Sometimes he doesn’t have answers, but they don’t understand that, they want him to know everything and find instant solutions.

“You have to bring her back home. She still has a bright future ahead of her. She can find love again,” Nkonzo says.

“You know that’s not possible, unless the Myezas allow it. Mawande is no longer ours, we married her off, remember,” he says.

A deep sigh! Why is life so unfair?

“I need to dress up and let MaNtusi know where I’m going before she assumes otherwise,” he says, leaving Nkonzo scratching his spinning head. This is one of many reasons why he’s scared of marriage. Loving someone from a distance seems to be a better option, even though it has its highs and lows.

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They wait for Thakasa in the car silently. Nkonzo's fear of commitment just reached new heights. Being left by someone you were sure that you'd spend the rest of your life with is not something he wishes to go through. Bandla would take that risk, in fact he'd swim through the oceans to be with someone he loves. He believes that everyone's happiness is sitting on the other side of fear. But today his belief is shaken; how is he going to tell Khanyo that the man she was shown in her visions, whose illness motivated her to face the sides of her she was running away from, is now dead. How is he going to jump that road of fear? Knowing how Khanyo is, she might feel let down and turn her back on her spiritual being again. That would take her back to partying throughout the weekends and daring the devil with her life. She was like that when he fell in love with her, he'd never judge nor dictate her, but he's a human, he deserves the best version of her because he also gives the best version of himself.

The driver's door opens, Thakasa gets inside and glances at them at the back. They always think they can bully him into driving whenever they need to go somewhere.

"Fasani amabhande," he says disgruntledly.

Nkonzo pulls a blanket under the seat, they both fasten their seatbelts and share the blanket to cover themselves. It's just after mid-night, they'd probably be on the road for the next two hours. He'll have a lot of thinking to do while on the wheel, the most being Nothile and Khosi's soon-meeting. She used his phone to text Nomkhosi, so she's under the impression that she'll be meeting with him in the restaurant. Deep down he wants to alert her, but then he did Nothile dirty, he can't drop the dime on her again. So he's just going to toss Khosi to the lion and let her get it in the neck.

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A mattress has been laid, candles are lit, Mawande has been sat down and covered in a heavy blanket.

Neighbours come and go, condolences keep pouring in. MaKhumalo has arrived to be by her daughter's side. She was in her position 7 years ago, after 37 years of marriage, her husband's death was tragic but not as heartbreaking as this one.

A girl comes with a bowl of porridge, she's one of the cousins, and puts it in front of Mawande.

"Please try a few spoons, my baby," MaKhumalo begs.

She shakes her head; food is not what she needs. If there's anything she's hungry for, it's her husband's love that she'll never get again.

"He said he was coming back Mama," she sheds a tear and looks at her mother, desperate for answers. "How can Nyezi leave me so soon? Where will I go? How am I going to bury someone who's in my heart deep under the ground? Mama...." Makhumalo shifts closer and peels the blanket off her and hugs her tightly. She cannot comfort her but she knows that it's not the end of the world.

"I'm sorry, my baby. Please be strong, he's in a better

place now.”

“Our home was a better place. Why Nyezi left me, Mama? Why?”

Pheewww!

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Nyezi’s funeral has been set for a Sunday.

MaKhumalo will be at the Myezas until then, the rest of the family will go on the funeral day to lessen the crowd. They’re keeping in touch with Mawande through MaKhumalo. It’s still hard for her to accept that Nyezi is gone, they put sleeping pills in her tea for her to close her eyes and get some sleep.

Today is the day Thakasa’s fears come true. Nothile has put on one of her best dresses and head-wraps, today her road leads to the Ocean Terrace to meet the side-chick of her husband.

He said he has no important meetings today, so he’s just lingering around and going in and out of their bedroom. He wants to say something but he can’t

say it.

He walks in, for the fifth time, if not sixth. His eyes go to Nothile briefly then he heads towards the wardrobe.

“Have you seen my grey pant?” he asks.

“I’m sure it’s there, look carefully. Please send your babymama a text, tell her to be at the Ocean Terrace in two hours,” Nothile says.

He exhales and takes out his phone. He cannot protect her, that’s how worthless he is.

Her response kills him:

IF YOU GET THERE FIRST, ORDER MEATBALLS FOR ME. XAP!

“And?” Nothile asks, staring at him.

“She says she’ll be there.” He forgets about the grey pant and walks out, tripping over his own heart. He

wants to be there for both of his babies, financially and emotionally. He wants to personally feed her cravings just like he feeds Nothile's.

That's selfish, right? He has to let Nothile punish him anyhow she sees fit.

He opens the door absent-mindedly and nearly bumps his chest into Sqalo.

"What is your problem?" he roars.

Sqalo frowns and steps aside.

Deep breath!

"I'm sorry," he whispers and goes to the cupboard to get a glass for water.

"Why are you not at school?" he asks Sqalo.

"There's a function for one of our old teachers, so nothing much will be done today."

"Oh, I see." He pours water in a glass and gulps all of it down. He puts it in the sink and turns to leave. Sqalo's painted toe nails attract his eyes.

“And then what is this?” he asks, his eyebrows knitted.

“Oh this, I was just checking it out,” Sqalo says. His heart is racing but he’s putting a brave face on.

“Checking it out, my foot! Go and remove this thing, now.” He leaves, shaking his head and grunting angrily.

Sqalo expected nothing less than this, but he had a little hope that he was going to question him furtherly and not just shut it down like this. He’s not going to remove his nail polish though, he loves it. He doesn’t want to look like a girl or anything, but beautiful nails turn him on, so why not?

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NOTHILE

It’s easy to spot her in those long fake hair of hers. An off-shoulder dress to show her skin to Thakasa, right? She clutches her bag under her arm and

strides towards the table she's sat on.

"Sorry, I'm late," she says, standing in front of her and scanning her with her eyes.

Khosi lifts her face, her eyes widen at the surprise company. Her eyebrows are perfectly drawn like she had a full make-up session before coming here. Her face contoured in golden brown and matched with her berry lipstick. What a waste of effort!

"Looking good for my husband?" Nothile asks, smiling and pulling a chair to sit.

Khosi bats her eyelashes in shock.

"No, for myself. Who are you?" she asks the obvious.

"I'm Manqele's wife. I guess you were expecting him here, not me. Well, he is me and I am him, so we can order and talk about you falling pregnant."

"Oh, wow!" That's all Khosi can say. She didn't see this one coming.

"That's exactly how I felt when I found out that someone was sneaking around with my husband. I said 'Oh, wow'," Nothile says.

“Was it you or Thakasa who asked me to come here?” Khosi asks.

“It was both of us but he had more important matters to attend and changed his plans. So, how far are you?”

“Two months,” Khosi says.

“And how long were you sleeping with him?” Nothile.

“Why don’t you ask him how long he was sleeping with me?”

“Because he’s not pregnant, you are,” Nothile says, giving her a look of stupidity.

“Why am I here?” Khosi asks.

“To discuss a way forward. If this is my husband’s baby that means it’s my baby too, I will let him pay for the damages and allow him to bring it to the Manqeles.”

She sits still, not sure if she should be grateful or leaving.

“But we have a condition,” Nothile says, raising one finger up. “Manqele and I want a paternity test so

that we can be sure that you're carrying a Manqele blood."

"So Thakasa sent you to tell me this?" Khosi asks with her eyebrow raised and lower lip trembling.

"We actually discussed it as a married couple. I'll be present when they do the test, I'm sure he'll be busy at work, then when the results come out we'll both be there to see the outcome."

"Is it?" Khosi asks, cocking her head to the side and boldly staring at her. Thakasa didn't like talking about her but sometimes he did. He wouldn't go into depths describing her, but she had an exact picture of her in her mind.

"Yes, and the sooner this is done the better," she says.

Khosi sits up straight and looks at her with the same fake smile she's been flashing around since she got here.

"Well, Mrs Manqele go back home and tell your husband that I said I don't need your approval or his. I don't need damages payment nor do I care if my

baby is accepted as a Manqele or not. Nothing makes the surname special.” She stands up and picks her purse.

“It’s really your decision Nomkhosi. DNA test or no father for your baby. You choose,” Nothile says unbothered.

“I’m not doing a DNA test on my unborn baby. Thakasa knows whether this is his child or not, when he’s grown a pair of balls, if he’s ever going to grow one, he’ll admit it. I’ve never cheated on him.”

“You can’t cheat on someone who’s not yours,” Nothile says.

The truth hurts, but she tries not to look fazed by it.

“Whatever! Bye.”

If she’s still not done with Thakasa after this then it’s clear that he’ll drive her to the grave soon. DNA test out of all things? What annoys her more is that he knows that she has not been involved with any other man. Everytime they met after a long time he’d check the tip of his manhood after first thrusts. God knows what he was checking, but it was always

followed by a 'thank you.' He knew exactly how much hold he had over her and he enjoyed picking and dropping her like a ball.

It's time to cut ties forever and she knows exactly how she's going to do it.

She just needs a few days...

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 21

KHANYO

Only Mandulo and two of our not-so-useful uncles would've gone to fetch MaSibiya and great-grandfather from Tinley Manor where they were impetuously buried. But when fetching dead spirits a lot is at risk. It's easy to attach other foreign spirits and bring them to your home. It's not just one or two instances where things suddenly go wrong in families after 'ukungeniswa kwabangasekho' because foreign spirits illegally entered and evoked violence within the ancestors. So they have to be careful, hence I'm being stringed along to ensure that all goes well. This will be my first spiritual task. I have to be present at Tinley Manor and throughout the journey to ensure that they come back only with the Mayises that we are fetching.

I hate mornings, but in this new life I'm adjusting to

my days starting at 4am. Today I'm extra early because we have to get there before the sun comes up.

Mandulo has been under interrogation since last night about his divorce. These old folks don't understand anything about ending marriage by a piece of paper. He's still trying to nurse his wounds, the last thing he needs is to explain himself to people who think marriage can only be ended by grave. At least they're still sleepy and hung over the sorghum beer they drank last night, they're sitting quietly at the back.

We park the car far and continue by foot. Their graves are not very far from the train railway, the place is exactly like it was in my dreams. I lead them to their isolated stone-covered graves and step aside for Malum' Mpisi to speak.

He introduces himself as their grandson and mentions who his parents were. I didn't trust him to remember what to say, he's been closing his eyes

and drunkenly whispering to himself all the way here.

“This is not home Nselenduna, white people buried you here like wild animals. Your family is waiting for you and great-grandma, MaSibiya, to come to your rightful home where you both belong. Now come with me.” He’s carrying a leaf, when he turns to leave we all follow behind him silently.

Then I feel it coming behind us. I cannot tell who it is but I swear this is an Indian ghost, the family buried him here and never looked back. I heard Indians and white people used to dominate around here back in the days. It’s a Maharaj or a Naidoo, those are the only two Indian surnames that exist, the rest are just clan names.

I stop, my shoulders are heavy, I need to tell whoever this is to go back and rest where he was. Now it comes naturally, I let my heart speak without my mind trying to gain authority over my mouth.

“Whoever you are, we are not here for you. Go back to where you belong, in the name of Jesus and

forfending Mayise ancestors, I dismiss you from this journey!”

When I open my eyes it's clear, only Mandulo is staring at me. I'm strange, I guess. It's going to take time for him and everyone to get used to this side of me. I'm still getting used to it as well. When I'm not spiritually channeled, I look at myself in the mirror and ask; “Woman, who are you?” It hasn't thoroughly sunk in.

Now my prayer is that Malum' Mpisi doesn't fall asleep and forget to tell the elders' spirits where we are. He needs to notify them of every river and place that we pass, because if he forgets even one place, they'll get out of this vehicle and remain behind. You see when a person dies, only the spirit crosses over, the brain is buried underground and eaten by ants. So these resting members don't really have brains, they left them here on earth.

Beside calling UThukela as UMgeni river, Malum'

Mpisi has been in his right senses throughout the journey. I'm going to ask Mandulo to reward him with a bottle of Smirnoff later.

"Now we are outside your home, where all your kids were laid to rest," he tells them outside the Mayise gate.

Mandulo gets inside to fetch a pot of traditional beer and the goat.

Now I'm hungry and over this whole thing. I woke up by dawn and I haven't eaten anything. I also haven't heard from Bandla in the last two days, his phone has been off since Wednesday, which I find very strange. I hope he's not giving up on me. I'm also worried about Nyezi. Not knowing how he's doing is killing me, Bandla was my spy, now I'm just in the dark about everything.

The smell of traditional beer connects the living to the ancestors, now they'll know that we are home. However, there's a disappointment at the end, a huge one. The goat is refusing to eat the leaf.

I snap out of my zone as Mandulo sits on the ground hopelessly.

This is bad, really bad.

Malum' Mpisi has held the goat's mouth, he's forcing it to eat but it doesn't budge. This means this whole thing was a waste of time; either they got annoyed by Malum' Mpisi calling UThukela as Mgeni and stayed back or there's something we need to do.

"So what now?" Mandulo asks, staring at me. He's exhausted, and probably hungry too.

I let out a sigh and shrug my shoulders.

"This is fucked up! We did everything you told us to do," he snaps at me. "Ask them what they want us to do?"

I don't know what he thinks I am. Yes, I do get accurate visions and connect to the ancestors, but I'm no sangoma, I don't have bones to throw and get answers to everything.

"You're not into this, are you?" he asks when I heave a sigh with a secret eye-roll.

“I’m hungry Ndulo,” I say.

“We all are. But we have to finish this first, it’s important for you and the whole family.”

“I want to eat,” I say.

He thinks it’s one of my Gogo’s child tendencies, but I’m really not into this anymore.

“Okay, go and eat, we’ll wait,” he says.

Now he’s talking, I leave them with the goat and go inside to get some food. I want meat, nothing else.

I boil two pieces of chicken and eat them with slices of bread and half-done eggs. After eating I go to my room and meditate. I need to connect to my spiritual self again. Bandla turning his phone off has taken a toll on my emotions, I don’t know why he did it but I have to finish this journey I have started.

Thirty minutes later I walk back to the gate and tell them to get another goat. I don’t know where they’re going to get it, but we need it to cleanse MaSibiya’s

blood and extricate the spear. Then this other goat will be slaughtered to unite the great-grandparents with the rest of the ancestors. It will be cooked and strictly eaten by family members inside the yard.

That's it. I don't think they'll need me for any other thing.

I go to my room and put my phone in the charger. At this point I can do anything to communicate with Bandla, just to find out if he's okay or not. I search for Mthonga Holdings on the internet, a lot of things pop up but my interest is on their contact details.

The call goes through...

I don't even know what I'm going to say to whoever answers.

"Good day, this is Mandy at Mthonga Holding," says the voice.

At least it's a girl, not one of his brothers.

"Hey, I'm Nokukhanya Mayise. Can I speak to Bandla?"

“Okay ma’m, please hold on a minute, I’ll put you through.”

So he’s alive and there’s nothing wrong with him. He better have a good explanation, we don’t disappear on one another, he could’ve sent even a text to let me know that he won’t be available on the phone.

The phone rings again, a different voice picks up.

“This is Bandlalethu Manqele at Mthonga Holdings, how may I help you?”

“By telling me why your phone is off Bandla.”

“Khanyo!”

Yes it’s me, Judas.

“Are you going to tell me?” I ask.

“Babe...I really don’t know how to say this. I wasn’t ignoring you because I don’t miss you, something happened,” he says.

“To Nyezi?” I ask.

“Ummm...yes,” he says.

“Then tell me.” My palms are sweating.

I don't know how long I can keep standing.

“He passed away on Tuesday,” he says.

Well, this is it for me. I don't want to be shown any visions, ever again. I did everything, every fuckin' thing! I wasn't asking for gold and silver, I wanted them to help me heal Nyezi and they raised my hopes up.

“Sthandwa sami?” Bandla says on the phone.

I even forgot about the ongoing call, I'm still stunned by my ancestors' betrayal.

“I will see you tomorrow babe,” I tell him.

“You're coming back?” Why he's so shocked?

“Yes, I'll find your workplace and bring you lunch.”

“Khanyo you cannot do that, please,” he says.

“Bandla I'm coming back and that's it. Now please switch your phone on, I want to send you some nudes,” I say.

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THAKASA

He walks in with bloodshot eyes and throws his briefcase on the dining table and proceeds to the lounge where the TV is playing. Luckily he finds only his wife. His brothers must be in their rooms. With Phethy you never know, one minute she's home and next she's roaming the streets. That one can't be groomed and they let her get away with almost everything because, well, she's a girl and she's 17. Despite her being a twin to Sqalo, she's treated like the last-born.

"Is everything alright?" Nothile asks, looking at him with a frown. They were okay this morning when he left. They talked about Khosi's decision to deny the paternity test and concluded that they have to wait until the baby is born. Well, it was her decision and he couldn't argue it because he's currently under her mercy. If Khosi doesn't want her involved and standing in for Thakasa then she'll walk this

pregnancy journey alone. Allowing Thakasa to go and bond with that baby is not a risk Nothile is going to take. Not only could he bond with a baby that's not his, he could bond with the mother as well.

"I received a message that I don't understand from Nomkhosi," he says uneasily. She's become a part of their lives, both of them can mention her name and talk about her as if she's not a threat lingering over their marriage. He has brought a third part into their marriage, something they were strongly advised against prior their wedding.

"Her phone is not going through, I think she blocked me after sending the text. Can I use yours?" This is very bold of him, but Nothile knows the situation between him and Khosi, and he promised to keep no more secrets between them. Him using her phone to call Khosi is another act of transparency. And he'll make the call in front of her.

"Sure, yeah," she says with a subtle hint of annoyance. Didn't she say she doesn't need Thakasa and the Manqeke surname for her baby? Why is she sending texts now?

He takes the phone and quickly dials Khosi's number. Her eyes widen at how fast he could punch it and the fact that he knows it by head. But today she doesn't want to be petty, she'll let it slide.

It rings a couple of times before Khosi picks up.

"It's me, don't hang up," he says.

This is not the life he wants to live. It's draining, both emotionally and physically. He's losing sleep over this. But he's reaping what he sow, it's what he deserves.

"What do you want Thakasa? I told you there's no baby anymore, nothing links me to you or your wife," Khosi lashes out.

His chest tightens. Suddenly he feels so hot like he could tear his shirt open and gasp for air. There's a jelly freezing in his knees. All this has to be a dream, a bad one.

"I don't understand. What are you trying to say Nomkhosi? Please stop playing with me," he asks,

his voice trembling a little.

Nothile is standing behind him and listening attentively. Why does it sound like there's trouble in Paradise? No, in Gomorrah. Shembe is not answering her prayers so soon! Her ancestors are not doing their magic so early! Why didn't she make popcorn? The movie is reaching its climax and it's hotter than ever.

"I terminated the pregnancy, I told you. It was not worth it. Now enjoy your life with your wife and leave me the hell alone," Khosi says.

He finds a couch with his hand and sinks down, tears pouring out of his eyes like a waterfall.

"Please tell me you're joking. Nomkhosi you didn't kill my baby before I can even hold him or her with my arms." His voice is low and filled with so much pain and disbelief.

"Now you know it was your baby? Goodbye Thakasa Manqele, thank you for the good and the bad times. I hope you'll be happy in your marriage with your marriage baby," she says and drops the call.

He dials her number and calls again. She has to say she's joking! She did not kill his baby. His baby knew daddy, he felt the connection between them. He was going to be a good father and let him or her live the life that he never got a chance to live.

"What happened?" Nothile asks, almost bothered but not.

"Khosi killed my baby!" He picks a cushion and presses it over his mouth. He's always been broken, but he's never felt any pain like this before, not even when his father died. His whole world has been crushed. The bus he's always felt like he was stuck under has ran over him and left him in pieces.

His cry is too deep, it escapes the cushion and buzzes in the house. His face is a mess of tears. Yes his child wasn't conceived the right way, this pregnancy would've shaken his world and revealed colors of him that most people have never seen. But it was his baby, his blood. The one he touched and felt drawn to. His first proof of fertility.

"How can she do this to me?" He throws the wet

cushion away and buries his face in his hands and cries harder. It's almost sad to watch because he hardly lays out his emotions like this or displays brokenness. But he's making noise...

Nothile picks the remote and increases the TV volume. Really, she cannot miss the repeat of Outdaughtered because of someone whose heart has been minced by his side-chick. She puts the packet of Doritos she was snacking on her lap and continues to watch TV.

Nkonzo walks in to his brother crying and his wife watching TV like nothing in the world is wrong. He panics and rushes towards them. Thakasa doesn't cry, at least not so openly and painfully. He knows Bandla to be a crybaby and easily-provoked. This one is the perfect one that gets everything in life by its order and makes parents proud. This one carries the whole clan on his back and never breaks.

Nothile sees him and lowers the TV volume. It's awkward being caught in this position. They're a

perfect couple to almost everyone.

“What’s going on guys?” Nkonzo asks.

Thakasa is a mess, he cannot speak, not that he’d tell Nkonzo anyway. He’s cried himself to the point of having hiccups. That’s how much he cares about this Khosi woman and their dead baby. Good riddance!

“Ukhaliswa ubufebe bakhe,” Nothile says unintentionally loud. (He’s crying over his whoring ways)

Nkonzo is lost. One, that’s not how MaNtusi speaks to him or about Thakasa. Two, what whoring ways is she talking about?

“Mthonga what’s going on?” he asks Thakasa.

Instead of answering he picks the cushion and walks out with it pressed over his swollen face. He’s never portrayed his weakness like this to anyone.

“MaNtusi?” Nkonzo turns his eyes to Nothile. He’s now worried and hurt to see his brother like that. Maybe if their mother was home whatever happened

to him wouldn't have happened.

"We had a fight and he overreacted. I guess my pregnancy hormones are doing a number one on him," she says with a slight shrug.

Well, it's weird and very complicated to understand. His brother just broke down because of a small fight? It doesn't make any sense.

"Can you please check on him? I know he won't speak to me when he's like that," he asks.

"Alright," she says with a low sigh and picks herself off the couch and follows Thakasa to their bedroom.

Nkonzo is left standing in the middle of the lounge with a loud TV in front of him. What is happening to his brother and his wife? He always tries to reach out to all of them but Thakasa keeps a lot to himself. They also put pressure on him as a family. When their father passed on he had to step up and they started treating him like their father.

Nothile walks in to their bedroom and finds him lying

on bed like a starved street kid.

“Dinner will be at 6:30,” she says.

He shuts his eyes with his jaws clenched and turns to sleep on his stomach.

Nothile opens the drawer and throws a bottle of eye-drop to him. She’s not interested in explaining to the younger ones why his eyes are red, neither is he.

“Now pull yourself together. Ubungakhali usafeba, so please Manqe!”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 22

KHANYO

I think toiletries were the last for me to pack. This is it, I'm checking out. I feel used, I did everything I was asked to do, I kept my end of the bargain but achieved nothing in return. I still can't believe I was played by dead folks who probably never went to school. I feel so stupid and naïve. I cannot shut out the picture of Mawande in my head, she looked so happily married and taken care of. Her and Nyezi looked good together. They were a picture of perfect couple. Clearing my path so that I can heal him was not too much to ask from Gog' MaSibiya and her crew. It's all I needed to validate my worthy.

But maybe I'm to blame too. I shouldn't have wasted so many years disregarding dreams and choosing the bottle over helping people. Had I done things right when there was still time, Nyezi would be still alive. It hurts even more because unlike any other

person I've been shown, I'm very certain that I was going to heal him. I know for a fact that it wasn't his time to die, I let him down.

Mandulo walks in, I'm not his favorite person right now. It looks like he's ready to leave. He picks the heavier bag and walks out without saying a word. I pick the remaining ones and follow him out. Again, we are shutting doors and turning our backs to the Mayises. I don't know when I'll come back again. I threw away the water basin and candles, it's no use for me to keep doing this shit if nobody is going to look out for me.

He should be starting the car but he's staring at me. I pretend to be busy on my phone, we've been arguing since yesterday. I know he wants me to stay here and finish my course, his anger over his money and time that I wasted is just an excuse.

"I thought you were coming right, that there was a decent human in you, but now I realize that I was just

hallucinating as usual.”

I scroll my phone and pretend not to hear or care. He’s been on my case since I announced that I’m putting down my tools, my decision has been made and he’s not going to change my mind.

“You’re a quitter. I’m not going to say a failure because you’re capable of winning, you just choose not to. What made me believe that you were going to finish this spiritual journey whereas you couldn’t finish a mere degree? You cannot finish a damn thing unless if it’s a bottle of alcohol.”

Wow! That’s very sympathetic of him. He’s really putting himself in my shoes.

“Please drive,” I say.

He shakes his head, looking at me like I’m a hopeless case, then switches the engine off and gets out of the car.

If I knew how to drive I swear I would’ve driven off and left him here. Such a dramatic, divorced-arse!

He finally comes back after 15 minutes of walking around the yard, doing nothing. I should buy my own car...well, in my dreams.

He fastens the seatbelt and looks at me. Lord, not this again!

“You were doing this for your precious boyfriend, weren’t you?”

“No, I was doing it for myself and Nyezi,” I say.

“You were doing it solely to please your boyfriend. Not for yourself, not for your ancestors and definitely not for God. This was about leli hwanqa lakho, nobody else,” he says.

I’m lost for words. Bandla has got nothing to do with my gift. Yes, he gave me advices and helped me become a better person for this journey. But not even once have I done things that concern my spirituality to please him.

“Believe what you want to believe Ndulo.” I’m done arguing, I just want to see my girls and Bandla. I know they’ll understand me and not kick me when I’m already down.

He's in his shittiest mood, I know there will be no stop on the way, not even for drinks. He turns on Boys II Men and drives out. People still listen to these old songs? God please give me a nap.

My God works on and off. Sometimes he doesn't answer and sometimes he does. Today was one of those lucky days where I pray to the Son of David while he's in a good mood. I fell asleep probably ten minutes after leaving home, I just woke up now because the car was no longer moving. We are in Pietermaritzburg, I'm alone in a car filled with an appetizing smell of pizza. He can be an arse at times but I have the most wonderful brother in the world. He bought my favourite, creamy chicken with extra cheese. I remove the seatbelt and set his dashboard as a table and feed myself.

The car is parked in front of the stores, so I guess he went in for a little shopping.

Minutes later he appears with a skinny lady wearing a nurse uniform. She remains next to the car,

blushing like a newly-wed.

“Makhanyi where is the pizza?” he asks.

Do I need to say it’s in my stomach or show him the remaining pieces in the box?

His eyes widen, “Who told you to eat the pizza? I was going to buy you something else to eat.”

Who said I want to eat something else?

“It was my pizza,” I say.

“No, I didn’t buy it for you. Enhle asked for it and I came here to drop it off.” He’s angry. Enhle must be the nurse that looks indebted to Tupperware here, by the car window.

“But you bought my flavor,” I argue because I don’t see my fault. What would you do if you woke up in a car and found your favourite pizza next to you?

“It’s not just your flavor, you didn’t create it. Urgh, damn it!”

I shrug my shoulders and burst a loud burp. I shouldn’t have eaten so much, now I’m feeling sleepy again.

“You’re so annoying!” He closes the door and turns to his nurse waiting for a pizza next to the car.

I think she must just buy the pizza with her own money. She went to a nursing schools so that she can inject people, shout at them and get paid to buy what she likes.

It looks like they’re arguing. I crawl over the seats and press my ear against the window at the driver’s side.

“You always do this Mandulo.” Hhayi bo, is she crying for a pizza? Really, who cries for flour?

“I told you I’m driving with my sister and she’s a drama queen. Please take a taxi home, I’ll make it up to you,” Mandulo.

Why is he calling me a drama queen? I have nothing to do with their fights. Yoh, I can’t believe he’s already dating. But why do I suspect that this nurse is not the girl who was in his house the other day?

“Your sister must get a life, I’m tired of always

getting pushed to the side because of her.”

I must get what? Oh Jesus Christ, this one thinks I’m one of her patients. Now I’ll always eat her things because she’s too forward and nasty.

I roll down the window and peep out.

“Mandulooo,” I yell.

I see her rolling her eyes. I’m not a monster-sister but she’s making me one.

“What?” Mandulo hisses.

“I want chocolate,” I say.

He gives me a scornful look, “Yeyi wena!”

“Brother, pleaseee.”

The nurse reaches her boiling point and leaves angrily. Next time she’ll leave me out of their fights. Who is she to tell me to get a life? She must get a life as well and stop getting angry over pieces of flour.

Mandulo is angry but I don’t give a fly. It’s not like

he's in a serious relationship with this nurse. He's fucking around because he's stressed.

"I'll drop you in town with your bags," he says.

"What? I can't carry all these bags and take a taxi," I say.

"You will, just wait and wait," he says.

It's official, me and the nurse are enemies. I love the one who was in the house the other day. Even though I didn't see her, I only saw her lipstick on the couch, but I can tell that she's a beautiful girl. I hope she's a doctor.

The heartless, divorced man drops me on Victoria Street with my bags. I look like an immigrant crossing the border illegally, it's too late for me to call Gugu for help. I have no choice but to take a meter taxi. This is wasting my time, I have to take a taxi to Mandeni before 13h00. I want to surprise my man with late lunch at work. I don't want his female colleagues to think he's a single man. I'm back to normal life by force.

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If I had enough time or planned this properly I would've cooked something than buying Nandos boujee bowl and Coke. But it's not bad for beginners, I've never bought anyone lunch in my life. They pack it nicely for me. I rush out to get a taxi to town.

I wasted more time by telling Nolwazi and Gugu the nurse's story. I'll probably get to Mandeni around 3pm and still saunter around, looking for another taxi to take me to their company building.

Luckily it doesn't take long for the Mandeni taxi to get full, now my prayer is that this driver breaks road rules and speeds to Mandeni.

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It took a while for me to get transport to this place. It's an industrial town, with so many factories and informal settlements. I find Mthonga Holdings in the

midst of clothing factories and plastic manufacturing companies. They have white-walled, typical squared offices with a queue of trucks parked outside the gate. I'm greeted by men lying under the shades of trucks, I guess they're drivers. Some yell for my phone number while others promise to give me the world. I'm not flattered, they probably do this to every lady that passes by.

Unlike most security guards, this one doesn't give me problems. He asks me to fill in my details on the guest book and lets me in. If it was those Durban ones who think they're owners of the buildings they guard, he would've asked for my mother's death certificate and affidavit before letting me in.

But now I have to deal with the receptionist, she doesn't look too pleased, I disturbed her on the phone call.

"Do you have an appointment with Mr Manqele?" she asks.

"Nope, I'm his girlfriend," I say.

She chuckles and looks at me from head to toe.

“So which way to his office?” I ask, fighting the urge to tell her about her eyebrows that look like spears of the coat of arms.

“I have to see the security first, you could be armed for all we know, then I’ll call Mr Manqele to see if he’s available,” she says and walks around her desk to leave. “Have a seat there,” she says. I’ve never met anyone with such a stinking attitude in my life.

She walks out in her ugly wedge and fake fake-hair. Weaves are fake hair because they aren’t originally our hair, but hers is a fake of fake. It’s either she needs a raise of salary or she needs to invest in quality.

Someone in a black suit appears and wears a slight frown upon seeing me on the chair.

“Hello, have you seen Mbali?” he asks, walking to the desk and leaving a pile of papers.

“The rude receptionist? She left me here because

she thinks I'm carrying a bomb to kill Bandla. I'm only here to give him lunch," I say, showing him the Nandos paperbag next to me.

"Oh, sorry about that. Mbali can be dramatic. Follow this passage and enter the second door, I think all of them are there."

All of them? I hope I'm not going to disturb a meeting. I pick my purse and food bag and follow the passage as instructed.

The door is slightly open, there are low voices coming inside. It sounds like a casual conversation, there is laughter here and there.

I knock once, one of them tells me to come in. I knock again.

"Umi ngezindlebe yini? I said come in." I know with no doubt that is Nkonzo speaking.

I knock again, this time there are footsteps coming. I take a step back and wait.

The door opens, our eyes meet and he looks

shocked for a second.

“My office is this side,” he says, showing me the door I passed.

How do I say ‘I’m not here for you’ respectfully? I clear my throat and look at him with my eyes widened.

He laughs, “I’m kidding, he is inside, come in.”

Such a cute idiot! I follow him in and sweat under arms when I see Thakasa standing next to Bandla’s desk looking like he just came to blows with a thunder.

“Bandla you have a guest,” Nkonzo says, collecting his phone from the desk and glancing at Thakasa.

The one I’m here for doesn’t look pleased at all. He’s staring at me like I’m a ghost or alien.

“Submit that report before you go home,” Thakasa says and walks towards the door. He glances at me once and says a flat ‘Hi’ and walks out before I can return it.

Nkonzo peeps inside the Nandos bag I’ve just put on

the desk and cries of hunger before walking out. Honestly, he's the only brother I like. Sqalo and Thakasa are cold, I don't need written messages to know that they don't like me.

I make myself comfortable on the guest chair, this one is still staring at me quietly.

"Hey, I'm back," I say.

He releases a low sigh and leans back on his chair.

"How are you?" I ask.

"I was good Khanyo, until I saw you here. Why are you doing this? Do you know how dangerous it is to turn your back at the ancestors and your gift?"

Here comes another Mandulo!

"Please Bandla, you don't know what I'm going through. You've never been appointed to help anyone and failed them. I'm here because I thought you can comfort me. If you can't, please allow me to leave this and find something else that can comfort my soul." I push the Nandos bag to him and turn to

leave. The last thing I need is to be judged and told how to feel about the betrayal from my ancestors.

“My love,” hands grab me before I reach the door. He turns me around, to look at him.

“You didn’t fail anyone, but if you quit you’ll be failing yourself. Now stop being dramatic and give me a kiss.”

I give him an eye roll first then wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him. I have missed these lips so much. I deepen the kiss and grab his manhood.

He breaks the kiss immediately and chuckles.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

“Checking if my property is still there,” I say.

He laughs and walks back to his desk. He opens the food bag and empties the contents.

“You bought this for me?” He’s smiling like a kid.

I feel like a breadwinner as I watch him read the name of the chocolate I randomly threw in.

“Yes, it was supposed to be your lunch but I’m late,” I

say.

“You told them you’re buying it for me?” he asks.

I frown, “The waiters?”

“Yes,” he says.

I would’ve been stupid to tell strangers that.

“Yes I told them,” I say.

His smile broadens. I can’t believe he’s so happy over a R65 cold meal. I can do this over and over again, I love seeing this smile on his face.

He takes a metal spoon from his drawer and stuffs his mouth like he hasn’t eaten in years.

He doesn’t drink the Coke I bought him, probably because it’s now warm, he drinks his half-drunk bottle of water and wipes his hands with a serviette.

He takes the chocolate. He’s eating everything all at once?

“How do I unwrap this thing?” he asks.

I know men, I'm not the first one to buy him chocolate, he just wants me to feel like a breadwinner.

"Tear it from the top," I say.

He unwraps it and eats only one small piece and puts it inside the drawer.

"I'll eat one piece per day," he says.

I laugh, men can be so deceiving. I know he didn't like it, he'll probably give it to his young sister when he gets home.

"So, did you take care of yourself," I ask and bite my lower lip.

He chuckles, "Yes."

I'd be a fool to take his word for it. I go to the door, the key is left in the hole, I shut it and lock.

"Khanyo wait, we are in the office, what are people going to think?" he asks, getting off his seat nervously.

Being a Shembe man means nothing, he's a human and he has needs. Or I have needs that I need him to

take care of.

“Does it matter what they think? We’ll make sure that you send your brother his report.” I turn my back for him to zip down my dress.

“Urgh, Khanyo!” It’s the last kick of a dying voice. He helps me off the dress, I’m left in red matching lacy underwear and his eyes are about to pop out of their sockets.

“You wore this for me?” he asks.

“No, I wore it for a certain guy but he turned me down. He didn’t want to have sex with me in his office, I guess someone had been taking care of him while I was away.”

“Stop being dramatic. I’m just scared that someone might come here and catch us. You know my brother can give me a written warning or call a family meeting.”

“Life is about taking risks Bاندلالابو,” I say.

“Labo?” He gives me a look.

“What do you want me to say? You care more about

other people, unguBandalabo,” I say.

“Uh-ah, come here.” He pulls me into his arms and grabs my face for a steamy kiss. I have him exactly where I want him.

He pins me against his desk, his hands start caressing all over my body. His front is poking out. I drop my hands to his pant and unzip it. His manhood springs out hard and thick. I caress his tip with my palm while he trail kisses down my neck.

“Did you bring a condom? I don’t have any here in the office,” he asks in a husky whisper.

“No, I didn’t,” I say.

“Then what are we going to do?” His fingers slide through the side of my panty and rubs my wet lips.

I know his status, I trust him and I’ve recently took an injection. Now I only need the King of Kings to provide his holy contraceptives.

“I don’t know, what do you think we must do?” I ask.

He smiles, “I say, let them fight without any bulletproofs and see who wins.”

'Fight' sounds hectic. I came here for slow, intimate love-making.

"Turn around, we have to be fast, we'll have enough time tonight."

He kisses my lips briefly before turning me to hold the desk. His hand covers my mouth, now I'm panicking, what are we doing here?

The first strokes are slow and fulfilling. My world is trembling with pleasure and lust. But when he increases his pace and pounds me like a madman, I'm gasping for air. I want to scream but his hand is pressed against my mouth.

"Babe why umnandi so?" He pulls out and rubs his tip around my anus.

No, no, no! I use that one to fart and poop.

"Waqina nje yini?" he asks with a chuckle. (Why are you tensing up)

I can't speak, so I spank his thigh to get a message across.

"Are you going to listen to me tonight or not?" He

removes his hand for me to answer.

“I will listen,” I say.

“Swear,” he rubs his hard shaft around my hole, my chest dries up. TF!

“I swear to God!” I say.

He chuckles and puts it back in its rightful place.

Phewww! That was nerve-wrecking. I cried everytime my grandmother inserted the enema syringe in my arse, so I know that I'd never handle a dick, not even a pencil-sized one.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 23

Bandla walks in when everyone gathers around for dinner. He is not expecting any shouting because MaKhumalo is at the Myezas, this should be their time of freedom.

“You can’t bring women in the office. That’s inappropriate and disgusting,” Thakasa bites his head off before he can say anything.

“Oh, really?” Nothile asks with her eyebrow raised.

“Can I reprimand my brothers without you interfering?”

“Preach what you practice Manqele. They learn from the best,” Nothile says, ignoring his scolding look.

Heavy silence falls into the room. It’s so unlike them to fight, everyone is dumbstruck.

“Tutu, go and eat in your room,” Thakasa says to Phethy and looks at Sqalo to do the same. This is getting more awkward, if MaKhumalo was home

none of this would've happened.

"Well, I...I came to say I..won't be home tonight," Bandla says, cutting through heavy silence.

Thakasa could've said something, like where he's going and continues to reprimand him, but he doesn't want to be furtherly disrespected by his wife in front of everyone.

"I also have some work to do, so I'll eat in my room," Nkonzo says and picks his plate and follows Bandla out.

The couple is left alone on the table. Nothile is enjoying her dinner like nothing happened. They've had problems in the past, many of them, but they didn't disrespect one another in front of the family and young siblings.

"So you're going to do this in front of Tutu?" Thakasa asks.

"Was I lying? You brought your sidechick to the office, you have no right to judge Bandla."

“I didn’t do it in front of employees,” he argues.

“And that makes you a better person? You disrespected yourself and our marriage.”

“MaNtusi how many times are we going to talk about this? I fucked up and I’m trying my best to work on our marriage.”

“Sleeping on the floor is trying your best?” she asks with her eyebrow raised.

They haven’t shared a bed since he received the news of his baby being aborted.

“I want to mourn for my baby and your happiness is not helping,” he says.

Nothile chuckles out in disbelief, “I’m not going to stop enjoying my pregnancy because your sidechick intentionally terminated hers.”

“It was my baby Nothile, who the mother was doesn’t matter, I lost a baby!”

“What about the one you haven’t lost?” She brushes her tummy and fights back tears. Now a dead foetus is going to stand in the way of her happiness?!

“You’re looking at it the wrong way,” Thakasa.

“What is the right way to look at it? You’re ignoring me and my baby because you want to stare at the ultrasound picture of a dead foetus and cry on the floor.”

“It’s not just a dead foetus, I lost a baby, my first proof of fertility and you’re always making me feel like my feelings are not valid. Like I shouldn’t be hurt because I cheated.”

“I never said that, I only said it serves you right,”
Nothile says.

He puts down the fork with disbelief written all over his face.

“It serves me right?” he asks, almost whispering.

“Actually, it’s funny. Now you’re going to pay damages for a baby that doesn’t exist?” she asks, laughing.

Thakasa pushes back his chair and stands up to leave. His appetite has vanished. This is exactly why he can’t share a bed with her. His pain is ridiculed

because he made a mistake.

Nothile picks a piece of meat from the abandoned plate and enjoys her dinner alone in the table.

Today they're not even sharing a room, Thakasa is preparing a couch to sleep on. Nothile clears the table and leaves without questioning him. He's the one who'll explain if the family ask what happened.

Nkonzo walks in to put his plate in the sink and notices someone on the couch in the lounge. He's long suspected that something was not right between his brother and wife and today just confirmed that.

"Mthonga," he says, walking to the other couch to sit. "What is going on? Why are you not in your bedroom? Please don't lie, I'm your brother, not a stranger."

"Please borrow me your phone first, I want to call someone," Thakasa says after heaving a sigh.

Nkonzo hands the phone over and stares at him curiously. Who is he calling and why is he not using

his own phone?

“Please don’t drop, it’s me,” he says to the person.

“Nomkhosi please, that’s not why I called..... I want us to meet so that we can discuss how the rituals will be done and where.....I have the right, I was the father.....Why are so cruel? Fine you’ve killed my baby, now allow me to make sure that him or her is at peace.....Nomkhosi why are you doing this to me?...Hello....Hello...Damn it!” He looks at the screen, clicks his tongue and throws the phone back to Nkonzo.

“Are you going to explain?” Nkonzo asks with curiosity and disbelief.

“I think you’ve connected the dots. I cheated, she fell pregnant and aborted,” he says.

There’s a faint look on Nkonzo’s face.

“You cheated without a condom?” he asks and realizes how useless his question is at the present moment.

“Does MaNtusi know?” he asks.

“Yes, she’s met with her. I don’t know what she said to her, but a few days later I got a text message that she’s aborted my baby,” Thakasa says.

“You think she might’ve asked her or threatened her to do it?” Nkonzo asks thoughtfully.

“Maybe. I don’t know. All I know is she met with her and Nomkhosi aborted my baby. Then she expects me to touch her? Ay Mthonga, no. I’m not sharing a bed with her, not after everything she’s said to me.”

“But bafo, she’s hurt. You cheated on her, on top of that you made the other woman pregnant.”

“So what? We should host a braai because ‘the other woman’ has killed my unborn baby?”

“No, that’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying put yourself in her shoes, this woman has done nothing except carrying all of us as a family and taking care of us. You did her wrong, allow her to express her anger anyhow she wants and be a husband you vowed to be.”

“Dr Mhlongo told me not to invalidate my feelings and bottle my pain.”

“You’re seeing a therapist?” Nkonzo asks in shock.

“Yes, MaNtusi suggested it. Right now I really don’t know what to do. Maybe you’re right, I should take blows as they come. I did Nomkhosi wrong and now she won’t let me do right by my baby’s spirit. On the other hand, MaNtusi wants me to be a father of the year and forget the other baby ever existed.”

This is really complicated. Marriage is really not a bed of roses.

“At least wait until MaNtusi gives birth, you’re putting the baby’s life at risk by constantly fighting with her. It would be really sad to see you losing both babies because you put your needs and feelings above everyone else’s. Really, you’re going to send goats and cows to another woman’s family to pay for the damages while she’s here?”

He heaves a sigh, “I hear you. Thanks for your advice, I hope you’ll do better than me in your marriage.”

“If marriage ever happens to me,” Nkonzo emphasizes with a chuckle.

“Come on, if Tema asked you to marry her you’d do it

in a snap,” Thakasa says.

His eyes widen, “Tema?”

“Yes, my PA. The one you always stare at and ‘accidentally’ find in my office when I’m not there.”

This is very awkward for Nkonzo. He was sure his feelings were a secret. Even Tema doesn’t know because everything is always a coincidence. He liked her the first day Thakasa introduced her as his PA, but there was a problem, she was fresh from marriage, if there is such. Her job at Mthonga Holdings was her first breakthrough after a sour marriage of 3 years. Until Thakasa intervened and threatened to get law enforcers involved, her ex-husband kept showing up and sexually degrading the poor girl by telling her dirty laundry to anyone who cared to stop and listen.

She’s a humble young woman, beautiful with her big eyes and plump, yellow cheeks. Everytime he sets his eyes on her his heart beats abnormally. There’s something about her that makes everything about him feels right. She has a positive energy and a

contagious beautiful smile. He also likes that she's short, there's something sexy about short girls, especially when they look up at you like you live in the sky. It's like they were made to be picked like babies.

"Why do you look so shocked? You're not so hard to read."

He clears his throat, "So you think I'm wrong for being attracted to her?"

"Because she's been married before?" Thakasa asks.

"Yes, and I'm still a virgin," he says.

"A virgin that randomly hooks up and sleeps in hotels? Be serious Nkonzo. You can't ask any advice from me though, now you know how imperfect I am. All I know is that I'll slice you into pieces if you ever hurt that girl." He's close to Tema, their relationship has reached a brother-sister level. He knows how far she's come and he only wants her to flourish and be happy in her life. She's only 27 but has married for 3 years, suffered two miscarriages and several physical abuse encounters.

Nkonzo just chuckles and leaves before of more of his secrets get unpacked.

Thakasa collects his duvet and pillow and goes back to his bedroom. He finds Nothile on her phone, looking unbothered. He folds the duvet and packs it and puts on top of the wardrobe. Nothile has put her phone under the pillow, she's now staring at him as he strips his clothes off to get in bed.

"What brought you back?" she asks.

"We are married MaNtusi, no matter how rocky things are, I have to stay next to you."

"And who reminded you that?"

"Nkonzo, he talked sense into me."

"Maybe I married a wrong brother."

He raises his eyebrow, "Meaning?"

"Nothing, switch the light off and get in bed," Nothile says.

"I expect you to see my brothers as your brothers,

not potential husbands.”

“And I expect you to be faithful,” she strikes back.

Sigh! Soon he’ll lose his sanity and get admitted because, wow.

He does as told and gets in bed. Despite the rising tension in the bedroom, he shifts closer and holds her.

“Is she kicking yet?” he asks, caressing her tummy.

“You said you don’t care about the gender,” Nothile says, in surprise.

“Aunt Mawande wanted girls, I’m just inheriting her ideas.”

“Oh, so she knows about your ways?” Her eyes are widened. This is shocking.

A whole Mawande!

“MaNtusi please, I’m trying here, meet me half way,” Thakasa says.

“I’m just surprised that Mawande out of all people could rejoice over my marriage falling apart. You

cheated on me and all she cared about was that the side-chick gives birth to a girl.”

“Please don’t involve Mawande in this, just don’t!” he says.

How ironic this is? She was told not so long ago that the Manqele siblings are her siblings as well, but Mawande has been scheming with her husband behind her back. Where is loyalty there? As a married woman, she expected Mawande to understand her pain and look out for her.

“Sunday I’m going home,” she announces.

“We are going to Nyezi’s funeral on Sunday, you can’t go home.”

“My sister, the real one, has a birthday party for her daughter on Sunday and I have to be there for my niece.”

“You’re a Manqele and the Manqeles are going to Nyezi’s funeral on Sunday.”

“I’m going home, kwaNgema and that’s it,” Nothile insists and pulls up the covers.

The mattress bounces, light turns on again and covers are aggressively pulled down.

“How long do you think you’re going to disrespect me because of something I’ve apologized for over and over again?”

“How is me not going to Mawande’s husband’s funeral disrespecting you? Is it you who died of rotten lungs?”

A hard slap lands across her cheek. Loud scream wails throughout the yard and wakes Nkonzo up in his room. He knows that it’s them. When trust has been broken everything else breaks in the marriage.

But the situation he finds them in is not something he expected. His brother sitting on the floor with his knees up and Nothile is squashed in the corner with her hand on the cheek.

“You beat her?” he asks, his voice trembling with rage and disbelief.

“I...I didn’t mean to...it’s a mistake Mthonga, I swear,”

Thakasa says and covers his face with his trembling hands.

“Fuck you, she’s pregnant and you put your hands on her? MaNtusi you have the right to go to the police station and open a case right now.”

Nothile shakes her head, “I just need a safe place to sleep.”

“MaNtusi I won’t do anything to you. This is a safe place,” Thakasa says close to tears. This is not him!

“Safe place, my foot. I respected you Thakasa, how dare you hit a woman? Not just any woman, your pregnant wife who’s carrying your child,” Nkonzo asks disgustedly.

“He wants to kill my baby so that Khosi and I can be even. He hates my baby!” Nothile.

Thakasa rises to his feet and goes to her.

“That’s not true, please let me rectify this, I’ll do anything to show you how sorry I am.” He tries to hold her but she pulls her hand and holds onto Nkonzo’s arm for dear life.

“Please speak to her in the morning when both of you have calmed down,” Nkonzo says with a sigh. A lot is going wrong in MaKhumalo’s absence.

“I’ll ask Phethy to sleep with her,” he tells Thakasa. He nods, fighting back tears, and goes back to bed.

Minutes later Nkonzo comes back. He’s not letting Thakasa get away with this.

“Mthonga, really? A whole slap to a woman?” he asks.

Silence...

“What did she do?” he asks.

“She wanted to go to a party on Sunday and I told her she can’t because we are burying Nyezi.”

“And you slapped her for that?” He’s in disbelief. So what if MaNtusi wanted to go to a party instead of a funeral? It’s not like her attendance would’ve resurrected Nyezi.

“It escalated,” Thakasa says. He doesn’t want to go

into details because this one might tell Mawande and it would add salt on a fresh wound. His sister cannot be held accountable for his sins. It's not fair.

"There's no excuse or enough reason to lay your hand on a woman. What if she miscarried? Do you know how...."

"Please Nkonzo! Close the door on your way out." He turns and sleeps on his stomach.

"Are you going to be alright?" They laid on the same womb, of course he cares about his old, troubled brother.

"Yeah," Thakasa says.

He walks out and closes the door, leaving his brother in the physical and emotional darkness.

This really has been a hectic evening. Khanyo did Bandla a favor by stealing him for the night. He leaves his brother's bedroom and goes to the big house to get something to drink. MaKhumalo always emphasizes her importance in the family and now he

understands what she means. It hasn't been a week since she left and things are already falling apart.

He walks in the kitchen mindlessly and gets surprised by Nothile standing with only her bra and towel wrapped around her waist. He's close to fainting, he shouldn't be seeing his brother's wife half naked.

Nothile sees him walking in, she jumps and almost trip. The towel falls down to her ankles, leaving her thighs out on display.

"Sorry, I didn't see you," Nkonzo says, quickly stepping back to the door.

She picks the towel up and wraps it over her breasts.

"It's okay Mthonga, get in and take what you want."

"No, it's fine. I just wanted something to drink."

Nkonzo dashes out of the door and rushes to his rondavel with a racing heart. He was only up to help restore peace before the younger ones caught air of what was happening. The last thing he needs is his brother to think he comforted his wife, secretly in the kitchen, while she's half naked.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 24

KHANYO

He took me to the mall of Mandeni for a little shopping because I always come here unprepared. Later we went to KwaGcaleka for some Kasi grilled meat. He's a regular customer there, they had a little private set-up made for him because he doesn't like eating in a crowded place. I had a short tour around the place, I enjoyed the Kasi spirit but Sappi didn't make breathing pleasant with its awful smell which he seemed not to have a problem with.

There's a big talk coming and I promised to listen to it. His phone rings just as he steps inside the bedroom after taking a bath. It's around 8pm and it doesn't sound good over the phone.

"I cannot come home right now...Just make sure that they sleep separately.....Is she hurt?....Eish, alright Mthonga I'll be home in the morning." He ends the call with a sigh and my eyes are widened with

curiosity.

“What happened?” I ask.

“The...the...there was an altercation between my brother and his wife, Nkonzo will.. he will handle it,” he says while scratching his ear.

If it was just an altercation that Nkonzo can easily handle then why is he stuttering? Why does he look so disturbed and stressed out?

“Did he hurt her?” I ask.

Honestly I wouldn't put it past Thakasa, he really looks mean with his serial killer eyes and big arms. Maybe he chokeslammed her to death.

“Huh? Oh no, he didn't,” he says.

He's not a good liar, I can see it in his eyes. He's just protecting his brother's image. Why the hell would Thakasa chokeslam his wife though, she looked nothing short of an angel.

He blows out a sigh and snaps out of it and gets in bed. His hands are so damn cold, I pull them under my arms and heat them up with my skin.

“What if I tickle you?” he asks, moving them up, to my armpits.

“If I laugh too hard I fart, so don’t,” I warn him.

He stops, “Your gas is too strong, let me not...”

TF! I push his chest and hit his forehead.

“You’re lying,” I say.

“You’ve never slept next to yourself at night. You explode Khanyo, the first day we spent the night together I woke up and pulled down the electricity switch thinking it was a thunder.”

I’m so embarrassed. Why Gugu never tells me this?

He pinches my arm and laughs.

“You should see your face right now. Anyway Fart-Boom, we have to talk,” he says.

I’m so close to killing this guy. Or better, I’ll just cut his hair and see who remains a Fart-Boom.

“You know that I love you, so in love we have to be honest with one another. Coming back home before time was not a wise decision.”

Here we go! I embrace myself for another Mandulo's long speech to boredom.

"My father made sure that we never go to school late. He said sometimes you do things repeatedly and they turn into addictive, bad habits. I know people who are always late, not because they always have little time, it's a habit they can't control. I also know people who start things and never finish them, no matter how important those things are. You are one of them."

I knew where this was going. He wraps me in his arms before I lash out my emotional response.

"Bandla you know why I was passionate about this praying thing. It was because I wanted to heal people, mostly to heal Nyezi. And the first person I wanted to heal so badly died? My ancestors let me down whereas I did everything for them."

"You're impractical. There was no deal between you and your ancestors. You didn't do them any favour. You took care of the rituals and cemonies because you wanted to clear your path. There are so many

patients who die in hospitals everyday. Do you think it would be fair if doctors resigned everytime they lose a patient?"

"Nyezi was my first patient. It's different," I argue.

"Knowing how Nyezi was, I know that he would've loved for you to heal people in the same situation as he was. He wouldn't have wanted you to be selfish because of him."

Oh, wow!

"So you think I'm selfish?" I ask.

"Angithi asilwi sthandwa? Yes, you're being selfish and imprudent," he says and shuts me with a kiss before I can strike back. The kiss calms me down, I find myself smooching his lips longer and brushing his chest.

He pulls away and stares at me. He's not distracted, there's still so much he needs to say.

"Until you ground your gift on serving ancestors and healing the people of God, not your certain favourites, you'll be similar to all these spiritual

healers who can't heal a mere headache," he says and drops his hand to my waist. Surprisingly, I'm just calm.

"I love you Nokukhanya. I want you and I to build a family together. I want to be your husband in future and have kids with you. But I want a responsible wife who can stand her grounds and remain resolute through storms. Our kids deserve a mother who has a direction in life, someone who can be a role model to them." He lifts my leg over his waist, his hard rod pressing hard over my mound. He's making it cozy while pouring his thoughts, which don't favor me that much.

"Don't make it a habit to give up easily. Fall down seven times, stand up eight, like a Daruma doll. Don't be a quitter, it doesn't suit you, umuhle," he says.

He has spoken and I've listened as I promised. I don't know, maybe I need time for some introspection and to analyze the impetus of my goals. My motivation seems to be always erroneous. Maybe if I didn't ground my healing gift on Nyezi I would've dealt with his death better.

“I’ll do some self introspection,” I tell him.

He kisses my forehead, his beard is swooping over my eyes and blinding me.

“You need to shave,” I tell him.

“I’m a man of God, living by His rules that were recorded by Moses for Israelites. I took a vow to abide and not shave,” he says.

He’s suddenly serious. I guess the joke went above his head. Anyway I’ve always had questions about this whole Nazareth thing.

“What else do you not do and why?” I ask.

“I don’t smoke, I don’t drink, I don’t eat pork and I respect Sabbath. Everybody should respect Sabbath, but some people are reading their Bibles upside down.”

A shot fired to Christians! I raise my eyebrow and look at him in awe. If we are throwing jabs at religions I must be informed so that I can cock my guns.

“Everybody? You realize that not everyone is a

Sabbath-observer, right?" I ask.

"God created heaven and earth in six days and rested on the seventh, which is Sabbath. Everyone is freed on that day, even those who are no longer with us get a chance to visit homes. Now imagine your forefathers visiting home and finding a heat of fire like the one they're temporary freed from in the other world." The look on his face tells me that he believes in what he believes and what anybody says won't count. People tend to be defensive and strongly opinionated when it comes to God as if they went to pre-school with him.

"So if we ever happened to live together I'll be subjected to all these rules even though I don't believe in Nazareth?" I ask.

"Remember when I asked if you'd be willing to compromise and you said yes?"

Lord, why did I say that? I heave a sigh and nod.

"That's it. You'll respect my religion and abide with all the rules set for the house. In return, I'll respect and abide with all the Christianly rules you set in the

house or whatever you believe is right for your faith," he says.

"Perfect. First rule, no sex before marriage!" I say, untangling my arms and shifting an inch away.

"Okay, which verse Mama Mkhokheli?" he asks, pulling me back and pushing his hand between my thighs.

I burst into laughter because I actually don't know. I haven't reached that stage of knowing verse numbers by head.

"We are not going to be perfect. I don't even want us to try, we'll do what makes both of us happy."

"I love you hwanqa lami," I say.

He frowns, "That's what you call me?"

"Mandulo, he calls you that way and he thinks I'm doing everything to please you."

"Prove him right, please," he says, laughing.

He's just...I don't know how to explain it.

"I love you Bandla and thank you for being so kind

and loving even when I don't deserve it."

He holds my hand and plants a soft kiss on it.

"The morning after I first met you I went home and asked Nkonzo if soulmates exist. Like, how is possible to see someone for the first time and see your world beginning and ending in her eyes? That moment when I lifted my eyes and saw a reflection of yours in the rear mirror I knew that I was never letting you go. I don't think I'll be able to ever live without."

"We are never living without one another. Trust me, I'll never leave you unless you push me to leave or tell me to."

Our lips lock in a steamy kiss. Have you ever loved somebody that a mere contact of his skin against yours gives you goosebumps?

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The night was nothing short of amazing. Just

thinking about his moans during the love-making has me squeezing my thighs and breathing heavily. This taxi seems to be swinging around one place and I don't see the passengers the driver is looking for. I was having sex throughout the night, I want to go to my bed and rest. He's got 3 passengers, I found them already here when I caught the taxi on Field Street. We should be going, it's not like he'll be a millionaire if he gets a full load.

"Can you drop me off here? If you're not going to Musgrave, I'll take a meter taxi," I say.

The driver turns his head to look at me. The other three look at me as well and it dawns to me that I'm the only female passenger in this taxi. Gracious Lord, I didn't even look at the registration number.

"Are you not the girl that drank my alcohol and then disappeared at Club 101?" the driver asks.

The one sitting behind him looks at me with his eyes narrowed, as if he's trying to pin my face to a certain picture.

I'm not sure if I did drink his alcohol or not.

“Yiyona le ngane,” says the other one before I can deny.

“Nx, yazi lezi zifebe zaseThekwini azobazi abantu!”
(These Durban bitches are disrespectful)

“Hhayi bo, I don’t know any of you. Drop me off, now!” I say.

The one sitting behind the driver jumps to the seat next to the door and blocks my way.

“Shaya imoto wena, bafo,” he tells the one driving.

My head starts spinning, one of them has snatched my phone so I know I cannot reach out for help any other way than screaming. But I don’t scream more than a minute, my mouth is covered by rough, smelly hands and I’m pinned against the seat.

These people were together, they know each other and right now I’m not sure if this is even a legally operating taxi. I’ve tried to negotiate, I know Mandulo can pay them whatever amount they want but they hear none of it.

When it merges onto N3 via the ramp to Pietermaritzburg I know that I'm approaching the death's door.

Something bangs hard against the side of my head. I get dizzy and for a moment I'm not sure if it hurts or not. Then I see blood dropping down to my chest. My earlobe is burning. It's the one who was sitting behind the driver, I don't understand why anyone would beat me like this. He grabs my hair at the back and pins his elbow on my chest. My hands find his face, I don't waste a minute, I dig my nails into his face. I'm not dying without a fight. When he looks at himself in the mirror he'll always remember that he killed a defenseless girl.

"Siyajwayela lesi sfebe!" It's one of the other two. Something sharp penetrates through my upper arm. More blood covers my breasts. Before my eyes shut, I see the pocket knife dripping with my blood, this time it goes through my stomach. My arm stiffens up, pain slowly surfaces but I won't be here to feel it all.

"We need to throw this thing eMngeni....."

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SUNDAY

Mawande had to say her goodbyes to Nyezi as a married woman. But it didn't end well at all, when they opened the door to let her out they found her passed out on the floor. MaKhumalo was against it from the onset, she knew how hard and traumatizing last moments are. However, the Myeza family insisted on it, saying it will shed a light to Nyezi's journey.

So, they opened the coffin.

"Talk to your husband for the last time," they said to Mawande.

Everyone left the room and closed the door to allow her some privacy. Unfortunately, she couldn't get a single word out. How do you look at your husband lying inside the coffin and talk to him as if he'll ever open his eyes and respond? She couldn't do it.

Today her husband is being buried and she's not here to see him off. She's lying in the hospital and connected in catheters. This is one of those sad funerals where everyone weeps in their corners.

MaKhumalo has looked everywhere for MaNtusi and she's no where to be seen. Before heading to the tent he spots Thakasa and makes her way towards him.

"Where is MaNtusi?" she asks in a low whisper.

"She went home. There was an emergency." He can't go through details right now because he knows his mother could stop this whole funeral to address his marital issues. It will be better when they're all home and sat down.

Nothile's uncle called the day she left, he wants a family meeting and fine incurred for the brutalization of his niece. This time there will be no hiding things behind the bedroom, everything has to be laid out in front of both family. All his imperfections, shortcomings and infidelities. He's made a bad husband,

that's for sure, but he still wants his wife back. He'll try harder and rectify his mistakes.

"I hope it's not another death," MaKhumalo says, narrowing her eyes at him.

"No, not at all, her sister fell sick," he says and clears his throat. "Has Tutu called from the hospital?"

"I called her earlier, nothing has changed. I just hope Nyezi won't take my daughter with him."

"Don't talk like that Ma, please." He puts his hand on her shoulders and comforts her.

As a family they should be focusing on Mawande's loss but everyone is going through something. Nothile packed and left a morning after he slapped her. He tried to apologize but she was fed up. On the other hand, Khanyo never arrived at her flat after spending the night with Bandla at Hlomendlini. The Mandeni taxi driver confirmed her getting in the taxi and getting off at YMCA. Nevertheless, her brother has been calling and threatening to take legal actions against Bandla because he believes that he's

keeping her somewhere. Nolwazi and Gugu have opened a case of a missing person and posted her pictures all over social networks. It's been stressful two days for both Bandla and Thakasa. Nkonzo had to take charge, both at home and at work.

Bandla appears behind them, his pant rolled up to his knees and covered with dust from the grave. At first he thought she was just being Khanyo, taking time out of telecommunications to focus on her spiritual being, but on Saturday when Mandulo called and enquired about her whereabouts he started worrying. Last night he didn't sleep a wink. He shouldn't have put her in a taxi. He could've asked the driver to take her to Durban as he always does. But with Thakasa and Nothile's situation there was no time to arrange anything. He saw her off the taxi rank and rushed back home. What breaks his heart is that it could've been the last time that she saw her. Nkonzo has agreed to go with him to Durban to search every hospital and morgue after the funeral.

"You all can't just stand like guests here, you need to

work like other men,” MaKhumalo says before turning her back. That should’ve gone directly to Thakasa who’s been in a suit from morning.

Bandla’s screen flashes as a message comes through.

It’s a picture of news headlines from a certain blog sent by Nolwazi:

A YOUNG WOMAN’S BODY HAS BEEN FOUND NEXT TO UMGENI RIVER IN KWADABEKA...

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 25

BANDLA

His hands keep slipping off the steering wheel, his face is covered in sweat but he's almost there. If it wasn't for his mother who suddenly cared about Khanyo probably because she could be dead, maybe he would've jumped in the car in his dirty clothes and left. But she called him back and asked one of the Myeza uncles to give him water and a room to wipe himself and look decent.

Nolwazi said it's bad and anything could happen. It's been two days since she was dumped next to the river and left to die. She must've cried for help and asked for forgiveness. Knowing a fighter she is, she must've fought back too and got overpowered. In all this, he blames himself. He could've protected her. He could've been a better man and made sure she traveled safely before running home to his brother's fragile marriage. He failed to put her first!

Getting out of the car his knees are failing him. He calls Nolwazi as he plods towards the entrance of Inkosi Albert Luthuli Central Hospital where it's said she was rushed to in an unconscious state.

As he enters and follows Nolwazi's directions, the ever-present smell of disinfectants, medicine and death hits his nose and provokes tears that he quickly blinks back.

He sees Nolwazi standing like a rained chicken with Gugu crushed on the waiting bench like her world just came to an end. Mandulo is also in presence, things have been tense between them since Khanyo was declared missing, but that's a wrangle to be settled some other day. His eyes are glued on Efe sitting with them. What brings him here? He has no business with him on the front burner but he'd have preferred if their paths never crossed in such a public space.

"Bandla, hey," Nolwazi breaks the ice as he stands half-wittedly in front of them.

He blinks rapidly and looks at her. She looks hopeless, so does everyone. Possibilities start filling his head.

“She’s still alive,” Nolwazi says, getting him back from his dorky state.

“You call it being alive? She’s in a vegetative state because of this shitbag.” Mandulo says brusquely and gets on his feet to stand face to face with Bandla. “I knew you had everything to do with her stupid decisions. What kind of a man are you? You dress in suits and drive expensive cars but you cannot afford petrol to drive your girlfriend back to her place and ensure that she gets there safely.”

He was against Khanyo coming back before finishing her spiritual course. God knows how much he talked to her about it before she left. But he deserves this anger from her brother, right? It was his responsibility to make sure that she gets to her place safely. When he couldn’t reach her on the phone he should’ve panicked instead of excusing it.

“She’s not in a vegetative state! She’s just

unconscious,” Nolwazi snaps at Mandulo and fights back tears. “She’s alive, there’s still brain activity, she’ll be fine. I know my friend, she’s a fighter.”

“Yes, babygirl is a fighter,” Efe chirps in.

Bandla pulls his face and glowers at him. Babygirl? That’s what he calls all his courtesans.

“When my guys found her, she was dead. That’s what everybody thought but babygirl pulled up,” he continues.

“Your guys found her?” Bandla asks with a frown.

Nolwazi clears her throat and looks at him with a thin smile.

“This is Efe, ummm...my friend,” she says and looks at Efe and introduces Bandla as Khanyo’s boyfriend. Now Efe is frowning too.

“We were making calls to everyone we know and fortunately Efe was able to help with his connections,” Nolwazi says.

“While you were relaxing in Mandeni,” says Mandulo, clicking his tongue.

His forbearance is really being scraped off layer by layer. He loves Khanyo, he hasn't slept a wink in two days and he also had people working with the police.

"Are they going to allow me to see her today?" he asks, looking at Nolwazi who's seemingly the only person that engages him with decency here.

"They'll allow visitors in an hour or so," she says.

"Do you know who did this?"

"The police are still investigating, there are no leads so far."

"Did...did...they..." He blows out heavily and blinks rapidly. Mandulo is staring at him, in a somehow demeaning manner. He hates people who do this, like having a speech flow problem is stupidity.

He'll wait for the doctor and ask him privately. He moves to the empty space and sits. His hands are shaking, he balls them into fists and bows his head down. Everything is possible, he has to do everything in his power to get justice for his Khanyo. He prays a living God, one way or another, those who were involved will pay dearly for what they've done. But

right now he just wants to see her and see how bad she was injured.

An hour later all visitors are let in to see their loved ones. Unfortunately they can't all go inside at once. Mandulo and Nolwazi go in first, they seem to be quite close. Gugu is not okay, it's like her mind shut down but nobody is paying attention to her. Efe is a guest too, and he's waiting for his turn. It doesn't sit well with Bandla, he knows the kind of a man he is and he's not someone he'd want closer to Khanyo. But he has no say over it, Mandulo seems to have no problem with him and after all, he is the knight in the shining amour.

When Nolwazi and Mandulo come out, she pulls Bandla aside while Efe goes ahead and enters.

"Please talk to her, she listens to you, tell her not to give up," she begs.

"I will," he says hesitantly. He's never dealt with anyone in such condition, someone he holds so

dearly in his heart. Seeing her motionless and half dead may even kill his soul.

He walks in and finds Efe holding Khanyo's hand. Fury crashes through his veins but he's in control of his emotions.

"What are you doing here Ugochukwu?" he asks behind him.

"Me and babygirl have a history," Efe responds, letting go of her hand and stepping aside. "I never thought you had a girlfriend ."

"What kind of history do you have with her?" Bandla asks.

"I'm not here to cause trouble, my man. I just wanted to see how she is." He puts his hands up and walks out, not giving anything more than them having history.

His eyes turn to Khanyo in bed. He walks closer and stares at her. There's a bondage around her head, it was said that she was stabbed five times and beaten all over her body. It wasn't robbery gone wrong or anything like that, whoever did this wanted

to kill her. Chances of her survival are slim, she lost so much blood and froze with cold for days. How she's still alive is really a mystery.

He steps closer, hesitantly he lifts her hand and holds it. It has no life and no warmth on it. Tears fill up his eyes, he blinks them back. He needs to stay strong for her. Nolwazi begged him to talk to her but words seem to be stuck in his throat. A huge lump has blocked his throat, dumping a heavy weight down his chest. In his soul, deep in his consciousness and spirit he wants to tell her to pull through. When he said he cannot see his world without her in it, he meant it. He has bigger plans for their future. There's so much love he still needs to give her.

But he cannot say it loud, words and his whole body fail him. He plants a soft kiss on her hand and turns to leave. Before he takes the last step out, a tear drops down his cheek and he quickly wipes it.

Mandulo is standing in a safe distance, but his eyes are sharp and roaming, a pang of guilt stings his

heart and he quickly slides out of sight. Maybe he was unnecessarily harsher on him.

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MaKhumalo stands on the veranda and waits for her son as he slowly approaches the house with his head hung down in sorrow. She warned him, and like usual, she wasn't wrong. Unfortunately, as a mother she has to tell it like it is, no sugarcoating and pretense. A sheep cannot swim in the river with crocodiles, it ends in tears.

"How is she?" she asks.

He holds onto the bench and releases a sigh that's accompanied by long-held tears.

"I don't understand why anyone would hurt her like that," he sniffs back tears with no success. "Five times Ma. They...they...stabbed her five times!"

A sigh! His tears don't scare her anymore. He's a crybaby of the family and funnily, the one who disobeys the most.

“You don’t listen Bandla. I told you to stay away from that girl. Look now, you’re crying over someone who fought with her drunk friends. These are consequences of her dark paths. Usukela amabhadi ezihlalele le eThekwini uzowafaka emzini wami.”
(You’re fetching bad lucks from Durban and bringing them to my house)

“Mama!” Thakasa exclaims behind her in shock. He’s always known that Bandla is not strong enough to handle that girl and all the complications she comes with. But right now he needs their support, not to be furtherly pushed to a dark corner.

“Hey, shut up wena! He’s like this because of you. He learnt from you. You’ve been spitting on your father’s grave and dragging our name in the mud, sleeping around with loose girls and disrespecting your wife. I’m not going to that meeting, I want the Ngemas to chop your hands off for hitting their daughter,” she clicks her tongue and turns to leave. But she’s not done with Thakasa. He’s a disgrace, a disappointment to the Manqeles!

“Awunambeko wena! Umuntu wabola amathumbu

nje, you had one role, only one; to lead this family. But you can't even do a single thing right." (You're disrespectful! Giving birth to you was just littering the world) She disappears inside the house throwing her hands up and shouting nonstop.

"Is she still alive?" Thakasa asks, ignoring the twinge of pain inflicted by his mother's words.

"Yes, but..." He stops Bandla with a hand.

"No 'but', she'll be okay. We pray and praise a living God. UDokotela wodokotela bodokotela. Idwala labadala. UNyazi lweZulu. Don't lose faith, remember what they say. Sometimes we are led into troubled waters because God wants to cleanse us, not to drown us. You don't ask the ancestors or God to guide your steps if you're not willing to move your feet."

Bandla lifts up his head, "You think this about her abandoning her gift?"

"Yes, but I could be wrong. You just need to hang in there and pray for her," he says.

As strange as it is seeing Thakasa being supportive

of his relationship, he takes his word and nod with a tad of relief dwelling on his grief-stricken face.

“I need some time off work,” he says.

“Uh, Mthonga, you’re pushing it now. As soon as she wakes up you’re coming back to work, please.”

“I will, I promise. I just don’t want to be in a working place in this distressful state.” He releases a sigh as he thinks of the hotel life waiting for him in Durban. But he needs to be closer to the hospital so that he can be present when she wakes up- if she wakes up.

“Will you be able to accompany me to the meeting tomorrow at the Ngemas?” Thakasa asks.

“Do I have a choice? Your mother ditched you,” he says.

“And called me trash,” Thakasa says with a grimace but quickly shrugs it away before he sounds childish. He taps Bandla’s shoulder before he walks off.

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Thakasa and Nkonzo arrive in suits, looking decent

for the in-laws. Bandla is wearing a Bermuda short, sneakers and hoodie. He looks a bit sloppy and unprepared for the day, but he's here and it's all that matters. He's supporting his brother as it's expected of him.

Judging by the number of cars parked on the yard, all Nothile's uncles are here. Thakasa's handkerchief has already started on its duties. His forehead is sweating, there has been no communication between him and Nothile ever since she left.

They're led inside the house by one of Nothile's cousin's sons. There are more people waiting for them than they expected. The atmosphere is intense, stares are exchanged as they settle on the chairs and greet.

"Manqele," the uncle looks at Thakasa whose eyes have been fixed on the floor from the second he walked in. "How can we help you?"

Nkonzo clears his throat, "Let us start by apologizing, things shouldn't have boiled down to this point. The unfortunate incident that occurred left all of us

shaken and embarrassed.”

“Unfortunate incident, you say Manqele. My niece came home by dawn with her bags, crying hysterically with bruises all over her face. Is that what you call an unfortunate incident?”

That’s a bit exaggerated but arguing will not change the point.

“Baba, I’m not favoring my brother. Not in any way. He was wrong, as the Manqeles we don’t condone violence against women,” Nkonzo says.

The uncle turns his eyes to Thakasa who’s turned into an innocent sheep out of the blue.

“Why did you beat my niece? What did she do that led you into seeing a wrestling opponent in her?” he asks.

Thakasa clears his throat, wipes his sweaty face and clears his throat again.

“Errr, we had an argument. It wasn’t something big, but we ended up exchanging harsh words. I lost control and I regret it. I regretted it the moment I

realized what had happened but it was too late,” he says.

“If you exchange harsh words with your mother you beat him as well?” another one asks, glaring at him.

“No,” he shakes his head.

“So she was just an exception? If you don’t love her anymore why don’t you...”

He cuts him short, “I love her. I’m here because I still need her. She’s my wife, a mother of my children. I made a mistake Baba, please forgive me.”

“As if that’s all!” one throws a comment and shakes his head with disgust.

“It’s unfortunate that we cannot discuss how you run your marriage and central issues within it, even though they may affect our niece. We are black traditional people, we understand that sometimes a man’s heart split into halves when he sees other women that he wishes to expand his family with. What we expect from you is that you respect Nothile as a wife that you fetched here and announced as your first wife. We’ll not stand and watch you

embarrass and mistreat her,” the uncle says.

“We also deserve to be updated if he’s starting a polygamy,” says another one.

“I’m not starting a polygamy,” Thakasa says quickly.

“Oh, you’re just messing around and....”

Nkonzo clears his throat, “With all due respect Baba, only MaNtusi can handle this one and give suitable punishment. We are all men here, I’m sure we all have our dirty laundry, musani ukugiya ngethambo lika bafo.”

They keep quiet. Thakasa releases a low sigh of relief.

“Okay, we’ll let them handle that. But we are not letting her go back to the Manqeles unless we are assured that something like this will never happen again and compensation has been paid.”

“Compensation?” Bandla asks with a frown.

“A cow.”

Gasps!

“MaNtusi got married at the Manqeles. Lobola was paid in full for her, now Thakasa has to pay another cow?” Bandla asks.

“Lobola wasn’t paid for her to be turned into a Zion drum. We’ve never put our hands on her as her parents, I’m sure her father is turning in her grave. What you did broke the promises you made before the wedding. If u MaKhumalo engafeli ekuzaleni, she has to charge you as well. You have to slaughter a goat and apologize to the ancestors for the chaos you created in their yard.”

He looks at his brothers and they all look defeated. There’s nothing they can say or do, they have no elder with them who can stand up for them.

“It looks like the relationship we had has been destroyed. We are now strangers at the Ngemas,” Bandla mumbles with dissatisfaction. “Where are we going to get a cow at this time of the day?”

The uncle chuckles, “Akuphoqi ukuthi kube ngeyoboya, I’m sure we can calculate and make agreements.” (It’s not compulsory that you bring a

live cow)

“R16 000 is not bad, given how expensive cows are nowadays,” another one chirps in.

Nkonzo gasps in shock, “Are we fighting now Baba?”

“R15 600?” the uncle cocks up his eyebrow.

“No, it’s fine bafo, I’ll pay it,” Thakasa says, holding down Nkonzo’s hand. He looks at the uncle and asks, “Is electronic transfer disrespectful? I don’t have so much cash with me.”

“No, Manqele. I won’t allow that to happen. Show remorse, go withdraw the money and bring it to us to see with the naked eye.”

“We are also thirsty as you see us. We’ve gathered here because of your itchy hands, instead of doing meaningful things at our homes,” another one says.

Thakasa nods and bumps heads with his brothers. One of them has to drive to town, withdraw cash and buy two crates of drinks. Nkonzo expresses his dissatisfaction before offering to go. He calls it being scammed by greedy old folks who don’t even

care about Nothile.

“I’d understand if they want this money to send her for counseling,” he mumbles, not too low, and gets a nudge from Bandla.

The meeting is put on hold while they wait for him to come back with the money. A girl serves them drinks and cookies.

“Is it possible for me to see MaNtusi, please?”
Thakasa asks the uncles.

“She’s still your wife, you said,” the uncle says and sends a girl to pass the message to Nothile.

After a few minutes the girl comes back and asks for Thakasa aside. She’s asking him to come to her bedroom. His heart starts racing again. Now he’ll be getting stares from her aunts as he crosses the yard to where she is.

He keeps his eyes on the ground and walks across the yard. The girl leaves him at the door and turns back.

She's sitting on bed, wearing a seshoeshoe dress and its matching doek. Their eyes lock for a few seconds but Thakasa quickly drops his and exhales.

"Why are you fetching me Mangele?" she asks.

"You're my wife Nothile," he says.

"A wife that you cheat on repeatedly and beat?"

He exhales audibly and stares at the ceiling for a moment.

"Please forgive me for hurting you and putting my hands on you. I cannot justify it or point fingers, all I can ask is a chance to rectify my mistakes and become a better husband."

"You're still going to stay in touch with Khosi and mourn her baby?"

"No, I promise, I won't. I want to focus on you and our baby. We'll discuss a way forward with her case once you've given birth, you know I have to acknowledge that baby's spirit to avoid spiritual conflicts in future," he says.

"Once I've given birth? Okay. But your brothers will

be in charge of those acknowledgements, not you. I don't want you near that woman, or any other woman again."

"Okay sthandwa sami. Can I kiss you? I really missed you, Ma is losing her mind in your absence."

She smiles and gets off bed. They embrace in a tight hug. His hand lowers down to her tummy and brushes it.

"Nothile please don't ever talk about Nyezi like that, he was a brother to me and a good man," he says, lifting her chin and staring deeply into her eyes.

"Okay, I won't. Now kiss me."

He smiles and lowers his head down to her. Her hands wrap around his neck and their lips lock in a steamy kiss.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 26

From one family meeting to another. This time they're summoned to an urgent meeting by MaKhumalo upon their arrival from the Ngemas. The last thing she wanted was to deal with rebellious children a day after burying her son-in-law and leaving her daughter surrounded by a dark cloud at such young age.

Before they go to the lounge where the meeting is held, Sqalo asks Thakasa aside. He's determined to come clean to his family, living in a shell isn't doing him justice anymore. Bandla wants to stop him, this isn't something they need to deal with as a family now. But they're in the room together, he'll be too late to stop him. He stands in front of the door with his eyes on Thakasa's door and his breath held up in his throat.

In the room Thakasa is paging through a book given to him by Sqalo. It's titled Embrace by Mark Behr.

“What is this?” he asks, flipping pages with a frown. He reads only for academic benefits, he’d never waste his time reading a book written in the early 2000s by some white man he doesn’t know.

“I can give you a summary,” Sqalo says with his eyes widen.

He sighs, “If this concerns school....”

“No, it’s about me,” Sqalo cuts him short.

“This book is about you?” He frowns.

“Not really. It’s about Karl, a young boy who falls in love with his best friend, Dominic, and his choir master.”

Confusion dwells on his face, not because of this love-triangle he’s being told of, but the assumption from Sqalo that he’d be interested in such a story.

“And how do I relate to it? I don’t know Karl or Dominic or his choir master,” he says with his eyebrows snapped.

“You know me, I’m Karl,” Sqalo says.

He releases a chuckle and glances at his wrist for

time. MaKhumalo will find more things to shout about if he's a minute late to the meeting.

"Okay Karl, I have to go," he says and throws the book on bed and heads towards the door.

"Bhuti," Sqalo calls and he turns his head with a lot of aggravation.

"I'm gay."

His face is undefined and murky for a minute. Something has to be wrong with his hearing sense.

"You are what?" he asks.

"I'm gay," Sqalo repeats, looking straight into his eyes with no stance of fear. "Maybe you should let everyone know during the meeting."

"Are you crazy? You think this is TV? Get your life on track, I'm announcing no bullshit and getting blamed for it." He glowers at him disgustedly before he walks out clicking his tongue a number of times.

He walks in and bangs the kitchen door behind him. Everyone is seated and silently waiting for

MaKhumalo to speak. He loudly drags his chair on the floor across the room and sits.

“We are here to stare at one another?” he asks.

MaKhumalo adjusts her glasses and looks at him. This is exactly what she was telling the preacher about; Thakasa has no respect for her, no respect for his own late father and no respect for the Manqele surname.

“Maybe you can entertain us by telling us why you go around spreading your seeds everywhere and being Mike Tyson on MaNtusi,” she says.

Nothile sips a glass of water and crosses her legs on the couch. They kissed, held hands and hugged, but forgiving isn't necessarily forgetting and sweeping under the carpet.

“We are waiting! What made you seek pleasure outside your bedroom? What is MaNtusi doing wrong?” MaKhumalo asks.

Nkonzo grunts in disapproval.

“If this doesn't include us then excuse us from this

meeting,” he says.

“As if there’s anything useful you’re rushing to do.” MaKhumalo shoots a look at him and turns his eyes to Thakasa. “Explain yourself Thakasa Manqele.”

He exhales heavily and casts his eyes on the floor. He’s never been a subject of the meeting, it’s him who’s always addressing situations and disciplining others.

“I felt emotionally neglected by Nothile,” he says.

Nothile raises her eyebrows in question but MaKhumalo shuts her with a hand before she can throw in her piece of mind.

“MaNtusi is always home, cooking food and preparing a bath for when you come back from work. You’ve never come home and not get a warm plate of food, or went to a cold bed at night.”

“I needed more than that,” he says with a shrug.

MaKhumalo claps her hands and lets out a chuckle.

“What more can a woman give a man? Her soul? Kidneys?”

“I’d rather not talk about this here, Nothile knows what drove us apart,” he says.

“I know?” Nothile raises her eyebrows and he releases another sigh. She looks at MaKhumalo and shakes her head in disapproval.

“Manqele will never admit his wrongs, let alone in front of people. He wants to be this perfect human being that his father was. And I’ve indirectly helped him do it. I allowed him to walk over me, chop my heart into pieces, bring his dirt into our bedroom and then shuts the door in the morning and steps out of the house a perfect man.”

“What’s really happening MaNtusi?” MaKhumalo asks with worry.

“Only he can answer that. In six years of my marriage I’ve done my utmost best as a wife.”

“Thakasa what’s happening? What is MaNtusi doing wrong?” MaKhumalo asks, directing her eyes to him.

He shuts his eyes and breathes out in frustration heavily.

“Nothing. Can I go take a bath?” He gets on his feet and stretches his arms. He’s not really asking for their permission to leave, he’s dismissing himself from this meeting either way.

“We are still talking to you,” MaKhumalo says sternly.

He walks past them on the couches and leaves.

Nothile gives her a look; ‘I told you about this’, and leans back on the couch in defeat.

“So you two are just going to fold your arms and not say anything?” MaKhumalo glares at Nkonzo and Bandla.

“How do you expect him to sit in this meeting when you don’t want to listen to his side? Rather continue without him and take it wherever you want it to go,” Nkonzo says. He’s never been shy to express his feelings to anyone.

“When are you getting married Mr-Know-It-All?”
MaKhumalo.

He laughs, “I was quiet and you asked me to talk, I’ve talked and now I’m Mr-Know-It-All?”

“You always have answers to everything except; when are you getting married,” MaKhumalo says and looks at the quiet Bandla.

“I hear you’re moving to Durban,” she says, piercing him with a sharp stare.

“Yes, until Khanyo wakes up,” Bandla says sorrowfully.

“Your sister has been hospitalized as well but you are not...”

He stops her with a hand, “Not now Ma, please!”

He’s the second to leave the meeting before MaKhumalo adjourns it.

“Hhayi-ke, nami ngibone behamba,” Nkonzo says, lifting his hands up and getting off the couch with an innocent look on his face. (I’m leaving because I saw them leaving)

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A while later Nothile walks in and finds Thakasa lying in bed and staring at the ceiling.

“Why did you leave?” she asks, lowering herself next to him.

“Do you really care?”

“I do. Why did you leave? Ma was only trying to help us fix this.”

“Only you and I can fix us. I acknowledge my wrongs, I really do, but I feel like you’re now gathering people to bully me.” He puts his arm over his face and exhales heavily.

“My mother has never thanked me for anything in life, but she’s able to call me names over a few mistakes I made in my marriage.”

Nothile stays silent. MaKhumalo sticks with her no matter what, she cannot speak ill of her after she’s defended her so much.

“I get blamed for everything in this family and Sqalo wants to make that worse. Can’t he see that I’m dealing with a lot already?”

“What did he do?” Nothile asks.

“He says he’s Karl.”

“Who is Karl?”

“A gay book character.”

She gasps in shock, “You mean to tell me that Sqalo sleeps with other boys?”

“He’s confused. He reads too much fiction and watches too many movies.”

“What if he’s really gay like Somizi and...”

“I don’t want to talk about it. We have so much to catch up on as a couple.” He inhales sharply and sits up. He holds her left hand and brushes her ring finger.

“Thank you for coming back. I know there’s a lot I need to make up for, but I promise you one thing, I’ll never put my hands on you ever again.”

“And cheating on me?” she asks.

“That too. It won’t happen again.”

“Okay, let’s start over. What was our routine?”

A smile breaks out of his face.

“No old routines, please. We are starting afresh,

remember.”

“Oh well, that means I don’t have to wake up in the mornings and prepare you for work, cook dinner and do your laundry and....” A kiss shuts her up. She giggles and snuggles on his chest.

“Is my princess still okay?” he asks, brushing her tummy.

“Yes,” she says.

“Can I greet her?” His hand lowers to her waist and brushes its way down.

“Your greeting has to go through me?” she asks, blocking his hand and firmly shutting her legs.

“That’s how I put her in your womb, so why not?” He removes her hand and inserts his knee between her thighs. He kisses her lips and stares down at her with a smile.

“How can you allow me to plant a seed and then not let me water it?” he asks.

“Okay Manqele, you’ve cried enough. But I want you to lick it first,” she says.

He chuckles, “With the same mouth I talk to impepho with?”

“Don’t you finger me with the same hands you hold impepho lid with?”

“At the Ngemas you watched blue movies, didn’t you?” He smiles and shakes his head lightly. “Let me lock the door first. Ngizolimunca lonke leli sobho.” (I’ll suck all this gravy)

She breaks into laughter, “My goodness, be romantic Manqe!”

He laughs and goes to the door and shuts it.

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NOMKHOSI

“He hasn’t asked you anything?” Ndondo asks with a slight frown on her face as they pull up at the doctor’s.

“Nope. But I’m sure that Mom told him everything. I

don't know if he's disappointed or just not getting involved because I'm not his biological child," she says.

"I think you must prepare yourself for the day when he finally asks you about the pregnancy, instead of making things up. Trust me, I know Ngidi, he'll strangle the truth out of you."

"Ndlalifa tried and failed. He's made peace with it, they must all do the same."

"Your life, your decisions babe. I'm just excited about the gender. I know it's a boy. I mean all of us have boys; Andiswa, Thalente and I. It'll be no different for you as well," Ndondo says excitedly.

"And your boys are attached to their fathers," Khosi says, mincing the pain in her voice with a chuckle.

"Yours will be attached to Mommy. It's not a big deal, don't make a storm in a teacup. We are having another baby, that's all that matters!"

She can't help the smile on her face. Ndondo has been a pillar of her strength. The last few weeks were hard but she soldiered on and found her feet.

Today she's finding out the gender of a person she's carrying. It's exciting, yet scary. Days are turning into weeks and weeks are turning into months, in no time she'll meet this person. In a few years, 10 to 16 years, she'll have to sit down and tell him the truth. Maybe she'll be a bad mother for lying and keeping him away from his father. But she's doing what's best under the circumstances.

"You look nervous," the doctor says, smiling, as she pours cold gel on her tummy.

"Ndondo is making me nervous with her chortles," she says, giving Ndondo a glare.

"Grow a spine, Mommy!" Ndondo.

The doctor places a transducer on her tummy.

"Please hold your breath," she asks, moving the transducer around.

Ndondo holds her hand tightly. She's more excited about this than Khosi. In her head she's concluded that there's another boy coming. They'll have their

little creche of ungovernable little men. Andiswa is due to deliver hers soon, it's raining boys everywhere in the family.

"Everything looks normal. Oxygen and blood flow, all good."

She releases a short sigh of relief and watches black and white pictures displaying on the screen.

"So we are looking for a little penis?" the doctor asks and they both laugh nervously.

"Well, I can't see a little penis here," she says.

Ndondo gasps, "She's having a girl?"

"Yes, here is her tiny head..." the doctor points at the screen.

"I told her so!" she titters in excitement.

"No, you said it's a boy!" Khosi calls out.

"No, I didn't. I said it'll be a girl and ta-da!"

She wipes the tear dropping from her eye and laughs at her friend's prevarication. Unfortunately, Ndondo is the only person she can share this joy with. She's

having a baby girl, her own little princess. Now her prayer is that she comes out looking exactly like her. She'll be hers, and hers alone.

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BHAMBATHA

For the first 17 years of his life he was okay. He went to church with his parents, obeyed the rules and lived as an example to his younger brother, Nyezi. It was when he left home for varsity that everything changed. It started with a cigarette at Res with a group of friends. A few months later he was smoking weed and drinking as well. By the time he finished his first year he was a party-animal and heavy drinker. After his parents failed to help him, he was officially disowned from the Myeza legacy. He had to make ends-meet and survive on his own. He made a circle of friends who had a mindset similar to his, at first they targeted small businesses like Kasi tuckshops, street vendors and Indian food

outlets. But greed grew as their standards rose, they went into car hijacking. It maintained their lifestyles; parties, flashy cars, international trips and lavish houses.

He did a few years in jail and came out only to be shown his father's grave. Of course, his mother blamed him for his death as his health took turn for the worst after he was involved in the hijacking of Reverend Nkwanyana that resulted into two fatal deaths.

Him and Nyezi were good despite their different lifestyles. Nyezi still regarded him as his old brother and he was his "Ntwana" even though he hated being addressed like that. They weren't close but they talked once in a while to check on each other. He's a black sheep of the family and he's not making a mess out of it. He's making the most out of the hatred given by his family.

It's really surprising that today they trusted him to fetch his late brother's wife from the hospital. He's been home since he got a phone call that his brother had passed on. He's been behaving himself; no loud

music, no shady friends coming over and no alcohol. He's mourning his brother properly, this time death hits him harder and he cannot point a gun at anyone to console himself.

He drives around in circles, searching for a parking spot and finds none. People are here to check on their sick loved ones, some will receive sad news and some will be going home with their relatives in better conditions.

There's a sheltered parking area reserved for hospital staff only. One car is driving out. It could be one of the doctors, or nurse's, who has finished her shift. He wastes no time, he drives his legendary Gusheshe in and ignores the shouting security guard. This car was his first baby, the first thing he owned after his parents told him he was on his own. Yes, he stole it. But he changed the painting, decorated it his own way and changed the registration number. It holds a special place in his heart.

"That's reserved parking space for Dr Mchunu," the

security guard says, charging towards him.

He pulls the last puff of his cigarette, throws the butt on the ground and steps on it with his shoe.

“Which way to sick women’s ward? My brother’s wife got admitted here two days ago,” he asks.

“Brother, you cannot park here, this is Dr Mchunu’s space, the head doctor of this hospital.”

“I’m not disputing that, I’m asking where I can get my brother’s wife. I found the space empty and I’ll leave it empty. It’s not like I’ll park here forever.” The corner of his lip curves up. Short sleeved shirt gives a peep of his inked arm. It’s pulled over an object poking out of his waist, but not covered enough to hide the shape of it.

The security guard swallows before tearing his eyes away from his waist.

“Be fast and follow me. I don’t want to get into trouble.” He leads him to the correct ward and leaves him at the entrance.

He's never been close to Mawande or tried to know her better. She's just another additional member to the perfect family, all obedient and perfect in every way. He was invited to the wedding but he couldn't attend due to a few family disagreements, but he did send them gifts.

He spots her sitting on her bed next to her packed bag as soon as he walks in.

It's awkward, they've never shared a mere table as a family. On a few occasions they've met, they never exchanged more than greetings.

"Hey, I'm Bhambatha Myeza," he says when he sees the frown on her face.

"I know, I just didn't expect you to fetch me."

Not knowing how to respond to her statement or strike a conversation, he asks if there's anything he needs to do before they leave.

"Please fetch my meds from the pharmacy. I don't know which way it is," she says, handing him a piece of paper. She has dark circles under her eyes and looks awful than he's seen her in recent pictures

Nyezi used to post. Maybe Nyezi would've brought her something to eat, or an energy drink. He saw other visitors carrying food parcels and flowers. He just came here empty-handed, it didn't dawn to him and he knows that he's let his late brother down.

"Are you hungry?" he asks regretfully.

"No," she shakes her head and releases a deep sigh.

"How was the funeral?"

"It went well. I'm really sorry about your loss." It's his lost too, but she must be going through most pain than anyone.

Heavy silence falls between them. He folds a piece of paper and heads out to find the hospital pharmacy.

A text beeps in Mawande's phone and she swipes the screen to check it. It's from Thakasa:

I'LL SEE YOU TOMORROW AND DISCUSS A WAY FORWARD WITH YOUR IN-LAWS. I DON'T WANT

YOU TO LIVE THERE ALONE, IT'S NOT SAFE WITH
CRIMINALS LIKE YOUR BROTHER-IN-LAW ROAMING
AROUND.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 27

THAKASA

Nothile buttons up his shirt and fixes his collar. Things have been good since she came back. She's not snappy, they're back to how they were before Khosi came to the picture.

"How do I look?" he asks, turning to the mirror and looking at his reflection.

"Like a snack. I hope Mangethe ladies will keep their distance; they can look but they can't touch." She stands on her toes and kisses his lips.

"Uneskhwele bo!" he chuckles and pulls her waist closer. It's been so long since he felt this connection between them. His hand massages around her thick bottom and his body quickly reacts warmly to it.

"Don't cook today, they'll eat Nandos and bread," he says.

She laughs, "MaKhumalo will die."

“You’re not her wife, but mine. I don’t want you to cook today, I’ll bring Nandos for dinner. Whoever doesn’t like it will find their way to the kitchen.”

“Okay, I’ll tell them it was your instruction. But what am I going to do at home the whole day?”

“Go shopping and eat ice-cream. Watch a movie and read a book. There are many things women do to have fun. I’ll give you a massage when I come back later.”

“You can give massage? A real massage? Since when Manqele?” she exclaims with shock.

He can do many things, she just hasn’t been exposed to that side of him. But conversations like that can take them ten steps back. He’s not willing to discuss anything that take them back to Nomkhosi.

“I have many hidden talents MaNtusi,” he says dismissively and kisses her cheek before picking a body spray.

“Last night proved it,” she says, her mind graced with dirty memories of what took place between them the

previous night.

“Keep your hands to yourself MaNtusi,” he says, smiling and pushing her hands off. “It’s important that I go, I promise I’ll spend the rest of Thursday with you naked.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” she says and lets go of his waist.

“I love you. See you later.” He kisses her cheek before picking his phone and car keys and heading out.

He passes by his mother’s room to bid goodbye.

“Please don’t be rude there, remember Mawande is now like their own child, we have no right over her and what they decide is right for her,” MaKhumalo says.

“Because of eleven cows now I can’t speak up for my sister? I’m not going there to listen and agree to everything they’re saying, especially if they think Bhambatha or anyone will fill Nyezi’s role in

Mawande.”

“That’s culture. If that’s what they want to do, then they’ll do it. Mawande went there to grow the family. Nyezi is dead, they have no child together; that means his house will be closed. That’s not right. Someone has to help Mawande keep his name alive.”

“We’ll see! Keep well.” He knows how much his mother loves tradition and wants everything to follow culture, but he didn’t expect her to throw Mawande to the wolves so soon after losing her husband.

As he steps out of the house, he bumps into Sqalo making his way in. They’ve never revisited their last conversation or talked at all. There are so many things he ignored; like how he’s never seen him with a girl, his fights with Phethy over friends and that incident when he saw his toenails painted with nail polish. He just doesn’t understand why he can’t be normal like all of them. And this gayness thing, when

does it end? One day he has to make his own family. How will he make children? Who will be their mother? Who'll cook and make his house warm? The sexual activities...urgh no, he mustn't think about that.

"Is Mpilo Dominic?" he asks what he couldn't ask him the previous day.

"Yes," Sqalo says, a bit unprepared to have this conversation in front of the door.

"If I ever see him again here, you and I will have a problem," he says.

This is not what Sqalo expected, he thought they're having a matured conversation, but he nods.

"I cannot deal with this at the moment. There's a lot happening in the family, you're not a child anymore, you see things that are happening and how stressed I've been lately. But when I do get time we'll sit down and talk. Don't do anything stupid." By that he means he mustn't do anything to put the family's reputation at risk. He's addressing this calmer than how Bandla and Sqalo expected, maybe because he's been dealing with a lot lately and he's just not in the mood

to be caught up in more drama.

“Do you understand?” he asks.

Sqalo nods, “I understand.”

“Sharp then, I’ll be home later.”

He’s a bit relieved as he proceeds inside the house. If Thakasa can understand homosexuality and accept him for who he is, it’ll be easy for the rest of the family to accept him. Well, that excludes Bandla, whom he doesn’t recognize as a brother anymore.

He plugs a kettle of boiling water and takes a frying pan to cook noodles. He purposely skipped breakfast because he had some work-out to do. Now he can’t bother his sister-in-law or MaKhumalo, he’ll have noodles and juice and go to school for his mid-day Maths test.

Nothile walks in as he empties a packet of noodles into the frying pan.

“Oh my gosh! Now I’m convinced that all gay people know how to cook,” she says at the door, staring at

him.

He's not only confused, but freaked out as well. Her voice is unnecessarily loud and MaKhumalo is just in the next room. Bandla, yes the brother he hates, is not around to defend him should anything happen. Thakasa just left for Mangethe and Nkonzo is at work. He's literally just alone here.

"I love Dinner At Somizi's. Is he the wife or the husband in his marriage?" she asks, walking in and standing against the counter.

"Sis' MaNtusi, I'm just making noodles to eat before I go to school. I don't know Somizi and his dinners."

"But birds of the same feather flock together. I'm going to search and see if there's any GAY campaigns and workshops you can be a part of."

"That won't be necessary, I have final exams to focus on and varsity next year."

"No, I think it's important for you to know how other gay people like you live and survive. The world is harsh out here, you'll get beaten and killed for sleeping with other boys. It's still a taboo."

MaKhumalo adjusts her glasses and stands at the door eye-narrowed. What did she just hear in her house?!

“Who sleeps with other boys?”

They both turn their heads and they see MaKhumalo. Sqalo’s eyes pop out of their sockets while Nothile’s frown disperses with relief.

“I was just telling Sqalo how harsh the world is against people of his kind. There’s a young boy who was recently killed in Durban for being gay. It’s better if he attends workshops with other gay people and learn how they live and protect themselves against the society,” she says.

“Why would he do that? My son is nothing like those people,” MaKhumalo asks, staring at her with her ire stifled.

Nothile looks at Sqalo eyes-widened.

“I’m sorry, I thought everyone knew,” she says.

“Sqalo!” MaKhumalo rasps and glares at him.

“Mama I was born this way,” he says timidly.

“Which way?”

“Gay.”

MaKhumalo sweats bullets in an instant and takes her glasses off. This is not happening to her. In her own house!

“I gave birth to a baby boy. You have a penis between your legs to prove it. You’re not going to do that nonsense here, my boy. Never! If you are tired of being a child I gave birth to, then pack your bags and go live where they taught you that it’s possible to change who God created you to be.”

“Oh my gosh, Ma!” Nothile gasps and covers her mouth.

“No, he better think twice before thinking this is a field of disrespect and evilness. Who have you seen gay at the Khumalos and here at the Manqueles? Not even a goat or chicken.” She turns back to the lounge, throwing her hands up and shouting.

Sqalo switches the stove off and storms to the door.

“Sqalo your noodles?” Nothile yells after him.

“I’m not hungry anymore,” he opens the door and walks out furiously.

“Do you mind if I eat them? I’m crazing something cheesy...Sqalo?”

He’s gone.

She releases a heavy sigh and opens the cupboard to get a bowl for dishing.

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THE MYEZAS

Two uncles are present by Mrs Myeza’s side. Then there’s Mzamo who’s a son to the first uncle and Halalisani, a cousin to Nyezi who’s been voted as a perfect match to Mawande. He has a Myeza blood running in his veins and he’s already married to his first wife, Thandiwe. It won’t hinder his life in anyway if he comes and keeps his cousin’s house standing. As a beneficiary to all Nyezi’s estates, it’s important that Mawande stays married to the Myezas and not

take the inheritance elsewhere. But right now it's only discussions, Mawande still needs to mourn for her husband traditionally.

"Makoti will mourn properly and nobody will fight her over the inheritance. But we have a few conditions," Mrs Myeza says.

Thakasa glares at her with a murky expression on his face. This is just what he expected from them!

"And what conditions are those? She just buried her husband," he asks.

"Halalisani has to fill in Nyezi's role. We cannot let go of KaManqele just because Nyezi is no more. She still has duties to fulfill as a wife and children to bear for the Myezas."

There's an applause coming from the door.

Bhambatha walks in wearing a tight, ripped jean and white sneakers. He's wearing a short sleeved shirt, so all his tattoos are out on display and 'attracting the devil'.

"Anikanyi nama-salad omngcwabo kaBafo kodwa senabelana ngomfazi wakhe," he says, standing in

the middle of the house clapping his hands loud.
(You haven't even shitted the salads you ate on his funeral but you're already handing out his wife)

"Bhambatha you're not welcomed to this meeting," his mother says with disgust.

"This is my brother's house and he's never told me I'm not welcome." He squeezes himself between the chairs of his uncles and sits.

"Go on, I'm not here to stop the meeting," he says and throws a dagger look at Halalisani looking like a groom on My Perfect Wedding across the room.

Sighs breeze around the room. He's not someone they needed in this meeting. The funeral is over, why is he still around?

Thakasa clears his throat, "I'm sorry Mrs Myeza, but that's not going to happen. Mawande married Nyezi, she's not a toy to be passed around the family. If you have any regrets, formally represent them to us and we'll compensate wherever we should."

Bhambatha looks at him. He's impressed with his attitude, which is a surprise given that he looks no

different from anyone in this room. Perfect God's saints! He wouldn't be surprised if they all get tiled rooms with aircons in heaven.

"That's not how things are done Manqele. You personally handed her over, legally and traditionally I'm a mother to Mawande and I have the right to take decisions regarding her marriage," Mrs Myeza says. Her brother-in-law nods in agreement.

"I thought the Manqeles knew culture, Makoti came here to grow the family and that won't stop because Nyezi has passed on. The legacy has to continue, she still needs to provide an heir to the Myezas," he says.

"But that wasn't a condition before marriage. Nyezi never set those rules for her. They married out of love and said 'till death do them apart' and now it's done them apart," Thakasa says.

Halalisani leans forward in his head and wipes his sweaty face. He didn't argue when the idea was presented to him, Mawande is a beautiful young woman, any man would be lucky to share a bed with

her.

“But culture doesn’t stand against remarrying into the family if the one you came to passes on. I’m not going to destroy what Nyezi built, I’ll carry on where he left off and make sure that his name lives on,” he says.

“Yet your wife keeps bearing children that look like Sgubudu across the street. What makes you think you can carry on where my brother left off?”

Bhambatha asks and everyone grunts beneath their breaths. He’s not even part of this family anymore, the only thing linking them together is blood.

“Bhambatha please leave or shut up. This is a family meeting and you have no reason to be still here, the funeral is over,” his uncle scolds him furiously.

He just waves him off with his hand. He’s not someone he takes seriously, not after he saw him being entertained by young girls in his wife’s absence. He’s just another wolf under a sheep’s skin.

“Does this mean one of you has been filling my father’s role too?” His eyes move from his uncles to

his mother. He snaps his brows as he waits for an answer.

“KaManqele is still young and childless, don’t compare pears and peaches,” Mrs Myeza says.

“It’s called ‘apples and pears’, anyway I’ll be killing anyone I see coming out of my brother’s bedroom, unless if it’s consented by his wife,” he says, looking at Halalisani with smugly grin on his face.

As usual, they’re not pleased with his threats. He’s not a part of the family anymore and he’s never cared about anything that happens in the family. He calls culture and religion absurd, so why does he care now?

“You wanted her to yourself?” Halalisani asks.

“Mina ngiyashela, ngiqonywe. I don’t wait for dead relatives’ wives, you can see I’m charming,” he says, flaunting his 9ct Figaro chain that’s worn over a T-shirt.

He lies on his back with his knees up and clicks his tongue.

“Kukwamsunu wenja la!” he says loud for everyone to hear.

“Bhambatha don’t disrespect your uncles like that! That language is not welcomed here,” Mrs Myeza says sternly. She can’t even lift her eyes because of the disgrace brought by this child.

“Yeah, the only language you talk is who is going to fuck my brother’s wife before he even rot in his grave. A young girl that never got a chance to experience life is being passed to this wireheaded son of a motherless goat.”

Thakasa cannot openly agree with him due to the choice of his words, but he’s on the same page as him.

“Maybe we can have this conversation another day, when Mawande has taken off black clothes and emotionally fit to make her own choices. But for now I have a request of my own,” he says.

Halalisani is not impressed by this at all. He was ready to go home and tell Thandiwe that she’s in a polygamous marriage and has to understand that he

won't always be home to her nagging ass.

"We are listening Manqele," says the uncle, glaring at him.

"I'm not okay with her living alone. It's not safe," he says and glances at Bhambatha who lifts the corner of his lip disgustedly in return and practices his right to remain silent.

"I want her to come back home to be around people who can take care of her emotionally and help her adjust to this new, harsh reality."

"We also love her and we can support her," Mrs Myeza says.

"I'm not disputing that, but it's not the same. I'm not saying she must come with me today, do all the rituals and then let her come home," he says.

"No, that's not how things are done Ma," Halalisani gets on his feet with a disapproving look on his face.

Bhambatha lifts his head up slowly, throws a look of significance to him and lies down again.

He inhales sharply and returns to back his seat with

his tail tucked between his legs.

“We’ll see after the rituals. I also need to have a personal conversation with MaKhumalo , woman to woman,” Mrs Myeza says.

This doesn’t sit well with Thakasa because he knows where his mother stands as far as this thing of Mawande being wifed by another Myeza man is concerned. He’s fighting this alone, well Bhambatha is on his side as well, but that won’t count if both mothers reach an agreement.

“I guess we have reached the end of our meeting, hopefully the following one will bear better fruits,” says the uncle, lifting himself off the chair and exiting through the door.

“Those who were rightfully attendants of this meeting, please remain seated, a girl will bring refreshments,” Mrs Myeza says as she shoots a look at Bhambatha and gathers her sandals at the door.

“Mxm, ama-refreshments akwaMsunu!” Bhambatha dusts himself up and excuses himself from the meeting he was never rightfully a part of. He’s used

to the treatment they give him and he treats them the exact way. There's no love lost between him and any of these people.

But before he walks out, he gives Halalisani a look that spits fire and bullets. Halalisani curls up in the corner and drops his eyes shamefully.

Thakasa hides his smile with an elbow. He'd never have someone like Halalisani become his brother-in-law. Never!

A text beeps. He can check it since the meeting has ended.

It's Bandla:

I TRIED TO PROTECT SQALO BECAUSE I KNEW THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT YOU AND YOUR MOTHER WOULD DO. PRAY THAT YOU FIND HIM ALIVE, THAKASA!!!!

He's confused.

What did he do?

What happened to Sqalo? He left him home and said they'll talk some other day. That surely wasn't such a

bad thing to say under circumstances.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 28

BANDLA

Critical but stable; nothing has really changed, but she's in best hands and that's what matters. He goes to the hospital three times a day, Mandulo has grown used, not friendly, to him. Despite the opinions he has about him, he still advised him to go home and appease to the ancestors and ask them to fight with Khanyo. Surprisingly, he listened and left for Bergville accompanied by Nolwazi.

He drops Gugu outside the building and drives back to the hotel. Sqalo's message beeps in his phone as he prepares for a bath.

Everything is written in riddles but he can pick suicidal thoughts from it. Thakasa and MaKhumalo's names are mentioned, it's not clear what they did or how he ended up packing his bags and leaving home.

The first thing he does is send Thakasa a fire-blazing

message, then he rushes to take a bath before preparing to drive home. He keeps imagining worse scenarios and partly blaming himself. He didn't do anything at all to help Sqalo.

He jumps out of the shower and dresses up in a snap. A knock disturbs him, he releases a grunt of annoyance and fixes his look and attends to it.

He expected a cleaner or security guard, but there's one and only Efe. His forehead creases into a frown as he stares at him shocked.

"I saw you coming in, I didn't know we share the hotel," Efe says with a thin smile to calm down his nerves.

"Oh, how can I help you?" Bandla asks coldly. They were never friends, their relationship was purely business.

"Did I catch you at the wrong time?" Efe asks.

"Yes," he says sternly. All he can think about is Sqalo roaming the streets with his bags.

“Let me not keep you, maybe we can talk some other time.”

“About what?” he asks.

“My man, I need help. You were my big customer, ever since you stopped requesting services business has been slow.”

He cocks up his eyebrow, waiting for wider explanation because this here, doesn't make any sense.

“I need R300k urgently. You know me, my friend. I won't do any funny shit, I'll pay you back before the month ends.”

“I'm not a loan shark Efe!” He's in disbelief. Why would he think him, out of all people, would give him money?

“I helped your girlfriend,” Efe says.

“Because you were helping your friend, Nolwazi. I didn't hire you.”

“I'm just asking you a favor. We are not strangers.”

“I'm sorry, I can't help you,” Bandla says with a deep

sigh and closes the door on his face. Now he feels unsafe in this hotel, how come they have shady men roaming around and knocking on other people's rooms?

Maybe he should cancel the days he's extended and looks for another hotel nearby. Another thought dismisses that; he's probably just overreacting.

He fastens his seatbelt and holds a brief conversation with the security guard, it's a guy he knows from school. Whatsapp indicates a new message, he opens it immediately thinking it could be Sqalo. But it's a video with a familiar face in what looks like a hotel room.

He presses 'play' and his own face pops up on the screen with two naked women lying in bed. This took place about a year ago in Onomo Hotel. He was still single but that wouldn't justify the position he is in as a man of God and well-respected businessman.

And this video has been edited, there's a recent date inserted on top, giving out wrong and twisted ideas.

Whoever this person is, he's out to ruin his life.
Khanyo will assume the worst when she wakes up.

He sends a reply: WHAT DO YOU WANT?

It singly-ticks and not delivers.

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THAKASA

He's not sure what to expect as he drives in and parks his car in the yard. It's quiet, but Nkonzo's car is here, which means he's home. He locks the car and makes his way to the house.

His mother is knitting on the couch as usual, but it's easy to smell trouble in the air.

"Ma, where's Sqalo?" he asks.

It's like she was a bomb waiting to explode on him. She pushes the wool basket aside and adjusts her glasses.

"Thakasa what nonsense are you promoting in my

house?” she asks, breathing heavily.

“What am I promoting?” Thakasa asks confused.

“Not only do you bury your disgrace and mistreat the poor MaNtusi, now you’re allowing Sqalo to sleep with other boys here in my house?” she asks, pointing with her fingers and glaring at him. If he was still a teenager she would’ve thrown the basket at him.

“You knew about the disgrace this boy is doing and kept quiet! What kind of an example are you setting? What kind of a brother are you? I trusted you with....” He leaves before she can finish and that furtherly pisses her off. “You’re turning me into a laughing stock, huh!” she yells after him.

Thakasa bangs the door on his way out and heads to his extended rondavel. Nothile will have a better explanation than the lioness that’s his mother.

He finds her soaking her feet in a basin of warm water. She’s wearing a gown and looking relaxed, which is what he wanted. But now he has to disturb

her because of the urgency of this matter.

“MaNtusi, do you know where Sqalo is? He sent a confusing message to Bandla and he’s worried that he might harm himself wherever he is,” he asks.

“I saw him packing his bags and leaving. He didn’t say anything,” she says.

“And you didn’t ask anything?” he asks, appalled.

“He had a fight with Ma about his sexuality and she told him to change or leave.”

“How did Ma find out? I told him I’d handle it when the time is right.”

“I didn’t know it was a secret Manqeale. Ma overheard me talking to him about it.”

His veins throb visibly. His forehead furrows into a frown.

“Why would you talk to him about it? Did I say take it outside this room?” he asks furiously.

Her eyes drop regretfully.

“And you’re soaking your feet like nothing happened,

yet my little brother is out there in the dark with his bags," he asks.

"I'm sorry, okay? I didn't know it was going to escalate like this. I thought everyone was aware of it," she says.

"Damn it, MaNtusi, damn it!" He bangs the door on his way out and runs to the car.

Nkonzo stands in front of his rondavel door and stares at him. He didn't know anything. Mawande, Bandla, Thakasa and Phethy all knew about Sqalo's sexuality and kept it a secret. It's like a huge slap on his face- how did he not notice? He's lived with this boy for 17years.

"There's a friend of his that stays at 19 in Chappies. Maybe you can start there, his name is Mangi Xulu," he says to Thakasa.

"And you're just going to stand there and do nothing while your blood brother is missing?" Thakasa asks.

"No, I'm not just standing and doing nothing." He

walks back inside the rondavel and shuts the door behind him.

Thakasa sighs and gets in the car and drives off.

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It took him time to find the right house. He had to ask around, get misdirected and buy a few cigarettes before getting the right house.

A lady opens the door for him. She has a purse in her hand and mounds of make-up on her face like she's ready to go clubbing somewhere.

"You are Sqalo's brother?" she asks, chewing her gum like a goat chewing grass leftovers in the morning.

"Yes, have you seen him? They say his friend, Mangi, lives here," he asks, staring at her desperately.

"They're in the dining room. Is your family so backward that you all don't understand homosexuality?"

He's relieved that Sqalo is here and safe, but it's not

this woman's place to question his family and how they choose to handle this matter.

"Thanks for keeping him," he says and walks past her, making his way inside the house.

She was on her way out, she struts out in her stilettos and leaves.

The whole dining room is filled with smoke. He chokes at the door and tries to narrow his eyes in search for Sqalo amongst bodies lying on the couches.

They're not smoking a cigarette or tobacco roll, they're inhaling from a thin tube on the floor. Fury rides through his veins as he spots him in Nike tracksuits, lying next to a bottle of alcohol.

"This is what you left home to do?" he asks, lifting him off the couch with his clothes.

He can't even stand steadily. His head and vision are clouded by this smoke filling up the house.

He has to press the last button of control in his veins

and stops his hand from smacking his stupid face.

He drags him out of the house, all the way to the car parked on the street below the gate.

Now the cloud is wearing off, he's slowly becoming aware of who's gripping his clothes so aggressively.

"Bhuti," he says in shock mixed with fear.

Thakasa shoves him inside the car, at the back, and closes the door.

"Why are you doing this?" he asks once he's settled on his seat.

"Bhuti I asked you to let the family know because I trusted you. But instead you told Sis' MaNtusi, I'm gay but I'm not her Somizi. Just like you're straight but you're not Siya Kolisi. I hate what you did! I thought you'd be better than Bandla but you sold me out cheaply."

He releases a sigh and starts the car. Obviously, Sqalo is angry and unreasonable at this point. Oh, he's also high. They can't have any meaningful conversation.

“We are going to Hlomendlini. You are going to have a cold bath, unuka insangu. Then you’re going to throw up all the alcohol you drank. I don’t need you to add to my problems. You being gay is already a weight on my shoulders,” he says.

Sqalo doesn’t respond, he lies down on the seats and shuts his eyes.

This is their father’s old house. Bandla likes it here, but only if he’s craving lots of privacy. They haven’t done much to change it because its originality is a memory on itself. They have an aunt who pops in frequently to clean up.

He fills a bathtub with cold water and calls Sqalo in.

“Get in the bath and scrub the weed off,” he instructs.

Reluctantly, Sqalo strips his clothes off. Thakasa is standing by the door and staring at him.

“Balala nawe noma ulala nabo?” he asks. (You fuck them or they fuck you)

It’s a rather uncomfortable question but the sharp

stare tells him he has no choice but to answer.

“I do both,” he says.

Disgust canopies Thakasa’s face and he tears his eyes away from his naked body.

“Have you ever slept with a girl?” he asks.

“Yes, twice. First, willingly and second, Bandla forced me.”

“And?” Thakasa raises his eyebrow.

“I still like boys,” he says.

A sigh! He’s not oblivious to life, he knows about ‘extra’ sexualities but he’s never thought a person of his blood would ever be one of ‘those’ people.

“What do you want me to do?” he asks in almost-whisper. His role as the leader of the family puts him in a compromising position. MaKhumalo is right for kicking him out because in their culture, people of the same sex cannot mate and build a family. His father would’ve done the same thing- he certainly knows this- but before he’s Mangele the senior brother, he’s Thakasa, Sqalo’s brother. Can he really

disown his 17 year old brother because of who he decides to have sex with? Does it make sense? He slept with Nomkhosi, her being a woman means nothing, he wasn't supposed to sleep with her because it defied what the Manqeles stand for. But he did it anyway because it made him happy. Sqalo continued to see him as a brother, he didn't say 'you're no longer my brother because you sleep with women you're not married to.' Now he has to disown him because he's sleeping with people of the same sex as him. It's not logically fair!

Sqalo splashes cold water over his face and cringes as it drenches into his skin.

"Sqalo, what do you want me to do?" Thakasa repeats his question, louder this time.

"Protect me. I don't want to die for what I do with my penis. MaNtusi said I'll get killed."

He swallows hard, this is not an answer he expected. He thought he'd want to be kept and accepted in the family.

"Nobody is going to kill you," he says with a

wrenching heart. It doesn't make sense why MaNtusi would instill fear in him like this?

"I'm sorry," he says too low for Sqalo to hear as he turns to the door and walks out.

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It's around 8pm when Thakasa parks his car in the yard. The back door opens and Sqalo climbs out. He has all his bags with him. He heads to his rondavel while Thakasa goes to the family house.

Nothile is sweating and running around the kitchen like a headless chicken.

His words come back to bite him. He lets out a heavy breath by the door, it completely slipped his mind.

He walks in and holds her full waist as she stirs the stew pot.

"Do you need help?" he asks.

"No, I'm almost done," she says, shrugging him off.

He plants the unwelcome kiss on her cheek before heading to the lounge where the family is gathered in front of the TV.

Bandla is home? He frowns and goes to his chair.

“Did you find him?” Nkonzo asks.

“Yes, he’s putting his bags in his room and coming.”

Most sigh out in relief, except MaKhumalo.

“Coming where?” she asks.

“Here, to his family.”

“Is he back to his senses?”

“Ma please, I had a long day. You haven’t even asked how the meeting went with the Myezas.”

“I’m not living with a moffie in my house. It’s either he leaves or I leave,” MaKhumalo says.

Everyone is shocked. They all didn’t just accept Sqalo, except Phethy and Nkonzo, but eventually they had to accept that they can’t change his sexuality or the DNA running in his blood.

Sqalo walks into a room heavy with rejection and animosity. He looks around, at everyone, but nobody can hold his stare.

“Ma?” He looks at MaKhumalo whose face is a nest of disgust and hatred.

“Only one of us can stay in this house Sqalo. It’s either you leave or I leave,” she says, looking at him like he’s a piece of shit.

“MaKhumalo you cannot leave the house you built with your husband. That wouldn’t be fair,” Thakasa says.

Sqalo’s eyes fill with tears. He ran away because he knew that Bandla was going to do something after receiving his text. But right now he doesn’t have a plan. Mangi’s sister can take him in, but for how long? He can’t go to Mpilo’s mother’s house because Mpilo is not ready to come out of the closet yet, and MaMtshali isn’t too different from MaKhumalo.

Thakasa looks at him, “You’re still young to be on your own, MaNtusi and I will leave with you so that MaKhumalo can live peacefully in her house.”

Nothile's mouth drops open at the passage. She stands motionlessly as she digests her husband's impulsive decision.

"I'm also leaving," Bandla says with no single emotion attached. Him and Sqalo share a look. They don't talk as much as they used to. There's so much hate between them, but it's built on a foundation of love.

"Where are we going to live though?" Nkonzo asks. He's coming as well, to wherever Thakasa and Sqalo are going.

Phethy is on the fence. What would life be without her mother? This sibling united force is awesome as it has poured a bucket of sweat over MaKhumalo but it's not thoroughly thought.

Thakasa stands up, Nothile is staring at him with her eyes popped out of their sockets.

"Sqalo fetch your bags and put them in my car." He turns to Nkonzo and Bandla who are still seated.

"Are you two coming?"

Bandla stands first. MaKhumalo lets out a shrill cry.

“What did I ever do to you Thakasa?” she asks in tears.

“One thing Baba asked from me was that I protect my siblings. How do you expect me to protect Sqalo if I don’t live with him?” He’s annoyed, his tone is unintendedly sharper.

“So you are going to take all my children?” she asks.

He pulls out his hands and displays them on her face.

“Do you see any of your children in my hands? Accept the assorted fruits of your womb or watch my father’s children scatter around the world with no place to call a home.”

Nothile shakes her head and holds his arm,

“Manqe!e, this is not how you should speak to your mother.”

“Let him be MaNtusi. My voice doesn’t matter in this house. They must stay and do whatever they want, I hope my husband is watching over me and seeing the mess he left me in.” She stands up and leaves

furiously. Minutes later there's a loud prayer coming from her room.

"I will check on her, Phethy will dish up for everyone," Nothile says with worry and follows the passage to MaKhumalo's room.

Nobody says anything afterwards, they all sit as Phethy makes her way to the kitchen.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 29

BANDLA

It didn't take long before the video-sender revealed himself. It's none other than Efe. It doesn't make sense why he'd blackmail him for a flippin' loan. They never had any problems with their transactions, it was all business and confidential. He doesn't owe him anything!

But right now his reputation is hanging on a thin line. They're meeting in front of the hotel pool to hatch it out. He spots him wearing a light blue kaftan and matching kufi. He's with two other gentlemen, just for control.

"My man," he says with a grin, looking at Bandla as he walks around the wooden benches to take a seat.

"I'm not your man. I want this to be private," Bandla says, glancing at the two men standing beside him.

Efe gives them a nod and they step aside without

breathing a word. They stand not so far away, but far enough for them to have their private conversation.

“So you are blackmailing me?” he asks Efe with a few lines creased on his forehead.

“I’m just motivating you to do the right thing, my friend. My mother is not well back in Nigeria, I need money urgently for her surgery.” Surprisingly, he’s right in his own world, this is just a small favor that he needs and it’s unfortunate that he had to pull a stunt for Bandla to take him seriously.

“And if I don’t help you you’ll publicize the video?” Bandla asks.

“I’ll have no choice but to do it.”

“And you’re going to make money from the video?”

Efe chuckles out in disbelief, “You wouldn’t risk your reputation like that!”

“Why wouldn’t I?” Bandla asks, narrowing his eye.

“Because Khanyo won’t think twice before she leaves you. I know how she is like, that’s why I ended things before she caused drama and involved my

wife.”

Now, this is a shock!

“You ended things?” he asks with a frown.

“We broke up not so long ago.”

With a hard swallow, Bandla nods and exhales heavily. Nolwazi lied to him!

“I need cash, I cannot go to the bank,” Efe says.

“I’m not giving you money Efe.” He gets on his feet, ready to leave. But Efe taps his shoulder.

“My friend, you’re not thinking this carefully. Think about your girlfriend, your family and business. I don’t want to talk about church, headlines will slam everything associated with your religion.”

“I don’t care,” he says.

“But I’m sure your family will care.”

That’s not far from the truth. Thakasa will take a fall for his mess and deal with the consequences of his actions. That’s definitely not what he needs in the midst of Sqalo’s issue, shaky marriage and forever

somber life. And it will certainly paint his church bad; one rotten apple spoils the whole barrel.

Efe's face brightens up with hope as he stands frozen on his steps.

"Her brother already doesn't trust you, him finding out about this may..."

Bandla grunts lowly.

"Fine!" He hisses and turns back to his seat. "But I want the memory stick with that video, or anything that you illegally filmed. You're supposed to be a legal criminal, to at least get a few things straight."

"How soon can you organize the money?" Efe asks, paying no attention to what he just said, he's just overwhelmed with joy and relief. His life is being threatened and he needs to get his family back to Nigeria as soon as possible.

There's an extra company they're both not aware of, Gugu. She's standing behind them and listening attentively to the conversation.

"Let's meet tomorrow afternoon, R300k is a lot of

money,” Bandla says.

Efe notices Gugu and clears his throat.

“Sure, take care my man.” His and Gugu’s eyes are fixed on each other. She doesn’t say a word until Bandla turns his head to her and nearly faints with shock.

“Gugu, what are you doing here?” he asks.

She slowly shifts her eyes from Efe and looks at him.

“We need to go to the hospital,” she says.

Fear rides down his veins. He feels sweat exuding under his arms and his chest pounding against his chest like a drum.

“What happened?” he asks.

“Just come,” she says and throws another look at Efe.

She’s not much of a talker, she’s neither close to Efe nor Bandla. Even Mandulo, he’s just a man who’s a brother to her best friend. Her opinions are Rands, the talkative Gugu emerges only when there’s money involved, or when she’s around her friends.

There's no time for goodbyes, not that they were necessary anyway, Bandla lifts his suddenly-heavy body and follows Gugu. There is Range Rover Evoque with tinted windows that's waiting for her. As Bandla rushes to the lifts to fetch his phone and car keys from his room, she walks to the car and talks to the man wearing black tuxedo and dark shades behind the steering wheel. They chat briefly before the car reverses and drives off, leaving her behind.

She paces around the reception area, ignoring piercing stares from the hotel management gathered around the front desk.

A few minutes pass before Bandla steps out of the lift and rushes to her.

"Okay, let's go," he says out of breath and leads the way to the guest parking area.

She's a little Madam, she puts her huge sunglasses on and fastens the seatbelt. Bandla is sweating and

anxious behind the wheel, Gugu's quiet nature isn't helping either. He's impatiently eager to know if there's been any good or worse change in Khanyo's situation.

"What R300k are you giving Efe tomorrow?" she asks randomly.

The question chokes Bandla; he wasn't aware that she had listened to some parts of the conversation.

"Just...just to thank him...for saving Khanyo," he says uneasily. Lying isn't one of his skills and he hates it.

"Do you personally know him?"

"Yes....no...." He releases a deep breath and fixes his eyes on the road.

"Not all help is good help. I just feel sorry for whoever was involved in stabbing Khanyo because South Africa is too small. Just 9 provinces, 53 landports, 9 seaports and 23 airports to exit."

Bandla glances at her with a frown. He's never heard her speak so plucky. And why does this sound more than just a threat? Despite her living and immersing

herself in a similar insouciant lifestyle as Nolwazi and Khanyo, she's still a Primness and elegant in her own way.

"Dust settles, I don't!" She pulls her phone out of the purse and types a text like the keyboard stays in her manicured fingers.

Bandla keeps his mouth shut. Maybe he doesn't know Khanyo's friends as he thought he does. He's not out for blood, which seems to be the case with Gugu, but he also wants the perpetrators punished, whether by God or human justice. But his prayer definitely won't fall on deaf ears; it never does.

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KHANYO

I'm stitched and everytime I try to move my body reminds me of it. I've been in a coma for days and I don't remember half of the things that transpired prior the accident or whatever happened that put me

here. The police have been here with their journals and Coke-bellies, but the doctor asked them to give me some time. He keeps coming and checking my responsiveness. Judging by how skittery they are, I'm not one of their normal patients. I know exactly who I am despite being out of the coma for less than two hours. I know that I was coming from my boyfriend's place before boarding a taxi on Field Street. It's what happened after I got in it that I cannot remember. But I'm Khanyo Mayise- Makhanyi to Mandulo, my one and only brother- and I have two best friends. The doctor said Gugu was called and she's on her way. Mandulo and Nolwazi are away, that's what he said when I asked and he didn't have more information on their whereabouts.

I'm feeling drowsy again. It must be the injection they keep giving me for pain relief. But as I lower my eyelids I see a figure walking toward my bed and my eyes fling open.

Trust Gugu to wear culotte pants and stilettos while I'm fighting for my life on a deathbed.

“If it was you dying I’d be in rags and crying my eyeballs out,” I say as she stands next to me, blinking her eyes rapidly.

“Fuck you!” she says, tears dropping down. She covers her mouth and silences her sobs.

I cannot give her a hug, my body hurts. But I reach to her hand and squeeze it. I wasn’t going to die, not under MaSibiya’s watch!

“They’re going to pay for this,” she says, wiping off her tears.

“Babe, I’m alive, that’s what matters. Leave everything else in God’s hands,” I say.

She shakes her head, looking at the tube injected on my arm. I don’t know what’s gracing her mind but I don’t want her to do anything stupid.

“Now fill me up, what’s been happening? Where is Mandulo and Nolwazi? And mostly, where is...” I don’t finish, the last person in question is walking in slowly.

His eyes are fixed on me. Lower lip latched between

his teeth and his eyes trying to lock back a thousand tear drops.

He stands next to the bed, his hands are tucked in his pockets. He tears his eyes off me and looks outside the window. His chest bounces; one hand comes out of the pocket and tucks his forehead.

“Gugu please give us a moment,” I say, trying not to break down at the weak sight in front of me.

She’s not sure what’s happening, but because she’s Gugu and not Nolwazi, she leaves with no questions asked.

Now I don’t know what to say to him. What do one say to a crying man that’s looking outside the window?

“I’m sorry I scared you,” I say. It only makes sense to apologize when the other person is crying.

He lifts his T-shirt to his face and wipes it. Still not looking at my direction.

“You’ll never ride a taxi, ever again,” he says and

sniffs back tears threatening to ruined his now dry face. "I'll never let anyone hurt you again."

He turns around and I realize how worn-out he actually looks. It's like he's been deprived of sleep and food for weeks.

"I'm happy to see you," I say, hoping to bring a smile, or a ghost of it, on his face.

But he's not done crying.

"How was I supposed to live without you?" He squeezes my hand and buries his face on it. A waterfall breaks behind my eyes.

"You're not living without me. Not now, not ever, please trust me."

Through pain, I pull his face up and force him to look at me. We are both crying.

"It wasn't your fault, or anyone's, I was a bull in a China shop and I nearly paid with my life. Just like everyone, I have a purpose to fulfill, God has given me a second chance and I won't take it for granted."

"I thought you wouldn't make it. I was so scared. I

don't think I've ever been this scared in my life. From now on, I promise to protect you, to guide you and to put your safety above everything else."

I can't help the smile cracking off my messy face. He's the one, I know this with certainty. I have a second chance to live and rewrite my wrongs, I pray not to make a mess out of it.

Then he asks the question everybody is asking.

"What happened when you got in the taxi Khanyo?"

"I don't know," I shrug my shoulders.

It's strange that I'd forget the most important part of the case whereas I remember everything that happened before that hour vividly.

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NKONZO

Sqalo is home, all of them are, except Bandla. But things aren't the same between MaKhumalo,

Thakasa and Sqalo. His consolation is that Sqalo is finishing school soon and moving out for varsity. Otherwise it wouldn't be healthy for him to live in a home that lacks love and communication like this.

He's still digesting events that took place that day; Sqalo bravely stood up for himself, nothing and nobody stood on his way. He's who he is and he loves who he loves, and that's that!

He thinks to himself; maybe he owes himself that chance as well. But he's never imagined himself loving beyond the temple. He'd never have a house that's religiously divided. The question is; would Tema be interested in joining his church? He hasn't seen anybody else, his heart has only been captured by her.

A knock disturbs his train of thoughts. It's Phethy carrying a pillow and packet of crisps. He shifts in bed and creates space for her because he knows that she'll be here for hours.

"Please turn on your Wi-Fi hotspot," she says,

climbing in bed and swiping the screen of her phone to life.

“This has nothing to do with school work,” Nkonzo says, pulling his phone out and grunting with annoyance.

“It’s school work, I’m doing a research,” she says with an eye roll.

“Oh, you log on Facebook for your research? School must be cool!”

She giggles and lies on her back with her knees up. He lets her be because at this point everyone is tired of calling her out about ukumisa amadolo as a girl.

“Do you remember that you said anytime I need to talk, I must come to you?”

“Yes, I remember.” He frowns slightly and turns his eyes to her.

“I don’t like talking to Sis’ MaNtusi because she’s Ma’s best pillowfriend,” she says.

Now he’s wondering about the seriousness of this talk. It’s easy when he talks to the brothers and

Mawande because she's an adult. A teenage girl?!

He clears his throat, "Well, you can talk to me."

"You won't be judgmental?"

Of course, he'll be judgmental!

"No," he shakes his head.

She releases a short breath of relief and sits up, hugging the pillow on her chest.

"Is it possible to lose virginity through fingering?"

Chest tightens! No, no, no!

This not happening, who the fuck is fingering his sister?

His eyes are going to pop out.

"Phethy did you....."

"The answer is yes or no? You said you won't be judgmental."

He said that???

Deep breath!

"No," he says with a hard swallow.

“Great! So it doesn’t show?”

“During virginity testing? I don’t know, but I highly doubt it.” He had a bottle of water around, he searches for it and gulps down a huge sip. “But it doesn’t mean it’s okay,” he says.

“Why?” she asks, frowning.

Why is it not okay by the way?

“Ummm, because dirt hides in the nails and carry germs. The...the...the...” How to say vagina to your little sister and not look like a freak?

“The kitty-cat is sensitive. You can’t allow people’s fingers in there, womb cancer isn’t a myth.”

Did he just say fingering causes womb cancer? Well, he did and she’s scared AF.

“We didn’t learn about that in Life Sciences,” she says, squashing the pillow like it had anything to do with her getting fingered.

“Not everything is in the school curriculum. You have parents to teach you some of the things.”

“MaKhumalo cannot teach me anything, she’d kick

my butt right away.”

They both laugh but it's not funny. Children should be able tackle any topic with their parents without any fear or shame. But with their mother it's a different story. Nothile was supposed to step in Mawande's shoes as a big sister, but that one can't keep anything from MaKhumalo.

“Can a guy feel it if you've been in a certain position with a boy before, even if it didn't include penetration?” she asks.

Honestly, no black brother deserves to go through this!

His head is screaming 'YES' but he has to be honest on this one.

“No,” he says.

“And if there was penetration?”

He gives her a look, “We are not stupid Phethy. Of course it's easy to tell.”

Now he's curious. Is she sexually active or just gathering information for future references.

“Can I tell if a guy has done it before as a girl?” she asks.

He can't help, but laugh at this one.

“I've never been a girl before, so I don't know.”

“Mhhh.”

He clears his throat, “Can I ask a question as well?”

“I know what you want to ask and the answer is no I don't have a boyfriend.”

Now he's confused.

“Then how did...?”

“Mnqobi and I are just friends.”

More confusing!

“You let a 'friend' touch you?” he asks.

“Curiosity,” she shrugs her shoulders.

“Of what? What are you in a rush to know.”

“Squirting.”

Oh Shembe! These children need to grow under the ground, isolated from one another because, wow.

He sigh out heavily.

“I have a female friend.” No, they’re not friends, she’s Thakasa’s PA whom he has a huge crush on. “I’ll ask if she can talk to you, girl to girl. I don’t want to have this conversation anymore.”

“At least both of us have friends of opposite sex. Where are you going to hook us up? Can I propose a restaurant?”

“No!!!” He still needs to think of how he’s going to approach Tema. They’re not friends, she takes him as her employer and nothing else.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 30

NKONZO

He can't seem to find the right way to strike a conversation with her. Thakasa has left for his late lunch with Mr Jones after wrapping up his last meeting of the day.

She's on the laptop, monitoring a tons of emails and responding where necessary. It's just an hour before she knocks off. There's not much she's looking forward to except soaking her body in a warm bath in her three-bedroom house in White City and fixing a hearty meal for one. Divorceville isn't hard as she had thought, at least now that Thula has moved out of her way. She hasn't heard from him in over six months, all thanks to Thakasa for his intervention. Funnily, Thula is the one who broke their marriage and a few of her ribs. He didn't act like a husband or someone who still wanted his marriage, not to mention extra partners he openly had while married

to Tema, but hell broke loose as soon as he realized that she was really divorcing him and starting over without him or his financial help.

Having the office just to herself, she's taken off the high heels and slid in flip-flops that are always in her car on standby. She unbuttons her peplum shirt from the top, exposing half of her chest and lays back on the chair relaxed. A few strays of her hair have fallen over her forehead but she's too engrossed on the screen to pay attention to hair.

"Can I come in?" the voice comes from the door and jitters crack her nerves.

It's Nkonzo.

"Sir," she says, pushing back the chair and almost tripping on her toes.

"Are you busy?" he asks, making his way in and standing in front of her desk.

"Kind of. Can I help?"

"No, it's fine. I'll see what I tell her." He pops his

fingers and turns around to leave uneasily.

What's new? He's never been able to hold any meaningful conversation that's not work related with her. He's always managed to make a fool out of himself everytime he got around her, nevertheless, he never stays away.

"I can help," she says hesitantly.

He stops and turns around with relief on his face.

"What do you need?" she asks.

He bites his lower lip, suppressing a grin she can't put a definition to, and steps closer to put his palms flat on the desk.

"I don't know where to start," he says with a chuckle.

Her nerves settle. She thought it was serious, but seeing how relaxed he is now puts her at ease.

"From the beginning," she says.

"My sister needs someone to talk to and I told her I'd always be there to listen. But the things she wants to know are above me as a man who's a brother to her."

She's confused but she nods as if she's following and understanding every detail.

"So I told her I'll ask my friend to have the talk with her, girl to girl, because there's no woman she's currently comfortable with in the family," he says.

Oh, now she gets it. Sex talk!

"I don't see anything wrong with that. Ask your friend to talk to her," she says.

Silence....

Okay, maybe she's not being helpful.

"Arrange a little tea party or a good movie for them and let them talk," she suggests.

He pops his fingers and bites his lip; dimples denting his light-hued cheeks.

"The friend doesn't know that I'm her friend," he says.

It can't get any weirder than this!

"Oh, okay," she says, stifling back her laugh. It doesn't make any sense, but he's her employer so she has to act like he's not stupid.

“I lied,” he says, shrugging his shoulders like it’s understandable and normal.

“Maybe I can talk to her, if she needs a sisterly advice,” she says.

“You can do that?” He’s about to pick this short girl and throw her up and catch her!

“If you and her are okay with it,” she says.

He releases a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, Shawty. I wasn’t sure you were going to agree, I don’t want her to learn from the streets.”

“Shawty?” she asks with a slight frown.

So people are named after their heights now?

He’d give himself a huge mental slap right now. He shouldn’t have said that loud.

He scratches the side of his face and grins.

“I’m sorry, I’m just not familiar with your name. What does it mean anyway?”

“I was born in Tema, Ghana.”

“I was born here in Mandeni, does it mean my name should be Mandeni as well?”

Really? This needs an eye roll.

“I’m joking! You should take me there, to your birth place, one day. I’ve been to Cape Coast and Accra.”

“I was only there for the first two years of my life, then my father came back to South Africa. It’s not like I’m a Ghanaian, I just have the name of the city,” she says.

“Yeah, but we can still visit.”

She’d love to but it’s highly impossible at the moment. There’s so much she still needs to do and achieve before travelling countries.

“Maybe,” she says just to put an end to the topic.

He stares at her and gets caught. But he continues with no stance of shame.

She clears her throat uncomfortably.

“So what time is she coming over?” she asks.

He frowns.

“Your sister,” she says.

Oh, damn! He pulls himself together and calls Phethy. Shawty is willing to host the talk in her house, which isn't far away from their home, all he needs to do is organize snacks for them.

Can't he be a part of this though? He'll just sit and watch them- or her- from a distance and not disturb.

“You're staring at me. Is everything okay?” she asks, shifting uncomfortably on her seat.

“Do you mind if I pick you up?” he asks. He's always fought against the urge to pick her up and swing her around when they bump into each other.

She frowns, “Pick me up?”

“Stand up,” he says.

Now she gets it. He keeps insulting her height but she finds it funny because she's always been tempted to pull him and his brothers by beards as well.

“Don't you dare, I'll scream,” she says, laughing.

“How do you scream?”

No, she shouldn't be thinking this so deeply. He means scream, as in the literal screaming. Not any other kind of screaming.

"Ummm let me wrap up, so that I can clean before your sister arrives," she says awkwardly. All of a sudden she's blanketed by shyness and failing to look at him in the eyes.

"What about me? Must I come as well?" he asks.

"Nooo!" Her response is quick and breathily.

"I won't make you scream," he says.

Her face pales out and mouth drops open.

"By picking you up, I mean," he says.

Fuck, she needs to stop putting her thoughts into nonsense. This is Nkonzo Mangele, of course he wouldn't see her like that. She's divorced, short with plump cheeks and no firm religious grounds.

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MAWANDE

She's a widow. The tag is attached and wherever she goes it'll be evident for anyone to see and pity her. Waking up in the morning, taking a bath and getting in her black attire will be her routine for a year. This time clothes don't just cover her nudity or keep her warm, they're a constant reminder of her status – she's a widow.

She's strong, or she's trying to be, but sometimes it's hard to sleep. She has to dismiss thoughts and expectations of seeing her husband walking through the door and saying it was all just a joke. Her mother-in-law and Nyezi's aunt have temporarily moved in with her. They haven't told her about Halalisani yet, but he comes everyday to greet and ask her if she needs any help around the yard.

There are many rules set for her as a widow. She's currently surrounded by a dark cloud and cannot associate herself with the public because she has bad lucks. She cannot go to other people's houses; she cannot come home after sunset; she cannot attend ceremonies.

Bhambatha walks in wearing black joggers and a hoodie pulled over his face. His mother only takes a single glance at him and her face closes up. This kind of dress code is not allowed at the Myezas. He looks exactly like a criminal that he is.

He puts a Woolworth bag on the counter and looks at Mawande sitting on the chair quietly.

“It’s a scarf you’re going to use to mourn since we mourn better with clothing and not by heart.” He takes a sharp glance at his mother and picks banana from a fruit bowl.

“Thanks for seeing us Bhambatha. We are well, hopefully you are well too. Thanks for the scarf but KaManqele will dress in the mourning attire of our culture,” his mother says, trying her best to remain calm and composed.

“How will it emotionally help her to dress up in full black attire?”

He questions everything in life, except crime because it benefits him.

“Nobody needs your opinion here, go back wherever you come from,” his mother says.

“Sisi, I want us to go somewhere. You’ll mourn by heart and live your life, that’s what my brother would’ve wanted,” he says.

Mawande’s eyes widen. She looks at her mother-in-law who’s seconds away from exploding, and back to her brother-in-law who doesn’t look like he’s going to take a no for an answer.

“Go and change into something comfortable,” he instructs.

“Bhambatha don’t come and disrespect my son’s memory like this! I don’t even know why my son was the one who had to die.”

“It should prove that God isn’t your best friend,” he says and looks at Mawande. “Sisi, please hurry.”

“But Ma won’t appreciate....”

“This Ma promised your brother to take care of you and make sure that you’re emotionally okay. Being confined in this house and dressed like Satan’s

agent won't help you with anything, instead it'll kill your soul."

She shouldn't be trusting this guy but she desperately need to go out and breathe again.

"Ma, can I go?" she asks, politely looking at Mrs Myeza.

"It hasn't been a month since Nyezi passed on!"

"But you've already arranged for Halalisani to move in with her," Bhambatha.

Mawande frowns and looks at Mrs Myeza. Halalisani out of all people? And who said she needs a substitute for her husband?

"Ma?" she questions with her eyebrow raised.

"Makoti we will discuss that with you when the time is right."

"There will be no right time, I don't want Halalisani anywhere near me."

"But you have to bear children for the Myezas since you failed to do so while Nyezi was still alive."

Shock transforms her face. It's too late for Mrs Myeza to take back her words.

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She has a black scarf wrapped around her head and wearing a poloneck and dropped-waist skirt. She's mourning, she's still a widow, but she's not carrying it with her. She looks normal, like any other women on the streets and nobody can attach any labels on her.

But she has to get inside a black Audi S6 with a man she's seen less than ten times and not familiar with.

And she doesn't even know where she's being taken to.

"You're okay?" he asks, emptying two pieces of minty gum on his palm and throws them in his mouth.

"Where are we going?" she asks.

"You like volleyball, right? There's a group of girls that train weekly around Tugela Beach," he says.

She LIKED volleyball before becoming a wife. But what did she expect from him? A trip to Mugg & Bean for breakfast? He's not Nyezi, he only knows about her what....wait, how does he know her?

"I saw your sport excellence certificate from high school," he says, putting an end to her silent questions.

"I haven't played in over two years, I'm not even sure I still like it," she says.

"Well, you'll find out today."

It's not appropriate. She can't be jumping with balls before Nyezi even rots in his grave.

The car drives off before she can loudly change her mind. She has time to study the brother Nyezi used to talk about, but half of his face is hidden in a hoodie.

He's not saying anything, neither is she, they drive silently. Thakasa would faint if he found out that she's been driven by the 'criminal'. This man has the baddest record in the whole Mangethe, and surprisingly, he doesn't give a rat ass about it. He's

not doing anything to rebuild his reputation, instead he's furtherly destroying it.

One thing she didn't think of was how different she'd look from other girls. As the car parks outside the fenced sport field, she sees them in their long legs and displayed flat tummies warming around.

She's wearing a flippin' dropped-waist skirt and a scarf. In two years she's gained more kilos than the fingers of her hands, she'll definitely look like an aunt who came to cheer on her niece amongst these fit, model sized girls.

"We are here," he says, looking at her as she rubs her arms nervously.

"Bhambatha this is not something I want to do. I look nothing like these girls and I can't even remember how volleyball was played," she says.

"You're here to remember and decide if you still like it or not. If you don't like it you'll find something else that you'll like. But one thing you're not here for, is to look like other girls. Are you them?" he asks.

A deep sigh!

She should've listened to Mrs Myeza. She's a widow and she should be staying in the house and crying over her husband nonstop.

The game has already started, even though team members are still missing on both sides. With the advantage of his height, Bhambatha catches the ball and stands by the dividing net and bounces it on the court floor a few times.

Then he looks at the girls.

"I brought a new member, Mawande Myeza. Who's in charge here?"

One girl steps forward with her hand raised.

"Please brief her on the rules, terms and lingos, and positions. She hasn't played in a long time."

The girl looks at her and smiles. She's tall, slim and beautiful with her long dreadlocks.

"Hey Wande, come closer." Her warm smile puts her at ease and she steps closer.

Her eyes lock with Bhambatha's shortly before he leaves the court and goes to lean by his car with a burning cigarette between his fingers.

"My gosh, is that your husband?" she asks as soon as the distance between them and him is safely. Her name is Pearl.

"No, brother-in-law," she says awkwardly.

"Is he going to watch us throughout the game?"

He might. Who knows what goes in Bhambatha's head?

"No, I don't think so," she says.

Relief washes over Pearl's face. It's too early to say this, but this one is about to become her new friend. The welcome she's getting is warm, or is it because there's a man in black joggers and hoodie watching them like a hawk?

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 31

TEMA

Phethy wants to know too much for her age, at first it was uncomfortable tackling sexual topics with a teenage girl, but she had to step out of a 27-year-old Tema and keep her promises to Nkonzo. She hasn't done anything stupid yet, but at this rate of curiosity she'll be giving up the cherry as soon as she gets to university.

Nkonzo is fifteen minutes late but Phethy doesn't seem to care. She's wrapped in a fleece blanket on the couch and watching Channel O on maximum volume. On any normal day, Tema would've been pissed and craving for her personal space by now. The clock is just a few ticks away from 7pm. But she's had a great time too; for a change she's flouncing around the kitchen in a halterneck dress, with her hair tied in a high puff and wearing only ped socks to escape bitterly cold tiles.

Footsteps approach as she sashays from the cupboard to a boiling kettle.

“Babe, tea or coffee?” she asks with her back turned.

“Tea babe,” Nkonzo says from the door.

She turns her head with her eyes widened and nearly drop on the floor. She just called her employer ‘babe’, who does that?

“I’m sorry, I thought it was Phethy,” she says, blanketed in shame.

He looks at her with fascination, for a long, uncomfortable minute.

“Still tea,” he says with that grin she never understands.

“In a sec!” she says, shifting her eyes away to break the awkwardness. But now she has to get a tea-bag container from the last top shelve of the cupboard. It sits there because she’s a coffee-girl and hardly ever resorts to Five Roses.

Why is he not going to the sitting room to watch

naked musicians with his sister?

She's standing in front of the cupboard and contemplating whether to jump and get the container or wait until he leaves then stand on top of the chair.

"Do you need help?" he asks.

He likes this, doesn't he? A helpless woman that's a size of a bite.

"Yes," she says with a low sigh and steps aside for him, the height-gifted one, to do a miracle.

As she stands, she's mentally sketching out her next move. With a pair of googly eyes following her, she'd have to get another cup for Phethy and maybe add some oatmeal raisin cookies.

Like a bolt from the blue, her back arches against strong arms as they lift her up, with no warning or whatsoever. Her back is against his chest, his arms are safely wrapped around her body and lifting her high enough to reach the top of the cupboard.

She'd like to let out a scream- who wants to be

randomly picked up? But then again, he's helped her get the container.

Now her feet have touched the floor again but his arms are still wrapped around her.

"That's enough now, thank you," she groans in a low voice.

Instead of letting go, he tucks his head over her shoulders; softly massaging her bare skin with his beard.

"Ngisacela ukushela," he says jokingly with a brief chuckle. (Can I ask you out)

A second or two passes with her mouth hanging open, then she inhales an enormous breath and untangles herself from his embrace.

She turns her head and their eyes lock. His face looks serious than how his voice had sounded.

"Stop playing with me,"- is all she could think of.

This got to be a game. Her out of all people!

“I’ve waited a year, trying to sketch out a better approach. Bengifuna amagama azofika efana noju ezindlebeni zakho ngoba bengisaba. Namanje nginovalo, ngiyakusaba ukuphoxeka.” (I wanted better words that would’ve sounded sweeter in your ears because I was scared. I still am, I’m scared of disappointments)

He looks dead serious, the glitter of mischief that’s always in his eyes is dimmed by strange reluctance and fear.

Words are stuck below her throat. Not even in her wildest dreams has she ever thought Nkonzo would hit on her. Not just in any manner, but so serious and humble. He’s the type that jokes almost about everything.

“Nkonzo I...I...I don’t...” He reaches to her arm and picks her free hand. Whether it’s her nerves that are scattered all over the place or his hand really has electric wires veining through it, the second his hand comes in contact with hers she feels electric shocked.

“Just hear out what I have to say. I won’t be long, I promise.” His thumb caresses her two fingers and she holds back a gasp.

Her voice comes through and carries the question husky, but audible enough; “Why Nkonzo?”

“I don’t understand what you mean,” he says, squinting his eyes and tightening his grip on her hand.

“I’m asking why you’re asking me out.”

“I’ll explain if you give me a chance, just one date.”

“And if I don’t?” She cocks up her eyebrow, suddenly feeling in control and bossy.

“Inhliziyo yami iyohlala ibalisa kodwa ngeke phela ngenze lutho.” (The gap will always be there in my heart but there’d be nothing I can do)

“I feel emotionally cornered,” she says with a low sigh.

“That’s not my intention, Tinkerbell.” His lips stretch into a thin smile.

“Oh, today I’m Tinkerbell?” she asks, throwing her

head backwards and tearing her eyes off him for a moment. Tea needs to be made!

“I’ll call you all these names until you permit me to call you ‘babe’.”

Hot air fans her cheeks, he grins wider as he stares down at her blushing and struggling to control the rhythm of her breaths.

“Hello friends, can I come in and throw this in the bin?” Phethy asks at the door, lifting the empty packet of chips she’s been munching on.

They’d forgotten about the extra company left at the sitting room.

Hands linked, with only an inch of space between their bodies! This is definitely giving a different picture. Tema’s attempt of stepping away from Nkonzo doesn’t have a desired outcome.

“I thought you guys were friends,” Phethy says, making her way in with a cheeky smile plastered on her face.

“We are friends?” Tema looks at Nkonzo with her

eyebrow raised.

He chuckles and glances at Phethy who's watching them like a hawk.

"Tomorrow after work?" he asks, turning his eyes to her.

"What's happening tomorrow after work?" she feigns ignorance but unfortunately for her, it doesn't work in her favor.

"Uzovuma ngishele," he says, oblivious to Phethy's presence, with his eyes fixed on her. (You'll allow me to court you)

In front of his 17 year old sister! She swallows nothingness and turns to two cups set on the counter.

"How many spoons of sugar babe?" she asks, directing to Phethy. This is how she calls all girls she knows, babe.

"One and half," Nkonzo says.

He knew she'd turn her eyes and widely look at him. He waits with a mocking grin on his face.

“I was asking Phethy.”

“Still, one and half.”

This...!

She sighs and looks at Phethy.

“How many spoons of sugar?”

“Two full spoons,” Phethy says and looks at Nkonzo,
“Are we sleeping over?”

“No, MaKhumalo would throw a tantrum,” Nkonzo.

Phethy’s face falls with disappointment. She likes it here. She owns the TV remote, ask for whatever she wants and watch half naked musicians that her mother never allows to be played in her house. And Tema is cool, she’s happy to finally have an understanding sister-in-law or brother’s bestie or whatever they are. It’s like having an older sister, whereas Nothile is like a second mother.

“Aren’t you too old for ‘umama uzothetha’?” Tema asks, unintentionally loud.

“Not under MaKhumalo’s roof. There I’ll always be a child.” He’s not offended, not in a slightest way.

“It will be like that until I find love and get married,” he says, dropping his eyes to her left hand.

It could’ve been a coincidence. In fact, it was her own eyes playing tricks on her. Nkonzo probably wants to smash and pass. He’s a man after all.

Marriage is not a place she wishes to go back to. Never again!

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BANDLA

He paid- that’s how he saw it- and took the memory stick containing his first porn video. He went to see Khanyo later on the day and everything was normal. She’s recovering well, Mandulo thinks it’s because of the ceremony he did back home and the doctors think it’s their magic hands. Whichever it is, Bandla is just happy to see the love of his life back to life. He’s been thinking of asking Nolwazi to help arrange a little ‘life celebrating’ party for when she comes out

of the hospital. He also needs to find a way to balance his life between Mandeni and Durban. Maybe getting a house this side; it would make things a lot easier than this hotel life.

His phone rings, startling him and breaking off his train of thoughts.

“My man,”

Damn! What does this one wants now?

“Yes Efe,” he says with zero enthusiasm.

“Things are bad! I’m sorry to do this but you’re the only person I know and trust right now. Someone took my daughter and left a note that they’ll be her new nanny.”

Isn’t that fantastic? It should give him and his wife some privacy.

“How is that any of my business?” Bandla asks.

“I need quick cash, my daughter’s life is in danger.”

Really? Maybe this man thinks he’s the Bill Gate of Africa.

“I gave you R300k yesterday!”

“It was for my mother’s surgery.”

“I don’t care, Efe. I’m not your friend and definitely not your father. Your problems are yours, not mine.”

“Please, I don’t want to embarrass you and post this disgraceful video.”

He frowns, “What video now?”

“Onomo Hotel three-some,” Efe says.

“You gave me the memory...” It clicks and he lowly curses out. He’s stupid, so so stupid! Fuck him, fuck Nigeria, fuck P-square, fuck Jollof rice, fuck Pidgin English and fuck channel 152.

“You are going to blackmail me my whole life and lie to me? You know what, go to hell and dine with Satan. You’re not getting any money from me.”

“Think about this carefully.” Yeah, his reputation is at risk bla bla bla!

He should’ve better than to trust this shitbag, Efe.

“Do whatever you like. I’m not giving you anything,”

he says sternly.

“My man think....”

He ends the call and releases a long held, heavy breath.

MTHONGA, I MESSED UP!

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THAKASA

His mother has been questioning his leadership. This morning she got a call from the Myezas complaining about Mawande’s behavior. Apparently, Bhambatha is still around and badly influencing Mawande and messing up her mourning journey. It’s said that “Mawande is back on acting like a child, jumping in the streets with common girls and breaking her mourning rules.” Thakasa had to call her to confirm if it was all true

Indeed, it was all true. But not bad as her mother-in-law had made it sound. Bhambatha found a volleyball team in the area and took her there to join. Mawande was always active in sport growing up and volleyball was one of her favorite.

She didn't sound like Mawande, the widow, over the phone. She talked about a lot of things, rather than her husband's death: There's a good friend Pearl, Thandi the bad player that bullies everyone and Sma who always costs her team the match. 'Jumping in the streets' as they call it has helped her channel her emotions into positivity. Nyezi would've wanted that; his wife to be happy.

So, instead of going to Mangethe and fight Bhambatha, he's watching a soccer match on TV.

MaKhumalo has never felt so disappointed in her life, but she vows to personally take action about it. She's not going to let her daughter disrespect the memory of her husband like that. She got married because she was ready to let go of all these childish

sports and become a woman. Which woman of the house jumps in the streets and chase balls? None.

Phone beeps in his pocket. He lowers the TV volume so that he can read the text message. Everybody does that, right?

-MTHONGA I MESSED UP.

It's from Bandla. There are screenshots of conversations between him and a certain guys attached after the text message. Then there's a picture of a video.

He blinks a couple of times and looks at it again. Bandla and two naked girls. WTF!

He goes back to the screenshots attached and reads the conversations.

His brother is being blackmailed by a guy named Efe. It looks like he's already paid the guy R300k and he's demanding more money or he's going to release the video.

Of course, he wants to call him and shout. Why on

earth would he do two women at the same time? It's disgusting, just looking at the picture of it. But right now there's no time for all that, they have to prevent this video from coming out because it'll taint the whole family and badly publicize the company.

GIVE HIM THE MONEY!- text message delivered.

He leaves the TV watching itself and absent-mindedly go to his bedroom. He needs to think! This guy will forever milk money out of Bandla, as long as he has the video of him.

I'M NOT GIVING HIM MONEY AGAIN- Bandla texts back.

He's crazy! This will ruin their image, all of them, not just his. They have no other choice at the moment but to pay the guy. They can think of something else later.

Nothile lets go of the T-shirt she was folding and comes to him with a slight frown on her face.

“Manqele is everything alright?” she asks, holding his hands and squeezing them.

“It’s Bandla,” he says.

“What happened to him? Is he okay?” Worry transforms her face as she searches in her husband’s eyes.

He can’t explain it, he just gives her the phone so that she can see for herself.

“Is this a threesome?” she asks as her eyes widen at the pictures.

“It’s a sex-tape,” Thakasa says.

“Wow, this is so kinky!”

“He’s being blackmailed MaNtusi.”

“Opportunists are everywhere, he should’ve been more careful. This is really bad for the company and the family.”

He exhales heavily, Nothile wraps her arms around him and rubs his back.

There’s another text, Nothile opens it and reads out

loud:

IT'S ALL OVER THE INTERNET WITH A WRONG DATE. I'M COMING HOME, I KNOW KHANYO WON'T FORGIVE ME.

"He's only worried about Khanyo?" Thakasa asks, more pissed than before.

"It seems so. You have to let him take responsibility for his own actions, don't get involved in this. He must call the press and explain himself, not you."

"But he's a....."

"Bandla is not a child, he's 29, don't even start. We are going away for the weekend, you're not getting involved Manqele."

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KHANYO

I know that something is not right. I've been hollow

since morning but I cannot put my finger on it. Everyone I know and love is okay. Mandulo bought me a new phone and I've been keeping up with everyone on Whatsapp. Gugu is not around often as others, but she says it's something business related that's keeping her away. I know her, she always has something to attend with her high profile persons.

Visiting time is still three hours away, so I'm surprised to see Bandla walking in. He must've pulled a few strings and used his name to be let in. Eitherway, I'm happy to see him even though he doesn't look happy to see me.

Nurses still stare at him like this? Have they never seen a good-looking Nazareth man before?

He sits on the chair. I don't get a kiss today, not even on the cheek.

"They want you," I tell him.

He glances back at the two nurses and they quickly

shift their eyes and walk away. Awkward!

“Maybe not. I’m a trending face, I thought you’d have seen it too by now,” he says.

“I haven’t seen anything. What are you trending for? I hope not for a sex-tape, I’d kill you.”

He doesn’t catch the joke. His face closes up, he exhales heavily and holds my hand.

This looks serious than a sex-tape! He’s freaking me out.

“What’s wrong Bandla?” I ask.

“Firstly, I want you to know that I love you Khanyo. I’d never do anything to put our relationship in jeopardy. But I’m human, I have a past just like everybody else.”

“Bandla you’re scaring me,” I say.

“I’m going home, your ex-boyfriend has a video of me and he’s released it to the public.”

There are so many people that can be regarded as my ex’s but Efe is the first person that comes to my mind. He was here a few days ago, apparently he’s

the one who saved me. I'm really grateful for that, but it doesn't change the fact that Efe played me. I'll always be a bitter ex to him, that's why I bragged about my relationship and told him to never come to visit me again.

"Efe? How do you know him?" I ask him.

He rubs his forehead, "He has a club, that's how I know him."

"You don't go to clubs," I say with my eyebrow raised. There's more to this than he's letting on.

"I was single before you but I still needed to be taken care of as a man. Efe was my agency."

I cannot judge his past because he didn't judge mine, but wow!

"So I guess it's really a sex-tape you're trending for." My heart just broke into a million pieces. I wouldn't put this past Efe, he's an opportunist, but I never thought Bandla would have such a dirty past. He looks so perfect in my eyes.

"Yes, he changed the date to make it look recent."

This is why nurses were staring at him! He's the recent Kim Kardashian.

"I want to be home until all this settles down. Everywhere I go people stare at me. I thought I'd be able to handle it but I can't."

"At Mandeni they won't stare at you?" I ask.

He shrugs his shoulders, "I don't know Khanyo, but I know that Thakasa will find a way to solve it. It was harmless fun, I never thought it would come back and bite me." He exhales heavily and rests back on the chair. Now I feel sorry for him, I know how much his family hates disgrace and bad publicity.

"I was his target but he didn't even hide the girls' faces. What if they lay charges against me? What if they have families?"

Now I'm lost, why is he using plurals? Maybe I need to see this sex-tape myself.

"How many girls are in the sex-tape?" I ask.

He swallows, "Two."

"Bandla!"

Someone needs to wake me from this bad dream.
My innocent Bandla would never do that!

“I’m not perfect or immune to sin,” he says.

I don’t want to lie, right now I’m just pretending to be okay with this. I’m still going to digest it with Nolwazi and Gugu. Hhawu, cha ngeke! Three-fuckin-some.

“Okay babe, go home if that’s what you think is going to help you.”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 32

Nolwazi walks in and gets surprised by a little girl crawling on the floor. She literally lets out a scream at the sight of the little human being with bulbous eyes and cute knots with pink ribbons.

“Whose child is this?” she yells.

The bathroom door opens, Gugu comes out in stilettos and tight, black sheath dress.

“That’s....I forget her name, but she’s with me,” she says.

“You don’t know her name? Whose child is she and why is she here?” Nolwazi asks.

“I’m just looking after her.” She runs her fingers through the rows of her newly done straight-back and releases a shallow breath.

“Listen, I won’t be around for a couple of days. Please take care of Khanyo, I hear that Bandla has left Durban after the sex-tape scandal.”

Nolwazi's eyes widen. Say what?!

"Which sex-tape scandal?" she asks.

"Search 'Shembe man fucks two ebony sluffs' you'll see what everyone is talking about."

"Oh, my goodness! You're sure it's him?" she asks, making a run to connect her phone to the charger.

"I know Bandla, please don't forget to update me on Whatsapp about everything, including you and Mandulo."

"There's no me and Mandulo. He thinks I'm young and dumb. Is Bandla fucking both ebony sluffs at once?" The search engine is not fast enough, ads keep popping up and disturbing her.

Jesus Christ! X-videos have it on their new African content.

"Oh my goodness! Come and see how huge his balls are? This girl is sucking them like a finish."

"What is a 'finish'?" Gugu asks with a frown, there's a text she's quickly typing.

"Isiqeda," Nolwazi says while increasing the video

volume.

“Bona, he’s stretching the poor girl’s vagina. I can’t believe he’s capable of doing this.”

“Lord, Nolwazi stop watching that. You’re traumatizing the poor baby here.”

“Take her and leave, I want to see how long he lasts,” Nolwazi says with her eyes glued on the phone.

A few minutes later there’s a tall, bulky man wearing a black tuxedo standing at the door.

“You’re ready?” he asks Gugu in a deep voice.

Gugu picks the baby and shows him bags on the couch.

Nolwazi pauses the porn video and looks up with her eyes widened.

“Hi, who are you?” she asks the man. Curiosity is splashed all over her eyes.

“This is Mohammed, a friend of my friend,” Gugu says.

“Is he related to Mohammed Ali? Gosh, he’s so tall. Does he....?”

“Bye Nolwazi, I love you, take care of yourself. I’ll see you soon.” She walks out with her tall, bulky friend of a friend, leaving Nolwazi with her mouth hanging open.

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BANDLA

“Oh, wow! Yafika iporn star, wafika umfendi omkhulu, wafika umshay’ wesinqe!”

He leans by the car and glares at Nkonzo. This is not funny, his life has been turned upside down by this scandal.

“Are you done?” he asks.

“You shouldn’t be mean to me. MaKhumalo is waiting for you, people have been calling all day and demanding answers. Thakasa left with MaNtusi for their weekend trip.”

No ways, this cannot be true!

“He left?” he asks.

“Yeap. I’d advise you to call a board meeting before addressing this publicly. The church’s name is being dragged through the mud because of you.”

“I get it, now stop acting holy because I’m not the only one who’s been in that position.” He clicks his tongue and blows out a huge breath. Now he has to deal with his mother who’s probably dealing with backlash from church leaders.

“Can you cover up for me? I’ll be home late, tell MaKhumalo there was a business dinner I got invited to,” Nkonzo asks.

He really has nice life problems, Bandla leaves him standing in front of his door, combing his hair.

His breath is held up as he walks through the door.

“Sawubona Ma,” he says

“Kawkona Ma? That’s what you’re going to say after this mess you put us through?”

“I can explain,” he says, sliding down on the couch.

“Right, you can and you will. What got into your head? Can’t you take a wife and satisfy yourself however you like? What kind of sick behavior is this? And you had to put it in film for the world to see.”

“It was harmless fun. I didn’t think it would end like this, I’m sorry Ma.”

“You’ve disappointed me and this family. I don’t know how you’re going to make this right Bandlaethu. Your father is turning in his grave.”

“I’ll think of something,” he says.

“Why can’t I have peace in my life?” She stands up and throws her hands up. “Your sister is jumping up and down in the streets instead of mourning for her husband. The other one....” Her breath is running short, she holds onto the coffee table panting heavily.

“Ma, are you okay?” Bandla asks in panic and rushes to her.

“Don’t put your hands on me.”

He sighs and steps back. He's stubborn but this time he understands where his mother's anger comes from.

"I'm sorry Ma," he says.

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THAKASA

His heart is heavy. As much as he understands MaNtusi's point of view, but he still feels like there's something he should've done. Bandla is still going to take responsibility of his actions in church, the least he could've done was to take care of things for him in the public. He has a smoother tongue than him, he would've addressed this better than how Bandla will.

And Bandla never been troublesome in his life. He's hardly ever in trouble, unlike Nkonzo. He could've helped him, just this once!

He glances at his wrist watch for time and frowns as he notices how much time has passed while he's

sitting here. Nothile takes these trips very seriously, she'll bite his head off and accuse him of not giving her attention.

He should rest because tomorrow he's being taken to The Legendary Sani Pass and taking a tour around to enjoy nature. He wouldn't take anything away from Malachite Manor, but he could've appreciated it on a magazine and be okay with it.

But he's here now, he has to appreciate his wife's efforts of planning these trips for them.

He walks into their room expecting to find her boiling and waiting to explode. But she's lying on her side and watching something on her phone with earphones in her ears.

"I was outside," he says, taking his shirt off.

No response.

He undresses and climbs on bed, then she turns her head and takes out the earphones with her eyes widened.

“What are you listening to?” He turns her hand to take a look at the phone and his brother’s exposed genitals welcome him.

“MaNtusi what is this?” He doesn’t know whether to be pissed or disgusted. Why on earth would his wife, out of all people, watch an illegal porn video of his brother?

“My sister sent it to me,” Nothile says regretfully and quickly locks the screen of her phone.

“Why did you ask for it? You and Nomcebo shouldn’t be distributing this video, you’re supposed to be Bandla’s family, not to pour petrol on a fire.”

“Manqele this is trending everywhere. What difference does it make if Nomcebo sends it to me?”

“You’re my wife, what do you get from watching my brother’s private parts?” His voice rises, he’s losing control of his emotions. “I’d never find pleasure in watching Nomcebo, or anyone close to you, being exposed in a sexual video. You should respect my brother.”

“Now you’re acting as if I went to Bandla’s room and

peeped on him. He filmed his sexual deeds, I'm one of the million viewers. Why are you taking your frustrations out on me?"

"You're being a pervert," he says.

Nothile's forehead furrows into a frown. Disbelief swallows her.

"Say what? I didn't cheat, impregnate and buy a house for my sperm-dish. Don't act like you know anything about respect."

"She was not a sperm-dish!!!"

"Oh, is it?"

Silence...

"What was she?" Nothile asks and folds her arms with a dead look on her face.

"MaNtusi, I don't want us to fight. Tell your sister to stop distributing this video and then delete it from your phone," he says.

"I asked you what she was to you if she was not a sperm-dish?!" Nothile yells and claps her hands to emphasize the question.

“Don’t raise your voice,” he says.

That motivates her to yell louder. “WHAT WAS SHE TO YOU, BUSTARD?” She’s clapping with each word. In a split second she’s grabbed him by his vest and yelling on his face.

He manages to get her hands off him and rolls off bed.

“I’m not sleeping here,” he says, picking his clothes from the floor.

“Yes, go Thakasa. Go and do whatever you want, with whoever you love.”

“Trust me, I will.” He buttons up his shirt with shaky hands and puts his pant on.

“Good, make her pregnant and she’ll abort again, fool!”

“You loved that, didn’t you? I wouldn’t be surprised if you had something to do with it.”

“She’s a whore, that’s what whores do. She can’t have her own man, what made you think she’d be

able to have a child and keep it?"

"I fell in love with her..." No, no, no! He didn't mean to say this loud.

"That's why you bought her a house?" Her tone drops instantly. She's flapping her eyes and preventing tears from cracking out.

"That's my house, MaNtusi. Not hers."

"It's her house! When did you fall in love with her?" she asks.

"I don't know....we were on and off....I'm really sorry."

She exercises some breaths.

"Do you still love her?"

"No."

"Manqele!"

Sigh!

"Can you look at me in the eyes and say you don't feel anything for her?"

"Why does it matter? I want to be married to you, I'm

not going back to her for anything. I want you.”

“It matters if you’re not living the life of your dreams with me,” Nothile says.

“I am living the life of my dreams.”

“You’re lying!” This time tears get heavier for eyelids to hold. They crack out and fall down on her cheeks like floods.

He climbs on bed and tries to hold her hand, but she’s too broken and emotional at the moment.

“MaNtusi I love you and I want to love you the way you deserve. But this ‘husband’ title makes it hard for me, it’s hard to be your lover because responsibilities of being a husband outweigh everything.” He doesn’t make any sense; this is what scares him about expressing his feelings to people.

“I want us to move out and find ourselves,” he says.

Her sobs soften, she looks at him and he wipes her wet cheeks with the back of his hand.

“We’ll take Sqalo with us,” he says.

“What about Ma?” she asks.

“I don’t know MaNtusi. I’m more worried about our marriage, I don’t want to lose you, ngiyakuthanda.”

“I feel like we’ll be lost without her. I don’t want to move out.”

“I think we’ll find ourselves if we have our own space.”

“You already found yourself when you fell in love with another woman.”

“Please stop taking us back. I did fall in love with Nomkhosi because she gave me a chance to, even though I never told her anything about it. I’m over that now, she killed my baby, her and I can never be. I’m your husband, she knew that from day one. Please also acknowledge and let that sink in, you gave me a ring and I gave my life to you. When the sun sets down, I’ll always find my way home and home is you.”

“Manqele I don’t know. I don’t know what to do or what to believe right now.”

“Let’s move out, everything will settle into place.”

“What if it doesn’t? What if having our own space, under no guidance, breaks us apart?”

“It won’t because I’m going to love you and give you the best of everything.”

She exhales deeply.

“Why are we taking Sqalo?” she asks.

“Because MaKhumalo cannot love and support him. Things are not smooth at home, you’ve seen how tense it is, I don’t think it’s okay for him to continue living in a place like that,” Thakasa says.

“I don’t know. If we are focusing on us, then why are we bringing a gay brother to live with us?”

“It’s not important for you to mention his sexuality. Sqalo won’t stand in a way for us to love one another and bond with our princess privately.”

“If you say so.” She shrugs her shoulders, “Where are we moving to? You need to be closer to work.”

“Tugela Mouth? I know that you love swimming, we can find a house with a pool and enough space for

three people.”

“No, I’ll find the house, not you.”

He laughs, “Don’t you trust my taste?”

“Can you blame me?”

“Oh, yeah? But you like how Mthonga tastes.”

Flip! The conversation just turned like that.

“I do?” she frowns slightly and chuckles.

“Maybe I should remind you.”

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BANDLA

He shouldn’t have drive past the shops. This is not something he can handle. People take pictures of him, some gossip about him on his face and some look at him like he’s the biggest sinner on earth.

He’s the most trending person in SA this week. It’s not dying down as he had hoped, now they’ve dug

out girls' identity and brought their families into the scandal. It's keeps getting more interesting for the public. He's due to release a statement in a day and he's not ready at all.

There's another article:

AMAHLE, ONE OF THE GIRLS INVOLVED IN THE LATE SEX SCANDAL, SAYS BANDLALETHU DRUGGED HER IN THE HOTEL.

Efe was his connection to these girls. Everything was consented, financial transactions were made and all of them were in their right minds. Now everyone wants to paint him as a bad guy and he can't even defend himself because anything he says can be twisted and turned against him.

"Are you blind? Why are you kicking my bucket?" MaKhumalo asks as he walks in the lounge absent-mindedly.

He sinks on the couch and drops his head on his

hands.

“What happened?” MaKhumalo asks.

“I’m a laughing stock Ma, noma ubani usika kwalithandayo nje. Why must I be exposed like this? For what? What did I do wrong?”

“Is that even a question? You did everything wrong?”

“But am I that bad? I didn’t hurt anyone. I made a stupid mistake, yes, but who did I do wrong except God? Why are my sins out there for everyone to judge but I’ve never judged ANYONE.”

“Bandla, you put yourself through this.”

“That’s not the point.” He hits the couch with a fist furiously. “I’m a caring person, Ma. I’m a very caring person! I’d never hurt anyone like this, no matter what. You know me, I’d never do something like this to anyone. I’d never dance on top of someone’s grave. I’d never hurt someone like this!” He stamps down his foot and covers his face, because he’s Bandla, he’s probably now crying.

“This will blow over,” MaKhumalo says in a low voice.

Until Khanyo, he was the most good one out of four. And he's right, he's a caring person. As much as she wants him to be punished for his sins, he's not for the whole world to crucify.

"When Ma? What are my kids going to think in future when they come across this video? Who doesn't do dirty things privately? Why must I be exposed? My life is ruined, I cannot continue to live like this."

No, no, no! She stands up and goes to the couch he's sitting on.

"Please don't speak like that." She's brushing his back tenderly, which isn't something she normally does to her boy children.

"I'll handle this, don't worry about it, okay? Focus on work, mina ngizobaqondisa. I didn't spend three hours in labour ward to have my son belittled by imbeciles. It's not your fault that those two loose girls didn't have respect for their bodies."

"Ma!" He lifts his head up, "You can't speak like that."

"I can speak however I like. You'll stay here, I'll do that press thing, tell organizers to bring a translator

because I won't bite my tongue explaining in English."

"No, I'll handle....."

"Are you hungry? I left some samp yesterday."

No, who's ever had their mother address the media for them?!

And MaKhumalo doesn't know how to mince her words.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 33

TEMA

Wow, so he even wore a mustard blazer over his white T-shirt and a new pair of jeans! He looks handsome, that's the first thing anyone would comment on. He's a clean, light-skinned and handsome guy. His beard is kept just like any other guy of his religion but it's not all over his face.

He smiles as he approaches her table. She insisted on driving herself to the restaurant. Being so punctual on everything, she got here exactly on 4pm as they had agreed on.

"Am I late?" he asks, pulling a chair and taking a seat.

He knows that he's late; almost 10 minutes late. She gives him a look and doesn't comment on that.

"Did you order for me?" he asks, rubbing his palms together.

"I don't know what you eat, I only ordered drinks,"

Tema says.

“Let me see the menu and order.” He pulls the menu and pages through it, passing the salad page without glancing twice at them.

He’s running his eyes on the Steak & Grill page, which isn’t a surprise because him and his brothers never eat anything other than meat. Have they never heard of gout?

The waitress appears with their drinks and takes his order. There are two empty tables between them and the old white woman enjoying a tall glass of wine across them. There’s privacy, too much of it! She’s getting nervous and Nkonzo can see it. But he’s not staring at her any less despite her discomfort.

“Thank you for coming,” he finally says.

Tema nods, “Pleasure!”

This doesn’t feel less than any of the formal meetings they’ve held together, but it’s actually a

date.

“Should I introduce myself?” he asks and chuckles.

Awkward!

“I’m Nkonzenhle Manqele, I was born in Enembe and grew up there. I’m a second born in a family of 5 siblings. You know where I work, I’m 34 and I think I’m in love with a girl but we’ll see how it goes.”

That last line was so unnecessary!

She picks her glass and sips on her cranberry juice.

“Why are we here Nkonzo?” she asks, not realizing how cold she sounds. It hasn’t sunk in, this whole thing. It feels like she’s breaking certain rules and jeopardizing her newly found peace of mind.

“I wish for you to know me better. To know a man behind the suit. I don’t know if what I have to offer will be enough; I don’t have anything except my heart. It’s been a long time since I first met you and believe me if I say I fell in love with you on that day. But at that time you were still dealing with ghosts of your past. I had to give you space to heal and find

yourself again.”

Her ex-husband, Thula, is the ghost of the past being referred to. Him and his brothers know all about scandals and skeletons of her marriage, which is one of the reasons why this date feels inappropriate.

“I really don’t know what to say, Nkonzo. I didn’t expect this from you.”

“Because I’m a Nazareth?”

“And you’re my boss.”

“I’m not, you’re Thakasa’s PA, not mine. He also knows how I feel about you.”

Her eyes widen. If Thakasa knows then it’s serious than she had thought.

“So you’re an unmarried woman now?” he asks.

The question is rather confusing. He knows very well that she’s divorced.

“Yes,” she says reluctantly.

“Were you transferred and welcomed back to the Dubes or you’re only unmarried on the paper?”

“I’m Tema Dube,” she says with a confused look on her face. She divorced Thula, everything was finalized and she re-registered as Ms Tema Dube at Home Affairs.

“Maybe one day I’ll be honored to meet your parents and discuss it with them. I’m a very traditional and religious man, which is something I want you to know more than anything about me.”

“Meaning?” she asks, cocking up her eyebrow in question.

“I love you but I cannot love beyond the temple,” he says.

Oh, great!

“Then why are we here?” she asks.

“Because love can pave a way. Right now I’m not asking you to marry me or anything, I just want you to get to know me better, then you’ll decide if I’m worth your love or not.”

“You just said you cannot love me because I don’t go to your church.”

“No, I love you, but for me to be able to take it to other steps you’ll have to be in church with me.”

“Who said I want anything to go to other steps?” she asks.

She just got out of a marriage for crying out loud!

“I don’t want to play hide and seek, I’m 34. I’m looking for something solid, I want to build something with you,” he says.

“I can’t change my life to accommodate you. I don’t even think I’m ready for a relationship.”

“I’m begging you, just give it one shot and see how it goes. I’m not going to let you down. I promise, you won’t regret it.” Fear dims his eyes. He’s getting rejected on broad daylight.

“I’m sorry Nkonzo, keep searching. I’m not ready for a relationship, let alone one that would need me to join a particular church before I can be loved properly.”

“Come on Tema, ngeke ngikuphoxe. At least tell me you’ll think about it, I’ll wait for you.”

She exhales deeply and shakes her head.

Not today, maybe not ever.

“No,” she says.

“I love you, Tema.”

“Still no, Nkonzo.”

His hands tighten around the glass he’s holding and almost breaks it.

“What must I do?” he asks in frustration.

“Forget we ever had this conversation. We were okay with only a professional relationship between us,” she says.

“I was never okay with it,” he says.

That’s not the point but she doesn’t argue. She slides her phone inside her purse and gets on her feet.

“I’ll ask them to pack my food. I have a lot of work to do at home,” she says.

“You really don’t like me, hey?” His tone is bruised but he’s trying his best to squeeze in the pain.

“Bye Nkonzo, let’s never talk about this again. I came because you asked me to lend you an ear and I did. Now let’s respect each other, please,” she says.

His eyes drop. He doesn’t say anything nor lift his head as she goes up to the cashiers at the counter with her purse.

He should’ve stayed away and loved her from a distance. His heart didn’t get broken in that position. For a very long time he was comfortable with loving her and not getting her love back, but from now on things won’t be the same anymore.

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MAWANDE

Her mother-in-law wasn’t going to stay with her forever. She’s gone back to her house and sent a little girl that’s Nyezi’s niece to stay with her. Life will never be the same without him but she’s trying not to dwell much on the loss. Nyezi left everything to

her, she needs to dust herself up and soldier on. She cannot let him down.

“Aunt, Baba says I must go to Gogo today,” says Liyana, the 11 year old girl that stays with her.

Which Baba now? She cannot sleep alone, it’s still too early.

Before she can enquire further details Halalisani walks in carrying a Nike bag. He’s six years older than Nyezi, a bit chubby with a round belly and Asian eyes. Thandiwe is happy, that’s all that matters, at the end of the day we were all made out of God’s image and we are all beautiful in His eyes.

“Ndimbane, can I help you?” Mawande asks, folding her arms and staring at him.

“KaManqele izwe selilibi manje, ngeke ngivume ulale wedwa emzini ongaka.” (KaManqele the world is bad nowadays, I cannot let you sleep alone in this gigantic homestead)

“Thank you for your concerns, but Liyana is here and I’m not scared.”

“No, even my cousin would turn his back on me if I let his wife be orphaned like this.”

“I said I’m fine!” she says sternly and looks around for Liyana and notices that she’s gone. Great, just great!

His eyes travel down her body and undress her. She’s only wearing a silky night dress, she didn’t think she’d have a guest so late.

“You should stop playing volleyball, you’ll lose weight.”

Mawande frowns, “Pardon?”

“Umfazi kumele abenezindawo zokubambelela,” he says with a stupid grin on his face. (A wife must have curves)

“Please leave, I want to sleep in peace.” She just lost all respect she had for this man. Who is he to comment on her weight? His eyes are penetrating her skin and making it cringe.

“I’ll sleep on the floor, you know it’s too early for you to share a bed with anyone,” he says.

“No, leave now!” Mawande.

“You want me to sleep in bed?” He smiles and licks his lips.

Mawande is dumbstruck. This got to be a joke!

“Uzongishaya ngesiphika senzila, umfowethu ngeke ejabule vele uma sekulala izilwembu esibayeni sakhe.” (You’ll hit me with a collar of your mourning attire, my brother wouldn’t be happy if spiderwebs grew in his cookie)

This person is getting closer and closer to her. She looks behind her and notices that her phone is out of reach. And who she’d call anyway? Her mother-in-law instilled this idea in this man’s head, now he thinks he can fill Nyezi’s shoes and move in. She can’t call home either, it would put unnecessary stress on her brothers. They’re already dealing with a lot, there’s a sex-tape scandal they need to solve. Bhambatha could’ve helped but she doesn’t have his number and it looks like he’s gone back to wherever he came from.

“I don’t bite KaManqele,” he says, running his fingers

on her arm.

“Halalisani don’t do this,” she begs and steps backwards.

“I just want to support you and make you forget about Nyezi.”

“It’s too soon. Please use the main bedroom, I’ll sleep in the guest one,” she says.

Displeasure displays on his face.

“I could’ve slept on the floor,” he says with a hint of annoyance.

She needs to play it cool.

“No,” she says. “I’ll put your bag there. Please have a seat so that I can dish for you.”

It takes everything in her to act this calm and collected. Thousand tear drops are locked behind her eyes. Why would a family member do this to her? Couldn’t they wait a year or few months?

He’s sitting on the chair like a man of the house. She quickly types a text to Thandiwe; **FETCH YOUR MAN IN MY HOUSE!**

Hopefully this will push the jealousy buttons in her and get her here in a split second to fetch her husband.

She puts a robe on and goes back to the kitchen to dish for the unwelcome guest.

It's been hours now, there's a loud snoring man in her bedroom. She's sitting on bed in a locked guest room, waiting for Thandiwe to knock. She's sent her five more texts and they all went through. Why is she taking so long? This is her freakin' husband, she chose him amongst hundreds.

Her eyelids are growing heavier, it's just a few minutes away from 11pm. She goes to the door and confirms the lock then goes back to bed.

This is the first time she's ever felt unsafe in her own house! Why did Nyezi leave? Why couldn't he grow old with her? Why death was so quick to do them apart?

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She wakes up to loud voices speaking and laughing. As drowsiness piles off she realizes that it's actually a loud playing radio; Ukhozi FM. What a way to wake up!

She goes to the bathroom to release herself and wash her face. Her eyes are bloodshot from the heavy crying she did before sleeping. Luckily there's a bottle of eye-drop that Nyezi bought a while back. It helps her clear her eyes but nothing can clear the ache in her heart. Thandiwe is okay with her man being here, everyone is.

Now she has to make breakfast for someone's husband!

She changes into a tea-length tiered dress and a blouse. Then she covers her shoulders with a black scarf and wraps her head with a doek.

The new man of the house is watering her plants

outside. She stands by the window and watches. Can't he drop and die? If this is how this family think they're going to treat her then they have another thing coming. Thakasa opened doors and asked her to come back home; she might take that offer and bid goodbye to the them before her mourning period finishes.

She spreads jam and butter on four slices of bread and cuts them into halves and lays them on a plate. She covers the plate with another one and puts it on the tray. Now she needs to boil water and makes tea. There's someone at the door, her skin cringes before she can even see his face. If he doesn't leave today she'd be compelled to call Thakasa.

"What is this nincompoop doing here, Mawande?" A voice she didn't expect to hear comes from the door. She almost jump and spills hot water all over the counter.

He walks in, wearing a black T-shirt and military pant. There's a leather gun holster around his waist and a

dead look on his face.

“He slept in my room,” her voice is breaking. Tears are burning her eyes and threatening to burst out.

“I told him to leave, he wouldn’t listen. He slept in my bedroom, Bhambatha!” Tears break free and escape her eyes, making their way down her cheeks like a waterfall.

“Did he touch you?” he asks, unhitching the leather holster and pulling out a Ruger 57.

“No, I slept in the guest bedroom.” Now she’s shaking at the sight of a gun. She’s relieved that he’s here because she knows that she can count on him, but she doesn’t want any gun fights or bloodshed in her house.

“Please don’t shoot him, just tell him to go,” she begs.

“Dlana isinkwa nojamu Mawande, ngizoyenza ngendlela abafuna ngiyenze ngayo lento.” (Eat bread and jam, I’ll do this exactly how they want me to do it)

Halalisani appears behind him and frowns. It takes

only one second for his shirt to be squashed in Bhambatha's grip. He pulls him like a sheep to a slaughterhouse, all the way through the gate. He's arguing his case and Bhambatha is hailing insults at him. Deep Zulu insults that makes one's skin cringe.

Mawande quickly scrolls down for Thandiwe's number.

"Wande," she answers in a sleepy voice.

"Thandiwe I told you to fetch your husband last night and you didn't bother. Now Bhambatha has fetched him for you and you might collect him in a body bag."

"What?" Now she sounds fully awake. "How can you do that Mawande? Why didn't you say you want Bhambatha instead of turning them against each other."

She drops the call before Mawande can respond.

"Oh, wow!" She's left stunned and shaking with anger.

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THAKASA

He's lying in bed, finally catching a break from all the crazy activities Nothile subjected him into. He hasn't called home and Bandla hasn't contacted him either. Everything must be good, he thinks to himself. Maybe he found a way to sort things out on his own, which is good. They're finally growing up, Nothile wasn't wrong for suggesting that he lets them be on their own for a while.

"Manqele you have to see this," Nothile says, coming through the door.

It must be another 'amazing place' to see or an activity not to miss out on. He appreciates her for everything she does, but horse-riding, hiking and all those activities are not for him. In a nutshell, he's bored to the core.

"What is it MaNtusi?" he asks with his hands over his

eyes.

He's not even interested to take a look at the laptop in her hands.

"MaKhumalo is on the news," she says.

That grabs his attention. He lifts his head and takes the laptop from her.

Indeed, MaKhumalo is doing a press conference.

"What the hell is this?" Shock transforms his face. Lucas, their PR manager, is standing next to her and translating for her. Who let this happen? Whose order was this; MaKhumalo addressing such sensitive issue and Lucas standing next to her like a bloody fool!

MaKhumalo: (pointing her chest) Awami
amadodakazi awakaze alale emahhotela namadoda.

Lucas: (Translates) My daughters have never slept with men in hotels.

MaKhumalo: Fundisani amantombazane enu isimilo, umfana wami akenzanga lutho olungenziwa abanye abafana.

Lucas: (Translates) Teach your girl children good behavior, my son didn't do anything out of ordinary.

Sweat perspires on Thakasa's forehead. Coming here was a bad idea, MaKhumalo is not addressing anything but trashing the girls in a sex-tape.

MaKhumalo: Mina ezami izingane zifundile, zinemali. Azikaze zenze oshotikhathi. (Her lip curves up in disgust)

Lucas: (Translates) My children are educated and rich. They've never taken short-cuts in life.

Nothile is pleased, she's hiding her smile. So far, so good! She's proud of her mother in law.

MaKhumalo: Ilezigilamkhuba zokufika uhulumeni aziyeka zichanase ezweni lethu. Umntanami unikwe iblackmail, wasatshiswa ngezibhamu.

Lucas: (Translates) It's the foreigners that our government let do anyhow they like. My son was blackmailed and threatened with guns.

MaKhumalo: Siwumndeni sizovula icala lokudicilelwa phansi kwesthunzi, okunye nokunye akuhlangene namuntu. Akekho umuntu ongakaze awele esilingweni samantombazane angenasimilo.

Lucas: (Translates) As a family we'll open a case for defamation of character, the rest is none of anyone's business. Everyone has been tempted by loose girls in their lives.

Thakasa releases a low grunt and wipes his sweaty forehead.

MaKhumalo: UBandlalethu umfana ozihloniphayo, nebandla sizomhlambulula bese siyamkhulekela.

Lucas: (Translates) Bandlalethu is a well-mannered boy, as a church we'll cleanse him and pray for him.

MaKhumalo: Niyakwazi ukuthumelana amanyala kodwa amathuba emisebenzi agcina phakathi kwenu nemindeni yenu. Owami umfana akagcini ngokuvula uzip webhulukwe, namathuba emisebenzi uyawavula.

Lucas: (Translates) You can send each other porn videos but you cannot share job opportunities. My son doesn't only open his zipper, he also open job opportunities.

Nothile bursts into laughter and receives a dead look from Thakasa.

“This is not funny. This should’ve been professional, if it wasn’t for you none of this would’ve happened.”

“Manqele don’t even start. This is all happening because of Bandla, I only asked you not to get involved.”

“See what happens when I don’t get involved. This is why I wanted to handle this. We cannot afford more scandals!”

She sighs, “Are you hungry?”

“MaNtusi we are leaving.”

“What? We are going to Sani Pass later, remember.”

“We are going home, this whole trip was stupid, just like the rest of them.”

“I thought you liked it when we spend time together. Are you even ready to move out if you’re going to run home everytime there’s a problem?”

“MaNtusi, please, not now!”

“I’m not leaving Manqele. Go home and play a hero that you always are to everyone, except yourself. I’m staying and coming back Monday.”

“You can’t stay alone here. Everyone is with someone.”

“Maybe I can. Should I help you pack?” she asks.

He exhales heavily, “Yes, please.”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 34

NOTHILE

The barman looks at her like she's crazy.

She repeats, "I said Chardon."

"Chardonnay, mam?"

Oh, smart ass?!

"Just give me the bottle."

Finally, he turns his ass around and does his job without questioning her. The last time she tasted alcohol was in her matric dance and it was just half a glass of Redds. Now, at 31 she's about to indulge in a drink she's sworn on her life to never drink because she doesn't have a husband. Yeap, he just left in the middle of their trip because something needed him home. He married her but he belongs to his family. It's always been that way. Family this, family that. And she grew familiar to it and loved his family like it was her own. Whatever they needed,

she was there for them. All of them. Maybe in some way she did have a hand in how things are now. Maybe because she loves MaKhumalo so much. That woman, despite her craziness and unpredictable character, has given her a glimpse of how it could've been like to have a mother. She's never made her feel like she was just a 'makoti' and sometimes it feels like she loves her more than Thakasa himself. Maybe she got sold to that idea and wanted to prove herself to be worthy of being her daughter-in-law and ended up pushing Thakasa away.

But she'll take only quarter of the blame because all in all, they caused her marriage to break. Even the late Manqele, he's not innocent.

She pays using a credit card, collects her bottle and goes back to her room. There must be a recipe or directions to drink written on the bottle of this thing. Does she drink it with dash? Ices? Or she should just drink it as it is?

Last lady moments, she pulls a glass and scans it inside and takes her first sip.

Bad, but not too bad. She pours a full glass this time and endures one sip at a time.

Thirty minutes later she's drank half of the bottle and is now packing her bags and singing happily. At least Thakasa Manqele was kind enough to leave the car behind. There's nothing left for her here, the plan was to spend time with him and get him away from the chaos, but he left so she might as well leave.

"Ma'am, are you sure you can drive?" asks a man she's never seen in her life before. Maybe she's a traffic cop or Bheki Cele himself. Oh wait, maybe he's RAF sponsor and he's worried that if she gets into a car accident she'll be her expense to take care of.

"You're Bheki Cele?" she asks.

He frowns, "No."

Stupid fool!

"Then bye!" she says, opening the car door and

stumbling inside. The doek must've dropped somewhere or left on top of the bed. But her hair isn't that bad, so it doesn't really matter.

She drives out, saying goodbye to the place she was looking so forward to enjoy with her husband.

Now, who's this man singing like he's got a vibrator in his throat? She scrolls down to the songs Phethy downloaded with her phone and plays them.

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It's quarter to five, everybody is home. Thakasa is yet to apologize to the public for MaKhumalo's choice of words and use her old age to cover up. He had to take care of business first and make sure that none of their clients were pulling out or getting wrong impression of who they are as a family.

His car drives in, buzzing with music:

I WAS BORN TO FLEX

DIAMONDS ON MY NECK

I LIKE BOARDING JETS, I LIKE MORNING SEX....

It's driven by a woman in big shades and plaited natural hair. They're seated under the verandah as a one big, selfish family. Their brows are raised as they watch the car drives in, playing unfamiliar music and driven by a strange woman.

"Who did you give your car?" Nkonzo asks Thakasa with a frown.

Before he can answer the door opens and the one and only Nothile steps out of it.

"Why is not covering her head?" Nkonzo again.

"Maybe she was robbed and they took her clothes," says MaKhumalo turning to Phethy dancing with her head to the song buzzing throughout the yard. "Go and fetch her scarf, Phethile."

She disconnects her phone and the music dies. But still all eyes are on her. She's now standing barefooted in the middle of the yard and staring at

them with her arms folded.

“Go and check if she’s mentally okay,” Bandla whispers to Thakasa. He’s still looking at his wife with shock and displeasure.

She makes her way to them and he makes his way to her with his jaws clenched.

“MaNtusi you are drunk?” he asks.

“Yeah, so what? You’re going to hit me again?” She narrows her eyes and breaks a brief chuckle.

He tries to grab her but Bandla saw it coming; he pulls him back before he can touch her.

“Y’all need to listen up. Nonke!” Nothile says, almost yelling, and pointing her fingers at everyone.

“You’re all married to my husband, right? We share him, even with you Ma.” She taps her fingers to collect her memory. “Us and Nomkhosi, of course. We all share one man.”

Thakasa yanks off Bandla’s hand.

“Mthonga I won’t do anything to her, I just want to take her to our bedroom,” he says.

“Bedroom of who? Whose bedroom? The bedroom belongs to who?” she cracks a laugh and pats her chest. “I, Nothile Ngema, don’t have a husband that’s only mine. He belongs to his brothers and mother.”

She looks at Bandla staring at her like he’s a saint from above and doesn’t know what she’s talking about.

“Thank you for ruining my trip with your sex scandals,” she says.

Gasps!!!

She raises her hand up, “Shhhhh.”

“Nothile!” Thakasa roars.

“Oh, poor husband. I’m a bad person, right? I had a hand in your side-chick abortion and nywe nywe nywe. I shouldn’t feel any type of way towards your siblings and should always be supportive to them through thin and thick. But who cares about me here?”

She looks at Sqalo, “Do you?”

“Of course I care Sis’ MaNtusi.”

“Yeah, right. But do you know who suffers when you take your problems and give them to Thakasa? Me. When you cannot tell your mother that you’re gay and rather dump it on him to solve it, I’m the one who gets subjected into a sullen marriage. The one who sleeps next to a man that sighs like a sangoma, not because he’s one, but because y’all problems are sitting on his shoulders.”

They’re looking so shocked, why?

“Do you tell them that you’re okay?” she asks Thakasa.

“Babe...” His voice lowers, now where’s the king of the jungle? He doesn’t want them to know that they’re too much.

“Are we not here because you felt emotionally neglected by me?”

He swallows and drops his eyes.

“Newsflash Manqeke, there’s nothing I can do to make you feel emotionally taken care of because your own family doesn’t care about your mental being,” she says and looks at MaKhumalo.

“He attends therapy. He cannot handle what you all expect from him. He wants to move out but he can’t even spend time with his wife on a trip because he got to jump back home everytime a problem pops up. You raised him like that. You all did. But at the end of the day nobody cares about him.”

Nkonzo looks like he wants to say something but fighting against it.

“He lost a child because his whore aborted and he cried for the whole week. Did any of you even bother to check if he was okay? No. He had to clear his eyes with eye-drops every morning and wake up to carry more company, family and every sort of problem there’s under the sun.” She’s staring at Nkonzo and it seems like his words have stuck below his throat.

“Now I’m married to a broken man that expects me to be more than just a wife to him and cheats on me on the name of being emotionally neglected. I cannot be a brother to him, it’s y’all job.” She points at Bandla and Nkonzo. “I cannot be a mother to him, that’s your job Ma.”

Thakasa holds her arm and looks at her in the eyes. He doesn't look angry anymore, he just want her to be done and out of sight.

"Please let's go to the bedroom," he says.

No! She jumps off his grip and goes to Bandla.

"You are looking at me as if I'm crazy? After everything I've done for him and this family, he cheated on me. Not just for sex. He fell in love with her, made her pregnant and bought her a house. But of course, none of you have ever asked how I feel. The only thing I'll ever be asked of in these premises is; MaNtusi what are we eating today?" Tears gush out and she doesn't even bother wiping them.

"Or you're doing this to me because I don't have parents? You know that you gave me a mother."

"Nothile, please, don't do this." This time she doesn't only say it, he grabs her hand and lifts her to his arms despite the heavy weight.

"Manqe!e you left me!" She's kicking her legs and fighting to break free.

He kicks the door of their bedroom open, walks in panting heavily and puts her on bed.

“Call Mawande and put her on the speaker. I want to talk to her.”

“You will call her when you’ve calmed down.”

“I’m calm! I said call Mawande,” she yells.

“Sleep,” he says, heading back to the door and leaving her in bed.

“At least have sex with me.”

“Sleep first,” he says and closes the door behind him and locks it.

After rambling for a few minutes, she turns to the side and let her body rests.

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Sqalo looks for him all over the yard and finally finds him sitting behind the rondavel with his head dropped in his hands.

When he hears his footsteps he lifts his head up and cracks a thin smile.

“Are you not supposed to be studying or something?” he asks.

“I am, but it can wait.” He looks for something and finds a stone. He drags it next to him and sits.

“What’s going on?” Thakasa asks with concern.

“I want to say I’m sorry.”

He frowns, “What did you do?”

“For everything. You’ve been raising me since I was 10 years old and I don’t know how many times I’ve caused you sleepless nights. But mostly I want to apologize for making my sexuality yours to confess.”

A heavy sigh!

“Sqalo, you’re not a burden to me. MaNtusi and I are going through a rough patch, but everything will be alright.”

“I still don’t want to add to your problems. Nobody takes care of your problems for you, I also want to be that independent.”

“Meaning?” He lifts his eyebrow in question.

“I want to move out. Not with you or anyone. I know that you’ll always be here if I need you, I just don’t want you to ever choose between Ma and I. I know that it takes a lot for you to do that.”

“Sqalo you cannot leave home like that. What if something happens to you and nobody is there to protect you?”

“Who has been protecting you?”

“Myself.”

“From which age?”

“I don’t know.”

“I want to be like you. Please help me.”

He exhales heavily.

“I’ll think about it and get back to you. Now go and do your school work.”

“Are you okay though?” Sqalo asks and gets no answer.

He leaves quietly.

Thakasa rests his head back against the wall and blows out a sigh. He didn't think it had gotten this far. Things weren't going to flip back to normal, were they? His wife is broken, so is their marriage. And he's responsible for it. Nothile would never drink or talk like that to his mother and brothers.

"Mthonga,"

Urgh, not this again!

Why are they looking for him? He's here because he needs to be alone.

Nkonzo sits on the stone next to him and exhales heavily.

"How are you feeling?" he asks.

"I'm good," Thakasa says with a shrug.

A moment of silence passes. Both their stares are fixed into space and they look deeply absorbed in their thoughts.

"When are you getting back inside the temple?"

Nkonzo finally breaks the silence.

“I need to resolve the issue of Nomkhosi and make things right with her family first.” He has been attending church, but not stepping inside the temple because of the sins he committed. He was suspended from the temple after everything came out.

“Do you still talk to her?” Nkonzo asks.

“No, we don’t talk,” he says.

There’s another moment of silence between them.

“I think it’s time to cut the chord Mthonga,” Nkonzo.

Thakasa looks at him with a slight frown. His eyes are bloodshot but he’s making sure that not a single tear drops out.

“The youngest son stays in his father’s home and keeps it standing. Of course Sqalo cannot do that, angithi bamudla ngemuva? The position automatically reverses back to Bandlalethu. This home is his to keep. You should’ve left us after getting married to be with your wife. We’ve all messed with both of your sanity. It’s time to cut that chord and go our separate ways. We are old now, we

cannot continue living together. I understand where MaNtusi is coming from.”

“Nkonzo you’re not moving out because of what she said?” Thakasa asks with shock.

“We need to stop depending on you. You’re having a baby soon, are you going to take care of her and us all at once? We all need to find ourselves beyond this,” he points around. “It’s not healthy. I don’t want you to lose your wife or end up in a psychiatry because of me. I apologize for all the things I put on your shoulders willingly and unwillingly.”

“You’re not a burden to me. You’ll never be,” he says.

“Thank you for that, but I really need my own space now.”

“If that’s what you think is going to help you get Tema.”

That gets his ass off the stone. It’ll take him days to get over that public rejection.

“I think you need to let me go to Cape Town on your behalf while you work on rebuilding the woman we

have broken.”

“Is it? So I guess my PA will have to go with you,”
Thakasa asks.

“Obviously, but it’ll be Nkonzo-saves-the-day kind of
situation,” he says.

“You don’t know MaDube very well.”

Nkonzo laughs, “Relax wena and watch the space,
ngizomlanda uShoti.”

He tried the first time and failed, he’s going to try
again and again and again. At the end of the day
Tema has to be his lawful plus-one. It’s so
unfortunate that he loves her and she wants to run
hills because of how he sketched their possible
future. But there’s no where to hide if you’re running
away from yourself.

It’s getting colder outside. It’s been almost an hour
since Thakasa sat here, he’s about to dust himself
up and go join his drunk wife in bed.

Bandla appears, walking like a hopeless ghost. He

thought he could handle things, but it's harder than he thought. He's taken a break from his phone to avoid journalists and reading everything that's being written about him.

"Not you as well," Thakasa says, hitting his head on the wall and covering his face with his hands.

"Angeke ngikubangele iscefe, ngifuna ukukutshela nje ukuthi ngizoba ubhuti ongcono." (I'm not going to be a nuisance, I just want to tell you that I'll become a better brother)

"Don't take it personal Mthonga," Thakasa says.

"I'm not, I just want to genuinely apologize. I'll apologize to her as well. I really want to see you two growing old together."

Tears roll down, he tries to press his lip and fight them back but he carries too much baggage in his heart.

"I don't know what to do anymore."

"Take your wife and leave. Get marriage counseling and focus on her. The brotherhood chord should've

been cut a long time ago. Being a husband should come first than being a brother to grown men.”

He doesn't respond but hopefully he heard him and he'll use his advice.

There's a banging sound coming from his bedroom.

“Thakasaaa!” It's Nothile, she's woken up.

“Please don't hit her,” Bandla asks as he dusts himself off the ground.

It's sad that his brother thinks he's an abuser that needs to watch his actions, but he cannot blame him, can he?

He wipes his eyes dry and makes his way to the loud voice yelling his name.

MaKhumalo is sitting in the veranda, she hasn't made a single comment- strange enough. He walks past her without looking at her direction.

He unlocks the door, walks in and closes it behind him.

“Why are you locking me up?” asks Nothile. She’s not drunk as she was when she got here. She’s wrapped a scarf around her head.

“I wanted you to sleep,” he says.

“No, you didn’t want people to see that your wife is drunk. Image is important more than feelings around here, let’s not forget.”

“MaNtusi, please, ngiyacela, don’t change because of me. You’re losing your character, I cannot blame you, but I urge you to be at least decent. All this doesn’t suit you. You’re pregnant, you know that drinking is putting the baby’s life in danger.”

“Do you even care about this baby?”

“Of course I care, that’s why I want us to work on our marriage so that she can arrive to a warm home.”

She throws herself in bed, her dress goes up and exposes her upper thigh.

He pulls it down and sits next to her.

“Can we talk when you are sober?”

“About what? Your family problems?”

“Maybe about how much I really love you Nothile. You are my world, I’m scared of losing you more than anything in life.”

She lifts her head, “You’re scared of losing losing me?”

“Yes. Am I losing you?” he asks, turning her face to him with his hand.

“I need a break Manqele.”

“We are not dating, Nothile.”

“It took me this long to finally get pregnant and it may be the last time. But I can’t even enjoy my pregnancy because now I’m this crazy, obsessed wife who’s always ready to attack. I want to go away for a while.”

“What about me?” Thakasa.

“I don’t know. What I know is that I need a break, I want to bond with my baby and be alone for some time.”

“Are...are you leaving me?” The pain in his voice cannot be contained. The broken man in him

displays in his eyes and he's helpless.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 35

GUGU

At first she liked Efe, despite him having money and being generous with it, he was good to Khanyo and he put up with her crazy character. Things changed when she discovered that he had a wife and he had brought her to South Africa. But still, it wasn't any of her business, her duty was to comfort her friend and help her get over the break up. She was going to find someone else, she told her. And indeed, she's found Bandlaletu who seems to be genuine and loving more than any man that has ever come into her life. Within a month of dating he's helped her confront dreams that have been bothering her for years.

First stamp of approval is, of course, that he's monied. Second stamp; he's wise and influential. And third one; he allows Khanyo to be Khanyo but still encourages her to be a better person.

There's only one thing Bandla wouldn't do though,

that's getting his hands dirty. He'd use Shembe anointed water, Vaseline and pastes a sticker of UNyazi on his forehead. But he'd never spill blood for revenge, he's too religious and law-abiding for that.

Mandulo may be, and may be not, the type that goes for blood. He didn't kill his friend after he smashed his wife behind his back for years, there are slim chances of him hunting down people and avenging his sister.

That's why she took matters in her own hands. She's not a stalker but she can get information, any that she wants. A red flag was raised in the hospital when Bandla saw Efe sitting with them, it was like he was seeing a ghost. The confrontation wasn't vocal, but rather exchanged with confrontational looks. Definitely, there was more than what met the eye and she had to find out if any of them had a hand in Khanyo's accident. It was just too brutal to be robbery, whoever it was wanted her dead.

Bandla had no motive to want her dead but in life she's met many wolves hiding under sheep's skins. She had to do some digging...

Bandla had too many private encounters with Efe in the past and spent many nights in different hotels. Them being partners didn't make sense and had little to no possibility. Obviously he was one of Efe's major client, he paid him large sums of money to take care of medical expenses of the ladies he booked and ensuring that security was always tight.

Then all of a sudden he pulled out and Efe's finances took a knock. He couldn't pay rent for his townhouse last month and was served a notice.

There's no love lost between him and Khanyo. Before everything settled down his wife got a restraining order against Khanyo after a few altercations. It was bad. Khanyo was bitter and thirsty for blood. Well, scratch that, she'd actually grab the wife's wig and exchange mean words with her. There was no bloodshed. Maybe she was thirsty for wigs, not blood.

But Efe has every reason to want her dead, now that she's snatched away his major client as well. Funnily,

he knew exactly where to find her “body.” But at this stage nothing can be proved, she’s acting on her instincts which are hardly ever wrong.

She puts the baby in bed and rolls her joint by the balcony sliding door. This is a state house and hell may break loose when Mike arrives. He knows about the Efe situation and he’s always involved where Gugu is, however he has a soft spot for women and children. Unfortunately there was nowhere she could’ve gone with an 11 month-old baby that she snatched out of a moving vehicle. Don’t ask!

She leans by the door and puffs up smoke. At this point she has no idea what she’s going to do with this baby. But Efe has released the sex-tape- stupid enough. He has nothing over Bandla now, which is a relief because now it’s going to be a fair fight. His wife and elder child are still stuck in the country. Soon his path will cross with hers and he’ll learn whose friend he might have messed with. These are not times to be on her wrong side, everything is going south in her life; they keep going in circles with the Minister of State Security. She has little to no

sympathy to nobody.

She met Mike before she met Mohammed and he was just a political driven nobody. Mohammed was a secretary at COMSEC; a department that ensures that the government and civil service departments electronic communications are protected and secured. She'd like to believe that he was an honest servant of the department until crossing paths with her in a formal dinner with the National Intelligence Coordinating committee where she was helping the catering team under fake chef pretense.

She's always been too ambitious and discreetly cunning. After a few sexual encounters, Mohammed was eating out of the palm of her hand. She didn't only get access at Musanda Complex, the head office of State Security Agency, she also managed to secure a tender for Mike as an agent to supply print and electronic resources to the state.

Of course, that was just one foot at the door, they have their eyes on a bigger price. Mike and her have nothing other than shared political interest, he's already reached his 40s and divorced. Their

relationship is strictly business, but she doesn't mind holding his arm and looking pretty next to him during events.

Mohammed is still with his long-term girlfriend but they have their stolen moments of intimacy every now and then. They have boundaries and both of them respect them. She's not looking for love yet.

Mike's cologne fills the room before he enters. He casts his eyes on the bed and sees a baby sleeping. His forehead furrows into a frown.

"And then? Who is this?" he asks.

"Efe's daughter. I took her, I want her father," she says, staring outside with no emotions attached. That's the thing about her, she's calm in everything she does. Who kidnaps a baby and says she "took her" so calmly as if there's no mother wetting a pillow with tears behind?

"Gugu this house is under wireless surveillance cameras!"

“Med took care of that,” she says waving her hand like it’s nothing. “Did you get the documents?”

“Not yet, but I managed to speak to the IT guy.”

“And he just agreed?” Gugu.

“I promised him money and....” No, no, no!

“Mike we can’t keep letting people play part in this. I don’t want to owe no IT fool money. If we break through, we break through. I want no loose ends.” It pisses him off when she treats him like a little boy who can’t think for himself, but what the hell is she supposed to do if he keeps messing up their plans?

“I had no other choice, if he becomes a problem we’ll eliminate him,” he says with a shrug.

She blows out a sigh and walks to the bed to shush the baby back to sleep. She eats, plays and sleeps. There’s no need to drug her, she’s a very good baby.

“What’s her name?” asks Mike.

“I’ll check it on her father’s Instagram page. I’m not good with names.”

He’s not surprised because he knows this girl too

well. She only cares about a few things and a few people in life.

“So what do we call her?” he asks.

“I don’t know, I call her Pinky because she has pink ribbons on her hair.” She looks at the baby and smiles. “She’s a good baby, I don’t know what she did to deserve such a horrible man as a father.”

“If she has blue ribbons tomorrow we’ll call her Blue?” he asks and they both burst into laughter, forgetting that they’re trying to put a baby back to sleep.

She opens her eyes and cries. Mike sits on bed and lifts her to his chest. He wasn’t lucky to get children in his previous marriage, but just like any other man, his wish is to have children of his own one day. Even though that seems like a fading dream now.

“So what’s the plan?” he asks, resting the baby’s head on his shoulder and rubbing her back.

She seems to be calming down.

“I don’t need a plan Mike. He’s the one who needs it.

I have his baby and I want Bandla's R300k back. Then I want names of the men he hired to try kill Khanyo, after that I want him locked up for attempted murder, drug trafficking and all other sins he's committed under the sun."

"Do you think it's going to be easy?" Mike asks.

"He has to make it easy, for his own sake," she says.

Pinky is now fully awake and staring at Mike with her big, innocent eyes. His heart sinks as reality hits him; she may not be freaked out by strangers but no child deserves to pay for her father's sins. To ensure her that she's safe in his arms, he plants a soft kiss on her head and she smiles.

"Man, she's so cute!" Gugu exclaims.

"Yeah, right? I wish I had my own, I'd do anything for her."

Okay, he's getting carried away with this temporary parenting duty. This is a kidnapped baby, not his and not hers. They cannot be emotionally attached to her.

This house cannot be mistaken for a home and

she's not about to play happy families using someone's child.

"Mike, please focus," she says and gives him a look.

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BHAMBATHA

His uncle's van pulls up, Thandiwe climbs out with a piercing scream. Her husband is bleeding on the ground, Bhambatha's foot is stamped on his chest while he makes an unpleasant phone call to someone. He keeps cursing over the phone, whoever it is has pissed him more.

He drops the call, slides the phone back in his pocket and grabs Halalisani up by his jacket. His fists have done enough damage. He might've broken his nose and a few of his limbs. He should be letting him go now, but another fool has annoyed him and he's going to make someone pay for it.

Unfortunately for Halalisani, that someone is him.

A fist lands on his bleeding mouth, he releases a low groan and tries to duck the next one.

“Oh, uyavika? Ngiyislima mina ngishaya umoya?” Bhambatha asks angrily. (I hit you and you shield your face, am I supposed to hit the air?”

He shakes his head, “Angiviki.” (I’m not shielding myself)

“Good!” He throws another fist and Halalisani lets it land nicely on his nose.

He groans out in pain.

“Ungangibangeli umsindo. Angifuni ukukhalelwa yindoda enamasende aluhlaza. Ungibangela amabhadi.”

“I’m not crying!” Again, Halalisani pulls himself together and obeys his crazy instructions.

He pushes him to the ground and stands over him.

“Yini ungenze umsunu wena? I asked you not to bother that woman and you went and did exactly that.”

“Bhambatha I was asked to go by the elders. I didn’t

touch her, I swear!” he says as calm as he can. He doesn’t want to sound broken, that as well may gets him more punches.

“Inkinga yakho unekhanda elixegayo njengempukane. You want me to go back to jail?” he asks, pulling the gun out of his waist. (The problem is that you have a loose head like a fly)

“Bhambatha let him go, now!” His uncle roars, making his way towards them followed by a crying Thandiwe.

This man thinks he calls the shots. He might be sleeping with his mother but he’s not his father. He cannot tell him what to do. Not after he told them that he’ll shoot Halalisani if he ever went to his late brother’s house without any invitation. They dared him, now he’s delivering on his promises.

He fires a few shots in the air and they run back to their van. He turns it to Halalisani who’s now shaking like a leaf.

“I don’t want your death on Mawande’s conscience,

that's the only reason I'm not pulling this trigger and blowing off your brains."

"Thank you," he says, unable to hold back his tears.

"Why are you crying? Ungithela ngamabhadi." (You're causing me bad lucks)

"I'm not crying." Yes, he's crying!

Bhambatha raises his eyebrow. He must not be annoyed again.

"Unyoko lo?" he asks, pointing at Halalisani's wet cheeks. (Is this your mother)

"These are tears of joy, my brother. I'm not crying," Halalisani says.

He clicks his tongue and lifts him off the ground. His uncle's van has sped off and left him and Halalisani to kill one another.

"Don't ever make me do this again. You'll go to Mawande and apologize. Then you'll never set your foot in that house again. Okay?"

He nods, "Yes, yes."

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MAWANDE

Anything can happen. There might be another funeral in the family, and this time she'd be the one to blame. Nobody is saying anything to her. The van with Thandiwe and Nyezi's uncle has come back without Halalisani. Maybe he's dead and Bhambatha has been taken to jail. Her head buzzes with unpleasant possibilities and she sinks on the couch hopelessly.

Why can't she mourn for her husband in peace? Staying here is not worth it if people are going to die over her. It seems like nobody is on her side here. Not even Nyezi's mother, a woman she's always considered as her own mother.

The door shifts and footsteps come in. She stands up quickly and fixes her eyes at the passage.

It's Bhambatha.

She blows out a sigh of temporary relief.

"Please tell me you didn't do anything stupid," she says, looking at him with desperation.

He looks around for a charger and spots one and makes his way to connect his phone.

"Do you know what time Sport Scene opens in town?" he asks.

"No," she says with a frown. Did he kill Halalisani or not? That's the only thing she wants to know right now.

"They'd be open by the time we get there anyway. Pearl said you have a game next week and I know that you don't have any sport wear; no joggers, no sport bras and no kicks."

Now he's really taking this far. There are no joggers and sport bras being bought.

"I'm not going to wear bras and joggers. You want people to say more nasty things about me?"

"Oh, uzogxuma ngezishweshwe namaphinifa?" he

asks. (You're going play wearing seshoeshoe dresses and panofores)

She sighs and fights the urge to roll her eyes. He has this thing of saying stupid things with the most serious face.

"I can wear a skirt," she says with a silent 'duh' at the end.

"Who have you ever seen playing sport in a skirt?"

She's about to mention a few netball players when he shakes his head with a low sigh.

"Wearing joggers and sport bras won't make you less of a wife. Why you want to make yourself look different in another town?"

"I don't want people to talk about me. I'm not you Bhambatha, I care about what other people think of me."

He exhales tiredly, "Alright. Please take my number, I'm still around for a few weeks. Call if you need anything."

She passes her phone to him and stands behind the

couch with her arms folded. She never thought this man would come and stand by her. He didn't even come to their wedding or any of the celebrations they hosted. He's always been scarce, even though he communicated with Nyezi and had a good relationship with him.

"You already have it," he says handing it back to her.

She frowns, "No, I don't."

"I don't why it's saved as General but that's my number."

Indeed, there's a number saved under the name General but she's never paid attention to it.

"Oh, I didn't know I had it," she says, still looking at her phone with disbelief.

"Maybe Nyezi did, but it's nothing, just remember to call me if you need something, anything."

He says he's going somewhere to meet up with a friend. Mawande is relieved to know that nobody died. She would've never forgiven herself if Bhambatha had killed him. Yes, after last night she

hates him, but he's a father and his children still need him.

Phone rings from the lounge. It's the ringing tone she doesn't recognize, she quickly rushes to it. Damn, Bhambatha left his phone here. The caller is so persistent.

She picks up, "Hello, Bhambatha is not around, I'll tell him to call you back."

"Who the hell are you? Why are you answering his phone?" It's a lady and she doesn't sound pleased by her answering Bhambatha's phone.

"I'm his sister-in-law, he left it on the charger and went to a friend," she says.

"You're not telling me why you're answering his phone."

God, not another drama! She's had enough for today.

"It's in my house and I was next to it," she says.

"Nobody answers my man's phone, okay? I don't know what you're up to or what he's still doing there.

But I'll tell you one thing; I'm not going to let you or anyone take my man. Don't even try that remarrying a brother bullshit with him. Your husband is no more, it's over!"

That's.....just stupid.

"Okay, sorry. Bye!" She drops the call and releases a sigh. Is staying here and mourning for Nyezi really worth all the drama she's getting, literally from everyone?

Her phone rings right on that moment of frustration and anger.

She picks up, "I'm glad you called, I don't want to be here anymore. I cannot do this anymore Thakasa."

"What did they do to you?" he asks in panic.

"What I came here for is over. The love is over, I cannot stay here anymore. I want to come home."

There's a sigh, followed by a brief moment of silence.

"Everyone is leaving. Things are falling apart," he says.

“What do you mean? Who’s leaving?”

“Nkonzo and Sqalo. I don’t know about Bandla but he hasn’t said anything. MaNtusi has already left, so....” He exhales deeply, “I don’t know where to go from here. I don’t know if she’s ever going to come back. I don’t know if my brothers are going to be okay on their own. I messed up, I’ve destroyed my family. Ma is not speaking to me, angazi nje Wandé, I really don’t.”

She’s trying to draw a picture of it; her family without Sqalo, Nkonzo and Nothile. They’ve never lived without one another. They’re one big family, they live and do everything together.

Is the emotional support she’s longing for even going to be there at home?

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 36

KHANYO

I've been so annoying, asking the doctor when he's discarding me. I feel like everything is going wrong in the outside world. Bandla's phone hardly goes through, his name is still making headlines. I guess he's not coping with all this bad publicity, which isn't a surprise because he's trending for all the wrong reasons.

I'm not A-okay with it. I saw the video, it disgusted me and poked my insecurities. I don't know how long it's going to take for that gross video to get out of my mind.

But I cannot be angry at him because that's his past. I also have mine and he accepted it. I just have to wear a big hat and move on. He needs my support now more than ever. Me being here isn't helping because I know his family is not making things easy for him either. He got suspended from church for the

period of three months, I don't know how that makes him feel, he loves church and he never miss a single one.

Sister Bee walks in with a piece of paper in her hand. She knows what I've been persistent about this whole week, she quickly explains it before I get excited thinking she's discharging me.

"I'm just here to check your vitals before your visitor comes in."

I roll my eyes. I have so many things to do when I get out, I feel like they're wasting my time keeping me here. I'm fully back to life now! I need to go home, appease to the ancestors and complete my course. I need to get my life on track.

Nyezi's death was just a test, I will not heal everyone I cross paths with. I've witnessed several deaths here in the hospitals. Doctors break down, losing a patient is hard, but they don't put down their tools and give up because of it. They still walk up and down the passages like they're battery-charged and

write prescriptions for patients like they put pens in their arses.

I have to be committed to my calling, just like they're to their profession.

"It's visiting hours already?" I ask Sister Bee.

"It's one of your friends, we let her in," she says.

That's not how things work, not around here. Since when do they care about the relationship you have with a person? Visiting hours are visiting hours, nobody can bend or ignore them. But I'll understand if it's Nolwazi, that one can trick people into anything.

Oh well, it's not her but Gugu. I haven't seen this one in two weeks. She's glowing and slaying in this huge, black kimono dress and wide-brim hat that could fit me and two wards of other patients.

"You look like an evil stepmother attending a wedding of her husband's son." I mean, who dresses up like this just to come and see a friend in hospital? You'd swear she's Kelly Khumalo's sister; always

unnecessarily overdressed.

“I’m actually a very good stepmother,” she says.

“You don’t have a husband, you are not anyone’s stepmother.”

We laugh and hug. She smells nice, like a million Rands. I wonder where she’s been, I know it got everything to do with Mike and the Minister of what-what. I’ve never been really interested in her political shenanigans; I’d rather count rice one by one than to talk about politics. I vote for ANC, attend IFP rallies and cross my fingers for EFF to solve community problems.

“How are you feeling?” she asks, sitting on the chair and crossing her legs.

“Physically, I’m really okay. All my wounds are healing. But now I just want to get out of here, bru.”

She gives me a look; the same look Mandulo has been giving me when I raise this up.

“No, not for Bandla. I just want to get out,” I defend myself before she says something about me rushing

to get out and see Bandla.

“You know you’re lying. Khanyo you cannot deprive your body a healing because of a dick.”

Seriously???

“Who said....?”

“I’m not arguing with you. I’m just saying allow the doctors to do their job and let Bandla sort himself out. He’s a big man, you saw how he handled those two girls.”

No, this bitch didn’t! I don’t want to hear anything about that video.

“Relax!” she’s choking down with laughter. I swear if I ever see one of those girls I’m snatching their wigs off. If they are not wearing any, I’m cutting off their hair.

“How are you taking it though? I hope you didn’t give Bandla a hard time because of it. It’s an old video.”

I blow out a sigh.

“I had no right to. I just hate Efe with every fibre in my body. He’s a scumbag, I wish he chokes on Jollof

rice and die.”

“Has he talked to you after this video scandal?” she asks.

“No, I told him to never talk to me again. I want nothing to do with that man.” I’m not ungrateful, I thanked him for saving me, but it didn’t erase that he broke my heart. He’s made it worse by going after my boyfriend. If our paths ever cross again, he better face the other way because I don’t know if I’d be able to control what I do to his stupid ass.

“Do you still remember his birth date?” she asks.

How’s that a part of our conversation? I frown. She keeps her face straight.

“13 August 1986.” I hate myself for remembering it. I should’ve taken it out of my head the day I took him out of my heart.

“Okay, thank you.”

Is she planning a surprise birthday party for the shitbag?

“Why do you ask?”

“Just wondering how old he is for all this childishness.”

I know she’s lying. This one is up to something and it’s not good. Well, not good for Efe and I don’t give a damn.

“What’s going on with your life? Nolwazi says you haven’t been around in two weeks,” I ask.

“You know Msibi? The acting director-general of...”
She can save it! I wish her the best of luck in her career or crime or whatever it is that she’s busy with.

“Let’s talk about something else,” I say before she takes it any further.

She laughs. This is how I always act when she brings up her political things, so our friendship is basically about me, not her.

“Okay, tell me about the hospital drama. Any fighting nurses? Or girl being admitted after being beaten by another girl over a boy?”

Yes, now this is something we can both discuss and laugh about. I think there was a girlfriend who was

beaten by her boyfriend's girlfriend being wheeled in yesterday. Life is biryani, I tell you!

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THAKASA

He wanted to know if she arrived safely wherever she was heading to. She did that, she called and said her trip was good. Now her phone is off. It makes sense; she needs a break from him, she wasn't going to stay in touch. But he keeps trying, hoping that she'll text or call. It's been 4 days without her and life is hard. Going to sleep on an empty bed is a harsh reminder of his reality. He wishes he cannot go to sleep and when he sleeps, he wishes to never wake up.

Nkonzo left, he got a house in Kwatasi and now he's busy turning an empty house into his home. Sqalo found a room to rent with his friend. It's not bad, he went to check it out and have a word with his landlord about the security. He's happy for him. He'll

have peace in his room. There'll be no one throwing shady remarks at him. He needed his own space more than anyone, even though he's still young to be on his own.

Bandla is a walking zombie. He doesn't even go to work, he's always in bed. MaKhumalo has to beg him to join what's left of the Manqele family for lunch and dinner. Being a porn star isn't treating him well. Bloggers and social media don't make things easy, he has to wake up everyday and see pictures of himself all over the internet. He thought it would be a few days scandal and blow over, but it seems like he had it all wrong.

Thakasa has to put aside his personal problems and run the company. He has to soldier on and keep it going. At least Nkonzo is there to help him. Even though he's doing it for his benefit more than he's doing it for the company, but him offloading some work and flying to Cape Town on his behalf really helps.

At this point he's lost. Does he continue with Dr Mhlongo's therapy or let things be how they're? Does he move out of home as initially planned? None of it makes sense if Nothile is not there. He wanted their marriage to work. What if something happens to her? What would he tell her family? His baby- what if something happens and he's not there? He doesn't want his baby to be born while he's not around.

He's isolated in his bedroom, just like everyone, and counting his sorrows. There's a soft knock on the door, before he can answer it shifts and opens.

It's MaKhumalo. She cooks and dishes up for everyone, him included, but she hasn't talked to him ever since Nothile left. She was like a daughter to her, so he understands where her anger is coming from. Not only that, the whole family is breaking apart.

"Your sister hasn't come home and it's almost 7," she says, walking in.

Thakasa searches for his phone under the pillow and

scrolls down for Phethy's number.

"So when are you leaving?" MaKhumalo asks, standing with her hands on the hips.

"There's no point anymore." He heaves a sigh and shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know, if she comes back we'll continue with our plans. If she doesn't....I don't know."

"If she doesn't come back then you have to take another wife. You cannot be alone, you're an heir and a leader of this family."

"Ma, I only wanted to get married once and have a family. I still want us to try and work things out."

"How are you going to work things out with someone who's not even here? She chose to leave her marriage. You think your father and I never had any problems? We did, but I stayed. I love MaNtusi but if she cannot handle the heat and help you build this family, then you need to find someone who can."

"And who is that Ma? Who can love a mess that I am?" he asks.

“You’ll find her the same way you found her,” she says.

“I’m sorry, but that’s not happening.”

He’s pissing her off!

“You think I’m going to wake up, pack lunch for you and cook dinner everyday? You’re 36 Thakasa.”

He exhales heavily. This isn’t something he expected a few days after being left by his wife.

“Can I be alone?” he asks.

“Yes, but please do something before this family becomes history.”

“I will,” he says to get her out of the door.

He follows behind her and locks the door. He sends another text, begging Nothile to call when she sees his messages. His marriage cannot end like this.

It can’t be over!

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NKONZO

She'll probably be pissed when she realizes that it's him and not Thakasa attending the association event and later on meet up with Singh Properties executive members. He asked for a room next to hers. She arrived earlier than him. He's always late in everything.

He drags his suitcase and walks through Victoria and Alfred Hotel reception to check in.

They'll be sending this weekend together, whether she likes it or not. That's long enough to win her over.

He gets his access card and keys and takes the lift to his room. What a good neighbor he's going to be! He's bringing his next-door a bunch of flowers just to say hello to her.

He leaves his suitcase on the floor and heads to room 123-7. Okay, this may not go the way he planned. He exercises some breaths before

knocking.

Opening the door Tema thinks it's a room service or one of the hotel staff. When she sees who it is she nearly faints on the spot.

"What are you doing here?" she asks in shock. Her eyes go to the flowers in his hand and she blows out a sigh.

"Thakasa couldn't come, so I had to step in," he says.

"So you are here?"

"Yes Tinkerbell, I'm here."

This....she can't deal!

"May I come in?" he asks.

She gives him a shrug and turns back in and goes to the little table to pour herself a glass from a bottle of Saint Anna.

"These are for you," he says, trying not to sound nervous and be awkward.

He never imagined her being this hard. He thought they'd sit down and talk. Agree, disagree and reach a

conclusion.

“Nkonzo, I don’t want us to go back to what we’ve already talked about.”

She’s standing against the table with a glass in her hand and staring at him.

He puts flowers on her bed and walks to her against her mean look.

“Maybe I messed things up. I came too hard and ruined my chances of being with you.”

He doesn’t get it.

She sighs and sips her wine.

“Dub’ elimthende, please allow me to prove myself to you before rejecting me. It’s all I beg, just one chance.”

“Nkonzo, please!” she says with a sigh. “First of all, you’re invading my privacy.”

“Come to my room then, I just want us to talk.”

He must be thinking she was born yesterday!

“You booked a room next to mine, bought me

flowers and burst into my room just to talk?" she asks.

"Yes," he says.

"Really? You must be thinking I'm a fool yazi. I know you're here because you think you can sleep with me."

He frowns, "What?"

"It's not happening. It's either you keep this all about business or I'm calling Thakasa."

He's appalled. This is how she thinks of him? He reduced what he said to her to just sexual hunger.

"I told you that I'm in love with you. I haven't said anything about sex. Not that I don't want it, but I wouldn't run after you and have sleepless night because of you only to fuck you in some hotel before my uncles even say 'Eh Baba' at your father's gate."

That humbles her to silence. However, he's pissed. Maybe, just maybe, he's taking this the wrong way.

"Maybe sit me down and tell me why you don't love me. What is it that you want that I don't have. Tell

me, I'll understand. Don't embarrass me in front of people and assume things about my character whereas you don't even want to know a thing about me." He's angry. More angrier than she expected.

He picks his flowers on bed, throws them inside the bin by the bathroom entrance and storms out. That was a dramatic one!

What does she do now? Run after him and apologize or continue drinking her wine?

(FAM, THINGS WILL GO BACK TO NORMAL FROM TOMORROW)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 37

THAKASA

After having a discussion with church leaders, he's compelled to reach out to Nomkhosi against his wife's word. He needs to seal that part of his life and move on. All he wants is to honor the spirit of his baby, get cleansing and formally apologize to the Nsele and Ngidi family.

Obviously, he cannot reach her over the phone because he's blocked and if he tries to use another number she drops when she hears his voice. A part of him understands why she acts the way she does, but he also harbors some hate towards her. He killed his baby! Despite of everything that happened between the two of them, a baby was innocent. If she didn't want it she could've given birth and brought it to him.

But this is not a time to let his feelings into play, he birthed this whole quagmire. He didn't even call to book an appointment with her. He leaves his information at the gate of Bantwana Holdings and drives through. His heart is beating hard against his chest as he tries to envisage this visit playing out. That bipolar sister works here as well, she may help the situation escalate unnecessarily. He's actually stepping into Nomkhosi and her whole squad's zone. And they all seem to be claws on each other's business.

His prestigious presence gets the lady behind reception desk on her feet with a wide smile spread on her face.

"Mr Manqele, welcome to Bantwana Holdings." She's unnecessarily loud and drawing him attention from cleaning ladies who've stopped moving with their buckets.

"Are you here to see someone?" she's asks.

She's not giving him time to look around and breathe in this glitzy building.

“I’m sorry to just pop in, is there any chance that I can have a word with Nomkhosi Nsele?”

Her eyes are on the BMW keys and iPhone 12 in his hand. His crispy white shirt hugs his arms and almost portly tummy perfectly. Of course, he’s married, that piece of satin band has a textured look that screams ‘I’m someone’s man’, but she’s only looking for whoring’ sake!

“Hello?” Thakasa narrows his eyes and the girl quickly snaps out of her drooling moment.

“Ummm no, Miss Nsele is on leave. But I’ll call Mrs Mngomezulu’s office, maybe you can have a word with her as they’re friends.” It’s a favor to be returned! Her smile is meant to tempt, sadly he’s not in that space of eyeing any woman at the moment.

He’s never officially met Ndondo, but he’s seen that egomaniacal woman around and she’s not someone he wishes to have a conversation with. But he has no choice, does he?

“Please do,” he says to the reception lady and she rushes around her desk and prods the telephone.

She didn't even want him to come up to her office. She steps out of the lift, walking high in her stilettos with an inhospitable look on her face. This one thinks she's Mary Jackson of Hidden Figures.

"Good day Sir."

Oh, she's keeping this formal.

Breathe Thakasa!

"Good day Mrs Mngomezulu," he keeps it formal as well and tries not to look as unsettled as he is.

"How can I be help to you?" she asks, keeping her eyes right on his without a single blink.

"I was here to see Nomkhosi but the lady here referred me to you. I think she said she's on leave or something like that."

"Yes, she is."

"I need to talk to her."

"No Thakasa, not this time around. Go back to your wife."

“It’s only about the baby. I just want us to arrange the ritual, I want this chapter of my life to be over.”

Ndondo clears her throat and tears her eyes off him for a second.

“Can you help me? I just need to talk, nothing much.”

She exhales out heavily, “I will call her and put her on loudspeaker.”

He blows out a sigh of relief and waits patiently as she scrolls down her phone.

It’s ringing. His heart is racing for whatever reason.

“Hey babe,”- it’s her.

“Babe, how are you?” Ndondo.

“Good, it’s just endless...” Ndondo cuts her short and jumps in to tell her who she’s with.

“I’m with Thakasa,” she says.

There’s a brief moment of silence.

“He wants to talk about the baby’s ritual.”

He grabs the phone from Ndondo's hand before the call gets dropped.

"Nomkhosi, it's me. I just want us to talk about the baby, nothing else." He's desperately trying to ensure her that this is only about the baby but she's having none of it.

"What about the baby?" she asks.

"He or she needs a name, Nomkhosi. I just want to do things right."

"Why would I terminate the pregnancy if I want to go to the lengths of naming the baby?"

"That's not a fair thing to say. In all this, the baby was innocent. We created that soul, together."

"No!"

"Nomkhosi this is not about..."

"I said no, Thakasa. You have a baby coming, the one you're sure is yours, shift your focus to that one and leave me alone."

"Can we meet and talk? Please."

“I’m out of the country.”

For a moment he’s dumbstruck.

“Without telling me?” he asks.

“You’re not my father, I don’t need permission from you.”

“I’m the father of your child!”

“In the world of morons, you’d be a king. You’re proof that God has sense of humor yazi!” With that said, she drops the call.

Ndondo shrugs her shoulders and takes back her phone. She tried, it didn’t end well.

“Thanks,” Thakasa says with a sigh of defeat. “Can you please let me know when she’s back. I’ll leave my number, I know she’s angry at me right now but we have to acknowledge the life we created. I want to move on and deal with other challenges that life bring me.”

“Sure!” Her tone is not convincing but she does take his number.

He heaves a sigh and turns to leave.

“Mr Manqele,” -the reception lady waving up her hand.

He’s trying not to be a mean-looking man that never smiles, but there’s so much going on in his life to go around showing his teeth. He nods at her and walks away.

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NKONZO

They just did the Singh Properties event, to say it was awkward would be an understatement. They couldn’t even fake united front in front of business associates. He’s always been a bad loser; he cannot take rejection well. What makes things even more frustrating is that she doesn’t tell him why she doesn’t want them to try. In fact, she’s not saying anything except; “Leave me alone.”

They still have a day in Waterfront and he’s in the room right next to hers. He hears the shower running

when she's bathing, he listens to her singing when she's in a happy mood and eavesdrops on her calls.

But that doesn't mean he's less angry about what she said.

There's a knock at his door. It must be the room service; he ordered because they served warm food at the Singhs.

He opens the door to a tinkerbell carrying a Tupperware container. His lips crack into a smile as he stares down at her looking at him nervously. Damn, he was planning to be angry longer, why is he smiling now?

"I know you're not speaking to me but I hope you're going to eat my food. They were baked before 6pm yesterday, I bought them on my way here and stored them in a container."

Women board flights and travel around provinces with food containers in their bags? Wow, these creatures.

She gives it to him and steps back to leave.

“Please come in and take your container back,” he says.

This is exactly what she was hoping for. She follows him in and sits on bed.

“You looked beautiful today.”

“Oh, thank you.”

He takes a plate and empties the scones on it.

“I wanted to compliment but I didn’t want you to think I’m trying to have sex with you.”

Her eyes drop in embarrassment. Are scones not enough for an apology though?

“About that Nkonzo, I’m really sorry. I’m just not...” she breathes out heavily, “It scares me when a man comes at me like that.”

“Like what?” he asks and takes a bite on the scone.

“With rules and dictating tendencies. I’ve been there before and I don’t ever want to go back to that place where there’s a man telling me what to do to be

enough for him.”

His appetite flies out of the window, he throws the scone back on the plate and goes to sit next to her on bed.

“I’m sorry you felt that way. I wasn’t trying to dictate you or anything. But I’m not going to lie to win you over or wear a colorful coat that I’ll have to take off in a long run. I want you to get to know me for who I am. It’s a try- just like I said. If you feel like I’m not a man for you then I’ll let you go, but not until we give it a try.”

“What exactly is this ‘try’? What does it mean?” she asks, quoting with her fingers.

“Come to my house and see how I live. Come to church with me, meet the people in my circle and paint a picture of how our future may look like if we work out.”

“And then what?” she asks.

“Then we get married, live together and start a family.” He’s too realistic and straightforward, it’s not even romantic.

“You don’t even know if I want to get married or not,” she says with a slight frown.

“Correction; happily married. I don’t just want to marry you, I want to make you happy. And for me to be able to make you happy, I need to be in my happy space.” He lifts her hand and holds it. She’s not comfortable but she’s not fighting him either.

“I want you to know that I love you. I didn’t approach you because I want a wife or someone to mess around with. I’ve always feared marriage because I don’t like doing something and not get it right. It’s a huge step, if love and honesty isn’t the foundation it will either fall apart or there will be no happiness. That’s why I want you to know my honest intentions, where I want us to be and how I feel about you. I don’t want to lie, Tema. And I don’t want to sleep with you, at least not now. I’m not dictating you, I just want you to love me and understand my religion because it plays a big part on who I am.”

“What if I try and not like it? I don’t want to hurt you and put my job in jeopardy.”

“I’d never cost you a job because of a personal relationship. I love you even when you don’t love me back, I’ll always do.”

Her eyes are getting moist. She releases a shallow breath and blinks rapidly while wiping the corners of her eyes.

“I don’t know,” she says.

He just needs to press the last button and press it right.

“Give me a chance, you’re going to be tall,” he says.

Just when she was listening and considering sacrificing one of her Saturdays to go to his church and see if sermons there uplift her spirit.

He holds her arm and brings her back. Her temper can be a size of her height.

“You can start by checking if you can kiss these lips.”

He’s too fast! Before she can oppose the idea he’s grabbed her neck and lowered his face to her.

Looking so close into his eyes feels surreal and

somehow uncomfortable. She wants to run, but it's too late.

“MaDube, ngizimisele ngawe. I won't let you down. I just need only one chance, pretty please.”

He just had to make a cute face, now she can't breathe. She wraps her arms around his neck and initiate a kiss.

Their first kiss, and she initiated it. Maybe she's finally giving him a chance.

He pecks her chin and goes up to her forehead and plants a wet kiss.

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SQALO

It's Mpilo's first time in his room. This is what he was looking forward to the most; spending some quality time with his love with no disturbances.

He's snuggled on his chest and playing with his

fingers. They haven't spent time together in weeks.

"How are you settling in without a mother and big brothers?" Mpilo asks, brushing his head.

"Better than I thought. The more privacy I have, the more peace of mind I get."

"What do you intend to do with all this privacy?" His hand has slid through Sqalo's T-shirt and massages his chest.

"I called you over so that we can figure it out together."

"I think better when naked," Mpilo says.

They share a brief chuckle before locking their lips in a steamy kiss.

"I've been missing you, ntwana. I don't know how I went through all these days without seeing you," Sqalo.

Mpilo shakes his head and kisses him again. They cannot waste time talking about what has already happened, but they can make today worthy.

He's hot for him. He just want to gag on that black

monster and feel his warm cream shooting down his throat. Their connection has always been too strong for neither of them to resist.

They both strip their clothes off. Mpilo takes a minute to appreciate his firm butt. Tonight he'll be cracking that, hopefully Sqalo bought all the set because he only knows one speed, fast.

Their lips lock into another kiss. Now their hands are all over each other. Sqalo grabs his shaft and rubs its head with his palm. A moan escapes his lips, he throws back his head and allows pleasure to spread throughout his veins.

Mpilo feels the thick rod grinding against his hard shaft and moves along the rhythm.

"Mmmm!" Sqalo moans as their shafts collide and grind against each other.

His moans are driving Mpilo crazy. It's been a while since he unloaded inside his tight hole.

"Do you have a lube?" he asks between heavy

breaths.

Sqalo points him to the bedside table. His hand wraps around his shaft and gives lazy strokes as he fetches the lube.

Sqalo lies on his back with his knees up and plays with himself. He's a finest tribute to masculine perfection, that's what Mpilo always tells him. He loves his dark-toned body and how firm his behind looks with all the thigh muscles surrounding it.

"I just want to lick you from head to toe; you look so damn sexy," he comments as he positions himself between his knees.

"I thought you wanted some ass," Sqalo says with a smirk on his face.

He grabs his hips and scoots his ass right on his face. He's always loved how intoxicating the mixture of his sweaty balls and body wash smell when he's between his thighs. He pokes out his tongue and gives his butt crack a long, sensual lick.

“Sqalo I love you,” he responds to his deep groan.

“I love you too, now please burst that ass open.”

Right on it!

He spreads lube on his two fingers. He slowly presses one on his rosebud and watches with anticipation as he flinches.

He inserts it and moves it around his hole slowly. Sqalo grabs the sheets and groans painfully.

“Ntwana, you’re okay?” he asks worriedly.

“Yes,” Sqalo nods.

Mpilo pulls his finger out and spreads more lube and coats it perfectly with a rub. Then he inserts his one finger again, this time Sqalo’s groans is that of pleasure.

Maybe he’s ready for more. He inserts two more fingers, with their full length and speeds up his hand game.

“Please,” Sqalo begs for more.

He pulls out his fingers and grabs the lube. He drops

it on his palm and rubs his throbbing shaft. This is the moment he's been looking forward to the most; to finally plunge into this tight hole.

He spreads Sqalo's legs further apart. His black monster is angrily standing against his navel; begging for a release.

He inserts himself slowly until he fits fully in while they both groan in unison. Now that he's fully in, tremors this hole sends through his body won't allow him to do this slowly.

"This feels so damn good," he groans as he thrusts in mercilessly.

"Hit right there, ntwana!" Sqalo cries as Mpilo hits exactly on his P-spot repeatedly.

"Fuck!" He buries his shaft to the hilt and prods deeper.

There's a tingle from his toes and a wave closing on him.

No, no, no. He cannot let this boy's tight ass turn him

into some noodles. He squeezes his muscles and pulls out against towers of pleasure.

He needs to calm down this beast!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 38

KHANYO

I'm home, still in one piece, and I have no one but God and my ancestors to thank. Okay, Efe as well. It's not really my home but Ndulo's house. He's here with his girls and we are having a little family reunion. It still feels strange to see him and the kids without Thobeka, and knowing that one of the girls is not his biological daughter. We are one messed up family.

"You're a good father. When I become a mother I want my children to have a father like you," I say as he clears their books from the floor.

"You should be thinking about completing your degree, not becoming a mother," he says.

I roll my eyes and focus on the ribs I'm eating. I can't go a single day without him reminding me that I didn't finish my course. I should get him off my back, apply for open-distance learning and finish my

studies once and for all. It's not like I was dumb or slow, I just didn't vibe with school. It's time I go back and seal all the loose parts of my life that I left hanging.

I also need to consult and see how I can mend things with Gog' MaSibiya. I know I have so many things to make up for and this time I'm willing to commit to my calling and stick to it regardless of the ups and downs.

"Are you going to judge me if I go to Mandeni tomorrow?" I ask Mandulo.

"Yes," he says doubtlessly.

"But I'm okay now. I just want to see him. He can't live his life like this. Nobody is perfect."

"I don't care Makhanyi. The doctor told you to take things easy but here you are, thinking about a man and his porn life."

Porn life? Wow.

"I'm leaving for Bergville soon. I don't know how long

I'll be...."

He sighs, "Do whatever you want Makhanyi. But don't forget how you got here."

So he's going to blame Bandla for what happened? That's not fair.

"He didn't have anything to do with what happened to me."

"As I said, you're welcome to do anything you want. Umhlabathi vele usemanzi, izulu liyana kulezi zinsuku." (The soil is still wet, it's been raining these days)

Oh, wow!

He's unbelievable.

How can he say something like this just two days after I got out of the hospital?

"You're so mean," I say.

"And you're so stupid."

He's not my brother!!!

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MAWANDE

Going to the gym and training has been a great stress reliever for her. She's found new purpose in life; meeting with Pearl and Royal Blue Girls has given her hope. She's not always swallowed in sorrow, she's slowly finding herself without Nyezi, which has spread rumors that she had a hand in his death. Sadly this comes from a family member. Not to brag, but she comes from a rich family, Nyezi's estate is just a spoon of sugar in a jar of honey. She had no reason to want her husband dead. That was the only man she's ever loved, kissed and shared a bed with. He was all she knew. Does she miss him? Yes, big time. But he's gone, he's never coming back and she has to live that reality. What they had together is good enough to keep her going. The love he gave her keeps her warm at night. He never slacked, he was the best husband he could be, and those two years they spent together were the best years of her life.

It's good to finally breathe and be away from that family for a few hours.

This is her first game away and one of the biggest games of RBG. Even though everyone's family is here to support, she still doesn't feel lonely with nobody from either side of her family in audience. Thakasa was too busy to come and watch a group of girls jumping up and down. His life is a hot mess, it would've been unfair to ask him to come. Nkonzo is only returning later from Cape Town and Bandla still can't show his face in the public after his sex-tape saga. The Myezas were against this volleyball thing from the onset, it would've been stupid of her to ask them to come and watch her first game. The line between Myeza daughters and daughter-in-laws is drawn and very bold, and right now Mawande is acting nothing like they expect of her.

Oops, a catch from Pearl!

They're going to lose this game. The whole Chatsworth community came out to support their girls and they're cheering loud enough to distract RBG.

She gives Pearl a look of motivation. She only served one time and got out after spraining her ankle. Don't judge, she's only trained for a few weeks after a long break. Things are not looking good for her team but they're still willing to give it their all.

CW team gets another serve?!

She grunts angrily and yells for her girls to get it together.

“Niyadliwa yini?” someone asks behind her. (Are you guys losing?)

This voice is too familiar, her chest turns into a Kalahari desert as she turns her eyes to Bhambatha standing behind her with an icy cold beer in his hand.

He's here? And he brought a beer? How? When? And why did he dress up in Orlando Pirates jersey? This is not a soccer match.

“Are you sure that this Indian coach is not being racist and robbing you?” he asks, lifting his eyes to the Indian coach walking at the sides of the court.

There's something about the way he asks, like he's already concluded how he's going to murder the poor coach.

"This is not Delhi," he says and gulps down his beer.

This is going to spiral out of control if she doesn't stop him now. They're losing fairly, not because of a coach.

"Bhambatha, no! They play better than us, we didn't train enough."

He frowns and looks at her. That look, gosh!

"What do you mean you didn't train enough? You've been training the whole week for this day. Tell me why is Pearl at the back row now?"

Sigh, sigh, sigh!

"It's part of the game; after the serve we exchange positions."

"Oh," he says and still throws a mean look at the poor coach.

Maybe she needs to make him leave. She is in no position to judge his character, they've never spent a

week together, but from what she's heard this man has no pinch of peace in his veins.

"I sprained my ankle," she says.

His eyes quickly travel down to her legs. Is it fear she sees on his face? That would be strange.

"Do you need a doctor?" he asks.

Isn't it clear that she needs no doctor? She's on her feet, with her kicks on. Sprained ankle, not broke a leg; clearly that's what he's thinking.

"No," she says.

"Are you sure?"

Okay, that was a bad one, he's really panicking.

"Yes, I just need painkillers," she says and mentally punches herself for causing him so much panic.

"Alright, sit. I'll drive to Spar quickly. Don't move your legs anyhow, you're going to make the pain worse."

She nods and fakes an ache as she holds through the row of chairs, making her way to her seat. She hates lying, but she also can't be the reason why he

causes havoc in one of the RBG important matches.

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They've lost. But it was a good game throughout, they share a group hug and celebrate their loss.

"I think I saw your husband. Where did he go?" Pearl asks.

She's told her over and over again to stop referring to Bhambatha as her husband. Firstly he has a crazy, disrespectful girlfriend, and he is nothing more than a long-distance brother-in-law who's around for a mourning period.

"He's not my husband. I told him to go buy me painkillers, he was about to come for the coach."

Pearl frowns. There was World War III brewing here while she was playing?

"Why?" she asks.

Mawande sighs.

"He thought she was coaching unfairly."

That would've been fun to watch. Why did Mawande send him away? She did pick some weird vibes from the coach as well. Or is it the sore feeling of losing that makes her wish the coach bad?

"You should've let him deal with her," she says.

"Pearl!"

She shrugs her shoulders and laughs.

Oh, he's back!

That was fast. He has a huge pharmacy bag in his hand.

"How do you feel?" he asks, looking at her foot.

He really bought her story.

"Better," she says.

"Good, but you still need to drink painkillers."

A lady in knee-length boots and white shirt-dress makes her way towards them with a food container in her hand. She looks like one of those cucumber-eating, beauty-obsessed girls who do their nails in

Sandton and preach “drink lot of water” to their friends while they have skin glow prescriptions from the country’s best dermatologists.

“Ummm...hey,” she says to Mawande and passes the food container to Bhambatha.

Oh, her hands are so pretty, with all the rings and long yellow nails. She’s gorgeous!

“Eat before you take painkillers,” Bhambatha says, handing the container to Mawande.

She’s still mesmerized by this piece of art standing in front of her.

“Oh, this is Mawande,” Bhambatha says to the girl and turns to Mawande. “Mawande, this is Nondu.”

The girl, Nondu, flaps her long eyelashes like a robot doll and looks at him.

“His girlfriend,” she adds for him.

Oh, hell no! This is exactly her voice; it was like this over the phone.

“You called the other day, right?” Mawande asks, looking at her carefully.

“Yes, and you answered.”

She’s happy for Bhambatha, just like Nyezi would’ve been happy to know that he’s found love. But she’s not standing here and having a little family union with a girl that talked trashy to her and commented on her husband’s death.

“Thanks, but no thanks ,” she says to Bhambatha and shoves his food container right back at him. She wants nothing that has to do with ‘her wanting to remarry a Myeza brother’ or forgetting that her husband is dead. She’s still mourning, she has to keep her behavior, especially in public places, in check.

She forgets about the so-called painful ankle and walks back to her squad looking perfectly fine.

Nondu is convinced that she was pulling the stunt of a sprained ankle just to have Bhambatha’s attention. That’s why she chose to come and show this bitch, and anyone that may get it twisted, that this man is taken.

“What’s going on?” Bhambatha asks.

He’s still wearing a frown of confusion on his face.

“She answered your phone,” she says with a shrug.

“And???” He raises his eyebrow.

“What do you mean ‘and’? I also don’t answer your phone, I had to set the boundaries and put her in her place.”

“What is her place?” If she knows what’s good for her she’s going to ignore this question. It’s a good chance for her to show remorse and retract her statement.

But no, not Nondumiso!

“She’s your dead brother’s wife,” she says.

Bhambatha shakes his head and breaks a brief chuckle.

Well, he’s on her side, so she keeps going.

“I told her to never answer your phone again,” she says.

He nods with his lower lip latched inside his mouth.

“I hope she gets over it soon because I’m honestly not going to tolerate her attitude,” she says.

Bhambatha looks around and sees an abandoned chair. He pulls it and puts the food container and medicine bag on top of it.

It’s his wallet he’s searching for. He finds it in his left pocket and opens it.

Notes? No. He’s going to use this money for petrol. He looks at his silver coins and realizes that he could feed hungry children at KFC with them. Maybe he can spare the 50c and 20c. He never use them unless when he’s buying plastic packets from shops.

His 50c make R4. 50c. He counts the 20c and 10c, if he adds them they make 3.60c. Now that’s R8. 10c. If he adds one R5 she’ll have enough coins to get home. Hopefully God is watching and writing this down on his Good Deeds book, because what he’s doing here is humanity.

After counting all the coins, he turns to her and hands them over.

“What is this?” she asks, looking at the roll of coins in her hand.

“Nondumiso awusayazi imali?” (Don’t you know money)

“I’m trying to ask what do you want me to do with this? Throw them in the bin.”

“How are you going to get home if you do that?”

Her face blanks out. What the hell?!

He generously adds R1. 50c.

“Buy sweets,” he says.

Maybe this is a joke- Bhambatha can be very silly and funny- she cracks into laughter.

“When you’re done giggling, go and find a taxi home,” he says.

“I’m not taking any taxi. Who said I want to go home? Take your cents back.” She hands them over but Bhambatha just stares at her hand and doesn’t take them.

Well, she throws them on the ground. Who still uses

cents? Brown coins.

The color of his eyes changes. His forehead creases a few lines. Within a snap of a finger he's turned into an animal. He was doing this quietly and letting her leave with some piece of decency to herself. But now she's taken it too far; nobody throws away his money. He dodges bullets, spills blood and plays Fast & Furious with the police just to have money.

"Icoshe!" he tells her. (Pick it up)

This time he's not the Bhambatha she's been sleeping with for over 5 months. He's a "Wanted" that the police always look for.

"Babe, you cannot do this to me," her tone has changed. She's now a soft lady with a sweet voice.

"Sisi, I want my money. I'm still asking you nicely, cosha imali yami," he says.

Ummm, how to bend and pick coins while wearing high heels you ordered from Zara?

"Nondumiso!" It sounds like a last warning.

She looks at the coins scattered on the floor and inhales sharply. Sorry, she just can't!

"Come on, this is not even money...." Before she swallows her sentence, there's cold air blowing through her cornrows.

She panics and touches her head. Nooooo! She looks at his hand, there is her 26-inch Brazilian weave held like a piece of old cloth.

"Bhambatha, no!" she cries out.

He puts the weave under his arm and picks the food container and medicine bag on the chair.

"Babe, please!" she tries to hold his arm but gets a cold look thrown her way.

"It's fuck-off' o'clock, Nondu."

She knows what this means. How did things get heated like this so fast? 'Fuck-off o'clock' is when he's done with the conversation, so now she'll have to let him cool down and think of a strategy to get his forgiveness.

"How am I supposed to get home?" She's close to

tears, not because she has to take a taxi but because she has to take it with cornrows in her head. What if she bumps into someone from high school? For all people know, she's a successful somebody.

"I don't know. You have brains in your head and feet in your shoes." He takes off and follows the direction Mawande took. Guilt is chowing his heart like poison, he wasn't aware of this. He's at blows with his family because of wanting Mawande not to feel like a lonely widow. But here is a woman he's treated as a girlfriend and even thought of giving her his house keys, furtherly pushing Mawande down and speaking on his late brother like he was some rat in her mother's kitchen. 'His dead brother' this one is going to drive him crazy!

Mawande has changed back into her Makoti long dress and sandals. Fortunately, she came here in her own car. She's not waiting for a hired macro-bus with the rest of the team. Pearl insisted on taking the bus with other girls, obviously for the alcohol bottles that they stashed under the seats.

“Mawande,”

Her heart skips a beat. Bhambatha is still here?

“Are you okay?” he asks.

She nods with a frown.

“I didn’t know about that phone call, you didn’t bring it to my attention that someone I know spoke to you that way. I’m really sorry.”

Oh gosh! She’s not the type of person that wants to be ran after with apologies.

“No Bhambatha, it’s fine. I just don’t want to be around her, that’s all.”

“Then I guess you’ll take my food and the medicine I bought you.”

“Alright, thank you. Now please go back to her, I don’t want her to think what she’s thinking of me.”

“Are you going to be able to drive all the way home?” he asks.

Either he’s acting blind or really uneducated about injuries. He still thinks she’s injured? It was just a

little ankle twist that pained only for a few minutes.

“Yes, I’ll be fine,” she says.

“Okay, take care of yourself. If you need anything, or if anyone troubles you, let me know urgently Mawande.”

“I will, thank you,” she says.

He gives her a long stare, almost like he’s confirming something from her eyes, before turning away and leaving.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 39

“Waking up without you next to me is hard. I didn’t appreciate you enough. I was so absorbed into work, family and my role as a family leader that I forgot to put my marriage first. I forgot to compliment you when you put on your best dress, sometimes I forgot to ask how your sister and her kids were doing. I let you visit your mother’s grave alone because I had an important meeting to attend or whatever. I failed to put myself in your shoes, not once or twice, but for most years of our marriage. You became a part of me, of my family, and took all of us on your back. But I never did the same for you; I expected you to be a wife to Thakasa while Thakasa was being a CEO. And when you started demanding a baby I never looked deeply into it. I never thought of the pressure you may have gotten from both sides of the family. Instead, I felt cornered and started to seek attention from another woman. Not just for a short period of time, she ended up being a third person into our

marriage and falling pregnant. I ended up developing certain feelings towards her and failed to hide it from you. I felt like you loved me but you weren't my best friend, and I needed a little warm corner that she provided. I account for my mistakes, imperfections and short-comings. I have deeper issues that only I can confront and deal with. I don't know if you're coming back, but if you do I promise to be a better husband. I'll take this time to work on myself and prepare for our prince or princess. You hold a very special place in my heart, you always will. I hope they're treating you good wherever you are, if you need anything please don't hesitate to call me. My door and heart will always be open for you MaNtusi.

Thakasa.”

She reads and heaves a long sigh afterwards. Her sister, Nomcebo, is sitting opposite her with her youngest daughter on the lap.

“What is he saying?” she asks.

“He’s sorry.” Nothile shrugs her shoulders and sips from a glass of water.

“I can’t believe it has come down to this,” Nomcebo says. They’re squashed in her two-bedroom house with her two kids and boyfriend. The Ngemas still don’t know that Nothile has left her marriage and when they find out hell will break loose. It’s only a matter of time before MaKhumalo let them know.

“I think he’s going through a lot. He wrote a lot of things, mostly blaming himself for how things turned out.”

“Yes, he should!”

Nothile gives her a look. This message has left her with mixed feelings. It’s one of many that she received when switching her phone on.

“Don’t tell me you’re feeling sorry for him after everything he’s put you through!” Nomcebo says, hugging her daughter tightly on her chest and throwing a look at her.

“It’s not like I was perfect, Cebo.” She inhales sharply and gets off bed and stands by the window.

“Nobody is perfect, but you didn’t cheat on him and put your hands on him.”

“I did,” she says.

Nomcebo frowns.

“You did what?” she asks.

Silence.

“Nothi, what did you do?” Her tone gets firmer. Her sister’s silence doesn’t sit well with her.

“I...I did something terrible Cebo. It was just one moment of weakness and now I stand to lose everything because of it.” She runs her hands through her unruly afro and sighs heavily.

“You’re not making any sense. Did you cheat on Thakasa?” Nomcebo asks.

“Yes,” she nods and swallows hard. “I did.”

Nomcebo puts the baby on the floor and gets on her feet like a mad woman.

“Tell me you’re joking!”

“I’m not. On the same night I slept with Thakasa, if

I'm counting weeks, any of them could be a father."

This is a lot for Nomcebo to take in. She grabs a mug and fills it with water. Her head is spinning, you'd swear it's her marriage on the line. While many mocked their late mother's situation; from how Mr Ngema neglected her and married a younger woman, leaving her behind with kids, to how poor she was. Growing up was a struggle and she died before Nomcebo even turned 10. Seeing Nothile graduates and gets married was her most proudest moment, even though she hasn't been able to reach those milestones herself. But she was happy that the daughter of the most undermined woman was making it in life. Their mother must've been proud in her grave too.

Nothile follows her to the door and stands behind her. Right now she doesn't need to be judged, at least not by her own sister.

"What do you think?" she asks.

Nomcebo exhales and turns her head back to her.

“What’s going to happen if the child is not Thakasa’s?” she asks.

“I don’t know. For now I’m praying that it’s his,”
Nothile says.

“Do you have money on your name? Did you save something for the future?”

“It’s not that much, maybe R45k or less. I had access to his cards, I was getting everything I wanted, so there was no need for me...” the look Nomcebo gives her makes her stop.

“You know it’s going to get ugly if he finds out, right?”

“Yes,” she nods.

“And you know that you’ll have no one to turn back to? Your uncles will keep their distance.”

“I know Nomcebo. I’m trying to stay positive.”

Nomcebo shakes her head, disappointment is written all over her face.

“So who is the other guy?” she asks as they follow each other back to the bedroom.

“We met in Bali. It was brief, more like a 1 night-stand thing, and I left with nothing more than his name.”

“And sperm,” Nomcebo adds.

She rolls her eyes, “We are not sure of that yet.”

“I never thought you had it in you. So you didn’t leave because of what Thakasa did, you’re running from your own imperfections as well?” Nomcebo asks.

“Come on, it was because of our marriage. The more we stayed together was the more it sank. We pushed each other’s buttons, and at this point, neither of us needs that stress.” She picks the baby crawling on the floor and sits on bed. Nomcebo remains on her feet, staring at her.

“I think he’s going through a lot emotionally. When we first met he wanted to be a father more than anything in this world. He wanted us to be a family, he told me that the second day we met. He used smile a lot, fool around and take me out. I don’t know when exactly things changed, but he just lost interest in so many things, including having a baby.”

“You think it’s because he lost his father?” Nomcebo

asks.

“It could be, I don’t know. But all I know is that everyone, me included, played a certain part in whatever it is. Here Nomcebo, I’m talking about someone who doesn’t have a social life at all.”

“Does he have any friends?” Nomcebo asks.

“No. His life revolves around work and his family.”

“Do you still love him?” Nomcebo asks.

“He’s no longer the man I fell in love with. Maybe we can still work if he works on finding himself and what he really wants.”

“And if you guys don’t work? What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know,” she shrugs her shoulders and looks away.

“Oh God! Nothile, I hope you’re not thinking that you’ll move on to your Bali person and live happily ever-after.”

“I didn’t say that,” she snaps angrily. “I’m going to do a DNA test as soon as I give birth, then the results

will determine my future at the Manqueles.”

“I’ll be praying for you sis. This is not good at all.”

Yeah, it’s bad. She’s going through each day with her breath held up. But unlike Nomkhosi, she’s not terminating her pregnancy. This is her baby, regardless of who the father is. And she’s going to do right by him or her, she’ll be honest about the identity of her baby. It’ll break Thakasa if he’s not the father, and it might take him ten steps back, but it’ll be what it is.

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THAKASA

Staring at the phone is not going to help him. His heart is heavy, especially today. As bad as they were, he misses sleeping next to her and wrapping his arms around her. For the last 6 years of his life he’s come home to a warm bed and woke up to his wife preparing his clothes and breakfast.

The ringtone of his phone ignites some hope in him, he pulls it and takes a glance at the screen. It's not Nothile, his heart sinks!

"Hello," he answers disappointedly.

"Mr Manqele, this is Precious from Bantwana Holdings."

He sits up, hearing that company name raises another glimpse of hope.

"Oh, hello Precious." He doesn't even know who that is, but the fact that she's from Khosi's work means something.

"You were here the other day and I overheard you asking Mrs Mngomezulu to let you know when Nomkhosi is back."

"Yes, yes I did ask her to let me know," he says.

"I was not sent by neither of them, but I do know that she's come back from Free State. I thought I should be the first one to let you know."

Free State? She said she was out of the country? Maybe it's another Free State.

“Thank you for letting me know. I truly appreciate it, Precious.”

“That’s my number, if you need any help don’t hesitate to call me.”

Owkaaaay!

“I’ll put that in mind, thank you. If you have Mrs Mngomezulu’s personal number please forward it to me, I’d like to have a word with her.”

“Please don’t tell her you got it from me, she may fire me.”

“I won’t do that,” he assures her.

“Okay, in a second.”

As soon as he receives her number he makes a call. He’s still blocked by Khosi despite him begging for them to talk about their baby. She’s back in Durban but she didn’t feel the need to let him know.

“Hello,” she answers with a baby crying in the background.

“You’re talking to Thakasa,” he says.

“Oh, okay give me a moment,” she sounds shocked. It sounds like she’s picking the baby up and calling someone. It must be her husband because she’s calling him ‘babe’ and asking that he comes and takes the baby.

“We can talk,” she says after a moment, now with a quiet background.

“You said you’d tell me when Nomkhosi is back,” he says.

“Oh, about that....I had to talk to her first. Unfortunately, she asked me not to get involved.”

“What is her problem? It’s not like I’ll harm her or anything, I want us to talk about the baby.”

“I guess she’s not interested in talking to you.”

“Okay then, I’m going to contact her stepfather. Whether she likes it or not, that baby was my blood and I’m going to take care of her even if she was denied her right to life. She’s already punished me by terminating, what more pain does she want me to go

through?”

Ndondo exhales heavily, “I’ll try to talk to her again, please give me a day or two.”

“No, I’m done begging her. Let her be, I’ll take it to people who’ll understand my situation.” He ends the call and throws the phone on bed. His chest is burning. Tears are welling up in his eyes.

He closes the door and locks it.

Fuck this life!

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KHANYO

I had to call Gugu again and ask her to find someone who can drive me here. I don’t think I’ll be travelling by taxi anytime soon.

“Gugu asked me not to leave you,” the GTi driver says to me.

I don’t know what kind of instruction was that from

Gugu. There's no need for him to wait for me because I'll be with Bandla probably this whole morning. Anyway he looks dodgy himself, I don't want to find myself arrested for drugs I don't know anything about.

"I promise you I'll be fine," I tell him. "Bandla will drive me back to Durban, don't stress."

"Tell her that you refused my help, I don't want her to think I defied her rules."

Huh? He's a tall, black-ass man. It's not like Gugu can do anything to him.

I take my curtains and climb out of the car. My brother was against this but I came anyway. This is the last time I disobey him, I swear.

I'm walking in these premises again. It's the same old story; a curtain girl delivering an order for Bandlaletu. I had no time to think of another strategy. This man's phone has been off for days and I can't leave for Bergville without checking on him.

I wonder when the wife is giving birth. This yard is too quiet for my liking.

I collect my scattered nerves before knocking at the door. It sounds like there's someone cooking in the kitchen.

I knock again.

"Ngiyeza!" she says.

It's his mother. God be with me!

The door opens, our eyes meet and she sighs exhaustedly.

"Hello Ma," I plaster my face with a huge smile, you'd swear I'm a cat seeing cheese.

"Yes?" So much love in her voice!

"I'm here to deliver Bandla's order," I say.

Isn't she too old to roll her eyes at people?

"Don't you sit down and think of fresh ideas? This one is boring and old."

Okay, that was a nasty blow. This old, fat woman is so savage.

I remain standing outside the door and staring at her.

“Come in,” her tone is not welcoming at all. But at least I’m let in, for a moment I thought she was going to chase me away.

“Uma kukhona okuvelayo angifune mfazi ozoza la ezothiinja yami idle amaqanda ngoba amaqanda aze enjeni yami.” (If you fall pregnant I don’t want any woman coming here, saying my dog ate their eggs because in this instance, eggs came to my dog)

Did she just call me eggs? In that case I’m an ostrich egg, not just any egg.

I stand by the counter, she goes to her pot and stirs it. Am I supposed to find Bandla by myself?

I clear my throat.

She’s annoyed.

“He’s in the lounge,” she says.

I whisper a low “thank you” and softly make my way towards the lounge. I don’t want to scratch her tiles and give her a reason to chase me out.

This one is dozing off on couches while I'm losing my mind over him?

"Vuka!" I whisper and shake his shoulder.

"Ma, please!" he mumbles with his eyes closed.

"Ek is nie jou Ma," I say in my Afrikaans accent and pull his ear.

He slowly opens his eyes, then he frowns and looks around like he's questioning his location.

"Nokukhanya," he says in a low whisper.

"I can't believe you're chilling on the couches while I'm worried sick about you."

He looks around again, for his mother now I guess.

"How did you get in here? My mother is home."

Oh, he thinks I broke in?

"I saw her, she let me in."

His eyes widen.

"My mother?" he asks.

"Yes," I sit next to him. "I'm scared of your mom, go

and dress up so that we can be somewhere else.”

“No, I’m not going anywhere Khanyo.”

“You’re coming somewhere. Go and dress up. I’m leaving for Bergville in a few days and I want us to spend a few hours together.”

“But I can’t go out, you know people....”

Here we go!

“Bandla nobody is perfect. You’re just unlucky that your private deeds were exposed to the world. But there’s nothing you can do about it. And I’m not going to have a boring relationship because of porn lovers. Suck it up!”

“It’s not that easy, babe.”

“You’ll be with me, trust me if I see anyone taking pictures of you or talking shit, I’m going to deal with them the Bergville way.”

He smiles, “You look so beautiful. Are you doing okay?”

“I’m good. Wounds have healed, even though I still get pain at times. Now it’s just scars, I hope you’re

not going to have a problem.”

The smile disappears. I know I’ve said something wrong. This one is too sensitive.

“Don’t even start. I love you, okay? You’ll always be perfect in my eyes,” he says, wrapping his hand behind my neck.

“Let me take you out,” I beg, linking my forehead onto his.

“I can’t say no if you make this pretty face. I have missed you so much,” he says.

I brush his nose with my lips. He chuckles and stares into my eyes.

“Cha uwadayisa kahle bo lamakhethenisi!” (You sell your curtains in a special way)

I quickly sit up straight and clear my throat. Is she a cat or something? She made no sound walking in.

Bandla lifts the cushion to his face and laughs silently.

“Yes, laugh. I’m a clown, aren’t I? But one day you’re going to need me to defend you from this girl’s

family because she won't tell them that it's her who "delivered", and I'll keep my funny nose out of your business. You know how we do things here."

Bandla stops laughing and looks at her.

"I'm sorry. Is the food ready? I have somewhere to go."

She looks at me as if she's about to accuse me of kidnapping her son.

"Where are you taking my son?" she asks.

"Around...to get fresh air."

"Oh, our air isn't fresh here?"

No, it's not fresh at all.

"Ma!" Bandla looks at her with disapproval.

"Alright!" she puts her hands up. "Awuzihambele mntaka Khumalo."

I think she's a drama queen. Imagine a drama queen from the 60s! This is my boyfriend, not hers.

"Dress up before she roasts me to dust," I say.

He laughs, "She's not that bad."

Well, that's debatable.

(Please support a fellow tenant after reading, go to the The Foundation Phase Door Challenge and like The Autumn Door, second on the list)

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 40

KHANYO

I took him to Mandeni Mall, did a little cosmetic shopping and now we are here in our little kingdom, he's still in one piece. Yes, people do stare at him and some take pictures of him, but that doesn't kill him. He's going to get used to his porn-fame.

I take our plates to the kitchen and pass to the bathroom to release myself. I planned to stay only a few hours, but I've already been here for half a day and this man is not saying anything about driving me back to Durban.

When I walk back into the room, he's getting off a call. I don't like people who drop calls when you walk in like they were gossiping about you.

"Who were you talking to?" I ask.

"Some clothing brand manager who wants to meet

up with me.”

Okay, this is interesting. I lie next to him and stare at him curiously.

“Why does he want to see you?” I ask.

“He wants someone of my type for his line, I don’t even know what that means. What type am I?” He cocks his eyebrow at me.

I can’t help but laugh. He should’ve asked that manager this question, not me.

“I hope they’re not trying to cash in to your one month porn-fame and trying to turn you into a male Kim Kardashian.”

“Who is that?” He frowns.

“A woman that got famous after her sex-tape got leaked.”

He holds my hand, lifts it to his lips and plants a soft kiss.

“How does it make you feel?” he asks.

“It makes me feel loved and appreciated,” I say.

“Not the kiss, I’m talking about the sex tape,” he says.

“I’m fine,” I shrug my shoulders.

He smiles but it doesn’t reach his eyes. His hand squeezes mine tightly.

“Come on, I know that you didn’t like it but you felt like you had no right to get angry because it happened before you.”

I let out a sigh. I didn’t want us to go there. My feelings don't matter to what happened in his past.

“I couldn’t watch all of it. I don’t even know why I watched that little part I watched. I can’t get that picture out of my mind.”

He inhales sharply and plants a tender kiss on my hand again.

“I’m sorry I embarrassed you like that. I tried to stop Efe but he was always going to use it against me.”

“Did you open a case against him?” I ask.

“I chose not to. I don’t want people to keep talking about this. Court may drag it for months and I just don’t have the energy.”

Speaking of energy....

“Why two women?” I ask.

He lets go of my hand immediately and releases a heavy sigh. He mustn't dare dodge my question!
Why did he overdose sex?

“Is that a necessary question though?” he asks when I raise my eyebrow at his silence.

“Yes, it's necessary. I want to know if you're going to need a second woman in the long run and ask me to...”

“Khanyo, please. I was single and free. I'm sure you've done crazy things out of curiosity too.”

“But I've never slept with two guys at once,” I say.

“And I've never drank alcohol and slept in clubs.”

I roll my eyes. This is not about me, I'm not trending countrywide.

“I'm sorry,” he says, pulling me back into his embrace. “My days of fooling around and doing crazy things are over. I just want you.”

Those last four words melt my heart. He's forgiven, just like that.

"Please take your top off," he says and pecks the side of my face.

I'm not the most secure woman at the moment, I have scars all over my body. Mandulo said he was going to take me to a specialist that would help my skin go back to normal, but I don't know if he's still going to keep his word. I'm not really a well-behaving sister that he'd like me to be.

I remove the top and leave the bra. I'm getting uncomfortable at his fixed stare.

"Luckily I didn't suffer any internal injuries, just skin damage that can be fixed," I explain.

He runs his index finger on the scar above my breast and massages it slowly.

"They're going to come to you on their knees and beg for forgiveness. Give God time, the world rotates sthandwa sami."

I'm not sure what this means, he looks calm yet sounds so convinced of his predictions.

"I'm just happy to be alive," I say.

He kisses my shoulder, "And I'm happy to get a chance to show you how much I really love you."

He unhooks my bra in a split second. Force of gravity fails my boobs dismally. They're the reason why I chose to sleep with boys from a young age, village people were already assuming that I wasn't a virgin because of saggy boobs.

"Are you going to pay for my boob job?" I ask him.

He frowns, "What?"

"I want my boobs to be firm and round," I explain.

"No, I won't pay for that."

He's so stingy!

"I've never asked anything from you though," I say.

"You can ask anything, but not that. You were created this way. I don't want my children to suck chemicals from plastic boobs."

Sometimes I forget who he is, I just see a bearded, handsome face of an educated man. I forget that he's Zulu, Nazareth, rural and selectively dumb. Chemicals from boobs? How?

"Are you angry?" he rolls my nipple and pokes my thigh with his erect shaft.

"Yes," I say.

"You'll get over it."

Stupid ass!

"I miss the coochie." He presses his hard front on me and licks behind my earlobe. "But I'll wait until your body heals completely, then I'll rip you apart."

I don't know why his tone scares. There's so much threat and hunger carried in his voice.

"When are we going to start planning our future?" He lifts his horny eyes to me and licks his lips.

"When you come back?" he asks.

I nod, "Yes."

"I love you, okay?" His voice is shallow and breaking

in between.

“Well, I love you too.”

He lets out a chuckle, “If you love me then why don’t you help me?”

“Help you with what?” I feign ignorance. Lust has squashed him into a needy, frustrated man.

He takes my hand and pulls it down to his hard shaft. My chest dries up when I feel how big he’s grown. I’d love to calm him down but it’s too early to subject my body into all that.

“Mthonga here doesn’t understand why Mommy isn’t feeding him today,” he says and pushes ‘him’ right into my hand.

“I’ll make it up to you,” I say, wrapping my hand around his shaft and giving him a few strokes.

“I’m scared you’re going to be gone for a very long time. I don’t want us to lose the connection that we have.”

“You’re not going to come and visit me?” I ask.

“I was not allowed to visit the last time you went

there.”

“You’re my pillar of strength. I don’t think it’ll affect my journey if I really commit myself into it. But I’ll communicate and make sure I don’t break any rules.”

“I’d appreciate that,” he says.

I wrap my arms around his neck and deeply kiss his lips. He breaks it off after a minute and cracks a smile.

“Can I step out for some fresh air?” he asks.

Oh, my body is giving him some heat?

“Yeah, sure thing,” I say, hiding the proud grin on my face.

He climbs off bed and heads to the door, unable to walk properly.

“I love you!” I yell behind him.

He doesn’t respond, he takes his horny ass to the bathroom and shuts the door.

This is the first time I’ve ever wished to be a hand in

my life.

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NOMKHOSI

Phone rings.

It's just an arm away but for her that's too far. She exercises a few breaths before pulling herself off the couch.

It's Ndondo.

"Babe," she answers, panting heavily.

"Are you home?"

"No, why?"

"Thakasa is on his way to meet with Ngidi."

She's popping this baby three months early!

"Whaaat?"

"I told you he said he was going to contact him. You better come up with a plan quickly."

“I didn’t think he was going to do it for real. This idiot!” she curses and sinks down on the couch.

“Goodluck with your mother,” Ndondo says.

She’s adding to her stress and being unnecessary. Khosi bids goodbye and ends the call.

It’s time for damage control. Thakasa cannot show his face at her parents’ house. She’s been lying to them and to him, for a good reason, but that won’t count when they find out the truth.

His phone rings a few times before he picks up. His background says he’s on the road, probably driving to Ngidi’s house.

“So you unblocked me today?” he asks.

“Thakasa why are you going to my parents’ house?” she asks.

“Don’t ask me that. You know very well what I’ve been asking from you,” he says.

“If you want it from me then why are you going to my parents? Were they present when we fucked?” she

asks.

“I don’t care. I’m going to do right by my baby whether you like it or not. I was the father.”

“Oh, really? You’re sure about that?” she asks.

“Nomkhosi that’s not going to work. Both you and I know the truth. I was the only man you were sleeping with.”

“Ncooh, that’s so sweet! You think you know me, neh? But guess what, you were not the only one.”

“That’s for you and your body. You cannot exclude me from my baby’s spirit,” he says.

This going back and forth is not helping her. She needs to stop this man from meeting Ngidi.

“We can meet later today,” she says.

“I don’t want to meet you anywhere. Do your things wherever you are, but one day you’re going to feel the pain you’ve put me through. You’ll know how it feels like to lose a child you were so desperate to meet and hold in your arms.”

Dee breath!

She stays silently on the phone.

“I know how our relationship was and I understand the pain I put you through. But not even once did I ever lie to you. You knew everything there was to know about me, I was honest from day one. I don’t know why you’re treating me this way.”

“As if you treated me right,” she mumbles and loudly clicks her tongue.

“I did Nomkhosi. If I didn’t treat you right you wouldn’t have come back after our first break-up. I couldn’t be with you and sometimes I got cold feet, but when I was there I was there for you. You know me from the most vulnerable depths of me.”

Another moment of silence passes. She’s struggling to find right words to sum up her response.

“You killed my baby, Nomkhosi. My precious cargo, iSphephelo sami!” he says mournfully.

There’s a stabbing pain in her chest. Why is he so attached to the baby he hasn’t even hold yet? It’s crazy.

“For what’s worth, I did love you.”

She stutters for a second, trying to find the right words to express her shock.

“Why are you only telling me...” She pauses and looks at the screen. It’s dead.

Fuck, he dropped the call.

She tries him again but he doesn’t pick up.

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THAKASA

It was supposed to stay between the two of them. But now he’s here, involving the family that wasn’t there when he sneaked around with their daughter. Phelo happened, that’s not something he’s going to disregard now or in future. Him and Nomkhosi created a human and he has to face the consequences of their naked-game.

He’s let through the gate. He drives in and parks his

car in front of a double-storey residence designed with a very sophisticated imagination. His heart begins a race but he fixes his shirt and keeps it together.

He makes his way towards a tall door that could accommodate a giraffe and knocks with sweaty hands.

He knows Ngidi. He's a well-known Tongaat Taxi Association former chairperson and business man. Although they've never had a direct encounter, their paths have crossed.

But today looking at the man staring at him at the door, he feels like he doesn't know him one bit. He has grey hair, deep set of dark eyes and a recently trimmed goatzee.

"You are Manqele?" he asks.

"Yes," Thakasa nods.

"Come in and follow me." He leaves the door open for him to follow.

Passages are wide, with either African portraits or family pictures hanging on the grey walls. His house represents his pocket; he's got a rich taste on everything. That's if all this is his taste and not his wife's. Either way, he's got a beautiful home.

A woman in an African-printed dress and huge head wrap is sitting on the couch with a cup of tea in her hand. The mother! A drop of sweat runs down his spine.

He stands next to the couch with his head bowed and hands on the knees.

Ngidi glances back at him before occupying a space on the couch next to his wife.

"You can have a seat," he says and shows him one-seater opposite them.

He's staring at him as Thakasa sits and opens the last button of his shirt due to the heat only him feels.

"I had to postpone my meeting for this. Please tell me exactly who you are and why you are here," Ngidi.

Okay, deep breath!

He pops his finger joints and explains himself.

“My name is Thakasa Manqele. I come from Mandeni, in a place known as Enembe. I asked to come and talk to you, not because I’m disrespectful, but this was the only option I had. Nomkhosi and I had...” The mother just raised her eyebrow at him. He inhales sharply and continues with his nerves scattered all over the place.

“We met and decided to have a relationship. It wasn’t the best relationship but we still had it anyway. It resulted into a third person being conceived, and that’s what brings me here today.”

They’re staring at him, not saying anything. He clears his throat and continues.

“Nomkhosi had a miscarriage, things were a bit messy from my side at the time and we weren’t on the same page anymore. We are still not, she refuses to see me and talk about the necessary steps we need to take regarding that situation.”

Ngidi looks at his left hand.

“You’re married to Nomkhosi?”

What a question!

He exhales heavily and shakes his head.

“So you messed with my daughter while you had a wife at home?” the mother asks.

“Yebo Ma, but we were both in it willingly.”

Ngidi shakes his head and grabs his phone from the coffee-table.

“Let me call this child.” He scrolls down his phone with rage burning from his eyes.

“Nomkhosi where are you....tell me why there’s a dark, afro-boy in my house....yes, you’re going to explain and you’re going to do it in the next 15 minutes.... I don’t know how you’re going to get here that fast and I don’t care.... 15 minutes!”

The following 30 minutes after that call were the most uncomfortable minutes of his life. Ngidi offered him a drink and he said he’s fine. But his wife quickly learnt that he was turning down Ngidi’s offer

because of religious reasons and made him a cup of tea instead.

“I can’t believe my daughter had a miscarriage before and didn’t even come to tell me as her mother.”

“She’ll explain Phumzile,” Ngidi says, patting her shoulder.

“I don’t know about this child anymore. If she’s not getting pregnant for married men, she’s getting pregnant for men whose identities she don’t even know.”

Okay, this is new information. His heart breaks into pieces; she slept with anonymous men? When was that? His ego is crushed.

“She’s been pregnant for a man she doesn’t know?” he asks. Nomkhosi never told him she’s been pregnant before. Phelo was both their first child, so he thought.

“She’s here, you’ll ask her that question,” her mother says.

His eyes quickly turn to the door. They grow bigger and bigger as they land on her. His jaw is on the floor. What is this?

“Nomkhosi you’re still pregnant?” He’s on his feet and charging towards her.

“Baba stop him!” she yells once and Ngidi grabs his arm within a blink of an eye.

He pulls him back to the couch aggressively. But he doesn’t care, all he wants to know is how come she’s still pregnant.

“You said you aborted my baby. I mourned for this baby Nomkhosi. I lost my wife and my sanity. How can you do something like this?”

“Okay you calm the shit down, young man. This is my house, akukhona ekhaya konyoko.”

Thakasa doesn’t care. His eyes are on Khosi and bleeding disbelief, hatred and pain.

“You’re keeping me away from my baby?” he asks.

“Who said I wasn’t going to tell you once she’s born?”

“Who said I wanted to believe that she’s dead until then?”

“It’s not like you wanted to get involved in this pregnancy. You sent your wife and asked me to do a bloody DNA test.”

“I never asked you to do any test. My marriage was falling apart, I had to...”

“You had to sort out your marital affairs and step back from fatherhood, right? What if I did that test and my baby died?”

He doesn’t have an answer to that.

“I’m not going to let my baby become your proof of commitment to your marriage. If you’re going to let your wife decide on her being and pull out whenever you want to impress her, I’m going to deny you access from seeing her even when she’s born,” Nomkhosi says.

He buries his face in his hands and releases a heavy sigh.

“Sit Nomkhosi,” Ngidi says. Now it’s time both of

them explain what's going on here.

He looks at Thakasa, "You said she had a miscarriage. Now you're claiming her current pregnancy and saying she lied about abortion."

"And you said you don't know who made you pregnant, but now you know this boy here and acknowledging that you're carrying his child."

Thakasa lifts his head up. His eyes are bloodshot, but he's keeping his emotions intact.

"My wife found out and got involved. Nomkhosi told me she then decided to terminate the pregnancy. I couldn't come here and paint her like that, that's why I said she miscarried. I informed my family and church of that unfortunate incident and mourned for my baby. I'm not perfect but I know that you cannot speak death on someone's life. On my baby's little life, you cannot do that!" He brushes his face, gets off the couch and storms out with his hand over his face.

Phumzile turns her face to Nomkhosi while Ngidi follows behind Thakasa.

“So you’ve been lying to us?” she asks.

“What was I supposed to do? Thakasa was keeping his distance.”

“From you, not his baby. That’s what you get for dating a married man. He’s married; he tied his life to someone and became one person with her. The minute you got pregnant you were bringing a baby into both their lives and the wife was bound to get involved. Why are you acting like a clueless young girl now?”

Oh, she’s going to cry now.

“You don’t have a right to keep a father away from his child because your relationship with him didn’t turn out the way you wanted. Your daughter deserves love from both parents, you cannot get rid of the wife because she’s the other half of this man. Suck it up baby girl, you know how hard it is growing up without a father.”

Ngidi walks in with a defeated look on his face. This isn’t something anyone expected from Nomkhosi. She’s always been a big sister, the one who advises

others and set an example.

“I don’t like the speed he left in, anything could happen. He’s driving with emotions, not sanity,” he says to her and walks past the lounge to get himself a drink.

“Ma?” Nomkhosi looks at her mother desperately. What must she do now? She cannot drive after him.

“Call his family,” her mother says.

How’s that going to be possible though? This is a mess. Now all she’s praying for is that nothing happens to Phelo’s father. Her baby can’t be fatherless.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 41

Nkonzo is getting ready to leave the office. Things aren't exactly how he hoped they were going to be, but at least she acknowledges him as a man in her life. She invited him to her house for dinner. He should go from work straight to her house, but then he's been thinking of other ways to impress. He'll buy a dress for her to wear this coming Saturday at church- they're still going to discuss the church thing though.

His phone rings. He looks at the screen and doesn't recognize the number.

"Hello," he picks up.

"I got your number from mutual business friend," says a girl in a crying voice.

"Can I help you?" he asks in panic.

"It's Thakasa.... He was not okay... He just sped off..."

"Okay, calm down and tell me what happened to my

brother.”

“I...I don't know if he'll get home safe. He didn't leave in a good state.” Now she's calm and making sense. He's never talked to her but he knows who she could be. Thakasa is not open with them, he didn't even know that he went to see her today.

“I'll call him and get back to you,” he tells her. It seems like everything is going south in his brother's life.

His phone is ringing to voicemail. He puts everything back on his desk and rushes to Bandla's office whose come back to work after a week of hiding.

“Thakasa is not answering his phone,” he says from the door.

“So what?” Bandla looks at him. His temper left with Khanyo.

“His girlfriend just called me saying he left in a bad state and she's worried that he may not be able to drive home safely.”

“Why is he not picking up?” Bandla asks.

“That’s why I’m here to ask you as well,” Nkonzo says.

They stare at each like two retards. Nkonzo’s phone rings again.

“Is he okay?” Now she’s screaming at him. Shembe!

“I’m still trying to call him, he’s not answering.”

“No, no, no! There’s a car accident on the N2, towards Umhlali.” She cries painfully before her line dies. Now his heart is racing, that can’t be his brother, no!

“What’s going on?” Bandla asks, getting off his chair with his face masked with fear.

“There’s an accident. We need to go there and check if he wasn’t involved,” Nkonzo says.

Nothing can ever prepare him for a moment where his brother’s life isn’t guaranteed. They cannot function without him, all of them. If anything happens to him it would be the end of the Manqele empire. Between him and Bandla, nobody can hold the ropes the way Thakasa does. He was trained

from birth to be a family leader. Their father was always preparing him for the time when he wasn't going to be around anymore. When he passed on, Thakasa knew everything there was to know and he fitted perfectly on his new role.

Sadly, he hasn't trained any of them to fill his role should anything happen to him. He's taught them to always count on him. To be boys while he was a man; to always be his little brothers. Ukuthemeleza in the kraal is his job, only he knows their elders from the great-grand parents by their names and praises to the extended late family relatives. Only he knows how to divide the meat during ceremonies and represent the family.

They took Bandla's car. Nkonzo didn't even cancel dinner with Tema, that would be another issue to sort out when he comes back. He's behind the wheel, trying to drive as fast as he can under the circumstances.

The accident happened on the southbound lane of

the N2, his car lost control and veered off the roadway, over the barrier and collided with the centre pillar. Netcare 911 paramedics have already taken him and rushed him to the hospital.

One of them has to inform the family, but in the state they're in right now neither of them has the guts. They don't know how bad he's injured or if he's going to make it. His BMW 7-Series is damaged beyond control- it gives them no hope at all.

Nkonzo has to be an older one and call home. His heart is on some race, he's trying not to think the worst but cannot help it.

MaKhumalo picks up after he's tried calling her twice. She's still struggling to come to terms with the fact that he moved out.

"Nkonzenhle," she says.

"Ma, I'm with Bandla," he takes a deep sigh.

"Oh, you're telling him to move out as well?" she asks.

Sigh!

“We are going to Alberlito, Thakasa has been in a car accident,” he says.

There’s a scream. His heart breaks into pieces. She’s lost her husband, she cannot lose a son too!

“Please put him in your prayers, we don’t know how bad it is but I’ll call you when I get there.”

No response. Her scream is piercing through the speaker of his phone and stabbing through his heart.

“Bhuti what’s going on?” Phethy asks after she’s snatched the phone from her hysterical mother.

“It’s Thakasa, he was in a car accident but he’s alive,” he assures her, lest she starts crying too.

“Please give her a glass of water and then pray with her,” he says to her before dropping the call.

They’ve arrived at the hospital. It’s like the world has just turned dark. Both of them are wrapped in one grief and hopelessness. Now they’re waiting for the doctors to brief them. The wait is killing them, despite one nurse telling them that he’ll be okay.

A tall woman with big, swollen eyes makes her way towards them. She's heavily pregnant but still wearing stilettos, extending her already tall height. Her dress is just above her knees, revealing her yellow, thick legs. She looks nothing like MaNtusi, or any woman a Manqele man could pursue. But that's no surprise, right? Khanyo also wear long wigs and fake eyelashes. They all seem to be falling for the opposite of what they thought they'd fall for- even Tema is no exception.

"Nomkhosi," Nkonzo calls her name and raises his hand to show himself.

She knows them. Everything about each and everyone of them. The light-skinned one gives headache and dodges most of his responsibilities. Bandla is the quietest one, Thakasa never complained about him. She was just as surprised when she saw him trending for a sex tape- that's not a brother Thakasa used to describe to her.

"Is he okay?" she asks, holding onto the arm of the chair and releasing a huge breath.

They're staring at her stomach. Have they never seen a pregnant woman before?

Oh shucks, they all thought she aborted. Maybe she made a bad decision, but at that moment she felt like it was necessary.

"We are still waiting for the doctors to update us," Nkonzo says, still staring at her with disbelief.

That's better than waiting for his body to be taken away, right? She sinks down on the chair, rests her back and pulls a slab of chocolate out of her bag. She unwraps it and bites a huge piece. It's her weapon against her forever-dripping salivary glands.

They're still staring at her. This is getting awkward and uncomfortable.

Phelo must be furious from all the running she did coming here; she kicks violently.

She sits up straight and covers her tummy with her arms. It feels like she's playing mapatile inside there. It's grabbing her stomach attention from the two

men that have been staring at her from the second she stepped in. She has some insane strong kicks.

She kicks the other side of her tummy. Now she's convinced that she's going to come out exactly like Snalo. Why is she causing all this drama? Is it because her fathers are present?

"Are you hungry?" Bandla asks with concern. He hasn't said anything to her since she arrived, understandably because she was told about his character.

"No," she says.

He makes a face she can't describe. Seemingly her answer doesn't satisfy him.

She explains; "I had a burger before coming here. I think she's just exercising her muscles and being dramatic."

They understand but confusion is still there in their eyes- probably why she's still pregnant. But she's not explaining herself to them.

There's a doctor making his way towards them. They all get up on their feet and wait with their eyes widely opened.

"I'm doctor Linford," he says and flashes a smile to put them at ease.

But it doesn't work.

"Is he okay?" Bandla asks.

"Yes, he's okay. He suffered a few scrapes and cuts, nothing much."

They look at one another. That's all? His car will probably be written off, how come he's okay?

"Can we see him?" Nkonzo asks.

"Yes, but only for a few minutes. I want him to get some rest, he has a bad whiplash."

This is a relief. This right here, proves that uNyazi LweZulu lives with them through their spirits.

He makes a quick call to Phethy, he needs to put MaKhumalo at ease before she assumes the worst

and faint.

Bandla proceeds and makes his way inside the ward. Khosi disappears to find her way to the bathrooms; she's been holding pee for a very long time.

"Mthonga!" Bandla says from the door and stands still. His is breath held up in his chest.

Yes he's alive, but this has been a rude wake up call. What are they without him? Does he even know how important he is to his family?

"Come in," he says calmly. His neck is in pain, but it's nothing he cannot handle. He's just surprised to see them here so soon.

Instead of walking in Bandla slides down the wall and sinks down on the floor with his head buried in his hands.

"Bandla don't do that. I'm okay."

Well, he's going to need a moment.

Nkonzo walks in. He sees Bandla having a moment on the floor but his attention is on his big brother for

now.

He envelopes him a hug despite the bandage on his arm. Thakasa chuckles and slowly pushes him off.

“Enough! Did you get all the statements from Floyd?” he asks.

“Maybe I did. Maybe I didn’t. I don’t care about statements Mthonga, we nearly lost you. What happened?” Nkonzo asks.

He exhales deeply and shifts his eyes away. Whatever happened hurt him deeply, he can’t even mask his pain.

“Your girlfriend is here,” Nkonzo says. “She’s the one who informed us.” He also wants to ask why she’s still pregnant if she aborted, but maybe now is not the time.

He stares at him, hoping he’ll give details of the situation or call him out for referring to her as his girlfriend, but he doesn’t.

“Okay,” Thakasa says and gazes at Bandla lifting himself off the floor with a puffy look on his face.

He stands next to Nkonzo and looks at his bandaged arm.

“I’m fine Mthonga,” Thakasa reassures him and tries to lift his hand to touch him but fails due to pain.

“If anything happened to you...” He takes a deep sigh and shakes his head. “I don’t know if the family was going to survive. You’ve held the family together ever since Baba passed on. You’ve been our guardian ever since I can remember. It would’ve broken me if you passed on before I can tell you how much I really appreciate everything you and MaNtusi have done for us. Especially you.”

“UNyazi lweZulu protected me. I still don’t know how I survived,” Thakasa.

“What caused the accident?”

Instead of answering he shifts his eyes to the entrance and stares. Bandla and Nkonzo turn their heads too and see that Nomkhosi is making her way in.

“I’m going to call EVERYONE and let them know that you’re in the hospital but okay,” Nkonzo says and

raises his eyebrow questioningly.

Everyone includes his wife, he nods and turns his head back to Nomkhosi. Both his brothers clear the room and give them some privacy.

“Are you okay?” she asks.

He takes a deep sigh and looks away.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

He’s still not looking at her.

“I’m not going to allow you or your wife to do DNA test on her now. Please wait until she’s born, then you can do it.”

He turns his eyes to her but still doesn’t say anything.

“I believe you’ll make best decisions as a father and always put Phelo’s well-being as your first priority. I’ll do my best as a mother too.”

“Why are you only believing in me now?” he asks.

“Because I’m fighting a losing battle. I don’t want my daughter to be born into this tension. And I don’t

want her to grow up without a father like me. You nearly died today, it was going to be the same story all over again.” She releases a sigh and throws her hands over her face. “I don’t want to be a bitter mom. I want what’s best for my daughter and sometimes I make bad decisions. I’m still bound to do so as I grow into motherhood. But the last thing I’d ever do is to hurt my own daughter and rob her the chance to have a father because I couldn’t have him.”

Thakasa’s jaw tightens. He shifts his eyes away and exhales heavily.

“I’ll do this for my daughter; set up another meeting. Maybe her and I can find some common grounds. I don’t mind her cutting our communication, as long as you’re going to be involved in your daughter’s life and not have your wife stand in for you in everything. That’s all I want now.”

The pain reflecting in her eyes as she lets go slices his heart into pieces. It wasn’t supposed to end this way.

“I’m going to be a father to my daughter. You don’t

need to make sacrifices or act a certain way. Nothing and nobody is going to come between me and Sphephelo.”

“Okay,” she says.

“Can I say hello to her?”

She takes a deep breath before stepping forward and standing at the reach of his left, unharmed arm.

“Is she healthy?” he asks, massaging her big tummy.

“Yes,” she says.

“How long before I see her?”

“Three more months.”

He sits up regardless of the pain in his neck and right arm. He wraps his other arm around her tummy.

“My princess. I missed your first doctor’s visit, I missed your first kick and I missed your first ultrasound scan. I’m so sorry, I promise you I’ll make sure you have the best father in the world. I promise you, I will never miss another first...”

Someone exclaims from the door. It’s MaNtusi

wearing a huge, disgusted frown.

He freezes. Khosi steps back and looks at them, her eyes and MaNtusi's lock for a second.

"I thought you wanted us to fix things," MaNtusi says, looking at Thakasa with so much hurt and disappointment.

"It's not what it looks like, I swear," Thakasa says.

"Didn't I walk into you hugging and sweet talking to her? Is she not pregnant while I was told she aborted the baby?"

"I just found out today also." He looks at Nomkhosi desperately. "Was I doing anything to you?"

"You expect me to listen to this tramp? Of course, she's going to lie for you. She's used to being chowed and tossed aside for the worthy ones." She walks in furiously and stands opposite Nomkhosi.

"Get the fuck out!" she says. "You got what's between his pants and money. What more do you think you're going to get? A ring? His heart?"

Commitment? Boo, turn around and take a look at yourself.”

“MaNtusi, please!” Thakasa says firmly. But MaNtusi is unstoppable right now. She’s angry beside herself.

“He’s not leaving me for you. Let that sink in and get out!”

Khosi inhales sharply and looks at Thakasa. She’s hurt, that’s plain visible. Every word she said found a way to sting in her heart and leaves her bleeding internally.

“Please excuse us for a moment, I want to talk to her,” Thakasa pleads.

That’s a sweet way of “tossing her to the side for the worthy one.” She nods and turns around and leaves without uttering a word.

A small voice reminds her that she’s doing all this for Phelo. She cannot fight the wife for fighting for her husband.

She cannot be mad at Thakasa for not standing up for her, that’s his wife. He thought she left him and

now she's back. In the midst of all that, his daughter is alive. The world is his oyster. He got a happy ending out of both parties.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 42

THAKASA

Nomkhosi walks out with a heavy heart. He can see the pain she's feeling, if there was a way he was going to stop her and probably give her a hug. Just to let her know that Nothile's words came from a place of pain, they don't necessarily describe her worthy as a woman.

"I came here running, thinking 'my husband' has been in a car accident, only to find you wrapped in your tramp's waist."

He releases a deep sigh and rests back on the pillow, softly groaning out in pain.

"You weren't feeling any pain while you were hugging and smelling her," she says.

"Thank you for coming," he says and shuts his eyes for a second. "Nomkhosi lied about the abortion. She's still pregnant, I named the baby Sphephelo. In

a few weeks I'll be paying for the damages, I want the baby to take my surname so there will be lobola payments once she's born."

Her eyes widen. She's in disbelief!

"And I have no say in this?" she asks, folding her arms.

"No, you don't. Until I know that you've accepted that baby and truly forgiven me, I'll be taking sole decisions regarding her. Nomkhosi has agreed to let me be a father to her, I cannot let her down and put my baby in the middle of my marital battles."

Fair enough! She pulls a chair and sits with a faint look on her face. She's still pregnant, this changes everything! It changes every plan she made.

"So she's giving you your first child?" she asks, pain reflecting in her eyes. "And not just any child, but a daughter you've always wanted. Every sacrifice I've made means nothing. The efforts I made to make sure that our marriage met all its expectations were in vain. She just came out of nowhere and made you the happiest man on the planet."

This time she's not lashing out and screaming her head off, she's laying out her emotions and brokenness. He's hurt both these women and it's the last thing he wanted.

"That's... that's not true. You also make me happy, MaNtusi we are having a child," he says, trying to hold her gaze but failing dismally. He cannot handle looking at the pain reflecting in her eyes. It's all because of him.

"It's hard ManqeLe. I don't know if you really deserve forgiveness because I don't think you're genuinely sorry. You want to have your bread buttered on both sides. You want me to be a piece of dignity to your name; Thakasa's wife. But you also want to enjoy fruits of your infidelity with her. You want me to accept what you did and open my arms to your baby, right?"

"Please, ngiyakucela. Phelo is innocent in all this, are you really going to crucify an innocent baby?"

She sighs deeply, "No."

"Are you going to come back home?" He's taking his

chance.

“I need to ask you something,” she says.

He looks at her curiously and nods for her to go on.

“If the roles were reversed would you hold me down?”

He’s playing with his ring and not looking at her. His body language says it all but she wants to hear it coming straight from his mouth.

“Manqele, would you hold me down?” she asks again.

He inhales sharply, “I don’t know.”

Tears that have been building up for months finally break out and flood her face. Chances were slim, she knew that, but to finally hear words coming out of his mouth hurts. It’s heartbreaking.

“That’s not fair,” she wipes off tears but they keep pouring out.

His heart breaks too but he cannot promise her something he knows he may not be able to do.

“I cannot lie and say I’d do this and this. But that

doesn't mean I don't appreciate you, MaNtusi."

She gets off the chair, shaking her head. She's given so much, yet received less in return. She's made sacrifices, a lot of them. If Thakasa can't guarantee her one thing that he wants from her the most-forgiveness- then it would be a meaningless sacrifice for her to stay in this marriage.

"I think this is where we end," she says with a heavy sigh.

"Please don't do this again. You can't walk out everytime and come back whenever it suits you."

"If I stay I'll end up losing my character. I don't think I want to stay around and watch you bond with her baby, while you haven't even thought about ours' name."

"So you're leaving me again?" he asks with a hint of annoyance.

"Not again, but for good. If the baby I'm carrying is yours, I'll be back to introduce you to him. Other than that, I think we've tried our best.."

His brain needs to slow down and reprocess everything she just said.

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“When you felt emotionally neglected, I was feeling emotionally neglected too; that’s what I mean.”

He doesn’t get it. Sweat perspires from his forehead as he struggles to get up from the bed.

“What do you mean ‘if the baby is mine’?” His eyes are already bloodshot and locking back burning tears.

“In Bali when we fought and I left the room angrily.” He frowns, trying to remember that night.

“I met some guy, we talked and ended up in his room.”

“Is this a joke MaNtusi?” His lips tremble. His face turns darker as his facial muscles tense up.

“No, it’s not a joke. I’m not sure about the paternity of this baby, but I’ll let you know.” Somehow she’s pleased to see that pain on his face. Now he knows exactly how she’s been feeling.

“You’re saying this to hurt me?” He’s in denial, even though the truth is slowly seeping in his heart and cutting through each vein of his body.

“I needed a savior, I was an emotional wreck, and he happened to be there. In that short 30 minutes, he made me feel attractive and worth his attention, which you hardly ever do.”

“That’s....you cannot be serious MaNtusi. I trusted you.”

“That’s the problem; you trusted me, not loved me.”

It sinks in! His wife cheated on him. Her earlier question came from a place of guilt.

“You didn’t even use a condom?” he asks, slowly like his brains are scattering all over his head and his signal is cutting off.

“Did you use it?” she asks, raising her eyebrow at him.

His chest tightens, he’s running out of breath. His head is spinning and he cannot see clearly. He holds below his left breast and releases a groan before

falling back on the pillow.

When he opens his eyes he's surrounded by two nurses and both his brothers. Nothile is nowhere around. He doesn't know what happened, he thought he was having a heart attack but it seems like it was something else.

"What's wrong? They say you panicked and blanked out," Bandla asks.

They both look scared AF. He needs a moment, maybe someone to talk to as well. But he can't talk to them, he doesn't want to put them in that position.

"Please look for Dr Zanele Mhlongo on Facebook, her number is on her page," he says looking at Bandla.

Bandla quickly logs into Facebook and searches for Dr Mhlongo. It doesn't take a minute before he finds her details.

"I think this is her," he hands the phone to Thakasa.

"Please excuse me for a second," he says and turns

his eyes to the nurses. "Am I good?"

"Yes, Sir. Dr Linfield will come and see you shortly," one says.

"Great. I'd like to make a private phone call, if you don't mind."

They all leave him to his phone call. Now Nkonzo is worried more than Bandla. It doesn't make sense why MaNtusi would rush to the hospital like a concerned wife and leaves so immediately. Leaving him in the state she left him in and doesn't look back. Nomkhosi left too. Something bad must've occurred between the three of them and he can't help but blame two women for having no timing. They could've said or done whatever they did to him when gets discharged.

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BHAMBATHA

It's been a week since him and Nondumiso parted

ways. He misses having her around, but he cannot let her think she can disrespect Mawande and get away with it. He was never there for his brother physically, but that didn't break the bond they had as siblings. Despite everything he's done in his life and all the crime he's committed, Nyezi never stopped looking at him as a brother and believing in him. He saw a human in him even when nobody did.

He should've taken the hint from their last chats. Nyezi must've felt that his journey was coming to an end. He spoke about Mawande mostly, he loved his wife more than anything. He wanted her to be happy and protected. And he trusted him, the first runner-up of the devil's right-hand man, to do it. Before he rebelled they used to chill and play like any other kids. They'd mix with the neighbors kids and play a game they called Soldier Race. One would be a General, then two would be criminals while others remained helpless community members. If you managed to run and catch both criminals without any help you became a General of the next game. Because of his long legs and athletic nature, he was

always winning the General position. It came with the perks of sitting under the tree and enjoying a glass of Sweeto while looking after 'the community' and making sure there was peace.

It baffles him why Nyezi continued seeing him as General because that was an honorable position. They held it with high regard in their childhood and all wished to be General in the game . But he got over it when he started causing more havoc than peace in the community.

Even though pieces are connecting, he's still in awe of the amount of trust Nyezi had in him. He was 'Bafo' in his phone, yet saved as 'General' in his wife's phone. That must've meant something, along with all their last chats. Nyezi wanted him to be Mawande's General and if there was a time for him to show his gratitude and love to his brother, it would be making sure that Mawande is happy and safe at all costs.

He texts Nondu and tells her to be ready in 30

minutes. It's his first text after tons of messages and a thousand calls she's been making throughout the week. He really needs some hanky-panky today and he trusts Nondu to satisfy his cravings. He's now familiar with her, that's a better way of putting it. He can have any girl he wants, smash the cookie and cuts it immediately afterwards. But he wants Nondu because with her everything goes. She has an understanding, even though it's a shallow one, but she does get him. His house becomes a home when she's around. She cooks homely meals, plays those old classics and gives him a good ass. When it's time for him to hit the road, she doesn't nag or question him. He finds her when he comes back.

However, she has to go and apologize to Mawande for them to be good again. He's brought back her weave and bought a pair of black, expensive heels. It's easy to make her happy.

"But Nondu you're going to say sorry to Mawande. We are going to address everything else after we have talked to her and fucked a little bit. I'm horny."

She sighs, "So we are going to emafamu now?"

"You're starting again."

"I meant that we are...."

He waves her away, "Yes, we are going home, to my brother's house though."

She's really not looking to this. Why is this Mawande given so much credit anyway? Is it because her husband died and now everyone has to watch their steps around her like she's a tray of eggs.

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Of course, they did a little shopping for princess Cinderella whose prince charming died!

It's annoying, seeing Bhambatha caring so much about her isn't helping either. But she's keeping it together, for the sake of her boyfriend she'll apologize.

They walk through the gate and her heart suddenly feels heavy when she realizes how big her life is out here in the Bundus. She has a Mercedes Benz

parked in her yard. She really did secure the bag from Nyezi. This makes her wonder if Bhambatha would ever do the same for her.

Mawande is not alone. She's with a young girl and mother-in-law who fails to keep her eyes anywhere else, but at Nondu. Bhambatha has hinted to her every now and then that his family doesn't like him.

Nobody is happy to see him. Not even a little girl, it's like she doesn't know this man.

His mother decided to leave the room upon his arrival. But he is not taking anything to heart.

He smiles and greets Mawande.

"I didn't expect you," she says firmly with an inhospitable look on her face. It's only because he brought Nondu to her house.

"Sorry to just come unannounced, Nondu would like to apologize to you."

Does she? Her eyes and Mawande's lock for a second, there's no love lost between them.

“I’m sorry about the other day and about the phone call,” she says with her last drop of humbleness.

“Thank you,” Mawande says with a smile and looks at both of them.

“Please have some tea before leaving,” she says.

They follow each other to the sitting room where Bhambatha’s mother is and join her on the chairs.

It’s just awkward. Bhambatha is on his phone and his mother is not even acknowledging their presence.

“Hating your own child is bithy,” Nondu says and grabs both their attention in a split second.

She looks at Bhambatha, “I’m glad you’re not letting this get through you. Some women don’t deserve wombs, it’s sad.”

“Nondu,” he whispers firmly and holds her arm.

“What is this trash saying to me?” Mrs Myeza.

“Trash is someone who hates her own son. Mother Shembe!”

Mawande walks into a rising tension and frowns at the door.

“Jesus Fuckin Christ, can we talk?” Bhambatha asks, grabbing the furious Nondu’s hand.

“What’s going on?” Mawande asks.

Nobody answers her. People are still in their hard feelings and shock.

Bhambatha pulls Nondu all the way to the car parked by the gate. They get inside the car and he turns to her with the most deadly look on her family.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” he asks.

“Someone needs to put your mother in her place. The way she treats you is not healthy.”

“You and putting people in their places! You put me between your legs, but that doesn’t mean you can put my family in your arse as well. We are here to rectify your mistakes but still usabhodla umsunu nje. Yini inkinga yakho?”

“My problem? Bhambatha don’t turn this on me and

try to make yourself look better. I'm trying to help you. Hell, you don't even love that woman!"

His eyes widen and a few lines furrow on his forehead.

"That woman is my mother. We may not get along but that doesn't take anything away from the fact that she's my mother. I don't love my mother? What the fuck are you talking about?"

Okay, this is news!

He told her about the tension between him and his family, but now he wants to play a good son.

"If you weren't a bitch I was going to kick your ass for this. That's my fuckin' mother, I don't care what I said or how my relationship with her is. You don't come for my mother if you're not me!"

Maybe she took things far while trying to play his guardian angel. She's seen him angry before, but not like this.

She releases a breath, "Okay, maybe I overstepped the line and....."

“Too much education la kuwe. There was no line in that house, you’re now shitting me twice in a week and maybe I should show you the toilet.”

Sigh!

She keeps quiet and drops her eyes to her fisted hands.

He clicks his tongue and opens his door and climbs out of the car. She remains inside the car, surely Bhambatha cannot wait to go dispose her like used condom like he always does after their fights.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 43

KHANYO

Things didn't turn out the way she had thought. Her mistake was to disobey her ancestors and turn her back on them. She had to undergo tests, challenges and many things that she can't share with anyone. A week after her arrival in Bergville, she had to depart and find Gog' MaSibiya's mother's home in the south of Tanzania. There she was assigned with many duties that her grandparents failed to perform. She spent a few weeks in the Kilombero Valley, being cleansed in the fresh waters of Mafinji river.

She needed that tranquility. It enabled her to find inner peace and understand her spirituality immensely. It's been the longest five months of her life!

Today is the day she finally completes her spiritual

journey of becoming the prophet and healer, Khanyo KaMayise. For the first time in her life she's done something and completed it. She's a new person, with a new purpose and duties to fulfil. She's committed herself to her calling and allowed Gog' MaSibiya to guide her.

Mandulo invited relatives, her father's family and a few neighboring churches. A welcoming service took place in the course of the night. In the morning they all went to the river, led by Pastor Ndlela, and prayed their hearts off before they were immersed deeply in the water as part of the cleansing custom. She's now an official votary of Ekuthuleni kwamaZayoni Church (Zion's Place Of Peace)

Now they're celebrating exclusively as a family. A goat has been slaughtered, both Mandulo's daughters are present and Khanyo's aunts didn't leave.

Everyone was excited to have her back home, except Mandulo. He seems to have lost himself and more

troubled than he was when she left. They haven't got a chance to talk. One of the things she wants to know the most is if Bandla was told about her return. It's quite strange that he hasn't shown face in two days that she's been home.

A lot has happened in her absence. Nolwazi is now in Wits and furthering her studies. She couldn't come to Bergville because of classes, but she did send a gift and a message.

Gugu couldn't stand church people, so she left in the middle of the service and promised to come back today. She could be on her way, if more important things didn't come up. Life has hit her hard; from fighting SSA, sparking a war with Nigerians and kidnapping a little child, to developing feelings for a 43 year-old man and helping his daydreams of fathering a little princess. Now Mike is in jail and she's pregnant with his child. They killed Mohammed, it was the most hardest decision to make but they didn't have any other choice. He was like a family to them, at least they thought so. When he wanted out it was hard for them to let him go with

everything he knew about them, so they decided it was better if he took their secrets under ground.

16 hours before Mike was sentenced to 10 years in prison for fraud, forgery and theft, they found out that she was 6 weeks pregnant. That followed after only two sexual encounters with him. Her biggest mistake was to let a moment of lust blind her. It's been two months since he's been gone and walls are really closing in on her.

Khanyo walks in after a short nap and finds Mandulo flooding his throat with a can of beer as though it can flood out all his problems.

"Are you okay?" she asks while applying cream in her hands.

"Yeah," he says.

"It looks like a lot happened in my presence. When did you last see Bandla?"

He shrugs, "I don't know."

Sigh! They had an agreement before she left; he was

going to keep Bandla on the loop about everything.

“What’s going on?” she asks with concern, trying to read his face.

“I have another child, somewhere,” he says with a heavy sigh.

“You don’t look happy.”

“I have a situation with Nolwazi.”

Oh Lord! He really allowed a young girl to let her crush fool her into a relationship with him.

“Don’t say anything. I know how you feel. You were right; I should’ve remained an adult in that whole thing. But I didn’t, now I’m about to break her heart.”

Khanyo sighs heavily, “Who is the mother of your child?”

“I’m yet to meet her and my son. It was a one-time thing, we met in Bali and things got heated in a moment.”

“Do you even know her name?” Khanyo asks in disbelief.

“I know her name. How do you take me?” He gives her a look.

“Is there anything else? I don’t like seeing you like this.”

“No,” he exhales heavily and turns to leave.

Today she should focus on the celebrations and think less about the man whose phone has been off the last two days. Maybe he changed his number, or he’s busy with work. It doesn’t look like Mandulo cared to notify him of her return. If he did, Bandla would’ve come to see her by now. It’s been five months, that’s almost half a year since they parted. He’s the first person she wanted to see more than anyone.

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THE MANQELES

Bandla followed on Nkonzo’s footsteps and moved out. They’re just 30 minutes away from home and

two houses away from each other. Thakasa remained at the Manqele traditional home with MaKhumalo and their newly hired helper. Phethy and Sqalo both left for university in January. Phethy left the province, she's in UJ doing Industrial Design. Sqalo went to DUT to pursue his love of TV production. They've always been cat and dog, for them it was easy to go their separate ways and find themselves beyond the siblinghood.

On the other hand, Nkonzo and Bandla are always together. For them it's hard to live separately. Sometimes they force Thakasa to hang out with them and live his life. He's still working on finding himself again while being a best daddy to his two months old daughter.

They're spending an afternoon in Nkonzo's house, having some grilled meat and watching soccer. They came straight from the office to his house and placed their bets against each other. It's one of those days when all of them had a great day.

“Have you heard from MaNtusi?” Nkonzo asks as they walk out to the balcony after a disappointing match that ended with draw.

“No,” Thakasa says. His face instantly transforms into hostility.

“Do you think she’s given birth?”

“She has. She was due last month. I guess it’s not mine, that’s why she’s not coming back.”

MaNtusi’s subject has been a hard one to digest in the family. MaKhumalo didn’t care what the story was or who pushed who to do what, she just wanted her son’s cows back. But Thakasa opposed the idea, he advised everyone to make peace and accept that she was gone. He was accompanied to the Ngemas to report the matter and also asked Nothile’s uncles to keep the dowry. Nothile hasn’t gone home, it must be the fear of facing her uncles after the disgrace she did at her in-laws.

“Anyway, how are things between you and Tema? I sensed some tension in the office.” He’s been very protective of their relationship, Tema is like a sister

to him as well. She wormed her way into everyone's heart when she visited church and ended up joining officially. She's MaKhumalo new favourite; she's been pestering Nkonzo about the wedding every chance she gets.

Nkonzo doesn't answer, instead he's laughing. Bandla also breaks into laughter. It must be their inside joke.

"You're laughing, I guess it's not that deep then," Thakasa says.

Nkonzo shrugs his shoulders, with that mock on his face.

"He's waiting for marriage and she's fed up," Bandla spills the beans.

Of course, Thakasa is confused.

"Bedroom services," Bandla.

He chuckles with a little frown on his face and looks at Nkonzo.

"That's very mature of you," he says.

"I've always been the mature one. That's why I'm the

only one who's got a woman here," Nkonzo says.

Bandla inhales sharply and grabs a can of cold drink in front of him. It's been hard. Five months ago when she left he was under the impression that they'd communicate and he'd be able to visit. But two weeks after she left, he received a call from Mandulo saying that she'd gone to Tanzania following her calling.

His worst fears came true.

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THAKASA

He took some time off work. Nkonzo referred to it as paternity leave, but he was taking a break to focus on his mental health and to deal with his interpersonal and marital issues. He often visit Phelo at her grandparents' house. It took long for the grandmother to accept him but eventually she had no choice. He paid for the damages; three cows and

one goat. Even though he hasn't fully claimed Phelo as a Manqele, she was registered as one at Home Affairs. His family has only seen her in pictures, they haven't met her yet because of her grandmother's drama. She's a little goddess; brown-skinned like fresh coffee with no additives. An angel that sparks life into anything she sets her beautiful, big eyes on. She's his reason for soldiering on and waking up everyday with purpose in life.

Leaving his brother's place he drove to the Ngidi residence in Izinga, where Phelo and her mother are currently staying. Against his word, Nomkhosi has gone back to work and left Phelo with a nanny. They went from crazy exes with unfinished business to strangers who share a baby and basically can't agree on anything.

Phelo is brought to him by Snalo in the lounge. Ngidi and his wife went to the village, he passed a few empty alcohol bottles in the kitchen. He's never liked nor trusted Snalo. She's shown him her unstable side, not once or twice, but so many times. Even now,

he's not sure if she's not going to drop his daughter.

"Let me take her," he says, meeting her half way and taking Phelo.

She rolls her eyes, "I've been an aunt three times before her."

"I didn't mean to offend you." He goes to the couch with Phelo wrapped in a fleece blanket in his arms. He lifts her little fingers and kisses them.

"When are you coming home and seeing grandma?" he asks, smiling at her. Everything becomes alright when he has this little human being in his arms.

"She cannot answer, you know. She's only 2 months-old," Snalo.

For someone who's been an aunt three times, she's really dumb.

He looks at her, "Where is Nomkhosi?"

"Upstairs."

"Please ask her if I can have a word with her," he says.

“Okay, grandson.”

Grandson? Okay, whatever!

Nomkhosi comes down, wearing leggings and loose T-shirt. In her hand there’s a glass of champagne. She refused to breastfeed so that she can drink alcohol, right?

“This is what I don’t like,” he says.

Nomkhosi sighs with an eye roll and sits on the opposite couch with her legs crossed.

“Hello Thakasa,” she says.

“Maka Phelo.” He releases a deep breath to calm himself down. He doesn’t want to argue today.

“I know you said she’s still too young, but I was wondering if...”

“No Thakasa, you cannot take her. She’s not even 3 months-old but you already want her to travel to another town and be away from her mother.”

“You went back to work, she’s always away from her

mother anyway. What difference does it make? I'm her parent too."

She sighs, "We are always talking about this, every fuckin day!"

"I'll bring her back tomorrow, please. I'm not going to let her cry, I'll make sure her milk is always ready and check her nappy every 10 minutes."

"You're being extra," she laughs. "Mom is going to kill me for this, please make sure you bring her back before they come back."

"Thank you," he says and plants a kiss on Phelo's little forehead. "You're coming with Daddy, you heard that?"

Nomkhosi is watching them with a smile on her face. He wasn't a good boyfriend and husband, but he knows and fulfills his role as a father excellently.

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BANDLA

He notices a girl in a white dress standing outside his house and slows down. As he drives closer he's able to see who it is. His chest vibrates with tremor, yet excitement is shooting up in his veins. He had made peace with her being gone and tried to live with the fact that he may see her after a few years, or never. Nobody told him anything. He tried to reach out to her friends and they both seemed to be in the dark. Mandulo had little to no time to discuss his sister with him.

He stops the car, opens his door and stares at her. She walks towards the car slowly, with a smile widely spread across her face.

He steps out of the car and opens his arms. They embrace in a long, tight hug before he gently pushes her off and looks at her from head to toe.

"You're back?" he asks, touching her arms and staring at colourful strings around her wrists.

"I'm back," she says, fighting back tears and hugging him again.

"Is it over?" he asks over her shoulder.

“Yes, I’m never leaving again. Am I still welcome in your life?”

He lifts her face up and stares into her eyes, disbelieving what she’s asking.

“It’s me, babe. UBandlalakho, I’ve been hopelessly waiting for this day. When did you come back?”

“Three days ago. Mandulo didn’t tell you?” she asks.

“No. You didn’t call me either.”

“Your number wasn’t going through. I thought you were busy and decided to finish everything at home before coming and looking for you,” she says.

“Get in the car, this is our house.”

She frowns with a little smile curving in her lips and looks at the ravish house in front of her. She knows him to have a great taste in cars and suits, but this house right here shows that he has a great taste in everything. It’s a double-storey with wide panels of glass and columns of bricks at the sides sides, and finishes off its frontage with a row of manicured garden hedges.

“I live here,” he says. “Nkonzo is behind that house.”

She nods, “I’m proud of you.”

His eyes drop. Khanyo kisses his cheek before turning to the other side and getting inside the car.

A grey and woodtone kitchen welcomes her. Smooth and sleek black cabinets crash up against the wall, to brighten up the manly looking kitchen is an orange light from the roof.

“You can change anything you want to change,” he says.

Did she look unimpressed?

“It’s beautiful, my love,” she says.

He looks relieved. He takes off his jacket and put it over a bar stool.

“Let’s see our bedroom,” he says, grabbing her hand and leading her towards a curved staircase.

It feels like she’s walking up to heaven. There’s a weird energy between them, maybe it’s because of

the time they've spent apart.

The main bedroom is nothing short of amazing. It could've been divided into two small rooms. Her picture on the wall gazes back at her. It was taken a day before she left for Bergville, the last time they were laying in bed together in Hlomendlini.

She's fighting back tears. This is overwhelming!

"I've been waiting for you to come back," he says and wraps his arm around her. "Remember you said we were going to talk once you come back? I've been holding on to that."

That feels like a long time ago. His arm leaves her waist, he goes to a shelf and takes out an envelope.

"Sit," he says, cracking a nervous smile and lowering himself on the bed.

"Do you still love me?" he asks.

"That goes without saying Banda. Of course I love you," she says.

He nods and sighs out heavily.

"You did Journalism, so I think your vocabulary is

better than mine.” He hands the envelope to her,
“Please check if my grammar is correct.”

She’s not an editor! Can’t a girl gets some sex before checking spelling and punctuations?

The envelope was not sealed, she opens it and pulls out a paper inside.

She briefly runs her eyes on it- a smile creeps off her face.

“What is this?” she asks.

“I didn’t write a date because I didn’t know when it was going to happen,” he says.

Tears fill up her eyes. He’s not only coming back to a house, but a letter to her uncles as well.

“Are you going to give them?” he asks, holding her hand and begging her with his eyes. Normal people say ‘will you marry me.’

“Yes, I’ll give them,” she nods.

He grabs her neck and onslaughts her with a kiss. As soon as their bodies collide and skins touch, connection sparks up like a wild fire. It’s still there,

this is still her Bandla and she's his love.

"I missed you so much!" he says and kisses her lips once again.

"Thank you for waiting Mthonga, Sgagu, Mpangazith' oziphangayo. Mnkonyeni wami."

He blushes and drops his eyes.

"Did you cut your hair?" she asks.

He touches his head and smiles. He's cute! She kisses his lips playfully.

"Fill in the date," she gives the letter back to him and they embrace in another hug.

He searches for the pen and doesn't find it in the drawers.

"Let me go check downstairs," he kisses her cheek and walks out.

This house is a dream. After bumping on bed a few times, she goes to the ensuite bathroom and releases her water. She needs to change the

pantyliner as well. When she opens the bin to dispose a wrapped pantyliner her eyes land on a condom foil wrapper.

“My love,” his voice calls nearer the bathroom door.

She has the foil wrapper in her trembling hand. Bandla walks in, his eyes bulge out and he stands grounded in front of the door.

“Is it...Bandla what is this?” Pain cracks her voice, she can't even stop her eyes from tearing.

“I don't know how it got there.”

“Don't you dare lie to me Bandla!lethu Manqe!”

He walks forward, looking guilty as charged, and tries to hold her hand.

“You moved on?” she asks.

“No, I swear I was only masturbating,” he says.

She throws the foil wrapper back in the bin and folds her arms with a dead look on her face.

“This is why you didn't care to find out when I was coming back and didn't come to my ceremonies?”

“Babe I swear this is not what it looks like. Your brother really doesn’t like me and I couldn’t....” She raises her hand up.

“You cheated on me. Don’t even try to make this about my brother. You motivated me to go and promised to support me.”

He exhales heavily and nods.

“Okay, I admit it. But I didn’t cheat, this happened only once. I just needed a distraction, something to take my mind off things.”

“And that was sex?” she asks.

He doesn’t answer, he’s scratching his head and looking like a sick puppy.

“Goodbye Bandla!”

He holds her arm, “Khanyo I’m begging you. I made a mistake, it was my first time and I regretted it.”

“Thank you, I feel so much better. Now let go of my arm.”

He sighs heavily and lets it go. She’s leaving him!

He fucked up. That one night is about to cost him one thing he wants more than anything in his life-Khanyo.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 44

KHANYO

I'm angry at myself for trusting this man so much. I put him on the pedestal and worshipped his ass. In my eyes he was always perfect, and I believed that we were soulmates. I feel so stupid, I let his calm nature and puppy eyes fool me. He's no different from any other man; he's crap, just like all of them.

Leaving his house I took a taxi to Mandeni and another one to Durban where I spent the night with Gugu in her flat. Yep, I even forgot that I have a taxi-phobia. I was crying and counting people's change. Gugu's problems are bigger than mine's but she was able to put them aside and listen to my outbursts throughout the night. That's my sister from another mother!

She woke up and went to meet with a certain lawyer

whom she's hoping can get Mike out before he finishes his sentence. I honestly feel sorry for her, I know it must've taken so much for her to hedge down the walls around her and allow a man, not just any man but a grandpa, to sleep and impregnate her. Now she's about to raise that child alone, even though she's miraculously financially stable, a baby still needs a father.

Speaking of fathers, I need to text the one who shared a womb with me and let him know that I'm in a taxi from Durban. He'll be very happy to hear that Bandla cheated on me. He told me so, right! After my attack and Bandla's sex scandal, he had a different version of him and he didn't like it one bit. This would just add another ounce of hatred. I probably shouldn't tell him because you know what they say; "You forgive your partner, but family don't." But I'll tell him because Bandla deserves everything that's coming to him.

I do a little cosmetic shopping before taking another taxi home. My life is now fully based in this place,

until I figure out what's next for my life. Nolwazi is furthering her studies and Gugu is rich with fraud monies that Mike stole for her. It's now me who needs to get a life, I'm not going to heal people day in and out. That's not something anyone can live on, not in this country and its critical but stable economy. And with fake pastors everywhere. It's hard to make a living out of healing people.

I get off the taxi with a few shopping bags and my overnight bag. When I cast my eyes down at home, there's a C-Class parked below the yard. Wonders shall never end! This one decided it was better to come here before me and probably paint me as the wrong one to my family. Why is Mandulo not chasing him out? Is he scared of him now?

I wish I hadn't left Durban. I'm not ready to face him yet. But of course his head is full of Shembe Vaseline, he doesn't know how to give a person something called space after he's wronged her. He's going to be all over my face with his hairy ass. He now knows his way around Bergville and he's brave

enough to step inside the Mayise premises? That's new under the sun.

I walk inside the kitchen, it's facing directly to the lounge and everyone can see me.

"Makhanyi where the hell were you?" Mandulo stands up with a furious look on his face.

His mood is always crappy.

"I slept at Gugu's place. What's going on?" I make sure to send a look at Bandla; he must know that I hate him.

"What's going on? You're asking me that?" He charges towards the passage and Bandla stands up immediately. Mandulo would never put his hands on me, he needs to chill that Shembe ass out.

"Last time you went to this man you nearly died. He runs here in the morning, not knowing where you are and you're asking me what's going on? Do you know how stressed I've been since last night?"

Bandla was dramatic. I get that he panicked, but he

shouldn't have come here and caused my brother panic. If anything had happened, it would've been on the news. I'm a famous porn-star's ex-girlfriend after all.

"I'm sorry, I should've called," I say.

He exhales heavily, "You only think after doing things, Makhanyi."

"I'm really sorry." I look at Bandla looking all relieved and shit, I feel my arms sweating up.

Why is he breathing?

"Why are you here? Mr 'I masturbate with a condom'," I ask him.

"I...I...was...I...I..." No, fuck his stutter!

God knew he wasn't an honest man, that's why he faulted his speech.

"You cheated on me, that's all you have to say and get out."

Mandulo turns to him with a frown and he instantly drops his eyes.

“Oh, that’s the reason? Again, you made her travel by taxis and put her life in danger,” Mandulo.

“I...I...tried...I talked to her...but she was...” I raise my hand up before he finishes his play & pause talk.

“I found used condoms in the bathroom of the bedroom you claimed was ‘our bedroom.’ You only asked me to follow my calling so that you can be a porn star in peace, huh?”

Mandulo holds me back. “Remember who you are now. Don’t allow this to destroy you. Stay calm.”

Okay, he’s right. Breathe Khanyo!

“Do you see what you’re doing in the Mayise premises? You’re here to cause all this noise,” he’s looking at Bandla.

He keeps quiet.

No, he must speak. I’m sure he wasn’t quiet on top of her.

“What if something happened to her again?”

Mandulo asks.

“I apologize Nyathi,” he says and inhales a sharp

breath. His eyes run from me to the floor. He's now acting like a humble saint and I look crazy.

"Just sort it out or ask him to leave," Mandulo says before walking out.

Now this one is staring at the floor like tiles motivated him to throw his black, ugly dick around. Nx, and those two uneven balls!

"If I did the same thing, were you going to forgive me?" I ask.

"I...I don't know, I think I would have forgiven you." He clears his throat and lifts his eyes to me. "But I...I would've never...never tossed you on fire in front of my family. Maybe...maybe I love you...too...too much. But I'd never allow my family to..." He stops and collects his breaths.

Now he's the one hurting more than me. This one would amaze you!

"I slipped once. I...I had no idea what was going on and it was just... just so hard!"

“How do I know it happened only once and meant nothing?”

“We can call my brother, Nkonzo.”

Of course that one is going to back him up, it's brotherhood code.

“And how do I know that it won't happen again? Next week I may go to another province to work, how I do trust you after this?”

“I'll do anything you say, just don't leave me. I made a mistake, once. Please forgive me and allow me to prove my commitment and love to you,” he says.

“I need loyalty as well,” I say.

“We can...we can work on it.”

Honestly, I don't know. I feel like I'm throwing myself deeply in the dam where everyone can swim if there are no guards around.

I know he loves me, but love isn't enough if there's no trust.

“Swazelihle!” Oh gosh!

Only he can get on his knees to trick a person into forgiving him!

“I’m sorry KaMayise,” he says.

Sigh! He couldn’t get on his knees when proposing, but now he knows how to get down on them.

I hold his hand up, “Get up!”

“Are you giving us another chance?” he asks.

“And if I’m not? Are you going to stay on your knees like this?”

“Yes,” he says.

I roll my eyes. He’s stupid!

“We are going to talk and set some ground rules,” I say.

He gets up and pulls me to his chest. Cheating chest!

“We really need to set them.”

I look at him, “No, I’m setting them. Not you.”

“Okay, sorry.”

My goodness!

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NOTHILE

All she wanted was to leave a peaceful life. Thakasa never reached out to her but he did go to her uncles and reported the separation. She hasn't gone home because she knows that nobody is going to listen to the side of her story.

She gave birth and waited a few weeks to see if Londokuhle would resemble any of the Manqueles. Fortunately, he looks nothing like those people. She had to look for Mandulo Nyathi, which wasn't very hard to do. But breaking news to him was hard and she was slightly offended when he asked for DNA test. He had every right to and she was going to conduct it in her own time and terms, but it still rubbed her the wrong way. She's dealing with a lot of things, so is Londa. The last thing they need is paternity tests while they're still conducting a thousand other tests.

But she granted him the test, today they're at Durdoc Medical Centre to give blood samples. They're meeting for the second time in life, but carrying a third person that both of them produced. Life is a dice game!

He doesn't look like the Mandulo she saw in Bali and held deep conversations with. He looks like a mess and so nervous. Deep down in his heart he must be praying not to become a father.

"Where is your husband?" he finally asks after they've completed all the procedures.

"He's home, I left," she says with a shrug.

There's a twinge of guilt knocking his heart.

"Because of this?" he asks, looking at Londa whose eyes have been closed since he arrived.

"No, I left before my third trimester. Things just fell apart and there was no turning point."

"Did you file for divorce?" he asks.

"I was waiting for my son to be born. I didn't want

that stress while I was pregnant because I know he's going to give me a hard time," she says.

He nods and looks at the little man in his arms. He loves his children and children in general, but this one freaks him out. He's done to someone else what Menzi did to him. He knows the pain, he's been there and the last thing he wanted was to inflict it to someone else.

"What if he's really mine?" His voice comes out as a low whisper. He lifts Londa's little fingers and he slowly opens his eyes. He fixes them on Mandulo's chest. A smile creeps off his face, he snaps his fingers but Londa doesn't shift his gaze.

Nothile starts crying next to him.

"Hey, what's wrong?" he asks with confusion masking his face.

Did he do something wrong? She was okay just a minute ago.

"He cannot see Mandulo," she sobs harder.

He's now confused. What does she mean by that?

His possible son cannot see?

But he has both his eyes and they look....oh, no!

He snaps his fingers again. Londa's eyes remain on his chest and don't move. His heart starts racing, what on earth is going on?

"What's wrong with him?" He's now panicking and blowing air in Londa's eyes. Only when he feels something blowing in his eyes he blinks and shuts his little eyes.

"He was fine after birth. Everything was normal. I don't know what happened, when I took him to his six-weeks check up they said he's blind."

He holds Londa with one arm and holds her hand. She's hurting and it breaks his heart. As a parent he understands what she's going through. And he feels it too, whether tests have confirmed his paternity or not. No child deserves to go through this, especially at such a tender age.

"Did you take him to the doctor? Did they run tests on him? What did the results say?" he asks.

“They don’t know what changed. Everything looks fine. He has no injuries, no deficiencies or genetic mutations. God just hate me!”

“Please don’t say that. Maybe it’s not something related to his health, but to us.”

She frowns, “What do you mean?”

“I have a lot to sort out with my ancestors and so do you.”

She exhales heavily and looks away, wiping her tears.

“I’m not going to run away from my responsibilities, Nothile. I’d never do that, I’m here for both of you. But maybe we cannot run away from mistakes and past.”

“I cannot go back to that place. I can’t!” she shakes her head.

“It’s not about you, but this little boy here. Hash things out with him. If he wants me to pay for what we did, I’ll pay.”

She sighs out heavily.

“There’s no other way, Nothile. You’re married before

the ancestors, that man sprinkled inyongo over you and tied you to his ancestors. The only way out is through him, more than it is through court.”

She looks at her little boy and gets a sharp pain in her heart. Why is he the one suffering? When is Phelo suffering? She was conceived the same way as Londa. Is it because Thakasa is a man and ancestors favor his gender? Why she’s the only one getting punished through her child? They both cheated.

“It’s going to be okay,” Mandulo says, rubbing her shoulder.

His phone rings. He gives Londa to her and takes it out of his pocket. Fear creeps up on his face as he glances at the screen.

“Answer it,” Nothile says.

He nods, still engulfed in guilt and fear.

“Hey Lwazi....no, I wasn’t ignoring you...can I call you back when I’m free....I love you too.” He locks the screen and slips the phone back inside his pocket.

“I’m sorry about that,” he says and takes Londa back.

“No, I understand,” Nothile says and cracks a thin smile to put him at ease.

She’s not in a good space and certainly not looking for any relationship. All she wants is for her son to be okay, and that means she has to go back and kneel in front of Thakasa for forgiveness.

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Mandulo dropped her off at Nomcebo’s place and promised to check on them the next day. It’s becoming crowded with Londa, Nomcebo’s kids and her boyfriend all in one house.

She’s been looking for cheap rooms to rent and second hand furniture around. Thakasa didn’t cancel her R6 500 allotment that he gave her monthly while they were still together. That one is deposited straight into her savings account. She also has his other FNB card and he hasn’t said anything about it. The pin is still the same and no funds have been withdrawn from it. But she knows the real Thakasa,

that's why she's nervous about going back. He's calculating his moves and preparing for the day of the real battle.

"How did it go?" Nomcebo asks, walking in with her daughter on the hip and a bowl of porridge.

"He's okay with everything. We'll be taking Londa to a specialist Friday," she says.

"I thought he wanted a DNA test."

"He didn't mean it in a bad way. He said I should call if I need anything, regardless of the pending results."

"He sounds like a good man."

Nothile sighs, "He also advised me to go to Thakasa and ask him for forgiveness."

"He thinks that may be the reason why Londa is, you know, blind?"

"I'm still married to him, Cebo. He's still recognized as my husband and Londa's father. And knowing how Thakasa is, he knows this very well and he's holding a grudge against me."

"Just call him. Now it's not about who's winning or

losing and what's fair. It's about Londa's health."

Why did she get married again? She puts Londa to sleep before taking her phone and dialing his number. Nomcebo gives her a motivating look before stepping out of the room to give her some privacy.

It rings a few times then drop. She calls again, this time it rings to voicemail.

She tries one last time and he picks up.

"I'm in a meeting," he says.

"Oh sorry, I didn't know. I'll call later," she says.

"No, you've already disturbed me. What's up MaNtusi?"

Deep breath!

"We need to talk," she says.

"About what?" He's been waiting for this day to come.

"I'm still waiting for DNA results. His name is

Londokuhle, he's now 8 weeks old."

"Congratulations!" he says.

"Manqele I need...." Another deep breath! "My son is blind."

"I'm not an ophthalmologist. Why are you telling me?" he asks.

Tears burn her eyes. He's so cold! They're both parents, he should have some sympathy.

"Can we hash things out, please. Give me my punishment, I just want my son to have a normal life."

"Why are you making me God? Is it because of me that you're facing those problems. I didn't ask you to leave, you did that on your own."

"Can I come back?" she asks.

"No. I asked you to stay when I wanted you to stay and you left. We could've sorted it out when I wanted to, but you wanted to do things your own way. Be on your own, qhubeka!" He drops the call.

Her heart is heavy in her chest. There's a burning

lump sitting in her throat.

Nomcebo peeps through the door and ask if everything is okay.

“Please call Bab’omncane,” she says.

Nomcebo’s eyes pop out. They both know how that will turn out.

It’s a mess!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 45

THAKASA

His phone buzzes with text messages. He's been trying to ignore her calls but now she's more persistent. He's very much aware of his wrongs, Khosi trusted him to honor his promise. But one more night won't hurt, Phelo is not lost, she's with her father.

Him and MaKhumalo got close after everyone moved out. It's them against the world, for the first time in his life he feels like he has his mother in his corner. He's been very supportive throughout his separation from MaNtusi. Now it's just him and her. The helper comes in the morning and leaves at 5pm. With Phelo around they have a lot to talk about and celebrate.

"Do you see how much she resembles Phethile?" MaKhumalo asks, walking in with a bowl of maize porridge and Phelo in her right arm.

“No, she looks like me. I’m her father,” he argues with a frown on his face.

MaKhumalo laughs, “This child is going to be death of you.”

His phone rings again. He sighs and puts it on silence.

“Is it her mother?” MaKhumalo asks.

“She’s just worried over nothing.” He dismisses her with a hand and picks the fluffy teddbear he bought for Phelo.

“MaNtusi called yesterday,” he says.

Disgust creeps up on MaKhumalo’s face. She didn’t expect what MaNtusi did to her family. She blames her for her sons moving out and the fact that she never came to her, she just left.

“She wants to come back. Her son is having sight problems,” Thakasa says and takes a deep sigh.

“She must take him to Dr Manzini. Since when are you an eye specialist?” MaKhumalo asks, laying Phelo against her arm and mixing a scoop of her

milk with porridge.

“This baby is not fed there in the suburbs. Look at how she’s staring at the porridge.”

Thakasa chuckles and shakes his head.

“She doesn’t even know that it’s porridge,” he says. “I wish I can talk to her mother.”

“About what?” MaKhumalo asks.

“A lot happened between us and we never really hashed things out. But I’m scared of how she might take it. You know with MaNtusi gone and everything, it will look like I’m trying to fill her place using her.”

MaKhumalo is about to give him her advice when a car loudly hoots in the yard.

“That must be Nkonzo,” Thakasa says and gets up to peep through the window.

It’s not Nkonzo, but a white Honda Jazz with Durban registration. He turns to MaKhumalo with a faint look on his face.

“I think that’s Phelo’s mother,” he says and scratches his head.

“What’s going on?” MaKhumalo asks, staring back at him.

“I said I was going to return Phelo back before the sunset,” he says.

MaKhumalo frowns, “And why you would’ve done that? She’s been only here for a minute. Kusamele ngiyomlahla inyoni bese egcaba ibala leli elisekhanda kuMaGwala.” (I still need to give her stamina for gastro and have her incised by MaGwala for the strawberry birthmark at the back of her head)

There’s a knock at the door. MaKhumalo carries on with feeding her granddaughter porridge. Thakasa heaves a deep sigh and attends to the door.

“Really Thakasa?” she asks, walking through the door with a wrathful look on her face.

“You’re overreacting,” he says.

“I’m overreacting? You are ignoring my calls and

keeping my daughter here against my will.”

“This is her home as well. It’s not like she’s lost; she’s with her father,” he says and hides his guilt with a shrug.

“It’s about damn agreements Thakasa! You agreed to bring her back today, but now you’re ignoring my calls and keeping her here.”

MaKhumalo appears, clapping her hands and exclaiming.

“Umhlola lo! You’re both standing in my kitchen and arguing like this is a playground. Where are your manners Maka Phelo?”

She’s never met his mother, it’s so audacious of her to question her manners whereas she’s been watching Thakasa keep Phelo without her consent.

“Thakasa is....” MaKhumalo exclaims and puts her hands over her head.

“Did you just call the father of your child by his birth name?”

Nomkhosi looks at Thakasa with a frown. Wasn’t he

given a name so that he can be addressed by it?

“Lapha ekhaya kuyangenwa, kubingelelwe bese kuhlalwa phansi kuxoxwe,” she says. (Here we enter, greet and sit down before we talk)

“This way,” Thakasa says, leading her towards the lounge with a satisfied look on his face.

Nomkhosi follows behind them. MaKhumalo is still clapping her hands and expressing her shock over her character.

Her eyes nearly pop out when she sees Phelo lying on a blanket with a bowl of porridge next to her.

“Thakasa what is this?” she asks and ignores MaKhumalo’s remarks. Thakasa is his name, that cannot be changed by her.

“Have a seat Maka Phelo,” Thakasa says, showing her the couch and picking Phelo up.

“You fed her maize porridge?” she asks, still on her feet and glued on the floor with shock.

“You should’ve seen how much she liked it. Maybe

Thakasa should start adding money for maize-meal to her papgeld,” MaKhumalo says as she collects an empty bowl from the carpet.

“She’s not even 3 months old. Her intestines aren’t fully developed. Why on earth would you give her solid food?” She’s beside herself with anger and these people don’t seem to get it.

“Porridge is not solid food. If it wasn’t for it you wouldn’t have a babydaddy today,” MaKhumalo says.

This is not going anywhere, they’re just going around in circles.

“Where is her bag?” she asks Thakasa.

“Ummm, I don’t think she can leave yet. Ma still wants to take her to MaGwala so that she can remove the strawberry birthmark at the back of her head.”

Oh, God! She has a baby with this man? This is her daughter’s family? Lord Jesus!

“That mark is harmless. Baby Nhla had it and he never needed any MaGwala to....”

“This is Sphephelo Manqele, not Baby Nhla,”
MaKhumalo interjects.

Sigh! Sigh! Sigh!

“Your mother cannot treat us like we are strangers to this child. My son has been there since her birth and he paid for the damages, which was him acknowledging that he’s the father and taking his responsibilities. If your mother has a problem give her my address.”

“Ma, calm down!” Thakasa says and MaKhumalo turns her fat behind and goes to the kitchen.

“Can we sit and talk?” he asks, looking at Nomkhosi guiltily.

“Why is your mother like this? And you allow her to feed our daughter maize porridge? What is she eating tomorrow? Samp?”

“Stop overreacting. My mother would never put Phelo’s life in danger. She raised 6 kids and they all came out fine.”

“This is my child, dude. Not hers,” she scolds him in a whisper.

“Don’t call me ‘Dude’,” he says.

She sighs and rolls her eyes.

“Whatever! I don’t want my child to be fed maize porridge. Maybe you should visit a doctor and learn how harmful solid food can be for a less than 6 months-old.”

“But Ma said she was hungry and she really ate,” he says.

“We are not discussing it Thakasa. I’m telling you to never allow anyone to feed my daughter maize porridge, otherwise...” Thakasa raises his eyebrow.

“Otherwise what?” he asks.

A moment of silence passes. They’re staring at one another.

“I’ll let her sleep today, please don’t do anything stupid. Bring her back tomorrow,” Nomkhosi says after a moment.

“So you’re okay sleeping without your daughter?”

She frowns. WTF!

“You’ve been begging me to let her stay here for aboMaGwala and stuff, now I’m okay sleeping without her?” she asks with her forehead furrowed.

“I don’t see why you’re leaving. I mean, this is your daughter’s home and we are her family.”

“I can drive to Durban, I don’t mind it,” she says.

“It’s not compulsory, you know. It’s almost 7pm and you’re a woman. It’s not safe for you to drive at night.”

“Everyone knows whose stepdaughter I am, you don’t need to worry about my safety. Just make sure your mother keeps her 1960s mother skills to herself.”

He takes a deep breath and nods.

Khosi kisses Phelo’s forehead and wishes her a goodnight.

He sees her out with Phelo wrapped in a blanket. Her and MaKhumalo don’t get along, chances of them

seeing eye to eye on anything are slim.

“I don’t like her,” she says when Thakasa walks back in.

He bursts into a fit of laughter.

“She’s the mother of your granddaughter and I think you and her are not that different.”

“What???”

“Nothing. I’m going to give Phelo a bath.”

“Good!”

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He’s taken a day off work because Nomkhosi doesn’t trust his mother with Phelo. She thinks she might feed her samp and trotters.

He walks out to dispose a nappy and sees a white van driving towards his home. That’s Nothile’s uncle’s van. It’s so early in the morning and all he wanted was to be with his daughter. They were certainly sent by Nothile.

He wakes his mother up and goes back to bed.

He dials Nothile's number and calls to find out what's going on.

"Your uncles are here," he says.

"Nomcebo gave them a call and they said they'd come and talk to you," she says.

"We already talked MaNtusi. You left because I cheated, right? Has that changed now? Or is it because now you are facing problems and I have to put my life on hold and attend to you?"

"This is not about us. My son is not well, I'm sure you can imagine how that feels. You're a father too, if Phelo..."

"Don't mention my daughter!"

"If Mandulo is the father he's going to pay whatever fine you want from him."

"I'm the father of that child. Nobody is going to tell me anything. If you want him to be fine you'll bring him home and continue with your Mandulo in peace," he says.

“But only DNA test will determine that,” Nothile says.

“Are you listening to me or not? I don’t care what the DNA says and I don’t want anything from your man. It’s up to you whether you take a Manqele child to him or not, but my word stands.”

“That’s not fair!”

“You should’ve thought about that before leaving.”

“Manqele....” He drops the call and connects it back to the charger. Phelo is still asleep, he needs to take a quick bath and dress up for whatever meeting is being held. He’s not taking anything from Mandulo, not even a cent. Nothile thought she was going to get an easy way out after everything she put him through whereas they both committed one sin and helped each other break their marriage.

Those happy-ever-afters only happen in the movies.

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KHANYO

I found my way to this house after he begged and got down on his knees. But the last thing I'm doing is giving him sex and sleeping on that bed where him and his one-nightstand made out. I'm still pissed, I ordered him to take down my picture until further notice.

We slept in another bedroom, he thought he'd dip his black dick yet into another cookie but I closed my thighs and faced the other way. He's horny and feeling sorry for himself in bed and I'm blessing my tummy with strawgurt; yogurt and strawberries and watching Tik Tok videos.

Footsteps come behind me, I lower the video volume and look at him.

"Good morning," I say.

He ignores me and goes on to plug a kettle of water. He'll suit himself, I increase the volume and continue with my videos.

"Cha kuyalanjwa bo layindlini!" I hear him say and lower the volume again.

"Kulanjwa ngaphansi nangaphezulu," he says. (We

starve in this house, from the bottom to the top)

You know what? I'm going to sit on this stool, look pretty and ignore his stupid comments.

"I thought you said one of your rules was that we use a condom," he says.

I look up from my phone, "Yes."

"But you still don't even want me to touch you," he says.

"I'm sure we can do better things than having sex. I just got back, show your excitement without your dick," I say.

"I love you."

That's not relevant to this argument we're having!

"All I'm saying is that sex isn't the only thing we can do to show each other love," I say.

"And all I'm saying is that I love you more than anything in this world. I wish I can undo what I did, but I don't have that option. All I can say is sorry, until you realize that I really mean it."

“Sorry is just a stupid five-letter word, it doesn’t mean anything. It’s just there to save everyone after they fucked up.”

“They say it’s an open statement that begs forgiveness and opens a room for ridicule. The metronome of a good heart doesn’t settle until things are solved. It doesn’t take anything back- it wasn’t meant to- but it pushes things forward and bridges the gap.”

“All this definition for sex?” I ask with an eye roll.

“For us to go back to where we were. I miss my crazy girlfriend who sells curtains, steals me away from home and immures me in a house with a box of pizza and warm cookie for two days.”

Immure him in a house? I never held this man against his wall.

“Don’t lie!” I say.

He laughs, “I’m not lying, I miss you. Both of us.”

What his dick has got to do with this? But I must admit, it’s nice being begged by a man. The last time

I was begged so genuinely was in Durban, by a Pakistan to buy a screen-protector.

“Yekela uMthonga alwe nontanga wakhe,” he says, wrapping his arm around me and kissing my cheek. (Let Mthonga fight with his compeer)

“You’re gaining weight,” he says and my wet dough turns into Thobeka’s Christmas dry cookies.

His mother is two times fatter than Aunt Caroline on the rice, what is he talking about?

“You can’t comment on my weight!” I say.

“Oh? While you can comment on anything. Yesterday you said my one ball is bigger than the other one.”

Gosh, I actually told him that loud? I need to filter what comes out of my cute lips.

“And I’m not even complaining, I can still wrap your legs around my waist and sex you in the air.”

I wrap my arms around his neck and jump off the stool to snuggle myself on him. He lifts my legs around his waist and walks with me back to the bedroom.

He strips my clothes off, carefully lays me on bed on my back and separates my legs to position himself between them. I'm going to make this one memorable.

"You're fucking with some wet-ass pu\$\$y," I say as he trails kisses down to my waist.

He glances at me and breaks a chuckle. I'm going to annoy his Shembe-ass and turn it off today.

He comes up to my face and kisses me affectionately before going down on me again.

His tongue presses over my clit before it separates my wet folds and slides through them.

"You should've brought a mop for it!" I say.

"I can handle it," he says with a smile and slides in his one finger.

"Put it in your face and swipe your nose like a credit card." He chuckles and fingers me with more pressure. For a moment I lose my senses and scream out his name.

“Make it creamy baby! Make me scream!” I say out of breath as his tongue swipes on my clit again.

“Hhayi-bo Khanyo!” He laughs and squints his horny eyes.

“I don’t cook, I don’t clean....” I was going to say ‘ask me how I got cheated on and given a letter to my uncles’ but his uneven balls are hanging over my neck.

“Maybe you need to put this mouth into good use,” he says, hitting his hard rod on my lips.

I open my mouth, he pushes his tip against my tongue and now it’s me who’s swiping my tongue on his tip like a credit card. Next time remind me that I’m not Cardi B!

He’s face-sitting me and my little throat can’t handle it. One thing about face-sitting is that you have little to no control from the bottom. He’s in charge of my air breaks and punishing my mouth.

He finally releases me and climbs off bed to stand

on his feet.

“Turn around, Ms Funny Mouth.”

I need a glass of water!

He pulls me down and puts me against the bed on my stomach.

I hear a condom foil tearing and shut my eyes. After a moment his hard rod rubbing between my buttocks.

“This is where my heart is. I missed you so much, my love.”

“I missed you too.”

A wet kiss lands on my buttock before he slowly pushes himself in.

I still love him with all my heart. Trust will be rebuilt, I really believe it can be. If someone hurts you repeatedly you're commanded by God to forgive them, but you're not expected to trust them again or allow them to continue hurting you.

“Forgiveness does not exonerate the perpetrator. Forgiveness liberates the victim. It’s a gift you give yourself,” – TD Jakes.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 46

THAKASA

Their helper arrived and took Phelo out of the room, now they can have this meeting without her dramatic cries and Thakasa putting everything on hold to attend her.

“Son, we are aware of the shame and disrespect Nothile brought into this family. We are prepared to take responsibility and apologize on her behalf.”

“With what Bab’ Ngema? As far as I know all her lobola cows were distributed amongst the family. Even Nomcebo didn’t get a cent. I had to give her money to buy the wedding furniture because you were all useless.”

“Thakasa!” MaKhumalo exclaims shamefully. She didn’t raise kids that talk back to adults.

“No Ma, it’s the truth. I’m not stupid, they’re going to take money from MaNtusi, which is my money, and

come with it to apologize. I don't want anything!"

"But the only way for her son to be fine is if she cleanses our premises and apologizes to the ancestors the right way," MaKhumalo says.

His jaw tightens, he keeps his mouth shut and stares into space. His stubbornness is at high peak today.

MaKhumalo clears her throat and looks at the uncles. She's an elder, no matter how she feels things have to be done the right way, especially now because there's a little boy suffering from all this.

"Two cows and one goat. We'll do what we have to do for a child but she's not allowed in my kitchen. Her husband will see where he puts her, Manqele had large yards of land."

Thakasa grunts angrily and shoots a look at her. Those two cows will be bought with his money, if it was up to him he would've stopped all Nothile's cards but a part of him knows that it's still his duty to financially take care of her. If it wasn't for him she'd be somewhere in life with her own money. But now her uncles are here to exploit him yet again.

“What annoys me is that she thinks she can bring her boyfriend here in my father’s house to justify himself and claim the child,” he snorts angrily.

The uncle looks at him a bit shocked.

“You want to father the child regardless of his mother’s mistakes?” he asks.

“That’s none of your business. I don’t want Mandulo or whoever he is to come here. I don’t care what their story is, but MaNtusi is a wife here and whatever she gives birth to is my child. She can go to court and file for divorce if she wants to, but once a Manqele, always a Manqele, until I say it’s over.”

This is not taking the right direction. Thakasa is still in his emotions and vengeful. MaKhumalo flashes a fake smile at the uncles who look confused and scared.

“Let MaNtusi come here first and face her disgraceful acts, then we’ll talk about the child afterwards.” She’d never allow a child she doesn’t know to be raised in her house. But Thakasa still needs time to work on his emotions and let go of the

anger, so she'll let him take his time.

It would've been better if MaNtusi reached out early, before her past caught up with her, because now she's desperate and looking for instant forgiveness, something she wasn't able to give Thakasa.

"Are we done here?" he asks, looking around at everyone.

Nobody answers. He takes it as a yes and dismisses himself to look for his daughter.

He did have respect for the Ngemas but over the years he's lost it. Today they're calling him 'son' and asking him to be considerate and take them as family. But did they do that when he was the one on the wrong side? Did they see him as 'son' or they capitalized on every situation and financially exploited him? No, he's not playing that game now. His days of taking the small road and humbling himself are over.

"Sis' Thandi." He walks inside the kitchen and takes Phelo from her arms.

“She’s sleeping again,” Sis’ Thandi tells him and lifts herself off the chair to continue with her chores.

“She’s lazy like Tutu,” he says with a grin on his face. Everything Phelo does is cute in his eyes, even if she turns out lazy it would be a normal thing and he’d make sure that she enjoys every last bit of her laziness.

He puts her in bed and lies next to her. It’s unfair that he cannot live with his daughter and be present on everyday of her life. Nomkhosi is hard-headed, it’ll be hard to convince her to go and stay in ‘their house’ in Waterways so that he can have free access to Phelo as well. It’s hard for him to visit multiple times in a week; MaNsele doesn’t like him and Ngidi is just not someone he likes to hang around to.

He decides to give Sqalo a call and check on him. They haven’t spoken in days.

“Mthonga, how are things in school?” he asks when Sqalo picks up.

“Good,” Sqalo says with no enthusiasm and he

quickly picks up sorrowfulness in his voice.

“What’s going on?” he asks.

“Mpilo broke up with me. I don’t even know what I did wrong. I’ve been trying to keep communication and spice things up regardless of the distance between us, but he just slipped away.” That’s heartbreaking to hear. His brother risked everything for that relationship.

It seems like they’re all unlucky in love, even those who are dating the same gender, so it’s not just women.

“I can relate. All I’m going to ask you to do is to not lose yourself in a relationship that no longer serves neither of your needs. Let him go if he wants to go. You’re only 18, there are plenty of girls...I mean boys out here.”

There’s a heavy sigh.

“I also moved out of that Berea flat. Things were being said and it wasn’t safe for people like me anymore,” he says.

“Did anyone threaten you?”

“No.”

“Did they do anything to you or anyone close to you?”

“No, bhuti. But there have been cases of gay boys being ganged upon and attacked.”

“I still think it would’ve been good if you got into the university residence. I don’t like it when I have to live not knowing if you’re safe or not.”

“I’ll be fine, bhuti. Is Bandla around?” Sqalo asks.

It’s a surprise question; he cuts his ties with Bandla. He never forgave him for what happened in Durban, even though Bandla has been trying to prove his love and loyalty to him. Nobody intervened in their tension, they’ll sort it out whenever they decide to.

“Call him, he’s at work though,” Thakasa says.

“I will. Pass my regards to Ma and tell her that I love her.”

He smiles, “Sure. Take care of yourself there.”

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BHAMBATHA

He's been working on his biggest dream for months and that was to open a Shisanyama in his community. It came out exactly like he wanted. There's a non-drinking area, a bar, spacious grilling space and dance floor. There are shelters and steel benches outside, for common village drunkards and Wi-Fi bugs of the area.

Today is the day he officially opens BMT Shisanyama. DJ X is on the desk, with a few local musicians on the line-up to entertain the crowds who've come out in numbers for free food and drinks.

Whistles welcome him as he steps out of his BMW X6 wearing a Givenchy black tracksuit and white Adidas trainers. As his friends cheer on him he does a little spin, laughs and claps for himself. Yes, he did it!

“Welcome to Bad Marauder Topee,” Nathi says as he bumps shoulders with his best friend.

“No dumbass, BMT stands for BhaMbaTha but you wouldn’t know that because you were practicing onanism while we studied abbreviations.” He pushes him off and walks past him.

“That’s an acronym, dickhead!” Nathi says behind him.

They flock together like birds of the same feather but argue over silly things like twins.

“No, it’s an abbreviation, just like the HIV and AIDS that’s running in your veins,” Bhambatha strikes back as they both make their way to the bar.

“HIV is an initialism while AIDS is an acronym. Cock that gun in your head and spill your useless brains.”

Everyone laughs, Bhambatha included. He knows that Nathi is more academic than him and he sucked English from his father’s dick, but he still argues with him for the fun of it.

He asks the bartender to pass them a bottle of

Martell and tonic water. Their VIP seats are exclusively set behind a glass sliding door that's looking over the dance floor where a few girls have already started to twerk their butts off.

"I thought Nondu would come, just to congratulate you as a father of her child," Nathi says as they lower themselves on their seats.

"What makes you believe that she was ever pregnant? That bitch was lying and I'm going to kill her when I see her."

Nathi frowns and takes a sip from his glass.

"Why would she lie about something so sensitive?" he asks.

"To hurt me, what else? I went to that dick-headed doctor and squeezed the truth out of him. They smashed, bribed each other and wrote a file of lies. There was no miscarriage."

Mnqobi joins them. He's more thuggish than everyone. Even today he's wearing silver grills over his teeth, a huge overlapping black T-shirt and sagging pants.

“What’s up? Who bribed and wrote a file of lies?” He bumps Bhambatha’s fist and sits next to Nathi.

“We are talking about the irrelevant Nondumiso, uMaka Spoki,” Bhambatha says.

He clicks his tongue and fills up his glass.

“I thought it was something important. Where are the chicks of this village? I came here prepared to get me some virgin wife of the village.”

“This is my Shisanyama, not eNyokeni Palace. There are no virgins here, and even if they were here, you’re not a husband material,” Bhambatha tells him.

Nathi points at one girl with a tuckshop scorpion tattoo on her back.

“That’s your type Mngqobi,” he says.

Mngqobi laughs, “Did she crayon her back?”

“Maybe it was a ball point pen. Bhambatha should extend this place with a tattoo parlor before these people go to hell for fake sins,” Nathi says.

There’s an ear-breaking laughter. One of the waitresses serves them grilled brisket, boerwors,

pap and relish. They eat and finish their drinks, then join the crowd for formal introduction and welcoming.

Bhambatha walks up to the stage and asks the DJ to silence music for a moment.

“Are you all having a good time?” he asks and the crowd cheers with their drinks up.

“I don’t need to introduce myself because you all know who is the crowned bad marauder of this place.” Everyone laughs, his friends hurl insults at him and he’s loving it.

There’s silence again.

“This has been my dream for a very long time. This is not just a money-generating business for me. It’s something I did to prove to myself that perfectionism is not a quest for the best, it’s just a pursuit of the worst that others project on us. It spells paralysis.”

“No, it doesn’t!” the voice comes from the crowd and

the room erupts in a fit of laughter.

“Shut up Nkosinathi, I’m a diamond with a flaw and your perfect ass is a pebble.”

Laughter again!

“But seriously, the excitement of seeing your dreams come true is beyond words. I’m not saying I worked hard to be where I am. I stole and did everything I could to get money,” he says and looks at the cheering crowd that was once celebrating his imprisonment.

“Crime may have paved the way for me but now I’m on my feet. I did it on own!” The crowd cheers and clap hands.

“I would like to thank izinkabi zami over there,” he looks at his two friends. “For holding me down through highs and lows. You fools are now a family to me.”

He drops the mic and walks off the stage accompanied by a round of applause.

Nathi wasn't going to let this moment of being on stage, holding a microphone like a motivational speaker and looking all handsome, pass him by.

He grabs the mic and whistles.

"We did it. Shisanyama owners. Black excellency!"

He rolls his fist up and whistles.

"That's my brother from another mother. Ubaba kaSpoki! Congrats nja yami." He gives back the microphone and goes to the DJ's desk. Now everyone is going to listen to DJ Coffee and his house music that went to Harvard University.

"We want to Dibala bro, this is not Sandton.

Awudedele uTira lapho," Mngqobi yells above the noise.

Nathi shows him his middle finger and continues to give the DJ his playlist.

There's a lady making her way through the crowd. She's wearing a slim, red turtleneck maxi dress and black platform heels. Her braids are tied in a high bun and wrapped with a headwrap all around like an Egyptian queen.

Everyone's eyes are on her as she climbs up on the stage and goes to the guy in charge of the sound system.

After being handed a microphone she turns around to a crowd of hundreds and flashes a nervous smile.

"Hey..." This is more uncomfortable than she had imagined. Her eyes lock with Bhambatha's and he gives her a look of motivation.

She sums up her courage and continues; "On behalf of your family, the Myezas, I just want to congratulate you. This is our first Shisanyama in this area, indeed you've achieved a milestone that you set up for yourself and that in my books, is success. May this day be the highlight of your triumphs. Look back to everything you've conquered and appreciate what UNyazi Lwezulu, your ancestors and God have brought you through. Savor the taste of your triumphs and celebrate your greatness."

Bhambatha inhales a sharp breath and keeps his eyes on her. She came here dressed for a high-

profiled event, not just a Shisanyama celebration. He didn't even know that she was back from Malindi. She has changed the atmosphere from jaunty to harmonious.

"I'm proud of you," she says and hands back the microphone and climbs off the stage.

Nathi is asking Bhambatha if it's okay for the music to restart with hand signs. Girls in skinny-jeans and All-Star takkies are ready to kill the dance floor, but is the lady in a red dress going to like the noise?

Bhambatha gives him a thumb-up and follows after Mawande. He didn't invite any of the Myezas because he knew none of them would come knowing the kind of a celebration he was going to throw.

His heart has swollen in joy seeing at least one person from his family showing up and saying those words to him; "I'm proud of you."

He finds her in the non-smoking area being taken care of by one of the waiters. The music is very loud

from the other side, but here there's some tranquility. She's the only non-drinker here, so she's just alone with her cold-drink and plate of pap and meat.

"Mawande," he pulls a chair and sits. "I didn't know you were back from your vacation."

"I had enough of Kenya and came back to continue with life. Then I heard Ma saying you're opening your Shisanyama and decided to come." Oh, his mother knew and even spread the word, but she didn't come?

"I really appreciate it," he says.

Mawande looks around, to appreciate the whole area and nods with a smile.

"You outdid yourself, it looks more like a restaurant than a Shisanyama."

"I tried." His grins with pride and shrugs his shoulders.

She takes one last sip of her drink and puts her fork and knife back on the plate.

"I'll be your regular customer, this is good! But I have to check my employees at Wandes and go buy Ma's

wheat malt.”

He also gets up from the chair as Mawande collects her phone and purse from the table, ready to leave.

“I know your people are now walking on eggshells because of my presence,” she says with a chuckle and extends her hand for a formal “congratulations” shake.

Instead of shaking her hand he pulls her for a hug.

“Thank you Mawande,” he says as her arms wraps around his waist.

“I meant it, I’m really proud of you,” she says.

He lowers his eyes to her face, before he thinks twice about it, he cups her face and smashes his lips against hers while his right hand roams the expanse of her back. He’s lost in the moment, his heart is beating faster and faster. After this moment, whether it only last for a few seconds and never again, he knows that his mind would never romp like a criminal’s, or that of a mere brother-in-law.

Her hand tenderly pushes his chest and his eyes opens. Then it hits him; he just kissed his late brother's wife?

"Mawande, I'm so sorry." The rims of his eyes are inflamed. He's trying to make it make sense in his own head, but nothing explains his heartbeat. Is it even a beat? His heart is threatening to burst his chest and leap out to the palm of her hand.

"I was just...." She lifts her eyes that are masked with fear.

"It shouldn't have happened. I'm sorry." With that said, she turns around, releases a deep breath and shamefully walks out.

He remains standing there, pale and guilty-stricken. She can still smell her from his lips, waves of tremors are thrashing through his hands.

What has he done? Ruining things with the only person who sees a human in him.

Nathi is yelling his name somewhere. He needs to get it together instantly.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 47

NOMKHOSI

Ndondo called her to her office and said it was urgent. She knows everything there's to know about work, so she just knows that she either heard something and wants them to gossip or Ndabuko did something. Baby Nhla is only two but Ndabuko already wants another child. Who can blame him though? Nhla may have his blood but he's a child he made for his late brother. Ndondo just needs to make peace with it and forget about being a CEO.

She pushes the door with her elbow and walks in with two cups of coffee in her hands.

"What's urgent?" she asks as she puts cups on the desk.

"The text message you received from Thakasa. What was it saying?"

She knew it! She rolls her eyes, takes her cup and

sits on the guest couch.

“He wants me to move to Waterways, imagine!”

Ndondo’s pupils dilate in shock. Say what?

“For what? That’s like, 30 minutes away,” Ndondo exclaims.

“He says he’s not comfortable coming to my parents’ house frequently and it’s robbing him time with his daughter.” She rolls her eyes and takes a sip of her coffee.

“So he’s going to move in with you as well?” Ndondo asks.

She shrugs her shoulders, “Do you think I know how his mind works? Kids always grow with their fathers living away, in big cities, and only seeing them once in a while.”

“That’s what you want for Phelo as well?” Ndondo’s eyes widen in shock. Yes, she grew up with both parents and her son is also growing up with both father and mother under one roof. But she can imagine how it must be like seeing your father once

in a full moon and never have him tuck you in bed and read you bedtime stories.

“Both Mom and Ngidi don’t mind if he comes around to see Phelo. He’s just dramatic,” Khosi says.

“Dramatic, right? That comes from someone who was fighting for Maqhingga to have fair rights over his son? That’s exactly what your babydaddy wants too.”

“I get it, but my situation is tricky. This man has played me over and over again. What if he wants me go live in Waterways so that he can take advantage of me?”

Ndondo chokes down a laugh and nearly spills the coffee in her hand.

“You’re a grown ass woman! It’s not like you can’t tell him no, you just chose to open your legs everytime he asked you to,” she tells her.

“Don’t judge me, bitch. I’m just trying to protect my heart, I know I’ll never fit in his world and now I have no desire to.”

“But Phelo needs to fit in his world, this isn’t just about you. You and him need to find common grounds and create an arrangement that benefits Phelo more than yourselves.”

Khosi sighs and finishes her coffee before it turns cold. She’s always prayed that her children have a father figure so that they don’t grow up like her. Thakasa is everything she wished for in a babydaddy, but how does she separate a father of her daughter from the Thakasa that hurt her? It’s not easy as people may think.

A call comes through and Ndondo attends to it.

She has late lunch with Snalo, then she’ll knock off early so that she can go home and release her nanny for her grant collection.

“That was your call,” Ndondo tells her. “Precious says there’s someone at the reception looking for you.”

She frowns, “Who could it be? I hope it’s not Thakasa wanting to take Phelo out for ice-cream.”

“Ice-cream? Is he that bad?” Ndondo laughs.

“They were feeding her maize porridge. I’m not even sure if it was real porridge or stiff pap.” She takes empty cups and leaves Ndondo in stitches.

It’s a pity that she cannot control what happens when Phelo is at the Manqueles. She came back with incision marks at the back of her head and around her navel. The explanation Thakasa gave her had no scientific meaning to it, so to her it was done just to hurt her baby over nothing. Not to mention the wool strings around her wrists that ‘prevent her from losing weight if people compliment her big body.’ Having a baby from that family is headache on its own.

She throws the cups inside the bin and takes a lift to the ground floor. As the lift doors open her eyes land on a woman holding a baby wrapped in a blanket. Her heart takes a leap as Phelo’s image crosses her mind- did something happen to her daughter? And who is....oh hell, no!

What is Thakasa's wife doing in her workplace? Now she's taking things far. Too far!

Precious gives her a nervous smile and pretends to be focused on her laptop while her eyes keep stealing glances at Nothile.

She exercises a few breaths, pulls her blouse over her chest and makes her way to her on the couch.

"Good day," she says formally and stands in front of her, tall in her cone heels.

"Nomkhosi," Nothile lifts her eyes to her.

She's nothing like the angry wife she met six months ago. But that doesn't put her at ease, this woman is like a vampire.

"This is my workplace," she says, heaving a sigh and scanning her surroundings. So far they only have two audience; Precious and one of her cleaning gossip-partners.

"I'm not here to fight," Nothile says.

She frowns.

"Then why are you here?" Her eyes go to the baby

wrapped in a blanket. It's a boy, a cute one in a blue romper and pom-pom hat. This is Phelo's baby brother and she doesn't even know his name.

She shifts her gaze from the baby to his mother and raises her eyebrows.

"What? I'm no longer with Thakasa. We only communicate if it concerns the baby."

Nothile inhales sharply and rubs her nose with the heel of her palm. Motherhood is pulling her by tits; she has dark circles under her sunken eyes. It must be lack of sleep.

"I'm not here for that," she says and takes another breath. Now whatever it is that brought her here looks serious and less about fighting.

"I need your help," she says and drops her eyes to the floor.

"Wena? You need my help? Are you looking for a job? We are not hiring." Nomkhosi folds her arms and gives her a stern look. What kind of help could a worthy woman possibly need from a woman who's not worth of anything?

“Right now I don’t care if you insult me, remind me of everything I once said to you or marry Manqele. My son is sick, he lost his sight before he turned 6 weeks and I need Manqele to help him.”

This is even more confusing.

“And how am I going to help?”

“You can talk to him,” she says and Khosi’s eyes widen.

Is this woman hearing herself?

“I’m not anything to Thakasa. Why would he need me to pressure him before he helps his own child?”

A sigh! She runs her hands through her cornrows and releases a sigh.

Nomkhosi raises her eyebrow. What is this?

“He has conditions and they’re not fair. Londa’s paternity results came back and he’s not Manqele’s son. His biological father is a good man and he wants his rights as a father. But Manqele only wants to help Londa under the condition that he lives at the Manqeles and his father stays away.” She looks at

her son and fights back tears. "I can't have my son raised by someone who's not his father. I know how hard that is. Manqele and Ma are holding grudges against me, I can't have my son raised by them."

Maybe she should've sat down for this.

Thakasa is now his mother's best friend and they don't really talk unless if it concerns Phelo.

"He wants my uncles to pay a fine of two cows and a goat. Manqele knows that those people would never do anything for me. It'll take them a year to raise money for those cows, that if they even care." She's a second away from breaking down. As much as Nomkhosi doesn't like her, seeing her in such pain is understandable. She'd lose her mind too if Phelo was caught in the same situation.

"Why don't you pay that fine yourself?" Khosi asks.

"He said he won't accept it. Obviously the money will report to him if I withdraw. The money I have in my savings account is enough for me to sustain a living, not to buy cows. I cannot ask Londa's father to pay for my sins. He's still going to be fined, if Manqele

finally allows him to correct his wrongs, and he's paying all the medical expenses for Londa," she says.

Phewww! This one is hard.

"Why don't you talk to his brothers?" Khosi asks.

She shrugs her shoulders, "If they cared they would've talked him out of it by now. I'm on my own."

"I really don't know if he's going to listen to me. As I said, our communication is now strictly about the baby."

Nothile looks at her, pleading with her eyes.

"He has a baby too, maybe if you talk to him from that perspective he's going to understand."

"You want me to emotionally blackmail him using my daughter?"

"If it's going to save another innocent child's sight, wouldn't you do it?"

Right! She exhales heavily and looks at the baby. If tables were turned she'd have done anything to get her daughter helped as well.

“I’m not promising anything but I’m going to try,” she says.

“Thank you so much.”

“You still have my number?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s keep in touch then.” Nomkhosi lifts herself off the couch and picks Londa for her.

“Be alright, baby boy,” she tells him, guilt striking his conscience like a lightning. At the bottom of all this is her falling in love with a married man and getting pregnant. Maybe Nothile wouldn’t have cheated, she would’ve birthed a healthy Manqele child and nothing would’ve gone wrong. There wouldn’t be this so much hatred between her and Thakasa.

Nothile picks her cellphone and the baby blanket, then takes the baby from Nomkhosi.

They promise to stay in touch and part ways.

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It's the following day and she hasn't found a way to talk to Thakasa. The clock is ticking, Nothile's hopes are now on her.

What line is she going to use?

'Phelo wants to see you?'- No, she's too young to request to see people.

'She fell and broke her arm?'- This one will drive him crazy. He may not even give her a chance to talk.

Maybe she should just give him what he wants, only for a short period of time, until she's able to get through him.

HEY. I'M GOING TO TAKE PHELO TO WATERWAYS AND SEE IF SHE LIKES THE HOUSE.

Well, Phelo is too young to like and not like houses but the message is already gone.

He calls immediately.

"I'm going to knock off and come pick you up. I don't

know if you're going to like her room, I wasn't being advised by anyone. If there's anything you don't like we'll change it."

He needs to relax, really!

"Okay Thakasa, thank you."

"I saw a sale of her nappies at Clicks but I'm not sure if they'd be still open when I leave work."

"She's still covered for this month, there's no rush, other sales will come. And if they don't, you'll buy with the original price."

"Oh, okay. I'm going to you all later then." He sounds too happy for someone who just wanted her to move to Waterways with no hidden agenda.

Ndondo walks in with a document in her hand and frowns at her. She's nervous as hell, this has nothing to do with her, it's not her place at all. Their marriage was theirs, it's only their families that can intervene and help them. But then she had a hand in destroying them, that's why Nothile came to her, right? She wants her to continue her role as the third part of her marriage, just like she was from the

beginning.

“And then?” Ndondo asks with a frown.

“I’m going to Waterways, tonight.”

“Whaaaat?”

She sighs out heavily.

“I need to talk to Thakasa and going to the house he wants me to be at would help me soften him up.”

“For a woman who called you all sort of dirty names under the sun?” Ndondo asks.

“And her son; that’s the most important one. It must’ve taken a lot for her to come to me, you know how much she hates me.”

“Oh, so you’re going to spend the night with him and give him sex so that he can ‘soften up’?” Ndondo raises her eyebrow. They’ve been down this road before; her taking this man back and making excuses for him.

“Who said I’m going to sleep with him?” she asks.

“Because that’s how Phelo happened. You cannot

continue living like this. What's going to happen when you've soften him up and he forgives his wife and casts you aside as usual? You're going to cry a victim of his dick again."

That struck a nerve. She inhales a deep breath and scratches her head.

"What do you want me to do? Seriously, what must I do?" she asks, curled in frustration.

"You were not responsible for what happened to their marriage. They're both adults and they're responsible for their own actions. Thakasa cheated with you on his own terms, that's on him. She also cheated because she decided to. It has got nothing to do with you."

"Her son lost sight, Ndondo. If she believes that I can help him it's worth a shot," she says.

Ndondo sighs, "She emotionally blackmailed you and it worked. Good luck, I hope it works in your favor."

They always argue about Thakasa and she never listens to her. But this time it looks like Ndondo is really giving up on her sanity.

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Her mother didn't approve of her decision but Ngidi quickly reminded her that she's a grown woman and she must be allowed to decide on her daughter. It's all thanks to him that she's here, stuck in the kitchen and listening to a man having a grown conversation with his daughter in the other room.

Nothile just sent her a "Hey" on Whatsapp. She probably wants to know if she's spoken to him or not.

I'LL CALL YOU TOMORROW- she sends a reply and puts her phone on the counter. She has to warm up the meat they bought on their way here and serve him. Ndondo would probably call her crazy and send her to a mental institution.

Phelo has fallen asleep on his chest. She puts his plate on the coffee-table and takes Phelo from him.

"I'll put her in the other room," she says.

"Why not the main bedroom? Her sleeping cot is

there,” he asks.

She gives him a meaningful stare.

“Okay, go and come back so that we can talk,” he says.

He’s going to spin her the same old story, but this time it’ll have some twists because he’s going to lie about loving her. She releases a sigh and watches her daughter sleeping peacefully, with zero care in the world. Then a picture of Nothile’s son crosses her mind. From the way she looked, she hardly gets any sleep. It could be overthinking and not knowing what’s next for her baby.

How twisted are the Manqele ancestors, really?

She turns around and bumps her face into his chest.

“Maka Phelo,” he says in a low, deep voice.

It’s “I’m sorry” time, but this time she’ll be participating for a different vision.

“She’s asleep,” he cracks a short smile and holds her hand. “We have to talk.”

She nods and follows him with her hand clasped in

his to the lounge.

He hasn't touched his food. Maybe he doesn't have an appetite, just like her.

He has this thing of holding people's hands; he hasn't let go of hers even after they've sat down.

"I know you're going to think differently from what my intentions really are," he says and tightens his hand around hers.

"Maka Sphephelo, I don't think I've hurt anyone in my life more than I've hurt you. Yet you've proven your love to me from the day you laid in my arms for the first time. You gave me Sphephelo, my new world. I don't know if I'd ever be able to repay you for everything you've done to make me feel like a greatest man in the world and for making me a father." He pauses and takes a deep breath. His hand is sweaty and slippery, but he's still holding her hand.

"You're a good woman. Nothing you ever did made you worthless, valueless and not good enough. You were just a woman that fell in love with a man who

had commitments and expectations to live up to. If there's anyone who lacked values and worth, it's me."

"That makes me feel so much better, thank you!" She pulls her hand and covers her face. This is stupid!

"I mean it, Maka Phelo. You're a good woman and I wish to be a man you've always wanted me to be," he says.

"It's too late for that Thakasa."

"How is it too late when we are both still breathing?" She lifts her face up and gives him an eye roll.

"I'll always be a second best to you, I know that very well."

"They say when your soul is ready, its mate will be standing right in front of your eyes." He smiles.

She doesn't return it, instead she stares at him vacantly.

"Right now, it's you who's in front of my eyes and my soul is ready."

“Is it?” she asks.

“Yes,” he nods.

“I don’t think you’re ready as you say.”

He raises his eyebrow, “Meaning?”

“Why are you not allowing Nothile to pay the fine you wanted from her family? What it is was Phelo that lost her sight?” she asks.

“Don’t speak about my daughter being blind.”

“I’m not saying she’ll be blind, I’m just making an example; what if?”

“Don’t say that about my daughter. I don’t care if you’re making an example or not. Don’t mention her name and ‘blind’ in one sentence. If you’re talking about Nothile’s child, talk about her child, Phelo has got nothing to do with that.”

That went south really quickly! She nods and takes a breath.

“Why can’t you let the baby be with his biological father? Charge him a fine and let him pay for the damages. Just free the poor boy, he doesn’t deserve

this.”

“You don’t know what I’ve been going through. You don’t, Nomkhosi. That’s why it’s so easy for you to tell me what to do and how to do it.”

“What are you going to get in return? That’s my question. After you’ve punished her and took her son away, what are you going to get?” she asks.

He shrugs his shoulders and picks his plate.

He’s done talking!

“Thakasa?”

“What? I’m not going to change my mind. I didn’t ask her to leave, we were going to find a way forward as people who were once married and in love, she chose her path. I also cheated, but did I leave her? No. That person dropped a bombshell on me while I was lying in the hospital bed and told me she was going to ‘let me know if the child was mine.’ Then months later I’m receiving a call; ‘my son is Londokuhle and he lost his sight. My babydaddy is going to pay whatever you want’.”

It's a bit funny watching him mimic Nothile.

"Things don't work like that. I want her uncles to pay, out of their own pockets, and then I want her to come home and admit her wrongs in front of the whole family and church. Just like I did. Then she'll be humble and let me decide if I want the father involved or not."

Well, then he's leaving her no choice....

"I'm going to keep Phelo away until you sort it. I don't want her to be in the middle of these grudges," she says.

His eyes widen, "You cannot keep me away from my daughter."

"Eat your wings, Thakasa."

"Nomkhosi you...." She picks the TV remote and increases volume.

He has the whole night to think about it.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 48

KHOSI

Phelo liked the house, that's what her father said after giving her a tour around. But Nomkhosi is still on the fence about moving in. Coming here didn't work out the way she expected. Thakasa hasn't said anything about accepting that Londa is not his son by blood and free to take his real father's surname.

Her decision stands as well. As much as she hates using Phelo to solve problems, this time Thakasa is giving her no choice.

He walks in, still not dressed up for work. He comes and stands behind her as she rinses Phelo's bottles in the sink.

"You look good with a scarf around your head," he says.

"It's cold, that's the only reason why my head is wrapped," Khosi.

“But you’re a mother now. I’m not saying it’s a must, but wrapping your head when coming to Phelo’s home is a sign of respect.”

Now he has her attention. She turns around with a frown on her face.

“I’ve never seen you coming to my home with your head wrapped. Or respect must only come from a woman?” she asks.

“That’s not how things....” She shuts him with a hand.

“I’m not your wife. If you come to my home with your head unwrapped, I’ll also do the same.”

A stare battle begins. He never wins. His word doesn’t stand with her and it’s frustrating.

“Are you not going to work?” she asks, breaking the uncomfortable stare.

“No. I want to spend the day with my daughter, Nkonzo and Bandla are there.”

“Oh, I guess I can go to work and.....” He gives her a look that shuts her up.

“Why can’t Phelo spend the day with both her

parents?” he asks

Phewww! Maybe in his mind Phelo is 5 years old.

“Did you think about what we talked about last night?” she asks him.

His face changes. He takes a step away from her and exhales heavily.

“Thakasa, I meant it,” she says.

He looks back at her. Her face remains glacial as she holds his stare.

“He cannot have the boy. I’m doing this for his innocent soul. If MaNtusi wants to take him to this Mandulo man, she can do so and they can raise him together. But that wouldn’t make him anything other than a Manqele.”

“You’re saying the same thing you said last night, just calmer this time. Are you going to accept her apology?”

He nods, “Yes.”

That’s better than nothing, but it’s still not everything. However, she tried her best!

“Thank you,” she says.

He stares at her again. She turns back to the sink and rinses the remaining bottle.

“What about what I talked about? Did you think about it?” he asks.

She ignores him and wipes her hands with a cloth before turning around to him standing a few inches away from her. Now this is awkward!

“Maka Sphephelo,” he lifts her chin with his finger and forces her to look at him.

“If you want me to stay here so that you can do this then....”

“No, that’s not what I’m doing.” He lowers his face to her, inch by inch, until his lips are softly brushing against hers. It’s exactly what he’s doing. And like a fool she’s kissing him back. His hand holds the back of her head as he deepens the kiss. It does to her what it always did.

A lot has changed, but between him and her only a few things changed.

“Phelo is turning 3 months in six days,” he says in a low whisper and chases her big eyes.

“Are you healing down here?” His hand brushes below his waist.

Breathe, Nomkhosi!

“That’s none of your business,” she says without much feistiness.

“It’s my daughter that you pushed out, of course it’s my business.” His arm wraps around her waist and pulls her body to his until there’s no inch of space between them.

“It’s been almost a year but you still drive me crazy. Please look at me, I love your eyes.”

Deep breath! She lifts her eyes to him and they display all her weaknesses to him.

“Maka Phelo...” He’s lowering his face to her and aiming for another kiss. Phelo’s loud cry pierce through their ears. Nomkhosi quickly pushes him off and rushes to the bedroom, leaving him with a firmly standing, hard schlong.

It's his princess, but damn you child!

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KHANYO

Things didn't turn out the way I expected. I came back only to discover that my boyfriend cheated on me a few days before I came back, then he proposed to me and gave me spare keys of what he calls our house. I gave Mandulo the letter, even though we're still working on building trust, lobola negotiations will be held in a month.

As if that's not enough to turn my life upside down, Nolwazi is calling me crying. I did say her crush on Mandulo won't end well. Look what's happening now, he has a whole child with someone and losing focus on their relationship.

The good is that he just arrived. He's depressed and home more. I'm ready to blast him for messing with my friend.

“Makhanyi,” he walks in with a couple shopping bags and leaves them on the kitchen table.

“I just got a call from Nolwazi,” I say.

“Urgh, she ran to you?” He better get his tongue right. Nbody messes with my friends!

“I still don’t know who the mother of your son is and what’s her story. When is she bringing the child? As an aunt I have the right to check if those little toes resemble any of ours.”

He laughs, even though his eyes remain dark and lifeless.

“We did a DNA test, he’s my son,” he says.

That’s good to hear, I guess. But I still need to see the mother and let her know that my friend has big butt.

“You don’t look like someone who just had his first son,” I say, trying to read his empty eyes.

“It’s complicated. I fucked up.” He releases a sigh and walks past me to the sitting room. I follow after him to dig more information.

“How is it complicated?” I ask, lowering myself on the couch.

Another sigh? Gosh, is it that bad?

“His mother is married,” he says.

My ears got to be deceiving me!

“Tell me the husband died five years ago,” I say with my eyes popped out.

“She’s not a widow. She’s someone’s wife!” he emphasizes.

“Is the husband in Johannesburg?” This is the only thing that would make sense; him to be in a far city and not performing his duties well. You know those type of village husbands that leave their wives and kids in the village, go to the mines in Johannesburg and never come back home.

“Londokuhle lost his sight, his mother is needed back at her in-laws and her husband doesn’t want me anywhere near him.”

“Does he know that the baby is not his?” I ask.

“He knows but culturally it’s his son, until he decides

otherwise.”

Now I understand, this is complicated and heavy to deal with.

“What are you going to do?” I ask him even though I can see that he’s ran out of solutions.

“I went to her mother’s home and gave her uncles the money required for the cows he wants as a fine. But Nothile says they haven’t bought the cows yet.”

Wait, I know that name....

“Nothile from where?” I ask.

“Manqele, that’s her husband’s surname. They’re based in Mandeni, maybe you’ve heard of Mthonga Holdings, that’s her husband’s company.” He needs to slap me back to life! Can’t he connect the dots? He’s talking about his future brother-in-law’s family.

“You slept with Bandla’s brother’s wife?” I’m in shock. What on earth is happening? The wife, that angel face, was pregnant with my brother’s child!

“Are you sure? There could be many Manqeles in Mandeni.”

“Nothile is Thakasa’s wife and Thakasa is Bandla’s eldest brother,” I say.

He curses under his breath and scratches his face. I wonder if Bandla is aware of this. If so, is he still okay creating a relationship between these two families.

“I didn’t know. We met in Bali, she was with her husband, I never got to see him, they had a fight and she sat in the hotel pool outside miserably.”

“And you were her knight in the shining armor?” I ask.

“I invited her for some pap and chicken and one thing led to another. It wasn’t my intention at all to break her marriage.”

I’m dumbstruck. I don’t know what to say. Even though I’ve only seen Nothile once I know that she’s a decent woman, at least she looks like one. And my brother, without taking his side, is a good man who just happens to be unlucky when it comes to the matters of the heart.

“Maybe you can talk to Bandla.” My eyes widen. Now I have to interfere into matters I had no knowledge

of?

“Please, your nephew cannot see Makhanyi,” he says.

“I know but I cannot interfere.”

“Please! Maybe if you talk to him and he talks to his brother and asks him to give me a chance to apologize....” Sigh!

“Okay, I’ll try.”

“Thank you, mother’s daughter.”

I roll my eyes and get off the couch. Indeed, life rotates like a wheel.

“If he refuses to help don’t blame him, remember that you’ve never liked him. You’re always making his life difficult.” I leave him miserable on the couch.

What do the elders say again? Don’t shit under the tree because one day you might need its shade.

I just hope my Bandla would be his sweet self and put everything aside for the sake of my nephew.

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I never thought one day I'd be driven to my boyfriend's place by my own brother. Desperate times call for desperate measures. Him and Nolwazi talked, they're back on good terms, at least there's something positive going on in his life. There's a ray of sunshine and I'm grateful to Nolwazi for standing by his side.

I'm carrying my overnight bag and a pack of condoms. I might need to use my private organ to soften this man up.

There's a car I don't know parked in front of the house. I make my way in with my grip tightened around the bag.

I walk into a short, plump-cheek girl sitting on my creamy, expensive couch like a queen. I swear I'm about to strangle this Masha to death!

"What are you doing in my house?" I throw the bag and everything I had in my hands on the floor. Just in case she thinks there's something she can do.

"Hello," she greets calmly and adjusts herself on the couch.

“Yes, hello. I asked what you’re doing in my house?” I swear, if she continues to give me that look like I’m a crazy person, I’m going to pick her up and throw her out of the window.

“Babe,” hands pull me from behind. It’s Bandla.

I yank his hands off and turn my fire-blazing eyes to him, “Who is this?”

“That’s Tema,” he says.

Am I suppose to know her by name? Is she famous, maybe? Tema Knowles?

Nkonzo appears and walks past us to her. He lifts her face and plants a kiss on her lips before sitting down.

Oh....I was dramatic.

“You should’ve told me you had guests,” I scold the one next to me.

“I didn’t know you were coming.”

What does he mean he didn’t know I was coming? This is my house, he told me so, I don’t need to report my arrival to him.

“It’s still your fault,” I tell him.

The girl laughs. If it was me I’d be mad, I guess she just doesn’t have drama in her blood.

“Are you two done?” Nkonzo asks.

I look at Bandla; are we done?

Nkonzo pinches his girl’s cheek and they both smile at one another. I guess we are the only dramatic couple in this country.

“Babe, that’s Khanyo, she holds my brother’s heart,” Nkonzo.

That’s sweet. I look at Bandla, he smiles and holds my hand.

“Don’t try to be us,” he’s dramatic AF, who said smiling was invented by them?

“Anyway, this is Tema Dube, soon to be Manqele. You two are going to help each other in MaKhumalo’s kitchen,” he says.

She’s smiling, I wonder if she knows the MaKhumalo that’s being talked about.

“I’m happy to meet you,” she says.

“Please forgive me for that dramatic scene, it was Bandla’s fault. I’m not a crazy person. Did you see my bedroom?” I ask her.

“No,” she says.

I pull my hand off this one’s and pick my bag from the floor.

“Come, I’ll show you.” Oh, my picture, did he put it back?

I look at him, “Did you put my picture back on the wall?”

“No, you said I must take it down until further notice.”

And he listened to me? Sigh!

“Let’s go Tema,” I say.

It’s been long since I had a girl to hang out with, without any sour topic to discuss, just chilling and talking about wardrobes and men. Gugu is going through the most, Nolwazi has her ups and downs, and I’m also dealing with my own issues.

“So how long have you two been together?” I ask as we climb up the stairs.

“Six months, going to seven,” she says.

“That’s a very long time, I mean in South Africa relationships don’t last. When is the wedding?”

“We haven’t set the date yet. But I’ll definitely invite you, that’s if you’d be around. I heard that you work with people,” she says.

I’m black, I don’t need an invite to attend a wedding. A standing tent is an invitation, this is not America. But I appreciate the honor.

I throw my bag on the bed and open the windows.

“I made him buy a new bed,” I tell her.

“Why?” she asks.

“Because he cheated on me while I was away. Never put your trust on these men, sleep with one eye open. It’s like they were born for sex,” I say.

“Born for sex? That definitely doesn’t include Nkonzo.

Sex is a foreign word to us.”

Huh? What is she saying to me?

“Don’t tell me you’re starving the poor guy.”

“It’s the other way around.”

Shut the front door!

“What?!”

“He doesn’t want us to have sex before marriage.”

“And you?” I ask.

“Six months, girl. Six! That’s how long I’ve been kissing and hugging this man with wet panties.”

No freakin’ way! We cannot let these men dictate when they should have our cookies. Our mothers have been there, done that. Not us, we are women in charge.

“Manipulate him,” I say.

“Huh?”

I sit on the bed and look at her innocent face.

“Men manipulate, blackmail and trick women into

having sex everyday. You're yellow, you have the cleavage, hips and round butt. Shave, smell nice and put your sexy underwear on. You'll have him anywhere you want him to be."

She laughs, "What if he rejects me even after all those efforts?"

"Then you'll emotionally blackmail him. You'll be returning a favor and representing all girls that were tricked by men into sex."

We both laugh. I take out my phone and log into the internet to search for a lingerie online. Nkonzo will have sex before marriage in his next life.

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After polluting his fiancé's mind, we went down to the kitchen and prepared a light meal for dinner. Bandla and Nkonzo are very close, they're living two houses away from each other. I think I'll be seeing his face a lot when I move in here. Tema is very humble and beautiful. I wouldn't mind sharing MaKhumalo's kitchen with her.

I clear the table and leave dishes inside the sink. It's late, I still need to speak to Bandla about Londa. I'm not sure if he knows that Mandulo is the one who made his brother's wife pregnant.

I know Mandulo wronged his family and I don't expect him to feel some type of way. But this is my brother we're talking about here, Londa is his only son, he deserves a chance to father him.

"Mthonga," I say, walking through the door. We've moved back to the main bedroom, but that's the only rule I've bent for him.

"What did I do to be called so nicely?" He shifts and extends his arm for me.

I make myself comfortable in his embrace before breaking the news to him.

"This is a small world. Why on earth would Mandulo do something like this knowing what pain it can cause to a man?"

He's asking the wrong person.

"Those questions can be answered later. Right now

a little boy is suffering in the middle of it.”

“MaNtusi knows what’s expected of her. Culturally, that’s my brother’s son and he’s expected to be brought home.”

“How is that fair though? Your brother has a child with another woman and nobody asked that woman to hand over the child. Why must Mandulo give up on his one and only son, simply because the mother is married?”

“Did your brother give his friend that backstabbed him his daughter?” he asks.

“He had already bonded with her. She knew him as her father, it wouldn’t be fair to just cut ties. And beside that, Thobeka secretly let Menzi father his child without my brother’s knowledge.”

He sighs and brushes my shoulder.

“Can we not get involved?” he asks.

“Bandla we’re talking about my nephew here. I can’t just brush it away.”

“What do you want me to do?” Now this is the

question I wanted to be asked.

“Talk to your brother,” I say.

“He’s my brother, not my friend.”

“You can still talk to him though.”

He sighs, “I’ll try, but at the end of the day this is his decision to make and there’s nothing anyone can do if he wants the boy to remain a Manqele.”

“That’s all I ask. Do you want a kiss?” I ask, wrapping my hands around his neck.

“I want it and more.”

So typical of him!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 49

BANDLA

After two days of not showing up at work, Thakasa is finally back and looking refreshed. He didn't tell them, his brothers, anything about him and Khosi being back together or whatever it is that's happening between them. But that's no surprise, they're always the last ones to find out about anything concerning his personal life. He's built that boundary between him and all of them as his siblings. Maybe today is the right day to address the Mandulo issue. He's in one of his greatest moods.

"What are we celebrating?" he asks as Bandla walks in, followed by one of MaGumbi's cook-girls with containers of dumplings and trotters.

"My success," Bandla says with a tease smile on his face. He's still called a cheater and reminded of his mistakes every now and then, but he's happy despite

that little discomfort.

“What success?” Thakasa asks.

“Me breathing is success on its own. How have you been?” He takes a seat while Thakasa clears his desk to set the surprise lunch.

“Good for you, Mthonga. Is Khanyo fine and successful as well?”

He chuckles, “Yes, she’s good, although she has her moments but I love her like that.”

“What moments?” Thakasa.

“I slipped a few days before she came back. You know her ancestors work overtime, I got caught right away,” he says.

It’s not funny, but they both crack into laughter.

“You know I’ll be blamed if this gets to MaKhumalo’s ears, right? What were you thinking?”

“I was stressed, her brother is a hard nut to crack. At first he liked me, but then things happened and he started really hating me. I’d try to call him while Khanyo was away and he’d just shut me down and

not tell me anything. Even when she came back, he never told me anything. I was in the dark about everything and it all got too much for a lonely man.”

Thakasa shrugs his shoulders and slices the dumpling.

“He’s just protecting his sister. You remember how long it took us to accept that Mawande was marrying Nyezi.”

Bandla nods and takes a deep breath.

“Actually, that’s why I’m here, because of her brother,” he says.

Thakasa raises his eyes with his mouth full and looks at him questioningly.

“You don’t know him but you’ve surely heard of his name,” he says.

Thakasa keeps his eyes on him. Now he’s curious about this brother; is he famous, maybe?

“Mandulo Nyathi,” Bandla says.

Fork dropped! What the heck?

“Who?” His voice already reeks animosity. That name ruined his marriage, or rather the crumps of it. Whatever, he hates that person.

“Mandulo is Nokukhanya’s brother. He got divorced early last year and met MaNtusi in Bali while gone on a vacation to clear his head,” Bandla explains.

“His wife probably left him for sleeping with other men’s wives.”

Bandla clears his throat and takes a sip of his drink.

Thakasa raises his eyebrow, “I hope you’re not here to talk for him because Bandlaletu I’m going to throw this dumpling on your face if you dare think that you can worm your way into his heart through this.”

“That’s not what I’m trying to do at all. I don’t care if Mandulo likes me or not, his sister still sleeps next to me either way. I just want what’s best for everyone; you, him and the baby. And that’s you handing the baby over the right way and giving Mandulo your blessing.”

“Over my dead body! Lingawa licoshwe zinkukhu

Mthonga. They're giving me more reasons not to want this Mandulo guy anywhere near me. He's sending his sister to solve his shit, on the other hand, his girlfriend is telling Nomkhosi to keep Phelo away from me until I agree to her demands. They're twisted and clever, I just want to see how far they can go."

He can look at it however he wants, but Khanyo wasn't sent to solve anything, she only pleaded on her brother's behalf, which isn't a bad thing to do as a sibling. But MaNtusi and Nomkhosi? They're even meeting with each other and talking?

"MaNtusi went to Nomkhosi and told her to keep Phelo from you?" Bandla asks with a frown.

"She did. She was there at her workplace with a baby, crying and planting ideas in her head."

"How did you find out?" Bandla is still confused. From what he knows, MaNtusi hates the air that Nomkhosi breathes.

"Precious told me," he says.

"Who is that now?" Bandla.

“Bantwana Holdings receptionist.”

“How do you know her?” Bandla.

“I’ve known her for a while. She gives me information when necessary.”

“A spy?” He shrugs his shoulders and Bandla reaches to his glass and sips. Oh, Nomkhosi, you’re going to fire someone!

“Why are you stalking your babymama?” Bandla asks.

“I said ‘when necessary’. I don’t stalk her, there’s no need to.”

“For your sake, I hope you’re being truthful.” Bandla exhales and looks at him, pleading with his eyes.

“Mthonga please allow these people to take their baby and leave you alone.”

“I want her to own up to her mistakes and then we’ll figure out a way forward.”

“I thought you were over this marriage and her,” Bandla says, confused.

“I cannot be unmarried to her. I cannot reverse the vows I made before the Lord and ancestors. She’s

my wife and that's it."

He probably shouldn't ask him this but....

"What about Nomkhosi?" he asks and Thakasa's face quickly turns from cold to afflicted.

"I'll do right by her. I love her and I want her and my daughter home," he says.

"Does it mean you're going to become a first Manqeke polygamist?" Bandla asks.

"I hated the idea of it, believe me. But I cannot keep hurting Nomkhosi to please her. I need to put an end to it. What I want from MaNtusi is for her to acknowledge her mistake and accept Nomkhosi and Phelo. Then we'll figure out what's good for Londa, but I know that he's going to have problems if they take him to his surname."

It seems like he's got it all figured out, but his stubbornness still wants MaNtusi to suffer a little bit.

"You know MaKhumalo doesn't like her now and will treat her funnily when she comes back?" Bandla asks.

“Ma doesn’t like Nomkhosi either. I’m sure her and Dad weren’t perfect too but they stayed together,” he says.

“Do you think Nomkhosi will agree to be number two?”

“She’s not number two, I love her. One thing I know for sure is that Nomkhosi loves me, crazily that sometimes I even think she was brought into my life for a purpose. I was never going to be okay living my whole life knowing that I loved someone and never got a chance to show them. But I was willing to do it, for the sake of my marriage. But now, it’s no skin on my nose!”

Phewww! A glass needs to be filled. What a revelation!

“Nkonzo will lead the delegation to the Mayises. I’m not going to have any talk with your brother-in-law,” he says.

Bandla sighs. Now he’s at the centre of this web. It’s important for him to have his brother’s support, as much as it’s important to Khanyo to have her

brother's support. Hopefully this won't cause any crack in their relationship.

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MAWANDE

No matter what she does, at the back of her head it rings; she kissed him! The brother of her late husband, she kissed him. That shit cannot be undone. She's betrayed her husband, with his own brother out of all people. Bhambatha was probably drunk, she should've been a damn sister and stopped him. But no, she was sucking his lips like a lollipop.

Now it's all done. She's fucked up and it's time to hit the road, before this reaches her mother-in-law's ears. And before Bhambatha's girlfriend shows up to scream at her and say she was right. Mawande has proven her instincts right by kissing her man.

She can run her business from home, Enembe.

Staying here is going to cause more bad than good.

She drags the first suitcase, leaves it on the floor in the lounge and fetches another one. Mrs Myeza left for Thursday women's prayer meeting, it'll give her an excuse as to why she left without telling her.

She drags in another suitcase with a bag balanced under her arm. And, there he is, on her couch in a black sweater and Nike track pant. Her heart stops for a minute. What is he doing here?

"You're leaving?" he asks with a look she cannot describe plastered on his face. It's not a pleasant one, neither is it cold glare.

She stands still and doesn't say anything.

"Mawande, are you leaving?" He's firmer and standing on his feet now.

"Yes, I'm leaving," she says after taking a deep breath.

"Why?" Guilt swallows him, he sinks back on the couch and releases a sharp breath. "Because of

me?”

Yes, because of you!

“No, not because of you. I was going to leave even if the kiss didn’t happen.” Oh shucks! Did she has to mention that though?

“I regret it too,” he says.

That shouldn’t hurt but it does. He regrets kissing a widow. Her face is unable to mask the pain reflecting in her eyes.

“I only regret it because you’re my late brother’s wife,” he says and stares at her for two uncomfortable minutes.

“I don’t want you to leave.” He sounds different, in a painful way. But she cannot stay, not when she doesn’t know who she is around this man.

“I have to. It’s not your fault, don’t beat yourself about it,” she says.

“You’re all that I have.” He brushes his nose with his hand and inhales sharply. “If you leave, it’s over for me, I’m back on the streets.”

“What does that mean?” Mawande asks.

He looks up, his eyes are inflicted with pain but he’s not the one to break down or display his emotions like that.

“It means I cannot say ‘I’m going home’ or anything like that. If you close these doors, for me it’s over. I do have a house but it doesn’t mean I don’t like having a place I call home and a family.”

She’s soft-hearted, naturally. This breaks her heart, she didn’t think he cared. He’s never shown it. She thought he was okay being out-casted and disowned. He still made it, he’s not short of anything in life, except that part only.

“You gave me that and I ruined it. Just like I’ve ruined everything else in my life. I shouldn’t have kissed you. I didn’t think it’ll take things this far and I’m sorry,” he says.

Mawande exhales and lowers herself next to him.

“I kissed you back,” she says.

He nods, “I know, I’m not your type, you wish it didn’t

happen.”

Silence...

He looks at her, she's staring at him.

“Mawande?” There's a little frown on his face.

“I regret it because you're my late husband's brother and that's why I'm leaving. I don't want it to happen again and I don't know if that can be guaranteed if I keep seeing you.”

He's blown off, he blinks rapidly and looks at her again.

“You don't regret it because I'm known as a thug?” he asks.

“I know you as a 'semi-restaurant' Shisanyama owner and a supporting brother-in-law. Not a thug. I don't want to ruin that, you've been so good and supportive to me more than anyone.”

“You cannot ruin anything. It can never happen with me. I'll never treat you badly under any circumstance.” He said that too quick, she's awestruck and failing to hold his stare. Things aren't

supposed to be this awkward, that's why she's leaving.

"I don't want you to leave," he says for the second time and holds her hand.

"But Bhambatha, what if we do it again?" she asks in almost whisper.

"I don't know," he says and pulls her arm over his shoulder. "Maybe we don't have to wait for another day to see if the world is going to end if we do it again or not."

"Bha...mba...tha!" Her eyes go to his lips that are just an inch away from hers.

Their lips lock. His hand holds the back of her neck and pulls her closer. His hand caressing her neck alone gives her chills. His breath is waffled with nicotine and mint. She welcomes his lips and sucks them slowly and passionately. His hand drops to her waist, he holds her tightly and pushes her back against the couch.

"Mawande," he pronounces in a two second break before he kisses her again.

It's steamy, passionate and filled with energy. Until his manhood gets excited and grows hard between their bodies. He needs to get off the poor girl.

He's a little bit embarrassed. Maybe if he was wearing a jean it would've covered his too-forward member, but he's wearing a track pant and it's visibly standing up like the arm of a baby.

"Are you hungry?" he asks awkwardly.

"Hungry?" She clears her throat.

He realizes the ambiguity of his question and quickly rectifies it.

"I mean food. You said you liked grilled meat from my Shisanyama, I can tell my boys to bring you some."

"Oh that, yes, I'm hungry."

He steals a glance at her. He's hungry too but this is not his pot to eat from.

"Your kisses are everything," he thinks out loud.

She gasps and drops her eyes.

“You’re just....” He should probably leave it here. He’s making things more awkward. It makes sense why Nyezi married her and loved her so much. He’d have done the same too had he met her first.

She’s a beautiful woman, so easy to fall in love with!

“Are you really leaving?” he asks.

“Yes, but only for a couple of weeks.”

It hurts. He cannot even hide it. But it’s what it is.

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TEMA

They are what anyone would call a perfect couple. She’s bent a lot of her rules, changed her lifestyle and sacrificed a lot for this man. Maybe Khanyo was right, for once she needs to get what she wants and get it her way, on her own time. She appreciates him having good intentions about her and only wanting the cookie after he’s put a ring on her finger. But come on, she’s not 17, that path has been walked on

before and it needs services.

She's wearing a long coat over the lacy matching underwear that Khanyo forced her to buy. One thing about her that Nkonzo probably knows and keeps poking at, is that she's insecure. Thula made sure it sinks in her head that she's cold in bed and her smelly cookie is widely open like a cave. He used to come to Mthonga Holdings and scream all those insults for everybody to hear after their messy divorce. Maybe that's where Nkonzo's fear comes from, she thinks. She's been doing a lot of kegel exercises, eating plain yogurt and lot of greens.

Nkonzo steps out of the shower, wrapped in a towel and looks at her with a frown.

“Wagqoka amajazi ebusuku siya empini yini?” (Why are you wearing a coat at night, are we going to a war)

“No,” she says with a nervous smile and shakes her head.

He kisses her lips and walks out, probably to his office to do some work. They always fight about everything indoors. He's learning things about her and she's learning things about him too. Things they probably would've surprised each other with after getting married.

Maybe she should follow him there. Khanyo said "there's no place and time for this thing; anywhere and anytime."

She knocks once and pushes the door. Indeed, he's on his laptop and reading something.

"We talked about this," she says at the door, trying not to scream and cause a scene.

"But I'm not working, babe. You see I'm on my feet and just reading this document through."

It doesn't justify anything, he's working on their time, but she's not looking for any argument tonight. She closes the door and softly walks towards him in front of the desk.

She wraps her arms around his waist and unties the towel. He gasps and looks at her as the towel falls down on the floor.

“What do you want to see?” he asks with a grin and bends down to pick it up.

Tema blocks his hand and steps on the towel with her foot.

“Okay, what’s going on?” he asks.

Deep breath! She unbuttons her coat slowly, with her eyes fixed on his confused face.

He swallows hard, “Tema, no!”

She pushes the laptop and jumps to sit on the desk with her legs slightly parted.

“Do you like what you see?” she asks as he drools over her bubbly cleavage.

“Come on, we talked about this.” He’s standing between her legs and embracing her. His body wants a different thing from his mind. He wasn’t wearing anything under the towel, he was still yet to wear boxers and vest before getting in bed with her.

His shaft has stood up against his navel, looking beastly and starved.

“I’m not a virgin, Mthonga. I crave more than just your lips,” she says and steals a quick from his lips.

“I want you to touch me here.” She pulls his hand and directs it to the castle between her thighs.

“And make me a happy woman,” she says and Nkonzo inhales sharply.

“I don’t want to wait until the wedding. I want you now.” Her whisper is sexy enough to loosen all his buttons and get him scooping her up in his arms like a baby.

They make it to the bedroom, he puts her on bed and pushes her legs furtherly apart. Their lips lock in an intimate kiss while he tries to pull down the lacy thong standing between him and her cookie jar.

“You’re so wet,” he says, tapping her folds and there’s that wet sound she hates.

“Get a wipe,” she tells him. Thula had a lot to

complain about, this is one of the things he didn't like.

"For what? Aren't you wet for Mthonga?" Nkonzo asks, playing with her dripping wet folds.

He shuts her with a kiss and keeps his finger tapping her clit. His shaft is now hard and close to bursting those veins, but he's still not sure if he's doing the right thing. There are procedures he wanted to follow before doing this. He wanted to do everything right and he wanted their first time to be special.

"You really want us to do this now?" he asks even though her body has already told him.

"Yes," she says.

He kisses her again, for gratitude. He rolls her nipple with a thumb and bites her neck. She moans out softly.

"MaDube," he whispers in her ear and clears the fog in his throat. "Are you on birth control?" he asks.

"No," she says.

"Ufuna ngigqoke?" (You want me to put a condom

on)

“I love you,” she says.

He lifts his eyes to her and for a moment they’re staring at each other.

He lifts her leg, pushes the tip of his shaft over her clit and rubs her.

“I love you, tinkerbelle,” he says before separating her wet folds with his fingers and pushing his hard shaft in, slowly.

Her body tenses up as his shaft effortlessly slides in. He lifts his eyes to her and spans her hip.

“Loosen up, I won’t be rough,” he says.

Okay, she takes a huge breath and relaxes.

He tucks his head over her shoulder and groans deeply as his shaft thrusts deeply in her core.

His body is shattering. He’s been inside her for less than four minutes but his body is already failing to handle the bundle of pleasure dished for Mthonga.

“Babe!” Tema screams as he thrusts in furiously like he intends to rip her apart.

He bites her shoulder as he tries his almost best to stay in the game. She moans painfully and calls his name. His teeth are now sinking into her flesh and he’s not even aware of it. All his senses are knotted and awaiting an immediate release.

His body gives in. He bursts inside her and releases a loud groan.

His teeth leave a mark on her skin, he rolls off and lies on his stomach with his head buried in shame.

A moment passes, he’s panting heavily next to her and she’s lying on her back creampied and still horny AF.

“You’re not fuckin’ serious Nkonzehle!”

He lifts his face to her and exhales heavily. He’s sorry, more than anything.

“I haven’t been eating well and it’s been a long time since I was with a woman. I don’t know how this

happened, I was....” Okay, he needs to cut it and just apologizes.

“I’m sorry MaDube. I promise you the second round will be better.”

“Yes it will be better because you’ll lick me first,” she says furiously.

His face pales out. Say what? Her face says she means business. He’s licking it and that’s it!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 50

NOMKHOSI

She walks to Precious on her desk and leaves a few messages.

“If anyone asks for me refer them to Snalo,” she says.

Precious notes it down, then she chews her pen and looks at her.

“I didn’t think you had a meeting out of town today,” she says to Khosi.

“It’s a personal meeting,” Khosi.

She leans forward and lowers her eyes before whispering.

“Are you meeting that woman with a baby again?” she asks.

Nomkhosi raises her eyebrow in shock. Since when they’re friends? Her private meetings are none of

Precious' business.

"That's all, you can go back to work," she says to her, giving her a meaningful look.

"Ummm, sorry." She goes back to her seat and pretends to be busy on her laptop.

Nomkhosi shakes her head in disbelief before strutting away in her stilettos and walking out to the parking area.

She's not friends with Nothile, that might never be possible, but they're both mothers now so they have to leave the pettiness and drama behind.

Because Thakasa has been all over Durban recently, she thought it would be a better idea if she personally drove to her sister's house in Harding and had one-on-one conversation with her. Obviously her 'sexual relationship' with Thakasa, or whatever he called it, has dug her into a deeper hole. She's now caught between their marital problems and it's too late for her to back out now.

Even though she knows that Nothile might feel a bit insulted by her buying Londa a winter tracksuit, she couldn't resist that cute boyish thing when she saw it at Earth Child.

She calls before driving up to the house and lets Nothile know that she's arrived.

Things are still awkward between the two of them even though they've been holding civil conversations on Whatsapp the last couple days.

"Hey," she says, walking to Nothile standing in the veranda with a toddler sitting next to her feet.

"Hi. I thought you'd come with Phelo," Nothile says with a lazy smile.

"Mom thinks it's her child, I kinda ask permission for everything." Nomkhosi has everything she never had, but this time she doesn't feel some type of way towards her, she's happy for her. Her daughter has a loving father, a protective grandma and uncles who'd kill for her. Londa may never receive that kind of love but she's willing to be the best mother in the world.

They walk inside the house. Nomcebo is sitting on the couch, looking ready to puke her lunch at the sight of the woman that broke her sister's marriage. But Nothile quickly reprimands her with a look and asks Nomkhosi to have a seat.

"This is my sister, Nomcebo, and these are her two daughters."

Nomkhosi looks at her in acknowledgement and doesn't say anything. It's easy to feel her bad vibes from that mean, ugly face. Fortunately, she didn't come here to make friends with anyone. This is strictly about Londa.

Nothile looks at her sister, "Please give us a minute."

Nomcebo rolls her eyes before picking her youngest daughter and pulling the other one to the room.

"Don't mind her, she's having a bad day," she picks a cushion and squashes it in her hands. "My uncle called, they finally bought the cows but couldn't get the goat."

"That's better than nothing. So you're going back?"
Nomkhosi.

“They’ll go on my behalf. I know MaKhumalo, I’m not in a good emotional space to deal with her at the moment.”

Khosi clears her throat and heaves a sigh.

“I think Thakasa needs a glimpse of a reality,” she says.

Nothile looks at her curiously.

“I know it’s hard for you to be away from your son. As a mother I understand, but at times you have to do what you have to do to get what you want.”

“I don’t understand,” Nothile says.

“He wants to be Londa’s father, right? Then pack his little bag and go leave him in his office.”

Whooh! That’s sounds a bit dramatic and plain stupid.

“No! I don’t want my son to be mistreated by that man.”

“I’ll keep an eye on him. I just want him to understand what this is all about. A baby!”

“No, no, no. What if he kills my son?” Nothile.

Khosi chuckles, “Come on now, he’s a parent. And he has a soft spot for these little human beings. ”

“Khosi, no!” she sighs. “I think he’s going to be okay if my uncle pays the fine. I don’t need to pull all these stunts.”

“But that’s not all you want, right? As far as I know the fine is an apology to the ancestors and then there’s an acceptance for Londa to the family. What about his real father?”

She sighs heavily.

“Life has never favored me. At the end of the day I’m not going to get anything my way. Thakasa will have the upper hand to decide what’s next for me.” She smiles lazily. “This is a lesson to you too, just in case you ever decide to marry him.”

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THAKASA

It's a normal Tuesday, he's at work and looking forward to spending time with his daughter after work. Khosi doesn't live in Waterways YET, but anytime he calls and asks her to go there with Phelo, she does. Today was one of those days, he called and asked to be with his family, she agreed. With Mawande back home there's less to worry about concerning MaKhumalo. She's bonding with her daughter and Thakasa will be bonding with his daughter too.

He has thirty minutes to spare, so he takes his lunch and goes to Bandla's office.

"Did Sqalo call you?" he asks.

"Yes, we talked. I think we need to sit down and talk face to face. But everything is good, he sounded okay and over the past."

"That's great. I hope you guys can work it out and go back to how you used to be," he says.

"I'll go see him on Friday. I know what I did hurt him, maybe I should buy him a car."

"You can't buy apology," Thakasa says.

“I’m not buying his apology. He’s 18, doing his degree and hasn’t got anyone pregnant yet.”

Thakasa opens his mouth to speak but he quickly shuts him down. “That’s not the point, he’s done great for himself. I’m going to get him a Polo.”

“What about Tutu? You know she’s going to cry Zambezi river.”

“I’ll get her a new laptop.” They both laugh because they know that Phethy will have none of that. She’ll scream favoritism and sulk the whole winter.

Nkonzo aggressively opens the door and stands with his eyes popping out like he’s seen a ghost.

Then the security guard appears behind him with a little baby in his arms and a bag.

“And then?” Both Bandla and Thakasa ask simultaneously.

“Mrs Manqele left this,” the security guard says, handing the baby to Thakasa.

“What...but... wait...” He puts the baby’s bag on

Bandla's desk and steps back to leave.

"Sorry sir, I have to go back to my job. There's a letter she inserted in the bag."

"Nothile is crazy. What is this?" He looks at the baby peacefully sleeping in his arms and looks at his brothers for any kind of assistance.

"Nkonzo don't just stand there like a fool. Fetch my phone!" He turns his fire-blazing eyes to Bandla behind the desk. "Open the bag and read that letter to me."

This is insane! What is he supposed to do with a baby?

I HOPE YOU'RE GOING TO BE A GOOD FATHER TO HIM AS YOU BADLY WANTED TO HAVE HIM AS YOURS REGARDLESS OF THE TRUTH. MY UNCLES WILL BE THERE ON SUNDAY, PHYSICALLY I WON'T BE WITH THEM, BUT SPIRITUALLY I'LL BE THERE. I'M SORRY ABOUT EVERYTHING THAT HAPPENED BETWEEN US.

GOODBYE, MANQELE

No, no, no! He pushes back the chair and stands up.

“I need to find her. I hope she’s not thinking about doing anything stupid.”

Bandla looks at the baby in his arms and raises his eyebrows.

“Where are you going to leave him?” he asks.

“Can you look after him for me?”

“Mthonga, I’ve never had a baby before. What am I going to do if he wakes up and starts crying?”

Oh, fuck! He looks around, his world is not that big now, he lowers himself back on the chair.

“Nkonzo how long does it take you to get a damn phone?” he yells furiously and the boy in his arms opens his eyes for the first time. His heart stops for a minute. He nearly drops him on the floor. His little eyes are fixed on his face.

“Bandla, he’s looking at me,” he says, almost

whispering.

“Can he see?” Bandla asks.

“I don’t know.” He’s shit scared.

Nkonzo walks in and gives him the phone.

“Call Nothile and put her on loudspeaker,” he instructs.

Nkonzo calls twice and it sends him straight to voicemail.

“Call Mawande and tell her to come here immediately. I need her to babysit while I go find Nothile.”

Bandla raises his hand up, “That’s a bad idea. You know how MaKhumalo is, this baby is not well, the last thing he needs is...”

“Ok, I hear you! I’ll make another plan.” He looks at Nkonzo. “Can’t you ask Tema to take him to her house and look after him for a few hours.”

“We have plans. Why don’t you ask Nomkhosi?”
Nkonzo.

When days are dark brothers are few! He takes his phone, exhales heavily and scrolls down for Nomkhosi's number.

Phewww!

"Maka Phelo," he clears his throat.

"Hello, I'm on the road, what's up?" Khosi asks.

"Are you going home?"

"Yes," she says.

"Look, I'll be in Waterways in 40 minutes. It's urgent, please be there," he says.

"What's urgent?"

Deep breath!

"Can you do what I ask and not question me for once?"

"You need my help, so...."

Fuck!!!

"Okay, I'm going to explain when I get there," he says.

“Sure. I’ll go home and take Phelo then.”

He sighs out in relief, thanks her and ends the call.

“You’re going to dump the baby with her?” Nkonzo asks.

“Should I leave him with you instead?” They’re so annoying!

“No, I was just asking.” Nkonzo lifts his hands up in surrender.

“I’ll make a few calls and see if anyone can trace her down,” Bandla says.

“I’d appreciate that. I’ll stay in touch, I have to hurry.”

Nkonzo brings his car keys, he takes Londa’s bag and leaves. Hopefully he’s not going to cry until they reach Waterways.

He tries Nomcebo’s phone but she drops it after a few rings. Damn!

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Nomkhosi bathes Phelo and puts her in a fluffy

jacket, pink legging and socks. This is the part she likes the most about motherhood; dressing Phelo up and taking pictures of her.

Thakasa walks into them taking selfies on the couch. He has a baby in his arm and a bag.

Nomkhosi's mouth drops. He inhales sharply and looks at her fearful while standing behind the couch.

"Who is that?" Nomkhosi asks.

"It's Londokuhle," he says with his eyes dropped.

"Oh," that's all she says before turning back to her little princess and taking more pictures of her while she's sucking her fingers and looking all around her.

"Can we talk?" Thakasa asks behind her.

"Yes, go on." She's tilting her phone and trying to capture Phelo's best look.

"I think MaNtusi wants to harm herself. She left the baby at the gate and left," he says.

"Oh, congratulations. Are you happy that you got the baby now?" Khosi asks.

“Don’t do that, please. Can you look after him for a few hours? If anything happens to her I’ll never forgive myself.”

“Why don’t you take him to your Mom?” she asks.

“I will, just not now.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t. This is what you wanted and you got it.” She picks Phelo up and sits with her on the couch.

“I think you need to change his diaper, Daddy,” she tells Thakasa.

He looks at Londa and frowns. Oh boy, you didn’t!

“Can you change it for me?”

Nomkhosi chuckles, “No. He’s your wife’s son, that makes him your son too, isn’t?”

Sigh! He peeps through the blanket, indeed there’s a funny smell coming from this little man’s pants.

“You’re a great father Thakasa,” Khosi’s voice catches him off guard. “Don’t let another person’s actions change that. This little boy needs his mother, not you and not me. He also deserves to have a

relationship with his real father. You need to forgive yourself, let go of the anger and accept what you cannot change.”

He nods, looking at Londa staring at him blankly. He’s a peaceful baby, unlike his drama princess.

“Nothile is safe. I talked to her a few minutes ago.”

Say what?!

“You talked to her?” he asks.

“Yes, she’s gone home to meet with her uncles. If you want to keep the baby now the stage is yours,” Khosi says.

“He’s innocent in all this.”

“I’m glad you now realize that. Now do the right thing and set him free.”

He shakes his head in disbelief. Yes she makes sense, but wow!

“So you’re now friends?” he asks her.

“No, we just fucked the same man,” she says.

Oh, that’s how she calls it?

“So we just fucked?” he asks in a bruised tone.

“Yeah. What else did we do? Take Phelo and give me the baby. In the morning you have to go and face your wife. Look how far deep fucking a married man has gotten me?”

“Stop saying you fucked me.” He gives her the baby and picks Phelo up.

“Whatever makes you sleep at night. Order something we’re going to eat for dinner.” She’s making her way to the bathroom to change Londa’s diaper and makes a secret call to Nothile.

They managed to put both babies to sleep. He’s now realizing how far he’s taken things and honestly, this is far from the life he wants. He can’t be feeding, bathing and putting another man’s baby to sleep every night. He loves kids, but this is too much.

“Are you okay?” Khosi asks, lowering herself on the opposite couch.

“No,” he says.

“I understand you and I feel bad. But at the end of the day we did Nothile wrong. Nothing justifies what you, specially, did to her. Not her cheating, not her getting pregnant and not her running away from home. Nothing. You both cheated, for your own reasons, and got babies out of marriage equally.”

“I know and I’ve apologized to her a million times,” he says. “I think we need to sit down and talk.”

“That’s all you could’ve done all this time. Thank you!”

He sighs and drops his eyes to the floor thoughtfully.

“It’s okay for the marriage not to work. Life goes on, it’s life,” she says.

“What if ours don’t work as well? I don’t want to make a hobby of marrying women and letting them leave,” he asks.

“We are not going to have any marriage, so don’t panic,” Khosi says.

“We are just going to keep ‘fucking’,” he asks, quoting her term with his fingers.

“No, we are fuckin’ co-parenting Thakasa Manqele and that’s it!” she says.

He smiles. It doesn’t have to turn him on when she’s being harsh and rude to him, but it does, especially after the rough day he’s had.

“But I want more; your hand in marriage, your warm cookie and more babies,” he says and gets a dirty look thrown at him.

“In your wet dreams!” she says.

“Do you know what I do to you in my wet dreams? Trust me, if I do you how I do you in my dreams you’ll need a wheelchair and painkillers the next day.”

Hard swallow!

“We have kids around Thakasa,” she says.

“They don’t even know their names yet. Come here!”

She gives him a look and looks at the bright screen of her phone.

His breath next to her? What’s going..... oh hell, no!

“Tell me I’m lying,” he says, lifting her chin up.

“Thakasa stop!”

“Just say I’m lying.”

Sigh!

“You’re not lying. Can I chat with my friend now?” she asks, fighting the urge to roll her eyes.

“Uzobhebheka phela,” he says, spanking her hips and moving away with a stupid grin on his face. (You’re going to get fucked)

She releases a deep sigh and crosses her legs to keep that throbbing clit calm.

At least she got what her and Nothile wanted. And she didn’t get fucked.

She finally has some control, but what's next?

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 51

THAKASA

He's outside the Ngema homestead before the sky fully bears out the sun. If it wasn't for Khosi he doesn't know what he would've done, and thank God, Londa is not a cry baby. Khosi made his bottles to make sure that nothing makes them fight on the way. He's not connected to him as he is to Phelo, and that's because he's living proof of what his wife did to him. But holding him in his arms wasn't bad as he had thought. He didn't feel any resentment, just a hollow feeling of 'he should've been my son.'

With everything that happened between him and the Ngema uncles, he's not sure if he's still welcomed as a son-in-law, so he parks outside the gate and calls Nothile.

After the call he goes to the back and gets Londa to

the front seat. Nothile takes her precious time coming out. She's really determined to test his patience. Precious said something about Nomkhosi rushing to meet with someone, now that he thinks carefully about it, Nothile must've been the one who called her to that meeting. He's going to address that, among other things that he wants to talk to her about.

It's been months since he last saw her. She's lost a lot of weight, probably some attitude as well. Her head is wrapped with a scarf, she looks horrible, like she hasn't slept or eaten well in weeks.

She opens the door and climbs in. Thakasa stays quietly and looks outside the window.

She sits, glances at Londa once and folds her arms.

One of them has to say something to start this off.

Thakasa inhales deeply and shifts his eyes to her. She's not looking at his direction, but he stares at her regardless.

“You’re not even going to ask how he slept?” he asks.

“I’m sure he slept well. He was with his father, wasn’t he?”

Oh, she only lost weight. Attitude still comes in bulks.

“MaNtusi,” he exhales and adjusts Londa’s head on his arm. “Why are you running around? Why do I have to chase you like I asked you to cheat and get pregnant?”

“I didn’t ask you to chase me. I asked a simple thing from you; charge me what you want and allow my son to be acknowledged by his own ancestors. But no, you set high demands knowing very well that my family would never do anything for me if it’s not beneficial to them. You know that I only had you and myself, without you- I’m on my own.”

“The problem with you Nothile is that you’d never admit and own up to your mistakes. Now that it’s you who’s at their mercy, they’d never do anything for you and bla bla bla. But if it’s me in your position you run to their arms and lick their feet. Nothing changes, I want those cows and I want them from

Raphael Ngema who took my lobola.”

“You’ll get them,” she says.

“Great!”

Heavy silence falls into the car. Londa breaks it with his cry and Nothile takes him to her chest.

“My son is not well, I don’t want to argue over his head, but maybe I’d never get a chance to ask you these questions.” She covers Londa with a blanket and releases a sigh.

“I forgave you Manqele,” she starts and Thakasa raises his eyebrow.

“I did not say I forgot, I said I forgave you, which I did. I booked you into therapy, planned trips for us and treated your family like it was my own. You said you fell in love with Nomkhosi and I asked you, not once, if you wanted to be with her.” He leans back on the seat and looks at her attentively.

“I asked, Manqele do you want polygamy? You said, no. I asked, do you want to be with her? You said, no. But you knew very well that was what you wanted. I

gave you options, I was never a crazy wife, neither was I close-minded. Being cheated on hurts, now you can attest to it. Why did you hurt me whereas you had options not to?" she asks.

He doesn't say anything. She gives him a stare until he rubs his bow-ridge and exhales audibly.

"I kept making efforts for us to work. That night when Londa was unintentionally made, you had turned me down and didn't even care to compliment the lingerie I went out of my way to impress you with. I don't think you've ever loved me, you only loved being married to me."

"That's not true and you know it," he says.

"It is true! You know that Nomkhosi will never attend church with you. She'll never wrap herself in long dresses and scarfs, and kneel for you in front of your family. She'll never cook for your grown brothers and nurse your mother's feelings. That's why you didn't want to marry her, you are scared she'll bruise your perfect Manqeale ego. But you couldn't appreciate the fact that I was there and doing that, you cheated on

me, made her pregnant and hit me. You're an asshole!"

He blinks a couple of times in disbelief. Was he just called an asshole?

"You're cursing over your son's head. Are you mentally okay?"

She throws her head back and lets tears flow down her face.

"At this point I don't think I still need therapy. You need it more than anyone." He takes Londa and continues staring at her weirdly.

"You're a mother now, some things need to change. You can't keep bringing up things everytime we try to sit down and talk."

"I just want to live a normal life with my son. Is that too much to ask, Manqele?"

"No, except that you're not asking but blackmailing me into it. I don't want to fight using your son, but I'm not going to be guilt-tripped by a woman who's a sinner like me."

She buries her face and sobs like a little baby. It's been hard; being squashed in Nomcebo's house with her boyfriend and finally coming back home to her furious uncles. She thought having a baby would bring her peace, but instead, it has turned her life upside down.

"So where do we go from Sunday onwards?" he asks.

She calms herself down and wipes her face with the sleeve of her gown.

"What do you want me to do, MaNtusi?" he asks.

"I just want to live a normal life. I don't want to go back to your mother's house, I want to work and raise my son, even if he's blind forever, I want him to have a good life."

"You have to go to my mother's house. There's no way around it. About your own house, we'll talk after Sunday."

"Thank you," she says with a sigh of relief.

"There's something else I'd like to address," he says.

Nothile looks at him curiously. She knows that he's

going to ask her permission any day, but she's not looking forward to that day.

"You and Nomkhosi," he says.

Deep breath! She's no longer angry at her, even though she can't consider her a friend, but she's accepted that Nomkhosi is a part of her life and there's nothing she can do about it.

"What about me and her?" she asks.

"What are you up to? Precious has been telling me about your private meetings and visits."

Okay, wait a minute...

"Who is Precious?" she asks with a frown.

He really shouldn't have mentioned names. How does he get out of this now?

"Manqele, who is Precious? Why is she talking about me and Nomkhosi?" Now she's furious. Did he go from Nomkhosi to Precious? What the hell is going on?

"I didn't say she was talking about..." Liar! He's onto some shady nonsense again.

“What are you doing?” he asks her as she scrolls down her phone.

It’s quite obvious that she’s making a call.

“MaNtusi...” Nomkhosi’s voice on loudspeaker cuts him short.

Nothile: Where are you?

Nomkhosi: Did you see the time? I’m still in bed.

Nothile: Do you know anyone by the name of Precious?

Nomkhosi: Ummm, no. I only know the one who’s working at our reception.

Nothile: I’m sure it’s her who’s been talking about us. You need to check her.

Nomkhosi: Say you’re joking! She was questioning me yesterday, asking who I was meeting with and all those things.

Nothile: (Looks at Thakasa) She’s a hired spy, your babydaddy knows her better, I’m sure he’s going to explain to you what business he has with that girl.

Nomkhosi: I'll be damned! I got that girl a job, are you kidding me?

The call drops. Thakasa's phone rings and he gives Nothile a look.

"You're not going to answer her?" she asks.

He sighs and puts the phone on silence. He'll deal with Nomkhosi when he gets to Waterways, knowing how she is, there's drama waiting for him. They've been doing so well since Phelo was born, this is going to take them a step back.

"Why are you doing this? I didn't hire anyone to be a spy."

"I don't care, she has our names in her mouth and I don't even know her. You're messy!"

Well, he has to own up to that, even though it's Precious who kept feeding him information he didn't ask for.

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KHANYO

I haven't had any undesirable dreams in a while. In fact, I haven't been that spiritually committed after the ceremony of thanking the ancestors. I've been dealing with other personal issues; Bandla's cheating, Mandulo's babymama drama and Gugu's pregnancy.

But last night I was taken back to my world of spirituality. However, it left me confused and frightened. I don't know Bandla's father, not even from a picture, but the man I saw in my dream had a resemblance of Bandla and looked like a Nazaretine, with a bushy beard and kept afro hair. He was doing laundry in the middle of a running river. There's something unsettling about it. Then I had another scene of someone cutting Thakasa's hair. I know that hair symbolizes strength and cutting is prohibited in their church. So, I woke up today and went to pray by the river before speaking to anyone. It wasn't one of my powerful prayers, something was lacking and I just couldn't pull up.

Maybe I needed to pray with Bandla, whom I suspect these dreams are linked to. That's why I'm here, in his house, waiting for him to come back from work.

I'm not in a good mood but I made an effort. I made cottage pies, sticky wings and chakalaka for dinner. His closet was messy, I did his laundry and sorted it out. I hardly spoil him and make him feel like a black man in a relationship.

He walks into the room in the middle of my meditating session. I don't know what he thinks I'm doing, he switches off my music, Alexis Ffrench-Radiate.

"What are you mourning for?" he asks, throwing his bag on the table.

I heave a sigh and open my eyes.

"I was meditating," I tell him.

"Oh," he says with a confused look on his face. It doesn't ring a bell.

"Next time you shouldn't disturb me." I stand up and

fold the blanket I was sitting on.

“How was your day?” I ask.

“It went from bad to good when I walked into this beautiful face.” He comes to me and peck my lips.

“You didn’t tell me you were coming. And it smells nice in here, what did you cook?”

“I come and go as I please, you said this is my house.” He chuckles and kisses my cheek.

“Of course, it’s your house sthandwa sami,” he says.

“I made pies and wings. Take a shower, I’ll dish up and then we’re going to pray together.”

“Is everything okay?” He cups my face and searches through my eyes.

“I had weird dreams. Did your father have a scar over his left eye?” I ask.

He frowns, “Yes, he had an accident at work.”

Phewww!

“Is your brother okay, the eldest one?” I ask.

“Yes, he’s okay. What did you dream of?”

“Someone was cutting his hair. I don’t think it’s a good thing. I also saw a man that I think is your father doing laundry. We need to pray, for you and your siblings.”

Family means a lot to him. I see his face transforming into fear within a snap of a finger. My dreams are never inaccurate, but this time I wish they’re wrong. I don’t want to see him in pain, ever.

After dishing up and leaving his food on the table, I go to the guest bedroom I cleared for today’s prayer session. I lay a leopard kanga on the floor and place a glass of water with R1 inside at the centre. I’m not looking forward to it, something is lacking and I cannot put my finger on it. But I’m going to try for his sake.

I close the door and pray for power and clarity. Something has to come up, I don’t know what, but I cannot have Nyezi’s story repeats itself. I didn’t sign up for failure and heartache. I want to help people.

“Babe?” his voice catches me off guard.

I open my eyes and look at the door. He’s done eating already?

He takes his sandals off at the door and walks in.

“Did you even eat?” I ask him.

“No.” He’s already broken before he even get clarification of what’s going on.

“It was just a dream and we’re going to pray about it.”

He nods and kneels next to me. I hold his hand and give him a smile, hoping he’ll loosen up a little bit.

“I brought candles, for you and all your siblings. Six, did I count right?” I ask.

“Yes,” he nods.

“I thought I counted wrong. Your mother really loved the labor ward.” The joke goes above his head. Sigh!

I open a packet of candles and hand them to him.

“We’re going to light them and pray. Maybe your father will come to one of you and give clarity.”

I cover my shoulders with a white garment and open the Bible. They say you let Him lead your prayer, you don't pray and leave Him behind.

"2 Corinthians 4:6 read as follows; God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the one who has shone our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Christ. Amen."

"Amen," he says and inhales sharply.

I love him for the respect he shows for who I am and what I believe in.

"I love you. Please light each of them so that we can pray," I say.

"In a sequence?" he asks.

"Yes, from your eldest sibling to the youngest one."

"Phethy and Sqalo are twins." He's smiling, even though he doesn't let it crack out fully.

"In your head Phethy is the last one, so?" I say with an eye-roll.

He chuckles, "Yeah, she's a family pet."

I think that family pet is now a wild animal there in Johannesburg. She's going to surprise them, I wish she comes back as an inspiring rapper, we don't have many female rappers in SA.

He lights the candles from his left- Thakasa, to his right- down to Phethile.

"Dear Lord, as the events of the day and those of our dreams continue to unfold, we seek your clarity and protection. Come fully into our situation, as families and individuals. Sort out our muddled feelings and fearful thoughts. Translate our dreams and pleadings, and may we understand your faithful response. In the power and the glory!" After opening we both pray together, from our hearts to our Creator, in our languages. With my eyes closed I find his hand and hold it. He's going to need me.

Tough days are coming.

"Nokukhanya!"

There's a problem, I open my eyes and look at him.

“One candle fell. Does it mean anything?” He’s panicking and picking it up.

“No, it must’ve been the tiles,” I don’t know what I’m saying, all I know is that I have to keep him calm.

He strikes the match and lights it again. He drops wax on the floor and glue it down.

The candle wick burns and crackles as if someone dropped water on it. Within a second it has doused out. It’s the second one from right, I feel a knot sitting below my stomach.

“Is something wrong?” he asks.

Yes, something is terribly wrong.

“I think it’s because I bought them from the tuckshop. Maybe they expired.” He fixes his narrowed eyes on me. I don’t know what’s going on but I know that a dark cloud is hovering over his family and he cannot handle it.

“Let’s pray,” I say.

“No. I... I...want to...to...know what’s going on Khanyo. You...you...went to Tanzania and immersed in... in the

river a...as..a clairvoyant, sangoma and nyanga. It's your job to define these things and tell me."

He needs to breathe, shouting and stuttering at me is not going to solve anything. If I say we need to pray, then we need to pray, periodt!

"Close your eyes Bandlalami," I say calmly and hold his hand.

He releases a sigh, bows his head and closes his eyes.

Dear God....

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 52

BANDLA

He still doesn't know what's going on, so he's on his knees every evening and every morning, praying for his family and Khanyo. They cannot go through what they went through with Nyezi again. She feels responsible to help, yet she doesn't have power because no clarity has been unveiled to her. She's isolated herself, to be with her spirit, and commenced a two days fasting.

Even though things aren't smooth, Sunday there's a ritual thing happening and he wants Sqalo to have his car before the day. Phethy won't be coming home, which has worked on his favor because it would've been chaotic when he gives only Sqalo a car. It sounds unfair but he really doesn't see the need to gift an 18 year old girl with a car. She's in another province, God knows what she'd get up to with a car under her name. It's risky, and in terms of

responsibility Sqalo has more maturity and understands life better. He did his license right after matric, searched for a place on his own and bought furniture by himself. You give him money and he gets things done in a snap. With Phethy it's different, she chowed registration fee and claimed that she got mugged in JHB CBD. Thakasa had to deposit it directly into the institution's account because she ended up creating too many stories. She's now 'thee girl' on Instagram and slaying with the ridiculous allowance that Thakasa gives her monthly.

He got him a blue VW Polo gummy-bear that he's convinced Sqalo will love. It's a great car to start off with, him and the other two had second-hand cars as their first cars and they got them after reaching 21. Hopefully he'll be grateful and they'd finally leave everything behind. Out of 5 siblings, he always had a soft spot for Sqalo. Not only do they look alike, but he could relate to his struggles within the family as well. Phethy has always overshadowed him, just like he felt overshadowed by Mawande. So he

understood when Sqalo wanted to have a distant relationship with Phethy because everything was always about her. They fought about everything, even friends, Phethy would take his friends and become the apple of everyone's eye as usual.

He's moved out of his Berea flat to Barcelona flats on Playfair road. Apparently, other tenants weren't comfortable living with his type and laid a couple of complaints before issuing threats. It's not clear how they made other tenants uncomfortable but Bandla is going to have that conversation with him, hopefully they'll get along.

Sqalo opens the door after a persistent knock and exclaims happily as he sees his brother's face.

"Heeeeeey," he throws his arms around Bandla and hugs him. His attitude seems to have changed a lot. That "hey" was damn too long, he didn't speak this way a few months ago.

"Are you good?" Bandla asks, walking in to a couple of boys wearing pink gowns and mounds of make-up.

“Yes, I’m great. I didn’t think you’d come up. Meet my friends,” Sqalo introduces each one of them. Their names sounds a bit ridiculous. Vusiminaj? What’s that?

“Have you packed?” Bandla asks him, shifting his eyes away from a group of Vusiminajs.

“Yes, but you’re not sitting down and having a drink before we go?”

He shakes his head, “No.”

“Why?” Sqalo frowns.

“Because no, Sqalo.” He looks around their little lounge and sees no bookshelf.

“Where are your books?” he asks, turning his unfriendly face to him.

Sqalo sighs, “Oh my God, you think we always hang out like this? They just came to say goodbye and finally celebrate our freedom. The last couple of weeks have been torturing and scary for us.”

“Is it safe here though?” he asks.

“Yeah, we haven’t had any altercations with anyone.

Here everyone minds their business.”

He nods, a bit guilty and sad for them. Living in fear because of who you choose to sleep with must be stressful and scary.

“If another incident occurs and you don’t feel safe, don’t hesitate to call me or Thakasa or Nkonzo. I’m sure if we take it to the Metro senior-superintendent, Nyambose, he’ll come up with a solution.”

“That’s very sweet of you, thank you,” one of them says, pouting his lips.

“Pleasure,” he turns to Sqalo. “Let’s go, I want us to start somewhere.”

Sqalo picks his bag behind the couch and hugs each one of his friends.

“I’m going to call you, ntwanas,” he says, blowing them a kiss.

He’s in a better mood than he was a week after Mpilo broke up with him. He’s made new, gorgeous friends and life is all about books, having fun and

juggling all of it with different beauty online classes. If they get everything they need by end of June, they're going to open a salon together and roll some cash while getting those degrees.

Bandla is taking him to the Versailles Restaurant. Yes, he's been here before, but he was paying food out of his own pocket. He couldn't order prawn cocktail, prawns and basmati rice, herb mash potatoes and ice coffee frappe all on one day. He had to eat on a tight budget. But now his brother is here, they have a table booked and a friendly waitress at their service.

"You're only going to eat a burger?" he asks Bandla with a frown.

"Yeah, I can't see anything I like here." He's staring at the menu full of salivating food and he can't see anything he likes. God have mercy!

"Try their Ribeye steak with Madagascan green peppercorn sauce," Sqalo says.

"Madagascan green what? No, thank you."

Sqalo bursts into a fit of laughter. A few months in

Durban and he's already forgotten who he shared a womb with.

"I decided to fetch you because I really want us to talk, Sqalo," Bandla says after they've received their drinks.

"I know, I've been giving you a hard time," Sqalo says.

"It's not even about that. I got a call from Thakasa, telling me that you are living in fear because some people are not happy, or comfortable, with your sexuality. That bothered me because I was one of those people, I treated you like them and went as far as setting you up with a girl." He sighs deeply and sips his cold drink.

"I didn't know better. I've never had a homosexual sibling before, I just panicked and thought it was something I could sort out. But I ended up hurting you and losing you. So, I'm sorry, from the deepest of my heart I apologize for what I put you through. I'd never hurt you on purpose, you know I look out for you and care. We are brothers," he says.

Sqalo takes a deep breath, picks a serviette and

presses it on his eyes.

“I really didn’t mean....” He stops him with a little chuckle.

“I’m not crying because you hurt me, but because I’ve been punishing you for such a long time even though I knew that you did what you did because you were scared. And you were scared because you love me. Shit could’ve happened. I just got away because it all happened while bhuti was going through his own rough patch. He didn’t have the energy to fight me. I know where you came from and I appreciate you for being the sweetest one.” He picks his glass, sips his ice coffee frappe with a straw and clears his throat dramatically.

“But you get it now, right? I don’t do fish sandwich, I do sausages.”

Bandla frowns and coughs.

“Whoah, hold it right there. I’m 30, you’re 18, I don’t want to hear anything about your sex life and sausages. Hha, hhayi-bo!”

Sqalo laughs and changes the subject. He’s never

apologized to Khanyo about what he did when Bandla tried to introduce them at the hotel.

“How is my sister-in-law?” he asks, quoting ‘in-law’ with his fingers and digging into his prawns.

“She’s fine,” Bandla says with a sigh.

“I know her and I have never sat down and talked. She has a different picture of me, I called her a prostitute and I’ve never apologized for it. I was angry at you, it was wrong of me to insult her that way. If you can get us to sit down one day I’d like to apologize to her in person and get to know her better.”

Bandla’s lips crack into a smile. It never bothered him because Khanyo was a bigger person about it, but he’s happy that they’re both ready to move forward.

“She’s a good cook. A bit crazy at times. But she’s a really good person, once you get to know her you’ll surely love her,” he says.

“I’m sure I will. You’re glowing a little bit, that means you’re in soft hands,” Sqalo.

“Soft hands, yeah, sometimes. I actually want you to sleep over my house, I have something for you, and I want us to have something like a prayer with her.”

“A prayer?” Sqalo frowns.

“It’s not about you being gay. There are some other things we need to pray about, you church drop-out. Your well-being, protection, school and family.”

Sqalo laughs at the ‘church drop-out and defends himself. It hasn’t been easy adjusting to life, he had to let a lot of things go, his mother included.

“How is Mom?” he asks.

Bandla sighs, “She’s good and happy with Mawande home.”

“Must be nice,” Sqalo taps his fingers for the waitress. “Can I have a glass of water, please.”

Oh, well....

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MAWANDE

Sqalo is home, driving in and out in his new car, and calling old schoolmates to show off. Everyone seems to be happy without MaKhumalo home. She'll be back on Saturday with some of her relatives to welcome MaNtusi back to the family. It's "uchakide uhlolile, imamba yelukile" situation. Mawande is frying 3kg potatoes in the kitchen and singing loudly in the kitchen.

"Hey, what's this?"

Oh shucks, this one didn't go to Waterways, he's here spoiling all the fun of being home without a mother.

"I'll throw it out," Mawande says.

"Your phone has been ringing nonstop," he tells her before walking away.

It must be Pearl. Their friendship has gotten tighter over the months. She clears dirt on the table and throws it out before Thakasa calls MaKhumalo and tells her that her house has been turned into a dump.

She joins her siblings in the lounge and scrolls down to check all the calls and messages she missed. None comes from Pearl, it's "General" who's been calling.

"Your in-laws want you back?" Nkonzo asks, sitting with Tema in his arm.

"Ummm, no." Oh Lord, she's being awkward about it. There's this unsettling text that says: CHECK DOWN THE ROAD.

What does Bhambatha mean she should check down the road? He couldn't have possibly come here because that would make things worse than they already are.

"When is Phelo coming home?" Bandla asks.

"I don't know. Her mother and I aren't talking," Thakasa says with a shrug.

"Why?" Nkonzo asks with a frown.

"It's a long story." That's all he's going to give them and they know it. He takes out his

phone, they strike another conversation.

Mawande's phone rings again. She silences it and looks at her brothers with her eyes widened. She's never been sneaky in her life. Bhambatha is really testing her brothers! He's parked down the road for what? Who does that?

"I'm going to the tuckshop to buy airtime. I want to call Pearl back."

Thakasa frowns, "You're walking to the shop for airtime? Can't you buy through the bank?"

"Let me top you up, my broke sister," Nkonzo says, pulling out his phone.

Mawande gasps, "No, no, no! I want to stretch my legs, really, it's okay."

They look at one another, confused.

"Oh, okay, then go stretch your legs," Nkonzo says.

Phewww! She's never been so freaked out by a man like this. It feels like she's a naughty 16 year-old girl.

She keeps her fries in the microwave, empties the cooked oil into a bottle and leaves the pan inside the

sink.

Changing her dress, really? Deep breath Mawande. She checks her face on the mirror and ties a scarf around her head. He's still her brother-in-law, if anyone catches her sitting in his car with no head-wrap they'll assume the worst. She sprays Lady Million around her neck and under arms.

"Okay, focus Mawande," she says to herself, patting her shoulders. She snatches her purse, takes a R20 note and heads out of the house.

His carbon black X6 is parked down the road, just two homesteads away from the Manqueles, which is eyebrow-raising on its own. He's playing Nathi's favorite Black Coffee album; Africa Rising.

When Mawande walks towards the car he turns down the music and climbs out to open the door for her. She's not pleased by his presence at all, it shows on her face.

“Sawubona,” he greets her.

“Hi Bhambatha.” She’s staring outside the window.

“Sibangani?” he asks. (What are we fighting about)

“Nothing. Why are you here?” Mawande says, turning her face to him. He has shaven his head bald and trimmed his beard shorter. He looks different, more like he’s miraculously matured over a single week.

“I’m here because you are here. Why are you here?” he asks her.

Sigh!

“I’m visiting my family. I told you before I left and I notified the family when I got here,” she says.

“You left because we kissed. So our kiss is the reason why my brother’s house is locked.”

She exhales and leans back on the seat. They talked about this. He was part of the reason why she left but it’s not deep as he now makes it sound.

“I don’t want to be the reason why my brother's house crumble down. You’re hurting me.” Mawande looks at him, he looks dead serious.

“I cannot deny that I feel something for you. If I had the life remote in my hand, I’d flip through the channels and switch my life around to become a potential man you can continue your life with. But I know why you’re running for the hills, anyone would.”

“What do you mean?” Her voice comes out in almost -whisper.

“I tried to sit down with Ma, but it didn’t work out. I don’t have the qualities.” He grins and shrugs his shoulders. He’s used to rejection and criticism, but lately it’s been stinging and cutting deeply in his heart.

“You don’t have qualities? Bhambatha, I’m not a job post or a prize to be won.”

“That’s not what I was trying to say at all,” he says apologetically.

“You didn’t go to your mother to apply for a competition? I’m a prize to be won, right? Because your brother paid lobola now all of you can take turns with me.”

“Mawande, that’s not....”

“What is it that makes one qualifies as my new husband? What are the qualities? What was your motivation speech?”

He sighs and rests his head back on his flattened palms against the seat.

“Don’t you think I deserve to have a voice to at least mention what kind of a man I want when I’m ready to have another husband? You think it’s all lies in your mother?”

“Mawande, I simply asked her what I can do to become a better son, a better brother and a better future-husband, and she said ‘nothing’.”

She throws her hands up, “You’re here because you think I left because of the stupid kiss. Okay, yes I left because of it, so what? You shouldn’t have kissed me. You were supposed to be my General, not Prince Charming who kisses me in the middle of the conversation.”

“I understand that and....”

“You were supposed to stay away from me after that because I told you I didn’t know if I’d be able to stop

that from happening again in future. But you are here wearing Hawaiian shirts, tattered jeans and....”

“They’re not tattered, they’re stylishly ripped,” he says.

“I don’t care, you are here wearing Hawaiian shirts, tattered jeans and looking like a potato, just to test me,” she says.

He cracks into laughter. He’s had his fair share of women, but he’s never been called a potato for shaving his head clean.

“I’m trying not to look at you as anything more or less than a brother-in-law. But you’re not making things easy, I had to sneak out like a little girl. For what? For what, Bhambatha?”

He snatches her waving hand and pulls her closer. The space between them closes as their foreheads link.

“I don’t have an answer. I don’t know for what, all I know is that I’ve terribly missed you so much. I understand why we can’t be around each other, but then again, it’s not what my heart and body want.”

She takes a deep, long breath. Talking too much is not who she is. This whole thing is frustrating, she prays about it everyday.

"I'm scared," she whispers.

"Don't be. I'm here for you, always going to be, regardless of how things turn out." His lips tenderly brush against her. He inhales her scent, looks up in her eyes and they lock with hers in a brief stare before he shuts them and sucks her lip slowly.

His hand brushes behind her neck, he's moaning softly and trying to capture her lips from every angle.

She breaks off, breathing heavily and buries her face with her hands. She's done it again! They're kissing, not accidental now, but on purpose. This is fucked up.

"I think I've fallen in love with you, in a very hard way," he says.

She looks at him with her heart pounding hard against her chest.

"That's ... I don't know what to say...I knew, I

mean...God, Bhambatha, you didn't have to say it. How do you expect me to react?"

"Just say when I should pick you up for dinner and where do you want us to go. I promise, I won't show up in tattered jeans."

She laughs, "They're not tattered, I apologize."

"You hurt my feelings, so what time? You're making up for it."

"If I'm able to come up with a story to my brothers, it'll be 4:30pm. Gosh, I hate sneaking out and lying!"

"I'll make it worth all your efforts," he says.

Her eyes drop to his jean. Okay, that's one sensitive, impatient dipstick. Always ready to stand up and say 'hello' to anyone that rubs skin with daddy.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 53

BHAMBATHA

Stanger is a very confusing town, you just don't know what's going on with anything. Its U-Save looks like a developing Pakistan tuck-shop. He wasn't even sure they'd find a decent restaurant. He expected some Curry & Rice thing with wooden desks and sweaty, Indian woman running around and shouting at waitresses. There are a lot of Indians in this town. They're street vendors, hawkers, taxi drivers and robbers.

"Have you never been to Stanger before?" Mawande asks as they settle on their seats inside Mozambik.

"I have, just not for restaurants," he says.

"Oh, what have you been here for then?" she asks.

"Heists," he says.

Yeah, right? She grabs the menu and pages it through. This is who she goes to secret dinners with?

They've never talked about his lifestyle or past, she just chose to trust him not to do anything while she's around.

"Mawande, are you okay?" he asks, lowering his eyes trying to read her face.

She sighs, "Yes. So what are you eating?"

"The peanuts they gave us," he throws them in his mouth and stares at her as she takes a deep breath.

"I'm talking about food. What are you ordering?"

"Whatever you're having," he says, shifting his eyes to the packet of peanuts they received at the entrance.

"Alright, I'm having stuffed green olives, grilled calamari tubes and tentacles with chicken livers."

Wait, can't she choose a chicken? He saw chicken on the menu.

"I don't want tubes and testicles. I want chicken and dumpling."

Did he just say tubes and testicles instead of calamari tubes and tentacles?

“This is Mozambik, not some food-shelter in the rank. They don’t serve dumplings,” she says in a lowered voice.

“Fine, I want rice,” he says.

“Coconut rice?”

“No, rice-rice.”

Sigh!

“You’re so hard to eat with.” She’s laughing and shaking her head. Nyezi was very sophisticated and classy. He’d take her out and buy her food she’s never even seen on TV. With this one it’s like taking a village boy to the restaurant for the first time, yet he has all the money in the world. He even owns a semi-restaurant Shisanyama.

“How is business?” Mawande asks after placing their orders.

“Shisanyama is doing better than I expected. Some are slacking, some are pulling up, but it’s all good.”

“You’re doing pretty amazing for yourself. Your mother must be proud of you. I’m sure she is, but

she just won't tell you."

He chuckles, "You're a good person. I love that about you."

"What do you love about yourself?" she asks him.

It's a difficult question, he doesn't know how to answer it.

"You don't know?" she asks.

"Na, I don't. What do you love about me?"

"You're protective, you speak your mind and do what makes you happy."

He's blushing.

"What I don't like about you is how you talk," she says.

The grin on his face disappears.

"How do I talk?" he asks.

"You curse a lot, you argue and raise your voice at your mother."

"But she pushes me to do so," he says defensively.

“You’re failing the first principle of being a black child. Never raise your voice at your parent. In her eyes you’re always going to be a child. And she has every right to be mad at you for the choices you’ve made in life. No mother wants to see her son go to jail, especially after she’s sent you to university and raised you well. It must be heartbreaking, she must be questioning herself as well. Where did she go wrong? You had all doors opened but you chose not to enter a single one.”

He’s getting worked up, “Are you judging me right now?”

“I’m saying I want you to show your mother that you’re sorry and you want to be part of the family. I know you think she doesn’t care, but she does. That’s why she can talk crap about you, but as soon as someone else tries to talk about you she strikes. You laid in her womb for 9 months, she had only two kids and now only one left.”

He chuckles in disbelief.

“My mom has never defended me from anyone, not

even my uncles who think their children are better than me," he says.

"Why do you think her and MaNtanzi are no longer friends?"

Well, he's never been interested in his mother's friends and enemies. Who is even MaNtanzi?

He shrugs his shoulders.

"MaNtanzi kept talking about you at the temple and spreading rumors about you. There was a huge fight, everyone was talking about it."

"Verbal fight, right?" he asks.

"No, physical fight. Mkhokheli had to sit them down and talk to both of them. But it was too late for their friendship to be rekindled."

A knot sits below his stomach. His mother is all things but she's not ratchet. She's a very well-behaved, respected woman in the community. His father must've turned in his grave when all that happened.

"That breaks my heart because I don't give two fucks

about what people say or think of me.”

Lord, that language! Can't he say he doesn't care in a normal way.

“But your mother cares, you're her son,” Mawande says.

He releases a deep sigh and pushes back his chair.

“I need a moment.” He walks out through the restaurant balcony door and stands outside for fresh air.

Maybe she took it too far. Now she doesn't know whether to follow and check how he is, or wait for him to come back.

Their food arrives, it took long enough.

“Finally, I thought you guys were still waiting for stock because wow,” she says, grabbing wrapped fork and tearing the stupid serviette off.

“We are sorry, mam,” says the waitress apologetically.

She's taking out her frustrations on a wrong person.

"It's good, thank you." She heaves a sigh and puts down the fork. She cannot eat not knowing what's going on with him.

Just as she pushes back the chair, he walks back in. Relief washes all over her. Painting him as a bad son wasn't her intention, she just wants to see him and his mother doing better. Nyezi would've wanted that too; his family to be united.

"Are you okay?" she asks him, trying to read his face.

"I smoked, I'm good." He pulls his plate and indulges into his food. He looks up, studies her face and exhales heavily.

"I smoke and drink. I've been into it for years, I don't think that part of my life can change. I can never be Nyezi, but I can try to step up and be a kind of a man you can be proud of. I love your company, your smile, your eyes and everything. I'm not proud of it because you're my sister-in-law, but I cannot control my feelings."

Her eyes drop to the table. It's been a year since

Nyezi passed on. He told her to be happy and go wherever she wants to go in the world. But she cannot help the questions in her head. Would he be happy to know that she wants to be happy with his brother?

“Where do I stand?” he asks.

She blushes, “With what?”

“Mawande, now you want me to go back to the 90s and ask if ‘uyangifaka noma uyangikhipha?’” His hand goes over the table and holds hers. He doesn’t look like the type that holds hands, his nervous smile looks weird.

“We are going to take it slowly. I’m not trying to step into my brother’s shoes, I’ll let you find yourself and be independent outside marriage. If you want me to step back, I will.”

“You don’t look like someone who steps back easily.”

He chuckles, “Guilty as charged. But I’ll treat you like a queen and take care of you. Instead of asking me to step back, you’d be begging me to stay with you.”

She throws her head back and laughs.

“Beg you?” she asks.

“Mawande,” he clears his throat and takes a sip from his glass. “Mbhemu here knows all tricks of the trade.”

“Who is mbhemu?” she asks in a lowered voice.

He smiles and bites his bottom lip. Gadzooks! She picks her glass and sips shyly.

“When are you going to say hello to him?” he asks with a smirk.

“Bhambatha, your food is drying up. Tell mbhemu I sent my regards,” she says, shifting her focus to her plate.

He cracks into laughter and eats his food as well.

This is definitely going somewhere and he’s excited to see how it turns out. However, he needs to see his mother and try to talk, again. Hearing that she cut off a friend because of him really shifted something in his heart. She’s the last person in the world to defend him, or so he thought.

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THAKASA

MaNtusi finally came back home. She didn't come alone, her uncles and aunts were accompanying her. They made sure to choose the skinniest cows in the farm. You couldn't tell if their goats are sick or hungry, they looked so unhealthy and fragile. It was all done on purpose and Thakasa wanted to kick them out with their stupid animals. But Nkonzo quickly reminded him why it was all happening. It was never about cows and goats, they are not desperate for all that, they can buy cows if they want them, it was all for Londa.

So now everyone knows about Nothile's infidelity, they were here, feasting on the cow that was slaughtered to appease the ancestors for her cheating. She didn't just lose everyone's respect, everyone makes faces and whispers when they see

her. Yet, Thakasa is walking around with a daughter that he got outside their marriage in his arm happily and everyone cannot stop complimenting them. Father of the year! Nobody cares if he cheated or not. It's her cheating that has turned scandalous and publicly.

On top of that, he wants a family meeting tomorrow. Everyone knows what that is about. Even if she still wished to argue the idea, now she's lost all that power.

Honestly, she doesn't know how long she's going to stay in this place. Mawande is trying her best to make her feel back at home, but things are just too different.

She puts Londa in bed, tomorrow before the meeting Thakasa will take him to some prominent members of the temple for a prayer. He's not that bad with him, but he's not loving as he is to Phelo. This is why she wants him to agree to Mandulo fully claiming Londa as his son. He's been very calm here at the

Manqeles, even laughed when Mawande poked his cheeks. But the fact is, he's not one of them and she doesn't want him to be. He's a Nyathi.

She's pacing around the bedroom that she knows Thakasa will not use tonight. There's no divorce, not in their type of marriage, but it can definitely end. She's married to this man, that won't change, but she doesn't see how they're going to move on from this one. Love has ended, both their hearts are in tatters. He hurt her and she hurt him back, 50/50.

Thakasa walks in, closes the door behind him because it's a bit windy outside, and unbuttons his shirt.

"Is he asleep?" he asks, looking at Londa.

"Yes," she nods with a sigh.

"Why don't you let Mawande keep him for the night? Phelo is not sleeping here as well, we need to talk and I don't think you know how to do that healthily."

"No!" she says.

“No to what?” He raises his eyebrow.

“He’s not sleeping with Mawande,” she says.

“So you’re going to treat him differently? I thought we were sorting out that mess today.”

“No, Manqele. Where are you going to sleep?”

He frowns, “Here, in my bed.”

“What about me?” she asks.

“We are still married MaNtusi. We’ve shared a bed for 6 years. It doesn’t mean we’re going to be intimate, unless if you want to go and share a room with MaKhumalo.”

“Whoah, no ways!” They both laugh, unexpectedly, and it becomes very awkward.

He takes his shoes off and sits on bed, careful not to wake the baby up.

“MaNtusi,” he says.

She looks at him with her breath held in her chest.

“I’m not leaving you. Are you leaving me?” This is the question that’s been hanging over their heads

silently the whole day.

She feels her chest tightens. What a question! She sits next to him and takes a deep sigh.

“I don’t want to be here. Families got involved, things will never be the same. My family hate you and yours hate me, it’s a mess!”

“I don’t remember asking your family to marry me, so I don’t care if they still love me or not. I care about your feelings. I know that we hurt each other, but I still say what I said to you 6years ago. Only death can do me apart from you.”

“What about Londa? Are you going to let him be with his rightful ancestors?” she asks.

“There’s nothing like that. Your kids’ rightful ancestors are here.”

She sighs, “Manqele, you know there’s something you can do.”

“I don’t want to do it. Londa is safe here, with us. Mandulo, or whoever his name is, must go find a single woman to impregnate.”

Lord, this is not going anywhere!

“Okay then, you’re going to build us our own house, as your aunts advised you.”

“I will do that. In fact, I wanted us to look at these houses and see if.....”

“No, I’m not done,” she says, pushing his phone away.

“If Londa remains your son by fire, by force, then you cannot take a second wife.”

His face flushes up. Whaaat?!

“You can, but you won’t have my blessing,” she clarifies.

“That’s Sphephelo’s mother, not just anyone,” he says with a frown.

“And that’s Londa’s father, not just anyone!” she says.

“I don’t know that idiot and I have no interest in doing so. I’m trying to keep my cool, but you are pushing me to lose my temper.”

“Exactly how I use to feel when you brought Nomkhosi up. The difference is, I’m not in love with

him. He's got a life of his own, kids and a girlfriend. I'm willing to let you marry the love of your life, only if you let Mandulo do right by his son. I know culture, I'm not saying you're a monster, I'm simply asking you a favor as someone you hurt and claim to love. As someone who's willing to live her whole life in a loveless marriage and watch her husband wed another woman."

He shuts his eyes and inhales a deep sigh from the bottom of his lungs.

"I love you, MaNtusi," he says.

"What about her?" she asks.

"Honestly, I love both of you."

Tears flood her face. He holds her hand and squeezes it.

"I don't have a reason to lie. I can't let you go, ngiyakuthanda. You're my wife, my first true-love, my smile-keeper."

"You don't smile though," she says, wiping tears.

"My heart do smile. When I come home to you

watching that stupid Indian channel with your ears blocked, my heart smiles. I hate your trips, especially when you want me to swim, but I badly miss them when you don't plan any. I love it when you open your eyes in the morning and check if I'm still asleep, then you slip out of bed slowly if you think I'm still asleep. I love how you smell after taking a bath, I love your thick thighs and full breasts. I love your smile, I love your food, I love your obsession with earrings. Things may have happened but I still love you. I still want to spend the rest of my life with you."

She's happy to hear this, but she's not sure about the future.

"Manqele, do you remember how you were after finding her? You don't know how to be a man to two people equally," she says.

"Things are different now. I promise you, we are going to communicate more. If we have to, monthly we'll have a family meeting and talk openly about anything concerning the family."

She sighs, "You guys already planned this, didn't

you?”

“No, she doesn’t know.”

“Huh?” Nothile frowns.

“I’m going to talk to her tomorrow morning, we are not on speaking terms following that Precious thing.”

“Are you sleeping with Precious?” she asks.

“MaNtusi, how can you ask me that question? I’m not the most honest man on earth, but I don’t go around sleeping with anyone in a skirt.”

She shrugs her shoulders, “I was just asking.”

“So what are you saying about having a sister?”

“Okay, go ahead with your plans. She’s the mother of your child and I’m not.”

“You’re Phelo’s mother as well. And you’re still going to give me children, right?”

“I failed to do so for 6 years, why would I succeed now?”

“That attitude is what brought us here today. Please

don't go there again, we are going to have more children together. And if we don't, we have each other. I love you, my wife, okay?"

She nods, "I love you too."

He smiles, not just with his heart, it spreads on his face as well.

"So where are the houses?" she asks.

"Oh, the houses...."

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 54

KHANYO

I woke up from my eventful nap and called him. He said there were things he needed to do, some of his relatives haven't left so he needs to be home to help out. It's just a day after they welcomed his brother's wife back home. But I took no excuses, I made it sound urgent- not that I lied- but now that he's here I cannot bring myself to break it to him.

I hug him, that's all I can do. I'm not God, I can help where I can, but His word is final. What I know is that I can give this one strength, hopefully Tema can be there for Nkonzo as well, because Thakasa will need them moving forward. He's ran out of strength, a thin string that he held on to keep this family together will break soon. He'll want to hand over the ropes and grovel into a dark place. More than anyone, he'll be destructed because he's endorsed himself as everyone's superman.

“Babe, what’s going on?” Bandla asks, looking at the white garment I’m wearing. I probably should take it off since I’m done praying, before ideas of comforting him alternatively strike my mind.

“I just wanted to see you.” I cannot control how strained my voice sounds.

He’s annoyed, but because it’s me he cannot express it.

“But Khanyo I told you we were busy at home. Now they’ll think I’m dodging work or being disrespectful.”

“Are you hungry?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says, too quickly for my comprehension.

“I’m talking about FOOD,” I clarify.

He smiles. My heart melts. I know I won’t be seeing this cheerful face for a few coming weeks, so I’m going to enjoy it while it lasts.

“You’re handsome,” I say.

He frowns, “Don’t say that, I’m a man, not a girl who just bought new leggings.”

“A handsome man, that’s what I’m saying, not disputing your gender.”

He’s trying not to blush but the twinkle in his eyes sells him off. This gender loves things too. They want to be complimented, cuddled like bears and massaged. They just don’t have the guts to admit it.

“Do you want a foot massage? I know you’ve been on your feet since yesterday?” I ask.

“Yes, I do. But why are you so nice?” He frowns, although he looks very much amused.

“I’m always nice. Take your clothes off, all of them, and lie in bed. I’ll get my Arnica oil from the bag.”

“Please don’t kill me, I made a mistake,” he says.

I don’t whether to laugh or cry. He really think I’d use massage oil to kill his cheating ass while there are so many knives lying in the kitchen.

“Take your clothes off and lie in bed, Bandlalethu,” I say.

He smiles and unbuttons his shirt. I think he likes how I sound when I’m irritated.

I change into a midi dress and get the massage oil. My mind cannot get over that dream. I told Sqalo not to respond, but I guess his father's voice was louder than mine.

He called him twice; "Sqalosamathonga."

My heart leapt to my throat. I believe that he could've sorted out his relationship with his mother, even though she's already breathed so many hurtful words towards him in the presence of the ancestors. Once your mother says "iyangihlupha le ngane", your life is likely to crumble down. It's a curse in disguise, everyone knows it, but our mothers let their emotions speak before weighing the consequences. Manqele doesn't want anyone to bother his wife. Thakasa was able to mend things with her while he still had time, even though he wasn't aware of it.

Now the old man is furious.

I cried as soon as I heard his voice.

"Sqalo don't respond," I said.

But he called his name again, “Sqalosamathonga!”

I heard his voice, deep in my sleep, responding to his father.

“Baba,” he answered.

I woke up covered in sweat with my heart pounding hard against my chest.

I prayed for him, the little boy whose only disrespect to his mother was to be sexually attracted to the same gender.

But there was nothing I could do- umbizile ubaba wakhe, wasabela.

Bandla kneels next to me with a bottle of water. He’s butt-naked, as I instructed before emotions got better of me.

My hands are shaking uncontrollably. I cannot do this, I thought I was strong but I’m not.

“Nokukhanya, why are you crying?” He’s scared.

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THAKASA

He called her, she didn't pick up, as he'd expected. So he sent her a text that got blue-ticked, but he still drove to Waterways anyway. He knows how dramatic she can be when provoked, and he realizes his mistake of associating himself with Precious, but now they need to talk. Real talk that he's been dreading since the day he first realized that what he has for her is not something he can get rid of.

He opens the balcony door and windows for fresh air, and keeps the pizza he bought inside the fridge while he waits nervously for her.

She hasn't responded but he knows she'll come. Even if she won't talk to him, or accept his apology, but she'll come out of respect.

Indeed, a car pulls up half an hour later. His palms start sweating, this is the moment!

Heels click on the tiles as she struts in with an inhospitable look on her face.

“Where is my daughter?” she asks, looking around for Phelo. She’ll be damned if this man came all this way without their daughter- the only thing that’s linking them together.

“I left her with Mawande,” Thakasa says.

“Oh, then why am I here if Phelo is not around?” she asks with a frown.

He takes a deep breath, stands up and walks around the couch to where she’s standing.

He takes everything in her hands, with no amount of force, and puts it on the couch.

“Nomkhosi,” he says, holding both her hands and inhaling a sharp breath. “I miss you. I miss us, just me and you.”

“Thakasa, you came all the way from Mandeni to do this?” She’s defeated, honestly.

He places his hand on the side of her face, she responds with a deep exhalation and drops her eyes.

“You want Phelo to grow all teeth before letting me in the coochie?”

She moves his hand off her face, yanks another one off and goes to the couch to get her stuff.

“I haven’t slept with anyone in months. The last person I was with, was MaNtusi, before she left me. Angikaze ngigange, I promise you.”

Really? She rolls her eyes and pushes her purse under arm.

“I don’t care what you do with your dick, Thakasa. Just stay away from my colleagues and be a man enough to get information straight from me.”

“Okay, I’m sorry babe, I mean it.”

Nomkhosi frowns, “Babe? Hhayi-bo.”

“I love you,” he says.

As much as she’s always wanted to hear him toss these words in the air, she cannot help but wonder about the timing of it all.

“Bye Thakasa, call me when you have my daughter.” She waves her hand and walks towards the door.

His hand grabs her, she's not surprised at all, this is his style.

"So you think grabbing my..." He grabs her face and onslaughts her with a kiss. It's so sudden and unexpected, but she responds to it calmer than she must have. When his hand starts playing below her waist, she breaks the kiss and gives him a look.

"I'll only put the tip in, I just want Mthonga to feel it. Please, Maka Phelo, it hurts." He's breathing heavily and trying to pull down her skirt without undoing the zipper at the back.

"You're going to tear my skirt, and we are facing the open balcony door," she says.

She's softening up? He feels a vein pulsating on his shaft. He walks behind her, lust getting the better of him as he stares her butt. She spanks and squeezes it.

"Thakasa, stop!" A giggle escapes her throat while she's trying to be earnest as possible.

"If it was up to me you'd be modeling naked for me. I swear I'd cum before I even touch you."

She enters the bedroom and steps aside for him to walk in, then shuts the door behind them.

She hasn't lost all her pregnancy weight. Having a child changed some parts of her body that he was accustomed to. He's never seen the cellulite on her thighs, getting rid of it will take time. Her butt, that he strongly believes turns him on more than anything, have a map all over.

"Do you need help?" He's already butt-naked and massaging his beastly shaft that looks ready to commit murder.

"No, I'm good," she says.

He comes and helps her take her clothes off anyway. His hands start squeezing any part of her body they can touch. He doesn't seem to be taken back by the changes on her body.

"Do you see the damage you're doing?" he asks, pointing at his hard shaft with a grin.

She swallows and shifts her stare G from his lower

body. He starts rubbing himself against her thighs and running his tongue around her neck. She's whimpering like a sick cat, separating her legs to allow his hand full access to her coochie and letting the tingles his tongue gives her spread all over her body like electric waves.

“Ngiyakuthanda mawomntanami, uyezwa?” He's professing his love a lot lately. There was a time when she did it too and didn't get an answer she desired, but now she gets awe-struck and dumbfounded when he says it.

He pushes her to the bed, “Lala ngomhlane, ngibuke sthandwa.” (Lie on your back and let me see, love)

“See what?” she asks, snapping out of the bubble of pleasure.

“If the doctors didn't hurt my poodle,” he says with a smile.

He brings her knees up, separates her wet folds and peeps in.

“They stitched you here?” he asks, rubbing the side of her opening.

It's uncomfortable having your vagina inspected by your babydaddy. But they're adults and she's shared a bed with him more than her fingers can count.

"Yes," she says, inhaling a deep breath.

He rubs her clit with a smirk on his face, "Did they touch the main switch?"

Oh, Lord! She firmly closes her thighs.

"You're so annoying!" she laughs.

"Why are you shutting me out? I want to greet, this coochie did a great job pushing my princess out," he says.

She doesn't resist when he separates her legs again. He lies flatly on the bed with his upper body and pulls her thighs to the sides of his face.

"Hello, pussy-doll!" He rubs his whole face over her mound.

She can't help but breaks into laughter as his hairy face tingles her wet flesh.

"Stop being silly!" she playfully hits his head and opens her legs wider.

Her clit smoothly slips into his lips before a warm tongue lick sends a shock of waves throughout her body.

“Babe!” She’s unaware of her words during this heated moment.

He fully latches on her clit and labial lips and shakes his head with a low moan. He gives her a long, all-corner lick before he sucks her clit again.

She tries to smash his skull by firmly pressing her thighs over his face, trying to fight waves of pleasure threatening to unscrew all her senses.

“Thakasa, p-l-e-a-s-e. Pleaseeeee!”

He hears none of her pleadings and licks his clit like a dog trying to finish soup before other dogs see.

He’s a second late when he removes his face, he’s already a victim of heavy floods.

“Damn!” he chuckles and wipes his lips with a T-shirt.

Nomkhosi is still out of it. He turns her to sleep on her side, lies behind her and lifts her leg up for a scissor position.

He directs his furious member from behind and slowly slips it inside the hole of joy. He pulls out, takes a glance at his manhood and slips a finger inside her. It comes back moist, he licks it dry and thrusts in again.

“What are you doing?” she asks, pulling his hand around her waist.

“Just tasting if what Mthonga feels is what it tastes like,” he says.

“You’re creepy!” she says.

“You made me, so now I’m your bitch,” he says.

She giggles and shuts her eyes as he thrusts into her soft corners with passion.

He pushes her down on her stomach, lifts her hips up and doggies her. He hates this position because it always ends his game before time. But she likes it, it gets her screaming wildly.

She starts shaking her butt, he stops moving and allows her to rotate her core anyhow she likes.

“Thakasa!” she cries, lying flat on her stomach and

panting heavily.

He lifts her up again and pounds her mercilessly. Her core tightens around his shaft, he increases his pace and pins her waist down.

“No-mkho-si!” he groans out as he finally gets his release. He stays inside her for a moment, emptying every last drop inside her and catching his breath.

He pulls out and rolls over to the other side. Their eyes lock for a moment, she doesn't look like someone who just had the best sex of her life.

“How did I think I was going to live without you?” He cups her face and kisses her lips tenderly.

She bites her bottom lip and keeps her indescribable stare on him. She's fallen back into his trap again. Ndondo will be so disappointed. She's not breaking the chain, instead she's becoming his sperm dish all over again.

“MaNtusi and I talked,” he says.

They made up- expectedly so- and he's here to release himself before going back to her.

“She’s back home. We are working on our marriage, taking it one step at a time.”

She nods, “Congratulations!”

“But she’s not moving back home. We are looking at the houses, there’s one in this neighborhood that we might consider.”

She removes his arm around her and rolls off bed. She’s not even heartbroken because he’s used her again and succeeded, it’s her own stupidity and weakness that’s shatters her. She was doing so well. MaNtusi and I were in a good space, not that she’s not happy for her getting her husband back, but Thakasa keeps proving her words right. She’s not worthy!

“Why are you crying Maka Phelo?” Thakasa asks, following her to the bathroom.

She tries to slam the door on his face, but he quickly puts his arm on the frame to block it. It slams against his wrist bone, almost breaking his hand.

His painful groan stops Nomkhosi. She opens the door with her heart pounding hard against her chest,

and checks his hand.

“Are you alright?” she asks.

“Yeah.” He grimaces as her fingers rubs on wrist.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to hurt you,” she says in a fear-filled, apologetic tone.

“Maybe I deserve it,” he says.

Well, he’s right, he deserves more than a door on his wrist.

“Ngisacela ukulungisa amaphutha ami,” he says.
(Can I rectify my mistakes, please)

“How are you going to do that?” she asks.

He takes a deep breath and holds her hand. He looks into her eyes, they’re pained and moist with tears.

“You’ll never shed another tear because of me,” he says.

She raises her eyebrow.

“Ngisacela ukuba yisihlobo nabakwaNsele.” (Can I be related to the Nseles)

“You have a wife, Thakasa,” she reminds him.

“And I have you as well. I want to commit my soul, my heart and my entire life to this beautiful thing we have going on. I’m tired of playing hide and seek with you. It hurts me as much as it hurts you.”

She chuckles and shakes her head in disbelief.

“So what are you saying exactly?” she asks.

“Please marry me, become my second wife by law. I love you, I really do, I can’t even fight it.”

“If Nothile didn’t give you a chance to do this, would you have said all this?” she asks.

“Eventually, I would have said it.” His face doesn’t show much confidence. He’s not sure if he would’ve done it either.

“When was “eventually” going to be?” she asks.

“I don’t know Nomkhosi, all I know is that RIGHT NOW I want us to be family and I have a blessing in doing so. And I love you, that matters more than anything.”

She shuts her eyes and takes a deep breath.

“You cannot, Thakasa, you CANNOT have your bread buttered on both sides,” she says.

“You are not bread to me. I love you more than I can explain. That doesn’t change how I feel about MaNtusi, vice-versa. You’ve been patient with me for so long, I wasn’t the man you deserved but now I’m willing to try my best to show you how much you mean to me.” He holds her hand and looks at her, masked with fear.

“Please don’t turn me down. This day means a lot to me, I’m always going to remember it for the rest of my life. Ngiyakuthanda Maka Phelo, with all my heart.”

Deep sigh! She feels cornered, he’s not giving her a minute to process her thoughts. This isn’t just her decision alone, Ndondo and Snalo have to throw in their two cents as well. Not that she’ll listen to them anyway, but they have to say something.

“We are all going to sit down and talk. You, MaNtusi and I. How about that?” He’s desperate.

“I’ll think about it, for now I need wipe your sticky

sperms off my thighs.”

He smiles, “Why do you need to bath because I’m still going to mess you?”

“Who told you that?” she asks with an eye roll.

“Into emnandi iyaphindwa, awukwazi lokho?” Just as he attempts to touch her moist cookie, his phone rings in the bedroom.

“Thank your ancestors,” he says, spanking her and walking away.

“In your head you are Bambino,” she mutters as she proceeds inside the bathroom.

“I make you cry!” he yells.

Nomkhosi laughs, getting a towel to nurse her coochie.

Thakasa checks the caller, it was Nkonzo. What now? They can be so annoying and timeless.

He calls him back, because he’s always going to jump to their demands.

“Nkonzo ufunani?” he asks as soon as Nkonzo picks up.

“I got a call from someone, I don’t know who she is, I’m losing my mind right now.”

“Talk, what’s going on?” Thakasa asks impatiently.

“They found Sqalo in a car next Matigulu bridge, I don’t know if he fought with someone or he was involved in a car accident or if someone tried to hijack him. Bandla is almost at the scene, he’ll tell me what’s going on.”

That just doesn’t make any sense. Sqalo had classes today in Durban, he left Mandeni in the wee hours of morning. He’s not a violent person, he’s a child, his car is not flashy and he doesn’t know anyone in Matigulu.

“Okay, I’m coming,” Thakasa says, dropping the call with shaky hands.

This was his big day. It was supposed to be. He doesn’t even know how badly injured his little brother is.

Nomkhosi walks in to him dressing up, looking absent-minded and frightened.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

“I don’t know what happened to my brother.” He doesn’t explain which brother, his mind seems to have deserted his body.

“Can you drive?” she asks him.

“Please go home and make sure that Phelo is fine. I don’t know if anyone there is in the right state of mind to take care of her.”

“But I’m not welcomed there. I mean, MaNtusi is there, your mom....” He disappears into the bathroom, she hears water running and sighs.

What’s going on? How is going to pop up while Nothile is there? What’s the situation waiting for her there?

“Nomkhosi, move! Why are you standing there like a statue, I said go home and make sure that our daughter is okay.”

Her eyes widen. She’s never seen this side of him.

Did he just address her like that, like a little child?

“Don’t shout at me, I don’t even know what’s going on,” she says.

“Not today, Nomkhosi. Do what I tell you, please!”

His ‘please’ is not begging, it’s delivering a warning.

He gives her a look, she takes a deep sigh and heads back to the bathroom.

This is not how she pictured this day turning out.

Something bad has happened!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 55

BANDLA

The woman called him first. Sqalo mentioned his name and asked her to search for his number. It wasn't hijacking because they left the car. It wasn't a fight either, there were three of them, grown men in hoodies and big sunglasses, he couldn't fight them not knowing what he was being attacked for. It didn't make sense why they kept asking him why he sleeps with other men. How did that become a business of strangers? He recognized the voices but he couldn't put his finger on them. One kept hitting his ankles with a golf stick, they had his hands tied together.

Bandla arrived before the paramedics and police. Yeah, South African emergency services. Sqalo asked to be with his brother privately, so Bandla asked everyone to step back.

He wasn't bleeding that much, but his whole face was swollen. They stabbed him two wounds in the

stomach. They weren't that bad, which made everyone believe he still had time. It wasn't that bad, they thought.

Bandla stood next to him with all his facial muscles tensed up. He'd been down that road with Khanyo, nothing hurt like seeing your loved one becoming a victim of hooligans, for no reason at all.

"Do you know who did this?" he asked, his voice breaking.

Sqalo opened his mouth, winced in pain, and took a deep breath.

"Bhuti, please pull this thing out, it's hurting me," his voice came out stronger than he looked.

Bandla frowned, "What thing?"

Sqalo dropped his eyes to the side of his waist. Bandla followed his eyes and saw a screwdriver dug into his flesh.

He wanted to scream at the stupid crowd that surrounded the scene. First thing they should've done was to remove the screwdriver. But Sqalo's

faint voice begged him not to. "Please Mthonga, remove this thing." He shut his eyes, squeezed his face and winced painfully.

"But Sqalo, what if...?" Sqalo opened his eyes and begged him again.

"It's hurting me," he cried.

Bandla had no choice but to release him from pain. He clenched his jaw, took a deep breath and pulled the screwdriver out.

"It's out. Now you have to hold on until we get to the hospital. Everything will be alright." He wiped Sqalo's forehead and brushed his head.

"Thank you," Sqalo said.

"Sqalo don't close your eyes. The ambulance is here."

He put his thumb up, but shut his eyes anyway. Nothing looked suspicious, even though Bandla wasn't comfortable with him closing his eyes. Until he coughed and took an enormous breath.

"Are you alright? The paramedics are making their

way here.”

Sqalo didn't respond. His eyes remained shut, with his head dropped to his shoulder.

“Sqalo,” Bandla's shaky voice called. “Mthonga please, don't do this.”

Then he started shaking him violently and screaming for him to wake up.

“Please step aside,” said a man behind him. But Bandla's emotions were too high, they had to get him off Sqalo's arm. He wasn't crying, he kept screaming and shouting, asking who did that to his brother and swearing. More than mournful, he was furious.

Sqalo was declared dead on the scene. A woman who found him gave her statement, which really didn't give any clues. She didn't witness much, only Sqalo knew what happened to him and how he got to Matigulu from Durban.

Nkonzo called for an update.

“Bafo, what’s happening there? Thakasa is on his way as well,” he asked.

“Book a flight for Phethile to come home,” Bandla said.

There was a screeching of tyres. Nkonzo’s car swerved off the road but he was able to control it, and thank God it wasn’t such a busy road.

“Nkonzo are you alright?” Bandla was panicking. He couldn’t lose two brothers in one day.

Nkonzo breathed heavily, “Where’s Sqalo?”

“He’s gone. They killed my brother. He didn’t even reach 20, how is that fair?” Bandla.

Nkonzo knew that moment that he’d need to stay strong for the family. He called Thakasa before he called Mawande. Then there was Phethy who needed answers before agreeing to take a flight back home.

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NOMKHOSI

The last thing she wanted was to argue with MaKhumalo, so she took a little bandana and wrapped it around her head and wore a knee-length skirtsuit for respect. Just as she turned onto Enembe Rd, Thakasa called him. She didn't need him to spit it out, his voice said it all.

"They killed him," he said.

"Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. I cannot imagine what you're going through. Where are you now?"

"I'm at the police station, from here I'll fetch his belongings in Durban. Don't leave before I come home, Phelo will be there until the funeral."

"Okay, please get someone to drive you. I don't want...."

"I'm fine, Nomkhosi," he interrupted.

"But you just lost your brother. How can you be fine? Please don't do anything stupid, your daughter still needs you."

"I won't, kodwa alikho izinyane lemvubu elingadliwa

zingwenya kucwebe isiziba.” (But no pond remains clear after the crocodiles have eaten a hippo calf)

“What do you mean by that?” Nomkhosi asked, uncomfortably.

“I’ll get them, anyone who was involved, even if he orchestrated a single phone call and didn’t touch him. But I’ll find out who they are and I will kill them.” He sounded too calm for her to excuse his words with pain and anger. They stuck at the back of her head. Her brothers are not saints, Thakasa has every right to kill those who killed his brother, but maybe she loved the religious man more than the heartless one she heard over the phone.

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It’s a village, so everyone rushed to comfort MaKhumalo upon hearing wails coming from her house. People are coming in and out, pouring their condolences. Mawande is still hysterical, she’s lost two important people in a space of a year. The candle has been lit, MaKhumalo is sitting on the

mattress and crying her eye balls out.

Nomkhosi doesn't know anyone. She parks her car below the yard and makes her way in. There's a group of women gossiping in the veranda, she greets them and walks inside the house.

There's no one in the kitchen but she hears a soft sob coming from the lounge and makes her way there. She makes her way there thinking she'll at least get an idea of where Phelo is and who she's with since everyone is in the rondavel with MaKhumalo, but she finds a girl in a school uniform, whom she assumes knew Sqalo from school.

She steps back, mentally considering to call Nothile, only to find her in the kitchen.

"Oh, you've arrived," Nothile says, plugging a kettle of water. She glances at Nomkhosi who seems to be confused and lost.

"They're with me in the bedroom. Manqele called and told me you were coming," she says.

"Yeah, he said I must come and look after Phelo since everyone is still in shock and mourning,"

Nomkhosi says.

Nothile chuckles, "That's not why you are here. Did you agree to become his wife?"

That's a difficult question to answer, especially to her.

"I said I'll think about it."

Nothile nods and takes two bottles out of the sink, one belongs to Phelo.

"They're on the same formula milk," she says randomly, with a smile. "You can use the kettle after I make their milk. You'll find everything in the cupboards, I don't know if breads will be enough."

"Wait, I'm not here to make tea. Thakasa said I must come and look after Phelo. I'm not even supposed to standing in this kitchen."

Nothile chuckles, "Welcome to the family! See, I'm not allowed to make food for MaKhumalo, she hates the grounds I walk on. So before 'thee daughter-in-law' MaDube arrives, you're taking care of everybody. Manqe's brothers, his mom, sisters and neighbors.

That's how life is around here, you have to be there for everyone."

Nomkhosi did not expect that. She's not a part of this family, yet. Her family don't even know that she's at the Mangeles.

Nothile leaves her standing against the table, perplexed. Because she's a mother too, she brings Phelo for a few minutes to see her mother.

"Oh, you just took a bath?" Nomkhosi asks the three-month old Phelo, lifting her up and kissing her cheeks.

"How is Londa?" she asks Nothile after having a moment with her daughter.

"His appointment is tomorrow, but other than the unknown, he's okay and growing."

"That's good to hear." She gives Phelo back so that she can start on her duties.

"Here, remove that lace thing on your head and put this scarf before you get judged." Nothile gives her a

scarf before leaving with Phelo. She's watching Showmax and minding her own business. Nobody needs her anyway, so she's just chilling with the babies in her bedroom.

Nomkhosi hardly cooks in her house. At home they have a helper and her mother is a very domesticated woman. During family functions she always have Snalo, Thalente and Ndondo in the kitchen. Here she's all alone and expected to make tea for everyone that comes in, while boiling rice and chopping stew ingredients.

She puts plates of bread on one tray, tea-set on the other and there's a kettle of boiled water as well. So this means she'll make three trips to the rondavel since nobody is here to help her.

Sigh!

There are about five women sitting on reed-mats and having a consoling conversation with MaKhumalo who seems to have calmed down.

"This is Phelo's mother," MaKhumalo introduces her

as she places a tray on the floor. She looks a bit impressed by her look today, thanks to the scarf Nothile gave to her.

“Oh, doesn’t Phelo’s mother kneel though?” one woman asks.

Oh hell no, she’s not going on the floor with her knees just to give them food!

“You know how our boys are, they chase beauty.” Really, Makhumalo? Nomkhosi inhales sharply as she puts a plate in front of each woman.

“Oh makoti, please make lemon tea for me,” one woman says.

Nomkhosi frowns, “Like boiled water with lemon slices?”

“No, boiled water with lemon leaves.” Weird much!

“The tree is outside, behind the rondavel,” MaKhumalo says.

“Juice for me, please,” another one says.

Oh Lord! Now they’re at the restaurant, choosing from the menu and ordering from a waitress.

Just as she finish serving demanding women, Bandla pulls up. He's with two other colleagues and a man who's a relative.

Now the bread is finished. If she was in Durban she would've made a few calls to get them, but here she has to find alternatives.

Nothile walks in to grab a few fruits and a bottle of water.

"Please cook uphuthu as well, some of these people don't eat rice. Rev Phungula don't eat Knorrox cubes, as well as Bandlalethu, so just use spices."

Nomkhosi sighs and takes another pot for uphuthu. This is not the life she signed up for.

"When Thakasa gets here, give him a basin of water to wash his hands, well all of them have to wash hands, but with Thakasa it's an everyday thing. Dish his stew in this bowl." She opens the cupboard and shows Nomkhosi the bowl. "And uphuthu on the plate. Fill a glass with water and put his spoon inside." She takes a tray from the cupboard. "This is

his tray, no one else uses it. Oh, and he doesn't sit on the couch, he sits on the leather chair. You'll pull a coffee-table to serve him on."

"That's...crazy. I don't do all that in my house," Nomkhosi says.

"Well, things are different around here. He's no longer just a boyfriend or sex partner, he's the father of your daughter and your husband-to-be, right? Trust me, you don't want MaKhumalo against you. Respect her house and its rules."

"Where is Nkonzo's fiance and Bandla's?" Nomkhosi asks. She's tired before she even begins.

"They'll come if their men ask them to. Nothing is expected from them that much, especially the golden MaDube. She'll get here, look all cute and cuddle up in bed with her man all day."

Nomkhosi chuckles in disbelief. She'd be damned if they tried that with her. Imagine serving a couple that's cuddled up in bed!

People from church, Mthonga Holdings, school teachers and relatives keep arriving to pass their condolences. Thakasa has arrived too, his car is parked outside, but he hasn't come to check on Nomkhosi. She's been on her feet all day, with no break or help. Mawande hasn't come out of her room, she's destructed.

They finally walk in; Thakasa, his brothers and two other men. He's in a deep conversation with another man, he doesn't even acknowledge her bending her back in the kitchen.

She gets a low 'Hello' from Bandla as he follows others to the lounge.

At long last, when everything is done and dusted, a short girl in a stylish head-wrap and tea-length dress walks in with a couple of shopping bags.

"Oh, hello." There's a little frown on her face, like she needs an introduction or something.

"Hi," Nomkhosi says.

They stare at each other for a moment.

“I’m Tema Dube, Nkonzo’s fiancée,” she says.

“Phelo’s mother.” That’s a fit description for now, just Phelo’s mother.

“Nice to meet you,” Tema says with a smile. “Your daughter is beautiful, I love her.”

“She’s a little princess, a bit handful but hard not to miss.” They both share a brief chuckle before Tema announces that she’s going to change in Nkonzo’s bedroom. Maybe it’s her trick of disappearing, who knows!

Nomkhosi dishes for men in the kitchen and prepares Thakasa’s special tray. It’s awkward walking into a room of mourning men. Instead of pulling tables and spending an extra minute in their presence, she leaves Thakasa’s tray on the table.

They thank her, but none of them look surprised. It’s like they expected her to serve them, as if it’s her duty anyway.

“We should compile a grocery list.” It’s Tema, peeping through the cupboards in the kitchen. She didn’t disappear.

“Maybe you should ask Nothile because I’m clueless, and I’m leaving today,” Nomkhosi says.

“I don’t think leaving is a good idea. Khanyo is only coming on Friday, I don’t know if Ma is going to allow MaNtusi to be in the kitchen.”

“MaKhumalo is on the mattress and this isn’t about her. People need to be taken care of.”

“Exactly why you should stay,” Tema says.

“You don’t know how dramatic my family can be. I’ll be back for the funeral.” Before she can swallow her last word, Thakasa clears his throat behind them.

“I need a glass of water,” he says.

Tema quickly finds something to do by the sink. Nomkhosi remains on the same spot, with a dishcloth in her hands, looking at him.

His eyes keep going to her and back to Nomkhosi. He wants her to get water for him, instead of him

asking his brother's fiance to step aside from the sink.

She finally gets it and takes the glass from his hand. Tema looks uncomfortable, maybe because Thakasa is a different version today.

He takes the glass from Nomkhosi.

"I sent someone to get your clothes in Waterways," he says.

"What? You said I'll be here until you come back and now you've come back. My mother doesn't even know that I'm here."

"We need you around," he says and leaves before she says something. That 'we' solidifies what Nothile told her earlier. It's him and everyone, he's not just Thakasa at home.

Indeed a man she doesn't know arrives with her bags. It's a little uncomfortable to know that a man had an access to her wardrobe and even picked underwear for her. Couldn't Thakasa call Snalo and

ask her to bring her bags? Okay, she would've refused because it's Thakasa, but this doesn't make any sense.

After talking with the man for a few minutes, Thakasa walks in and takes her bags.

"Come," he's leading her to a guest bedroom. She's tired, fed up and longing a glass of wine.

The wardrobe is filled with sleeping blankets. He takes them out and piles them on top of the wardrobe.

"Are you going to work tomorrow?" he asks.

He wants her to say no.

"Yes," she says.

"You'll sleep here." He looks at her, trying to read her face but it remains calm. But you never know if her calm is really calm or she's just calm to look calm.

"I'll sleep with Bandla and Nkonzo. Are you going to be okay?"

Really, someone passed on, everything feels heavy, people are crying.

“No,” she says.

“Mawande’s room is next to this one. And I’ll be a phone call away.”

She kicks off her push-ons and throws herself in bed.

“I’m tired,” she says, closing her eyes and inhaling a deep breath.

Thakasa massages her foot, “I appreciate you being here. I know I’ve wronged your parents by bringing you here, but I’ll rectify that.”

“Thakasa what you said earlier didn’t sit well with me. What are you up to?” she asks.

“Someone has to pay for this. Ibheshu nembatha kuzohlala phansi from today. This was the last straw, now you mess with my family, I do what any man does out there. I’m done being kind-hearted and always willing to listen- letting the law take its course. They killed my little brother, I’m going to pay any amount to find them before the police do.”

She sighs, “Why can’t you pay someone else to do it? Why do you have to get blood in your hands?”

“Because Maka Phelo, I want to see each and every one of them take their last breath. I want my face to be the last thing they see before they die.”

His mind is made up and she can't really blame him. If it was her brother, she would've probably killed someone too. All she can pray for is that all these intentions and thoughts don't change who he is.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 56

KHANYO

I'm home, call it running away or whatever, but I'm here trying to make peace with what happened to Sqalo. I had this lingering feeling of guilt that I needed to get rid of, through prayer and meditating. Today I promised Bandla that I'd be with him, to support and grieve with him, but something has come up. Mandulo was admitted, I undermined the amount of stress he was going through. Just as he was healing from Thobeka's scandals, he discovered that he has a son and he's got no right over him. Today he's being discharged, as much as I want to be a supportive girlfriend, my brother has to come first, he's got no one else beside me.

I clean his room and cook lunch. Maybe I haven't been supportive enough, it's been ME for months and months. He's had to nurse the special child and disregard his own problems.

There's a car driving in, which is surprising because Mandulo is in no condition to drive. Or I'm exaggerating? I go to the window and peep through.

I don't know the car but Mthonga on the registration makes me suspect that it's Bandla. I'm confused; why is he here instead of preparing for the funeral on Sunday?

I was half naked, I grab a towel and wrap it over my chest and go outside to check.

He's not even allowed to come here as he pleases. He doesn't do it. That's disrespect in our culture.

Instead of Bandlaethu, his big brother steps out of the car. I have nothing against him, but the guy doesn't look friendly at all. Maybe his face hurts if he smiles, he looks cold, chances of Mandulo ever seeing his son are slim. He looks like he's aggressive in bed....okay, stop Khanyo.

"Hi," this feels so awkward. I have only a towel and bum-short, this is my future brother-in-law.

He takes something from the car before he returns my greeting. 2L of water and one white candle.

“Sawubona KaMayise,” he says turning back to me. He’s here to seek? Why did he need to come all the way from Mandeni?

He stands and doesn’t say anything. I guess he wants me to tell him what to do.

“You can follow me,” I say after clearing my throat, unnecessarily.

He follows me. I leave him inside the rondavel where I do all my prayers and consultations.

Now I have to dress up and mentally prepare to see a client in him, not a brother of my boyfriend.

Damn, Bandla should’ve said something.

I call him quickly.

“Babe, how are things that side?” I ask him.

“Good, I guess.” He’s been calm throughout this. Or is it me who expected him to be a typical Bandlalethu who cries and becomes all sort of things when going through pain? I’m not happy with how he’s handling Sqalo’s death. I want him to cry, that’s how he deals with things.

“Your brother is here,” I say.

“Really?” Why is he so shocked?

“Yes, with a bottle of water and white candle,” I say.

He sighs, “I told them about your dream, I guess he wants to know more. He didn’t tell me anything about coming there.”

“What if Mandulo arrives while he’s here?” I ask.

“They’ll deal with it. I can’t stress myself about two grown-ups,” he says.

Aybo! My brother is sick, and tiny compared to his brother. He wants him to kill my brother. If he tries anything I’m calling the community on him and saying he’s a thief.

I say goodbye and dress up for the consultation and prayer. God, please guide me through this one!

I take my seat on the mat and look at him leaning by the wall.

“You’re good?” I ask him.

He gives me a nod. His stare is unsettling.

I open the Bible and quote a verse; "Isaiah 41:10, Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

He's staring at me. Right now there's no God in him, not through Christ, not through Shembe. He smells blood and hatred.

"Please close your eyes, and pray with me," I say.

He doesn't say anything.

I close my eyes and start praying. He doesn't pray along. When I open my eyes he doesn't look like he closed his eyes for a second.

"You're here about your brother," I say striking a match and lighting his candle.

"Yes," he says.

"How did he leave home?"

"He went to study," he says.

"Really? That's solely why he left?"

He clears his throat and adjusts on his seat.

“There was a fight concerning his sexuality, Ma told him to leave her house but I told him not to. But eventually he left, found a room somewhere and rented throughout his grade 12,” he says.

“So he was kicked out by an elder? Someone whose voice matters more than anyone’s?” I ask.

He sighs and nods.

“There has to be some way to bring him back home. Your mother has to accept him back so that he can unite with his ancestors,” I say.

“With a goat?” he asks.

“Yes, and open hearts.”

He nods, with uncertainty this time.

“Your mother said a few distasteful words that stuck to the elders, over and over again. Your father came to take his son, to be next to him and closer to reprimand, since his wife constantly cried about the trouble she was getting from Sqalo.”

“That’s bullshit! Baba is fucking with us. Sqalo

is...was only 18. In all that he couldn't consider that?"

I do get questions that I can answer. I only deliver what I can see. I'm not a medium, I cannot take question to and take answers from dead people.

"I'm sorry," this is all I can say.

"Did he give you any clues on who killed my brother?"

Ancestors are not FBIs, at least not where I come from.

"No," I say.

"So he's useless?"

I can't say that about my future, late father-in-law.

"Can you pray for it?" he asks.

"I can't, because it'll be under your instruction. I listen to the guidance of the inner grandmother in me."

He's not satisfied. Maybe he came here thinking I'm an answer to all his problems. But unfortunately I'm not.

“You’re angry,” I say.

“Yeah. So many dogs to get and not so much time,” he says.

There’s another car coming. It’s my brother’s. I know how its engine sounds like, believe it or not. My heart is about to leap out of my throat.

“Would you like me to pray for you to make peace with everything that has happened?” I ask him.

He chuckles, disbelievingly.

“No,” he says.

I take his water and pray for it. I know he’s not going to use it, he was here for names that I don’t have.

“Mix it with your bath water and pray before you sleep,” I instruct.

“Mmmm okay,” he says.

I’m wasting my prayer here. This man is not about the man in heaven or his ancestors, he’s over them, he’s done.

“Travel safely,” I say.

Inwardly, I'm praying that Mandulo has gone to his room. I don't want them to meet here. MaNtusi needs to be present to sort out her mess, not me.

He puts his shoes on outside the door and walks away. I should be having a moment of silence, but it sounds like there's something going on outside.

Mandulo was dropped off by one of his friends. They were saying their goodbyes when Thakasa stepped out of the rondavel. From pictures, Londa looks like his biological father, it doesn't take long for Thakasa to know who he's looking at.

He goes straight to him. I want to scream for help, but then I remember that my brother is still a man and he'd want me to let him handle his own shit. I'll just wait here and watch.

"Mandulo, right?" he asks.

Mandulo nods. He's apologetic, he's been from the day he found out. My brother wouldn't intentionally destroy another man's marriage, it was just a moment of weakness.

“Let’s talk, outside the yard,” Thakasa says.

Don’t be stupid, Mandulo, he wants to beat you!

“I’m not well, can we talk when I’m okay. Manqele, I never meant to disrespect you.”

“Outside the yard. You didn’t postpone fucking my wife.”

WTF! Why is Mandulo putting down his bag. Is he out of his mind?

“Mandulo, go to your room!” I sound like an old, divorced woman struggling to raise kids alone.

They both turn and look at me.

“He’s sick,” I say.

“It’s fine, Makhanyi.”

Fine, where? He’s lost so much weight, one punch from this man he’d be on the ground. Unless if he plans to pull him by his beard.

I’m following them. I need to see what he’s going to do to my brother.

And this friend, he's driving away? I'd never keep friends like him, if you touch one of my friends you're touching me. I don't care what they did. He's a coward!

"Makhanyi!" Mandulo turns his head and scolds me.

I'm not going anywhere. Thakasa made vows with his wife, Mandulo didn't owe him any loyalty, he's fighting the wrong person.

"You've been playing happy families with my wife?" he asks.

"I didn't. I was there for a baby."

"Whose baby?" he asks.

Silence.

"I'm asking you a question." I hate him! Can't he see that my brother is sorry?

"My baby," Mandulo says.

"I marry a wife and you make babies with her. What am I? Your sponsor?"

"It was a mistake," Mandulo says.

“How? You fell on top of her and your clothes miraculously peeled off?” he asks.

Mandulo doesn't say anything. I want to snatch him away and answer all these questions on his behalf.

“I respect my brother's girlfriend and her home, that's the only reason why I'm being civil and decided to have this conversation outside the yard.”

Mandulo nods. For that I don't hate him that much, he's not beating my brother.

“I love Londokuhle and I love my wife. I can make sure that you never set a foot near them. But for Londa's sake, I'll allow you to have a relationship with him. Strictly with him. You're lucky that your sister is about to become one of us, you can go through her, instead of me.”

“Does that mean he'll take my surname?” Mandulo asks.

“I'm still trying to gain his sight back and you want me to evoke more drama with the stupid ancestors?”

I'm cringing! Yes I get that his father disappointed

him, but that's not a way to talk.

"I'm sorry about your brother," Mandulo says.

"Thanks."

I release a sigh of relief. It could've went left, for a moment it did, but thanks to me, the brother's girlfriend, nothing hectic happened.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 57

THAKASA

For the first time in his life he's not worried about how the family is, or if the arrangements for the funeral are proceeding well, or how his siblings are holding up. He's away, crashing in hotels and holding private meetings with private investigators. He hasn't seen Phelo in three days, it feels like a lifetime, he hasn't spoken to neither MaNtusi nor Nomkhosi. Nkonzo had to fetch Phethy and handle everything. Thakasa is not there, he's not calling, burying a dead Sqalo is not that much of a priority. What matters right now is that each and every head that was involved in the murder of his brother is chopped. And he's just a step closer into finding them.

There's a group of students that harassed Sqalo and his friends for quite some time at their place of residence. But they were just being kids, bullying each other to feel better about themselves. He can't

possibly hunt down a group of 18 year olds and kill them. And they didn't kill Sqalo, they were all at the campus on the day of his death. If there was anyone who could answer half of their questions it would've been Ndlazi, the security guard that saw Sqalo's every movement. But surprisingly, he resigned two days after the incident and disappeared into thin air. Or so he thought.

They got him just as he settled back in his village, about to start a new job as the security guard in one of the high schools in the area. He had some explaining to do.

Not even once had Thakasa thought he'd tie a man old enough to be his father on the chair.

He rolls his sleeves up to his elbows and pulls his own chair. He has Ndlazi's phone in hand.

"My brother left the building at 9:17, you were on duty that morning, and at 9:19 you were making a phone call to this number that doesn't exist anymore. Two days later you handed over your resignation

after not showing up for work. Care to explain why you're being shady?"

"I didn't kill the boy. I have nothing to do with it," Ndlazi says.

"You're answering the question wrongly. I asked why you're being shady," Thakasa says.

"I had plans to relocate back in the village and work locally. There's nothing shady going on."

"Who were you calling?" Thakasa asks.

He opens his mouth and stutters for a minute. "My... my cousin."

"Why did your cousin destroy his sim card immediately after my brother's death? What did you two talk about?" Thakasa.

"I don't know. It must've been a coincidence," he says.

Thakasa leaves the room. He wants to scream, but it would be a waste of time, there's a number of men camping outside this abandoned house.

He comes back with a cleaver. He's darker than

usual, his eyes are bloodshot. He keeps wiping sweat on his forehead with his arm.

He takes Ndlazi's shoe off, the left one.

"You move, I miss and you pay," he says.

"No, no, no! I swear I didn't do anything," Ndlazi cries when he realizes what's about to happen.

Thakasa shuts his eyes with his jaws tightens. He's never killed before, he's only slaughtered a goat and a cow, not a whole human being.

"What was the call about Ndlanzi?" He's giving him one last chance. He knows that Ndlanzi didn't do much, he only helped the responsible ones.

"I was calling my friend, asking him to bring me lunch." He's changing the story. He needs a little motivation.

Thakasa bites his lip and lifts the cleaver up. It cuts two of Ndlanzi's toes, blood spill all over his pant.

"Shit!" he curses and throws down the cleaver. No killer tries to wipe their pants before they even kill a person, but he does, he can't stand Ndlazi's blood on

his expensive G-Star Raw jean.

“Are you going to talk or what?” he asks after wiping his pants.

He’s still trying to deal with pain. He’s crying like a little kid.

“Drop names, Ndlanzi,” Thakasa says picking the cleaver again.

“They promised me a job in exchange of his soul,” he says.

Thakasa’s jaw tightens. His brother died for a bloody security guard job.

“Names!” he says in almost whisper.

“Innocent Mavundla.”

Everything stops. His brain. His heart. Innocent Mavundla? That’s Mpilo’s uncle, someone Sqalo considered his own uncle as well. He’s like family to them, even when the kids, Sqalo and Mpilo, misbehaved in primary school they’d log heads with him to discipline them.

“He’s the principal, right?” Thakasa asks after a

minute of zoning out.

Ndlanzi is in too much pain, the question went over his head.

The cleaver cuts between his forehead. A scream follows and one gunshot.

Thakasa falls on his knees in front of a dead man and cries. His father made him do this. He was a good son almost his whole life. He did what they told him to do. He abided by their rules and put everyone's happiness first. This is how Manqele thanks him? After raising his twins for eight years, he's taking one of them in such a cruel way.

He's made him someone he's not, because from here he's hunting down Innocent and everyone he sent to do his dirty work.

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MaKhumalo almost lost her mind. Thakasa, out of six of them, has always been the most level headed

one. He knows what to do and what not. He's the one who instills the Manqele customs and rules into others. Him disappearing for days before his little brother's funeral didn't make sense.

But today he's here, and hopefully he's got a damn good explanation why he's only home today.

"MaKhumalo, sit still, you cannot raise your voice on the mattress," one of the neighbors tells her.

She sits, but she's not letting go. Not after Thakasa disrespected her like this. She sends for him to be called.

Bandla is that the youngest boy now, and the most emotional one, if it was him who pulled these stunts maybe everyone would've understood.

"Yeyi wena, where have you been?" she explodes just as Thakasa walks in.

He doesn't answer. He scratches the side of his face and stares at the sheet pulled over Sqalo's clothes that await his body.

"I asked you a question. Your brothers have gone to

fetch the body, and you, the eldest, is nowhere to be seen," she says.

Thakasa turns his eyes to her. They bleed nothing, but hatred.

"You kicked my brother out," he says, calmer than he looks.

"I didn't. Sqalo visited home whenever he wanted," MaKhumalo defends herself but her eyes are painted with sudden guilt.

"You kicked him out because he was gay. You said it with your own mouth, Ma!"

"I was angry," she says.

"You kept saying it. You knew what you were doing. He carried your curses on his back. We are here because of you. You called for the death of your own son."

MaKhumalo starts crying. Everyone is quiet, probably recording the whole circus with mental cameras for hot village gossip.

"Sqalo turned me into a joke. I was never a bad

parent to him. I raised all of you the right way. My heart bled for him, I cried every night.” She wipes her face with a scarf and looks at Thakasa, “Until you have a child that chooses to live a foreign life that no one in your bloodline has ever lived, then you can come back and preach to me.”

“So you don’t regret it?” Thakasa asks in disbelief.

“Sqalo was my son, you don’t know how much pain I’m going through, you don’t have a son that has your blood running through his veins.”

He sighs. Why did he forget how this woman is? Now this is a competition of sons.

“Sqalo was like a son to me. I knew him more than you. In fact, I know all your children more than you do. All you do is control our lives, nothing else!”

“You’re accusing me of being a bad mother, Thakasa? After I raised you to this tall, stupid man you are today.”

“Oh, I’m stupid now?”

Nkonzo walks in and taps Thakasa’s shoulder. He’s

exhausted, physically and emotionally.

“Please, don’t do this,” he begs.

“She’s calling me stupid,” Thakasa says with a frown on his face. Today he’s stupid.

“We need you outside,” Nkonzo says ignoring the stupid argument between them.

“No, this woman is calling me stupid after everything I’ve done for her.” He sounds and looks different. The Thakasa everyone knows would never call his own mother “this woman.”

“Mthonga, uncle is waiting for us outside,” Nkonzo says.

Only then he takes a step back, but he’s still frowning like he wants to knock MaKhumalo down.

Nkonzo goes to MaKhumalo to have a word with her. Sqalo’s coffin cannot be taken inside the yard before MaKhumalo lets everything in her heart out and welcomes him back home as her son.

There’s a phone ringing. Mpilo’s mother quickly gets up and goes outside to answer. A minute later

there's a piercing scream outside.

A few women rush out to check on her. It can't be that she's still crying for Sqalo.

"Umntaka Ma!" she's hysterical. Someone has killed her brother!

Thakasa is walking around the kraal with his hands tucked in his pocket. He reached out to one person he's judged his whole life, Bhambatha, and he made sure to tie all his loose ends.

Nkonzo makes his way to him. Everyone has gathered at the bottom of the yard where a goat and Sqalo's coffin are, except Thakasa.

"Bafo, you have to come, we can't do this without you," Nkonzo says.

"Sqalo knows that I love him. I don't need to use an innocent goat to talk to him when he's dead. I'm not coming there," he says.

"You don't even want to see him?" Nkonzo asks.

"I don't want a dead picture of him to be the last in my head," he says.

“You’re not coming?” Nkonzo.

He sighs, “No.”

“Are you okay?”

He shrugs.

Nkonzo stands still. His heart is heavy, him and Bandla never had to do so much on their own.

“Malume didn’t want him to come home today because he died by a weapon, but I said no,” he tells Thakasa.

“You did well, he deserves a proper send off. Paste his wounds with umswani and make sure Tutu does everything accordingly.” He’s not saying it now, but he’s proud of how Nkonzo stepped up and got everything together.

MaKhumalo is crying again. There’s so much noise in the yard. Thakasa goes to his bedroom and shuts the door. He saw Mawande, but didn’t see Phelo, which means Khosi left with her. He doesn’t even have the energy to call her, he just texts; BRING HER

FOR THE FUNERAL.

He lies in bed and releases a heavy sigh. He's killed all of them, he should have some sort of relief now but he's hurting more than ever.

MaNtusi walks in after a moment. She's carrying a tray of food, she can still serve her husband.

"Manqele, where were you?" she asks.

There's no answer. He's lying on his back with his eyes closed. But he's not asleep, his pink finger keeps tapping on his chest.

"Are you okay?" – MaNtusi.

She's truly concerned. This time she knows that he wasn't whoring, the question is; where was he and who he was with?

"Come here," he pulls out his arm for MaNtusi.

For a moment she's hesitant. They haven't hugged or done anything intimate since she came back.

Eventually she calms her nerves, closes the door and lies in his embrace. He opens his eyes and looks at her.

MaNtusi doesn't recognize her husband in him. It's like she's staring at a complete stranger.

His lips come closer to her. Her heart starts beating loud. He smashes his lips on her, his hand starts grabbing on her waist.

She breaks the kiss, "Wait Manqele, we're not supposed to do this, your brother's body just arrived."

"Please, MaNtusi, I need you," he begs and pulls her for another kiss.

She cannot resist him. He's going through pain, if her body is what he needs to release stress so be it.

He yanks her panty to the side and sneaks his finger inside her cookie. She's moist, but not enough for him to slide in.

He continues kissing her and fingering her. His body wants a release, but his mind is still occupied by many dark thoughts.

He stops, sighs heavily and buries his face on the pillow.

“Manqele, I’m here if you want to talk,” MaNtusi says.

“I want the pain to go away.”

“Give it time,” she says.

“Now, MaNtusi. I want it to go away now!” he says.

She exhales heavily and keeps quiet. She knew he’d blame himself, but she didn’t see his character changing over night. He’s a different person, the look on his face is scary.

“Why did you disclose his sexuality to MaKhumalo?”

Oh, they’re going there now!

“What are you trying to say?” MaNtusi asks with her eyebrows snapped.

“If you had given me time to handle it the right way Ma would’ve understood. She wouldn’t have kicked him out and said all those hurtful things,” he says.

MaNtusi chuckles in disbelief.

“So she’s not responsible for anything that she did, I’m the one who caused all of this?” she asks.

“Homosexuality is foreign to us, she didn’t need to

find out in the middle of the kitchen, there could've been a better way to explain it."

"So you're saying he's dead because of me?" she asks.

"Why did you treat them that way because you were also cheating on me? Why did you make a 17 year old suffer for my sins?" he asks.

She's stunned! Now he's going to bring up the past? She did all that while she was still hurt, and she never cheated on him for any specific period, it happened once and she fell pregnant.

"My son is suffering for my sins too," she says.

"It's not the same. He's not dead. Sqalo is," he says.

"So we're fighting now?" she asks.

"No. What did you cook?" He changes the subject and scratches his head.

She's not comfortable. Now this man is trying to pin her to Sqalo's death.

"We're moving out after the funeral," he says.

Her eyes widen. Say what?!

(If you ordered Baby Momish and haven't recieved it kindly hala at me on 0637108652)

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 58

MPILO

He's an emotional wreck. Before they started doing things their bodies wanted to do, they were best friends. From lower primary grades throughout high school, they were tight. He was his "Ntwana" before he was a lover. As much as nobody can believe him, their break-up tore his heart too. He had to distance himself from Sqalo for the sake of his inheritance. Yes, he chose money over his truth.

He's lost his uncle as well, in the most cruel way. Sqalo would've comforted him through this grief, but he's not here because it's the day of his funeral.

He arrives in a dusty pink suit, even though they never cross-dressed Sqalo still liked fashion at its finest. They weren't on best terms when he passed on, but both in their hearts there were no hatred nested. Circumstances pulled them apart, Mpilo had to choose, he chose the inheritance his biological

father left in the hands of his uncle, for him to be able to go to university and keep his mother financially sustained, he had to break things off.

Thakasa stops him before he reaches the tent. While all his siblings are smartly dressed for their brother's funeral service, he's in baggy jeans he wore when he repainted his mother's room, and an unbuttoned short-sleeved shirt.

"What brings you here?" he asks glaring at Mpilo.

Sqalo bled to his brother. Thakasa was the scariest to come out to about his sexuality, yet he became the most understanding one. He knows everything that went down in their relationship.

"I loved Sqalo," Mpilo says.

Thakasa's stare remains glued on him. He breaks a chuckle and lets a moment of heavy silence pass.

"Leave," he says in a slow, deep voice.

"Bhut' Thakasa, please, I just want to say goodbye for the last time," Mpilo begs.

“Mpilonhle, listen to me when I talk to you, don’t push me to do something I have no intentions of doing. Ungangiqali!”

Mpilo exhales heavily, glances inside the tent and sees the coffin with a funeral wreath on top. Tears burn his eyes, not even once had he ever thought he’d lose Sqalo this way.

“Can I say goodbye?” he begs, tears running down his cheeks.

“He’s dead. He doesn’t talk, he doesn’t hear, he doesn’t feel, he doesn’t think, he doesn’t taste. You had a chance to say whatever you want to say while he was still alive, but you chose to break his heart. Now leave before I make you leave with your jaw broken,” Thakasa says.

He sniffs and wipes his face, his heart is broken, but he has to accept that he’s not welcome, and not disturb Sqalo’s funeral.

They go on without him. He sits under the tree shade, a few yards away from the cemetery, and watches

as men dismantle the coffin and lower down his body down to the grave. They fill up his grave like they'd been waiting for this day to come.

He bites his hand to silence his sobs. They're dispersing from the grave, leaving Sqalo all alone in his grave. He'll never see him again. He'll never get a chance to explain to him why he had to keep distance. It wasn't over, not for good, he would've gone back to fix things with Sqalo after graduating.

He has to cry here and make sure he releases all the pain, because when he gets back home he'll have to pull himself together. Had he known that his uncle would die so soon, he wouldn't have broken things off with Sqalo. Now his inheritance automatically goes to his mother and he's lost Sqalo.

It was all for nothing!

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THAKASA

Most relatives have left, except for a few aunts who are lingering around for gossip. Nkonzo returned back to work with Tema to temporarily hold the fort while Thakasa finds himself through grief.

“So she sits in her bedroom and texts her boyfriends on Whasaphu the whole day?” one of the aunts asks. She’s not really related to them, her mother had an affair with their father’s brother, because he was a forward Manqele and stupid in love, he took her in as his daughter.

“No, it’s Facebook. That’s where all loose women find men,” Hleziphi Manqele says. She’s the daughter of their grandfather that he got from Johannesburg.

“Yuu, I hope she didn’t bring HIV &Aids to Thakasa.”

Speaking of the devil! He walks in. He didn’t sleep at home again. He stands by the door and stares at them.

“Khehla, where were you?” MaKhumalo asks getting off the couch. She’s been worried sick. The last thing she wants right now is to lose another child.

“Are you all gossiping about my wife?” he asks.

Silence.

“Okay, why are you all still here? The funeral was three days ago. Or I must extend the house and build you rooms since you’re now moving in?”

“Thakasa don’t speak like that with your aunts,” MaKhumalo says in shock.

“They must pack their things and go. My aunts wouldn’t talk about my wife like that.” He looks at them disgustedly. “Hleziphi has four different babydaddies. Zandile doesn’t know where hers are. If she paid attention to who impregnates her with the same effort she puts into my business, maybe she would’ve known the fathers of her kids.”

Gasps!

Hleziphi is the first one to storm out of the house angrily. She’s never been disrespected by a child like

this, in her entire life!

Others find way to their suitcases and start packing as well.

MaKhumalo is staring at Thakasa with so much disappointment. They were here to comfort her.

“Khehla, what is....” Thakasa wrinkles his nose and frowns.

“Don’t call me that,” he says.

“Talk to your mother, what’s going on? We’re all going through pain, you may not believe it but we do. But you’re acting different from everyone,” she asks.

“You killed my brother, that’s what going on,” he says.

“I’m a bad mother, you said. I didn’t raise you all well and I’m ignorant about modern things. Kodwa akekho umama ofuna ukubona ingane yakhe ibuya ilele ngomhlane kade iphume ihamba ngezinyawo.”
(But no mother wants to see her child leaving on his own feet and returning home lying on his back)

The pain he’s feeling blinds him from seeing others’ pain. His mother doesn’t care, that’s how he sees it.

“I’m leaving,” he says.

“Where are you going?”

He doesn’t answer. He turns around and leaves. MaKhumalo sinks down on the couch and prays softly; “MaThonga, Nyazi lwezulu, please keep my children safe.”

Right now she doesn’t care where they go and who they’re with, she just wants her children alive.

Thakasa walks into MaNtusi folding a pile of his clothes on the bed. He hasn’t slept home since the funeral. He didn’t even send a text, so he’s expecting anything from her.

He stands by the door and stares at her.

MaNtusi lifts her eyes, “Where were you?”

She’s calmer than he expected.

“Yesterday I slept in Waterways,” he says.

She keeps her eyes on him. If that was the case Nomkhosi would’ve told her, now there’s no need for

them to hide anything from her.

“Which Waterways?” she asks.

“I didn’t tell Nomkhosi. I wanted to be alone,” he says.

She sighs and sits down.

The soft look on her face permits him to walk in and sit next to her.

“Let’s leave today,” he says.

MaNtusi frowns.

“Today?” They talked about moving out, but not so soon after the funeral.

“Today, I don’t want to be here anymore,” he says.

MaNtusi sighs and holds his hand. He’s going through pain, she understands, but they don’t want to make any mistakes.

“We cannot leave home like that. We need your mother’s blessing and to be accompanied by the ancestors as well,” she says.

“No, I don’t want to...”

“Manqele,” she calls and Thakasa stops and looks at her. “Sqalo loved you. He trusted you with his life. Don’t do anything that’s going to make him feel bad or responsible for your actions. Remember he’s still with us, we just can’t interact with him anymore.”

“I’ve done worse things than moving out of home,” he says.

“Things like what?” She frowns.

He sighs and pulls her for a hug.

“We are not leaving today, Manqele,” she tells him. There's no arguing with her because she has a point.

“Okay, I hear you. But we’ll eventually leave, I want to focus on my family.”

“Which one?” she asks.

“I only have one family. You, Nomkhosi and the kids.”

She chuckles and looks away. He cups her face and turns it back to him.

“I miss you,” he says.

“How do you miss me when I’m right here?” she asks.

“I miss our simple life, before the drama and fights. You didn’t give me a child, but your presence gave me a reason to wake up everyday with my head held up high. Why couldn’t you see that?” he asks.

“I didn’t want to disappoint your mother. She wanted to be a grandmother, it was an honor to your father who blessed our marriage,” MaNtusi says.

“You didn’t allow me to be me. You neglected my emotional needs. I asked you to let it go so many times. I told you it was okay, we didn’t need a child, but you cornered me every chance you got. You made me feel like a failure, like we weren’t enough, and I hated every moment of it.”

Tears burn her eyes. She has a baby now that she never planned for. She didn’t drink anything, she didn’t sleep a certain way or set dates on calendars. It just happened from God’s will.

“When I went out I was happier than I was when I returned home. Nomkhosi wasn’t going to be anything more than someone I released stress with.

But she gave me something I was longing for, to be treated like a man that was not an heir that needed to produce a child. I never lied to her and said I didn't love you. So I kept going back to her, eventually feelings developed, I found myself calling her to sit and chat, with no sex involved. I'm sure you've seen the caring side of her, she's a really good woman. Just like you. Before I knew it I had crushed both your hearts. I don't know if you'll ever be complete again. I'm not even sure you still love me."

MaNtusi releases a long held breath and asks, "You're sure she loves you?"

"Nomkhosi?" he asks.

She nods, "Yes."

"I think she does," he says.

"She didn't have a father. Make sure you're not filling up a certain void. I'm not saying this as your wife, but as someone who understands the void of not having a parent. Nomkhosi doesn't look like someone who settles for anything that life throws at her. But with you it's different, more like your presence in her life

rubs something off her.”

He inhales sharply and pulls a pillow to his lap. He squeezes it and stares at the wall.

He wouldn't know what to do if he discovers that what Nomkhosi has for him is not real love. A lot has happened between them; risks, sacrifices, challenges and life changes. He's here today, in this situation, because he fell in love with her. Feelings have to be mutual, genuinely.

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NOMKHOSI

She didn't attend the funeral. Out of concern, her mother advised her not to send Phelo for the funeral. She'll go for the cleansing rituals when everyone is emotionally okay to look after her. Obviously, Thakasa didn't take that well, he's giving her the silent treatment. It's been a few days now, he's not calling or texting to check on Phelo. To avoid looking

like a dramatic babymama, Nomkhosi has decided to let him.

Precious calls from the reception. She still has a job at Bantwana Holdings, thanks to Snalo's temporary good heart. She begged for her to be given a written warning.

"Someone is at the gate waiting for you," she says.

"Oh, okay." Nomkhosi frowns and looks at Ndondo who's standing in front of her with two sets of lingerie waiting for her opinion.

"Someone is at the gate waiting for me," she says.

"Who? Did you call the security to confirm identity?" Ndondo asks.

"They wouldn't have called Precious if there was something fishy."

"You're right, I hope it's not Phelo's father because we have plans."

"It's not that one, he's not speaking to me these days," Nomkhosi says with an eye roll.

"May it stay like that forever!" They both laugh. It's

awkward because Nomkhosi never really liked Ndabuko either, she only warmed up to him recently. He was shady AF, lying and playing hide & seek with Fuze and her friend. Now the tables have turned, she fell for a married man and Ndondo hears none of it.

Thakasa's car? She nearly trips over her stilettos. He's the last person she expected to be see here. And why is he not driving in? He's been here before.

She opens the door and climbs inside the car with a slight frown on her face. Nothile said he wasn't handling Sqalo's death well.

"Hi," she says with her stare fixed on him.

"Where is your bag?"

"My bag?" She frowns.

"I want us to talk."

Strange!

"I was wrapping up a few things with Ndondo," she says.

“Must I wait for you?” he asks.

“Yes, or maybe you should go home and pick Phelo up and drive by to get me afterwards.”

“I want to talk to you. I’m not in a good space to see a baby,” he says.

Nomkhosi frowns, “Your own baby? You think parenthood can be switched on and off.”

“No,” he sighs. “Babies are sensitive. I don’t want her to pick any bad energy from me and get sick.”

“Okay, give me a moment.” She doesn’t understand his reasoning, but she’s not going to force things.

Ndondo walks inside the office as she packs her laptop and some documents.

“Who is it?” Ndondo.

“Thakasa,” she says.

“What does he want?”

“I don’t know, he says he wants to talk,” she says.

“I hope he’s not here to break up with you for the million time.”

That hurts a little. No, not a little, it really hurts because there’s a huge chance of it being the truth.

She’s dragging herself to his car. Yes, they are not in a relationship, even though he’s tried to pursue it a number of times. But she’s not ready for him to drop her like a hot potato again.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

She nods, “Yeah.”

The drive to Waterways is filled with heavy silence. He’s back with Nothile and seemingly their marriage is stable again. The words he said to her the last time he broke things off starts ringing in her head.

He puts her bag on the counter and fills a glass of water in the sink. She takes a little sip and a huge breath.

“Thakasa, are you breaking up with me?” she asks.

His eyes widen. He’s standing behind the counter

and staring at her.

“No, but we’re not together, how can I break up with you?”

She shrugs, “You’ve done it before, we were just fucking, but you’d drop me everytime things went smooth in your marriage.”

He drops his eyes. He’s not proud of it, even though he never lied to her.

“Do you love me, Nomkhosi?” he asks.

She frowns. This is a question she expected at all. Surely he didn’t bring her here to pursue her for a relationship, or marriage, so soon after his brother’s funeral.

“Why do you ask?” she asks.

“Because I want to know, do you love me Nomkhosi?” He’s staring at her, not sparing her even a moment to collect her thoughts.

“Yes, I do, but that doesn’t mean I’ve decided on becoming your second wife,” she says.

“Why do you love me?” he asks.

A sigh!

“Because I’m stupid, I guess.”

He walks around the counter and pulls her to the couch in the lounge. He sits next to her and pulls her head to his chest. There’s a tight, warm embrace she gives her. For a moment she feels safe in his arms, like they’re home, where she’d want to be when the sun sets down.

“I want to search for your father.”

She lifts her head up and looks at hiim, eyes-widen. What did he just say?

“Huh?” She frowns.

“I know I can find your father if I put money into it. Help me search for him, please.”

“Thakasa, he left because he didn’t care. Why must I follow him around? He’s probably happily married with other children that he loves. I don’t need him.”

“You can’t say you don’t need something that you’ve never experienced how it’s like to have. He’s the grandfather of my daughter, for her sake, I want to

know everyone whose blood runs in her veins. What if she grows up and marries one of your nephews and you don't know?"

She sighs. Does it not bother her that she's never seen her biological father even in pictures? It does, but she pushed it to the back of her head. Now Thakasa wants to dig deeply into her life. Phumzile, more than anyone, hates discussing this issue.

"I love you too, MaZikode."

She's relieved to hear this, but not so much when she remembers that he's now forcing her and her mother to confront the past and look for a man who planted a seed and left.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 59

NOMKHOSI

He's not leaving. He's still sitting on the couch with an empty plate of food in front of him. They've never spent hours together without Phelo since she was born. This is the first time and she's already feeling like a bad mom for spending time with her father while she's not here.

"We should fetch Phelo," she says.

"No," he sighs. "I can't be around her. I'll see her when I'm okay."

"I know you think she's too young to know you and realize when you're not around, but Thakasa that's your daughter, she's never gone this long without seeing daddy, I know she misses you," Khosi says.

"I miss her too. You think I don't want to spend time with my daughter? She's what I need right now but I can't be around her."

“Why? You live with Londa and he’s okay. It’s not like there’s a dark cloud over you, you just lost a brother.”

“And I killed,” he says.

Nomkhosi stops dead on her tracks. That has to be a joke! She told him not to do it with his own hands.

“Are you serious?” she asks.

He sighs and nods. Oh, hell no!

“What does that mean for you?” she asks.

“I think I’m done, with a lot of things. That was the last nail into my coffin. Right now I’ll just follow wherever life leads me.”

This is heartbreaking for her to hear, because as much as she didn’t benefit from that side of him, she still loved the discipline and church grounded Thakasa.

“What about work?” she asks.

“Nkonzo will take over. I’ll figure out what I’m going to do, maybe apply for a job somewhere else and...”
He exhales heavily and buries his face in his hands.

“Please don’t forget and lose who you are,” she says holding his hands and kneeling in front of him on the couch. “I don’t want my daughter not to have a dad.”

He looks at her, pain-struck.

“What about you? Do you want to be without me?” he asks.

“I’ve been without you before and I’m still standing. I just don’t want my daughter to experience the same thing I experienced,” she says.

“So with us, was it ever a thing or you’re just filling the void of a father with me?”

Her eyes widen. She stands up and chuckles out in disbelief.

“What makes you think you can be a father figure to me, or anything like that? You don’t support me, either financially or emotionally. You don’t take care of me in anyway. Or you think your penis alone is enough for me to forget that I don’t have a father?” she asks.

That’s touched the nerve. He didn’t expect that at all.

“If I needed a man to fill the father void, I would’ve gotten someone better than you, because I CAN get him if I want. You’re a good father to your daughter, but that’s it, you’ve never treated me good enough for me to find solace in you.”

“You didn’t have to attack me, I didn’t mean that in a bad way. I know that I’m not perfect, I’m far from it,” he says.

“I’m not attacking you, I’m just telling you that you’ve never played any role of a father, or even of a boyfriend, to me. Don’t think there’s a void you’re filling in my life, you have your own issues with your parents. Don’t you dare try to act like you’re better than me because you had both parents growing up, because in actual fact, you raised yourself and their kids. You also have daddy issues, that’s why you’re living your life trying to impress a man that’s not even alive.”

“Okay, drop it. I’m sorry I mentioned it,” he says.

She mumbles something under her breath and walks away. Fury is crashing through her veins, before this

escalates further, she should leave.

“Nomkhosi,” he calls after her as she grabs her bag and types something quickly on her phone.

“What, Thakasa?” she jeers at him.

He stands in front of her and looks at her fire-blazing eyes.

“I said I’m sorry,” he says.

“For what?” she asks.

“For everything.”

She rolls her eyes and looks away. He holds her hand, she hates and loves it when he does that.

“Can I drive you home?” he asks.

“I already requested from Bolt.”

“Cancel it. I’ll take you home.”

This time she doesn’t have much to say. She cancels the ride and follows him out to the car.

He takes the Ridgeside Drive exit. They’re not

speaking because she's still pissed and he'd prefer not to have his head bitten again.

"We're going to Getaway?" she asks when he turns onto Medigate Rd.

"I thought you and Phelo might need some things," he says.

"But I always tell you if Phelo needs anything. I don't want to go to stores, I want to go home," she says.

"Can I get you something?"

She frowns, "Why?"

"I just want to buy you something," he says.

"You feel guilty because I said you've never done anything for me? Really, you have a huge ego. I don't want anything, please drive me home."

"That's not fair. I'm everything, but I'm not a stingy man, I take care of people in my life. You have never allowed me to."

She practices her right to remain silent and stares out of the window.

“I feel like you wanted me to commit to you but now that I want to, you’re backing out. Was it all for nothing, Nomkhosi?” he asks.

“I’m backing out?” She frowns.

“Yes, you are. When am I getting my answer?” he asks.

“I just feel like I’m not a Manqele wife material. That’s not me; serving people on my knees, dishing on personalized plates and wearing scarfs.”

“You did that for one day, only one! And I never said you’ll stay with my mother, we have our own house, you’d be expected to be that type of wife if we’re home.”

“But that’s the type of a wife you want, right? That’s why I was dumped over and over again.”

“You’re making excuses for me. I don’t have a problem with how you are, this is how I met and fell in love with you. I don’t want you to change.”

“You want a traditional wedding?”

He frowns, “That’s the only wedding I know and

recognize.”

“What if things don’t work out? Will you let me go?” she asks.

He keeps his eyes on the road and doesn’t respond. This is exactly why she’s undecided. Getting married, specifically to a Manqele, is a lifetime commitment that you can’t step out from. If you’re in, you’re in. Thakasa’s views on marriage are backward and very strict.

He parks outside the gate at the Ngidi residence. He did everything necessary to stay clean after taking lives, but his heart still doesn’t allow him to touch little babies.

“Tell Phelo that I’ll see her soon. I miss and love her,” he says.

“Alright.” She takes her belongings and opens the door to climb out.

He holds her hand. She turns and looks at him.

“Hey, I love you,” he says.

She chuckles, "I'll keep that in mind."

"Seriously?" He's offended.

"There's no need for me to say anything back because you've already concluded that I have father issues. Bye!"

He heaves a sigh and sits inside the car for a good while after she's disappeared inside the gate.

Nomkhosi walks into Ngidi and her mom watching TV with bowls of soup in front of them.

Snalo is somewhere in the house singing. She seems to be focusing on the happy side of life. Everything seems to be perfect, except the Mondli part. They're on and off; unpredictable.

"Who dropped you off?" Phumzile asks.

"Phelo's father," she says and sits on the couch. Something is troubling her, Phumzile quickly picks that up.

"Phelo is sleeping in her room."

Nomkhosi nods and heaves a sigh.

“What’s wrong?” Phumzile asks lowering the TV volume.

“Ma, where’s my father?”

Ngidi turns his eyes to her. They both look shocked that she asked that question.

“I told you he left and we lost contact,” Phumzile says.

“Why are you not looking for him? Bab’ Ngidi has connections, he can find him. Why are you so relaxed while your daughter doesn’t know her father?” she asks.

Ngidi clears his throat and asks, “Where is all this coming from?”

“Baba, I’m grown, I have my own child now. Why is it not important to her to find my father and introduce me to him? He’s my father, Phelo’s grandfather!”

“She tried. Some people are just never meant to be in our lives for a reason. You’re grown, beautiful and successful. You don’t need him,” Ngidi says.

“You’re wrong, I need him.” She turns her eyes and looks at Phumzile, “Ma, I want my father. Get something solid to start on, I’ll search for him by myself.”

Ngidi wraps his arm around Phumzile’s shoulder. They watch as Nomkhosi angrily storms out of the room with her bag.

“I knew this day would come,” Phumzile says with a heavy sigh.

Ngidi caresses her arm and plants a soft peck on her cheek.

“Maybe it’s time we tell her the truth. She’s grown, these things happen, I know it’ll be hard but she’ll understand why you kept quiet,” he says.

“What if it destroys her?” Tears burn her eyes. She’s not ready. She’s done her utmost best to raise a strong daughter, this will surely turn her into a broken woman.

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MAKHUMALO

She's now all alone since Thakasa sent the aunts packing. Neighbors do check on her, but they're not persistent. They only come around breakfast time to score some tea and scones.

Mawande is home. She's everything one would ask from a daughter. Less drama, more respect. Sometimes she's lazy, but that's nothing compared to Phethile. That one bottoms chairs.

MaKhumalo walks in and finds MaNtusi in the kitchen. She usually leaves and comes back when she's cleared the room. But today she walks in and stares at her with her arms folded.

"I'll be done in a minute," MaNtusi says wiping Thakasa's tea-set and packing it inside the cupboard.

"Where's your husband?" MaKhumalo.

MaNtusi frowns, "He went to see Phelo."

"Oh, I wonder when they're visiting. Sphephelo and

her mother,” MaKhumalo says maliciously while eyeing her.

“I’ll text her and find out for you,” MaNtusi says.

“You’ll text who?” she asks.

“Nomkhosi, I thought you were talking about her,” MaNtusi.

“You’re her friend now?” She’s beside herself with shock.

“No, we’re not friends. We just talk, after all we are now sharing a man and we’re moms. The world may have turned its back on me, but I still have people who treat me humanly.”

“Don’t even go there. You did that to yourself,” MaKhumalo says.

“True, I guess I expected too much while I had nothing. You only have two daughters, I only had the right to call you Ma because I married your son and I was what you considered a perfect wife. Blood is thicker than water, and I don’t have your blood in my veins, my own mother died.”

“I’ve always treated you like my daughter,” MaKhumalo says in awe. “Now you want to use the fact that you don’t have a mother to justify the disgrace you brought this family.”

“Thakasa and I are even, he cheated first and got someone pregnant,” MaNtusi says.

“Yes, and I stood by you throughout that situation. I didn’t talk to my son, I couldn’t stand his sight and I called him names. I was supporting another cheater, nizifebe nobabili. I don’t favor any nonsensical child, I’ll treat you exactly how I treat anyone who disappoint me.”

“Except that my punishment is longer because I’m not your child.”

“And your mother died, go on, play your cards, MaNtusi.”

Tears burn her eyes. They used to be close. As much as she wants to be out of MaKhumalo’s yard, she still wants things to go back to normal between them.

“I’m sorry, Ma,” she says.

“I’m nyonyi Ma. What got into your head? Your husband may call me a bad mother, but you know me better than anyone. I’ve been a mother to you more than I’ve been a mother to him. I taught you a few things about this life. I don’t remember you sitting down with me and telling me about your flaws in marriage. You leave whenever you feel like leaving and come back with no explanation. I’m just a picture here.”

“But this is still my marriage, I deal with my emotions the way I see fit,” MaNtusi.

“So it’s not your marriage when it’s Thakasa who’s at fault, you need me there?”

MaNtusi sighs, “No, that’s not how it’s like.”

“I’m going to call women to come and pray for this family.” She walks towards the passage, throwing her hands up and mumbling to herself.

“Can I make you a cup of tea?” MaNtusi asks.

“No, I don’t want it,” she yells at the passage.

“What if I add extra milk?”

“Still, no.”

“Okay, I’ll make it later then.”

Thakasa walks in wearing a huge frown. “Who were you talking to?” he asks.

“To Ma,” she says.

Since when she’s Ma to them now?

“About what?” he asks.

“Tea,” she says.

He walks past the kitchen to the lounge where MaKhumalo and his sisters are. He’s been avoiding Phethy because he doesn’t know what to say to her. He hasn’t been there for her as a brother.

“Tutu,” he stands behind the couch.

Phethy turns her head and looks at him. She’s a drama queen, so this is obviously a big deal. She lost her twin and she’s not getting enough support from these people.

“Come here,” Thakasa pulls out his hand. She grabs

it and stands up. They pull one another to her room. A minute later there are sobs coming from the room. She's been given a platform to cry in bulk; for Sqalo, for the iPhone and for an increase of monthly allowance.

MaNtusi walks into the lounge with a tray of tea-set and puts it on the coffee-table. She comes back with a plate of butter cookies and sits next to Mawande. Hating her was a waste of time, Mawande really doesn't care or involve herself in family feuds. She's been great help with Londa since she came to visit home. Or has she come back for good? Nobody is asking her. MaKhumalo is still dealing with a lot, but sooner or later she'll confront her.

"This is my first time watching this series, Bhambatha recommended it," Mawande says.

"That's your brother-in-law who was in prison, right?" MaNtusi asks.

She laughs, "Yes, but he's not the main character. He didn't break out of prison."

“He could’ve done it, why are you putting it past him? That’s why he likes watching these criminal things,” MaKhumalo interferes.

They don’t say anything. Wentworth Miller is the main character and all this was scripted, it’s not a true story. Bhambatha simply liked the series, like everyone, it has nothing to do with his character. Mawande grabs a cup and makes herself tea.

“So nobody is going to ask if I’m hungry, you’re all just going to eat like you’re sitting with a picture?”

“Hawu Ma, you could’ve asked if you wanted some tea,” Mawande says taking another cup.

“I asked and she said she doesn’t want it,” MaNtusi says.

Mawande stops with a slight frown.

“I didn’t say anything about cookies though,” – MaKhumalo.

“So you only want cookies?” Mawande asks.

“No, and tea as well, you want me to choke and die.”

Mawande rolls her eyes. Luckily, she understands

everyone in this family, nothing surprises her anymore.

A text beeps in phone: WHEN SHOULD I PICK YOU UP?

Gosh, she's still trying to figure out how she's going to get out of the house! She might need some of the Prison Break tricks, because both Thakasa and MaKhumalo are home now.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 60

KHANYO

He's sitting in front of the TV. I don't know if he's watching it or it's watching him. I'm worried about his lack of emotions. I expected him to have a total breakdown after Sqalo died in his hands, that's typical how he is.

"Babe," I say.

He looks at me. I ask him, "Are you okay?"

"My feet are cold," he says.

He's not answering the real question. I wasn't asking about his feet. He doesn't have good-looking feet, I should make sure he never wears sandals in front of my friends. Speaking of those souls, I should check up on them later. Nolwazi's boyfriend is not well, she should be coming to KZN to take care of him. I want her to prove her worthy as a future sister-in-law. I'm that type of a sister.

I come back with a pair of socks from the bedroom and give him. He doesn't wear them, he puts them beside him and continues staring at the TV blankly.

"Did you seek any kind of emotional help after going through what you went through?" I ask.

"No," he says.

I raise my eyebrow. He's not the type that neglects emotions.

"There was a lot going on. Thakasa wasn't there, Nkonzo and I had to hold hands and make sure everyone and everything was okay. There was no time, and I don't want to heal."

He doesn't want to heal? What kind of a statement is that?

"What do you mean you don't want to heal?" I ask.

"Because I killed him, Khanyo."

What the hell?!

"No, you didn't."

"He was alive with the screwdriver stuck in him. He

could've survived, I should've waited for professionals to remove the object. Everyone saw it, he wasn't hurt that badly, I killed him."

"But he asked you to remove it. He was in pain. You did what any brother would've done." Hearing him shifting the blame to himself breaks my heart because both him and I know the truth. Sqalo's time had arrived, there was no turning back.

"I'll never forgive myself for that, Khanyo. Never!"

"But babe..." He shakes his head.

I stop and release a sigh. He's not being fair to himself and to me who has to deal with this strange version of him.

"How's Thakasa holding up?" I ask.

"I don't know. I know he hates me, I just feel sorry for Nkonzo because he didn't do anything."

"Why do you think he hates you?" I'm perplexed. To me it didn't look that way, he even avoided a physical altercation with Mandulo in my presence because he respected that I was his brother's wife. I mean,

girlfriend.

“He disowned us. Me and Nkonzo,” he says.

Forgive me, but I think they’re big babies who are confused about who their father really is. He died, like RIP.

“He just doesn’t care. I don’t remember him asking us how we are since Sqalo passed on. He doesn’t check how we are holding up with the company, our personal lives and grief.”

“Do you check how he is holding up?” I ask.

He looks blank.

“Do you?” I ask again.

“I...I do. I...I...did.” Oh, my man is stuttering. Just know he only stutters when he’s in trouble, angry or explaining something with frustration. Never during sex, or any of his happy moments. It’s like he chooses when his speech does pause-and-replay.

“Really?” I know a liar when I see one.

“Khanyo, you don’t know how hectic things have been. But I did call to check where he was.”

Bathong, if you ask where I am you're checking up on me? This is brand new. Straight from the box!

"He's been a CEO since he was 29, right? With that he had to be a husband, a son and mostly a family leader. But he still checked on you and made sure you were okay. Two days'nyana nje of communicating with the funeral parlor people and sorting out the insurance paperwork, suddenly things are too hectic that you can't even check on other people?"

He stands up and throws my socks on the floor. "It... it...was more than...that. Gosh, you...you...are... making me hate you right now."

Hate is a big word. I'm not trying to undermine the amount of stress that comes with arranging a funeral, but I know for a fact that they had people running around to get things done.

"He...he died..." He sinks back on the couch and buries his face in his hands. This is the Bandla I know.

I sit next to him and try to touch him but he doesn't

want me to. He sobs in his hands and I sit next to him helplessly.

Then he stops and looks around for something. His car keys. He grabs them and stands.

“Bandla, you’re not driving in this emotional state. What if...?” He walks away.

I jump to my feet and yell behind him. Thakasa almost died in a car accident, Sqalo died in the car, and now he wants to have his turn?

“Where are you going?” I’m behind his heel. We are now making noise and disturbing peace of this quiet neighborhood.

“You make me feel like a bad brother all over again. I’m doing my best, okay?” He throws the car keys on my chest and walks out of the gate furiously.

Was I insensitive? This is the first time he got to spend time with me, he needed comfort and I wanted him to be something he’s not- that is being a protective brother, it’s the other way around. Bandla gets protected, he’s the second baby boy of the family. Thakasa created them to be this way. I’m

sure he doesn't mind when they expect too much from him.

I call Tema. I don't know who else to call and report to. MaKhumalo would roast my ass before I can even spell the word "Bandla".

"Hey, sister," Tema picks up.

"Hi," I'm always the one with problems. Or I'm dramatic vele? "Where are you?" I ask.

"We just left for Zimbali."

Nice life!

"I thought Nkonzo would be home to see if his brother arrives. He just left the house angrily."

"Did you guys have a fight?" she asks.

I sigh, "Sort of. I'm worried about him because he left his phone and car keys behind."

"Maybe he's just taking a walk to let off some steam. Do call if he doesn't come back after an hour or so, I'll let Nkonzo know."

“Alright, thank you.”

This is frustrating. I’ve never had to deal with a “walking out” boyfriend before. I’m still living in fear, we all are, his brother was murdered and no arrest has been made. What if something happens to him?

Fear start building up. I’m quivering and rocking myself on the veranda, staring outside the gate. What if someone kidnaps him and kills him like they did to his brother. What if it’s not even a stranger, but someone he knows and adores. What if there’s someone who’s jealous of him out there; a fake friend.

~A man is going to walk through the gate all smiles. It’ll be a happy visit, that’s how it’ll look like, except that he’ll be accompanied by men in hiding. All that for his hard-earned money.

Gunshots start blazing in my ears, they’re deafening, I’m screaming for help. I don’t know him and I don’t know who he’s come to see. There’s blood everywhere. A man is dead. He died for his hardwork.

But there are more bodies on the ground. “Pray Khanyo!” I want to, but I can’t, I’m scared,”~

“Who does she live with?” a white woman asks as she forces a drop of water down my throat.

I don’t know who answers her. I’m surrounded by a number of people. There’s a police van pulling up. Everyone is panicking and I cannot even remember how I started screaming for help.

“Nobody is dead. See?” says one of them. My white neighbors, I didn’t think they care. He’s convincing me, somehow. Of course, nobody is dead, my eyes work just fine.

The officer arrives to us with a confused face.

“We are so sorry. It seems like we wasted your time, she was hallucinating,” the woman holding me says apologetically.

“Hallucinating or lying about a crime scene?” This is not one of those Coke-drinking, patient ones. This must be one of those who went to the police force

for revenge. You know the “criminals killed my father, so I want to punish them in future” type of police.

“I had a vision,” I say, opening my mouth for the first time after bringing the whole neighborhood into a standstill with my screams.

“So we are here because you’re high on drugs? You’re wasting government resources.” He picks me up aggressively. I try to hold on to ‘my white mom’ but Mr Officer is not playing with us. I’m probably the first person he’s ever arrested, he’s trying to make a name for himself.

“I’m a trained seer. Sometimes I get visions. It happened that they panicked and called you for help.”

He’s having none of it. He’s pulling me towards the van.

“Can I get my cellphone and call home?” I beg.

“So you’re not even home. Uvukwa ubungoma obungekho emkipitweni?”

Jeez! One effective service and he’s already acting

like SAPS ever has anything serious to do during the day. He probably came fast because white people called. Back in Bergville we call the police and they arrive when we've even forgotten where the crime scene was.

"You're going to regret this." This is a warning he shouldn't take lightly. Not only am I going to tell my rich boyfriend, I'm going to tell Gugu and pray for MaSibiya's immediate response.

Yeah, I've been arrested for lying about a crime scene and wasting government resources.

I don't even know one jail song. I can't believe I'm a 26 member now!

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MAWANDE

She's packed her toiletry and overnight bag. It's been a very long time since she spent time with a man. She's nervous. Also, she still needs to let these

people know that she won't be sleeping home because of 'an urgent business thing' she has to attend.

"Why does it look like you're leaving?" Phethy asks.

"About time!" MaKhumalo.

She frowns, "You didn't want me here, Ma?"

"You have your own house. You're crowding us," MaKhumalo says.

She laughs her ass off. Not this woman wanting her out of the house at 25 and doesn't want her 30+ year old sons to move out.

"MaNtusi and Thakasa are leaving in a few days. You're going to miss me when you're all alone and miserable."

MaKhumalo looks at MaNtusi. She's hurt, but because she's who she is, she puts a cover on it.

"You're leaving in a few days?" she asks.

MaNtusi looks at her husband, unfortunately he's not speaking to MaKhumalo, so she has to answer.

“No, we are not leaving yet. Maybe in a month, or so. We can’t leave you with a fresh grave,” she says.

News to Thakasa Manqe! There’s a slight frown on his face as he looks at his wife.

“I don’t want to be anyone’s burden. If you already made plans of moving out then do it the right way.”

“Ma, you can’t stay alone so soon. I know you hate me, but I don’t want to lose you. You just lost a son, you need people around you.”

Her eyes wander up the wall and stay on Sqalo’s picture for a moment, then she glances at Thakasa and sighs.

That’s the end of it. Nobody seems to mind Mawande leaving with a bag at 7pm before dinner.

Oh, maybe she got relieved too soon.

“Wande, uyaphi?” Thakasa asks.

She stops. Blinks rapidly. Heavy breaths.

“There’s an urgent thing I want to attend at Wandes tomorrow morning,” she says.

“I’ll drive you in the morning. Don’t travel at night alone.”

“I’m not travelling alone.” All eyes turn to her. Great, just great Mawande! Now they want to know who she’s travelling with.

“A friend is picking me up,” she tries to cover up.

“She must come and get you from the house so that I know who to deal with if anything happens to you.”

MaNtusi frowns. He deals with people now? Or he meant prayer-wise.

Mawande stands frozen on the same spot. How to get out of this one now?

“It’s a male friend,” she says.

MaKhumalo’s face transforms into awe.

“Does your husband’s family know that you have male friends now?”

“Mawande, you can go. Call me when you get there,” Thakasa interferes.

MaKhumalo jeers at him and looks back at

Mawande for an answer.

“Do they know or you’re putting me in trouble?” she asks.

“If any of them has a problem with her having friends of her choice then they must come to me,” Thakasa says.

“I’m not talking to you!” MaKhumalo scolds him.

Phethy runs off to her bedroom and shuts it behind. Too much drama, this is why she prefers New York over them. One day she’ll move to New York and Skype them two times a week.

“Please don’t fight over me. Ma, I’ll call you too when I get there,” Mawande begs.

“No, Thakasa is right, tell that friend to come and get you here inside the house,” MaKhumalo.

“Oh, there’s something I ever say right?” Thakasa.

MaNtusi sighs, “Manqele, stop!”

“No, this woman has been insulting me every...”

“But I said stop, you’re being very disrespectful right

now and you're not a child."

"Never got a chance to be one," he mumbles and turns to his phone.

Silence.

"Can I go?" Mawande asks in almost whisper.

"Go, I hope he doesn't have one eye and he's ready to face the Myezas," MaKhumalo.

Phewww! That dragged long enough. Bhambatha must be wondering what's keeping her.

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BHAMBATHA

He's staring at her with concern. Mawande adjusts on the seat and sighs out heavily.

"They wanted you to come in," she says.

Silence.

She turns and finds a pair of eyes staring through

her soul.

“And now?” she asks with a slight grin.

“No, I’m listening. They wanted me to come in and...?” he asks.

“Well, I kinda gave them a clue that I was going out with a man so Thakasa backed off. But Ma, yoh, she nearly bite my head off.”

“How long are we going to do this?” he asks.

Mawande’s eyes widen.

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“I don’t know about you, but I love you. I’ll get a lot of backlash for it, but you accepting me means the world to me. I can stand against all odds.”

This is the conversation she’s been dreading the most. She’s trying her best to reserve what she feels for him.

“Did you talk to your mother?” she asks.

He sighs heavily.

“It didn’t go anywhere. She doesn’t believe in me and

it's okay." No, it doesn't sound okay. He's hurting, even though he's trying his best to take it as his fate.

"Do you blame her?" She's trying not to sound judgmental. To her family is foundation of everything. If they do this, they need to have a concrete foundation to fall back to.

"I come from a very knitted family. We look out for each other. No matter what happens I know I'll always have my family in my corner. I cannot imagine my future and my own family being the other way around. I don't want it. I don't want to have a man and possible father of my children who doesn't believe in family. Make things right with your mom, please Bhambatha."

"I don't know where to start," he says helplessly. He's a man of many tricks, she's feeling sorry for him.

"We'll figure something out, babe," she says and adjusts her earrings.

He's staring at her and she's not aware of what she said yet.

“Sisi,” he says.

She turns with a frown. She was ‘sisi’ before, but now it sounds weird coming from him.

“What did you say?” he asks.

“When?” She’s confused.

“You said ‘babe’ to me.”

Oh, snap! It’s awkward, everything about them sitting here and grinning at each other like Cheshire cats.

“You’re my babe, aren’t you?” she asks smiling.

“That’s...that... come here.” He wraps his hand around her neck and brings her face closer. Their lips lock in a brief, sloppy kiss. His hand lowers and lifts her arm around his neck. He kisses her again, sucking her lips slowly and reacting to the taste of her scented lipgloss with heavy breaths. He wants more with each second that passes with her lips locked in his. He fishes for her tongue, a vein twitches up around his manhood. He brings her closer, his hand drops to her waist. He’s super turned on, everything about her gives him chills.

There's a knock on the window. Mawande quickly breaks the kiss. Her heart is pounding heavily and it's not the BMT effect alone, there's fear as well.

It comes again. There's a tall shadow standing outside. They should've drove off as soon as she got inside the car.

Bhambatha rolls down the window. A flashlight flickers on their faces.

"It's me," Bhambatha says.

It takes a moment for Mawande to realize that it's none other than the Mufasa of the family.

"What's going on here?" he asks.

Bhambatha just holds her hand and says nothing. He doesn't know how he's going to defend what they're doing, but he got her.

His eyes land on her, she can't keep the stare, her eyes drop.

"Now this is what I hate about you, Bambatha. I don't care about where you and I stand. You don't disrespect my father's house like this. You don't park

your car down the road and do this.”

“We were about to leave,” Bambatha says apologetically.

“That’s not the point. My sister is not your typical floozies. Don’t mess with her on the streets. Do things decently, for once.”

He looks at Mawande who still can’t look at him in the eyes.

“What’s wrong with you?” he asks her.

“We were about to leave, Thakasa,” Bhambatha says.

“I told you that’s not the point. If you love my sister then let your family know. She was your brother’s wife, treat her with that decency.”

“Okay, I’m sorry,” Bambatha.

He didn’t have a great day, the apology goes above his head.

“Must I tell MaKhumalo that you’re cuddling men in cars outside her house?”

“Your life would be over. I keep your secrets, you

keep mine.”

Bhambatha wants to laugh because this is the Mawande he always deals with. Thakasa on the other hand seems shocked.

“I tell you things in confidence,” he says.

“And I’m telling this in confidence as well. I’m trying to explore the feelings I have for Bhambatha. Zip it!”

He looks at Bhambatha, “I don’t like you as a brother-in-law. You’re polluting my sister.”

Bhambatha cracks into laughter.

“Hey man, zip it. Otherwise we’ll make you trend before you can even spell the word ‘sorry’.”

They laugh, both of them.

Now it’s Mawande’s turn to be shocked. Her brother is laughing, not just with anyone, but Bhambatha Myeza.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 61

KHANYO

Calling Bandla was useless because I knew he left his phone in the house. In Mandeni I don't know anyone, except Tema and Nkonzo whose numbers I don't know by head. So I called my brother, if he doesn't kill me today I'll throw a survival party and invite everyone.

He's still going back and forth with the station commander, threatening to sue them for disrespecting and abusing me. Now they're claiming to have not known anything about the kind of a person I am. Apparently, I should have a significant look; iziphandla and izinyongo, and wear calamine on my face. Funny enough I told that ugly giraffe over and over again that I was having visions, but he wanted to impress white people so he arrested me.

I feel bad for always dragging Mandulo into my mess though. He's not well yet. I wait on the chairs

while he goes beserk on the police, if I had my phone with me I would've recorded the whole scene for social media. Black on black hate, they would've never arrested me if I was white.

"My lawyers will be in touch," Mandulo says before turning to me and instructing me to go to the car outside.

Bandla walks through the door with his jacket in hand. His face is covered in sweat. Lord, there's another drama coming. This is the 100th time I encounter problems while in his 'care.'

I hear a sigh from Mandulo.

Here we go...

"You're finally here?" His question is a jab on its own.

Bandla is looking at me trying to check if I'm fine. I don't know if I'm angry at him or happy to have my freedom.

"What happened?" he asks.

Mandulo points at the policeman on the front desk,

"Ask them."

He turns to me, “Makhanyi, let’s go.”

I clear my throat and look at Bandla. He’s hurting, and that’s the last thing I need for him right now.

“Go, I’ll bring your bag tomorrow morning,” he says.

“Are you feeling better?” I ask him.

He nods. I’m not convinced, but there’s nothing I can do for him. It’s one of those situations where you hope one’s family will handle things.

“Nyathi, I’m sorry. This was an unfortunate incident, I wasn’t in the house, I found out when I got home from my brother who had been called by one of our neighbours.”

“Okay,” Mandulo says.

Bandla sighs.

I guess that’s the end of their conversation. We have to leave, he’ll either enquire about it from the police or leave as well.

It feels good to be outside the world again. That was Khanyo’s long walk to freedom. I can’t believe I nearly spent a night there. My goodness, I would’ve

died in those tiny rooms.

“He’s not a bad person,” I tell Mandulo. I know Bandla has his imperfections, but I hate how unfortunate events keep popping up and painting a bad picture of him to my brother.

“I didn’t say he was, I just don’t understand him as a man. But that’s none of my business, if you’re happy I’m happy.”

That’s what people say if they don’t believe in your relationship- if you’re happy, I’m happy.

“I’m sorry I made you drive all this way. How are you feeling?”

“Physically I’m well, my girlfriend sends me long lists of healthy food to eat.” He’s smiling, so am I. I love Nolwazi. “But I can’t help feeling like one of these days I’ll have no reason to keep holding on.”

Now I don’t understand.

“Meaning?” I ask.

“Look at me, Makhanyi. What’s going right in my life?”

“Your relationship with Nolwazi.”

He shrugs, “Yeah, but that’s it. My biggest fear is that my mind might fail to carry me before I get a chance to show my son how much I love him.”

It’s easy to help a physical ill person, you give him pain tablets or injection. An emotional ill person is hard to help.

“Maybe you have to get counselling or something like that.”

He shakes his head, “I just want my life back.”

My brows snap.

“Don’t tell me you want Thobeka back?” He mustn’t dare!

“I miss my life, not her. Right now I don’t know if I’m coming or going,” he says.

“And where does that put Nolwazi?” I ask.

“Nolwazi has a whole life ahead of her. She’s going to have a bright future and I pray she becomes happy, even if she doesn’t end up with me,” he says.

“Do you love her?” I ask.

“I do. But more than that, I care about her,” he says.

“Don’t break her heart. She really loves you. Do it for her, take care of your mental health.”

He smiles faintly. I don’t know if he gets it or he still wants to dwell on negativity.

“Maybe you should come to church one of these Sundays.”

He bursts into laughter.

That was not funny. I mean, I’m not what I was a year ago because of prayers.

“I’m serious,” I say.

“Fasten your seatbelt, Makhanyi.”

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BANDLA

He arrives home before the clock strike 9pm. He

looks like a mess. He's not competing with Mandulo, but now it doesn't sit well with him that he's always there to rescue Khanyo. Now he's questioning himself as a man. Adding to his sorrows is how the situation is at home. It's like Sqalo's death broke the family apart. There's no warmth at home. No unity. Some are not talking. Everyone is doing their own thing and not considering others' feelings.

MaKhumalo sees him first. She's still up because she was waiting for him. MaNtusi has gone to put Londa in bed. Mawande went out. Phethy is locked in her room, doing God knows what. Nkonzo went to Zimbali with his fiancé. Thakasa is sitting there, not speaking to anyone.

"Where is KaMayise? Is she alright?" MaKhumalo asks with concern.

"Her brother took her. She's alright," Bandla says.

"What about you? You don't look fine. Are you hungry?"

He sighs and sits on the couch.

MaKhumalo rubs his back and begs him to eat

something.

“Or you want sweet-potatoes from yesterday? I kept them in the fridge, I’ll just...”

“Ma, please!” he sighs.

“Who made you angry, my boy?”

“Everyone,” he says.

MaKhumalo’s eyes widen. She doesn’t have a favourite, but when it comes to him her heart develops a soft spot.

“Not you too. What did Ntombengcwele Khumalo do this time?” she asks referring to herself by her birth name.

Thakasa glances at her and goes back to his phone.

“Why can’t we get along? It’s like Sqalo’s death drove the family apart. I regret buying him a car, and removing the screwdriver because he’d still be alive today.”

Thakasa lifts his head and looks at him. They don’t talk as they used to. There hasn’t been a time where they sit down and heal one another about how Sqalo

left.

“Mthonga there’s nothing you could’ve done to prevent his death. Your mother needs to take responsibility for her words and actions. If it wasn’t for her Sqalo would be alive today.”

“You burn impepho and tell your family to take me as well.”

Bandla hits his head with frustration. He starts groaning and shaking his body. This is his breaking point. He’s gasping for air and sweating. There are no tears but pain all over him.

Thakasa jumps off his chair and comes to him. MaKhumalo has marched for the bottle of water.

“Bandla what’s going on?” He’s trying to calm him down. They have never witnessed him doing this. It looks scary.

MaKhumalo sprinkles water on his face. He wriggles out of Thakasa’s grip and storms out. He goes to Sqalo’s rondavel and lies on the floor.

“Ma, you can’t throw words like that around. We just

lost a brother and now you want to die too,” Thakasa says in defeat.

MaKhumalo’s brows snap.

“You don’t care,” she says.

He sighs. “Where did Manqele find you?”

“Same place MaNtusi found you.”

They rush out and follow Bandla.

They find him lying on the floor, not crying, but looking devastated.

“Bandlalethu,” his mother calls him at the door.

He doesn’t answer.

“Mthonga,” Thakasa.

Still, no answer.

He reaches to the wall and switches the light on. Books are neatly stacked in their case. Sqalo’s picture in his school uniform is facing the door from the top of his small study desk. His scent is still

everywhere in the house. His suitcases that Nkonzo fetched from Durban are leaning by the wall near the wardrobe.

Thakasa sits on the bed, looks around and inhales sharply.

MaKhumalo has stepped inside but her distance is still a heartbeat away from the door.

“I didn’t agree with the choices he made but I loved him. I still do, he’ll always be my baby.”

Thakasa turns his eyes to her. He’s exhausted now. He doesn’t want to fight anymore.

“It wasn’t his choice, that’s what you don’t get. Just like you didn’t choose to be born attracted to a Manqele man and to be stubborn, he also didn’t choose to be attracted to whoever he was attracted to,” he says.

“I still wanted him to be a boy that I gave birth to. We’ll never resolve this if you want me to lie. Unlike you, I’ll never lie to anyone. Even now, here, in front of his picture and hopefully his spirit as well,” she says stepping closer to the desk. Sqalo’s picture is

staring back at her.

“My boy, I didn’t like the choices you made in life. But that doesn’t mean I wanted you to die. You were my baby, always will be. I forgive you and I hope you can forgive me too for the careless things I said.”

Nobody says anything. Bandla is still lying on the floor. Thakasa is staring at the picture.

“There’s no school for being a mother. You just do it the best way you know how. I guess my best way wasn’t your best, so I apologize for that,” MaKhumalo says to Thakasa.

“Your best way of being a mother is to call me stupid?” he asks.

“I accept that my tongue may be slippery at times, but...”

“Not at times, Ma,” Bandla disagrees and sits up.

“Definitely not at times. Everytime someone tells you that you’re wrong, you just lose it. Sqalo couldn’t even explain himself to you because you don’t have listening skills at all.”

“And you have them?” she asks.

“I’ll answer that when the discussion is about me. Today we’re talking about you.”

“Alright, go ahead,” she picks Sqalo picture and wipes it with her hand. “Just know that if you tell me something on your feet, I’ll take it on my feet as well. Don’t expect me to sit down.”

“Does it make everything invalid if I’m on my feet?” Thakasa asks.

“Yes,” she says.

“Okay, now we’re sitting down. What is it going to take for you to accept our partners?”

“You have many. Which one are you talking about?”

Thakasa chuckles, “I have two. My wife, MaNtusi. And Phelo’s mother.”

“Who didn’t I accept?” she asks.

“Phelo’s mother who doesn’t want a traditional wedding and also MaNtusi because...”

“Phelo’s mother needs to be grounded and you’re

failing. She needs to learn to respect you.”

“She respects me,” Thakasa comes to Khosi’s defense.

“Maybe in bed,” she says. Bandla holds back his laugh.

“Bandlaletu turned KaMayise from being a stripper into a beautiful, God-fearing woman.”

“She wasn’t a stripper,” Bandla argues with a frown on his face.

“My point is, if he changez your character, Phelo’s mother is going to respect him and stay grounded.”

Bandla nods, “I agree. Listen to her. Respect her opinions. And most of all, love her.”

Thakasa laughs, “Are you two seriously giving me relationship advice?”

“If you balance things out with both your women we’ll have less chaos here at home,” Bandla says.

“Chaos is MaNtusi?” Thakasa asks.

“Trust me, the last thing we need here is the angry

MaNtusi. Please don't unleash that crazy woman ever again."

"I'd wake up in the middle of the night to check if I was still alive."

Laughter!

"So when are you coming to church? I think you need to learn about polygamy from your elders so that you don't mess things up."

He scratches his head, "Church, Ma? I've done a lot of things, I don't think I still have a place there."

"You do. That way you can ask for forgiveness and change your ways."

"I don't know. I really don't."

Bandla is staring at him. He cannot drop out of church now. 37 years later?!

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BHAMBATHA

He's never really put his mind into it until now. She's here, in his house, somehow, he has to keep his brother's standards. Which is like competing with a dead brother. He doesn't even know what she likes. Women are different, some like home-cooked meals, some like pizza and some prefer to be taken out.

Instead of guessing and looking lost in the kitchen, he decides to just ask her straight up.

He clears his throat. She turns her head to him. They both smile. Silly!

"So, what do you like to eat and drink?" he asks.

"If I say chamomile tea, beef stew and steam bread are you going to make it?"

He wrinkles his nose and chuckles.

"Not today. But I can get someone to make it tomorrow and buy your tea," he says.

She's flattered.

"Give me whatever you have," she says.

He stands still. Staring at her like she's a precious stone.

“What?” She blinks like an owl in the sunshine.

“I have braai left-overs and bread rolls.” He’s not that fond of home and house life.

“As long as it’s no pork,” she says.

That’s a relief, although he feels bad about bringing her here to feed her left-overs. He mentally plans a breakfast trip to make up for it.

He warms up beef sausages and grilled chicken that Nathi made a day before. Nathi would probably troll him for feeding a woman left-overs. He makes tea, even though it’s not the one she likes. Someone from his friends came with Rooibos teabags. Maybe someone said tea boosts sex drive, because why else would one of those fools drink tea? These teabags are probably three months old or so.

Really, Bhambatha? From left-overs to expired teabags. If Thakasa finds out about this he’d definitely chop him with a heaver.

He serves her and sits beside her. He’s never been

this scared to have a woman around before. As much as Mawande has accepted him with his imperfections, he still needs to uphold her standards.

“I don’t trust your tea,” she says.

His heart races. She can tell that he used expired tea-bags from the cup?

“Where did you get teabags? I know for a fact that you never drink tea,” she asks.

He chokes down laughter.

“What do you mean? I buy teabags, I’m a human.”

She gives her a side-eye and brings the cup to her lips to have a first sip. Something strikes his mind, his eyes widen.

“Wait Mawande.” She frowns and looks at him.

“Expired teabags don’t kill, right?”

“Seriously, Bhambatha, you made me tea with expired teabags?”

“I don’t know if coffee-shops are still selling tea at this time. I didn’t want to disappoint you.”

She rolls her eyes and sips.

“Mawande!” he gasps.

“I’m not going to die. Teabags can be used even a year after their expiration date. As long as they’re kept in a sealed container with no moisture.”

Relief! Relief! Relief!

“Now you can eat and stop staring at me like I’m Judge Judy of people’s hospitality,” she says.

He doesn’t trust himself with a guest like her. Now that he’s relieved, he takes his plate and they eat in front of the TV.

Mawande cleans up after eating. He has gone to shower. She has the opportunity to tour the house. It shows that he had women coming here. Stylish curtains, ceramic vases, African face abstract canvas on the wall. Only a woman can do this. There are string lights in the passages, she feels like a princess stepping inside a castle for the first time.

Her eyes widen when she bumps into a home

aquarium towards the dining room. He's keeping guppies?

"He likes fishes?" she mutters to herself kneeling in front of the tank and watching rainbow fishes.

"Do you want to feed them?" His voice catches her off-guard.

"Ummm yes," she stands up and takes a packet of pellet fish food from his hand.

"Why do you keep them?" she asks.

"To look fancy," he says.

She stares at him.

He doesn't laugh. That's the only reason, it's not like he's going to eat these fishes some day.

"You're weird." She throws the guppies their food and kneels down to watch them eat.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 62

TEMA

It's Saturday afternoon. They went to church as a family, with everyone except Thakasa. Even though Nkonzo isn't saying anything about him, she knows that his brother's new character bothers him. He instilled family traditions into them, yet he's the first one to defy all of them. Nobody knows when he's coming back to work. Tema has been managing things around the office with no single update. Now she's basically working with Nkonzo, which sometimes get weird because as much as they try to separate business from pleasure, being in a confined space for eight hours a day leads into some fondling and forbidden scenes behind closed doors.

Today she called everyone and invited them for dinner at 7:30pm. Thakasa and his family – it'll be up

to him who he brings, and Bandla and his plus-one. Phethy has gone back to Joburg, Mawande went to Mangethe and never came back, so it'll be the brothers and their partners. She's changed into a shirtwaist dress, flip-flops and ankara print headwrap. Pots are cooking, she's restless in the kitchen as she tries to get everything done.

"Can I help?" Nkonzo asks coming from behind. He's been in his study buried in some work. Thakasa's absence is felt by everyone in the office.

"No, babe, go and relax. I'll manage," she says.

"Why didn't you tell Khanyo to come earlier?"

"She's coming from her brother's house in Durban. And I want her to be a guest, just like everyone."

His phone rings. He grins widely before answering. His eyes are on her, it must be someone they both like hearing from.

"Wait, I'll give her the phone," he tells the person before giving her the phone.

She glances at the screen before putting the phone

against her ear.

“Hi Ma,” she says.

“MaDube, everyone is dressing up and going to the dinner I wasn’t invited to.”

She smiles with a little eye roll.

“You’re mourning nje, and I wanted to unite the siblings so that they can spend some time together. You know how tough things have been. But I have something planned for both of us tomorrow.”

Nkonzo frowns. He didn’t know about those plans.

“It better be something nice. What did you do to get Thakasa to accept the invitation?”

“Before we became the in-laws he was my boss and my friend.”

“He’s bringing both his women, be ready to be a peacemaker.”

Tema’s eyes widen. He’s bringing the Nomkhosi too? Is she officially a family member now?

“No Ma, I don’t want to be caught in between two

fighting women.”

MaKhumalo laughs, “I know MaNtusi gets attacked by demons at times, but she’s certainly not that type. If any fight breaks there it’ll be between Thakasa and Phelo’s mother.” She says and imitates Nomkhosi, “Thakasa don’t do this. Thakasa I want this. Thakasa, Thakasa, Thakasa!”

Tema breaks into a fit of laughter. She knows MaKhumalo very well. Something must’ve happened between her and Phelo’s mother, like a petty disagreement. They all started there; Khanyo, her and lately MaNtusi. MaKhumalo likes giving people a hard time, even her own kids.

“Enough gossip!” Nkonzo says snatching the phone from her ear and finishing the conversation with MaKhumalo.

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THAKASA

They're getting ready for dinner at Nkonzo's house. They'll find Nomkhosi there, it wasn't his suggestion but MaNtusi's. If she's going to be part of this family she needs to know everyone and understand how things work.

"I'm giving you five minutes now," he says impatiently as he walks into her still doing what he left her doing ten minutes ago; wrapping her head and brushing her eyebrows.

"I'm almost done," she says.

He knows that she's just bluffing, so he sits on bed and watches her like a hawk.

Londa moves his hands and scratches his face. He tries to cover him with a blanket but he's now awake and licking his little lips for his milk.

"I've taken his bag and all bottles to the car," Thakasa says picking him up.

"He's going to scream," MaNtusi says trying to hurry up.

"Only if you weren't taking the whole day to marinate

yourself,” he says and gets off bed.

“I’m not marinating myself, and beside, I have to look beautiful in your arm to neutralize the view.”

He laughs, “Wow! Let’s go before I change my mind and hide my ugly face in this room.”

Londa’s eyes lock with his mother’s as Thakasa heads towards the door.

“Hey Kuhle kamama,” she’s smiling and snapping her fingers at him.

His eyes shift from her face to her fingers. Her heart races, she snaps her fingers again. “Wait, Manqe!”

Thakasa stops and looks at Londa on his shoulder. MaNtusi points her finger between his brow-ridge, he blinks and shuts his eyes.

“Oh Shembe, he’s seeing my finger Manqe. He’s seeing my finger!”

“Wait, are you sure?” They go back to the bed and lay Londa down. They test him with their fingers, then flash different colors in front of him, his eyes follow. MaNtusi is crying. Thakasa is calling Londa’s

optometrist and confirming if what they think is happening is really true.

He's instructed to flash a light on his face. He does, Londa's eyes squint but follow the light. This is it, his sight is back!

"Please bring him on Monday for further examination," says Dr Mcineka.

MaNtusi is still crying. He pulls her for a hug.

"I told you he was going to be alright. The ancestors wouldn't have forsaken you. You came here innocent and gave their home the warmth they needed. You're more than just a wife here, you're the backbone of me, MaKhumalo's frenemy and her first daughter-in-law. Now the most caring mother I know, ngiyakuthanda mkami."

"I love you too, Manqele. Thank you for everything." She wraps her arms around his waist. Thakasa kisses her lips and wipes her wet cheeks with his hands.

"Now both of you are crying. Londa is crying for his milk and you're crying for me," he says.

MaNtusi chuckles and moves off his chest with a smile.

“I’m not crying for you. Maybe later I will,” she says.

He bites his lip.

“Now I’m not even interested in Tema’s dinner, I just want ‘later’.”

The watch is ticking forward, but they have something to privately celebrate before leaving. Thakasa goes to the car to get one bottle of milk while MaNtusi stares into her son’s eyes and wondering if he knows that she’s his mother.

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THE REUNION

Bandla is the first one to arrive, without Khanyo though. He’s alone, wearing a grey pant and golf T-shirt. Anyone can easily tell that things aren’t okay.

“Where is Khanyo?” Tema asks.

Khanyo is the only woman she knows and gets along with in this family, if Phethy isn't included. She doesn't know MaNtusi that well. She's met Nomkhosi, but their little encounter didn't build into a friendship.

"She's coming," Bandla says.

No further question is asked. If he says she's coming then she's coming. Tema is a bit relieved, she sends a text to Khanyo to confirm, and indeed she's on her way.

He disappears with Nkonzo to the balcony. Everything is set but she's still restless. This is her first time hosting a Manqele dinner, everything needs to be in order.

"Tema!" Thakasa's voice comes from the door.

She smiles, "Heeey."

They hug. MaNtusi stands aside with her son in her arms. She seems to be relaxed than how she usually is.

“How are you?” Tema asks and takes Londa from her arms.

“I’m good, how are you?” MaNtusi.

“Not complaining. Your boy is growing, he looks handsome.”

“Babies grow fast. You’ll see it one day,” she says.

Tema chuckles and gives Londa back. “Is he on any treatment?”

“No, actually he’s fine. Everything is perfectly fine with him.” She looks at Thakasa and smiles.

He smiles back at her. Okaaay!

“I thought his eyes were...” Thakasa cuts her short.

“They didn’t disappoint in this particular situation. He’s okay now.” He’s referring to his ancestors. He hasn’t forgiven them for Sqalo’s death yet, but for this instance he’s grateful.

“So do you need any help or you are a superwoman as usual?” MaNtusi asks with a cheeky smile.

Tema chuckles, “Not really. I sent invitations not for

you to come and work. You're guests."

"As usual," MaNtusi chuckles and rolls her eyes.

Thakasa gives her a little smirk and takes Londa from her.

"I think you two need to talk," he says.

"Manqele, I still need to feed him his bottle," she says.

He walks away. "I'm not handicapped, I'll feed him."

She sighs and turns back to Tema with her hands on the hip.

"So your boss thinks we need to talk. What's up? I thought we were good," she asks.

"I really don't understand why you're always acting up with me. What did I do wrong?" Tema.

"I'm always acting up? You took sides in something that had nothing to do with you."

"What side?" Tema frowns.

"MaKhumalo and I had obvious issues and you tried your utmost best to use that to your advantage. I

always felt like you were being this glorifying wife and snubbing me, who at the moment was the underdog, and you got away with it.”

“Maybe you and I haven’t sat and introduced ourselves to one another. Let me tell you something, if you ever seem me glorifying someone know that I’m just reciprocating that glory. He earned it. If you see me being submissive know that I’m being treated right. I joined church because Nkonzo had proven himself to me. I fell in love with MaKhumalo because, despite her judging me at first, she eventually welcomed me warmly, with my scars and everything. I’ve been married before, that you know, so the last thing I’ll ever do is to involve myself in someone else’s marital issues. I had no reason to choose sides between you and MaKhumalo. I know how tough marriage can get, so I’ll never judge anyone. If you opened your heart to me I wouldn’t have kept my distance. I gave you space because it looked like you needed it.”

“So you don’t have anything against me?” MaNtusi.

“Geez, MaNtusi, you should be showing me around

and teaching me the Manqele traditions and techniques to survive the MaKhumalo seasonal fever. Not fighting me, I have nothing but respect for you.”

She laughs and opens the fridge to get something to drink.

“I wish I had those techniques. But trust me, she’s not bad as she seems. I’ve been living with her for years, luckily for you Nkonzo moved out early. You’ll survive, she loves her family.”

“Just like Thakasa. He’s a family man. I’m happy to see you guys back together and happy.”

“Trust me, it took a lot for us to get here. I thought I was done, I think we both did. But marriage is never easy, we had to stick to our vows and forgive each other.”

“You’re happy?” Tema asks.

“When you’re at peace, happiness becomes an automatic thing. I love my husband,” she says.

Tema nods and sighs.

“Do you think Nkonzo will take a second wife one day as well?” she asks.

“That’s a conversation you must have with him. Just communicate effectively so that you don’t find yourself in my situation one day.”

There’s a clucking of stilettos as the person scuttles in. They both turn their heads to the door.

The one and only Nomkhosi in a white cinched-waist top and black pencil skirt. White top and a baby? This must be a well-mannered baby.

Relief dwells on her face as her eyes land on MaNtusi.

“Am I late?” she asks.

“Yes, seemingly everyone is running late. We also got here five minutes ago. Why are you wearing white?” MaNtusi asks putting away the drink she had in her hand and taking Phelo.

“It’s my favourite. Phelo gets the drill,” she says.

“Can I have her for a day and you take Londa, because wow!” They both laugh.

“You and MaDube have met before. No need for introductions,” MaNtusi says.

They exchange formalities, hug and dive into a normal conversation.

“Where’s Londa? I got your message,” Khosi asks.

“He’s with other men outside. This is the happiest day of my life. I still can’t believe it!”

“I’m happy as well. Hopefully those little eyes didn’t gain vision for him to see women when he grows up.”

MaNtusi laughs, “I want a daughter-in-law, he must put his vision into good use. I want no ugly girl in my house, he must look carefully.”

“Hhayi-bo, you can’t choose for him,” Tema says.

“Why not? I’ll pull a MaKhumalo if he thinks otherwise.”

Laughter erupts!

Tema calls Nkonzo to the dining room. Everyone

comes in and gathers around the table. Khanyo hasn't arrived and Bandla is worried.

Phelo snuggles onto her father. It's been a while since they've seen one another. Londa is on Khosi's lap. MaNtusi is helping Tema dish up and serve around the table.

The last guest finally arrives. Tema holds back her scream. Now dinner has officially started.

"What kept you so long?" she asks hugging Khanyo.

"I had to start somewhere before coming here. Hello, everyone."

They greet her back. She plants a kiss on Bandla's lips. All eyes turn to them. She doesn't care, even when Thakasa stares at her longer than anyone's.

She sits next to Bandla and looks at everyone around the table.

"You know MaNtusi, right?" Tema.

She nods, "Yeah, the face."

"That's Phelo's mother over there, Nomkhosi Nsele. You know your future husbands, there's no need for

me to introduce them.”

“Yeap,” she sighs and reaches for a glass of juice and gulps it down.

“I thought you weren’t coming,” Bandla says in almost whisper pinching her hand.

She smiles faintly.

“I wouldn’t have disappointed the Dube princess. How are you?”

“Happy now that you’re here.”

“Good. Are you going to drive me back to Durban later?”

He frowns, “You’re going back?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because my brother is suicidal and he’s the only family I have, so I have to keep an eye on him.”

“I didn’t know that. What’s wrong with him?” Bandla frowns.

“Ask them; the happy family.”

There’s a moment of silence.

She looks at them; MaNtusi, the babymama and Thakasa.

“You all got a happy ending, right? Everyone is laughing; ki ki ki. The only person who’s still suffering from the triangle... or was it a rectangle? It’s my brother. The one who got him into this mess is now living a happily-ever-after in her polygamous marriage.”

“But I told your brother I was still sorting things out? You don’t sleep with someone’s wife and then threaten to kill yourself when things don’t go your own way,” Thakasa says, slightly irritated.

“And you’re going to take your precious time because you don’t care. MaNtusi should be fighting for righteousness.”

“My husband agreed to let him have a relationship with Londa. My main priority was my son’s health. What did you expect me to do?” MaNtusi says in defense.

“You took my brother for a ride. He had to maintain you until your husband took you back. Now that things are good you’re not keeping the same energy to ensure that he gets a chance to see his son.”

“My goodness, are you being serious right now? I’m married, I discuss things with my husband. Mandulo should be patient, Londa is fine, he just gained his vision back.”

“Did you tell him that or it was just for you and ‘Mangele’ to celebrate? Because I’m Londa’s aunt and as far as I know he’s blind.”

Thakasa is now fed up.

“Okay, you’re not going to go back and forth with a senior wife of this family,” he says firmly. He’s now enraged. This was supposed to be a family dinner, not a court of custody case.

Khanyo pushes back her chair and gathers her bag and cellphone.

“I’m not sitting here and watching this,” she mutters furiously.

Bandla gets off his chair freaked out. This shouldn't be getting out of hand like this.

"Babe, please sit down."

"I'll never get married to a family that caused my brother's death."

He frowns. How can she say that? Now he's being held responsible for something he played no part in. Pain reflects in his eyes.

"Don't talk like that. This can be sorted," he says following her behind.

"I'm telling you, Bandlaethu. I only have a brother in this world. No one else. If he dies because of your brother and his wife I'm not going to be part of this family. You'd have to choose between me and them. I mean it!"

"Can we talk?" he asks.

"Yes, but not in this ridiculous dinner. If you want me, come with me."

He stops and glances back. Everyone is looking at him. Thakasa's eyes are sharp like a set of needles.

They have nothing but brewing anger.

“Khanyo, please!”

“Bye, Bandla.”

He sighs and follows her out.

“Wow!” someone at the table says.

Everyone is stunned. What did just happen? Bandla left family dinner for a woman.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 63

A long moment of silence passes. Nobody breathes a word. Eventually there's some movement. It's MaNtusi leaving with a serviette over her eyes. She's crying. She never thought she'd be shedding tears on this day; the day her son finally gains his vision back. But here she is now, cuddled up on the bathroom floor and crying her eyes out.

"Can I check on her?" Khosi asks directing at Thakasa.

He doesn't respond. He's still furious about the drama that just unfolded, and the fact that Bandla let his woman talk anyhow with him and then left with her. He can stand being talked to that way by Nomkhosi because, well, she's the mother of his child and he loves her. But he can't take it from anyone else.

Nkonzo takes Londa, Khosi leaves the table and heads towards the bathroom.

“I have to check on Khanyo.” Tema pushes back her chair and leaves with her phone. Her and Khanyo talk everyday. She knew that her brother had moved back home to be closer to her, but she didn’t know things were that bad.

Thakasa takes a sip from his drink and wipes his forehead with a cloth.

“Don’t make him choose between us and her. It’s unfair. He loves her,” Nkonzo says.

“She made him choose. Not me. And he’ll choose her.”

“He doesn’t have to. Please let the man see the boy,” Nkonzo begs.

“He’s got weak-ass ancestors. What if Londa loses his vision under his care again? I didn’t say he’ll never see the baby, I said I will let them have a relationship through his sister. All they need to do is wait until I’m sure nothing will go wrong. Londa is a very sensitive boy.”

“But it kinda looked bad. I mean all of you are good now, it’s just him. We are not a selfish family, that

should never be a picture we portray to people. If MaNtusi can accept Phelo's mother and love her child with no boundaries, surely you can do the same."

"I'm not going to be friends with him. And if Khanyo calls I'm going to tell her the same thing I've been telling her over and over again; 'I'll let you know when it's safe for him to visit.' Their ancestors nearly killed her for that useless gift of hers. They couldn't do one thing right; protecting her brother from marrying a loose woman. Now I must send a baby that has ancestors battling over his head to them?"

"Then advise him which steps to take in order to make things right. I know you know how things are done. You were fortunate enough to have a father who taught you everything. That's a child-headed family. They don't know anything. Even her discovering that gift was because of Bandla. This is going to take a toll on Bandla. I don't know about you but I'm not ready to lose another brother."

Tema walks back in. They immediately cut the conversation. Now they're just going to eat and

depart.

Nomkhosi finds finds MaNtusi crying on the bathroom floor and exhales before touching her shoulder.

“What’s really going on?” she asks.

MaNtusi wipes her eyes and sniffs back tears.

“I never used her brother. Manqele never stopped maintaining me as his wife even when I was away. Mandulo and I both wanted the same thing; Londa to be fine.”

“I’m really sorry. Maybe when both of you have calmed down you can talk things through.”

“I can’t talk to someone who behaves like that. She’s now fighting with me. I may not be communicating with them regarding the baby, but I’ve been talking to Manqele about it. He knows that I want Londa to know his father and he recently agreed to it. Now I must jeopardize my marriage and son’s health to nurse her brother’s mental health that was...”

Khosi interferences, "I hear you. Just calm down and have a conversation with Thakasa. I don't think it's healthy for Londa to have both ancestors and living families fighting over him."

She gets up from the floor and goes to the mirror to clean her face.

KHANYO

Except him asking me if I'm hungry along the way, our journey has been filled with silence. We do fight, but silent treatment is not our code of conduct. I feel bad for ruining Tema's perfect dinner, but my emotions caught flames of anger when I saw that happy family. Mandulo is now the only bad guy, they all decided to work things out and keep him in the dark. I expected something from Nothile, from what I heard she knows my brother to some extent. She should be feeling some sympathy towards him. Do I regret talking to her that way because she's the senior wife? No, at that moment I was addressing

my brother's babymama.

His phone rings again. He ignores it and keeps driving.

"It could be important," I say.

"Khanyo, please. I'm trying to think," he says.

"Think about what?" I ask.

"About this whole thing. You argued with my brother in front of the family. Khanyo, that's the most disrespectful thing anyone can do in my family. When it comes to him there's a line that nobody crosses, and you crossed it. Now I have to think how we're going to make things right."

This is unbelievable!

"Bandla, I don't care about your brother's ego right now. Did you hear me saying my brother is not coping mentally?" I ask.

"I heard you very well. If you had let me handle things and not disrespect my brother things would've been easy. Now we have to start by apologizing to him before talking about Londa's

case.”

“He can hold that against Mandulo?” I’m shocked. Is that how cold-hearted he is?

“I don’t know if you get it, but you’re an elder at the Mayises. You’re an aunt, Mandulo’s sister. You represent the family. I hate to say this, but on this one, Thakasa has the last word. It’s his way or no way. Throwing tantrums won’t help, if he says wait, you wait.”

“I don’t think he cares. And I don’t think you care about my family the same way I care about yours.”

“I talked to him, Khanyo. What do you mean?” He’s seriously acting confused now.

“I mean do something, man up for me. I can’t even be away from home because I have to take care of my brother. He hasn’t been working in over a month, you know that. That’s the same man you want to send your bride off. If he dies I have no one. Literally no one!” My emotions are running wild and that’s the last thing I need while we’re on the road.

“Do you think having Londa is going to help his

situation? His issues are beyond this situation," he asks.

"Do you think not having him is helping?" He cannot answer because his question wasn't well thought in the first place.

"Are you going to help me? Bandla, I always bend my back when it comes to you and your..."

He sighs, "I will. Okay? I will turn against my family for you."

If he thinks putting it that way is going to make me feel guilty then he's mistaken. I'm very much happy to hear it. His pain is always my pain, it's time he returns the favor.

We arrive at Mandulo's house. The outside lights are turned on, which means he's home.

I turn to Bandla behind the wheel.

"Are you coming in?" I ask.

"No," he says and sighs.

“Just come and greet.”

“I’ll swing by tomorrow. What time are you going back to Bergville?”

“He’s fetching his blood test results from the hospital at 13h00 then we’ll leave.”

“I’ll come before 13h00 then. Please send me a text when you’re in bed so that I can call.”

I kiss his lips. It takes him a second to kiss me back. I don’t know how he’s going to face his siblings after walking out on them, he seems bothered by it. Mostly, me arguing with his brother. It’s like the biggest sin of them all.

“Drive safely. I love you.”

He nods, “I love you too.”

My heart breaks when I see him driving away but Mandulo and Nothile put us into this. I’ve done my best to stay neutral because, to some extent, I understand Thakasa’s anger. But if you throw my brother to the wolves I’ll come back leading the pack. He’s lying on the couch covered in a fleece blanket.

My eyes land on the beer bottle hidden under the table.

“Who was here?” I ask.

“Hello to you too, Makhanyi.”

I throw my bag on the table and slide down on the couch.

“I thought we agreed that you’ll maintain a healthy diet for this while.” I stare at him. He looks slightly drunk, I know I shouldn’t be judging him but I can’t help it.

“It was just one beer,” he says.

“Yeah, and next it’ll be two, then vodka and weed. A year later it’ll be nyaope,” I say.

He breaks into laughter.

“You’re dramatic. How did the dinner go? I thought you’d come back later than this.”

“I left before it started.”

He sighs, “What did you do?”

“Londa was there. Thakasa’s daughter and her

mother were also there. She had Londa on her lap, the babymama, while her daughter was on her father's lap. Your babymama was on wifey duties. Everyone was kiki'ng, so I called the happy family out and I was told everything is fine because Londa has regained his vision. Thakasa caught feelings on behalf of his wife and I left with his brother."

"He regained his vision?" He's sat up. His forehead is creased into a forehead.

"Apparently, yes. But I don't think we'll see him anytime soon because of what I did today."

"You'll have to apologize. I don't want any problems with that family again." He's unbelievable!

Why do I have to apologize for speaking up? I'm the one who's always here to listen to his problems, which include that baby boy.

"I'm not apologizing," I say.

"Makhanyi, that man is going to be in my son's life forever. I'm not saying you did a bad thing because I know who you are as my sister and I love you to death. But sometimes you have to apologize

because you choose peace over being right. That's what I ask from you, for me and him to be at peace, apologize."

"I actually didn't say anything to him. I was addressing your babymama," I say.

"Don't say that. Jesus Christ, he'll think I want her!"

"He's your babymama, that won't change because he's insecure."

He laughs and lies back on the couch. "Now I understand why mom never liked your aunts. Aunts are always a problem."

"What do you mean? I've been nice for months. But for you, I'll apologize to your babymama, even though I'm not sorry."

"Thank you. Why ihwanqa lakho didn't see you in?"

"Come on, you don't like him. He's obviously avoiding you."

"Do I have to like another man?" he asks with a chuckle.

"Not necessarily, but you don't have to be nasty." He

always makes things awkward for Bandla, understandable so, I still think he can try to meet him halfway. Wouldn't he be in Londa's life as an uncle as well?

"Did you order any food?" I ask.

"Yes, but I didn't leave anything because I thought you were eating where you were," he says.

Yawn! Did I say I didn't regret my actions one bit? Well, scratch that, I actually wish I could've waited until I had eaten before popping off.

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BHAMBATHA

He may be trying too hard, but having friends like Nathi means you're always making stupid decisions and a fool out of yourself. Today he's here with a breakfast takeaway and bunch of flowers because Nathi questioned his sense of romance. He left his car at the Shisanyama and came by foot to avoid

attracting attention.

They're doing their thing. It's official. They text everyday and address each other as lovers. But that doesn't change the fact that this house, bedroom and everything inside it was bought by his brother. He'll never disrespect his memory by sharing a bed that he bought with 'his wife.' They'll do their thing in his house and hotels until they're both ready to come out to the family.

So he's just dropping off her breakfast and leaving. She opens the door wearing a gown and rubbing her eyes.

"Hi," she's still sleepy, which looks too sexy on her.

"Are you good?" he asks.

He's staring instead of walking in.

"I'm good, Bhambatha." She's still sulky because he woke her up before time. Unfortunately they're still sneaking around, if she's here it'll be their norm.

"I brought you breakfast and flowers," he says.

"Thank you," she says.

He looks around and finds a chair to sit for a minute. He's not just going to leave; she's not bad to look at.

"Do you like them?" he asks.

"Of course, I love flowers."

He's happy. Nathi isn't such a fool after all.

"So I don't get a 'thank you' hug before I go?"

She drags her feet from the base where she was putting her flowers and comes to him.

"Mawande, come on." He laughs and pinches her nose. "You know I was up before 3am and I'm not sulking. It's 6:25 and you're acting like I woke you up in the middle of the night."

"I don't like being woken up by a phone call," she says.

"What do you prefer?" he asks.

Her sulky face breaks into a smile.

"A kiss, or a hug, or more," she says.

"More?" He lifts his eyebrow.

“I’d like to go back to bed. When am I seeing you?”
She’s trying to change the subject but his face still shows much curiosity.

“I’ll see you tonight so that I can wake you up the way you like,” he says.

“Which way is that?” She feigns confusion.

“By warming the sausage in the microwave,” he says.

“Warming the sausage?”

“Isende-ke,” he says.

Her eyes widen. She pulls her hand from his grip and tries to get away. He laughs and pulls her back between his legs.

“You don’t have to use vulgar language,” she says.

“Okay, I’m sorry. Please give me a hug, I want to leave.”

She wraps her arms around his waist. Bhambatha pulls her chin up and brushes her lips gently while staring into her eyes. Then he sucks her lower lip and shuts his eyes. Her lips are soft and addictive as usual. His hand holds the back of her neck as he

fishes for her tongue and onslaughts her with a passionate kiss.

“What is this?” the voice comes from the door, shocked.

Mawande breaks the kiss instantly and steps back fearfully. They didn’t hear anything, and where’s Mrs Myeza going so early in the morning dressed up for occasion?

“Ma,” Bhambatha says getting off the chair and brushing his face with a heavy sigh.

“What are you doing in my son’s house with his widow?” She’s standing a step away from the door with a huge, disgusted frown on her face.

“I brought her breakfast,” he says.

“And fed it to her with your mouth? Who said she needed your breakfast that was bought with a bloodied money? Nyezi left money, she doesn’t need your dirty money.” She turns her eyes to Mawande and shakes her head slightly in disappointment.

“What kind of breakfast is that?” she asks.

“Eggs, beef sausages and...” Mrs Myeza claps her hands before she even finishes.

“Now he wants you to pay with your body for lousy eggs and sausages? But why am I disappointed? That’s how he works; taking advantage of everyone, even his own family.”

Mawande glances at Bhambatha and doesn’t get any solid reaction. But she has to defend him this once.

“He wasn’t making me pay for anything,” she says.

“I saw him holding you and shoving his tongue down your throat. It’s high time this house gets a man, thugs are now doing as they please.”

“What do you mean?” Mawande asks with a frown.

“It’s time we revisit and finish the conversation we had a year ago. You need a man in this house and you need him fast.”

Mawande is about to faint. Her eyes are all out. Fast? What does that even mean?

“I’m not ready to remarry,” she says and looks at

Bhambatha for support.

“That’s fine, but this house needs a man,” Mrs Myeza says.

“It’s my brother’s house. You can’t decide who lives here without Mawande’s opinion,” Bhambatha says.

“Don’t involve yourself in this. You were never a brother to him. You were useless, just like you always are to everyone. I don’t want to see you. I don’t want to talk to you. I will not answer anything to you, I don’t know why you didn’t die when you had pneumonia at 6 months old.”

“Ma, come on!” Mawande says standing between the two of them. Things are escalating really fast.

“Listen here bitch, I may not be perfect but at least I’m not you. Try to eat make-up so that you can be pretty inside.”

Mawande gasps, “Bhambatha! You can’t call your mother a bitch. We talked about this and you promised to change.”

Mrs Myeza turns to the door furiously and leaves.

There's a stare battle behind, Mawande is fuming.

"Really, Bhambatha?" she asks.

"She's constantly telling me how she wishes I was dead. That makes her a bitch," he says.

"Okay, I'll see you around."

"Are you kicking me out?"

"Bhambatha, please."

He exhales heavily and walks out. Mawande closes the door behind him and sighs.

What is the way forward? How is she going to bring peace between mother and son? Why Nyezi didn't do it before he died?

(Sms TBBA BFA89 to 34877. T&C's apply)

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 64

KHANYO

I told Bandla that I was going to the hospital with Mandulo today, so his call surprised me this morning. He wants us to meet at this particular restaurant in town. He didn't explain anything. Now I have to pack my bags earlier and go to that restaurant before coming back for Mandulo's hospital appointment.

It's a bit cold today, I put my sweater and knee-length boots.

"I'll be back in an hour or so," I tell Mandulo who's glued to the TV screen watching a tennis thing. He has some white boy tendencies.

"Okay," he says without shifting his eyes from the screen.

Bandla better have a good excuse for this. He didn't mention anything last night, he said he was going to come and visit Mandulo before 13h00.

The meter taxi drops me outside the Grill Jichana where we are meeting. I call outside the entrance and ask him to come out.

"Hey," he greets and hugs me.

"Hi, you look like you're up to something. Why are we here?"

He chuckles and pulls my hand. Before we turn towards the table I see her. Now I'm more confused. Why are they here? Does Thakasa know about it?

"What's going on?" I look at him.

"Please greet first," he says.

I was going to greet. I'm not that ill-mannered.

"Hello, MaNtusi," I greet.

She smiles. I don't know if it's genuine or fake.

"Hey, unjani?" she asks.

“I’m good.” I’m still on my feet and staring at the boy in her arms. Now he’s grown to resemble my mother so much.

“Am I allowed to hold him?” I ask.

“Ummm yes,” she says hesitantly and looks at Bandla.

“You can hold him for a moment. I want to take him to your brother while you and MaNtusi talk.”

Talk? Shock me again!

“Does your brother know about this?” I ask him.

“He approved it. It’s not like Londa will be sleeping over. Your brother is not going to burn impepho for him or anything. They’ll just meet and spend some time together.”

“You arranged that for Mandulo?” I’m getting emotional. I don’t know which card he played for his brother to let this happen. He probably cried, I know for a fact that Thakasa can be hard on every person under the sun except his siblings, anyway I’m grateful.

“Thank you,” I say and briefly kiss him before taking my nephew and holding him in my arms for the first time.

“Hey little Nyat...” Oh gosh, this is awkward! I cannot say that because he’s actually a Manqele.

“Hey boy, why are you growing so fast?” I peel the blanket off and sit him on the table.

“What do you feed him?” I ask Nothile.

“He’s on S26. I cheat and feed him Nestuum cereal at times.”

No wonder he’s getting so big. If he was rightfully my nephew I was going to buy a wheelbarrow for him.

“And what are these strings on his wrists?” I ask her.

“They protect him from bad spirits. Manqele got them for him.”

Oh, father of the year!

I’m an aunt for a third time now. The only difference right now is that I’m an aunt to a baby boy and everything is complicated regarding our relationship

with him. Mandulo hasn't even told the Nyathi family yet, because what's there to report? 'I fucked someone's wife and got her pregnant and now I'm paying for it through my son?'

"Okay, it's time for me to go, you said you're going to the hospital at 13h00." Bandla takes Londa, my hands suddenly feel empty, so does my heart.

A question strikes my mind, I look at him; "Do you love babies?"

He slightly frowns and chuckles. He's holding the baby like a pro.

"Yes. You want to give me one?"

"I want us to adopt one," I say.

Nothile laughs. They both do. I guess it's not a possibility at the Manqueles. They want you to pop their babies out of your womb.

"I love you," he says giving me a look that emphasizes something. I was going to apologize to Nothile because my brother asked me to.

He leaves with Londa. There are menus on the table and cold drinks already ordered.

“You’re paying?” I ask turning my head to her.

“Yes,” she says.

Well, I guess I can order any expensive meal here, her husband is rich. I read through the menu while trying to memorize how I’m going to apologize without sounding defensive of my actions.

“Khanyo, I never used your brother,” she breaks the silence.

I look up a bit alarmed. She’s here to clarify that part?

“I never asked him for anything. He did everything he did out of his own will,” she says.

“I’m sorry if that’s how you see it. From how I looked at things you kind of used him.”

“How?” She knits her brows at me.

I close the menu and push it aside.

“Okay, let’s break it down.”

She sits up straight and stares at me.

“You didn’t tell him that you were pregnant until you discovered that the other woman was still pregnant,” I say.

“Because I didn’t know where he lived. Are you being serious right now?” she snaps.

“However, you managed to find him when you needed him.”

“Because Londa was born,” she says.

“And you thought your marriage was over. Were you going to tell him if the other woman hadn’t been pregnant?” I ask.

She blinks rapidly and sighs like I’m being dramatic. I give her a minute to answer and she doesn’t say anything- I’m right.

“When you found him he did everything for you. He’s a sweet person by nature. Even if Londa wasn’t his son he was still going to help you if you needed help. But as someone who had time to know him better and understand how his life is, I expected you to be less harsh on him. You can’t use the ‘married woman’ card now that everything is going alright in

your life. That's how I saw it, you are now happy and don't really care about his feelings."

"Trust me, I'm motivating Manqele to let them have a relationship."

"If you say so. What are you having?" I open the menu and read through desserts.

"Manqele just lost a brother. It's taking a toll on him. The last thing he needs is me persuading him to fix things with the man I slept with. I'm motivating him and giving him time to breathe as well."

"The way you feel the need to be soft on his feelings, is the same way I feel the need to protect my brother's."

"Okay, if you feel that way than I apologize. I really don't want us to be enemies. We love brothers and you're the aunt of my son. If there's anyone I truly want to have a healthy relationship with, it's you," she says.

"We are not enemies. I'm a vocal person, that's how I deal with my emotions – I speak up. With that said, I'm sorry for disrespecting you yesterday. You're

thee senior wife and more than that, you're Londa's mother."

"Truce?" she asks.

I laugh, "Yes. We sound like kids."

Now that we've talked things through we can get to know each other.

"You made them move out. I'm so grateful, I was tired of that Hlomendlini tiny house."

"My goodness, I didn't mean to chase them out. I was kind of drunk."

Say what? I choke on my saliva.

"You were drunk? You?" I ask.

"I'm not strong as I look, and Manqeale didn't make things easy for me. I'm a work in progress."

"Are you happy though? Is he treating you right?" I ask.

"Well, most people didn't see us going forward after Londa's birth, but we are here. He's treating me better than how I treated him when I found out about

Phelo's mother."

"That's because he's channeling all the anger towards Mandulo," I say.

"All I'm saying is, he's handling things better. We are still wife and husband. Bedroom life isn't awkward at all."

Now that she's mentioned it...

"He looks rough," I say.

She frowns.

Hhayi bo, I have to break it down!

"I mean, he looks raaaaaf," I say.

"Oh my word, no!" She breaks into laughter and hides her face.

"He's got this dictating thing around him, which is only cute in the bedroom by the way."

"Not everyday. He has his moments." She's still laughing.

I can't believe we're here, discussing her bedroom life after what happened yesterday.

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MAWANDE

This day has been disturbing from morning. She cannot clear her head and not think about Bhambatha and his mother's exchange of words. Something needs to be done and Nyezi is not here to do it. The last thing she's going to do is get in a relationship with Bhambatha and make an enemy of her mother-in-law. She's not dividing this family any further.

She makes two phone calls and takes a fleece blanket and lies on the couch in the lounge.

Mrs Myeza arrives within a blink of an eye carrying a lunch box and painkillers.

"KaManqele, what's wrong?" She's panicking. She's lost many important people through different illnesses, the last thing she wishes to go through is losing another loved one.

“My head is aching,” Mawande says.

“Okay, wake up and eat, you’ll drink these tablets and lie down. It’ll be better,” Mrs Myeza says.

She lazily sits up on the couch and takes the lunch box from her. She’s not even hungry or sick. It was a strategy to get her here.

There’s a car pulling up outside. Despite their little argument early in the morning, when she called and said she was sick Bhambatha had to drop everything he was doing and come. He’s also carrying a bag of medicines he got from the pharmacy and McDonald’s foodie bag.

His face transforms into a frown when he walks into his mother cuddling Mawande on the couch.

Why would she call him here knowing very well that him and his mother can’t stand each other?

“I brought you some meds. Where must I leave them?” He’s standing by the door, not stepping in.

“Please come in,” Mawande says.

“No, I’m not interested in being insulted. I’ll leave these on the kitchen counter,” he says.

“Bhambatha, please come in, I want to talk to you.”

He sighs. He’s only going to sit across that woman because he respects Mawande who always address him with respect.

As soon as he sits Mrs Myeza stands to leave.

It’s going to be a tough evening!

“Ma, please sit, I want to talk to both of you,” Mawande says.

“You heard him calling me a bitch. I don’t want to be in the same space as him. I don’t want him to breathe my air,” she says.

“For my sake, please sit Ma. It’s not him who asked you to come.”

“You said you are sick. I’m here for that, nothing else,” Mrs Myeza.

“If I told you the truth you wouldn’t have come. Why do you despise him so much?” Mawande asks.

“Ask him,” she says.

Bhambatha frowns, “She must ask me what? You can’t explain why you hate your own son and wish death on him?”

“I have a reason and you gave it to me,” his mother says.

“By calling you a bitch once? You’re always bitchy towards me!”

Nobody expected it. It’s quicker than a striking lightning. Before he can even blink twice, a slap lands across his face.

Mawande gasps in shock.

Mrs Myeza is not done yet. She takes her shoe off and hits his head as many times as she can before he shields his head with his hands.

“Ma, please calm down,” Mawande tries to pull her back. She didn’t call them here to wrestle, what the hell?!

“Repeat what you just said and you’ll see what I’m made of.”

Bhambatha doesn't say anything. He wipes his head and stands up to leave.

"Sit your ass down," his mother orders.

"I'm not sitting down and allowing you to hit me because you know I cannot hit you back."

"Let me speak your language then, fuckin' sit that black ass on the couch before I whoop it green."

Mawande gasps in shock. What on earth is going on now? Why is Mrs Myeza suddenly ghetto?

"Bhambatha, please," she says.

He sits down, chuckling out in disbelief. This is the first time in his whole existence that his mother has put her hands on him.

"KaManqele you want to know why I hate this child, right?"

Mawande nods. Both her and Bhambatha are seated. Mrs Myeza is still on her feet, breathing heavily.

"Because I loved him too much that I was ready to lose certain people for him. And I did. I lost friends and relatives through him. More than anyone, I lost

my husband.”

Mawande frowns. How did she lose her husband through Bhambatha? As far as she knows Mr Myeza died much in love with his wife.

“When the family wanted to train him to be responsible like all other boys born first at home, I refused. I said they’re abusing my son and asked them to be easy on him. He didn’t have any responsibilities growing up. I always made sure that all his needs were met. I didn’t treat him any different from Nyezi who was the baby of the family. I made sure they were equal, he was a good example to his brother, or so I thought. Ask him, you can, he’s right here. Ask him if he ever asked anything from me, even if his father was against it, and did not get it?”

Mawande looks at Bhambatha. He’s not saying anything, which means he’s not disagreeing with what’s being said.

“I always fought people who commented on his character. When someone told his father that he

was smoking I threatened to leave if he touched even my son's stray of hair. I was that mother, he couldn't do anything wrong in my eyes. Then he killed his father's best friend, Rev Nkwanyana, for his car with his friends and went to jail."

There's a brief pause.

He regrets that incident. Even though he didn't know it was Rev Nkwanyana and didn't pull the trigger, he still takes half of the blame.

"At that time his father and I were not together. We were not sharing a bed anymore, but for Nyezi's sake we had to keep the picture shining. His father had cut Bhambatha off after he failed to stay in rehab, and as usual, everyone was wrong and my son was right. His father got sick, I was still protecting my son who was behind bars for killing his father's best friend, an important church leader. I blamed the floods in Mozambique, high petrol prices and everything under the sun, except my son. He just needed time, people weren't being kind towards him, I said."

“I knew my mothering skills, I had raised a good boy for 17 years. It was probably a demon and his father’s strict hand. I mean, Nyezi was raised by me as well and he was a good boy. There was no way my first son was going to disappoint me after everything I went through for him. I was sure of it. His father died, people laughed and said Rev Nkwanyana death did not go in vain.”

His eyes have dropped to the floor. Mawande is listening attentively, even though her eyes are burning with tears, she’s keeping it together and playing her listening role perfectly.

“He got out of prison. A mother was patiently waiting for her precious little boy to come out and prove everyone wrong. Ask him what he did when he got out of prison,” she tells Mawande.

She cannot open her throat and ask him. She only stares at him for a moment and looks back at his mother.

“He made me regret everything, including giving birth to him. He openly proved me to be a fool to believe

in him. In my entire existence nobody has hurt me more than this child. My only mistake was giving birth and loving him unconditionally.”

Heavy breaths!

A moment of silence passes.

“Now you know why I don’t want him anywhere in my space. I nurtured a dog that was going to come back and bite me. He handed me the scissor to cut him off. Now he cannot sit here and ask why I’m bleeding because he stabbed me.” She takes her empty lunch box, ready to leave.

“Ma, wait,” Bhambatha stands.

She heads towards the door and not give him a second of her attention.

“Let her go. Give her some time,” Mawande says.

He sinks back on the couch with blood-shot eyes and releases a heavy sigh.

“Bhambatha, what went wrong?” Mawande asks him.

He pulls his T-shirt over his face and lies back on the couch. He doesn’t respond, so she doesn’t persist.

The healing journey may be tougher than she expected. But at least one of them opened up, that's something, right?

"Do you need a glass of water?" she asks him.

He shakes his head.

Phewww!

(SMS TBBA BFA89 to 34877. T&C's apply)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

BONUS INSERT OF 65

THAKASA

He's quiet. That's how he's been since she came back. He seems to be deeply engrossed in the world of his own.

Londa has fallen asleep. He sleeps in his cot and doesn't bother them that much at night. He's a good baby, even when he wasn't well physically he was still brave.

"What are you thinking of?" MaNtusi asks getting in bed wearing a nightdress.

He sighs and slides under covers.

"I have a lot of questions in my head. I don't know, maybe I'm scared or just crazy," he says.

"Talk to me, I'm here." Her hands hold his waist. He releases a sigh and turns his face to her.

"Are we ever going to have kids? Me and you?" he

asks.

Well, that was unexpected. She's thought about it as well but quickly pushed the thought back.

"You want a child?" she asks slightly guilty. She came here to build the family and so far she hasn't been able to do so, technically.

"No, not really. You know there's no pressure from my side. But I'm wondering if we will ever have a baby together. Six years is a very long time, we tried everything and then one...one moment...and you conceived. It doesn't make any sense, if I didn't have Phelo I would've concluded that I'm not fertile," he says.

"We are both fertile," she says holding his hand and squeezing it under covers.

"Then what's going on? Why does your womb reject me?" he asks.

She deeply exhales, "Like you've always said, it'll happen on God's time."

"What if it doesn't happen? Ever?"

“Then Nomkhosi will give you children,” she says.

“We have our own marriage. You do want Londa to have siblings, right?”

“Yes,” she says.

“What if I fail to get you pregnant?” he asks.

“Manqele, you’re overthinking. There’s nothing wrong with you and I. Maybe I stressed you out and I was too hard on my body. Now we are both emotionally okay and I think we have learnt great lessons from everything we’ve been through.”

“What have you learnt?” He raises his eyebrow.

“That I should always consider your feelings and ensure that we’re both emotionally on the same page before...well, I just learnt that I should worry more about your feelings than other people’s.”

He chuckles, “I do feel like you love my mother more than me.”

“I can never love any man more than the one who gives me this.” Her hand caresses his manhood. He breaks a little chuckle and steals a quick kiss from

her lips.

“You owe me, remember?” He lowers his eyes and picks her chin with his two fingers.

“Okay, I shouldn’t have brought that up, now you’re remembering old debts. What did you do for me to owe you?” She frowns; feigning amnesia.

“You said you were going to let me have some later the other day and when you came back you went straight to bed,” he says.

“You didn’t even touch me to show me that you were still interested.”

He smirks, “You wanted me to touch you? I thought you were tired.”

“Yes. Or better just slip it inside and wake me up with a spank.”

“You’re getting ruined, my wife.” He’s laughing out loud, which isn’t a very familiar sight.

“Do you want the innocent me? I can be Nothy, the girl you deflowered seven years ago in the hotel room.”

He blushes. Yes, Thakasa blushes.

“My heart broke when you started crying. I wanted to stop but you told me to continue.” He takes a deep breath and stares at her for a minute. “I love you, Nothile.”

“Why are you calling me by name? I feel like a side-chick,” she asks.

He laughs, faintly this time.

“I’m glad you’re still here. Thank you, babe. I’m blessed to have you in my life,” he says.

“We should have an anniversary wedding after your second wedding,” she says.

He inhales sharply and rubs his head.

“I don’t know when that wedding will be. Phelo’s mother is drifting away and I don’t even know why.”

“Did you talk to her about it? Maybe she’s going through something.”

“I don’t know how to talk to her if she shuts me out. I don’t like fighting with neither of you. Maybe she needs space to think things through. Maybe she

loved me as a snack, not so much as a potential husband.” His insecurity levels are skyrocketing today.

MaNtusi just chuckles and shakes the topic off. Nomkhosi is a grown woman, she’ll make her decision when she’s ready. Whether she marries Thakasa or not, they’ll always share a bond and talk.

“Shhhh!” he covers her mouth and pushes himself further inside her core.

Well, she told him to just slip it in but she didn’t mean during the cuddling. Next time she’ll arm herself with a full panty. Maybe not- she’s loving it.

“Why are you crying?” he whispers in her ear while stirring her core steadily and slowly.

“You’re shagging me so nice!”

He hits repeatedly into her softer inner tissues and spreads her butt cheeks. A low groan escapes his throat, he bites her lower lip softly to stop himself.

She wraps her hands over his head and furtherly widens her legs. His face tenses up. His thrusts start

being more harder. He locks her lips into his to stop her from screaming and waking up Londa.

He breaks the kiss for a quick second and says; “Dedela, mama.” Then he continues with the same pace, hitting each corner and rubbing her sensitive spots.

Her nails dig into his skin. Her legs coil around his waist, restricting his movements and locking him inside her.

“Thakasaaaa!”

“Nothile. Mama!”

Everything becomes a foggy memory to both of them as they get lost in the cloud of pleasure. Both soaked in each other’s sexual fluids.

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NOMKHOSI

She’s hugging her knees on the floor in her bedroom,

rocking herself back and forth. Phelo is sleeping with thw grandparents in their room. She told them she was going to be okay; she just needed time to be alone.

But it's not that easy. She wasn't looking for a relationship with him. But like any other child she had pictures of him, in her head, and she was sure that she'd meet him one day. Just to see her other parent. Any child wants that. But now for her that's not even a reality. Her father is lying in the grave and he's not just anyone but her own uncle. How can he be so cruel? Him and her mother shared the same womb. He should've protected his sisters instead of violating them.

She's a mess of tears. She reaches for her phone on the bedside table and dials Thakasa's number. It's the first one that comes to her mind. She's always been there for him when he's going through the most as well. Or rather her vagina has been there. Either way she's always listened to his cries and comforted him in time of need.

It rings and rings and rings. Nobody answers. She

tries again and this time he rejects the call, which means he's busy.

Why is she crying louder? He's with his wife, probably making out and having fun. They deserve, right? It's what married people do. Well, if there's no nagging side-chicks in the picture.

Ndlalifa is also with his wife. He'd be the second person she calls, but that's another person who doesn't need her calls at this person.

Ndondo will panic and call her mother which is the last thing she needs.

'Get it together, Khosi.'" Those are her last words to herself before she climbs to the bed and sleeps on her stomach sobbing silently.

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THAKASA

He cleans MaNtusi and slides in bed next to her. This is promising to be a great day. It just started on

a high note, or was it high sex drive?

“Please wake up and do what you promised you were going to do,” she says.

It’s about work. He grits his teeth and turns to sleep on his stomach.

“I’ll go,” he says.

During Mthonga’s excited moments he made some promises to her. Two of them being going back to work and mending things with God.

“Alright, I will get your clothes and go prepare your lunchbox.” She gets off bed and looks for her dress.

He knows he’s not going to back out of this one. He shuts his eyes and enjoys the last moments of the comfort of his bed. MaNtusi leaves with his clothes to prepare for his first day back at work. He’s looking forward to it. How exciting. Yawn!

It strikes his mind that he rejected incoming calls the previous night and silenced his phone.

He goes through all the calls he missed and notices that Nomkhosi called as well. It’s so unlike her to call

him late at night. Damn, he shouldn't be ignoring calls. He's a father for goodness sake. What if something was wrong with Phelo?

"Pick up. Pick up!" he's mumbling to himself as her phone rings unattended.

Eventually, after two attempts, she picks up with a lazy hello.

"I just saw that you called," he says.

"Yes, last night. Sorry, I don't know what I was thinking," she says.

"Was everything alright though?"

There's a low sigh. "Yeah," she says.

"Nomkhosi, you don't sound okay."

"I'm okay," she insists.

"Okay, when should I send my people over?" he asks.

Silence...

"Nomkhosi, why can't you make up your mind?"

We've been together for..."

“Not everything is about you, Thakasa. I don’t care about all that; your cows, how long we’ve been fucking and all that. I don’t give a flying fuck. I don’t want to talk about lobola negotiations or wedding.”

“Did I do something wrong? I don’t understand what’s going on,” he asks.

She sighs, “I have to go to work. Phelo has ran out of shampoo and wet wipes.”

“Okay, should I bring you anything?” He’s getting worried. They should be working on their relationship, now everything is out in the open. He doesn’t need to hide his feelings for her anymore.

“No,” she says dismissively.

“Nomkhosi,” he says with a deep sigh. “I don’t know what’s going on. I don’t know if I did something wrong or you’re going through your own personal things. But I want you to know that I love you and I’m going to wait for you to come back to me. No matter how long it takes. If you need anything please let me know.”

“Okay,” she says.

“Ngiyakuthanda Mama kaPhelo. Please be alright. Can I come see you later?” he asks.

“No,” her voice sounds fragile and faint.

His heart breaks. Why can't she talk to him?

MaNtusi walks in. He sighs heavily and drops the call.

“Are you alright?” she asks.

“Yes,” he lies with a broken face.

“Who were you talking to?”

“Nomkhosi, I don't know what's going on but I'm not going to let it spoil the morning you've made so great for me.”

She cocks up her eyebrow.

“It doesn't look like you're not letting it spoil it though,” she says.

“I'm not,” he insists.

She puts his shirt on a hanger and stands next to the bed looking at him.

“There are going to be some rules Manqele,” she says.

Didn't they establish that though?

“I like Nomkhosi. But if she's not willing to be a wife here then there'll be no hide& seek. I'm not going to put up with that.”

Oh, that wasn't expected.

“If she's with you then I want it to be official so that we can have healthy living arrangements. I'm not going to have you crying over MaZikode in my bed. You'll go to her house and cry there with her. If you're here it's all about me. Do you understand?”

He nods hesitantly.

“So what do you want to carry to work for lunch?” she asks.

“Anything,” he shrugs his shoulders.

“Polony and bread?”

He frowns, “No!”

“Then what do you mean by anything?”

Okay, this is not going to be a great morning.

“Can I have yesterdays leftovers and any fruit you can pack?”

She nods and leaves.

Now he needs to digest the new rule she just laid. If Nomkhosi doesn't agree to marry him that means it'll be the end of them. Is that even possible?

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 66

TEMA

Things have been less tense at work. She has time to breathe and grab quick lunch with Nkonzo, which barely happened while Thakasa was away. She's grateful to whatever motivated him to come back work. Here they're boss and employees, Thakasa knows how to keep family affairs out of the business. Even with his brothers, when it's time for business that's where he keeps it. Others may say he's a bit strict, but that's how you get things done when you're working with your siblings.

"So I talked with mom and Thakasa, we'll be cleansing this coming weekend," Nkonzo says in the middle of their lunch break at Nandos.

"Oh, that's pretty soon," she says in awe.

"We have a wedding to plan, remember?" he says.

"Yeah, about that, do I need Thula's family over?" she

asks.

He frowns, "Need? No. But they can come and watch me making you mine."

He can be extra at times.

She laughs and shakes her head.

"So what's the process?" she asks. They had a goat thing at the Dubes where she was welcomed back to the family and her return was announced to the ancestors so that when she leaves for the Manqueles she leaves as a Dube.

"You've been married before, you know what that means. So before you officially step inside the Manqeles premises you have to be cleansed. All those hands that have touched you before have to be tidied off." She's stopped eating and staring at him. He grins and asks; "Why don't you ask elder women at church? You should know these things."

"Is that why you didn't want to have sex with me before marriage? Because I wasn't clean," she asks.

"I didn't say that. You asked me about the wedding

process and I just highlighted what I thought you didn't know," he says.

"You're not answering my question, Nkonzenhle. Was that the reason why you didn't want to touch me?"

"No," he says.

His voice is not convincing enough. Well, in her ears.

"Then why?" she asks fiercely.

"We are having sex now. Why does it matter? It's all in the past." They don't fight, that's not how their relationship is.

"Because I forced you. I had to seduce you like a slut before you touched me." She's getting warmed up. This didn't make her angry until now. Well, simply because now she's gotten to the bottom of it.

"Let's eat and go back to the office," he suggests and digs in what remains of his food.

She's not eating. Really? Women are rare beings. Why is she warmed up about something that has long passed? Why is it even relevant?

“So you’re going to get cleansed too? I mean you have to, you were not innocent before me.”

He shouldn’t be laughing. It’s not funny but her face!

“I was innocent before you. Who did I sleep with? You broke my virginity,” he says laughing.

“Stop lying! I found you already used,” she says.

He laughs harder. Sometimes he doesn’t take her seriously. Why? Is it because she’s short and he’s tall?

She’s not speaking to him in the car. He’s not minding it either as he’s tuned into a certain radio station and keeping up with what’s happening around the world.

“You’re not a nice person,” she says.

She’s been staring at him for a while trying to gather her thoughts.

“What did I do?” he asks with a smirk.

She hates it when he doesn’t take her seriously.

“You’re messy,” she tells him hoping it’ll strike a certain nerve. That smile on his face is annoying.

He laughs, “Okay baby.”

Did he just say okay to her? Deep breath, Tema.

“Do you see why I didn’t want us to have sex before marriage?” he asks. He’s parking the car. They’re almost ten minutes late from their lunch break, but who cares? Thakasa just got back, he cannot bark from day one.

“Yes, I see why. You needed to have me cleansed with a goat first because I have my ex-husband’s hands all over me. Mtchewww!” She pulls her face and throws a dead look at him.

“And you catch easily,” he says.

What was that? There’s a blank look on her face.

“What is that supposed to mean?” she asks annoyed.

“It means that ayichami amanzi kapawpaw,” he says. (It doesn’t shoot blank)

More confusion.

“What are you talking about?” She has a frown plastered on her face.

“It means that I made the right choice. You’re worth the 34 years I waited to meet you.”

She’s blushing. Where’s the anger now? Lord, but how can she not blush when she’s got such a cutie pie for a man. He’s even more fine than her. Clean face, dimples and hella cute smile. But she’s gotten used to it, people stare at him more than her, especially ladies. He’s like those Instagram most lusted boys.

He hugs her. Slowly his words are sinking in. His hand confirms it when it caresses her tummy.

“Nkonzo, I didn’t get my periods last month!” She’s on panic mode. She’s getting married soon, this could’ve waited, right?

“Don’t worry, your periods are kept in a safe place by the Mthongas. They’ll give them back to you after 9 months when you bring their gift.”

This man! He thinks this is a joke.

“Nkonzo!” She’s defeated, honestly.

He’s smiling, all happy and proud of himself. Yes, they didn’t protect that much, but...it’s not fair.

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THAKASA

He was told not to come and he respects that. But she’s all he has been thinking about the whole day. That’s not the energy MaNtusi wants from him when he goes back home. So he needs closure, which is why he’s standing here being subtly seduced by Precious at the reception with a bunch of flowers in his hand and a gift bag. He’s been trying to be of more financial use to her, not just Phelo alone, but she has almost everything. She doesn’t ask him for money because she’s got her own, yet she implies that he’s not taking care of her financially. To him that’s an insult, he’d bail out of many things but not taking care of his family.

He's finally let through after he's stood at the reception forever. There was a board meeting, he's bumping into men in suits. Some he's seen around, hence the stops and greets before he reaches the lifts. Ndondo doesn't like him that much, so being told to go to her office feels like a test. He has to go through her before getting Nomkhosi.

It's her, Ndondo and the loose-screwed sister. How great!

"Sanibonani," he greets as he makes his way in after knocking twice.

"Thakasa," that's an acknowledgement from Ndondo before she picks a file and leaves the office.

Snalo remains seated. She hasn't looked up nor said anything. Didn't she threaten to kill him the other day?

"I'm here to see you," he tells Nomkhosi. Her face alone tells the story; she's far from being okay.

"Okay," she says with a heavy sigh.

Snalo stops whatever she was doing on the phone

and looks up. A smile cracks from her lips. Too many fake smiles in this place!

“Hi Phelo’s father figure,” she says.

Is that ‘figure’ supposed to imply something or she’s just being her crazy self?

“Hi Snalo,” he says.

She gathers her things and leaves without saying anything further. She’s an interesting character, really.

Now it’s just them. He puts the flowers on the desk and the gift bag next to them. Then he sits on the chair and looks at her.

“I dropped Sphephelo’s things off and came here. Why did you plait her hair?” he asks.

“Girls plait their hair,” that’s her answer.

“Is it not painful though?” he asks.

“I’m her mother, I wouldn’t put her through pain.” She’s getting defensive and he wasn’t even trying to

start a fight.

“But you’d put me through pain,” he swerves the subject towards what brought him here.

“I put you through what pain?” She raises her eyebrow. Today is not a day she wants to go back and forth with him.

“I had to come here because you’re not telling me what’s going on. I don’t know why you don’t trust me. I’m not the best partner but I’ve never lied to you about anything.”

She sighs and leans back on the chair. Babydaddy drama is the last thing she wants to deal with.

“I can’t go home and be sour to my wife because of my issues with you. It’s not fair on her. I have to deal with whatever I have to deal with here and squash it before going home.”

“I haven’t done anything to make you sour to her,” she says.

“But all this contribute to my mood. I can’t be happy knowing that things are not okay this side.”

“So I should laugh and be happy even when I’m not because you have a mood to keep with your wife?”

“Why are you not happy? That’s what I’m trying to ask,” he says.

She shakes her head and prods her laptop. This is useless; him, his flowers and whatever he bought in that bag.

“Maybe that’s not how I should’ve put it. What I’m trying to say is that your pain is my pain. Your happiness is my happiness. I just want to be here for you if there’s something you’re going through,” he says.

She’s working. Her attention is on the screen of that laptop.

“I feel so stupid right now,” he says and grimaces at the sight of her working while he’s here to check on her. He’s trying his best.

“I always open up to you. I always confess things that not even my brothers know about.” He chuckles and shakes his head. “My marital issues, family issues, everything.”

She's listening but her eyes are fixed on the laptop.

He imitates himself; "Nomkhosi, I had a fight with my mom. MaNtusi and I are not okay. My brother is going through this. I have committed murder. I tell you EVERYTHING and I feel so stupid because that's obviously not the level of trust you have in me."

She lifts her eyes and looks at him. Everything she's going through is showing in her eyes but she's never been the type that breaks.

"Before anything else, you were my best friend. Or so I thought." He blows out a sigh between his hands and shakes his head. It feels like a huge slap on the face. Everything he's been through with her amounts nothing to her? He may have not been the best partner but they were great friends. They talked about everything. Even now he still talks to her. Not even his brothers know about his killing spree. He told her before doing it and after doing it. What could be so bad that out of all people she cannot even tell him?

"I feel so stupid right now!" He shuts his eyes firmly,

tears roll down his cheeks and he quickly wipes them off. No, he's not going to weep in someone's office.

He gets off the chair aggressively and turns towards the door.

She stops him abruptly; "Thakasa wait!"

He doesn't turn his head. His emotions are too high, he just wants to get in the car and breathe.

"I know the truth about my father," she says unexpectedly.

He turns his head and looks at her.

"Msawenkosi Nsele," she tells him.

He frowns and steps back to her desk. This doesn't make any sense.

"That's great, right? So your mother was married to him or she just decided to use his surname?" He's confused.

"That's their surname. They were siblings; sister and brother. She was raped and I was born. I feel like a book character. It feels like a nightmare that

someone is going to wake me up from.”

He’s in disbelief. The frown on his face is not helping the situation. Mawande and Tutu are like his own babies. He’d kill for those two girls. Even the fact that Bhambatha sweats on top of his sister doesn’t sit well with him. Yes she’s married and all that but...

Thank God nobody is touching his Tutu yet. He’d probably chop someone to death. He cannot begin to imagine it being him who touches her inappropriately.

“First thing I did when I got a job was to do ibhayi ceremony for aunt Magcina and isihlangu ceremony for him. Like I slaughtered a whole cow for my mother’s rapist. And she never said anything, I feel like a bomb waiting to explode.”

“Can I give you a hug?” he asks.

She sighs and gets off her leather chair and walks around the desk to him.

He embraces her in a tight hug, fondling her newly-done Sweet & Sour hairdo. For a moment he’s just letting her breathe on his chest.

“I think if everyone who knows you was to gather here and say one thing about you, they’d all agree that you’re a strong, intelligent woman. But I don’t want you to carry that on your shoulders. You’re not a rock, awusiyona imbokodo, sometimes you break. You don’t have to be strong for pain, especially this kind of pain. If the knife is too much to handle allow yourself to bleed. Nobody wants to know that their parent was abused. I understand your pain and I’ll understand if you need space to wrap your head around this thing called ‘men’.”

“I don’t know what I want to do,” she says with a sigh.

He rubs her back, “That’s okay as well. I’m sorry for not checking up on you sooner. I care about you Nomkhosi, a lot than you think.”

“Thank you. I’ll be alright, I’m just going through shock and all that.”

He plants a soft peck on her forehead and takes the gift bag he left on the desk.

“So who’s this man of yours who breaks his waist on stage?” he asks taking an envelope out of the gift

bag.

“Which man?” she asks.

“The one you want to sleep with? I don’t know, he says a stupid thing about adoring and you become wet,” he says and gives her three tickets to a concert in Ellis Park, Johannesburg.

“Miguel?” Her eyes pop out. How did he know Miguel was coming to South Africa.

“You got me...? My goodness, Thakasa!” She’s excited. Nothing matters at this moment except these tickets in her hand.

“You’re going?” he asks with a grin.

Obviously she’s going. It took him a long time to figure out the best gift he could give her.

“Are you kidding me? I’m going there two days earlier. I’m taking Ndondo and Snalo with me. I need a dress, oh my goodness, my hair! I need to buy a new weave.”

He’s watching her stress out about looking good for another man and smiling with satisfaction.

“It’s still two months away, you know that, right?” he asks.

“You’re soiling my mood. Thank you so much for this. I needed something like this to lift my mood up.”

“So do you promise to never lie and say you’re okay when you’re not?”

She nods, “Yeah, I’ll try to open up more.”

“And to remove that thing on my daughter’s head?” he asks.

“No, why would I? The whole point of having a daughter is to practice hairstyles on her head and dress her up like a doll.”

“I’ll get you a real doll to practice your dull hairstyling skills.”

Okay, you can buy Miguel concert tickets and bring her flowers, but don’t throw jabs at her hairstyling skills.

“You’re going to leave my office crying Thakasa,” she says.

He laughs and raises his hands up.

(SMS TBBA BFA89 to 34877. T&Cs apply.)

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Model: Princess Thingo

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 67

NOLWAZI

She aced her exams. If anyone told her a year ago that she'd be so passionate about Health Sciences she would've probably laughed her ass off. For someone who comes from her background it's a shame that she had to be begged by a man to do something about her future. Education was a priority, she shouldn't have let life waste her time. She's got responsibilities waiting for her at home.

Her colorful results calls for a celebration but she cannot be fully happy because the "love of her life" hasn't been well. He always asks her not to worry about his situation and convinces her that he's alright. But she always gets a different version of the story from Khanyo, which has seen her packing her bags and leaving for KZN for the long weekend.

As a baddie that she is, she'll go home on Sunday afternoon after spending two days with Mandulo. She decided not to tell him that she's coming, Khanyo assured her that he'll be in Durban for the weekend. Because of his current condition Khanyo is always with him, they fully reside in Bergville and regularly come to his house in Durban. Hopefully her arrival will be a good surprise, you know how bad these things can go. Sometimes you try to surprise a man with an unannounced visit only to be rewarded with an unpleasant surprise yourself.

Gugu is the one fetching her from the airport with one of her right-hand man. Okay, that sounds too gangster. But it's one of those men employed by her jailed babydaddy to guard her 24/7. Only God knows how she got herself involved in such a complex situation. Good life comes at a price in this country.

She's now heavily pregnant and it doesn't look good on her. Hopefully the acne on her face will be treated after giving birth. Nolwazi gives her a tight hug and tells her how big her tummy is.

“Khanyo says you eat peanut butter and mayo sandwich. What’s that?” she asks.

Gugu laughs, “You two don’t have any important family issues to talk about except my cravings?”

“Don’t turn yourself into a hot topic, we were not gossiping, bitch. How is the pregnancy treating you though?”

“It’s been a test of strength but I’m getting used to it.”

“Is there a chance of him coming home earlier than expected?”

“Yes, prison break.”

The man on the wheel chuckles and glances at Gugu through the rear-view mirror.

“I’m kidding,” she says to Nolwazi laughing.

What’s the secret joke? And this thing of prison break, hopefully it’s not true. This is South Africa, not a movie. Daily Sun would release story the next day with some stupid headline like; Old Grandpa Slyzes Out Of Prison.

“I hope you’re not sleeping with him,” Nolwazi whispers and signals at the driver with her eyes.

She laughs harder. Too unpredictable! You cannot fully trust this one and her jailed babydaddy.

“So we both ended up with old men?” she asks.

“I was always going to end up with my soulmate,” Nolwazi brags. “And don’t compare Mandulo to your man. Is he not a pensioner?”

They both erupt into a fit of laughter.

“Does Mandulo believe that he’s your soulmate though?” As much as Mandulo has been a good guy, Gugu is still not convinced that he sees any future between him and Nolwazi.

“Why wouldn’t he believe it? I’m beautiful, sexy and I love him.”

“I don’t doubt that for a second, Nolwazi. But I don’t want to find myself hating my friend’s brother one day, so just iron that out- find out what his plans are.”

“Okay, Aunt Gugu, I’ll talk to him.” Nolwazi says

rolling her eyes and sipping from the can of energy drink.

Khanyo left as initially agreed. She's going to spend the weekend with Bandla to give them space to cuddle and bond. Perks of dating your friend's brother!

Mandulo went to see a friend and will be back any moment from now. He has no idea that Nolwazi is in his house, or in KZN for that matter. She has prepared a light dinner; peach kebabs, roasted pork and green beans. She didn't actually make it herself but it's the thought that counts.

She takes off the apron she wore to set the table.
Domestic skills!

There's a car driving in, she quickly goes to the bedroom where her bags are and peels her dress off. Yes, she's wearing a lingerie underneath. She covers with a long coat and catwalks back to the kitchen.

The door handle turns. He walks in wearing a jacket, Cargo shorts and Nike trainers. He looks better in pictures, honestly.

“Surpriseeee!”

He stops dead on his tracks with a frown on his face.

“You’re not dreaming, it’s me.”

He walks towards her sitting on top of the kitchen counter legs-crossed.

“Nolwazi what are you doing here?” he asks.

She doesn’t say anything. She’s staring at him with a smile on her face.

“Nolwazi?” He narrows his eyebrow.

She exhales a deep breath and slides down from the counter with a displeased look on her face.

“I thought you’d be happy to see me,” she says.

“I’m happy, I just don’t understand how you got here, shouldn’t you be focusing on your studies? You’re doing your third year soon, your modules...”

Another deep breath!

“I’m not your sister, I’m your girlfriend, Mandulo. You’re seeing your woman, not a little sister.”

Guilt flashes through his eyes. He’s never really left the protective brother shell and fully transformed into a boyfriend.

“Babe,” he says guiltily and pulls her arms to the sides of his waist. He’s a bit tipsy but can hide it well. Khanyo doesn’t want him to drink and honestly, it’s a bit unfair. He’s always been able to manage his alcohol intake. But it never goes well with meds, obviously.

“I did all this for you and all you care about is studies? I have all my priorities straightened out, I’m a grown woman.” She’s still angry about the reaction she got.

Mandulo tries to kiss her lips but she tilts her head to the side.

“I care about your future. I want you to be successful and independent. I want you to go anywhere in the world and live the life of your dreams.”

This has been his ‘vision’ of their relationship from day one; her going anywhere in the world and being

happy. He's never included himself in her future and that's a red flag she chose to ignore.

"Do you love me?" she asks.

He snaps his brows, "What kind of a question is that? Of course, I love you."

"As your sister's precious friend or as your woman?" she asks.

"Both," he says and walks towards the passage leading to the bathroom.

"Why do we always have to talk about this?" he asks.

"Because you're always insinuating that you won't be with me in the near future."

"Nolwazi, you're still going to meet fine, young boys. I'm not going to stand in your way or stop you."

"So I'm easy to let go?" Her voice is bruised. It may not come from a bad place but no woman wants to hear their boyfriend saying they wouldn't fight for them.

"I didn't say that. I just said I'll never stand in your way of happiness."

“You’re my happiness but here you are standing in my way.”

He takes off his jacket and throws it on the bed. Then he turns his head to her standing with a fierce look on her face by the door.

“Why do you want to put yourself through this?” he asks.

“Through what?” She frowns.

“I’m depressed, physically frail and sexually inadequate. Why can’t you use me for financial benefits and spit me to the side afterwards? I wouldn’t mind, you’re still young and has far more to achieve than being trapped in this relationship.”

“Mandulo that’s not all there is to...” He interferes before she can finish.

“This is not the Mandulo you had a crush on. You don’t deserve these broken pieces. I hate being a burden, especially to a 24 year old. That’s not fair, Nolwazi.”

“You don’t get to decide for me, Mandulo. You don’t

know shit about my heart. I love you and I'm not going anywhere."

He's stunned.

"Now do whatever you came to do and come to the table for dinner. I didn't come all this way to be dumped, you're my boyfriend. I don't care what challenges you're facing at the moment." She turns and leaves.

"Nolwazi...." She takes the kitchen corner and disappears. He blows out a sigh and walks into the bathroom.

Maybe allowing this relationship to happen was a mistake from the onset, even though he's always stood by his word of giving her the world to enjoy the way she sees fit. Many girls would take this opportunity and run with it. Why does she want to stick around?

What could've been a romantic dinner for two has turned into a sour dinner. She's dished his plate and arranged his utensils on the saucer, but she's not

speaking to him.

It's been a long time since he was in the setting of this kind. Candles, rose petals and a goddess sitting opposite him in a long coat.

"Thank you for this," he says with a nervous chuckle.

There's no response.

"What are you wearing under that coat?" He's trying to break the ice.

Silence.

"The food is really nice. Where did you buy it?"

She sighs, "I don't want to talk to you, don't you get it?"

"But we can't share the table and not talk," he says.

"Try it," she says.

"Come on, I don't want us to be like this. I didn't mean to break your heart. I care about you."

"Mxm!" she pops the champagne bottle and pours only in her glass.

“To my miserable heart,” she raises her glass and toasts in the air then brings it to her lips for a sip.

Mandulo is staring at her the whole time. His face is expressionless. His mind seems to be roaming afar, yet his eyes are glued on her.

“Feeling sorry for the gold-digger?” she asks.

He takes a moment to answer.

“You loved me when I was married, loved me when I was divorced, loved me when I discovered that I impregnated a married woman and loved me when I lost myself in depression and physical illnesses. You’re just 24, I’m 40. I’m trying to understand what is it that I have that you find so worthy and interesting. Obviously it’s not money or good looks. What do you see in me?”

Such an easy question!

“I see my future in your eyes,” she says.

Okay, he didn’t expect that answer. Nobody has ever said that to him, not even his ex-wife.

He gets off his chair, walks around the table and

kneels before her. Her eyes widen. He's not proposing, is he?

"Please give me a little time to put these pieces together. You deserve a whole man," he says.

She smiles and blushes like a newly wedded bride. Yes, she's forgiving him. Every relationship has its ups and downs so don't look at her like that. The man is on his knees for her, this is the first she's experiencing this.

"I don't take you for granted. Thank you for always being there for me and loving me at my lowest."

He gets up and lowers his face to her. They're in the middle of dinner, he pecks her lips and gives her a smile.

"Still want to see what's under the coat?" she asks and starts unbuttoning the coat.

He gets a sneak peek of her cleavage and gasps. He's still a man, his body reacts to the sight of pecky breasts and her tiny waist. She's the total opposite of Thobeka. She's the type he'd carry to bed with one arm and sex while standing.

“You’re okay to do it, right?” she asks as he sits back on his chair.

His eyes drop to his plate. His chest bounces as he takes a deep breath.

“Mandulo?” She raises her eyebrow.

“I haven’t been intimate since you left, so I don’t know,” he says.

Why is that bringing a smile to her face? So he didn’t believe in their love but stayed faithful regardless.

“We are going to try, I’ll be gentle,” she says and winks at him.

He cracks into laughter, “Tables have turned, neh. Okay, we’ll try. You look super sexy by the way.”

“I know. I’m always sexy,” she says.

The atmosphere instantly changes. They’re now chatting as they eat, there are laughs in between and winks.

“Did you drink?” she asks as Mandulo pulls her off the chair giving her a puff of whatever beverage he had.

“Just one beer,” he says.

“Aren’t you supposed to...”

He interferences, “You’re not my sister, remember your own words. Now act like my woman and wrap your sexy legs around my waist.”

She laughs and wraps her arms around his neck. He lifts her to his waist and heads towards the bedroom. The table is left messy in the dining room, but who cares? Aunt Khanyo is not home.

“You don’t weigh anything. As sick as I am it still feels like I’m carrying a feather. Are you eating at the res? Do you need grocery?”

She laughs and hides her head over his shoulder. Gently, he puts her down in the bed and trails kisses all over her chest.

“You look sexy,” he says.

His eyes are filled with lust. He looks ready to devour her. He takes his T-shirt off. He’s trying to gain back his muscles but it’s not easy at all.

“You’re going to bounce back.” She’s sitting behind

him and running her hands on his back.

He's not confident enough to turn and face her. He hates how easily his body got knocked down by pain.

"Mandulo, I want a kiss," she says.

He has to turn and look at her. She's one feisty little girl.

Her smile is welcoming. There's something non-judgmental and warm about it.

He links his forehead on hers and gently kisses her lips. She's too sexy for words. His hand caresses her boobs, she arches her back and releases a shallow moan.

He breaks the kiss and chuckles. Her reaction is everything. She's not making him feel less of anything, even though she knows his situation.

He loves her lingerie but he loves her nakedness even more. He kisses her shoulder as he takes it off.

"Are you not scared that I'll die on top of you?" He asks that as a joke but Nolwazi receives it differently.

"Don't joke about death," she says.

He nods and whispers an apology. He wraps his hand around her neck and turns her for a steamy kiss.

He pushes her down and slides between his legs. His hands start caressing every part of her body.

“Put the condom on and let me take charge,” she whispers.

“I can do it, just relax.”

“No, I want to ride.”

He chuckles, pecks her lips and rolls off. He reaches to the drawer for a packet of condoms and takes one. She’s stroking his shaft and gently caressing his balls. Now he feels comfortable.

“Let me know if anything goes wrong,” she says as she helps him insert the condom.

It breaks his heart that she’s living like this because of love. There’s no happiness, there are risks in everything. His mental and physical health, and his sexual life. He can only confide in his doctor about some of his issues, not his sister. Nolwazi knows, he

thought she'd find someone else but here she is. He's been treated of every infection, if the problem persists it'll mean he was cursed.

He bites his lower lip as Nolwazi slowly inserts herself and moves her waist to rightfully position his shaft inside her core.

"Aaah, baby!" he moans.

She lowers her face and kisses his lips. Then she sits up, grabs her boobs and bounces on top of him.

His body needed this. He's spanking her thighs and groaning with pleasure.

She crosses her hands over his chest and circles her waist around. Her soft walls are burying and squeezing his joystick. He's going crazy, calling her by every pet name under the sun and making ridiculous promises.

She's riding it. Twerking and bouncing on it. She likes how helpless he sounds and looks.

"Awww baby!" he shuts his eyes and tightly bites his

lower lip.

Nolwazi's own senses are being pulled by extreme pleasure to all directions. She must've taken screaming lessons from Pornhub, because her little screams can wake up a divorcing couple and tempt them to bang one another.

"Are you close, baby?" Mandulo asks. His eyes are still shut. His hands are squeezing the bed covers.

She doesn't answer. She didn't even hear him. The sound of their genitals colliding and the pleasure that comes from it is all she hears.

A minute later her body shatters. She screams his name and splashes her juices all over his thighs.

He gently pushes her to the side and releases a sigh. It takes a moment for Nolwazi to open her eyes and look at him. Reality hits her.

"Are you okay?" she asks.

"Yes." His jaw twitches as he moves up to remove the condom.

"Mandulo, you're..." Yes, he's horny, but not to that

extent.

“You’re swollen?” she asks eyes widened. This is not happening again!

He doesn’t say anything. That drives her crazy, there must be an explanation. This is what she’s had to deal with from the beginning of their relationship. Penetration has always been an issue from his side.

“I thought your doctor was dealing with it,” she says hiding her fury.

“I’m sorry, Nolwazi.”

Sigh!

“How can I help you? I don’t want you to be sorry, I want us to work this out together.”

“I made one stupid mistake, Nolwazi. Unfortunately God always punish me differently, like I’m not his child.”

What is he talking about? She frowns. He limps to the bathroom and slams the door behind him.

Maybe it’s time she tells Khanyo what’s going on with her brother...

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 68

KHANYO

I woke up at 3am and I haven't been able to sleep since then. I've been tossing and turning, and trying to make sense of things as they are. I've been with Mandulo to his doctor's appointments and nothing like this ever came up. Or maybe they chose what to discuss when I was around. I can't even call him and ask questions. I don't think he wants me to know, I'm his sister and this is his sexual life. It would be too embarrassing if he finds out that Nolwazi told me.

Hands touch my waist and lift up my pyjama. We slept naked, I dressed up after Nolwazi's call. I've never heard her crying for any man, now I know that her crush was actually real love and I have to do everything in my power to help.

"Are you okay?" Bandla asks.

I sigh, "Yeah, just been unable to sleep."

“Why are you lying?” He pulls me to his chest and kisses my cheek. He’s still sleepy, and horny I guess, he looks sexy with his eyes half closed.

“Kwenzenjani?” he asks. (What happened)

I shouldn’t be spreading my brother’s bedroom issues, but this man is my best friend and my brains at times. I know he’ll think of something and guides me on the things I need to do. Prayer isn’t one of them. Not in this situation. They have no business having sex in the first place- sex before marriage thing. I’d be wasting God’s time, maybe this is how he wants to punish Mandulo for sleeping with a girl he’s not married to.

“Talk,” he says and pokes me with his erect shaft. Not this morning Mthonga, mommy is not in the mood!

“I got a call from Nolwazi in the middle of the night. She was in tears,” I say.

“Did they have a fight?” he asks.

“Not really. It was something else. Something concerning their sexual life,” I say.

“Oh, that’s none of our business then. We have our own sexual life to worry about. Like how hungry Mthonga is right now.”

Honestly....sigh!

“Bandla, stop. This is serious, my brother is sick.” I shift from his horny ass and pull up my pyjama pant.

“There will be a difference, trust me,” he says.

“How? Who’s going to bring that difference?” I see he’s taking this lightly.

He chuckles, “I cannot call His name while I’m in this position, come on.”

Oh, it’s about Unyazi Lwezulu. I don’t doubt his faith in any way but this has got nothing to do with what Mandulo asked him to pray for.

“His manhood...is...it gets swollen.” Today I’m the one who has a stuttering problem. “Nolwazi says it’s been like that since they started dating but they found a way around it. She thought he’d be helped by now but they’re still faced with the same dilemma.”

“I’m confused,” he says frowning.

“So am I. I thought he was just depressed about the divorce and Londa’s issue. But now I don’t know anymore.” How did his life turn into this mess within a year? You know what, I blame Thobeka. All this is her fault.

“Do you think Thobeka is bewitching him?” I ask.

“His ex-wife?”

“Yes,” I nod.

The look on his face tells me I’m stupid. But why would I put anything past that woman? She’s Lucifer.

“Has he ever talked about asking forgiveness from the Manqeles?”

Hebana! Are they God’s cousins kanti? How many times does he need to apologize for a consented one-nightstand?

“He’s done that so many times,” I say defensively and a bit annoyed.

“To Thakasa, yes. But he’s never came to apologize to our ancestors. MaNtusi is Thakasa’s wife. Their union was registered at Home Affairs, joint by the

ancestors, blessed and strengthened by God and Unyazi Lwezulu. That's not something he should've taken lightly. I'm not saying that's the reason why he's having these problems, but if he didn't have them before sleeping with MaNtusi then he should look deeply into it."

"Hhayi-bo, wasn't MaNtusi aware of all that? As far as I know that blessed married woman went to my brother's hotel room, not the other way around."

"Okay, that makes a lot of sense, you're right." Now he's mocking me.

Sigh!

"Why didn't the same punishment apply to Thakasa's babymama then? Him and MaNtusi committed the same sin," I ask.

"You're really interested or you're just collecting points for your own gender-equality debate?"

Phewww!

"I'm interested," I say.

"Okay, firstly I didn't say your brother was being

punished. I said it's a possibility. I don't know how much Thakasa prayed when he found out that your brother had impregnated his wife. I don't know how much he cried and which ancestor reacted. I cannot be sure of anything. But what I'll say right now is you're comparing apples to pears. Phelo's mother is not a married woman, she's carrying no mark.

Thakasa may be married but he never tied himself to anyone's ancestors other than his own. His duty as a son in the family is to keep our father's name alive. Even if he does that with Phelo's mother. He knows his power and he understands his position. If the tables were turned and he was in Mandulo's position, Londa wouldn't have lost his sight in the first place and he'd be a Manqele."

I'm stunned. Dumbfounded. Just to say the least. All along I thought the situation was unmendable.

"Wow!" That's all I can say.

Just wow.

"It all comes down to the wisdom a father passes to his son. And no offense sthandwa sami, but Londa

is safe as a Manqele than a Nyathi.”

Why do I feel like my brother is being undermined here? We’ve all established the fact that Thakasa is a manipulator and a bully.

I wish I can challenge him on this one but I cannot put my nephew’s life at risk to prove a point. I’ll tell Mandulo to go and kiss his feet. The world is his oyster, we are here to witness him get everything he wants.

An arm wraps around me. I release a deep sigh to calm down my tits.

“Don’t tell him that you discussed this with me,” he says.

I give him a look. I’m not that stupid.

“Motivate him to consult elders from his side, if they don’t know what to do I’ll find a way to make Thakasa guide him,” he says.

Thakasa, Mr Know It All. I’m sure he’d be more than happy to give orders.

“I don’t know how I feel about your brother anymore,” I sigh and rest my head on his chest.

“I don’t think he owes your brother anything except humanity. But let’s not involve ourselves in this. I, personally, have no ill feelings towards your brother. He’s a good man who just made a mistake. I love you and I want him to be okay for you.” His lips land on the side of my face. I release a deep sigh and link my fingers into his. We should be minimizing people’s issues in our bedroom but it seems like we are in the middle of the storm here.

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BHAMBATHA

He’s dressed up; Cuban collar shirt, Denim shorts and Raf Simon’s black sneakers. He looks great, he always does, but today he should have dressed differently. He doesn’t look apologetic in those clothes.

Mawande clears her throat at the door. She's got her purse and everything. She's the one accompanying him because his mother and uncles distanced themselves.

"I'm ready. We should go." Her eye remains on his chain. He can leave it behind this one day. The last thing the Nkwanyanas want to see is their father's killer rocking a 9ct gold Figaro chain.

He empties the remains of his beer and takes a bottle to the kitchen bin.

She doesn't approve of him drinking before facing Nkwanyana's family but if this is his way of gathering courage then she has to let him be.

He's been quiet all morning, which is so unlike him when Mawande is around, nerves are really wrecking him.

"Asambe," he says coming from the kitchen looking unsettled.

She nods but stands still.

He frowns, "Wande, asambe."

She gets down on her knees. There's a scarf covering her shoulders.

Oh, Lord!

“Usidele ngani Nkosi kangaka

Buyela kithi usithethelele

Obaba bethu bona abasekho

Sithwele-ke thina izono zabo

Shaya Nkosi uphozise, wena

Sonile siyavuma ebusweni bakho

Singabakabani uma silahlwa nguwe Nkosi

Buyela kithi Nkosi yoxolo.”

He didn't remember a single lyric, she was just singing alone. This took him back to his childhood when faith was still the center of his being. He enjoyed it while it lasted.

She recites a small prayer and they both stand up. His knees hurt from the unplanned kneeling he just did.

“You’re a good woman,” he says.

He always tells her this. Now it sounds like a verse more than a compliment.

They head out with their hands linked. She’s going to do everything to support him, except opening her mouth when they get at the Nkwanyana homestead. That’s his issue to handle, his alone.

Mawande did call one of Mr Nkwanyana’s daughters to let her and the whole family know of their visit. There was no problem over the phone, she said they’d be waiting for them.

“Bhambatha.” Her eyes are on his waist. They’re widened to their corners.

He looks at her, follows her eyes and quickly pulls his shirt down.

“Seriously, you’re carrying a gun?”

“I don’t know what they’re going to do,” he says.

“Does it even matter? Any reaction from them is justified,” Mawande.

He frowns, "What do you mean? Nobody is justified to hit me."

She rolls her eyes and sighs.

He gets out and comes to her side to open the door for her. Now she can only pray that this goes well. His mother will make her realize that he's growing and taking responsibility of his mistakes.

He's behind her, Mawande inhales a sharp breath and knocks at the door. There were multiple voices coming from inside, they quickly silence when she knocks.

Nozipho opens the door. She's the one Mawande talked to over the phone. She was just 23 years old when her father died, to say she hates the man standing behind Mawande would be an understatement.

"You can come in," she says after exchanging greetings with Mawande. Her eyes locked with Bhambatha's once and her nose wrinkled up.

There's actually a whole family, even an angry looking uncle. It's a full house. Bhambatha instantly regrets agreeing to this. Nathi doesn't even know he's here. Obviously he'd never sell him out but being constantly accused of something you didn't actually do is infuriating. Everyone heard that Bhambatha was at the scene and quickly pointed at him as the killer. Had he seen that it was Nkwanyana in the car he would've done his best to save the situation. But he didn't know, Nathi had already shot him when he saw the sticker of his car at the back. It was too late. Nkwanyana was declared dead and they all went down.

Mawande greets. They respond.

"Sanibona," he greets too.

No response.

He pulls back and shuts his mouth too. Mawande gives him a look.

Well, this is getting awkward and uncomfortable.

"This is Bhambatha, my brother from the Myezas," she says.

Brother, really? His brow furrows.

Mawande gives him another look; 'this ain't the time!'

"I know everyone is in pain and it was hard for you all to agree to meet him. For that, I'd like to thank you." Her hand brushes his knee. "He's got something to say."

Throats clear around the room. All eyes turn to him. Mam' Nkwanyana hasn't looked up. This boy was like a son to her. She only has girl children, if her husband wasn't around and she needed someone to fix a bulb in the house she'd call Bhambatha. To be here, looking at him as the killer of her husband is unbelievable and scaring, to say the least. Who to trust in this world?

"Ummm...I cannot undo the tragedy that happened or erase the pain my actions caused this family. I cannot take any of that back. And I'll understand if you reject my apology, but I want you guys to know that I'm really sorry. I've been regretful from day one. I didn't want Bab' Nkwanyana to die."

Nobody breathes a word. Girls don't have much to

say to him. If he can't undo it then there's no point, their father is dead.

"Ma, would you like to say anything?" Mawande asks. She thought she'd be sitting and letting the situation play out, but she has to be a mediator because nobody seems to be too interested in talking.

Mam' Nkwanyana doesn't respond. Instead, she covers her face with a scarf and leaves the room. Old wounds!

Bhambatha's head bows down. He's ashamed of himself, genuinely.

Then the uncle stands up. He's livid. He takes a few steps towards Bhambatha but one of the girls stop him halfway.

"Babomncane calm down." She holds him back. She's the oldest daughter of Nkwanyana.

"I prayed for this hooligan when he was 6 months old and dying from Pneumonia. His mother called everyone crying and asking for prayers. Had I known I would've prayed for Pneumonia to take him there and then."

His hide rises. Mawande shifts closer to him. This doesn't have to turn ugly, he should take the blows – he deserves everything.

Cold water splashes on his face. It's the furious uncle, he just threw a bottle at him.

“Well, fuck you!” He lifts his arm and wipes his face. He's still sitting though, Mawande is holding her breath next to him.

“Boy, what did you just say?” the uncle asks.

“I said fuck you for throwing water at me,” he says.

“Bhambatha!” Mawande grinds her teeth. They talked about this behavior!

The uncle slaps him. Things are about to go to a whole new level. Mawande quickly stands up. The Nkwanyana sisters run to the door.

“Was it not enough that you killed our father?” Nozipho cries.

“Bhambatha don't move!” – Mawande yells.

“No, let him kill me just like he killed my brother.” How famous is this line!

“I’m not fighting you. But I don’t like your hand on my face, so please stop,” he says.

The uncle puts his hand on his face again- another slap- deliberately.

There’s a scattering of chairs. Mawande screams Bhambatha’s name. Things are happening too fast, she’s not even sure who is grabbing and who is hitting.

Mam’ Nkwanyana comes out of her room. Things have gotten out of hand.

“Bhambatha what are you doing in my house? Uyangihlolisa?”

He gets off the uncle’s grip and fixes his shirt. MF!

“Ma, I didn’t do anything. He is hitting me and I’m just protecting myself,” he says.

The uncle’s blood is still hot. He wants a fight, Nozipho has come back to calm him down.

“It’s not enough that you killed my husband, now you’re here to disturb our peace and to fight his brother?”

“Ma, I don’t think he was doing that at all. Uncle here got too angry and things escalated really fast,” Mawande interferences.

“Take your sex partner and get out of my house,” Mam’ Nkwanyana says.

Well, news travel fast around this place!

“We are sorry, this is not what we came here for but we understand everyone’s anger. Nisale kahle.”

Bhambatha leads the way out. Surprisingly, he’s not angry. Just unhappy about the wet sleeve of his shirt.

“I need to change,” he says taking it off and leaving his tattooed body naked.

“Really? You’re only worried about clothes after the chaos we caused there?” Mawande asks.

“Of course I’m sad about the situation, but I’m even sadder about my shirt,” he says.

She sighs, “Drive me home.”

“But I didn’t do anything. Or you wanted me to sit, not defend myself and turn the other cheek? I’m not Jesus.”

“I didn’t say that. I’m just annoyed by your lack of concern,” she says.

“You want me to cry?” he asks.

She shakes her head in disappointment.

“Are you even sorry?” she asks.

“Mawande, how can you ask me that? If I could undo one thing in this life it would be that day. Nkwanyana was like an uncle to me.”

“Okay, who killed him?” she asks.

“It was a chaotic scene. All I can say is that I didn’t pull the trigger and kill Nkwanyana. And now that doesn’t matter, he’s dead and we all went to jail.” His phone beeps saving him from this conversation. There’s a bro code he cannot violate. They don’t say names. One’s mess is everyone’s mess and that stands until they all go to grave.

As he reads on his eyebrows furrow.

“What’s going on?” Mawande asks.

“Ma is inviting me for isijingi. I don’t know when was the last time I ate it. That’s my favorite out of all Zulu

traditional food.”

“She invited you to her house?” Mawande doesn’t seem excited as he is. This is too nice of Mrs Myeza, and where the hell did she get a pumpkin?

“I’m shocked. I didn’t even know she had my number.” He’s over the moon. This apology thing must’ve worked for real.

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*****FIVE MINUTES EARLIER*****

Mrs Myeza was trying to shift her mind from the whole Nkwanyana and Bhambatha thing. If it was up to her she wouldn’t worry about anything that has to do with him. She tries her best to shut him out but cutting the cord with someone who laid in your womb for nine months is not that easy. Sometimes she finds herself sitting up in the dark, during deep hours of the night, and thinking about his future. He’s either going to end up in jail or dead. Neither of

those possibilities give her a good sleep, even though she's wished him death so many times.

Her phone rang in the middle of her wardrobe packing and she quickly attended to it.

"Hey wena mfazi kaMyeza!" It was Mam' Nkwanyana blowing over the phone.

"You sent your brat here to come and disrespect us on top of everything he's done to this family?" She was livid.

"Oh Lord, what has he done?" Deep down in her heart she knew Bhambatha was going to mess it up, but she had to let Mawande see things for herself. It's not that she doesn't believe in Bhambatha, there's nothing to believe in.

"He was fighting Babomncane here. This time you're not going to get away, you and your brat. I want you to come and apologize to my ancestors for all the noise your son caused. Bring a goat or we are taking this to the Chief." With that said she dropped the call leaving Mrs Myeza stunned.

She's had so many 'last straws' moments with this boy but this one is the LAST of them all.

Spare the rod and spoil the child- maybe she's guilty of this. She never disciplined this boy, let alone sit him down and tell him he was wrong. Defense is not disciplinary.

Many people told her he was going to turn into this, because ingane emiselwe iyahlupha. Him and Myeza wanted a son and it was taking too long for her to get pregnant. He came as a gift and a blessing, but he chose to live his life as a curse.

Mawande cannot fix him. It's her who has to be a mother she should've been a decade ago. Myeza told her this- one day she was going to regret how she raised this boy.

She took an empty bowl, covered it with a lid and put it on the kitchen counter. She was beside herself with anger, even breaking a mop with her old knee felt like nothing. Then she called a child to come and type a very short text for her;

SON, I COOKED ISIJINGI FOR YOU. PASS BY ME ON
YOUR WAY BACK.

(SMS TBBA BFA89 TO 34877. T&Cs apply)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 69

KHANYO

I decided to give Mandulo a phone call. Sunday is too far and Nolwazi is counting on me.

“Makhanyi.” I can hear from the tone of his voice, he sounds so down.

“Hey, is everything okay?”

“Yeah,” he says.

He’s lying.

“I was thinking here, before you go back to work we should go and fix things with the Manqeles.”

A moment of silence passes.

Then he sighs heavily. “But they don’t want me anywhere near them.”

“This won’t be about Londa, but about you sleeping with Thakasa’s wife. Just apologize, when they’re

ready to let you have Londa to your surname they will. I just want this behind you.”

“I don’t know how to go about that. I’ve never been in this kind of situation before.”

True, and I wonder what is it that was going through his mind when he fucked a whole Nazareth wife. I’m sure she had a piece of cow’s skin around her waist showing that she’s traditionally married. He ignored all that and went ahead dipping his now sick dick into her. SMH!

“It’s time for you to tell elders from the Nyathi side. I’m sure there’s some thing they should do before whatever your token is leaves the premises,” I say.

“What if they turn us down?” he asks.

“It’s up to them, there’s nothing we can about it but on the books you’d have apologized,” I say.

He exhales heavily, “I’ll see what I can do.”

“And this thing of Thobeka, bro I think you should be informing the underground gang about what happened between you two. She wasn’t just your

wife, you know they can bite you if they no longer see her around," I say.

There's a moment of silence, then a chuckle.

"Have you been discussing me with ihwanqa?" he asks.

That hwanqa is busy cooking, he's not even with me at the moment. But yeah, he told me all this.

"Ummm...no," I stutter.

"Oh, so you've inherited the stutter as well? Tell him I appreciate it, I'll use the advices."

He's not angry?!

"So I'm allowed to discuss you with him?" I'm surprised.

"No, dumbass."

"But you just said you appreciate his advices," I say.

"I do but I don't appreciate my name being a subject of your pillow-talk. Find something interesting to talk about," he says.

I roll my eyes till they touch my coronal suture.

“Okay, fine. What do you want me to bring you when I come back?” I ask.

He laughs out loud. It’s so good to hear him laughing for once.

“You don’t work, Makhanyi. I don’t want anything from imali yomgovozi.”

What the hell? I’m dropping the divorced MF. He can be such a crackhead at times.

Footsteps approach. I turn my irritated face to the door and see a bearded man. Why is he staring at me?

“What? ” I snap.

His eyes widen.

“What happened?” he asks.

Sigh! This bearded man is my future husband.

“Mandulo is annoying. You won’t believe what he said when I asked him if I should bring him anything when I go back,” I say.

His face tells me to go on.

“He said he doesn’t want anything from imali yomgovozi,” I say.

He bursts into a fit of laughter.

There’s nothing funny here. I’m not here spreading my legs and getting paid for it.

He steps inside and closes the door. Is he done cooking? I don’t want a lazy husband.

“Awugovoze simlaye,” he says. (Spread your legs, let’s spite him)

“Bandla this is not funny,” I say.

He winks at me and takes off his T-shirt. “Uzoba umfazi onjani onqena ukugovozela indoda?” (What kind of a wife would you be if you’re lazy to spread your legs for your man)

I pick a pillow and throw it at him. He dodges. MF! I jump to him. He catches me and throws me back to bed.

He presses my hands over my head and stares down at me laughing.

“Uyeyisa kodwa ukumitha uyakusaba,” he says and pulls down his shorts. (You’re cheeky but you’re scared of getting pregnant)

“I’m not having sex without a condom, Bandla.” I try to sit up but he pushes me down.

“So you’re having sex?” He raises his eyebrow with a smirk.

“Your dick is out, so...” I hate what he’s doing; turning his lust into mine.

“But you can say no,” he says and sneaks his finger under my thong.

“Not really. My body is your property.” Oh bitch, your whole family is disappointed in you!

“I respect my property though.” He’s now talking softly against my ear and my legs are spread wide like a tollgate opening for a big truck. I don’t deserve a chair at the women empowerment meeting.

“You don’t have to. You can exploit this property,” I say in a hushed tone. Winnie Madikizela Mandela would be so disappointed in what I do with my

woman's right that she fought so hard for.

"Ngiyakuthanda Khanyo." His lips gently pull my earlobe before his tongue swabs down my neck.

I feel my cooze lips stretching, there's a hard rod gently sliding in and a hand grabbing my butt cheek.

"My people are coming Thursday morning. I'm ready for anything. My family is ready for anything from us. They know that you're my sunshine and sunset. Injabulo yami yonke isezandleni zakho, KaMayise."

Okay, this is no sex talk. I look at him, he's not moving but staring at me.

"Your people are coming?" I ask. We haven't discussed that. How did he decide without me?

He pulls out and thrusts in again. A moan escapes my mouth.

"Kumnandi?" he asks pulling out and thrusting in again.

"Aah...yes!"

"Nakimi kumnandi."

He doesn't pull out this time, he lifts my leg up and steadily reels it inside my core. Everything becomes a memory, my present and my future is his dick. I want no motivational speaker to tell me about letting a man take advantage of my body bla bla bla. I know what I'm doing, this is my body, okay!

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BHAMBATHA

The car parks in the yard. Mrs Myeza takes her seat and hides something under the table. She's trying to hide her anger as well but failing miserably. There's a knock, she releases a heavy breath and sits still, without raising any suspicion.

Mawande walks in first. Her eyes are running all over the room; she suspects something. The delinquent walks in after her half-naked. Even that alone is disrespect, he's been parading the streets with no shirt on? How can KaManqele allow this to happen? He's polluting her, this is exactly why they nominated

Halalisani to take her. Bhambatha is too bad for her.

“Oulady,” he says.

Deep breath.

“Sit,” she says.

Mawande frowns. Mrs Myeza looks at her, “Can you fetch my potato seeds from MaShandu?”

“Potatoes don’t have seeds,” Mawande says with a frown.

“MaShandu knows what I’m talking about. Get me sliced brown bread on your way back,” she says.

Mawande is not convinced but she was taught better than to go back and forth with an elder. She turns and leaves.

Bhambatha opens the empty bowl and looks at his mother with his brows snapped. He thought they were finally getting along, what’s this prank now?

“You said I must come over for isijingi,” he says.

“Yes, I did,” his mother responds.

“But the bowl is empty or you’re still going to dish?”

he asks.

“Are you surprised? The bowl is empty like your head,” she says and pushes off her chair.

He heaves a sigh. Mawande did say this was too good to be true. This old woman is playing pranks on him while he’s genuinely trying to mend their relationship.

She takes the bowl and leaves it inside the sink then she shuts the door and locks it.

And now? He frowns and looks at her coming back to the table. She takes something under the table...mop stick?

“What are you doing?” he asks.

He’s still chilling on the chair.

“I want you to get up and fight me.” With that said the stick lands over his left shoulder. He’s shocked, what the fuck did his mother just do?

“Are you serious right now? I fuckin’ apologized and you are hitting me?”

It lands and cracks on his forehead. Blood instantly gushes out. Now he realizes how serious this is. He pushes the table between him and his mother, asking her what he did wrong.

He stops counting as the stick beats him all over his head countlessly. Both his forehead and earlobe are bleeding. He can do anything but not fight his own mother. He runs towards one of the bedrooms and finds it locked. A kettle is thrown his way and it hits his elbow.

“MaNdlovu, what did I do?” This is getting too much to handle. His mother is not a violent person.

“Pick up my kettle,” she instructs.

Her mop stick has broken into pieces. That’s how much pain his body has handled.

“You are the one who threw it at me,” he says.

That’s exactly the answer his mother wanted. It was a trap. She throws a chair at him. A whole chair!

“Okay, just kill me if that’s what you want,” he says.

“No, you pull that gun out and finish me. You already

killed me, Bhambatha. How many people have you turned against me? How many times have I cried because of you?"

"But that's what I'm trying to rectify," he says.

"You or KaManqele? Because I'm seeing her trying to make you a human being. You have no interest in changing your character or behavior, and soon you'll be dragging her down to your dump."

"Okay, can I leave now?" He moves two steps forward and stops when he realizes that she's picking a vase. This woman really wants him dead.

"You're not going anywhere. Clean this mess up first," she says.

He frowns. What the heck? She's the one who's been throwing things around.

He stands still. Broken pieces of a mop stick fly to him and he quickly bends down to clear the mess she created while beating him up. He should've been a white person, none of this would've happened.

"Nx!" He's now pissed.

Sadly, there's nothing he can do because she's his mother.

He gets his third slap in the day. This got to be some fucked up test of patience and respect.

"Entlek kanti zishaphi ngawe?" He stops what he was doing and stands up to face his mother.

"You're talking to me like that?" She picks an umbrella leaning on the wall by the kitchen corner and gives him a few whoops.

"Open the damn door!" Bhambatha roars.

"Take out that gun you brought to my house, shoot me then open the door and go have a braai with your friends."

Someone screams at the door. There's a knock at the kitchen back window as well.

"Ma! Bhambatha!" That's Mawande's voice crying outside. She knew something was up and didn't even reach MaShandu's house. She came back only to find the door locked and hear Bhambatha pleading with his mother.

It's been a moment now, she had to ask help from the neighbours. MaMdluli arrived, she's the one knocking at the window and shouting at Mrs Myeza. Poor old woman, her high blood pressure is going to rise.

"You're going to kill the child, MaNdlovu. Open this door now!" she shouts in her funny, squirmy voice. She's a 85 year old woman with a 16 year-old voice.

Finally, the door opens. They expect Bhambatha to dash out of the door, but nobody comes out.

Mawande walks in first and finds the kitchen upside down. There's a gun on top of the table, Bhambatha is cleaning the objects scattered on the floor and he's bleeding.

"Oh Shembe, what happened?"

No response.

This has to be the first time she's seen him this angry. He's breathing fire, and by the look of things, he doesn't even care about the blood running down

his head.

“Ma, you hurt him like this?” She’s in disbelief.

“Aw, MaNdlovu! Was this necessary?” MaMdluli asks. She’s the oldest woman in the village, most of these wives grew before her eyes, MaNdlovu included.

“Necessary? MaMdluli I should’ve done this a decade ago. This boy is disrespectful, isibozi nje sengane.”

Mawande inhales a sharp breath. This is a really hard situation. She cannot offer to help Bhambatha clean up because cleaning is part of his punishment.

“No, what you should’ve done was to take him back to where he was created before things got out of control,” MaMdluli says.

There seems to be a silent conversation between the two women and Mawande is dying to know what this is all about.

“He needs to be separated from whatever his life was initially created with,” MaMdluli continues in a hushed tone. Bhambatha has left with a dust-pan,

Mawande is listening.

(Not lengthy like usual inserts, I'll post another part of it tomorrow♥)

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 70

MAWANDE

Bhambatha has left. He didn't say anything, not even to her. He got in the car after cleaning up and sped off.

She takes a deep breath and turns to the shattered Mrs Myeza. She doesn't look satisfied as she was after beating him. Is she feeling guilty because she badly hit him or because of what MaShandu said?

"What was Gogo talking about?" Mawande questions.

Instead of an answer she gets a sigh.

"Ma, are you keeping something from me? I mean, if there's a way he can be helped to become a better person then why would you ignore it?" she asks.

"It's complicated, KaManqele. Please make me a cup of tea, headache is killing me."

“You broke the kettle, remember?”

She hits her forehead and sinks down on the chair. She was ready to switch sympathy off where Bhambatha is concerned, but now she has to live with the fact that she scarred her son’s forehead and possibly injured his elbow with a kettle. However, it would be typical weak of her to reach out and ask him to come back so that she can nurse his wounds.

“I’ll fetch my kettle, but first we need to talk Ma. I have something to tell you,” Mawande says.

“I already know. You two have been parading the streets, holding hands. Everyone knows that you chose a thug over a decent Halalisani. My son’s house is finished!”

That’s a bit dramatic. She has never been with Bhambatha anywhere in public holding hands.

Mrs Myeza looks at her in disbelief.

“Why, KaManqele? You’re going to be a widow twice, I’m telling you.”

She swallows hard. That one cut deep. Mrs Myeza

shouldn't be talking like this about her own son.

"That's why I want you to help him," she says. "I don't think this has anything to do with him replacing Nyezi. He really loves me."

Mrs Myeza lets out a chuckle and claps her hands.

"Bhambatha and love? The one I carried in my womb? Ay, KaManqele musa ukuphupha emini!"

"There's a genuine person inside him. If you can give him a chance as well you'd see that." She reaches to her mother-in-law's hands and hold them. "Please allow us to be. I don't want to be anyone beside being a Myeza wife, and Bhambatha is the one I want to be with, not Halalisani."

"Have you told your mother?" Mrs Myeza asks.

She clears her throat and sits back.

"I thought you'd tell her. I mean, you're the mother and..."

"Nope. I'm not going to MaKhumalo and telling her I've shifted her daughter to my gangster son. You'll have to do that yourself," Mrs Myeza interferes.

“But Ma, she’ll understand if it comes from you,” she begs.

“No, you’re a grown woman. You have your own house, this was your decision and it’ll remain that way.”

Wow! Okay.

“Can you help me with Bhambatha at least? Do what MaShandu told you to do. He’s your son and he’s ready to become part of the family again. That’s what you and Baba wanted, right?”

“It’s complicated, KaManqele.” She heaves a deep sigh, “Bhambatha was conceived through traditional routes. Myeza wanted a son. We both did, and it wasn’t happening. There was a traditional doctor we went to see to make him happen.”

“But that’s not a bad thing, right? People do it all the time,” Mawande says with a slight frown.

“Not at all, desperate times call for desperate measures.”

Mawande stares at her curiously.

“What’s the problem? How did that affect him growing up?” she asks.

“We didn’t follow all instructions. It wasn’t intentional. Bhambatha was a complete normal child, things changed when he went to varsity. By then it was too late for us to go back and fix things with Baba Nxumalo. Him and Myeza had a fall-out way before Bhambatha killed his cousin, Nkwanyana. It’s impossible for me to go there and ask help from him now.”

Oh, Lawd! Why does he need to be connected to the Nkwanyanas?

“Can’t you get help elsewhere?” Mawande asks.

“No, he’s the only one who can help me because every traditional doctor has a different way of doing things. Or at least someone who inherited his bags. I just know that insimba (common genet) was killed and had its certain parts taken out. I don’t have full information, I didn’t pay attention to what was done, I was looking forward to the product.”

“The wild cat?” Mawande’s eyes widen.

“Yes, a male one.”

“So is it living inside him making behave wildly or there’s a missing ritual?”

“Missing ritual.” She sounds guilty. “He was a good boy, I didn’t think it was necessary. When I thought maybe it was necessary he had killed Nxumalo’s cousin.”

Talk about shooting your own foot! Only if Bhambatha knew.

“Wow!” She’s speechless.

Mrs Myeza looks up desperately.

“Now you understand why I protected him even when I shouldn’t have? I knew how I got him- the sacrifices. He’s my baby...” Tears blind her vision. She breaks down in front of her daughter-in-law.

“I know he messed up. But he didn’t kill Nkwanyana intentionally and he didn’t know about all these things. He’s a decent guy, he just needs help.”

“He messed it up for himself,” Mrs Myeza says wiping tears off.

“Did you know about his issues with his father?”
Mawande asks.

“They didn’t get along. Myeza wanted more from him and I stood on the way,” she says.

“I think sons need their father’s love more than us. Bhambatha has scars from the rejection he got from his father.”

“His father loved him. He didn’t agree with many things that he did but I know he loved his son. He was a bit strict, even with Nyezi. You know black fathers want their sons to grow a specific way and be strong.”

“He didn’t need to make him feel belittled to show that love. He was hurt, he’s still hurting. You’re the only parent he has now, I know he’s hurt you deeply, but awukho umgqomo wokulahla umuntu Ma. Please help him and give him another chance.”

She sighs, “Okay. But please promise me one thing, you’re not going to change.”

“He’s not trying to change me, but I promise you ngeke ngishintshe.” She smiles and brushes Mrs

Myeza's hand. They have an agreement. Now she has to find out where he went.

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BHAMBATHA

Nathi steps out of the house wearing gown and sleepers. It's 3:43pm; soft life things and shit. He's carrying a cup of coffee in his hand, just like his white neighbors in the mornings.

He sips while staring at Bhambatha furiously getting out of the car and making his way to the house. He has no shirt on, something must've terribly went wrong.

"Amagata?" he asks. (Is it the police)

"Yilo mfazi kababa," Bhambatha says walking past him and clicking his tongue. (It's my father's wife)

Nathi frowns and tries to remember a picture of Mrs Myeza as he knows her. She's a grown woman, umagrizza.

He follows behind and finds Bhambatha pouring cold beer down his throat.

“You said your mother moered you like this?” he asks.

“Yeah.”

He chuckles. What on earth? No, he laughs out loud.

Bhambatha scolds him, “It’s not funny, she nearly killed me and there’s nothing I could do because she’s my mother.”

“But wait....she Batistad you bru,” Nathi laughs harder.

Bhambatha clicks his tongue and walks away. He disappears in Nathi’s bedroom where he opens the wardrobe and grabs an ugly shirt and puts it on.

Nathi follows again. He wants the whole story. Bhambatha glares at him walking through the door.

He lifts his hands up, “I’m not laughing anymore.”

Bhambatha sits on the bed and releases a deep sigh. If it was any other day he would’ve laughed about it too.

“What happened?” Nathi asks.

“I don’t know, that’s what makes me mad. I thought I was doing something good by apologizing to the Nkwanyanas but clearly I’ll never do anything good in her eyes,” he says

Nathi’s eyebrows are furrowed.

“Nkwanyana, the Rev?” he asks.

Oh well....

“I went there. Mawande asked me to and I really needed to apologize.”

“If Mawande tells you to jump you’re going to ask how high everytime?”

“Now you’re being a punkas\$. You know they were like family, I needed to apologize some day.”

“So did they forgive you?” Nathi asks.

“No, the uncle fought me. You know what, I’m tired. I want to sleep.”

“Not in my bed, bru. I have someone coming over in two hours. Why don’t you go to the guest room, I’ll

make you a hot cup of coffee.”

Bhambatha clicks his tongue and leaves with one pillow. “Fuck you and your coffee!”

“Painkillers?” Nathi yells.

He gives him the middle finger.

Nathi laughs, that’s what he’s good at.

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Mandulo sits below the Manqele homestead under the tree shade. He didn’t come with anybody. He didn’t tell his elders. Today he just wants to talk, maybe Thakasa will understand him better if he takes him down the timeline of his life and what transpired the night Londa was made.

There’s a car driving up the small paved road, he stands up and walks towards it. It could be him or one of his brothers coming from work.

Mandulo stops the car and it slows down. The

window rolls down, Thakasa looks out with a few lines etched on his face.

“Can we talk?” Mandulo asks rubbing his hands. He took the risk, a high one, this man can call people to attack him if he wants. People in rural areas don’t like strangers in their space that much.

“Nyathi, what are you doing here?” he asks.

“I only came here to see you. I haven’t talked to anybody else,” Mandulo says. He knows how quickly things may go south if his intentions are misread.

“Why didn’t you come to the office or call? Why are you being creepy? Ufunani la?”

He sighs.

“I’m sorry if I crossed the line. I just wanted us to talk, I didn’t think anything through.”

Thakasa stares at him for a minute and releases a deep exhalation.

“I have a baby in the car. Give me a few minutes, I’ll be back,” he says.

This is better than an argument. He’ll wait for

whatever time he takes. He goes back to his comfortable spot under the tree and waits.

Thakasa takes Phelo out of the car and grabs her bag. With her in his arm, he goes to the main house where he's convinced he'll find his mother. Indeed MaKhumalo is sitting in front of the tray of beans removing dirt and rotten ones.

"Is that my sisterwife?" she asks dusting her hands off and standing up. She usually refers to Phelo as mnakwethu; a girl she would've shared Manqeke with.

Phelo wraps her arms around her father's neck and refuses to go to her grandmother.

"Wuu, this is how she's like now?" MaKhumalo asks in disbelief.

Thakasa kisses Phelo's cheek and begs her to go. Of course, she doesn't hear anything and she wants no grandmother. She starts crying and hiding her face on Thakasa's shoulder.

"Okay, I'm not going anywhere," he says guiltily and

sits on the couch with her. He doesn't get to spend much time with his daughter. He never wanted to be a father that sees his child go to bed through video-calls.

He pushes the milk bottle into her mouth, she starts suckling and grabbing his beard.

"Does she crawl now?" MaKhumalo asks.

"No, not yet," he says.

"She should come home. You'll see, it won't even take her a week. Londa is younger than her but he holds his own bottle and..."

Thakasa sighs, "There's no competition, Ma. She'll crawl when it's time."

"Teach her to hold the bottle," – MaKhumalo.

"She doesn't need to. I'm here holding it for her. Now I'm scared to leave her with you because you may start teaching her how to sweep." He picks the blanket and walks out to look for MaNtusi.

MaNtusi is coming out of their bedroom door after

putting Londa to sleep. When she sees her husband coming she stops and waits.

“You’re back?” she asks with a smile.

Thakasa kisses her cheek and walks inside the room.

“How was your day?”

“Not bad. MaKhumalo is in a good mood today, she’s been a great help,” she says.

“That’s good. Mine was ruined a few minutes ago,” he says.

MaNtusi raises her eyebrow and stares at him.

“Nyathi is outside the yard,” he says.

MaNtusi’s eyes nearly pop out. This has to be a joke. Why would Mandulo come here without being asked to come?

“He wants to talk to me,” Thakasa says.

“Ummm...you’re going to talk to him?”

“Yes, if Phelo sleeps. She’s still on some princess mode,” he says.

MaNtusi tries to take Phelo and she refuses. “Oh my

goodness, she's so clever! Nomkhosi didn't tell me she now chooses people."

She takes one of Londa's toy and then pulls her arms out. This time the princess doesn't refuse.

"You'll have to sneak out," MaNtusi says while distracting Phelo with more toys.

Thakasa waits until all her focus is on the toys and then sneaks out. Doing all this for a man that slept with his wife is a favor. He's sacrificing time with his family.

He chooses not to inform his mother about it. He'll tell her after they've talked. He goes to the tree below the homestead where Mandulo is seated. At least he knew he wasn't welcomed to step inside the premises. There's something he knows!

"My daughter will cry when she realizes that I'm not around. Let's make this quick; what brings you here beside your Tucson?" he asks with his hands tucked inside the pockets of his black formal pant.

“I’m here to ask you to allow me to come and apologize to you and your family,” Mandulo says.

“So that you can have Londokuhle?” Thakasa.

“No. My apology would have nothing to do with him. I want to apologize for touching what was not mine. For stepping inside a castle that belonged to you. I know what that does to a man. I should’ve avoided it.”

Thakasa frowns, “What do you mean ‘avoided it?’”

“She...she wasn’t thinking straight. I could’ve stopped before things went too far. I didn’t think I’d ever see her again nor that there’d be something coming out of that situation. I comforted her the wrong way and I regret it.”

“Didn’t you see a ring on her finger?” Thakasa asks.

“I saw it,” Mandulo swallows hard.

“So wena wavulela mina indlela kumfazi wami?”

Thinking about it makes him angry all over again.

That same night he slept with MaNtusi and they had sex.

“You rejected her. She was crying. I was just trying to be a listener and then she kissed me. I was a little drunk and miserable at the time.”

“You’re still miserable,” Thakasa interferes.

Mandulo nods, “Okay. But things happened how she wanted them to happen. We had sex on the couch, it was a quickie and it ended there. I was there to take my mind off things, not to make babies with someone’s wife. I made a mistake.”

Thakasa chuckles, “So you’re saying my wife seduced you?”

“I was trying to comfort her with food and just a hug, but she wanted more and I was not in a sober or good space to put her back in her senses.”

“And you fucked her?” Thakasa asks.

Sigh!

“Yes, and we both regret it.”

“If you were good at it your wife wouldn’t have cheated and left you. My wife would’ve left me for you as well.”

Mandulo nods and releases a heavy sigh. "Okay!"

"Learn how to be a man before coming here," he says.

"You can belittle me or say whatever you like, I'm still sorry and I acknowledge my wrongs. If it makes you feel better than go ahead. My life is falling apart, and if this is one of the things I have to fix to have my life back then I'd do anything. I never had a mother growing up, she gave me to my father and my father passed me to boarding school. I don't have brothers. I had to figure things out on my own. I'll never compare my journey or measure my manhood to yours because we are not the same. I don't have a wife, mine left me and yours is with you. I may be sexually weak as you put it, but now I have a girl who loves me and accepts me with my flaws and weaknesses. I want to be a good man to her, that's why I'm here trying to fix my mistakes."

A brief moment of silence passes. Mandulo releases a deep sigh and shakes his head.

"You can keep Londokuhle, just allow me to fix

where I touched and broke, I want to move on," he says.

Thakasa's eyes narrow. Did he just hear that? This man is willing to give up Londa.

"Just raise him well." He blows out and looks up in the sky. Then he looks at Thakasa, eyes blood-red and asks in a hoarse voice; "So what's your price?"

"Nokukhanya."

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 71

THAKASA

He stands at the door and watches as MaNtusi sets the pillows and takes his charger off the plug.

“Come here,” he says after a moment.

MaNtusi turns with a slight frown. That caught her off-guard, she didn’t expect him to come back so soon. Maybe Nomkhosi met with him halfway to take Phelo.

“I hope you weren’t breaking road rules with the baby,” she says.

His lips stretch into a smile and he shakes his head.

She expected him to be a bit moody given that Nomkhosi unexpectedly asked for Phelo. There is a new uncle situation, they’re going to Melmoth for the weekend to visit that uncle. It’s one of those complicated family discoveries.

“Are you okay?” she asks running her hands over his chest.

He chuckles, “Yes.”

Weird!

“I thought you’d be pissed or something. First it was...Mandulo, and then Nomkhosi wanted Phelo,” she says.

“Despite all that I still come home to this beautiful face. Why would I be pissed?”

Hot air flushes down her cheeks.

“I see,” she says.

“You’re beautiful, MaNtusi. I’ll never reject you in anyway. I’m attracted to you. I love everything about you; your voice, your body and your confidence.”

She’s missing something. Where’s all this coming from? She pulls him to the bed and unbuttons his shirt.

“I’m sorry, Ntusi yami. If you didn’t respect your body I wouldn’t have found you a virgin at 24. I know how godly you treat your body. I know how much value

you have for yourself as a woman,” he says.

She inhales a deep breath and sits next to him. Did Mandulo go into details of everything that happened? If he did then he’s dumb.

“I’m still mad that someone indulged into this thickness. This is all mine,” he smiles and grabs her arm. “Why would you feel like I’m not attracted to you?”

It seems like Mandulo spilled the beans. They’re really talking about this.

“Manqele, you love Nomkhosi. You had pictures of her half-naked in your gallery. I saw them and when I tried a lingerie you didn’t even look at me for more than a second. You just said you were tired,” she says trying not to sound pained. It happened long time ago, everyone has moved on.

“But now I understand that I can never be her. I can only be myself and appreciate whichever portion of your heart you give me. Because I love you, Manqele. Useyikho konke kimi.”

He inhales sharply and holds her hands. Every ounce

of pain she feels stings in his own heart.

“You can never be her. I don’t want you to be her. You’re enough the way you are. You made me a man I am today. You have stood by me through grief, financial loss and family challenges. You have loved my loved ones like they were your own family. You helped me run this household and made sure I had a safe place when I returned back from work. You gave your innocence to me and allowed me to grow with you. I’m a very lucky man and I’m not ashamed of our journey and imperfections. I’m not ashamed to admit that I love you and my biggest fear is still losing you. Nobody knows us the way we know ourselves. Don’t ever think I’m not attracted to you because when I said I’ll love you till death do us apart I meant it. I’ll always be your husband, MaNtusi.” He cups her face and wipes off dropping tears. Then he kisses her lips tenderly.

“Mandulo and I talked. We reached an agreement regarding inhlawulo from his side. I also paid at the Nseles,” he chuckles and lifts his eyes to MaNtusi.

“He said he’s willing to give up Londa to fix his life

and move on. But I don't care about his feelings, he fucked my wife on the freakin' couch." Nothile's eyes drop.

"I don't know why he thought it was okay for him to dip his pink-finger in my cookie because you came back horny and craving real sex after that ncikidane." He sneaks his hand under MaNtusi's dress and taps his fingers over her mound.

There's no time to go through the shade he just threw at Mandulo, she gasps as the finger massages her soft tissues.

"Who makes this pussy cough up?" he asks.

She blushes, chuckles and drops her eyes. "It's you."

"Good! So I only care about your feelings as far as Londa is concerned. Do you still want him to take after the Nyathi surname?"

She thinks for a moment. His finger rubbing her clit doesn't make the thinking process fast.

"I want them to have a relationship. I don't want him to call a Nyathi while living at the Manqueles."

Thakasa raises his eyebrow. She heaves a deep sigh, "I don't want him to be questioned by other children or to feel different from Phelo and our other children. He'll know Mandulo as his uncle until he's old enough to understand," she says.

Thakasa nods and dips his finger inside her warm core.

"You're so wet. Were you missing me?" he asks.

"Yes. You know with Londa in the room it's hard to even get morning glory. I trust Nomkhosi to feed you."

He pauses and looks at her. "You said we shouldn't bring any third party into our bedroom."

"Okay, sorry." She chuckles and kisses his lips. Their kiss lingers for a little while, his hand is grabbing her hip.

"Are you good?" he asks.

"Yes," she says in a whisper.

"Mmm. Good, good? You don't need anything. Not even money to spend irresponsibly?"

MaNtusi cracks into laughter. He kisses her cheek and chuckles.

“Well, since you’ve brought it up maybe I should start thinking about a trip, Londa is grown now, we can travel with him. Nomkhosi can tag along too.”

He doesn’t say anything. His hand rubs against her nipple as he inhales a deep breath.

“She’s not marrying me anytime soon. I thought you only wanted us to be family when she’s agreed to become a Manqele wife.”

“I never said I don’t want to see her. She’s Phelo’s mother and I truly admire her,” she says.

“I see that, I must say I’m surprised and scared at the same time. How do you feel about your other sisterwives?” he asks.

His hand is down in her cooze again. Her body is warmed up and growing desperate of his touch.

“Khanyo is not a gentle person but I don’t have anything against her. We are all created differently. She’s good to Bandla, that’s what matters the most,”

she says.

He's massaging around her waist and staring at her. It's moist between her thighs, he's still playing with her while trying to hold a deep conversation.

"And MaDube?" he asks.

MaNtusi chuckles and shifts her eyes away. He pokes her thigh with his erect shaft.

Gasp!

"You still don't like her?" he asks.

"No, I have nothing against her. I just thought Nkonzo would marry someone different from her. She's rough around the edges and Nkonzo is...he's just handsome and humble. He's different from everyone I know," she says.

Thakasa chuckles and pulls her face closer. He onslaughts her with a deep kiss and lifts her to lie on his chest.

"She's a great woman. I can't wait to meet their little one. I have no doubt that fatherhood will change Nkonzo for the better."

MaNtusi blinks a couple of times and stares at him disbelievingly.

“She’s pregnant?” she asks.

“There are yet to announce it.”

“Wow!”

This is surprising. But why? It’s not like her and Tema are close like that.

“Nobody can replace you around here, babe. Don’t let other people’s journey intimidate you. Wena ungumfazi kaThakasa.” He pecks her lips and stares into her eyes. Something is missing- he cups her face and kisses her.

He breaks the kiss and smiles, “Te quiero.” His erect monstrous manhood penetrates between her wet folds. He locks his lips into hers and lifts her knee up.

A moan escapes his open mouth as he rubs his tip against her swollen clit. To suppress the sound he locks his lips into hers in another steamy kiss.

Then he flips over and lays her on her back. He pulls her legs apart and inserts himself between her

thighs. He directs his shaft into her opening and pushes in.

With a baby in the room every move or noise they make has to be moderated. He shuts her with a kiss while rocking his hips in putting more pressure to the pace of his shaft.

“This is what I wanted, Ntusi,” he whispers against her ear and releases a low moan. She’s massaging his head and breathing heavily beneath him.

“There’s so much warmth. I missed this part of us—you feel so good mkami.” Their eyes lock, MaNtusi smiles. He pulls one of her hand and sucks two of her fingers.

It’s.....she’s turned on.

“Give it to me, Manqe!”

Oops! Noise.

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KHANYO

For the first time in my relationship I'm in the dark about a lot of things. Bandla said his lobola delegation is coming, I knew nothing about it, now Mandulo knows about it as well.

"I don't understand how you brought groceries and prepared for guests I didn't tell you anything about." I'm still at it. I've been drilling him with questions and complaining since morning.

"If you don't want them to come just tell me and I'll pass the word."

Is he stupid? Of course I want Bandla to pay for...ummh breaking my virginity, but I must be part of the decision as well.

"I want them to come," I say.

"Then stop making noise, you're going to be a village wife soon."

I frown, "Village wife?"

My boyfriend has a fancy house in a mini suburb. What is he talking about?

“Your hwanqa is now the youngest son, Thakasa does not want you to leave the premises. And he wants the wedding before this year ends.”

Owkaay, pause!

“You’re kidding, right?” I ask.

“Unfortunately, no. We have to make sure everything concerning your elders is in order before we wed your ancestors into theirs.”

“What if I wanted a white wedding?” I ask.

He sighs, “I don’t know, Makhanyi. All I know is that I need you there so that my son can know about me.”

“But you can’t let Thakasa dictate my life for your own gain.” He’s unbelievable. What’s going to happen in our marriage is between Bandla and I.

“But you love hwanqa, why is this a problem? I can’t be hard on them while I’m at their mercy.”

“What if I didn’t want this whole ancestor wedding thing? It’s a trap, look at your babymama.”

“She’s not trapped. Nothile has never cared about me. It was just sex that produced a human.”

Urghhh! I can't believe this. I need to call one of my friends and take my mind off things.

"Don't be angry, I won't let you marry into that family if you have doubts. I'll never do that to you."

He must drop it. I love Bandla, everyone knows that, but I don't want to be trapped and dictated by Thakasa.

"I'm going to call Gugu," I say leaving the table with my phone.

I know he's not a bad brother and he's under pressure to fix things with the Manqeles- he's going there with a goat soon- but giving Thakasa false hope that I'm going to stay with MaKhumalo is not the way to go. I'm not going to be a village wife, let alone stay with MaKhumalo 24/7.

"Girlfriend," I sit with my legs crossed on the bed and place the cellphone between my knees.

"Babe, what's up?" Gugu asks, her face popping on the screen.

Is she ever sitting and not eating?

“A lot. The Manqueles are coming over this Thursday,” I say.

She gasps in shock, “What?!”

“I know it’s short notice, I just found out as well.”

She frowns. Yeah, that’s my life; confusing AF.

“Whose baby is there?” I ask. I can hear a baby playing in the background. Hers is still driving her nuts with food cravings from the comfort of the umbilical chord.

She seems taken aback. Her eyes widen as they search around the house.

“Gugu, did you steal the baby?” I ask.

She laughs uncomfortably. I know my friend, there’s some shit going on that I know nothing about.

“You’ll hate me,” she says.

“I already hate you. Talk!”

She rubs her face and sighs out loudly. Now she’s making me anxious with all that nervousness on her

face.

“Remember when you were attacked and nearly killed?” That feels like a decade ago. I always try to keep traumatic events at the back of my head.

“Mmm-mmmh,” I encourage her to go on.

“It was Efe. I hunted him down, kidnapped his daughter and...his wife ended up hospitalized due to heart complications.”

Oh my goodness!

“You’re not serious!” I know she’s a sneaky, mysterious person but kidnapping a baby is too extreme.

“I’m serious. I wanted to return the baby but Mike grew attached to her. We had her in the house for three months. People died, Efe was looking for his baby high and low. Then I offered to help him in exchange of the names of the people who did that to you. We had a deal, I gave Bandla the names and he dealt with them his own way, then I found Efe’s baby. Now I’m her heroine and godmother, even though I hate her father.”

It's a movie- this one plays on TV screens. Efe had a downfall; all his businesses collapsed, he lost his property and cars. He's now an ordinary Nigerian guy making ends-meet in a foreign country. Am I surprised that he organized people to kill me? No.

Am I surprised that Bandla 'dealt' with those people and didn't say anything to me? Hell, yeah.

"So you're with Efe's baby there?" I ask.

"Yes, the mother and I talk. I was going to tell you but a lot happened. Being a godmother is one of those things that keep me sane."

I understand this betrayal. I know it sounds crazy, but I can excuse this one. Gugu always have my back and I love her to death.

"Are you good though? Do you want me to come over and help you spend your money?"

She laughs, "You can come. There's more where it comes from."

Wow, rich kids of KZN!

"Bitch, you're the happiest woman on earth. Bandla

borrowed me his credit card and takes it back, imagine!" I've accepted that soft life is not for me. I always have to look at the price first, I can't just do my shopping and not crack my head with Maths.

"Urgh! You found love, I found money. Happiness found you, and for me in return, I lost all my happiness."

"Isn't Mike your happiness?" I ask.

"He's the father of my baby. I love him but not in that way. I want a normal man who'll bump into me at the passage, lock his eyes with mine and fall in love. I want a beautiful love story."

Is someone going to tell her or not?

I clear my throat, "That only happens in movies, honey."

"Mxm! You're such a bore."

"Join Tinder, you might find yourself a white man. I want a white sbari." I know I like the sound of my own voice. But now I'm falling in love with my own ideas too.

“In fact, I’ll create a profile for you. Don’t worry, I’ll include that you’re pregnant so that we don’t mislead any white, rich man.”

“Dude, I want a black man. You think I’ll go from Thoriso’s black dick to a white one?”

Wait a sec....

“Who is Thori...” Where is she? I made this video-call, she can’t end it!

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 72

THAKASA

He called a meeting with his brothers. Since they no longer stay at home it is held earlier than usual. They're in Nkonzo's rondavel, Tema is in the kitchen with MaKhumalo.

Bandla is the last one to walk in. This is a very busy and intimidating week for him. He's taking the first step towards the future he's always dreamed of. It's scary and exciting at the same time. Soon he'll have the love of his life next to him, and it'll be forever.

"I see you're glowing instead of MaDube," Thakasa says to Nkonzo with a grin.

Nkonzo smiles, "Happiness looks good on me."

Thakasa pats his shoulder. Out of them all, he's the

least they expected to settle down and bide by the rules. Well, at least half of them.

“You are going to make a great father. I can’t wait for him or her to arrive,” he says.

Nkonzo swells in pride. He’s proud of himself for making Thakasa, who is like a father to them, proud.

“And how are things in your side?” Thakasa asks Bandla.

“Everything is good. I’m just nervous,” he says.

“Why are you nervous? You’re in the process of marrying the girl you love more than anything and anyone in this world.”

“I don’t want anything to go wrong. I messed up once, I don’t want to do it again.”

Nkonzo fools around for a moment, trying to give his brother words of encouragement. He’s been there, he knows the emotions that come with choosing the right one and negotiating with her family. It can be stressful but it’s worth every moment.

Thakasa clears his throat, grabbing both their

attention.

“We have to talk about the future of this home. My father’s house that he built through sweat and tears. And our mother who now needs someone who can look after her and keep this home warm.”

They don’t respond. They’re waiting for him to get straight to the point. And they just don’t disturb him when he’s serious and talking.

“MaNtusi needs her own space now, but you both know how much she cares about MaKhumalo. She can’t just leave our mother to stay alone.”

Nkonzo raises his eyes, “I thought you guys already bought a house. Ma can get a housekeeper.”

“She had a total of four sons. Why should we all desert our mother and hire a stranger to stay with her? This home needs a wife.” His eyes jump from Nkonzo to Bandla who hasn’t breathed a word since this subject came up.

“MaNtusi has held it together for the last seven years and it wasn’t even her place. I didn’t want to move out because nobody was ready to settle down.

Now everyone is taking a wife, things should be set straight.”

Bandla heaves a sigh and leans against the headboard biting his thumb nail.

“Babomncane remained at the main homestead after his brothers moved out. It’s always been a tradition here that the last son remains home with his wife.” His gaze goes to Bandla. He fixes it on him, not sparing him a second.

“Sqalo is no more. Even if he was still alive roles would’ve been reversed because of who he was. We need a solution, Mthonga. You are one,” he tells Bandla.

Out of them all, everyone knows who’s always been less fond of staying in the village. He has one life and one chance to experience life outside the village he grew in.

“That’s unfair, I’m not responsible for Sqalo’s passing or his sexuality. Why must I stay behind?” Bandla asks.

“Because you’re automatically the last born of

MaKhumalo's sons now and I think it makes sense for you not to move out," Thakasa says.

"Why doesn't it make sense for you to stay? You're going to have two wives, one can stay here while the other one has a house somewhere else."

"That means MaNtusi must stay here, because Nomkhosi will never survive a day? Well, that sucks because I'm not even sure what the future holds for us. Now my question is, when will MaNtusi get a break if she's going to hold Khanyo's responsibilities?"

Heavy sigh!

"You're a Manqele, the sooner she understands what that means the better. You are not going to choose between her and this family because we are not an option. You can follow her behind, have sex like rabbits and whisper sweet-nothings to her, but your protection comes from here. You can never disregard that and you will NOT disregard it because there will be consequences."

"I didn't disregard anything. She was just fighting for

her own family and I wanted to show her support. You also fight for us, why can't she fight for her brother?"

"Angazi, all I'm saying is we are not an option," Thakasa says.

Bandla sighs, "Alright, I hear that. What I don't understand is why must I stay in the village while I was born third?"

"Because it's what you should do, Bandlalethu Manqele. I did my job as the first born, Nkonzo does his as the second in line if needed to be, you're also going to do the same. We all have roles to play. I want to move out with my wife before this year ends."

Bandla shakes his head. He's being bullied, he's already bought a house and turned it into a home.

"Well, if nobody agrees to stay here with Ma then I'll take her to come and live with me and MaNtusi. These doors can be closed for all I care. It's not my responsibility to keep them open."

He takes his phone and slips it inside the pocket of

his jean. He's spoken, to obey or not to obey is entirely up to Bandla.

He makes his way to his bedroom, MaNtusi was taking a nap when he left. Londa is teething and unwell. Hopefully they'll sleep today, MaKhumalo made a necklace with a key and rubbed some burnt herbs on his gums.

His phone rings, he steps back before it disturbs and wakes them up. It's Nomkhosi- so unexpected!

Things have been foggy between them, if that's the correct term to describe people who are ignoring each other without a solid disagreement or fight. He's been trying to be supportive, he even suggested therapy for her and her mom after she discovered the truth about her father. But his efforts seem to be futile, they're disconnected and drifting further apart. At the same time MaNtusi seems to be more sold with the idea of having Nomkhosi as the sisterwife.

He leans by the outside wall and answers.

"Maka Sphephelo."

Sniffs!

His mind is bombarded by fear instantly. His grip tightens around the phone.

“What’s wrong?” he asks very panicky.

“He’s dead...they killed him.” She’s sobbing between words, it’s not clear who she’s referring to.

“Nomkhosi?” His tone thickens. What’s running through his mind right now is his daughter’s safety and hers. Anything happens if you’re in the taxi industry, he’s always on edge about their safety but he learnt to trust Ngidi.

“Ngidi...they shot him...he’s gone!”

Shocking but not entirely new in the industry he was in. But how did anyone even go near that man with a gun, pull the trigger and shoot him dead? He was one of those untouchable ones; always on guard and armed.

“I’m so sorry. Where are you right now? I’m coming to get you and Phelo,” he says.

“No, we are safe. The police and bodyguards are

here," she says.

"Where were they when he got shot? I'm coming there," he insists as he charges inside the house to get his car keys.

"No, Thakasa. I have to be here with my mother. The house is fully guarded, I'll call you if I need anything," Nomkhosi says.

He stops and exhales heavily.

"Do you know who did it?"

"Maqhingana, Ndabuko and Ndlalifa will find out soon."

"Okay, MaKhumalo will be there in the morning. I'm so sorry, please let me know if you need something. I still love you, Nomkhosi, and I won't stop."

She heaves a sigh and says her goodbye. She's going through something and Thakasa comes with something she doesn't want to deal with at the moment; a marriage proposal.

He releases a deep breath and turns around to...MaNtusi!

She's woken up and staring at him. Yes everything is in the open but he didn't mean to declare his love for another woman in front of her. He was just caught up in the moment.

"Is everything alright?" she asks.

Relief dwells on his face when he realizes that she's not pissed.

"Nomkhosi's stepfather was shot and killed. I'm sorry, I should've finished the call outside."

"What? Is she okay?" She sits up with her eyes widen in panic.

"I don't think she's okay. He was like a father to her. But she'll be strong, I know her," he says.

"This is sad. I'll call her in the morning and check on her." She glances outside the window and realizes that it's getting dark.

"Why didn't you wake me up? I was supposed to start cooking dinner thirty minutes ago."

"MaDube and Ma are cooking in the kitchen. Relax, you didn't sleep well last night," he says.

She fixes her headwrap and gets off bed despite that. She still has to boil water for Londa's bottle and prepare his cereal.

"MaNtusi, relax. They know you didn't rest enough," Thakasa says.

"No, I'm just going to..." He grabs her arms and turns her around. He lowers his head and captures her lips in a short steamy kiss.

"I'm stressed," he says.

Confusion dwells on her face.

"Huh? What's stressing you?" She frowns.

"I'm unsure about a lot of things. The future of this family, Nomkhosi and I, and mostly the dreams I keep getting."

Okay, she's completely lost. She takes his hand and pulls him to the bed. She holds his hand, warmly and comfortingly.

"Nomkhosi and I are not doing well. She hasn't said anything about marriage, recently she's not even talking to me as someone she considers special.

That's number one," he says and takes a short pause. MaNtusi inhales deeply. She was aware of this but she thought they had a little argument or something.

"Then there's a situation of MaKhumalo and the future of this home. Bandla is just too soft for that girl. He needs to toughen up, these walls and all my father's land belong to him."

"You think Khanyo will agree to come and live in the village?"

"It's not a request. It's an order. I want us to move out before this year ends," he says.

"Oh, now you're talking."

He smiles with a little frown.

"What do you want to do to me when MaKhumalo is not around?"

"I'll serve you dinner naked and twerk for you," she says.

He breaks into a fit of laughter.

"Stop playing!" He stops laughing and holds her hand firmly.

“I’ve been having these weird dreams of my father giving you a little baby boy wrapped in a blanket. I don’t know what that means. I’m scared to get excited because I have tried for years to get you pregnant and I’ve failed.”

A little gasp escapes her mouth. She holds over her waist and looks at Thakasa with hope brightening up her eyes.

“I don’t want to give us false hope. I’ve been disappointed so many times.” He heaves a sigh and lifts his eyes up for a second; blinking.

“We’ve been having the best sex of our lives. Maybe I did catch, who knows,” MaNtusi says unable to hide her excitement.

“I’m just scared. I don’t want us to test, I want things to be the way they are. I’m happy to come home everyday. I look forward to it.”

She smiles, “Coming back home was the best choice I’ve ever made. I’m falling in love with you everyday.”

“Woza la!” he says grabbing her waist.

A knock from the door disturbs them. It's Bandla, he needs his brother's attention.

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MaNdlovu Myeza

It's been over three decades since she came to this place for the first time. The difference now is that she's not with her husband and she's here to face his enemy. Their fight started over coins, Nxumalo wanted more than what was agreed on. He acted like Bhambatha was his hand-made product, they had to forever grovel to his stinky feet forever. So to put an end to it, Myeza drew the line.

Maybe Nxumalo knew that they'll need him one day. They're indebted to him. She cannot ignore the issue now because Bhambatha's character is not shaping up for the better and now he's her only son. He has to help Mawande carry the Myeza name.

She didn't expect to find houses in this poor condition. Traditional doctors make a lot of money. Nxumalo had a lot of apprentices and customers. But it's been a long time since she heard from him or anything about him, things happen, traditional doctors lose their powers. Maybe he's one of those, it doesn't look like he has a cent from where she stands.

"Please wait for me here," she tells her driver as she fixes her blouse outside the car.

The driver nods and closes the door. Mrs Myeza takes a deep breath, clutches her bag under arm and approaches the Nxumalo entrance below the yard.

One rondavel has the smoke coming out. She makes her way to it and greets two steps away from the door.

A female voice tells her to come inside. There's so much smoke, even the woman inside is coughing nonstop. She stops and takes a second to analyze her guest's face.

“You’re here to see Baba?” she asks and doesn’t wait for an answer. “Ukwaguqa. Leave your shoes at the door before entering.”

With that said she turns back to the boiling pot in the fireplace. So much hospitality!

Mrs Myeza leaves the kitchen and goes to a hut where Nxumalo is said to be. She’s nervous, no lies. But this is something she has to do for her only surviving son; the child who was a child of her dreams.

The man inside the hut is humming and grinding something. It must be muthi. Mrs Myeza leaves her shoes at the door as instructed and greets loudly.

There’s some silence, then a little cough...

“Come in,” he says in a hoarse voice.

Mrs Myeza bends at the door and steps in with her head bowed. There’s a guest mat rolled and leaning by the wall. He instructs her to lay it on the floor and sits. Then he studies her face carefully. There’s an

escaping chuckle of mockery.

“Is this Ntombenhle?” he asks.

Deep breath!

“Yebo baba,” Mrs Myeza responds.

“Unyawo alunampumulo, hhe? Tell me, what brings you here?”

Her eyes drop. She was never against him being paid what was due to him, it was the exploitation of her husband’s money she was against.

“The child is grown now and he has very bad behavior issues. I tried rehab, police put him in jail, church leaders prayed. Now you’re the only one who can help him.”

Nxumalo grins with satisfaction. What a great way to start his day!

“And what made you think I’ll be interested in helping you after what your husband did to me? Thanking me with a plate of shit.”

Mrs Myeza sighs, “Please, Sothondose. I will settle the debt and pay whatever amount you want. He’s

the only child I have left.”

“You’re wasting your time. I gave you clear instructions and you chose to defy me. Ingane iyihlongandlebe njengawe.”

She’s getting fed up. She didn’t come here to get insulted.

“Can you refer me to someone who can help me?” she asks.

“You’re sitting opposite that person and he’s refusing to help you. You have money, right? Let it help you then. Go and buy him help.”

Tears well up in her eyes but she’s not going to give him that satisfaction. She takes a deep breath and stands up to leave.

Nxumalo stares at her legs and mentally draws a picture of what’s above her knees upwards.

“Sit. Maybe we can have an agreement,” he says.

Mrs Myeza frowns and hesitantly sits back on the mat.

“I’m listening.” She’s willing to pay any amount for

Bhambatha to get help.

“It smells differently since you walked in here. I always have to endure my wife’s bad odour and her pudenda that smells smoke.”

Her eyes widen. What did she just hear? She doesn’t know his wife to be offended on her behalf, but what kind of a man would speak so bad of his wife?

“Myeza is no more. I’m sure there’s a spiderweb between your legs now.”

Oh hell no!

“What did you say?” Her tone is sharp. She’s already feeling insulted and violated.

“When you’re ready for me to help your son you will call me so that I can get rid of the wife for a few days. Then you’ll bring R500 and come here wearing no panty.”

“Nxumalo are you out of your mind?” She grabs her things and stands up furiously. “I’m telling your wife all this nonsense you just spewed.”

“I’m not scared of my wife. You are scared of losing

your son. Go and think about it. Don't forget your shoes outside." He picks his grinding stone and grinds his herbs humming a low hymn.

She has a difficult choice to make. She didn't think she'd be leaving this hut with a lump stuck in her throat and tears burning her eyes.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 73

KHANYO

I got a call early in the morning saying he's on his way here. I didn't expect his visit, we usually discuss it before meeting and we always spend time in our house at Mandeni. I don't have a room to accommodate him here in Bergville and he knows it. Mandulo is here, I cannot disrespect him by bringing a man in. I cannot disrespect my ancestors like that either. So we are just going to sit in the car like rich school kids. Is he even allowed to see me before lobola negotiations begin? Alright, maybe I'm dramatic, that only happens before the wedding.

I'm anxious even, he didn't sound okay over the phone. I've taken a bath, dressed up in a mini drawstring bodycon dress and sprayed my most expensive perfume that I bargained with a Muslim man to give me on discount.

"Washeqeza ekuseni uyaphi?" Mandulo asks sitting

in the kitchen table and having breakfast Chef Khanyo made.

“This is not short,” I defend my dress that’s just below my butt.

“It is short. You’re about to become someone’s wife,” he says.

“Yes ‘about to’, I’m still enjoying my last girly days,” I say.

He shakes his head and eats his food. “You never listen to me anyway. So where are you going and when should I expect you home?”

Bathong, it’s nine in the morning. I know my way around the village.

“Bandla is coming,” I say.

“He asked you to dress like a slut for him?”

I’m rolling my eyes to heavens. I know sluts who wear church uniforms but that’s not the point, this is my last year of wearing short dresses and pants. I’m going to have fun while it lasts.

“Nolwazi dresses up like me where she is,” I break

the news to him.

It's so satisfying watching his face right now. Rude awakenings!

He breaks into unexpected laughter. What's funny?

"Nolwazi is not marrying anyone. You can't compare yourself to her," he says.

Mxm! I grab a bottle of milk and drink all the remaining milk. I'm being his annoying sibling, he must enjoy me while I last.

"How are you going to pick something if it falls? Your whole ass will be out." He's still worried about my dress.

"I stand tall. I don't bend. I don't break. I don't back down," I rap tucking earphones in my ears and connecting them into my phone.

"Nobody is going to take you seriously and come to consult here."

"I'm not the one who need help. Why do I need to dress up like a nun while I'm not even in the consultation rondavel?"

He lifts his hand up in surrender and continues with his breakfast.

“You know what they say about being too happy?” he asks between the chews.

“Yes, you live happily ever-after,” I say.

He laughs, “No, it ends in tears.”

Somebody give this divorced man his tikoloshes so that he can start his witchcraft professionally.

My phone rings. It’s Bandla, I guess he’s arrived. I go to the bedroom and answer.

“Hey Bandlalami.”

“Hey babe, I’m parked over the road. Please bring me some water, I forgot to buy it.”

I hate my poor ass, now I have to find an old bottle of Aquelle and fill it with tap water.

Mandulo has gone to the bedroom. I yell my goodbyes and leave with a bottle of water and my phone.

He's leaning by the car and staring at me. I start walking like a Victoria Secret model; swaying my hips and calculating my steps.

I'm getting closer and he hasn't taken his eyes off me. You go girl!

Wait a minute, did I just see him rolling his eyes? What kind of a man rolls eyes at a supermodel.

"You're not impressed?" I ask.

"No." He turns and opens the car door. The one at his side, nobody opens the door for me, I'm hurt.

I open it myself- my poor hands- and get inside the car.

"Hey, are you okay?" I'm asking about his sanity. I mean, who wouldn't be impressed by me?

"Yes. What about you? Where are your uncut dresses?" he asks.

I look at my dress. Where is it cut? When was it cut?

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"You're not wearing anything, Nokukhanya. Are you

horny?”

Whoah! I know this is not how I should dress publicly but hello, check where I'm at.

“I'm home, Bandla. At MY home. This is where I'm free to do anything. I can even walk naked if I want,” I say.

“No, you won't!”

Owkaaay....?!

“Can I get a kiss?” I ask testing waters. For some reason he looks pissed more than I thought he'd be.

He releases a deep breath and turns his face to me. I meet him for a light kiss. He looks stressed out, my fingers reach to his facial hair and play with it while he tries to get his words out.

“There's something I need to tell you before the negotiations begin,” he says.

Oh, my poor heart is beating like a drum. What did he do? I hope he didn't pull a Thakasa on me; getting someone pregnant. As wives we don't like that. I, personally, will leave his black ass right away.

“Talk!” I already sound like a wife who got cheated on.

“You know we have a house around town?” he asks. I nod with my stare fixed on him.

“We cannot stay there full time. Thakasa is threatening to take Ma and leave with her if nobody, between us, the Manqele sons, agrees to marry and remain home,” he says.

Oh Jesus Christ! Mandulo told me this, why am I still not ready?

“I don’t want my father’s house to collapse. That would be selfish of me. But I can’t stay there alone, I need your help. I need you next to me. I know we had dreams beyond life in a village, we can still achieve them, I’ll make sure of it.”

“So you came all this way to ask me to be a village wife? On top of that to stay with a ticking bomb, MaKhumalo, every freaking day?”

“Is this love conditional?” he asks.

“No,” I say.

“But why does it sound like you’re not going to marry me if I stay in the village?” he asks.

“You expected me to celebrate? So I will be the wife who knows where the spoons are during family gatherings. The one who brew traditional beer and slaughtered chickens while Tema and everyone else come on the day of the ceremony wearing high heels from Zara and....” He sighs before I finish. The more I think about it, the clearer the picture of myself as a village wife after two years becomes.

“I love you. I don’t want to marry someone else or add a third person to what I already have. Please carry my burdens with me, I’d do the same for you.”

Although I don’t understand the third person part, but I feel sorry for my man now.

“Are we going to go out every weekend?” I ask.

He chuckles, “Yes.”

“Okay, I’ll marry you and come stay with you wherever you are.” I sound very romantic right now. I should be hired to write messages on Valentine’s Day cards at Shoprite.

“So my people are still welcome for discussions?” he asks.

“Hell, yeah!”

Imagine how bad it would’ve looked on me if abakhongi ended up not coming. We have our own paparazzi here in the village; very trained and alert about things.

“I didn’t sleep last night thinking about this. Thank you so much, sthandwa sami. I’ll tell Ma as well, she’ll be so happy.” The relief and happiness on his face is enough.

“Now go dress up, I want us to go to town, I’ll drive you back.”

This time I won’t even argue with him. He doesn’t like the Victoria Secret model in me and there’s nothing I can do about it.

I have to change and get ready for another expensive shopping trip.

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MaNdlovu Myeza

It was a tough decision to make. Today she's leaving her husband's house to share his honeypot with another man for her son to get the help that he needs. She never thought this would ever happen to her. She can't cry for help because there's no help to cry for. She got herself into this mess. She got her own son into this dilemma. Now it's time to solve it and she'll do it alone since Myeza is no more.

She instructed her driver to get Nxumalo's number and asked him not to breathe a word to anyone. Today the same driver is taking her back to that place, in the morning when the deal has been sealed he'll be fetching her. It's a shame that she still calls herself a woman after what she did to Nxumalo's wife- calling her husband and motivating him to get rid of her. This is a disgrace!

It's now dark, before entering the homestead she calls Mawande and tells her that she's sleeping over

a relative's house. She switches the phone off after that call and grips her overnight bag tightly before going through the entrance.

Her driver flashes lights and hoots before driving away. He won't be too far, one phone call and he'll be at her rescue within a blink of an eye.

Strong hands grab her as she walks past the kitchen. She almost screams out in fear, but a rough laugh puts her on ease.

"You scared me, Nxumalo," she says.

"It's me, don't worry you're safe here." His hand is uncomfortable on her butt and massaging her.

She's holding her breath. "Let's get inside the house. I don't want to stand in the cold for too long."

"You can't wait, huh?" He's chuckling and grabbing her butt.

She's getting fed up. She stops and yanks his hands off.

"I'm not your wife. I'm only here because I'm desperate. Our agreement was R500 and the deed

once-off. My body is not your playground,” she snaps.

He listens for a few minutes. They get inside one of the cracky rondavels, he takes her bag and puts it on top of the wooden man-made table. There’s a plate of Lemon Cream biscuits and a jug of Fusion juice waiting for her.

“Are you eating first? I know you’ll be hungry,” he asks standing behind her and wrapping his arms around her. There’s a smell coming under his arms. Did he even bath?

“I’m not hungry,” Mrs Myeza says looking at the bed she’ll be spending the night on. There are four bricks balancing it up. Someone of her weight might collapse with it to the floor. What about bed bugs?

“Nxumalo, you don’t have a better bed? What is this?” she asks.

Nxumalo is offended. He spent the whole day cleaning and even took out some new blankets for her. Something he’d never do for his wife.

“Don’t insult my home, Ntombenhle,” he says bitterly.

Mrs Myeza takes a deep breath and sits on the bed.

He takes off his shirt, revealing a hairy chest and waist tied in colorful yarns, then pulls down his pant. He has one of those red cheap underwear from free-market. As thin as he is, he still has a potbelly from all the medicines he drinks daily to protect himself against evil spirits. He looks like a child suffering from malnutrition, like those African ones they put on posters when begging for American donations.

“You brought the money?” he asks.

“Yes, it’s inside my purse in the bag. Nxumalo can I ask a question?”

“Mmmh, go ahead,” he says.

“Do you always do this to your wife? Does she know that you sleep with desperate women who need your help?”

“This hobosha cannot eat pap everyday. That’s boring. I need to try out different dishes.”

“I’m not a dish,” she says firmly.

He chuckles, “Wait until I devour you. You’ll be

coming here for more on your own.”

She doesn't find humor in it. He laughs alone. Then he instructs her to stand up.

“I hope you didn't wear an underwear,” he says.

His hand sneaks under her long skirt and grabs her honeypot. When he finds it covered in nothing but a bush of pubic hair, he licks his dry lips and smiles.

“Myeza is stupid. He died and left such a meaty twat behind? Well, we'll feast on it on his behalf.”

“Don't mention my husband!”

“Okay, take your clothes off and let's start working.”

Everything he says is turning her off. How can a man be so unattractive and dirty?

“You won't cry about aching joints, right? You, old women, bore me with that,” he says.

She doesn't say anything except taking heavy breaths before laying on her back naked.

Nxumalo climbs on top of her and lowers his lips to

her for a kiss. Mrs Myeza tits her head to the side and dodges it. So he kisses her cheek instead and goes to her ear. His wet tongue licks her earlobe, leaving drops of saliva inside her ear. Oh, she's definitely losing her hearing after this.

Luckily, he stops and swabs down her neck to her breasts with that wet tongue of his. Just drops of her saliva left on her skin feel like a deadly virus.

He pinches her nipples and starts chewing them like undercooked pieces of red meat. There's no pleasure in what he's doing, he clearly doesn't know how to do it. But she shuts her eyes and lets him continue. His hand slides between her thighs with a piece of alum stone. He inserts it in her opening. "Close your legs firmly," he instructs.

"Nxumalo what did you put inside?" she asks in astonishment.

"Just an alum stone to make it tight. I'll take it out after a few minutes. Where do you want me to touch you?"

Who asks a woman this question?

“Where do you touch your wife?” Mrs Myeza asks.

“That pudenda knows me, I don’t need to touch her, I just push my snake in,” he says.

“Do that to me as well. I want you to finish,” she says.

No, not Nxumalo. He still has a point to prove. He licks her whole face like a cat and even inserts the tip of his tongue inside her nostrils. She’s still dry AF!

A few minutes have passed. Surely her vagina is intact now, he takes the melting stone out and inserts his finger.

Mrs Myeza moans deeply.

He chuckles, “You haven’t felt anything, Ntombenhle. You’re still going to scream your lungs off.”

It wasn’t the pleasure she felt. He has untidy nails, he was scratching her honeypot.

He pulls his finger out after some time and stretches her legs further apart.

“Mmmh...I should marry you and make you my second wife. It’s not fair that such a meaty twat decorates your thighs and don’t get fucked.”

Another turn off!!!

“Here at the Nxumalos you’ll be happy every night. I’ll even leave my first wife’s bedroom and sleep with you every night. Hers is old, wrinkled and it farts.”

“Stop dreaming, Nxumalo,” she says annoyed.

He grins widely. She’ll swallow her words soon; she’ll be begging him to marry her.

He spits in her opening and rubs his tip with Vaseline. His smile has stretched to his ears.

“This will be the best night of your life, Ntombenhle. Why don’t you allow me to kiss you?”

‘Because I’m not sure you brush your teeth,’ her heart says while her mouth stays shut.

His manhood is really big; long and thick. It takes time for it to slide in.

“Do you feel it?” he asks.

Mrs Myeza moans out her response. He chuckles and pulls out to tease her some more.

Against her better judgment, her folds are getting

moist and ready for the deed. She does want him inside her. Devil much!

“Be ready now, Ntonbenhle,” he says.

She wraps her arms around his waist and keeps her eyes shut.

He pushes the tip in and slowly goes in inch by inch. Once he’s fully inserted he latches on her nipple and chews it. There’s both pain and pleasure.

A moan escapes her mouth. Nxumalo looks up and smiles.

“Get set, Ntombenhle. Are you ready?” he asks with his hands gripping her hips.

“Let’s go!” He’s not gentle. Not slow, but not too fast. If he didn’t smell bad, and if he looked a bit attractive, and if this happened out of free will, maybe she would’ve enjoyed it more.

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She was Nxumalo’s sex toy the whole night. She did get some pleasure out of it, but this is something

she'll never forgive herself for. Myeza and her were no longer intimate at the time of his death, but he was still and will always be her husband. If there was someone who deserved a slice of his cake it would've been one of his brothers or cousins.

"Are you okay, mam?" Her driver asks.

She gulps down a bottle of water and sighs. No, she's far from okay but that isn't something she'll ever discuss with anyone.

"Drive, Benjamin. I'll start at the doctor's office," she instructs.

No further question is asked. The vehicle takes off.

She scrolls down her phone and stops at Bhambatha's number. It rings a few times before he picks up.

"Hello." He's shocked to get a call from his mother so early in the morning.

"Bhambatha, it's that bitch who gave birth to you," she says.

There's a heavy sigh. Trust mothers to bring up

things you said while angry and apologized for.

“I hear you, Ma,” he says.

“Listen, tomorrow we are going to see a traditional doctor who’s going to help you and I have a better relationship. Be ready at 7am,” she says.

“Witchdoctor? I don’t associate myself with those. You’ll go alone,” he says.

“This is not a request. I’m telling you, we are going to visit a traditional doctor and that’s it.”

“Sorry, Ma. I’m not visiting any witchdoctor, I’ll be in Richard’s Bay tomorrow.”

“Hey wena! Bhambatha... where’s this boy...are you still there?” She looks at the screen, the call ended a few seconds ago.

“Oh, Nkosi yami!”

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 74

THAKASA

It's easy to get his brothers off his back. If he's cold they stay away, if he doesn't say anything they don't ask. But at home things are different, he has a wife and a son. He has a mother, a dramatic one for that matter. He needs to pull himself together or isolate himself.

He finds Londa sleeping in bed and lies on the pillow next to him. He's still fully dressed, even his tie is still on. He has a mother of all headaches. Londa looks so peaceful next to him; so innocent and carefree. He doesn't remember himself being at that stage of life. He remembers his early teens, peace was already a strange word to him, he was already manning-up by then.

MaNtusi walks in, her brows slightly furrow as her

eyes land on her husband. It's unlike him to come home and not start in the kitchen to greet.

"Manqele," she says standing next to the bed.

He exhales heavily and shifts his eyes from Londa to her. There's a vein throbbing on his temple and pronounced lines of stress etched on his browridge.

"Are you okay?" MaNtusi asks.

"I have a terrible headache. Can I skip dinner? I want to bath and sleep," he says.

"But you know how Ma feels about someone skipping prayer and dinner while inside the yard. I'll give you painkillers, you'll be fine."

"I don't want to be fine!"

MaNtusi's head tits to the side, her eyebrow curves up as awe struck her face.

Thakasa sighs and brushes his face in frustration. "I want to sleep, please." His tone softens and begs.

MaNtusi sits on the bed and holds his hand.

Something happened to him, he was happy when he left home.

“What happened, myeni wami?” she asks worriedly.

“I miss my dad,” he says.

She didn’t expect this one. He’s never cried for his father before. Even when he died Thakasa was the one who comforted others and became a pillar of the Manqueles.

“Why do you miss him?” she asks.

“There’s so much I still needed to learn from him. There are things I fail to handle and go through alone,” he says.

“But you’re married, you don’t have to go through anything alone. I’m here,” she says.

“I know, my love. But it’s not everything that I can share with you. Sometimes I need a man who gave birth to me to tell me what to do. He taught me to be strong but there are things that I fail to be strong for. I need new strategies to deal with them. His teachings and my own heart are failing me. I don’t know what to do.”

A moment of silence passes.

Then she sighs, "Do you want to talk to someone professional at least?"

"No, I want to sleep MaNtusi."

She nods, "I'll bring your food."

"Thank you." He turns and lies on his stomach. MaNtusi brushes his shoulder and sighs before taking her son and leaving.

MaKhumalo stares at her as she walks past the kitchen to put Londa in bed in Phethy's room. It's almost time for prayer, where's Thakasa?

She follows behind with her hands on the hips. She heard the car driving in, obviously he's home and he didn't even bother greeting.

"Where's your husband?" she asks MaNtusi.

"Oh, he's not well. He has a headache, so he won't be joining us for prayer and dinner."

"Sick people don't pray now?"

"He's resting, Ma."

“That’s what you two want to teach Londokuhle? That it’s okay to disappear from family prayers and dinner. No, surely he can sacrifice a few minutes to pray and eat, then I’ll give him something for the headache.”

MaNtusi decides to let mother and son handle it. She shushes Londa back to sleep while MaKhumalo leaves to sort out Thakasa.

“Kuyangenwa la?” MaKhumalo asks at the door. Thakasa’s groan is enough permission for her to push the door and lets herself in.

“Why are you sleeping? Didn’t you see the time?”

“Ma, please! I have a headache.”

“That headache, when did it start?”

“A while ago.”

“Come, we’ll pray for it.”

“I don’t want prayers, I want...” He holds his breath and pulls a pillow to his face.

“What do you want?” MaKhumalo asks.

He releases the breath he held for a second. “I want Phelo’s mother back.”

“Did she break up with you?”

“Yes,” he says and inhales a sharp breath.

“She’ll come back, let her breathe, we all deal with grief differently.”

“I lost my brother too but I didn’t dump her. Ma, my heart is not made of stone, I do feel pain when she hurts me.”

“So you’re going to lie and say you have a headache, cause MaNtusi panic and cry on her bed throughout the night? Trust me, she’ll leave you as well and thirsty men out there won’t waste any time to catch her. You’ll become a zombie, you know how your wife becomes.”

“That’s why I need to rest, I have to get my emotions together and be emotionally present where I am. MaNtusi and I are in a good place, I don’t want to ruin that.”

“But you’re already skipping prayer and dinner. You’re going to ruin your marriage again, obviously.”

“I love that girl, I’m not pretending. I really do. I wish she can see past my mistakes and allow me...”

“Thakasa!” his mother roars.

He sighs, “Okay, I’ll come shortly.”

MaKhumalo shakes her head in disappointment and walks out.

There’s only one person he can talk to right now and be calm. His sister...he lies on his back and dials her number.

“Duyaza,” Mawande answers.

“Hey, are you busy?” That’s how all of them begin, she already knows that there’s something going on.

“We can talk. What’s going on?” she asks.

“We broke up,” he says.

“You and MaNtusi?”

“No.”

She sighs, "I'm sorry. What was the reason?"

"She said she needs space. I don't understand what kind of space because we don't stay together, I rarely get to spend time with her anyway.

Bengingasona iscefe kuye. We last had sex...."

Mawande coughs, he takes a deep breath and pauses. Sometimes he forgets that she's a fourth born, only 25 years old.

"I'm sorry, I'm just going through a lot. This is the first time I go through something like this with her."

"But you guys have broken up many times before and fixed things," Mawande says.

"She's never broken up with me. Maybe there's someone else. I don't know what to think."

"If there's someone else are you going to accept him and respect him like MaNtusi did with her?"

Mawande asks out of curiosity.

"Excuse you? We have a child together, I'm not letting any monkey come and groan next to my daughter. I'll sort Nomkhosi out, I know she'll let her guard down in time. She's mine!"

“What do you mean? How are you going to sort her out?” Mawande.

“I know her circle now and my forefathers approve of my seed being nurtured by her womb. I’ll give my daughter a sibling. Eventually she’ll have a ring on her finger and it’ll be me, the father of her children, who put it.”

“Is that even legal?” Mawande asks in astonishment.

“Is it legal to break someone’s heart without a reason? Nomkhosi knows that I cannot live without her. She saw me trying to break things with her so many times and failing. She’s doing this to torture me, that’s all.”

“Yoh! It’s almost time for prayer, please be okay. Think of everything you’ve survived, you cannot let a woman asking for space turn you into a zombie. Eat and live your life.”

He sighs, “Thank you, mntakama.”

He’s not okay but talking to his sister always calms him down and puts some sense into his head.

He logs into his bank app and transfers R10 000 to Nomkhosi Nsele. Her family can afford the funeral, the most luxurious one this country has ever seen, but he'll throw in his five cents as well.

He follows up with the sms; "PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF IT'S SHORT. MY HEART IS WITH YOU. ULIPHATHE KAHLE IKHEKHE LAMI MAZIKODE."

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MAWANDE

She had dinner alone, which isn't a new thing to her. It's been that way ever since Nyezi passed on. Sometimes kids do come and keep her company and sometimes their mothers refuse. 'Akazalanga ngani ezakhe,' that's the question she's heard being thrown around a few times.

Bhambatha agreed to go to the nyanga with his mother and seemingly everything went well. Mrs Myeza hasn't sent any messages, Bhambatha

dropped her off and left for whatever emergency. Yes, they traveled together. That counts for something; there's a light at the end of the tunnel.

Getting a call from Thakasa has given her something else to think about other than the Myeza bitter relationships. Personally, she's never disregarded the fact that her brothers, any of them, could become a polygamist one day. But Thakasa was the one who was always anti-polygamy. He only wanted to get married once, have kids and live his life with one woman, MaNtusi.

But now all that have changed, he wants a second woman. He's already drawn a picture of his future, it fits all three of them and their kids, and now that Nomkhosi is backing out he's crushed. He feels powerless. It's another dream crushed. Dream after dream, like a series of failures.

But can Nomkhosi be blamed for breaking things off? Not at all. She was there the day Sqalo died, for a day she got a glimpse of what being a Manqeale wife entails. Everyone accepted their relationship, there's no sneaking around anymore, which has brought

new light to their relationship. Maybe that light burnt some of her comfort zones, or maybe it brought light into things that were in the dark before. Anyway she's gone, maybe not forever but Thakasa is hurting. MaNtusi is about to get caught in the middle and she'll have her own drama to spare.

Owww, dear Lord! This is too much. Even the crazy Khanyo doesn't bring this much drama to the family. Well, Tema has always minded her own business, worked with the brothers professionally and stayed out of drama.

"Are you okay?" the voice comes from the door. She lifts her eyes and releases a sigh. She's been lying in bed and thinking about all the drama that surrounds her. Now here's someone who can put an end to her distress.

"Yeah, I'm okay," she says.

He walks in, takes his shoes off and sits on bed. She didn't even know that he was coming. He's still not comfortable with them doing things in his brother's house.

“You looked so deep in your thoughts. What’s on your mind?” he asks.

She doesn’t tell his brother’s business to anyone.

“I was thinking about you,” she lies with a smile on her face.

His upper lip curves up in a ghost of a smile. He’s cute, a bit thuggish in those long camouflage pants and black hoodie but she wouldn’t have him any other way.

“I’m here, don’t think no more.” He pulls her for a hug and kisses her lips affectionately. Then he sighs and lies on her lap. A bit heavy but they’ve done things from different positions. Sometimes with his whole body on top of her. This is nothing.

“Do you think now Ma and I are going to be okay?” he asks.

“Yes. She knows what she’s doing. Who knows, maybe you’ll be coming to church with us as well.

He breaks into laughter. Church and him? Nope.

“I love my life the way it is.”

Well, she was just testing waters.

“So what did the man do?” she asks.

“You don’t want to know. I have to sleep home today,” he says.

Silly her for thinking he was going to sleep here, with her!

Something strikes his mind. He looks up at her, “Babe, what did you want to tell me earlier? You looked troubled.”

Sigh! Benjamin made her swear on her father’s grave but she was going to tell him anyway. Maybe not today because she didn’t want him to not go with his mother. She did the most for him to get this Nxumalo’s help.

“Did you notice anything weird with the man?” she asks.

“Yes, he’s ugly and very unpleasant to be around.”

She laughs at that.

“Anything you noticed between Ma and him?” she asks.

He frowns, "No."

"Nothing at all?"

He sits up, "Just tell me what's going on."

"I think something happened. Ma blurted it out," she says.

"Something like what?"

"Sexual violation."

He frowns, "Wait wait wait, sexual violation to who? By who?"

"Your mother was sexual violated by that nyanga before he agreed to help you. There's history between him and your father, when he..."

He's up on his feet.

"Bruh, you're trippin'! You're crazy. Sexual vio...? To my mother? Are you serious right now?"

She expected a reaction. She also went into an emotional deformation after confirming Mrs Myeza's whereabouts from Benjamin.

"I also called Benjamin and asked if he ever drove

Ma there and he said yes. She slept there and instructed Benjamin to pick her up in the morning.”

“Who the fuck is Benjamin? Why are you calling aboBenjamin?”

“He’s your mother’s driver, the one Nyezi got for her.”

He’s scratching his face and pacing around the room. She’s actually freaked out a little bit. There’s a gun on his waist. He still hasn’t learnt to leave it in the car.

“That same morning I found your mother crying in her bedroom. She blurted out something about being that nyanga’s sexual slave the whole night for you to...” He slides down to the floor with his hands over his head. “...for you to get the help you were refusing,” Mawande says.

“No, no, no! Nobody touches my mother. Nobody takes advantage of her. NOBODY!”

“Okay, my love, but we have to be calm. I’m still trying to collect all the evidence, tomorrow I’ll go to your mother’s doctor because that’s where she went the next morning. I guess she wanted to do tests,

just to be safe from sexual transmitted diseases.”

His brows furrowed. Tears run down his face. His head is spinning. Blood boiling hot. His veins are threatening to burst, he needs to punch somebody. Not Mawande though....the wall.

Mawande gasps, “Bhambatha!”

“She’s 56. My mother is 56 years old. 18 May 1964. Do you feel me? She’s an old woman.”

“I know, baby,” she says.

He’s yelling at her- the wrong person- to get his frustrations out.

“She has this fuckin’ thing...what is it called? Arthritis.”

Mawande nods. She’s well aware of that, but she never thought he knew or cared as well.

“She’s a grown, fragile woman. Do you feel me? So I don’t care what my father owed him, I don’t care that he created me or whatever, anyone who touches my mother is putting me back to jail. Bada boom, bada bing, I don’t care. It’s fuck-off o’clock, he’s shuffling

off the mortal coil. Tonight he's going to suck the kumara!"

"I don't want you to go to jail." Tears are welling up. A part of her regrets telling him before the police. This hurts her as much as it hurts him, Mrs Myeza is a mother to her, but she doesn't want to lose anyone in the name of justice.

"I've killed innocent people before. I'm not going to be scared when it's time to kill a cunt that deserves it. I'd be damned!"

"So you're ready to leave me and go to jail?" she asks.

"I'm always ready for anything in life, Mawande. Loya msunu had his last breakfast today. Kusasa amapharishi ayogxabha elele eqhweni njenge-sausage." He lifts his hoodie over his face, wipes tears off and walks out with his phone in hand. He's calling someone....Nxumalo is dead!

Mawande is still sitting in bed wrapped in misery and regret. Out of everything; murder planning, curses and zero change in character, she's only worried

about him going to jail. The only thing she doesn't want to come out of this situation is an arrest of someone she's grown so comfortable and in love with.

But he's ready to leave her anytime for jail. He's not scared of being away from her. What they have together is a priority, but there are things he'd put above it any time, any day. He'd never compromise for it. He'll always do things the way he's always done them, her being in his life doesn't change that and it hurts.

The door closes, he's gone. He might and might not come back.

Tears are blinding her vision, her fingers dial the first number that comes to her head.

"Mawande," he answers breathing heavily. There's a huffing in his background.

"Hello?" he says when she doesn't respond.

Mawande's hand is still over her mouth, she's trying not to break down and cry over the phone because Thakasa will be jumping into the car and coming to

Mangethe in the blink of an eye.

“Yes, it’s just...” she sniffs back tears.

He groans out in pleasure as the female’s voice calls out his name demanding his attention.

“I’ll call you back,” h

e says to her and drops the call moaning.

What time is it? This sucks. She shouldn’t have called him at this hour, obviously he’s still making up to MaNtusi for all the bullshit.

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LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

CHAPTER 75

BHAMBATHA

He asked the wife to leave, he didn't care whether she saw his face or not, at that moment nothing mattered more than looking at his mother's abuser in the eye. It took Nxumalo time to realize that something was wrong, it was until he saw the gun in his hand.

"Mfana kaMyeza kwenzenjani?" he asked sitting up and putting his vest on.

"Stand up!" His knuckles were sore from punching walls. Tears were still burning his eyes, his heart too heavy in his chest. Nothing could ever prepare a child for the sexual violation of their parent. He's the first born, the one who should've protected his mother after the death of their father. But he's been

nowhere to be found and this is where it has led. His mother was taken advantage of because she was an old, defenseless woman in need.

“Why did you rape my mother?” he asked once Nxumalo stood up in his scotch short and ingwe vest.

“I never raped your mother.” He could’ve convinced him if he was stupid. But nah, he saw right through him.

“What do you call what you did?” he asked.

“I did her a favor and she returned it. Your mother knows how much your father owed me.”

“I’m going to do you a favor as well.” He threw a rope and pointed a gun at him. “Tie your ankles, make it tight so that you won’t be able to move.”

Nxumalo frowned, “Why?”

“So that you won’t be able to move, why do I need to repeat myself?” he snapped.

Nxumalo picked the rope, looked at it and shook his head. He was not prepared to tie himself with a rope,

that's bad luck.

Bhambatha fired a gun and purposely missed him. The muzzle report and recoil were reduced by a silencer. Neighbors heard nothing, even those who heard something thought it was a drum or something.

Nxumalo fell to the floor and quickly tied his ankles together.

"I said tie them tightly. Your hands weren't shaking when they were all over my mother," Bhambatha said harshly, his voice hoarse and cloaked in pain and anger.

Nxumalo trembled and tried to tie his ankles tighter. Bhambatha's Combat boot landed at the side of his face, his jaws started bleeding.

"Mfana, don't anger my ancestors," he threatened.

"There are no ancestors here. Ancestors don't stay in dirty places. This whole place is a rape scene. Shut the fuck up, there's no ancestor here, you're delusional."

He took out handcuffs and cuffed together Nxumalo's hands. "Do I need to tape your stinking mouth?" he asked.

"Please, let's talk. We can resolve this, I brought you to this earth son," Nxumalo pleaded.

"Ey ey ey! You're not God. You didn't create shit, except these useless medicines of yours." He went to the table and turned the lamp off. He used his phone for light, Nxumalo was lying on the floor with both his hands and feet tied.

"You live like a witch, you die like a witch. You remember how communities used to kill witches back in the days?"

Nxumalo cried, "Let's talk, mfana."

Bhambatha didn't listen. He didn't care. He was going to do it heartlessly and brutally. He taped Nxumalo's mouth, walked to the door and locked it from the outside.

He sprinkled petrol on the grass roof and set it alight. He didn't wait nor look back, he left the rondavel in flames and drove off.

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He's been driving around Lembede Street looking for this building and getting lost. This 'life expert' is said to work from here, 10th floor. He doesn't wait for the lift, he climbs up the stairs.

He took a shower but he didn't change his clothes. He looks like a criminal with a hoodie over a beanie and bloodshot eyes. Oh, he's one anyway.

He didn't call or book any appointment, he's just here, he's got both cash and credit card- however they'll want him to pay.

He bumps into her at the door. She looks exactly how he imagined her to be; dark-skinned, fit and tall. She's breathing education-flavored air with those specs on. She's wearing one of those fake afro wigs and baby pink suit.

"Gentleman, can I help you?" It looks like she's going out for lunch or something. She has her bag, car keys and phone in hand.

“How much do you charge for talking?” he asks taking his wallet out.

She looks confused.

“Did you miss or cancel your appointment?”

“This is my appointment. I need your help, I’m desperate.” He’s being vulnerable and desperate with a stranger. But it’s her job, isn’t? She signed up for this.

“I was going out for lunch with my fiancée, maybe you can wait...”

“I don’t want to wait, I have to go home and fix things with my mother. She was sexually violated because of me.”

She sighs in defeat and turns back to the door of her office with the key. This has never happened in her entire career, people book for sessions and pay upfront.

“Here,” she shows him a leather chair and sits behind her desk.

He sits, his hands are shaking a little bit, killing

Nxumalo didn't ease the pain or release the anger boiling inside him.

"Would you like some water?" Dr Dlamini, the psychological counselor, asks.

He shakes his head and rubs his hands together.

"I'm Bhambatha Myeza," he says and lifts his eyes to her.

There's a cold chill running down her spine as their eyes meet. He looks hungry for blood, there's something poking out of his waist.

"I'm a bad son, a curse, disappointment and disgrace. My mother has lost everything because of me; friends, relatives, husband. Everything that meant the world to her. A few days ago she lost her dignity, all because of me." He takes a deep breath and shakes his head, taken back by the path he chose and how it has affected his mother.

"I'm selfish, Doc. My mother did everything for me, I didn't care. I had no dankie. I never reciprocated that love. I just wanted my father. I only cared about his validation and attention. My mother has been there

for me since birth. She's always had my back, loved me and defended me tirelessly. I never appreciated that, it was normal for me to take from her and not give back. I was so invested in getting my father's attention, good or bad, I didn't pay attention nor care if my mother was hurting. I hated her when she said she wished it was me who died instead of my brother, but now I realize that I had no reason to. She was right, I don't deserve to live. I don't deserve her as a mother, I don't deserve anything."

Dr Dlamini opens her mouth to speak but he cuts her in.

"Imagine being safe for 56 years and then get sexually violated when you're close to the grave, only because you want to help your son who's never done a single thing to make you proud. A dirty, ugly man! She had to endure him doing as he pleases with her body throughout the night. How do I ever forget that? My father died, Nyezi also died, I'm the only male she has left. I didn't have to graduate, I didn't have to go to church, I didn't have to get married and produce grandkids, I didn't have to stay home and clean the

yard. I already failed all that. I only had one job; to protect my mother from being violated by cruel men out there. I managed to protect my brother's wife, someone I hardly knew or had any relationship with. But with my own mother I failed, she was treated like a helpless widow by that..." He balls his hand into a fist and bumps it on the desk.

"Okay, please stay calm. You can take responsibility for your mistakes but not for what another man did to your mother."

"How can one person be so bad? There's no light. How did I become such useless motherfucker? My mother is awaiting tests from doctors because that man did her dirty." He gets up on his feet and brushes his face. "How do I live with myself knowing that I made my mother become a statistic of victims of sexual violation?"

He turns to Dr Dlamini and stares at her. She's letting him release everything in his chest, it's a first step towards healing.

"Aren't you supposed to be giving me answers? You

know everything, this is your job, right?"

She nods, "Yes, It's my job."

"Then do it. How do I live with myself?" he asks.

"You've acknowledged that you need help and you know exactly what has led you to this point. Now you need to open yourself to forgiveness- forgive yourself and..."

He sighs, "Were you even listening? I haven't done anything to myself. Why do I need to forgive myself as if I broke my own ankle intentionally? I failed to protect my mother and now she has to live with this nasty experience of being fucked by a man she didn't love the whole night because she needed help."

"Forgiving yourself means taking accountability for your mistakes and separating who you are from what you've done. It'll enable you to make necessary changes and grow from your experiences. Once that is done..." He sighs again and sits back on the couch.

He pulls out his wallet and takes R100 notes. He doesn't even bother counting them, he puts them on

her desk.

“This is more than what I charge for one session,” says Dr Dlamini hesitantly.

He slides his wallet back into his pocket and walks out. She tries to stop him, there are things she’d like him to do at home that might help him. But he’s not in listening mode, she takes the money and checks her fiancée’s angry texts on her phone. Phewww, what a day!

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MAWANDE

She’s woken up by Thakasa’s call. She doesn’t even remember when she fell asleep, she was determined to stay up the whole night and wait for a call, or anything, from Bhambatha.

“Hey, I’m sorry about last night,” he says.

“I understand, it was late. Are you okay?” she asks.

“At home, yes. In life, no. But things are going to be okay. What about you, why did you call?”

“I was just going through things. It’s not easy, I think I messed up big time. Bhambatha has been gone since last night. I don’t know where he is, maybe he’s in jail.”

“Whoah, what happened? Did he do something to you?” he asks.

“No, I told him something and he went nuts. I’ve never seen him like that before and now I regret even telling him.”

“He’s a soldier, I know he’s not stupid, he’s going to be home safe. Wait, are you now living with him?”

A giggle escapes her mouth. Is that even his business?

“No. But if we did would it be a problem?” she asks.

“Yes, they haven’t told us anything. It has to be official and done right.”

“I just hope he’s safe. I’m not ready to lose another man.”

“He’ll be back, trust me. If you don’t hear anything in the next two hours call me.”

That gives her some kind of solace. Her brother will be here, she knows that nobody really cares about Bhambatha in the Myeza family except his mother.

She takes a shower and dresses up before sitting in front of the TV with a bowl of Jungle Oats. It’s morning news and one of the top stories is about a traditional doctor who was burnt alive in his home.

Her heart starts racing when they mention him by name, famously known as Bab’ Nxumalo. The police are about to investigate, they’re following all the leads.

“Oh God!” she sighs breathing heavily with her hands shaking.

Why is he not returning her text messages? What if Mrs Myeza finds out? It’ll completely destroy their relationship, she might even get blamed for pushing him to commit crime.

Her phone rings. It's him. She almost breathes her lungs out.

"I've been so worried. Where are you?" she asks picking up.

"Sisi please come over his house. Something has happened," says someone whose voice she can't familiarize.

"Happened to who? Who are you? Why are you using his phone?"

"I'm Nkosinathi, please come over and talk to him. I've managed to get all the guns but I don't know what's next. He's suicidal."

Whaaaat?!

"No, no, no! Please don't let him take his life. I still need him. None of this is his fault." She's running to the bedroom to change shoes and get her car keys. Her heartbeat is faster than her pace. Joints are failing her; she feels weak. This is her mess, had she kept her mouth shut none of this would've happened.

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Oh, she's seen this man before, he's a close friend of Bhambatha. He looks just as devastated as she is. Helpless even.

"Where is he?" She's already walked past him towards the bathroom that's shut.

"He's there," Nathi says standing behind her with a low sigh.

She takes a deep breath and knocks. "Bhambatha please open."

There's no answer....

"Please, it's me."

Nothing.

Nathi releases a sigh behind her and walks a few steps away.

"My love, I'm here, let me feel whatever pain you're feeling. If it's death that you want open and let us die together."

A minute passes, the door handle moves, he opens and lets her in. She closes the door and turns to face him. His white bathroom walls have trails of blood on them, so are his knuckles. Punching walls again! He looks like a mess. He's still wearing the same clothes.

She tries to hug him but he refuses and goes to stand by the window. He's barefooted. This is the most horrible state she's ever seen him in.

"What do you want us to do?" she asks.

Silence.

"I can ask Nkosinathi to give your gun back but my question is how is that fair to me and your mother?"

"You don't know what I'm going through. Your mother has never been touched by anyone the wrong way," he cloaks out heavily.

"She did all that to have you back in her life. Now you want to kill yourself. That's not fair, Bhambatha."

"I don't know how to go on. I ruined the whole 56 years of her life. She has to wake up everyday and

live with this. My mother is religious, she respects her body and would never use it to benefit anything. I have devalued her, destroyed her soul and..."

Mawande takes a few steps forward and stands in front of him. She doesn't touch him though, she folds her arms and stares at him.

"How do you want to go back home? In a coffin accompanied by a goat or you want to go there now and look at your mother in the eye and say, "Ma, I'm sorry"?" she asks.

Deep breath...

She's waiting.

"I want to go home," he says.

"In what way?" she asks.

"I want to look at my mother like a child and ask for forgiveness."

He had to want his mother's forgiveness on his own. He had to see his mistakes and understand how far his mother has gone and is still willing to go for him. Apologizing had to be his decision for it to be

genuine.

“I want to go back home,” he says.

Mawande walks closer and hugs him. This time he allows her to.

“I’m sorry.” He buries his head over her shoulder and releases a deep breath.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 76

BHAMBATHA

He's brought home by his late brother's wife, Mawande. They've traveled together, mostly at night, for their personal reasons. Today things are different though, it's about family more than about them. It's about restoring peace at the Myezas, unity and forgiveness. He's humble; sitting below the gate with his head buried between his knees. If Nathi didn't come on time he could've died, Mawande could be inside the house to report news of his death. It was impulsiveness, he'd never take his own life- it has never crossed his mind until two hours ago.

Mawande comes out of the house with a phone against her ear. He lifts his eyes and looks at her as she gets nearer. His brother found her first and left,

now she's the one for him too.

He can't apologize enough for everything he's done to shake her world.

"I'm sorry," he says once again and exhales heavily and casts his eyes to the ground.

She almost went through it again- that pain of losing a loved one. It's not fair, she asked him more than once if he was ready to leave her and he failed to reassure her.

"She's coming. I didn't tell her about the suicide attempt." She glances at the screen of her phone and releases a sigh. "It was you, right?"

She's asking about Nxumalo.

He nods, "Yes."

"Okay," she rubs her hands together and blows out. If there's any time to end what they have it would be now. She's a woman of God, righteousness and morals, and Bhambatha is everything she's against.

He's regretful, not for killing Nxumalo but for disappointing her this much.

“I can make things right,” he says in a low whisper. Just thinking about going through coming days without her upsets him deeply in the stomach.

“Did anyone see you?” she asks.

He nods, “Yes, the wife.”

“Bhambatha!” she sighs heavily.

“Can she recognize you?”

“I don’t know,” he says.

“I guess you might go to jail as prepared. I don’t even know why I’m stressing myself about it, you’ve always been ready to leave me.”

“That’s not true. I’m scared of losing what you and I have together. Sometimes I act impulsively, especially when I’m angry.” He gets up and touches her arm. She forces her eyes to meet his. She’s hurting!

She exhales heavily, “I don’t trust you.”

“What do you want me to do to prove myself to you?” he asks.

“Don’t go to jail,” she says like it’s his call. He doesn’t get to decide whether he’s jailed or not.

“Do whatever you gotta do to be around.” She’s telling him to bribe someone, or kill, or destroy evidence. Whatever he has to do.

“And don’t say anything to Ma. All this will kill her soul, figure it out and bring nothing but peace in her life,” she says.

His fingers caress her skin on the upper arm, his eyes have no spark but they’re still penetrating her soul.

“What about us? Where do we stand?” His tone is kneaded with fear and uncertainty.

“I still love you,” she says.

He pulls her to his embrace and rests his chin on top of her head, eyes tightly-shut.

“I’m really sorry, my love. I didn’t mean to put you through all this. I didn’t mean to drag you into my mess. I want nothing but...”

Someone clears her throat. Mawande quickly breaks

away from his embrace.

It's Mrs Myeza staring at them. They deserve that stare, they are doing too much in public.

"You didn't sleep home," she says looking at Bhambatha. She hasn't heard about Nxumalo's death yet.

"There was an emergency at work," he says scratching his head.

"Where do you work?" she asks.

He glances at Mawande, she slightly shrugs her shoulders.

"Don't look at her, you're talking to me. I took you to someone for us to get help, you agreed and I spent my money on that man only for you to break all the rules and disrespect me again."

"I'm sorry," he says.

This is it, she's done. This is where she stops trying to mother him.

"I have nothing else to say. I wish you nothing but luck, my child. I hope you survive," she says.

Tears burn his eyes. Looking at his mother's eyes he sees no hope, no anger, just plain disappointment.

"I want to come back home," he says. "I'll be a son to you. I want to make you proud."

"It's too late, after the stunt you pulled on me last night I don't think I'll ever..."

"It was a mistake," - Mawande interjects.

They both look at her.

"He came to my house and I begged him not to leave. I was feeling lonely and scared," she says.

"Why didn't you come and sleep with me if you were scared?" Mrs Myeza asks.

She glances at Bhambatha, he's still shocked at the lie. "I needed him with me. It was more than just physical safety," she says.

Mrs Myeza loses it.

"KaMaNqele you know how important yesterday was for me. How can you be so selfish? Putting your sexual needs above this family's peace and unity!"

“I’m really sorry. I’ll do my best to find someone who can help you since this one wasn’t carried out to its full instructions.”

“Only Nxumalo knows how to help us. Others won’t know what he did, he’s the only best.”

“Please give me a few days, I promise you I’ll find someone who can help with this. My brother knows people who know people.”

“I’ll call Nxumalo first and ask if there’s any damage control we can do.”

“He’s dead.”

“Who?”

“Nxumalo. It was on the news in the morning, a house burnt with him inside.”

“How?” Disbelief dwells on her face. She looks faintly for a moment.

“I think it was an accident,” Mawande says, her eyes briefly locks with Bhambatha’s. He clears his throat and looks away.

His mother looks at him. It would be bad of her to

think so ill of her son, but wouldn't he do it? He didn't like Nxumalo that much, he questioned and challenged every instruction he laid out.

"Do you really want to come back home?" she asks him.

"Yes," he nods.

"You're aware of what that means, right? There are rules here and everyone has to abide."

"I know that but..." He pauses and takes a deep breath. "Please allow me to have my own spiritual journey and beliefs. I don't want to be made feel less because I don't do what everyone believes is right."

"Bhambatha if you still want to commit crime and..." He cuts his mother short. That's not what he meant.

"That's not what I mean, I'm saying don't force religion down my throat. I'm good in that department."

His mother sighs out in defeat. Just like any mother, she wanted God-fearing children. She has to accept that he is her son, but before he's her son he's a fully

independent human being who can make decision for himself as far as faith goes.

“I will call your uncles, they’ll guide us on which necessary steps do we have to take to reconcile you with both me and your father. You owe him apology as well.”

“So you forgive him?” Mawande asks.

She smiles and looks at Bhambatha. Even though she’s wished death on him, vowed to never share her space with him nor call him her son, but this boy is hers.

“I will cook isijingi for you,” she tells him.

Bhambatha’s eyes widen. Isijingi again? He likes it but...

“No, thank you,” he says.

“Ahh! Now you’re scared of a broom-stick but you’re always carrying guns. I’ll cook isijingi for you, MaShandu gave me two pumpkins last week.”

“Ma, I still have bruises, my perfect body was ruined. I swear if you do what...” His mother waves him off

with a hand. Everyone knows that she's not a child-beater, she was pushed over the edge.

"Your ruined your body with tattoos long time ago. It looks like Satan's temple," she says.

Mawande bursts into laughter. Bhambatha is complaining, following behind his mother. This is exactly what he asked her not to do a minute ago; imposing her beliefs on him.

"This is common knowledge, I'm not dragging you to church or forcing Bible verses down your throat, tattoos are Satanic. You won't see heaven with all that ink on your body," she continues. This is her house, she's not going to be restricted on what to say and what's not.

"I thought only the soul went to heaven. You, church-goers, God's classmates, always say the body is just 'clay' and will remain here on earth. So what's wrong if I choose to decorate my clay?"

Mawande chirps in, "Most sins are committed through bodies. It doesn't mean they'll be excused just because the body is not there."

“How do you know? You’ve never died before,” he asks.

“She reads the Bible,” his mother comes in. “If you did the same you’d know that. Your body is the temple of God and your heart is...”

He sighs! What did he just get himself into? Two God’s agents against one. This is about to become his life, even in the bedroom.

While his mother delivers a sermon walking in front of them, he grabs the behind of Mawande’s ‘temple of God’. She gasps and yanks his hand off.

She turns her head and scowls at him. He keeps his face calm and shows her a thumb inserted between his middle and pointer finger.

This one is here to destroy her morals and turn her into something she never thought she was. How did he move from wanting to kill himself to making ‘I’ll fuck you’ signs?

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NOMKHOSI

Tema came to the funeral, together with MaKhumalo and all the brothers. MaNtusi couldn't make it, Thakasa believes in spirits and all that so he didn't want her to come to the funeral and fetch bad spirits that will harm Londa. But she did send her condolences and checked up on Nomkhosi almost every morning.

They came bearing gifts for Ngidi, which will never make sense to Nomkhosi. Black people always do that; getting a dead person blankets and flowers. Both Thakasa and MaKhumalo came with blankets to give her dead stepfather. It was good gesture though, especially from MaKhumalo. Her presence allowed her to grieve as much as she wanted. Phelo was in safe hands, she didn't have to worry about her.

Tema came with a bucket of scones, helped in the kitchen and served people after the funeral. It gave a lot of people sisterwife vibes, something she's still

trying to distance herself from.

“These people have already accepted you. They see you as one of them. How are you going to break all these relationships?” Ndondo asked her the night after the funeral and she had no straight answer.

Then she received another sum of money from Mr T Mangele. Ndondo didn't even know about the first one.

“I asked him for space but he's still in my space. He wakes me up every morning with romantic messages, calls to say he misses me and sends me money. I don't know what else to say to him. He doesn't get it.”

Ndondo rolled her eyes, “He's doing what you enabled him to do.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Because your break-up line was; “I still love you and I'll come back to you, but I just need a break”. You weren't firm as he was when he told you were a sperm-dish.”

Ndondo was right. She needs to set the record straight, even if it means lying about her feelings for him. He needs to back off and the only way to do it is to be firm and heartless.

She wanted them to meet at a restaurant but Ndondo talked her out of it. It would look like a date and her mother won't take it well since it has only been two weeks since they buried Ngidi. So they're meeting in their house at Waterways. She came wearing Hlomuka Logistics work clothes. Yes, she had to honor Ngidi's last wishes and join the family business. Ndondo understood when she resigned at Bantwana Holdings, one day they had to go separate ways business-wise. Their friendship started as work-related but now they're more than that, they're family.

She walks into him setting the table. There are covered dishes, lit candles and a bunch of flowers at

the center of the table. One turn-off is the Shembe instruments playing softly in the house. If she wasn't trying to break up with him this would've been romantic to see. He's wearing the kitchen apron and softly humming to the instruments.

"Hi," she greets and stands away from the table. She can't be distracted, not now.

"MaZikode," he says smiling.

Deep breath, Nomkhosi.

"I came here to talk," she says.

"I know. Come and have a seat, we'll talk through dinner."

"No, I don't have time for that."

He sighs, "It's just food. I made an effort and this is how you thank me?"

"You can go and cook for MaNtusi. I'm not your wife," she says.

"You will become one soon." He looks at the table and rearranges something. "Rate me out of five."

“Thakasa!” she snaps.

He’s not taking her serious.

“What?” he asks.

“We are not together. What don’t you get? Stop sending me money, I work and make my own money. And stop copying messages from Google and sending me. You wouldn’t be that romantic even if your life depended on it.”

He laughs, “But I’m trying. I’m making an effort. You know how much I love you.”

“I’m over it. I don’t have feelings for you anymore. I’d appreciate if you start acting like Phelo’s father, not like Romeo from the novel.”

He stares at her for a good minute. She came here to tear his heart apart, didn’t she?

“What did I do?” he asks in a pained voice.

“Nothing, you didn’t do anything. I just want more in life than being your second wife. I’m capable of becoming more than that. I can be the only wife to someone out there. I can have someone’s whole

heart. Why must I limit myself?"

He blows out and pulls a chair to sit. This feels like a punch on the face, after everything they've worked through this is what she brings up?

"You've always known that I'm a married man, I already have a wife at home," he says.

"Not every choice I've made has been the best. What I can do is turn my life around and do better. And that's exactly what I'm doing."

"Leaving me is doing better?" he asks.

"Yes," she says.

"I fucked you for a year, gave you a baby and fucked you some more, and now you think there's someone better out there?"

"Precisely. In fact, there is someone better than you."

"Who?" He raises his eyebrow.

"None of your business. You just have to respect people's decisions. If I say I don't need you in my space stop sending me money and messages like we're an item. I didn't do that to you after you called

me a sperm-dish.”

“So you’re still holding on to that? You also hid the pregnancy from me but you don’t hear me bringing that up every time we fight.”

“We are not fighting, I’m telling you to back off.” She takes out her phone, logs into her banking app and transfers back his money.

It reports in his phone, he checks the notification and his face transforms into shock.

“I’ll only accept money from you if it’s our daughter’s,” she says.

He gets up from the chair and comes to her. He holds her arm and pulls her to his chest. He embraces her tightly.

“Please forgive me. I don’t have a crystal ball to see into the future, maybe if I did I would’ve waited till I met you. But one thing I’m sure of is that I love you and I want to spend my life with you.”

She inhales a deep breath. Her heart is in tatters, there’s no denying the love she sees in his eyes and

feels thudding in her own heart. But sometimes you have to stand against your own heart to see the other side of the grass...maybe it's greener.

"I want someone I can be the only woman to and you're not that person. Allow me to find myself and explore the world. You're not what I want."

"That's not fair. You've got me addicted to you, you inserted yourself in my heart and now you want someone else." His voice breaks, just like his heart.

"I didn't insert myself into your heart. You left your wife and chased after me over and over again."

"You gave yourself to me," he says.

"Well, now I have someone else to give myself to," she says.

"You're mourning," he says with a frown.

"I comforted you with my body. What's different if I use that same body to get comfort from someone else?"

He lets go of her. "You're sleeping with someone?"

"It's none of your business. You said I gave myself to

you and I'm saying I'm ready to give myself to someone else now."

"You're a whore," he says angrily.

"Not your whore now, I'm someone else's whore." She grins and throws her cellphone inside the bag and zips it.

"What are you going to give him? Your back hole, because I finished this one?" He points at her front. Her lower lip trembles. That one got into her nerves as he intended.

"You paid a cow for it, bitch!"

"I did you a favor, you weren't a virgin when I got you."

"Whatever makes you sleep at night, go back to your wife and leave me alone." She shows him the middle finger and turns towards the door.

"He's not going to marry you, whore. If anything he'll fuck you and leave. You're just a good fuck, you are good at opening your legs..." A bag flies straight to his face. She charges back to him. He steps

backwards and laughs.

“I’m a whore but you’re still here begging me to marry your ass. What makes you think I want a cheat for a husband? You’re dumb.”

“That’s how you call someone who’s dick has been down your throat and up in your...” A hot clap lands across his face. The second one follows and blinds his vision.

“Nomkhosi!” He blocks the third one and holds her arms.

“Why are you hitting me? If I hit back you’re going to run to your brothers and police and cry abuse.”

She pushes him off and picks her bag from the floor. She’s fuming.

“Nomkhosi, why are you hitting me?” he repeats the question following her to the door.

They’re arguing all the way to her car. Nomkhosi is not apologetic about putting her hands on him and he’s thrown over the edge.

She gets inside the car hurling insults at him.

Neighbors are standing in balconies and watching. Some have called the police to come and solve the madness.

He jumps in front of the car. "Run over me. Kill me, Nomkhosi!"

She starts the car. Neighbors starts screaming at them. There's a police vehicle pulling up on the driveway. Nomkhosi swerves to the left and drives past him. She passes the police on high speed and flees the scene.

MaKhumalo was the last one remaining in the dining room. She's about to go to bed when Thakasa walks in. MaNtusi said he went to Waterways, they thought he'd sleep there but he's here with a handkerchief over his left eye.

"What happened to you?" she asks with a frown getting off the chair.

"Maka Phelo slapped me. My eye keeps tearing up,

I'll see a doctor tomorrow morning. Can I sleep here?"

"Wait, what? Who slapped you?" MaKhumalo asks with her eyebrows raised.

"Nomkhosi," he says with a heavy sigh.

She paces around the room with her hands on the hips. Then she puts her glasses on and scrolls down for Bandla's number.

"Bandlaletu...yes, I'm fine...tomorrow morning come pick me up and drive me to Phelo's grandmother's house...hey, don't try to psychoanalyse me, I'm fine... I just want to go over there and talk to the woman who helped me give birth to Thakasa." She drops the call and grunts angrily.

"Ma, what are you up to?" Thakasa looks at her in confusion.

"I don't have a child who's a pinching bag. Phelo's mother is not eating bacon and salads in those mansions to beat my son. I was alone in the labor ward."

“Ma if you go there it’ll cause a lot of tension between two families and I don’t want that.”

“Her beating you has caused that tension. It’s too late, my boy.”

Sigh!!!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 77

KHANYO

Lobola negotiations were held. Nkonzo came with two other uncles, Thakasa is said to be going through things. Doesn't he always go through them? I'm glad he didn't come though, imagine the tension between him and Mandulo. He'd never accept that he got under his wife's skirt and planted a seed. A part of me understands, I also hate the faceless chick Bandla fucked in my absence.

Anyway, today I'm a guest at the Nyathis. We are here for the free meat, it's one of those instances where all three of us together. Mandulo invited both Gugu and I, Nolwazi was already here practicing illegal wife-duties. He's doing a cleansing ceremony for his grandfather and formally reporting his divorce

to the ancestors. There was a sangoma performing rituals last night and now people are here for the goat meat.

“I might move away for a while,” Gugu drops the bombshell.

“What do you mean?” Nolwazi asks.

I’m also curious.

“Out of the country. I’m not sure where yet, but I’ll let you know before I leave and we’ll stay in touch.”

“How long will you be gone?” – Nolwazi.

“It could be months, a year or years. I don’t know yet,” she says.

“Is Mike going to be with you?” I ask curiously.

She laughs, “Maybe.”

You know what, I wash my hands with Jik.

Nolwazi’s eyes are out of their sockets. “He’ll escape from prison?” she asks.

“Not literally but we might have to lie low for some time and let things blow off.”

“I feel like your life is a movie. It should be shown in cinemas and we’ll eat popcorn while it airs,” I say.

She rolls her eyes, “As if yours is heading to a better direction. You’re about to become a village wife and stay with a mother-in-law in the same yard.”

Urgh, she mustn’t remind me!

“A part of me can’t wait but I’m also scared. There’ll be no turning back, Mandulo will hand me over and I’ll enter at the Mangeles with a casket.”

“A kist, dumbass,” Nolwazi says.

We all laugh. I’ve never seen such a disrespectful daughter-in-law.

“Whatever, but I’ll be changing my surname forever. Those people will bury me next to their ancestors, away from my mother.”

Gugu exhales, “Yeah, that sounds heavy. But I’m proud of you and how far you’ve come.” She looks at Nolwazi and rubs her arm. Big sister vibes!

“In fact, I’m proud of both of you. Nolwazi you’re finishing your degree next year. Now I’m starting to

think we were toxic to each other. Nothing went right during our flat-sharing days. We were like a bunch of unstable beings.”

Again, we laugh.

“I think I needed love. Ever since Bandla came to my life I’ve been a better person,” I say.

“You also followed your ancestors path. How is that going so far?”

“I still get visions and pray. I’ve had a few people coming to seek and I believe I helped them. But it’s not as big as people thought it would be,” I say.

“Why? Is there something blocking you maybe?”
Nolwazi asks.

“I think everything happens in God’s time. I followed every instruction that was laid out for me, if there’s something missing then it’s from their side,” I say.

Gugu hugs me on the shoulders. “Everything will be fine. Please include me in your prayers. Just my safety,” she says.

“Are you in danger?” Nolwazi and I ask

simultaneously.

She laughs, "No, you two need to chill."

"You'll give us heartache." I say and look at Nolwazi, hopefully I'm not overstepping the line.

"You slept here last night?" I ask the obvious and she nods.

"With Mandulo?"

"Yes."

I raise my eyebrow, "Are you good?"

Gugu is confused. It's family matters!

"Yeah. We are not doing any penetration though, just oral and toys."

"Toys?" I gasp in shock.

"Mandulo is open minded, that's one of the reasons why I fell in love with him."

Indeed, he is open minded. I don't think I'll ever introduce sex toys to my bedroom life- imagine Bandla's fat ego taking a knock.

“I’m happy,” she says with a smile convincingly.

“Is he happy as well?” Gugu asks.

“I think so,” she says.

I really appreciate her being in Mandulo’s life. He’s hopeful again, there’s something he wants to live for, he’s realized that his world didn’t end with Thobeka. And I finally have the go-ahead to communicate with MaNtusi regarding Londa on his behalf. Even though he’ll be in his life as an uncle, half a bread is better than nothing. He’ll do his best, when Londa is old enough to understand he’ll be told the truth and it’ll be up to him if he wants to take the Nyathi surname or not. They all agreed on 16; MaNtusi, Thakasa and Mandulo. They’ll wait until he turns 16 to tell him.

I’m happy with the outcome of the situation.

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MAKHUMALO

Bandla has been trying to convince her to go back

home. He thinks this is a bad idea and it'll cause tension between families. But isn't Nomkhosi the one who started it? Even MaNtusi, Thakasa's rightful wife, has never put her hands on Thakasa. How is Phelo going to respect her father if her mother turns his into a punching bag?

There's a gate-intercom and annoying guard. He wants to know every detail before opening letting Bandla park in. He's just a second away from asking their blood type and weight, that's how petty he is.

He searches Bandla and the car then allows MaKhumalo to go through. Bandla wants nothing to do with the drama, he's just here as the driver, nothing else.

She walks past one of the boys standing by the garden and greets him. It's the older one, he returns her greeting respectfully.

"Is your sister here?" she asks.

"Yebo, she's inside," he says.

He looks so much like his father. Hopefully he's doing okay and carrying the family forward as he should.

The door is open, she greets loudly before letting herself inside. This is a huge mansion, the floor is two times larger than hers.

Ndlalifa walks in right after her and offers to give her a seat while he gets his mother.

Phumzile walks down after a moment with Phelo in her arms. Nomkhosi is getting ready for work, she's running late.

Phelo sees her uncle and starts crying for him. It's either him or Thakasa, she loves these two men. If Thakasa is not around she thinks Ndlalifa is her father. He takes her and disappears in the kitchen to get her something to eat.

Phumzile greets and sits down. She's lost people who were close to her before but this time it hits harder. The pain is different but she's trying to keep it together for the sake of the children. Maqhingisa is not coping at all. He's found comfort in the bottle,

Andiswa is trying her best to be there for him but it's getting harder each day.

"I'm sorry to come to your house unannounced, I'm here to see your John Cena," MaKhumalo says.

Phumzile frowns, "My John Cena?"

"The one who beats my son. I want to know who gave her the right to put her hands on my son."

"Nomkhosi?" Phumzile asks in shock.

"Yes, she damaged my sons eye and I want to know why," she says.

Phumzile is beyond herself with shock. She certainly didn't raise an abuser. Nomkhosi knows how she hates abuse, in any form of it.

"Ndlalifa call your sister here, right now!" she yells.

Instead of marching up the stairs Ndlalifa dials Nomkhosi's number and calls her.

The helper comes with juice and biscuits but neither MaKhumalo nor Phumzile eat. They're impatiently waiting for Nomkhosi to come down.

She finally walks in looking ready for work in black pencil skirt, white plunge-neck shirt and corset heels. Her mother instructs her to sit down. She sits and puts her purse on the lap.

“You physically injured Phelo’s father?” her mother asks.

She frowns, “Ummm...no.”

“And she’s a liar too.” MaKhumalo throws her hands up. “Thakasa couldn’t have faked an eye injury.”

“Oh that, I did slap him twice,” she says.

Her mother gasps, “What?!”

“He was insulting me and going on and on with it,” she says.

“Why couldn’t you walk away? What gave you the right to put your hands on the father of your child?” Phumzile asks.

“Ma, don’t take his side, you don’t know the full story,” she says.

“If it was him who beat you I would’ve taken your side too. I don’t condone abuse. I’ll never side with anyone who thinks it’s okay to communicate through slapping. Don’t you have legs to walk away from someone who insults you?” Phumzile.

“I did walk away but he didn’t stop,” she says.

“My son doesn’t go around insulting people. He loves you, why would he insult you? Tell us the truth, were you drunk?” MaKhumalo asks.

Nomkhosi is left stunned; her mouth is hanging open.

“She drinks, right?” MaKhumalo looks at her mother.

Phumzile exhales heavily. “Occasionally, every young person drinks nowadays.”

“Not my children!” MaKhumalo.

Phumzile secretly rolls her eyes and turns her eyes to Nomkhosi.

“You should go and apologize,” she tells her.

“Seriously, Ma? You don’t even know what he was saying to me.” Tears run down her face. She’d never give anyone the satisfaction of her tears, but sitting

here and getting blamed for reacting to Thakasa's insults cuts deeply in her heart. It hurts.

"I want her to come and apologize to him personally. This is not acceptable, I don't want to hold any grudge against you because you're my granddaughter's mother. I'll excuse you this once because I believe you made a mistake. You didn't have a good example of how a man should be treated."

Phumzile's eyes widen, "And your son had a good example of how a woman should be treated?"

"Yes, that's why we have MaNtusi at home," MaKhumalo says.

"He still came after my daughter though, right?"

"They came after each other. Your daughter could've walked away when she found out that he was married but it seems like she never walks away from anything."

Phumzile gets up with her hands on the waist.

"He's not getting any apology. Tell him to go and see

the doctor, and then go to his pastors to learn how to control his tongue,” she says.

“Oh, I see she learnt it from you. Next time she put her hands on my son there’ll be a wrestling match. I’m Ntombengcwele Khumalo, uThakasa angimfebanga mina!”

“Okay, thank you. Have a safe trip,” Phumzile says waving her away.

Ndlalifa appears with Phelo and a frown on his face. MaKhumalo has walked out of the door angrily.

“What’s going on?” he asks looking at Nomkhosi who’s fixing her make-up through teary eyes.

“Talk to your sister. I don’t want to deal with angry mothers whose children she’s beaten. I didn’t raise a hoodrat,” Phumzile says taking Phelo and walking away.

Ndlalifa remains standing and looking at Nomkhosi for an explanation.

“You are beating men now?” he asks.

Nomkhosi takes a deep breath and wipes corners of

her eyes carefully.

“He called me a whore, said nobody is going to marry me because he finished me. He said he did me a favor by paying inkomo kamama because I was not a virgin when he got me. He said I’m only good at opening my legs and I threw myself at her.” She pauses and takes another breath. “I tried to walk away but he kept poking at me, and I slapped him. All I said was I don’t want to be with him anymore, I want someone better,” she says.

“How many times did you slap him?” Ndlalifa asks.

“Two times,” she says.

“Next time knock his teeth out if he ever calls you a whore.”

She frowns, “You condone violence?”

“All the way! Don’t let anyone shit on you. You did him a favor and gave him a child. He’s a father because of you. And if he wants his cow back tell him to come and get it from me. Was he a virgin when you got him?”

She laughs, "Of course not."

"If he wants a virgin he must go and pick one from his church. Are you still going to forgive him and go back to him?"

"No, not this time!" she shakes her head.

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THAKASA

He walks out of the main house, the time reads; 8:22 am. MaKhumalo left early with Bandla. He's a bit embarrassed that his mother is there fighting for him. Sadly, once MaKhumalo makes up her mind there's no talking through her.

He walks out of the guest bedroom and bumps into MaNtusi.

"Manqele?" She's shocked to see him home.

"Morning babe," he says not looking at her. His eye is still tearing and blood-red.

“I thought you weren’t home,” she says with her eyebrow raised.

“I came late, I didn’t want to wake you up,” he says. She looks at him carefully.

“What happened to your eye?”

He rubs it, “I’ll see a doctor before I go to work.”

“I asked what happened. Are you sick or what?” she asks.

“Yes, it’s been sore since yesterday,” he says.

She doesn’t believe him.

“Where’s Ma?” she asks.

“He left with Bandla.”

“She didn’t tell me about it. Where did they go?”

He looks away and ignores her.

“Manqe!e, what’s going on?”

Deep breath!

“Nomkhosi and I had a fight. She hit me and Ma is pissed. She went to her mother’s house.”

Whoooah! She blinks rapidly.

“She hit you?” she asks in disbelief.

“Yes, I said a few things to her and she lost it. It was pretty nasty,” he says.

“Are you two okay? I don’t understand this,” she says walking to the TV stand and taking her phone.

“She broke up with me a few weeks ago. I thought yesterday she called me to fix things but she only wanted to brag about the new man she has and how he’s better than me.”

“You never told me anything about the break up. As far as I know Nomkhosi is getting married to you.”

“You said you don’t want me to bring our issues to you. I didn’t want to upset you.”

MaNtusi sighs and shakes her head. This whole drama happened right under her nose and she didn’t catch a wind of it.

She scrolls down her phone, stops at one particular picture and gives the phone to him.

He wipes his left eye and looks at it. “What is this?”

“Venue for our anniversary. I don’t want it to be too big,” she says.

He nods and gives her phone back.

“So what do you think?” she asks.

“I didn’t know you were already planning it. I love everything you love, send me the invoices.”

She smiles and pulls his beard playfully. He chuckles and stares at her. He loves seeing her this happy and carefree.

“Oh, is there anyone you’d like to add to the guest list? I have all the relatives and friends. Maybe you can add your business friends and employees.”

“No, I only care about your presence on the day,” he says.

“I invited Nomkhosi as well. I’ll find out if she’ll be coming with someone,” she says.

“You did what?” His brows furrow.

“I invited Nomkhosi, the mother of your child,” she says.

“I don’t want her there,” he says.

“I want her there. You made her family, she has your child, and I’m not going to stop talking to her and wanting her around me and Londa because things didn’t work out between the two of you. I want our children there and Phelo comes with a package; her mother.”

He doesn’t say anything; he has no comeback.

“I’ll make breakfast. What time are you going to the doctor?”

“Eleven,” he says.

She goes to the kitchen scrolling down her phone, probably looking for more venues.

He’s excited about the anniversary celebration. But there’s this one thing he’s not looking forward to...Nomkhosi’s attendance. He’ll have to stand there and say his vows to MaNtusi in her presence. Yes she’s always known that he has a wife, but what if watching them exchange vows solidifies her doubts? What if that convinces her that she made the right choice, being a second wife is not good for her? He

needs to make things right. They can work things through in time, before things fall apart.

He types a message quickly;

CAN I BOOK US INTO A RELATIONSHIP COUNSELOR?

His message only ticks once. There's no profile picture. No last seen. He's blocked again!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 78

MANDULO

He's been waiting in bed the whole hour. Giggles are still coming from the dining room; these girls won't stop gossiping. At long last the noise dies down, he fixes his eyes at the door waiting for Nolwazi to walk in. Khanyo will take care of herself and Gugu. There are enough blankets, he cleaned the guest room for them, and luckily it's not close to his bedroom. He'll have the freedom to celebrate with his girlfriend without his sister eavesdropping.

"Bye," – voices say outside the door.

Nolwazi giggles, then he hears footsteps descending. Did they really accompany Nolwazi to the bedroom? Girls are dramatic.

"You're still awake?" Her eyes widen at the door.

“I’m waiting for you,” he says.

She smiles with a slight frown.

“Oh, okay that’s nice,” she says.

He chuckles and pulls out his hand for her. He walks right into it, he pulls her down and kisses her lips with so much affection.

“Okay, what made you so happy?” She’s leaning over him and running her finger tip over his eyebrows.

“Doing the ceremonies and having a sangoma telling me that my forefathers welcomed it and rejoiced. And having everyone I love around; my sister and kids, even though Londa couldn’t be here, and mostly you sthandwa sami,” he says.

“I’m happy to see you happy. It looks good on you; you have a very beautiful smile.”

His smile broadens. He pulls her to sit on his waist and holds her hips while staring into her eyes.

“I’m not going to hold back now. Age is just a number, you’ve shown me the love I didn’t even know existed, I want to love you back with everything

I have. How you held my hand throughout these past couple of months still get me dizzy to this minute. How you stood with me in sickness and in health, like we've already stood in front of the priest and made vows, I appreciate that, thank you." He holds her hand and gently strokes her fingers.

"How you tackled my sexual demerits left me stunned. You're wiser than your age. You're loving, mindful and accepting. You're everything."

She rolls her eyes, "You know I'd swim across oceans for you."

"And I'd climb mountains for you," he says.

She leans her head down, their lips lock into another kiss. His hands rub her perky breasts under a loose T-shirt.

"Do you want us to try again tonight?" he asks.

A deep breath.

"I don't think I'm ready to watch you go through pain because of me again," she says.

"I can say I wasn't comfortable back then, but now I

trust you enough to let you know when I want something to stop. Let's give it a try, pretty please."

She bites her lip, a smile is threatening to crack out.

"Were you thinking about sex the whole day?" she asks.

"Do you blame me? Look at yourself, umuhle," he says.

"Okay, search what you want and get it." She gets off his waist and lies down on her back with her arms spread to the sides.

He laughs and starts undressing her. It's like undressing an unconscious person, she doesn't even move her arms.

"So you're just going to lie here like a chicken waiting to be slaughtered?" he asks pulling down her lacy thong and kissing her upper thigh.

"Am I not getting slaughtered?" she asks lifting her knees up.

"No, we are making love, siyathandana nje," he says.

He lies beside her on his side and massages her

nipples with the palm of his hand. Their lips lock into a kiss, his tongue chases after hers, he smooches each of her lip and moans softly to the heat radiating from her body to his.

He lowers his lips down to her ear and licks below it, then he sucks the side of her neck while fondling her nipples with one hand.

He comes to her face and kisses her lips. Nolwazi grabs his erect manhood. He chuckles and breaks the kiss.

“You’re naughty. Let me taste how salty you got down here,” he says.

She wrinkles her nose up and grunts disgustedly.

“Don’t you want a taste?” he asks with a chuckle.

“No, thank you,” she giggles shaking her head firmly.

“Why? Do you hate yourself?” he asks. He pulls her legs apart and kisses both her thighs.

“I love how the cookie smells. So raw and addictive.” Yeah, he has his strange moments. He can turn into an abnormal alien in no given moment.

“You’re weird,” she says.

“No, I’m comfortable.” He pushes his head between her thighs and sweeps his tongue between her folds. She bites her lip and fixes her eyes to his every movement.

He sucks her clit, like a child sucking on the nipple. Her back arches, she releases a low moan and brushes his head.

He inserts his pointer finger and rubs her inner soft tissues, her pleasure knots rift. Juicy fluid runs down his hand, he continues sucking her clit. She’s trembling and screaming his name.

As she regains herself back, he lies on top of her and inserts his shaft in her opening. Their eyes lock, his are squeezed with lust and hers are weak from the first orgasm.

“I love you,” he says in a low whisper. “Please look at me in the eyes, I want you to see everything I’m going through.”

He's moving his waist, for the first time in a long time his manhood has filled up her core. Instead of worrying about the next second she's enjoying every moment of what's happening in the now.

He lifts his upper body and balances on the bed with his hands. His strokes are low-paced but getting deeper and deeper.

"Nolwazi..." he calls to get her attention off his shaft and back to his face.

"Yes baby?" She lifts her eyes.

"I won't let you down." He's thrusting deeper and hitting every corner in a rotating move.

"Are you still alright?" she asks.

"Yes, if there's anything that freaks me out now is how warm you are."

She smiles, "You love it?"

"I love it, sthandwa sami."

He lies on her chest again. Nolwazi wraps her arms and legs around him. Their bodies fit into each other like pieces of the puzzle.

His thrusts are accompanied by low moans- he's getting too warmed up and impatient.

"There's no one else, Mandulo," she whispers against his ear. His pace seems to be infuriated by her confession.

"Nakimi akekho omunye Lwazi," he says tearing her core apart. (There's no one else for me as well)

"Ngidla-ke Nyathi," she says and bites his neck.

His chest tenses up. He pounds into her groaning deeply and staring at her with his eyes popped out like someone is strangling his neck.

"Baby?" she calls him softly.

"Yeah, baby," he responds.

"You're okay?"

"Huh?" he says absent-mindedly.

"Baby?" Nolwazi calls again.

"Yeah baby." His eyes are about to drop of their sockets. He looks like someone who's seeing a ghost.

“Are you alright?” She squeezes her vaginal muscles and grips on his shaft. He bites his lower lip, teeth-sinking into his flesh.

“What are you feeling?” she asks him.

“Heaven!” he cries and bursts his fluids inside her. His body straightens and goes complete rigid on top of her.

“Nolw...azi!” He releases an enormous breath and drops his head on her.

There was no condom, she’s sticky with his sperms.

“Why didn’t you pull out?” she asks fondling his head.

“I just...are you not on birth control?” he asks.

“I am, but there are no guarantees,” she says.

“We’ll get morning-after pills, I’ll never put your future in jeopardy on purpose.”

A moment of silence passes. He’s still inserted inside her, his shaft is shuddering and releasing more warm fluid inside her.

Finally he pulls out, he’s dripping juices and leaving

her wet as well.

“Thank you,” he says and plants a kiss on her forehead. “For standing with me through it all. Now you can brag about your man too. You’ll have something to talk about- I know you girls talk about everything- you’ll have nothing to be ashamed of. Umshini usuyasebenza,” he chuckles and pecks her lips.

“Am I getting another round?” she asks.

“You’re getting everything you want in this world. Anything!”

She smiles. He kisses her again.

God is good all the time! Love always wins. Oh well, mostly.

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NKONZO

He attended an event at Northcliff, before taking a

flight back home he decided it would be a good idea to pay his little sister a visit. Thakasa rented a bachelor flat for her which she shares with a friend they've only spoken to over the phone.

He finds directions and drives there with a few house necessities he thinks she might need, and a few goodies of course.

There's no back and forth between him and the security. He produces proof of identity and they search for him if the tenant he's looking for is in, and indeed Phethy arrived a moment before him coming from one of her many shopping trips.

The way the security guard spoke about his little sister doesn't sit well with him. Her "one of many shopping trips", is Phethy here to study or to live like Bonang?

He takes a lift to the 6th floor and goes to her room with his hands weighed down by shopping bags.

The door is slightly open, there's a giggling voice coming inside. It's Phethy, he wouldn't mistake that voice for anyone's. A part of him still can't believe

that she's grown so quickly and living by herself in a different province. Time flies, hey.

He knocks once and lets himself inside, only to be welcomed by a thin light-skinned boy wearing shorts and long socks with push-ons.

"Am I in the right room? I'm looking for Phethile Manqele," he asks.

The boy's eyes widen, he rubs his hands together and looks at the passage.

"Do you know her?" Nkonzo raises his eyebrow.

"Ummm, yeah. Imma get her for ya." He's got fake American accent but that's none of Nkonzo's business, all he cares about right now is who the hell is he and what he's doing in Phethy's room.

She appears with the sleeves of her sweater pulled over her hands and her hands tucked on her cheeks. She's walking slowly, not running into his arms as he envisioned.

"Hi," he says looking at her from head to toe.

“Bhuti,” she leans on the wall and stops a few feet away from him.

“What’s going on? Who’s this boy I found here and what is he doing here?” he asks.

“Ummm...he’s my study-mate. We...we were doing...ummh assignments.” She doesn’t stutter, Sqalo did, now only Bandla does.

“Who is that boy? Think of an honest, straight answer and tell me,” he says firmly.

“I swear he only arrived last night to spend the weekend with me since Nosi went home,” she says.

“To spend the weekend with you?” His brows furrow. This has to be a joke or prank.

She fiddles with her hands and looks at him with puppy eyes.

No, that won’t work today.

“Pack these things,” he says and marches towards the direction of the boy.

Phethy remains glued on the same spot with her eyes bulging out. She can’t warn Christian because

it'll drive Nkonzo even madder.

Nkonzo taps the boy's shoulder and signals for him to get off the couch. He's shaking like a leaf.

"What are you doing here?" he asks.

"I brought Phethy's book, she borrowed me a few days ago and I couldn't..."

"Boy, hey boy! That's my little sister, what are you doing here?"

Christian takes a deep breath rubbing his trembling hands together.

"We are dating," he says.

"She's here to study. Does your mother know that you're here looking for a wife instead of studying?"

"I'm not looking for a wife," he says.

"Then what are you doing with my sister?"- Nkonzo.

"We are...dating."

Nkonzo grabs him by clothes and pushes him to the

wall. He could've punched him, only if it was not illegal to instill manners into today's kids.

"Do you know who she is?" he asks through gritted teeth. He's trembling with anger.

"I really like her, I promise you we are not doing anything we are not supposed to do. I understand that she is inkozazane and I respect that," Christian says suddenly losing his fake accent.

"You'll date in campus and malls, not inside her room. Do you understand me?" he says.

Christian nods fearfully. He lets him go, within a minute Christian gets his bag and runs out.

He sits on the single couch shaking his head in disappointment. He knew that Phethy wanted to know things bigger than her age but this one blew his mind away.

"I'm sorry," she says softly behind him.

He sighs, "Sit down."

She quickly sits and looks at him with her eyes

widen out of their sockets.

“Why are you disappointing us like this? You know if it was Thakasa who walked in here you’d be on your way home and that boy would be in the hospital?”

“Every girl has a boyfriend around here,” she says in subtle defense.

“You’re not every girl. Why do you need a boyfriend? When the time is right you’ll meet a man who’ll love you and marry you.”

“I want to explore before I expire.”

He looks at her stunned. This is not MaKhumalo’s little girl.

“Are you still going to attend the reed-dance this year?” There’s no better way to ask this; if she’s still a virgin.

“Of course, I’m not having sex with him,” she says.

Relief!

“Keep it that way. I’m not saying date but if you do, do it carefully.”

“I will,” she assures him.

“Now you’ve pissed me off, I won’t give you the gift I bought for you.”

“That’s not fair. What did you get me? Reversing a gift is a sin.”

“A bigger sin is cohabiting at 15.”

Phethy frowns, “I’m not 15!”

“Whatever, I’m taking my iPad back to the store or giving it to Sphephelo or Londa.”

“They’re babies,” she says.

“Exactly, they’re babies, not adults, they deserve gifts.”

Tears where are you? There’s an emergency!

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NOMKHOSI

She’s having lunch with Njabulo, the warehouse

manager. He's the first male she got close to except her brothers when she got into the company. He's in his mid-thirties, very humble and professional in his work. Ndlalifa didn't come to work, they're still dealing with grief in their own different ways. He calls her just as her lunch is about to end.

"You need to come to home immediately!" There's a hint of panic in his voice.

"What's wrong?" The security was tightened, but she can't help and not live on edge after what happened to Ngidi.

"It's Phelo...I don't know what's wrong with her...she's been throwing up and crying since 12."

She pushes back her chair and marches towards her office to grab her belongings. Njabulo is running after her asking if everything is okay.

"Where is she now?" she's asking Ndlalifa.

"Ma is trying to put her in bed, she gave her the medicine and she seems to be getting sleepy."

"Okay I'm coming," she drops the call and turns to

Njabulo with panic written all over her face.

“My daughter is sick, I have to go home,” she says.

“Don’t worry, I’ll let Ruby know and make sure everyone is aware.”

She thanks him and rushes out. Phelo doesn’t get sick regularly, she’s a very healthy baby, so hearing the panic in Ndlalifa’s voice gave her a fright. It must be bad. She gets in the car and drives home like a maniac.

She gets home and finds her mother dressed up with her bag in hand, and Ndlalifa holding the wrapped Phelo and her bag. It looks like they’re heading out.

“We are going to the doctor,” he tells her.

She drops her bag and takes Phelo.

“Is it worse?” She pokes her cheeks, Phelo opens her eyes briefly and shuts them again. She looks too weak.

“I’m worried about her breathing, it’s so faint, we

better have her checked by the doctor. Maybe it's more than just throwing up," her mother says.

"Baby?" She shakes Phelo trying to get her to open her eyes and see that her mother has arrived.

Ndlalifa rubs her shoulder, "Hey don't cry, she's going to be alright."

They leave in Ndlalifa's car, she cannot help the tears, Phelo was okay when she left in the morning. How can she fall sick and get so weak within a few hours? It doesn't make any sense.

Sphephelo was admitted, her temperature had skyrocketed, she was drowsy and hard to wake. Her skin paled due to nonstop vomiting. A drip has been placed into her foot to her vein to give her fluids. Nomkhosi is in her lowest, this is her first moment of a sick child as a mother. Ndlalifa drove Phumzile back home and promised to come back with a few of her lady's necessities since she might be in the hospital overnight.

They're at odds with Phelo's family, this is a mess!

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 79

THAKASA

He's been feeling down the whole day. As soon as his day ended he packed his belongings and drove straight home. But it looks like that wasn't a good idea, here he's subjected into the anniversary celebration planning- something he knows nothing about.

"I was thinking of ivory drapes with a dash of sequin and mirror works. Or sparkling crystals. What do you think?"

He chuckles and pulls her into his arm. He plants a kiss on her cheek and wraps her in his embrace.

"Are you going to get mad if I tell you the truth?" he asks.

She sighs, "You're not interested?"

"No, it's not that, but I think it can cut us some slack if we just hire a professional event-planner. I only know how to plan a board meeting- with the help of MaDube. I'm looking forward to the day, I'll wear my Bottega Veneta tuxedo and wait for my beautiful bride."

She laughs, "Bride? It's not a wedding, we are celebrating our marriage."

"Oh...what are we going to do then?" he asks with a slight frown.

"Celebrate our marriage with our friends and families, that's it. It's more like a party."

"Mmm! I'll just follow your lead. Do you want me to buy you a new ring?"

"Nope, but do get me an expensive gift." She lifts her face to him and kisses his lips. "I have a gift for you as well. It'll change our whole life."

"What is it?" He looks at her curiously.

"It's something you've always dreamed of, you'll

have to wait until that Sunday to find out.”

His phone rings before he digs deeper. He’s not a gifting husband, neither is she a wife that bears gifts every now and then. This makes him even more excited about their anniversary. He needs to pay a visit to a car dealership soon.

He glances at the screen and doesn’t recognize the number. He gently removes MaNtusi and answers.

“Thakasa!”- the caller.

There’s only one woman who can call him so fiercely by his name.

He clears his throat, “Hi.”

“I’m at the hospital, Phelo is sick, they’re feeding him with a tube because she’s dehydrated and can’t eat anything without throwing up.”

He sits up in panic.

“Which hospital? When did she....”

Nomkhosi cuts him short. “Listen, if anything happens to my daughter I’ll personally plan your death. You sent your mother here, she came like a

wrestler and went back and forth with my mother in my daughter's and ancestors' presence. Two old women, Phelo's grandmothers, exchanging words and now my daughter is sick. You're always mindful of what aura people bring around your children except when it's your mother."

He stutters, "Nomkhosi...I...I swear that's not...it's not what..."

"I want my daughter okay. Doctors can't find any tummy infection in her, your family caused this and you might pay for it if something happens to my daughter." With that said she drops the call leaving Thakasa's forehead furrowed into three lines.

"What's going on?" MaNtusi asks.

"Sphephelo is in the hospital. They suspect my mother's aggression for it. I didn't send Ma there, I don't know anything about what transpired when she got there," he says picking his shirt and putting it on.

"What are the doctors saying?" MaNtusi asks looking at him frightened.

"They can't find what's wrong with her. I'm going

there, I don't even know which hospital they're in."

"Please keep your phone on. I'll try to call her as well and ask Ma to start praying." They hug before Thakasa rushes out with his car keys and dashes to the kitchen to inform MaKhumalo.

MaKhumalo adjusts her glasses and looks at him running into the living room like an ill-mannered boy. Who runs inside the house?!

"Phelo is sick," he says panting heavily.

"They must bring her home and let us as her family see what to do."

He sighs, "Ma, it's serious, my daughter is hospitalized and doctors can't find any infection that might be causing her to throw up. Did you go there and disrupt peace at the Ngidis?"

"I went there to talk to the mother of your child..."
Urgh! He knows what 'talking' means to his mother.

"If she doesn't get better we might have to go and apologize to them."

MaKhumalo's eyes widen in awe.

"Apologize for asking why Phelo's mother slapped you?" she asks.

"For the noise you called. I don't even want to discuss this, if we have to apologize we will, my daughter comes first. You had no reason to fight with her grandmother." He turns and leaves MaKhumalo stunned. Talk about the ungrateful child!

"Ukushaye kancane uMaka Phelo, kusho ukuthi ubumdelela njengami!" she yells after him and clicks her tongue.

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NOMKHOSI

She's watching her daughter fall asleep after spending a few minutes with her. Seeing Phelo so weak and sick breaks her heart, this is one of painful motherhood realities- watching your child sick and not knowing what to do to help her. The doctor said

she'll be alright but looking at her, even a little child can tell that she's far from being okay.

She runs her fingers through Phelo's hair as she starts snoring softly. There's a human standing behind her, heavy on her shoulders and tall.

It's none other than Phelo's father, a man who insulted her and degraded her more than anyone has ever done.

"Thakasa," she says turning her head to him slowly.

"How is she?" he asks with his eyes fixed on Phelo.

"You're here, not fixing the mess your family caused?"

"Babe it's late, I can consult tomorrow and find out what's happening with her. Right now I just want to see her. Is she in pain?" He walks closer and leans over Phelo's bed sorrowfully.

"Babe or whore?" Nomkhosi asks.

"Can we not talk about that here? I don't want her condition to worsen," he says.

Nomkhosi sighs and shifts to allow him to have a

moment with Phelo. They have a strong bond, she can deny everything but not his love for his daughter.

He picks Phelo's hand and plants a soft kiss on it.

“MaMkhutshana kaSodondo kaNcungu,
MaMnkonyeni, MaDuyaza omhlophe
njengezihlabathi zolwandle. Granddaughter of
Zakhele, uMkhont' odla izimbangi,
uNozikhawundane zimcel' usheleni ngesinene. We
apologize if there's anything that made you upset.
All I'm asking is for you to be okay. Daddy is going to
fix whatever it is that was broken.” He kisses her
little hand again and releases a deep breath. Phelo
unconsciously chews and turns to sleep on her right
side. He gently pats her back until she snores again.

He turns his head, his eyes lock with Nomkhosi's but she quickly shifts hers away. She can't stand him!

“Can I stay with you guys?” he asks.

“No, I'll call you if there's any change,” she says coldly.

“Can we step outside and talk?”

“No!” she says firmly.

“Okay, at least unblock me and read my messages.”

“Your timing is off. Please leave!”

He inhales sharply and glances at Phelo then leaves. He really wants a chance to clear up what he said when he was hurt and angry.

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NOTHILE

Khanyo was sent to take Londa out for shopping. His uncle wants to buy something for him. Even though Thakasa had a little problem with him getting clothes from Mandulo, they did reach an agreement that he'd be allowed to do everything an uncle does. Even birthday parties and school events, he'd attend to support as an 'uncle' or send his sister on his behalf.

Khanyo has a few days before returning back to Bergville so she was asked to help Nothile with

shopping for Londa. She knows every shop and every street of Durban. They're getting hoots and smiles from cashiers. She's not just buying for Londa, she's buying her own things as well, which is unlikely to be an instruction from Mandulo. But it's her brother's money, who can say what?

Finally they're taking a break at one of the cheap restaurants in town. They serve grilled chicken, two salad choice, fries and cold-drinks.

"I'm not used to such places," Nothile complains as she steps on the dirt with her heel.

"You're a rich housewife, I don't expect you to. This is where I used to eat when having bhabhalazi, they have nice sauces," Khanyo says.

"I don't even like chicken," Nothile says looking through the two-page menu with so much displeasure.

"Try it with hot chips and 330ml Coo-ee," Khanyo says.

She can't help but laugh. She last chose such meals at her youth years, way before meeting Thakasa.

“Chicken makes me nauseous. I’ll try something else, maybe pizza or a slice of chocolate cake,” she says.

Khanyo looks at her with a frown. By the way she’s a bad baby holder, Londa is pulling everything under her guard and she doesn’t even do anything about it except saying; ‘baby, stop it!’

“Are you pregnant?” she asks.

The smile on Nothile’s face says it all. Thakasa’s dream was true, she’s about to turn four weeks pregnant.

“Are you?” Khanyo raises her eyebrow.

“Yes, but I’m still keeping it a secret, I want to surprise Manqele with a positive pregnancy test at our anniversary celebration.”

As her soon-to-be sisterwife she thought Khanyo would be happy for her. She’s finally pregnant with her husband’s baby, it’s a dream come true for both of them. This is going to be the biggest pregnancy in the family.

“Londa is not even one,” Khanyo says.

“That doesn’t mean anything. He’s still my baby, people always get babies that are...”

“No, it means something. You’re getting yourself and Thakasa a baby of your dreams. What if you end up neglecting Londa while rejoicing over the ‘right’ baby?”

“I won’t. I can love both my babies equally. And Londa will be grown by the time this baby comes. If needed I’ll get a nanny.”

Khanyo sighs, “Mandulo is going to be worried when he finds out. I hope it won’t take him back to that depressed place, he loves Londa like he’s his only child.”

“Manqele loves him too,” Nothile says defensively.

“Oh, I bet!”

Before this turns nasty....

“Okay, let’s change the subject,” Nothile suggests.

Khanyo sighs, “Right. So what should I expect from marrying into the Manqeles?”

“Losing the ‘I’ and understanding that you’re not just

Bandla's wife but everyone's pillar. Family comes before everything, sacrifices and compromises are made," she says.

Khanyo's eyes widen. That sounds even deeper coming from the senior wife herself.

"Oh, and you obey all the house rules whether you believe in them or not," Nothile adds.

"Yeah, Bandla told me about that. I'm already practicing cold food on Saturdays in his house and the no sex thing."

Nothile bursts into laughter.

"I didn't think Bandla was a strict observer," she says.

Khanyo frowns, "Isn't Thakasa also one?"

Nothile laughs even more and opens her cold-drink ignoring the question.

"Isn't that a sin, having sex during the course of Sabbath?" Khanyo asks with a gasp.

"KaMayise, nobody is perfect in this world, especially not me and my husband," Nothile says.

That's it! Khanyo wants more food, specifically fries with extra sauce. Maybe another leg of chicken as well...

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THAKASA

It's the next day, Nomkhosi hasn't said anything regarding Phelo's condition, which means she's not getting worse or better. He's seen Gog' Zikhali and she advised him to go and make peace with the Ngidis. His uncles are not available at such short notice so he hijacked Nkonzo and drove Mawande all the way from Mangethe to come and represent his mother. Right now they're just going there to talk with the head of house, Ndlalifa. He'll say his price if he wants something or just apologize about the noise to his ancestors without requesting anything. All this happened too soon after the death of Ngidi, that family is still under a dark cloud.

"I can't believe this week. First it was Phethy and

now you, don't you guys get tired of drama?" Nkonzo asks coming back with a can of energy drink from the garage.

"What did Tutu do?" Thakasa asks.

"She's just being a girl. Anyway I bought an iPad, I don't know who to give between Phelo and Londa. Who's older?"

"Phelo, but not old enough to own an iPad," Thakasa says.

"Well, I'll give it to her, she's my daughter I can give her anything I want. It'll be her welcome back gift when she comes out of the hospital," Nkonzo says.

Mawande chirps in from the back, "That would be nice. I'll give my children everything too, regardless of age."

"You're having children? With who?" Nkonzo asks with a frown.

"With Bhambatha," Thakasa answers before she can.

Silence...

"Really?" Nkonzo after a moment.

“Ummm, yes really,” Mawande says.

He looks at Thakasa with his eyebrow raised. “Am I the only one who’s shocked by this?”

“Probably, yes,” Thakasa says.

“Wow!”

Another moment of silence passes. The car drives off and heads to Durban. This family is heading everywhere except the right direction.

“What really happened between you and Phelo’s mother?” Mawande asks after a moment changing the bitter subject of her and Bhambatha. It’ll take time for everyone to digest and swallow it.

“We fought but it wasn’t our normal fight. It got pretty nasty and she ended up slapping me,” Thakasa says and takes a deep breath. That situation could’ve been avoided, he could’ve acted better than he did.

“And you still want to marry her?” Nkonzo asks shaking his head in disbelief.

“She’s not perfect, neither am I. What matters is that

she loves me and I love her.”

“Seems like I’m the only sane person in this family,” Nkonzo mumbles and turns up the music.

They arrive at the Ngidis and find Ndlalifa and Phumzile waiting for them. They’re the people they’re here to see- main ones.

Nkonzo takes the lead; greets and introduces himself and Mawande.

“We heard that there was a bit of a disagreement between our family and yours,” he says looking at Ndlalifa.

“That’s how you call insulting the mother of your child, calling her a whore and saying you want your cow back because you didn’t find her a virgin?” Ndlalifa asks and shifts his eyes to Thakasa who’s eyes have been fixed on the floor.

“I spoke out of anger and I never said I wanted any cow back,” he says.

“Good, because even if you wanted it you were not

going to get it back,” – Ndlalifa.

“We are not here to fight, we want peace. We also understand that Ma came here unannounced and created an unpleasant scene. If there’s anyway you’d like us to do to show our apologizes let us know and we’ll arrange it,” Nkonzo says.

Phumzile releases a sigh and sits up straight. If she let this go on Ndlalifa might cause even more damage between two families.

“I’m not a mother who favors a child even when she makes mistakes. Nomkhosi is a well-disciplined child but I’m not going to defend her for what she did because I don’t know how she acts when she’s with Phelo’s father. What I was hoping would happen is that me and MaKhumalo would’ve talked like adults and help our children resolve their issues. Even if they’re not getting married anymore, it’s important for them to be civil towards one another because they decided to bring a human into this world.”

Nkonzo nods, “That’s very true.”

“So we welcome your apology and I’d like to

apologize on my daughter's behalf as well. Her behavior was unacceptable," Phumzile says.

"Do we have to pay something?" Mawande asks.

"No," – Phumzile.

"Yes," Ndlalifa says in contradiction. Phumzile gives him a look to shut up.

"We are mourning, Bab' Nhleko told us to stay peacefully and they disturbed that. Obviously they have to offer something if they're serious," he says.

"No, we've talked about it and it ends there. I don't want us to start the tendency of charging one another for mistakes," Phumzile says and Ndlalifa sighs in defeat.

"Thank you very much," Nkonzo says with relief and gets up to shake their hands.

Mawande does the same. The son-in-law remains seated with his head bowed. Now if Phelo doesn't get better at the hospital they might be compelled to take MaKhumalo's advice and bring her home, at the Mangeles.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 80

NOMKHOSI

She's exactly where she refused to be about a year ago; communicating with MaNtusi regarding Phelo. Even when Phelo got discharged from the hospital, MaKhumalo demanded that she's brought home to be with her 'rightful family', it was MaNtusi who arranged for her to be fetched. Thakasa hasn't said anything in a while, which is actually good. Once Phelo got there 'they decided', MaKhumalo and her beloved son, that Phelo was only going to return to her mother after her father's anniversary celebration. Knowing how Phelo gets when there's tension between families Nomkhosi decided not to fight them, she'll come back with Phelo today- it's finally MaNtusi and Thakasa's big day.

MaNtusi still insists on her being there. How closer they've gotten over months didn't allow her to turn down the invitation.

"T-strap or mule heels?" she asks Snalo waving two pairs of shoes.

"Mule," Snalo says, not even looking at them. She doesn't want her to go because she's scared the anniversary thing might hurt her. Maybe a year ago, when she was still delusional and head-over-heels in love with Thakasa their anniversary celebration would've hurt her, but now she's in a better place with her emotions. And MaNtusi deserves everything that's happening to her now.

She lifts the dress up and turns to return to the bedroom.

"You even designed a dress for their anniversary celebration?" Snalo asks behind her.

She rolls her eyes, "I can't be ugly and ruin their pictures."

"You're a better human than me. I would've rocked up in baggy jeans and ANC T-shirt," Snalo says.

She bursts into laughter, that's so like Snalo, she'd definitely do that, no doubt.

"Have you talked to Maqhinga recently?" she asks.

Snalo sighs, "Yeah, a few days ago, he was sober. I think he'll come around in time, King needs him."

"Ngidi would be so disappointed in him. I understand that he's hurting, but wasting himself like this isn't helping anyone. Ndlalifa is just a click away from losing his sanity. They should be working together and helping each other going forward."

"I know, let's just give him a little more time to get himself together. He was the closest to Dad."

Ngidi's death really left a gap in the family, a huge one. More especially for the boys, he single-handedly raised them. His brother as well, Nhleko, they just found one another and now he has to figure things out alone; whether he changes the surname or not, how he's going to fit in the family and all that.

Life will never be the same again, both at home and in her personal life. Her mind has been made up, she's not becoming a Manqele's second wife,

especially not after Thakasa stood there and called her a whore. She'll have what Ndondo and Thalente have; stable life partner who'll dedicates his life only to her. If she can get over not having a father in her life, surely she can get over Thakasa as well.

Finally look; red sequined prom dress, mule heels and blonde short hair. She cut her hair purposely to indicate her new journey in life. Most women do that when starting over; they symbolize it by removing their hair . She's trying that too, maybe it'll work. And short hair looks good on her, she doesn't regret it at all.

The driver picks her up. She's going there alone. She could've taken either Snalo or Ndondo, but those two are capable of creating unnecessary scenes and ruin Nothile's big day, which isn't something she has any intention for.

She's a bit late, there's a Shembe old man who's already speaking at the front. Everyone is seated.

Phelo is not wearing the dress she sent with her but a turquoise tutu dress and beaded neck-piece that looks like MaNtusi's. Little Londa is dressed up in a tuxedo that matches Thakasa's. They're almost like a perfect family. MaNtusi outdid herself with decorations, you'd swear it's a wedding and not just a celebration dinner.

Nomkhosi takes a seat at the back row of tables, everyone's attention is on the speaker at the front, she's almost unnoticeable, which is good. His brothers, sisters and mother are sitting at the front row, all looking resplendent.

She's watching attentively. Everyone is giving their piece of advice, congratulating and saying how amazing they are. Mostly it's people from church and the Manqele long-distance relatives. They look happy, MaNtusi has been smiling nonstop, she's a glow-getter. She's wearing a floor-length African designed bridal dress and a large Zulu beaded isicholo with chandelier earrings. She's got minimal make-up on her face, just the touch-ups and

mascara. This is her day, and she's the highlight of it; from her magnificent dress to her smile that's worth a king's ransom. Even the forever longface of Thakasa melted today, he flashes a smile every now and then, and holds his wife's hand.

Their one day of fairytale. It's now their time to take the stand. Nomkhosi takes a deep breath and casts her eyes to the right side of the front rows. Tema's eyes are on her, when they stares meet she cracks a smile of acknowledgement. Pity smile!

Nomkhosi smiles back and fixes her eyes back to the customized bride & groom wingback chairs.

Thakasa is up with a mic and creeping smile on his face.

"I asked her to hire an event-planner who'd just name her price and get everything done but she insisted on doing everything herself. I'm still shocked, I mean, this is my wife!" He looks around with a disbelieving smile, people are laughing their lungs off. "I'm not sure I know who I married anymore. Maybe she's

even a good singer and I don't know..."

MaNtusi interjects, "I'm a good singer. You've heard me sing."

"Ummm...okay, let's move on. You outdid yourself, thank you very much for this day," he says.

MaNtusi puckers her lips in disappointment.

Everyone erupts into laughter.

"I'm kidding, you're a good singer and you look beautiful," he says and takes her hand for a squeeze.

MaNtusi blushes.

"Seven years ago on this day I tied my life to you and vowed to love you with everything that I have and everything that I am. I haven't been perfect, I was never immune to sin and imperfections, but this past year has proven to me that our love is stronger than life, MaNtusi. I don't know what to say, I'm not a poetic person nor am I creative, so I'm just going to thank you. Thank you for loving me so boldly and carrying my family like it was your own. Thank you for your support throughout the years and resilience. Thank you for companionship and...thank you for

making me a man.” He takes a deep breath. Shyness takes over, he drops his eyes. MaNtusi smiles at him encouragingly.

“I still love you the same way I did the first time I set my eyes on you. Things may have happened, and might still happen, we don’t know what the future has stored for us, but there’s one thing that will never change, and that is my love and promises to you. I promised you forever and that stands until forever comes.”

She’s shedding a tear. Thakasa gets down on one knee in front of her.

“Happy Anniversary, my love.” He gives her a red box with a ribbon. She whispers something excitedly, probably asking if she should open it right away, and Thakasa nods at her. She opens the box grinning like a Cheshire cat. It’s car keys, she screams out in joy.

BMW 2-Series, that’s the gift. She did ask for an expensive one, but that’s not all, there’s more. A go-spend-me card with a written cheque.

“I know you’re worth more than this. This is a gift for

each and every single day you've spent with me. 7 years, 365 days per year and R100 for each day. That's $(7)365 \times 100$. Thank you, sthandwa sami."

Women are gasping! Men are clapping hands. Thakasa's lips are locked into MaNtusi's- love is in the air.

MaKhumalo is blocking everyone's ears with her piercing ululation. MaNtusi shyly holds the mic and takes the stand.

"First and foremost, I'd like to thank everyone who came to celebrate with us today. I don't know if I would've made it to this day if it wasn't for Ma. Thank you MaKhumalo for taking me in and treating me like your child. Or even more than your child," she says and chuckles. "Your son complains that you love me more than you love him. I love you too, you're the mother I never had. Thank you for helping me figure out motherhood and helping me become a good wife to my husband. Without your advices and lessons we wouldn't be here today."

Thakasa clears his throat, "It's our anniversary, not

yours and hers.”

Everyone laughs, MaKhumalo included.

“I’m saving the best for the last,” she tells him and relaxes on the chair with a smile on his face and stares at her as she goes on to thank almost everyone in the family.

“Happy Anniversary Mthonga wendlovu. Duyaza omhlophe njengezihlabathi zolwandle!”

Thakasa touches his face and laughs. What a contradiction!

“Well, in my eyes you are. And I love you so much. Thank you for doing life with me, Mthonga. The vows I made seven years ago still stand today. I’m still going to respect you, honor your word and support your dreams. I’m still going to love you till death do us apart,” she says and signals for Nomcebo to bring her something. A little gift bag. Thakasa chuckles, that’s smaller compared to what he gave her. Didn’t she say it’ll be the biggest gift?

“I have a surprise for you,” she says and gives him the sealed envelope.

“I’ll share it with him,” Phethy says loudly and rushes to Thakasa’s side. It could be money and her brother doesn’t really need it.

“I remember you’ve been telling me these past few years, before Londa and Sphephelo came into our lives, that God will answer our prayers in time and that I should leave everything in his hands. I grew impatient and we ended up taking different directions in life. It affected our marriage, in a very big way. Indeed, you were right myeni wami, out of everything that you are, your leadership cannot be questioned. I have seen the goodness of God in a hopeless place. While we had every reason to break up, we sorted things out and stayed in our marriage. Happy anniversary Mthonga, and congratulations on being a father again.”

He frowns. She directs his eyes to the envelope in his hand. He opens it quickly while the whole Manqeke family stand up to rejoice over the news.

Thakasa looks stunned and speechless. The ultrasound picture is trembling in his hand.

“Your dreams were accurate. We are having a baby!” MaNtusi beams and wraps her arms around him. She leans down to his ear and whispers; “I know what’s going through your mind. We’ll definitely do a DNA test to...”

He doesn’t let her finish. He grabs her neck and onslaughts her with a kiss. He doesn’t publicly gets affectionate this much, but today has been the best day of his life- he’s vulnerable with his wife.

Nobody calls MaKhumalo to the stage. Nobody has ever programmed him, it won’t start today. It’s her son’s anniversary, now she just found out that she’s about to become a grandmother again.

She starts off by reciting all the Manqele surnames and hugging her son. Then she sings and turns the whole thing into a praying session.

“This feels like a dream. My son is finally going to have a child he’s always wanted. A child my husband died dreaming to meet. Our prayers didn’t go in vain. Finally the Manqeles have remembered us, they

remembered their son and daughter-in-law. Their real makoti who was sprinkled with inyongo and got inside the Manqele premises in broad daylight with a kist.” She sings again and starts dancing. Everyone is happy except Nomkhosi at the back. But she’s sitting still because she doesn’t want to ruin MaNtusi’s day in any sort of way. Nothing MaKhumalo said was untrue but she’s old enough to know when things are said to spite others and she’s not playing that game at the expense of her daughter.

The buzz eventually dies down. Nkonzo takes up the stage and says his few words, so does Mawande. Then it’s catching up moment for the churchgoers and refreshments time. Caterers are serving the tables and running around like headless chickens.

“Maka Phelo,” the voice quakes next to her and she turns her head to the awe-struck Mawande staring at her like she’s at the wrong place, at the wrong time.

“Hi, I was invited,” she clarifies quickly.

“Ummm...I know.” She still looks shocked though.

They stare at one another for a minute before Mawande breaks the silence.

“You cut your hair? Did you get permission to do so?” she asks.

“Permission to cut MY hair? No. Is it a new law?” Nomkhosi raises her eyebrow.

“Ummm...no, never mind. Please come to the front, don’t sit at the back like a stranger.”

“No, I’m good here. Please get me my daughter,” she says.

Mawande nods reluctantly and walks away from her table. She’s trying to stay collected, really doing her best.

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What a day it was! Everyone will be sleeping at home, just to celebrate the rest of the day with Thakasa.

Even Khanyo came, which rarely happens.

There's another car driving in. Maybe one of the relatives who need a place to sleep, so they think.

But it's Phelo's mother who steps out of the car with her head uncovered and makes her way towards the house. With everything that was going on, Mawande didn't get the time to talk with her brother nor get Phelo as Nomkhosi had instructed.

"You're only coming now?" MaNtusi asks meeting her at the door looking shocked. She didn't meet each and everyone from the guests.

"No, I came late and sat at the back. Everything was beautiful, let us know when you've officially started planning events. And congratulations!"

MaNtusi chuckles, "Thank you. Maybe Mangele will allow me to look into it if I take it as a hobby."

Thakasa appears with Londa in his arms, he just bathed and put Phelo to sleep. His eyes run everywhere except to the two women standing in the kitchen.

"She was telling me that I should start planning events, as a job," – MaNtusi.

Thakasa looks at Nomkhosi with his eyebrow furrowed but he doesn't say anything.

"Actually I'm here to get my daughter. I don't know if I should start by greeting MaKhumalo and asking permission from her."

MaNtusi frowns, "Of course not. I can just let her know that you are here." She touches her hips, feeling the texture of the dress and gasps.

"Ayisenhle! Let me go and tell Ma that Phelo is leaving."

She rushes off to the lounge leaving two estranged parents looking at one another.

"You look beautiful," – that's his opening line. He's not happy about the haircut but at this stage of their relationship his choice of words may come across as dictating and cause more harm.

"If you ever get time please give me a few minutes. I just want to talk to you, even if there's a diving wall between us."

She doesn't respond. He doesn't understand both her voice and silence but today she chooses silence.

MaKhumalo walks in followed by MaNtusi who makes an eye contact with Nomkhosi and shrugs her shoulders. There's drama coming!

"Maka Phelo, where's the doek?" MaKhumalo asks.

She doesn't say anything. Her answer to that might be disrespectful; they've never bought her any doek, which one is MaKhumalo talking about?

"Can't you take the baby in the morning, MaZikode? It's late now," MaKhumalo asks, suddenly looking very calm and humble.

"No, I'd like to take her now. I want her to sleep home with her family," she says.

"We are her family and she likes it here. She's even gained weight," – MaKhumalo.

"I'd rather have her in a safe environment where nobody nitpicks over her for being unplanned and born out of wedlock than to have here gaining weight," she says.

"I didn't nitpick over Phelo, she's my granddaughter,"

MaKhumalo says sharply and defensively.

“My mother is not always careful with her words but I’m sure that’s not what she meant,” Thakasa interferes taking his mother’s side.

“You’re both right. Can I please have her and leave?” she looks at MaNtusi and MaNtusi requests from MaKhumalo with her eyes.

“It’s no secret that she was born from umantshontshana and neither one of you planned her. So if I rejoice over the pregnancy news that both my husband and I wanted that shouldn’t...” Mawande clears her throat before her mother goes any further.

“Can we sit down and talk about this? I’m sure there’s a misunderstanding,” MaNtusi begs.

Thakasa looks defeated and dumbstruck.

Mawande takes a deep breath and speaks up. They don’t obey but everyone definitely listens when she talks.

“Please just apologize, Ma. As a grandmother, as an aunt and as a father, I believe our job is not to

remind children how they came and if they were wanted or not. We should be protecting and making them feel equally loved.”

Nobody says anything. MaNtusi sighs and walks out to fetch Phelo.

“This hurts,” Thakasa says with a deep sigh and bites his lip.

“I’m sorry you felt like I was nitpicking over my own granddaughter. I love that little girl, she’s...I apologize, I’m sorry,” MaKhumalo says.

There’s that moment of disbelief from Thakasa and Mawande.

“It’s cool, please tell MaNtusi I’m waiting in the car outside,” Nomkhosi says and turns around and leaves.

Loud exhalations!

“I think my guardian angel drinks,” Thakasa says, still staring at the door where the woman who use to be his best friend and comfort zone disappeared.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 81

It's been a few weeks after MaNtusi's big announcement, things are smooth at home. Cows were sent to the Mayises, they received a letter of izibizo and now Tema's wedding preparations are taking place. This is definitely one of the biggest years for the Manqueles, and obviously the busiest with many shockers.

Speaking of shockers, Mawande asked for a special dinner that would gather everyone. She's a Myeza now, it's very bossy of her to request dinners/meetings from the Manqueles. But MaNtusi put it together anyway. Tema has arrived with Bandla and her soon-to-be husband. Khanyo is still not that much involved with the family, she knows she's about to spend the rest of her life with them and using this time to enjoy her last months of freedom, because that's what you lose when you

become a Manqele. Most of your freedom, if not all of it.

“Does anyone know what this is about?” Bandla asks pulling a chair and taking a seat.

Nkonzo and Thakasa know, but it’s not their place to tell. Thakasa instructed Mawande not to bring Bhambatha yet and wait until everyone has wrapped their heads around the idea of him being her husband before inviting him to family dinners and gatherings.

“Let’s wait for her, she’ll tell us why we are here,” Thakasa says.

It sounds like there’s a car driving up, hopefully it’s her, they’ve waited long enough.

“When is Phelo visiting?” MaKhumalo asks Thakasa.

Lines pronounce on his forehead as he heaves a deep sigh. It’s been tough; going this long without seeing his daughter. But he decided to give Nomkhosi space to cool down, maybe when she’s calm she can open her heart again.

“MaNtusi said her mother promised that she’ll still visit,” he says.

MaKhumalo thunders, “She promised? Whose child is Phelo?”

“Well, it seems like Nomkhosi is now questioning us as a family and safe environment for Sphephelo. I know what you said may have been received wrongly but now I just feel like my child is being put in the middle of fights.”

“Why don’t you take her to court?” MaKhumalo asks.

“Because I don’t want to fight with her. I have a baby coming, I want peace,” he says.

MaKhumalo snorts angrily but his mind is made up. He’s not going to fight with anybody, especially not Nomkhosi. That would put him in the amount of stress he doesn’t need right now.

Mawande arrives dressed up like a Myeza makoti she used to be when Nyezi was still arrive.

MaKhumalo is happy about it, she was tired of her

carrying herself like a little girl.

“Bandla take a picture of her, I want to show MaZikalala,” she beams and points Mawande at the chair next to her.

“I don’t have battery,” Bandla says.

“Stop being jealous and take a photo of your sister. If I need to pay you for your data I will.”

Bandla laughs, “Camera doesn’t use data. I’ll take pictures later. Can we eat now? I’m starving.”

“Your woman should be here cooking for you. MaNtusi can’t be feeding you while your own woman is parading the streets in shorts skirts. Is she still a healer?”

“It’s just food that I asked!” Bandla says fuming and roughly pushes back his chair.

“Guys can we not fight today?” Mawande asks a bit shocked by her brother’s reaction. Everyone knows how MaKhumalo is, why is he taking what she said to the heart?

He leaves the table and walks out. Everyone turns to

Thakasa, he has to do or say something. But he's just leaning back on his chair looking absent-minded and unaffected by anything that's happening.

"Can I check on him before we continue?" Nkonzo asks.

Nobody answers.

He leaves the table as well.

This isn't going well before it even starts. Tema is being a quiet guest as usual. Deep down she's feeling guilty of what Khanyo is being accused of since she came late and MaNtusi had already done everything by herself. She's carrying a precious cargo, MaKhumalo will come for each of their heads if they overwork her to feed their men.

Nkonzo comes back, there's a car leaving, he failed to convince Bandla to come back to the table.

"I think we should go ahead," he says taking his seat.

There's a shuffling sound of plates being passed around, then Mawande clears her throat and gulps

down a glass of water.

“So I have decided that I’m not leaving the house my husband built for me.” Eyes widen around the table.

“I’ll stay there, fulfill all the dreams I had with him and continue his legacy,” she says.

“And you’ll do all this alone?” – MaKhumalo. Which young woman has ever run a house on her own?

“Nope, that’s actually an announcement I came to make,” Mawande says and rubs her nose nervously.

They stay quiet. Too quiet for peace’s sake!

“I have let someone in my house.” This is a better way of putting it, hopefully they are getting it.

“Shouldn’t the Myezas be the ones telling us this?” MaKhumalo asks.

“They will. I just thought it would be better if I break the news to you first,” she says.

“So who is it?” MaNtusi asks with a full mouth. She’s still in her first trimester but her appetite has dramatically increased to the point where she eats everything in sight and always has a snack next to

her.

“His brother,” Mawande says.

“Not the one who went to jail, right?” MaNtusi asks with her eyes widen.

“Him. He has changed. I promise you, he’s a good man,” Mawande convinces desperately.

Thakasa doesn’t look surprised, MaNtusi raises her eyebrow at him and he just shrugs his shoulders.

“Do we have a say in this?” Nkonzo asks.

Mawande shakes her head, “Not really. I’m a Myeza now, remember.”

A sigh!

“MaNtusi please get my pain tablets, I think this headache is here to kill me,” MaKhumalo says unexpectedly.

There’s an awkward silence.

MaNtusi passes Londa to Tema and leaves the table to fetch the tablets from MaKhumalo’s bedroom.

“So, Ma when do you think you want to meet him and

the family to discuss things?” Mawande breaks the brief silence.

MaKhumalo sighs and looks at Thakasa. His silence is too loud.

“You’re not going to say anything to your sister? If I talk you’ll say I’m heartless and I don’t know how to speak,” she asks him.

“You’re her mother. I don’t have a problem with who she decides to be with, as long as she’s happy and not doing anything to disrespect Nyezi’s memory,” he says.

MaKhumalo begins to sweat a storm. What’s wrong with these children? First it was Bandla, this one didn’t do anything to reprimand him for walking out from the family dinner, and now he can’t put his sister on the line!

“You’re letting a criminal in your sister’s life? That boy killed Reverend Nkwanyana, what if iqunga rises and he kills your sister?” Dramatic as usual!

Thakasa shrugs his shoulders and pours himself some juice.

“If anything happens to my daughter I’ll hold you responsible,” she hisses angrily and grabs the bottle of tablets from MaNtusi’s hand and swallows two. MaNtusi passes her a glass of water and goes back to her seat.

“Ma, I’m a grown up, Thakasa is not responsible for what I do with my life. Talk to me if you have a problem,” Mawande says.

Thakasa is unbothered and drinking his juice. He’s not even emotionally available at the table.

“I’m not going to talk to you about anything. You said we don’t have any say because you are a Myeza. Tell MaNdlovu that her and I have to talk,” she says and pulls her plate. She’s done and eating her food.

That’s how it ends. MaNdlovu owes her an explanation. That’s the same boy she can’t control, now she’s shifting him to her daughter. What a nerve!

“Babe are you okay?” Nkonzo asks Tema in a low whisper.

“Yes,” she nods.

Things have been a bit tense, she's bound to get freaked out.

"Please don't starve my grandchild, MaDube. Why are you playing with food and not eating?" MaKhumalo asks.

She chuckles, "I'm eating, Ma."

"Please do, I will make amahewu for you tomorrow. Even if you don't have food ready in the house you'll easily fill your stomach while cooking," – MaKhumalo.

She's not sure about 'filling her stomach with amahewu', but what can she say? She smiles and nods.

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BANDLA

He's getting ready for work. He did call Mawande before going to bed and apologized for walking out of dinner. He also found out about Bhambatha's

involvement with his sister. Apparently the older two already knew about it, and seemingly they've accepted it. He has his concerns when it comes to Bhambatha but nobody is perfect in this world. Mawande supported his relationship before Khanyo even stopped partying and drinking. He has to give them the benefit of a doubt and be supportive as well.

He makes his way to the kitchen buttoning up his shirt and notices Thakasa's car pulling up. It's very unusual for him to come to his house so early in the morning. Maybe it's about him storming out of dinner. He unlocks the door and goes back to the counter to prepare his lunch-box.

"Mthonga!" Thakasa walks in dressed up for work.

"I thought I'd see you at work," Bandla says biting a slice of bread. He's currently living like a bachelor but it'll change soon.

Thakasa pulls the chair and sits.

"No, I don't want us to bring family issues to work. Are you okay?"

“Yeah, I’m okay now,” Bandla says.

“So what made you leave? The food issue or that Ma spoke like that about Khanyo?”

“Both. This is why I didn’t want to stay at home after getting married, because of these slight jabs that she throws around. I don’t think Khanyo can take it lying down. My life is going to be chaotic.”

“Ma is old, Bandla. Old and kind of lonely without Dad. We are a big family and there’s always something happening; stressing her out. I don’t think she’s the kindest person on earth. She does say things to me as well. But I don’t think we should let her get under our skin, she’s our mother and our wives have to learn from us how to handle her. Let’s practice a little bit of patience with her.”

Bandla sighs and takes his sausages out of the pan. Maybe he’s not so thick-skinned, things do get to him, especially if Khanyo is being tossed in the middle.

“Why is Khanyo keeping distance anyway?” Thakasa asks.

“I think it’s a two-way street. You are involved in the Ngema affairs, or you were before things happened. Nkonzo is also very much involved in the Dube affairs as the son-in-law. If there’s something happening there he makes sure that he gets us, his family, there to support Tema. Even with Phelo’s mother, our families may have a rocky relationship but if there’s something happening there you will get all of us there, supporting her in time of need. But with Khanyo it’s different, we are not a family to her family. Maybe because of her brother’s issue, I don’t know. But I think the energy my family gives her is the same energy she gives back, which is fair enough.”

“Oh Bandla, stop being a lackey! I’m not going to jump and go support Mandulo’s ceremonies or whatever he does so that Khanyo can acknowledge that she’s marrying into the Manqueles and not the other way around.”

“Then let’s not be surprised if she skips our dinner or function. You can’t give two and expect ten in return,” Bandla says and puts everything back in the

fridge. “She did come to the anniversary celebration. Maybe you didn’t see her, just like you didn’t see Phelo’s mother.”

The conversation is taking a different direction. Thakasa takes a deep breath and peels a banana.

“She hates you,” Bandla rubs it on his face and laughs.

“I didn’t want her to come. I knew something was going to happen and cause more tension between us. But I didn’t think it would be Ma and it would involve my daughter, I thought maybe it would be what I say to MaNtusi and how it would plant another seed of doubt in her mind about my feelings for her,” he says.

“I thought she knew about MaNtusi from day one. You want polygamy, you can’t be scared to express your love to the other wife because of another one. It doesn’t make sense.”

“I know, I just don’t think we are currently in a good place for her to witness all that,” he says.

“That’s not how it works. MaNtusi will be present at

your second wedding, if it's still happening, and she will have to witness it all as well," – Bandla.

Sigh!

"Do you think the second wedding is still happening?" Bandla again.

"If it's not Nomkhosi then I don't think I will get married to another woman," he says.

"Well, at least you and MaNtusi are having children now. Nothing will compel you to take another wife," Bandla says.

"I wish it was that easy. Anyway I'm looking for venues for Phelo's first birthday."

Bandla frowns, "She's about to turn one already?"

"In two months, yeah. I want to plan early," he says.

Bandla laughs. He finds this desperate side of his brother funny. Nobody knew he could be this weak because of a woman. It's an evil thing to wish for but life would be funny if Nomkhosi hurt him more often.

"Are you trying to score points?" He's choking down a laugh.

“You’re being dumb. It’s my daughter’s 1st birthday, if Nomkhosi is sure about this co-parenting thing then she should prove it now and work with me in planning our daughter’s birthday party.”

“She doesn’t want to be around you. Why don’t you divide planning tasks; find the venue and let her come with decorations and food?” Bandla asks.

“We have to work together. No matter how much she hates me, she created a child with me and we have to raise her together,” he says.

“I don’t think it means having lunch and discussing party themes while looking at each other’s eyes and lusting over...”

“You don’t have a child Bandla, shut up. You don’t know anything about parenting, so please save your advice and make sure you don’t come to work late.” He grabs another banana and storms out of the house.

Bandla shakes his head and laughs.

He's almost done. He still has five minutes to spare. Thakasa needs to be strong and deal with life. Who said it was going to be fair?

He scrolls down and calls Khanyo.

"Mmhhh!" That's how she answers.

He must've woken her up and disturbed her beauty sleep.

"Morning, my love. How are you?"

"Good. Mmmhh," she moans.

"Wake up, sthandwa sami. Did you see the time? What kind of a wife are you going to be?" he teases going to the bedroom to take his belt.

"You're so annoying! How was dinner?" Now she sounds awake.

"I don't know. I left before it started. Why didn't you come, Khanyo? My family is now asking questions."

"What questions? You didn't tell me to come," she asks.

"Do I have to spell it out? If I inform you about

something that means I want you to come with me.”

“Urgh, Bandla! You are not a poet. Don’t speak to me in metaphors,” she says.

“Okay, are you going to be more present and involved in my family now? I’m tired of defending us,” he asks.

“If you ask me nicely. But I don’t feel like there’s any rush, I’m going to be a village wife for the rest of my life anyway.”

“You’re going to be a wife. My wife, not a village wife, unless if you’re planning to sleep with the whole village while married to me.”

“That’s not a bad thing either. Listen, there’s something you have to hear. Oh my goodness, Bandla!”

Damn, five minutes is almost over!

“What is it?” he asks.

“Did I tell you about Mzwandile? He went to Joburg in 1999 leaving his wife and kids. You know everyone thought he died in the mines or

something.”

“Didn’t he die?” Bandla asks.

“No, wait for it! So his wife ended up getting a sex toy with two legs. They have two kids together, she took him in and made him the head of Mzwandile’s house. Guess what happened last week?”

He laughs. This story is too predictable!

“No,” he says.

“He’s back. Now the wife is living with both men in the house, both are refusing to leave. It’s a woman’s polygamy thing.”

“Polyandry,” Bandla says.

“Yes, that’s the word. You’re my walking dictionary.”

He laughs, “Please wake up and brush your teeth. I’ll call you later.”

“No baby, I’m horny. Let me position myself well, then break my sex-call virginity,” she says.

He gasps, “Khanyo, did you see the time?”

“It’s your father’s company, why are you panicking?”

Look, I'm lying on my back now, naked and wet for you."

A vein in his manhood throbs. "Come on," he whispers.

"Wrap your hand around that beautiful monster and play with it."

He's standing in the middle of the kitchen. This juicy phone call or his brother's instruction?

Deep breath!

"Let's do a video-call, I want to see you," he says.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 82

NOTHILE

She's at Hlomuka Logistics for the first time. She could've sent the driver these things that Phelo left behind but she wanted to personally see Nomkhosi. There's no annoying receptionist like Precious here, she's welcomed by a bubbly woman who chit-chats and leaves her at the door of Nomkhosi's new office.

"I thought you were joking when you said you're coming," Nomkhosi says lifting her face with a smile as she walks in with a little pink bag.

"I'm here!" she says and mesmerizes around the office. "You have a beautiful office but I'd do something about these walls."

Nomkhosi rolls her eyes and laughs.

“Yes mam, please give me a quote,” she says.

Nothile makes herself comfortable on the guest couch and pushes her shoes off.

“I’m kidding, your babydaddy blue-ticked my request of event-planning and decorating,” she says.

Nomkhosi gives her a look, she’s not pleased. “You should’ve informed him, not ask permission. He’s too self-centered and selfish for that.”

MaNtusi narrows her eye, “I’m a wife and I’m pregnant, maybe he’s just concerned that I’ll overwork myself.”

“No, Thakasa only cares about himself. I don’t know what demons possessed me to want something with him. Maybe I was used by the devil to turn your world upside down.”

MaNtusi sighs and puts Phelo’s bag on the desk. She doesn’t have to ask anymore, they have broken up and by the look of things Nomkhosi hates the air Thakasa breathes.

“What did he do?” she asks.

“He refused to give me space when I asked for it. I called him to Waterways to explain what it means to give someone space and he blew up. He called me every derogatory name there is under the sun. I’ve never been insulted like that in my life.”

“Insulted? Maybe you misunderstood him, he’s everything but not...” Nomkhosi stops her with a hand. This is exactly what MaKhumalo said. Just because he’s decent at home doesn’t mean he’s decent with everyone.

“Your Manqele is not the Thakasa I know. With you he’s a man, a leader and husband. With me he’s a little boy with special needs who throws tantrums and acts like you broke his favorite toy whenever you choose yourself over him,” she says.

“But you still made a child with him,” Nothile argues.

“I don’t regret my child, she’s my life. But I wish I had her with another man, especially after her grandmother stood in front people and talked like that about her.”

“It wasn’t about Phelo, she didn’t mention any

names,” Nothile defends.

“She didn’t have to. My family had an argument with her and she avenged by attacking how my daughter came in public. Phelo is not the first child in the world to come unplanned and from a secret relationship. I’m a child of rape and a stepchild at the Ngidis, but nobody has ever made me feel like I was different. I’d rather have my daughter surrounded by unrelated people who see a beautiful girl in her than to have her cuddled by a grandmother who sees a product of “umjolo” and unplanned pregnancy in her.”

Nothile nods with a heavy breath, she gets it, she really does.

“I’m really sorry about that. I will talk to her about it. Maybe she didn’t think it through. But please believe me, Phelo will never be treated differently at home while I’m around. It has never happened before, MaKhumalo just had one of those crazy moments of hers,” she says.

“Honestly, you are the only reason why I’d be

comfortable ever sending my daughter to the Manqueles again. You are a good mother, maybe Londa was just a test to your motherhood and after God saw you nurturing that boy like a Kangaroo He thought; 'What a gem, this woman has to carry more of my children!' then boom, Londa is not even one and you're pregnant again."

Nothile cracks into laughter.

"And this time around I'm not scared of anything. I'm going to enjoy my big belly till the end," she says.

"That's what I want too, if I ever get pregnant again. With Phelo I was crying every night, scared of how she'll grow up without a father and all that. I don't want to go through that, if I ever fall pregnant again it would be with a man I'm sure I have a future with," Nomkhosi says.

Nothile chuckles, "In marriage?"

"Not necessarily, but in a stable relationship with someone I know is going to be there even if we don't work out, and still give me respect as the mother of his child."

“All the best in your search,” Nothile says with a mocking grin. “Anyway, how is your mother holding up?”

“Better than I expected, she’s a strong woman,” Nomkhosi says.

“I don’t know if I’d survive without Manqele. I’m not that strong.”

“You left him and survived,” Nomkhosi says with her eyebrow narrowed.

“It was different. Death is the end of life, you can never see the person again,” Nothile says shrugging her shoulders.

The opening door cuts their conversation, a man in crispy white shirt and fit jeans walks in. He sees that Nomkhosi has company and stops two steps away from the door.

“I didn’t know you are busy,” he says looking at Nomkhosi.

“Don’t worry, I’ll come to your office when I’m done here. Please get the muffins, I’ll come with the

coffee.”

He nods and looks at Nothile. He smiles warmly revealing a set of white teeth with a narrow gap.

“Hello, I’m Njabulo,” he says.

Nothile looks at Nomkhosi with her eyes widened. Why is he telling her his name?

“This is MaNtusi, Phelo’s father’s wife,” Nomkhosi comes to the rescue.

Nothile clears her throat and leans back on the couch uncomfortably.

“Oh, I’m happy to know her. Maybe we’ll see her around more often,” he says, glances at her again and heads out with his head held above his broad shoulders boldly.

“Did I disturb something?” Nothile asks with her eyes stuck at the door.

“We have some work to do together but it’s not scheduled for today. We just need to chase the deadline.”

“Over muffins and coffee?” – Nothile.

Nomkhosi chuckles, “Yes. We are colleagues, that’s pretty normal.”

“Your normal is not normal. He looks good by the way,” she says.

“He’s sweet too.” Nomkhosi says and pulls the bag to check what’s inside. There’s a couple of clothes she doesn’t know and that beaded neck-peace Phelo wore at the anniversary celebration.

“Thank you for this. I love it!”

“I got it from Zamafuze Beads & Jewelry,” Nothile says.

Nomkhosi frowns, “The one in town, Grey Street?”

“Yes, my aunt’s daughter owns it but we are not close. I heard she’s getting married this year, Nomcebo and I aren’t even invited.”

“You’re related to the Ngcobos?” Nomkhosi with her eyes bulging out.

“No, her mother is related to us, she married to the Ngcobos. It’s a long story, but yeah, if you need jewelry you can check in her store.”

Nomkhosi laughs shaking her head in disbelief.

“I will ask her about you. She’s getting married to Ndondo’s brother, my friend. I didn’t know you two are related, that explains the curves and booty.”

Nothile rolls her eyes, “I don’t have a tiny waist though.”

“Because you’re pregnant, duh!” Nomkhosi says.

She shakes her head, “I never had it. Having Londa made it even worse but I’m not worried. Manqele doesn’t care about my fat paunch, he only cares about what’s below it.”

They both burst into laughter.

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She did a little shopping and headed back home to start on dinner preparations before Thakasa comes back from work. She took longer than expected, hopefully MaKhumalo won’t bite her head off. She’s still flaunting her new car; driving anywhere, even to buy a packet of salt in town for no solid reason.

“This car is going to be the death of me!” says MaKhumalo clapping her hands and staring at her as she enters the house with shopping bags.

“I’m sorry, Ma. Did he trouble you?”

“No, you troubled me, Londa didn’t break any promises. You said you’ll be back before 3pm, it’s almost 4pm now!”

“I got held up, I’m sorry. I’m going to roll a dumpling and boil chicken for dinner. Did Londa eat his porridge?”

“Yes, his nanny fed him, angithi?” MaKhumalo derides and peeps inside the shopping bags.

“Hawu Ma, how many times do I need to apologize? Anyway I saw Phelo’s mother today.”

She ignores that and takes a slab of chocolate from the shopping bag. MaNtusi knows that she has a sweet tooth and it’s getting worse with age. It’s pure luck that she still has most of her teeth.

“I think what you said did more damage than we thought. She’s hurting on behalf of Phelo and she

thinks you intentionally said what you said because of what happened between you and her mother.”

“Why would I fight my own granddaughter to get to her and her mother?” MaKhumalo asks.

“She doesn’t know you that well. Maybe you have to reassure her, unless if you really see Phelo differently, which would be sad because her and Londa aren’t that different,” she says.

“She’s crazy,” MaKhumalo says dismissively and sits on the chair eating her chocolate.

“Ma, it’s serious. She said she’d rather have strangers surrounding her daughter than for her to be cuddled by a grandmother who sees a product of umjolo in her.”

That almost takes MaKhumalo’s breath away. How can Nomkhosi speak that way? She’s Phelo’s grandmother by blood.

“I have nothing but love for Sphephelo. It’s so cruel of her to say such thing about me.”

“Maybe you have to do something to make her

comfortable sending Phelo here again without worrying about her being publicly embarrassed or looked down.”

MaKhumalo sighs and gets off the chair. She leaves the kitchen and goes to her bedroom. Nomkhosi is taking things too far. How dare she deem her as a hater in her own granddaughter’s life?!

Thakasa arrives and takes a bath while MaNtusi sets up for dinner. It’s been a long day, all he wants is a warm meal, steamy sex and long sleep. He puts on his casual clothes and goes back to the kitchen with Londa who just woke up.

“I haven’t seen my father’s wife,” he says putting Londa in his chair and pulling his own to sit.

“She’s been locked in her bedroom since I told her that Nomkhosi is not comfortable sending Phelo here because of what happened.”

“You went to see Nomkhosi?” He raises his eyebrow.

“Yes,” she nods.

A sigh!

“Let me check on her.” He pushes the chair and goes to MaKhumalo’s room. He knows how much his mother loves Phelo, she’s just not good with words.

He knocks at the door and waits.

“Ma, it’s me,” he says after a moment.

MaKhumalo opens the door and goes back to her bed and continues with her knitting.

“Dinner is ready,” he says and sits next to her. “What made you upset?”

“Why don’t you ask your babymama? She thinks I hate my granddaughter!”

“She comes from a different background. I’ll talk to her but I need you to be a little mindful of what you say and be open minded. I’m not insulting you, we are about to become a bigger family, you have to find a way to accommodate everyone and make them comfortable. You wanted daughter-in-laws and grandchildren, right?”

She sighs and nods.

“Now all that is happening. Bandla and Nkonzo are getting married. And Bandla’s wife is not going to be like MaNtusi and MaDube, but still you’ll have to coexist with her.”

“What do you want me to do?” she asks.

“I know you stand by your truth, but not every truth is a good truth. If something has a potential of hurting the next person it’s better not to say it. Especially about the kids, don’t talk about them if it’s not positive.”

“Hhayi-ke, I hear you,” she says taking a deep breath.

“So what is this?” he asks looking at the piece of cloth she’s knitting.

“A long skirt for KaMayise,” she says.

Thakasa chuckles, “Is this a good fabric though? You think she’s going to love it?”

She raises her eyebrow, “Are you trying to say it’s ugly?”

“No, not at all. I’m sure she will love it. Let’s go

before MaNtusi sends an army,” he says holding back his laugh and stands with his hand held out for her.

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KHANYO

I can't believe I'm standing in front of the mirror and wrapping my head with a scarf. I only do this when I go to bed with a new hairstyle, but this time I'll be walking around in a headwrap the whole weekend. The Manqueles, or should I just call them out by names; Thakasa and MaKhumalo, complained that I'm not showing any enthusiasm as a Makoti-to-be. Well, I'm about to prove them wrong. I know MaKhumalo has no faith in me, she'll be amazed by my dishes. I'm a Chef in making, my recipes are ready for them.

“Babe, it's almost 2:30pm,” Bandla says coming from the door. I'm almost done- I've been 'almost done' the past hour.

“I’m taking bags to the car, when I come back be done or you’ll walk to ENembe,” he threatens and leaves.

Only if he was Thakasa, I’d have my own BMW and R100 for each day I live on this earth.

I pack my cosmetics and take one last look before I rush to the bathroom. I hear the door opening and him shouting my name. I rush out and put a coat over my shoulders, makoti look nailed!

He’s racing to the door. You’d swear we are rushing to work or something. I thought I’d have a chance to buy a few things in town but he’s driving straight home.

It feels so strange being here for no reason and to know that I’ll be here the whole weekend with MaKhumalo. Bandla takes out our bags and goes with them to his rondavel. I go to the main house and find Londa playing in the kitchen. He’s growing tall and losing some weight. His mother walks in just as I pick him up and kiss his cheek.

“You’re here,” she says smiling and standing behind the table.

“Yes, Bandla couldn’t wait. So what should I do first?” I ask.

“Go and greet Ma. We’ll start cooking later, maybe around 4pm,” she says.

“Okay, I’ll go with my boy.” I put him on my hip and go to the lounge. My mother-in-law is reading a book. I didn’t know she was a book worm.

“Hello Ma,” I greet and sit on the couch.

She lifts her head up and I see her eyes running all over me, checking me out below glasses.

“What did we do to deserve a visit from you?” she asks.

I don’t say anything. I don’t think any answer I give would be right.

“I’m happy to see you. You should be around more often, there’s a wedding to prepare for and MaNtusi can’t handle everything alone. You can see that I’m old and useless.”

“No problem, I’ll come but I don’t know how to brew umqombothi and all that,” I say.

“I thought as much. You look amazing but I think you might need to change your expensive skirt. Luckily you fell in love with my favourite son, I’ll always look out for you,” she says.

Are mothers allowed to have favorites? Either way I’m happy to be looked out for.

She takes something next to her, it’s in the plastic bag, she passes it to me and tells me to open.

Now what is this? A rag rug for what?

“That’s your skirt, go and change,” she says.

I swear this is the most ugliest skirt I’ve ever seen. I wouldn’t buy it even if it was R2.

“This is bigger than me,” I say looking at the ugly thing in my hands.

“It’s not big. I always measure my designs with my eyes and they fit everyone.”

That’s not possible. Not even legendary fashion designers measure that way.

“I do have something I can change into,” I say.

Bandla walks in and looks at us with a slight frown.

“I knitted a skirt for KaMayise,” MaKhumalo tells him. I don’t know if she’s testing me or dead serious. Even her own skirt is better than this one.

Bandla takes it from my hands and looks at it. I know my man has a sane fashion sense...

“Wow, Ma!” he says.

I look at him, there’s nothing ‘wow’ about this skirt.

“Thank you, that’s very sweet of you. Please go and fit it, babe. I’m sure it’ll look amazing on you.”

I’m beyond shocked. Doesn’t he see what I see? Unbelievable!

I leave with Londa and go to Bandla’s rondavel to change. MaNtusi frowns as I walk past her eating a bowl of popcorn in the kitchen, but she doesn’t ask anything.

He has a mirror, good! I put his mother’s hideous

skirt. What a mix of colours! I look like a walking South African flag. It's not that big though, it helps that I've gained a few kilos that I'm not even interested in burning down.

I walk back inside the main house, MaNtusi looks at me once and breaks into laughter.

"I'm glad we'll be indoors because, wow!" she cracks up.

"I know," I roll my eyes and walk past the kitchen to the lounge. I don't know if I should give them a twirl or just stand straight up so that they can see how awful I look.

"Wow!" Bandla again. He's starting to sound like an ambulance, there's nothing jaw-dropping about me right now.

"So I want to cook chicken parmigiana, I don't know which side people are going to love. Mashed potatoes or green salad?"

They freeze. Did they think I can't cook? Bandla is slow then.

“This is not Durban, KaMayise. Cook rice or pap, you’ll cook those things in your shack with Bandla,” MaKhumalo says.

“You’ll love it. I’ll make green salad. Thanks for the skirt.” I kiss Londa’s cheek and leave him on Bandla’s lap.

I’m cooking chicken parmigiana, Bandla has to drive to the shops and get me everything.

They wanted me to come, I’m here now they should embrace me.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 83

THAKASA

They had dinner, not a normal one. Luckily tomorrow morning they'll be leaving, this weekend has been a confirmation that once Bandla marries he'll move out with MaNtusi. Khanyo comes from a complete different background, and instead of adjusting to the ManqeLe lifestyle she's making them adjust to hers.

"I can't believe I had leaves for dinner," he grunts as he undresses to get in bed.

MaNtusi chuckles, "But it was delicious. I like how she did her steak, I just didn't like the olives in her salad."

"She could've made savory rice or something. We don't do diets around here, we eat to fill our stomachs, not to look sexy."

“Okay, let’s appreciate the efforts. She did great, better than anyone expected,” MaNtusi defends.

He gives her a look, “That’s very warm of you. Totally different from how you welcomed MaDube; with Khanyo you can’t find a single fault in anything she does.”

If she responds to this an argument may start and she’s not looking forward to that. Londa is asleep, she needs a cuddle from her husband, not a fight. There’s some truth in it though, she’s warm to Khanyo than she is to Tema. It’s not even because of Londa, from the first day she came disguised as the curtain-seller they exchanged positive energy.

“Get in bed,” she says pulling up covers for him. Thakasa puts his phone on top of the bedside table and gets in bed wearing his short only.

“Your body is cold!” MaNtusi states running her hands all over his upper body.

“Then warm it up,” he kisses her neck and wraps his leg around hers.

“So how was your day?” she asks him. They spent

the whole day together, he didn't really go anywhere today except the shops but she still needs to ask as his wife.

"I don't know. How was yours?"- him.

"It was good, when I got Nomkhosi's call telling me that Phelo can stand on her own it became better, and now that I'm in your arms it's excellent," she says.

A deep breath!

"I don't know this and I'm Phelo's father," he says, his voice wounded and reeking annoyance.

"Maybe it skipped her mind. She had a dinner thing she was attending with Njabulo today," MaNtusi says.

His forehead furrows into a frown.

"Who is that?" he asks.

"A new, very close friend of hers that she works with at Hlomuka Logistics," she says.

"Oh, I didn't know she made friends already. Let alone male friends."

“He didn’t look like a shady person. I saw him in her office the other day, he’s young and good-looking.”

His veins are throbbing. He can burst at any second. His embrace around MaNtusi has loosened and neither of them is even aware of it.

“You went there to check men’s look or to give her Phelo’s bag?” he asks.

MaNtusi secretly rolls her eyes. He’s the fine one to ask, didn’t he attend a function and checked out Nomkhosi’s looks?

“I’m just saying. Even if he ever happens to be around Phelo I don’t think he’d be dange...”

He abruptly cuts her; “Don’t even go there! My daughter doesn’t work at Hlomuka Logistics, there’s no need for him to be around clowns that work there, unless if someone is testing me.”

“Are you jealous?” she asks him.

“I don’t understand your question, you brought this up and now I’m reacting as you wanted me to. That’s not jealousy, we’re talking about my daughter here. I

want no man around her.” There’s more into it than he lets on. His nostrils are flared out in anger. He’s livid.

MaNtusi chuckles, “I just want to know if you’re still into Nomkhosi or not. It’s my business as much as it’s yours.”

“I’m not comfortable discussing that with you. Yeah, you know that I love her as much as I love you, but you don’t have to know deep. I don’t think it’s fair. Even you said that I mustn’t bring my issues with her to our bed.”

“I know but it wouldn’t hurt to stay updated,” she says.

He takes a deep sigh.

“I want her back but I don’t know what’s going to happen, especially now that there are other men involved. It does hurt but life isn’t over, you’re still here and you complete me in your own way. Maybe in another life I would be her man and I’d be able to make her stay.”

“So that she won’t be the one that got away?” she

asks.

Even though he doesn't fully understand the question he nods, "Yes," he says.

"Mmmh!" she turns the lights off and sleeps facing the other side.

He releases a deep sigh, shifts closer to MaNtusi's back and wraps his arms around her waist. If there's anything that makes everything feels okay right now it's this precious gift from his father.

"Has he started moving?" he asks in lowered voice and brushes the back of her neck with his lips.

"Not yet, it's still early," she says.

He presses his bottom front on her and tenderly bites her earlobe.

"Maybe he needs a little motivation," he says.

She's ignoring him, purposely. There's no response from her body, at least not externally.

"Are you tired?" he asks trying to turn her around.

"Yes," she says.

“Kancane nje mama.” He’s pushing his fingers between her thighs and forcing her panty aside.

“You don’t have to do anything,” he begs, dipping his fingers between her folds. He bites the side of her neck.

Even though her core is warm and wet, there’s no clear response from her.

“I’m tired, Manqele,” she says.

“Why don’t you just say awufuni because I know this is just an excuse?” he asks.

“I’m not Nomkhosi, I can’t be making sex everyday, it’s a tiring sport. Maybe you do need to consider taking a second wife, even if it’s not her because this is too much for me. Every night I know I’m getting laid, before I wake up it’s the same story. My body is not going to heal you.”

“I thought we were both enjoying ourselves. I didn’t know you feel this way,” he says.

“I do enjoy myself but this new routine came with the break up. You have to find new healing techniques

because I'm not going to serve you sex on my behalf and for the 'one that got away' as well."

He releases a deep sigh and turns on the side-lamp on her side. He wants to look at her in the eyes.

"MaNtusi sit up, we have to talk," he instructs sitting up and leaning back on the headboard.

"I told you that I'm tired," she grunts.

"MaNtusi!" he voice becomes firmer.

She sighs and sits up. She pulls the covers up to her shoulders and leans back on the pillow.

"I don't want us to go back there. We've worked too hard to be where we are today. Don't make it hard for me to come home again, I'm begging you," he says.

"What did I do?" she asks nonchalantly.

"Don't pretend like you don't know. Uma ungafuni nenkomo yakho thani awufuni. Don't bring issues to bed and then pretend like I'm the one who have issues. I'm not a sex addict, I just like how we've been connecting these last few months. It's not

about Nomkhosi, if it was about her I would've asked you to wear a different character each time we make love," he says.

She sighs, "I just thought...never mind."

"I do mind, we are having a conversation and I'd appreciate to hear your thoughts."

"I feel like the attention you're giving me has multiplied because of her absence. I don't want to get used to it because you're still going to fight for her and things will have to go back to normal once she's back."

"So what do you want me to do? Go to Waterways and sleep alone," he asks.

"No," she says.

"You want us to sleep in different beds?" he asks.

She shakes her head, "No."

"You want us to have a sex timetable?" he asks.

She shakes her head angrily and breaks into tears.

"No, Manqe!"

He's confused. He pulls her to his chest and wraps his arms around her.

"Okay, if I'm wrong then I apologize. I don't want to hurt you anymore."

She's still crying, there's no explanation. He has to calm her down before she wakes Londa up. He's rubbing her shoulders and planting soft kisses on her forehead.

"Please mkami, don't flood me with tears like this, I know it's not easy."

"I just want to be sure where I stand. I love you and I only know how to love you. I pray for you, Manqele."

"You stand in my heart. I love you too, MaNtusi. Please don't let what's going on between me and other people affect our marriage. If I'm doing something you don't like tell me in a respectful manner."

She exhales and wipes her tears.

"Okay, I'm sorry I'm just too emotional today," she says.

“Let’s just cuddle, I’m sure Mthonga can understand that mama is not in the mood today.”

She chuckles, “Maybe tomorrow.”

He nods and brushes her arm. It may take a while for his member to accept the starvation but he’ll go through the night.

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He woke up early, changed Londa’s diaper, took out trash, ironed his clothes and prepared his lunchbox. MaNtusi’s alarm went off but he quickly switched it off before it woke her up.

He has boiled Londa’s water, filled the flask bottle and rinsed his milk bottles. He wanted to make something quick for her before she wakes; a sandwich or a bowl of cereal. But Khanyo has occupied the kitchen, now it’s hard for him to go in there and move around as he pleases.

Khanyo notices him passing the kitchen for the second time and realizes that maybe he needs

something. It's just the two of them up for now.

"Do you need anything?" she asks him.

"I just needed fruits or a cereal for MaNtusi," he says.

"Breakfast in bed?"

"No," he says with a slight frown.

Oh well! She opens the fridge, takes out yogurt and grabs two spoons from the drawer and clears from the kitchen.

Thakasa looks around the kitchen for bowls. He sweats before finding anything in the kitchen. There are some kitchen appliances he's not even sure he can use. He runs the tap, leaves it running and looks inside the fridge. Cereal or fruits? Sigh!

He puts a pear and two bananas in a plate, then makes a bowl of Cornflakes. Maybe yogurt as well. Khanyo took it, that means women love yogurt in the morning.

MaNtusi's eyes flutter open as he walks through the door. They widen as the sun rays shine brightly into

them.

“What time is it?” she asks in panic.

“Don’t worry, I’m sorted.”

Her brows knit, “What is that?”

“I wanted to make you something to eat but I didn’t know where to start, so I opted for this.” He’s embarrassed, obviously MaNtusi is a better partner than him, she would’ve made better breakfast if the roles were reversed.

MaNtusi giggles, “Thank you, my husband. Let me go to the bathroom first.”

“Can I have my morning kiss? I have to dash to work, maybe I’ll pop in during the day, if you want something by the shops let me know.”

“Okay, have a great day.” She pecks his lips briefly and goes out rushing to the bathroom.

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NOMKHOSI

There's nothing going on between her and Njabulo. No matter how many times she explains this Ndondo and Snalo still see a bright future between them. He's a colleague and the fact that he's employed by Hlomuka Logistics makes it impossible for them to be more than friends.

"Anyway I received a letter from Thakasa. I don't know why he couldn't text or call me."

"Didn't you block him?" Ndondo asks.

"He could've found alternatives instead of writing me letters like we are in the 80s," she says.

"Babe you know where my dustbin is, throw that thing away. He's probably bored with his wife," – Ndondo.

"We have a child together, I can't block communication forever."

Ndondo rolls her eyes, "Let me go put my son to sleep while you sit here and fall back into his trap."

Sigh!

She waits until Ndondo disappears and goes to sit in the balcony with the sealed envelope signed by Mr T Manqele.

Another deep sigh.

She opens the letter and reads with her breath held up;

**

Maka Sphephelo

I don't know where to start. I have so much to say, so many words in my heart, but presently everything seems to be at sixes and sevens. Maybe I should start by saying I'm sorry, for everything that has happened intentionally and unintentionally. I wish I can take some of it back, I tasted and digested it a little bit too late. You are angry at me and I understand why. I don't deserve you, I never did. When you said you wanted someone better I looked

at myself, I introspected, and took a moment to look back at us. You and I, we were meant to be but we never got to be because in this life not everyone gets everything they desire. It was too late when we met, I already had a life and you had yours, even though you were willing to let me in, it was too different from mine. Loving you would've been easy if I wasn't Thakasa Mangele. You are so easy to love MaZikode. Your playful spirit, your humble yet fierce character, your good fellowship and ability to love behind the scenes and do it completely. Honestly, I've never known a love like this. I know the kind of love that accommodates everyone, I'm not saying I don't love that kind of love. No, I love it. I was raised that way; to love comfortably and permanently. To love for myself and for everyone. But ours was different because I had to be selfish. When I met you and fell in love with you I knew that our love wasn't the kind that was going to cater for everyone. In fact, it was going to either destroy everything I had or personally destroy me. And indeed, it has destroyed me. My heart is worn to shreds, I'm scared for the first time in a very long time. I don't know how I'm going to

ever forget you because you live in there- in my heart. I carry you around with me. It's hard but I'm trying to live a balanced life even though I'm now standing on one foot. I miss how you hold me. I miss our deep late-night conversations and how vulnerable your presence make me. I thought after everything we went through Phelo was finally going to be the reason our love made sense to everyone. But it's you who has pulled back. You have left me, Nomkhosi. I don't know how to live. People are asking questions and I don't have answers. While some people get their forever, you and I didn't even get half a decade. Ukukuphatha kungihlulile, uthando lungihlulile, namanje inhliziyo yami iyabalisa. Ngiyathatha ngiyabeka, kubuhlungu kuyaqaqamba. I don't know who to turn to, my emotions are stuck in a place that's just too dark. Even if you don't knit back tatters of my heart, can I have my friend back?

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A hand taps on her shoulder. It's Ndondo. She blows out and keeps her face down.

“You’re crying?” – Ndondo.

“I’m just...I don’t even know why I’m crying.” She can’t find any serviette, she wipes her eyes with her fingers and blows out another sigh.

“He got to you. Oh my goodness, Khosi!” Ndondo exclaims.

She shakes her head. He didn’t get to her, it’s just that she can’t stop the tears.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 84

THAKASA

He knew immediately as soon as he got unblocked. He was about to knock off, he checked his messages and realized all of them had gone through. He didn't waste any second, he called right away. He didn't know what he was going to say, just hearing her voice would've been enough. But they had a conversation, she didn't shout at him or mention anything about their current relationship status. They talked about Phelo, she sent him videos of her and he took the opportunity to ask to see her. She said yes, that almost felt like a dream.

He's called MaNtusi and let her know that he won't be home on time. But he didn't mention anything

about going to Khosi because her emotions are very high lately. He doesn't know whether she still welcomes the idea of him with Nomkhosi or not. This promises to be one hell of a pregnancy.

Now he's on his way to Waterways, because he doesn't know how long he's going to be there he passes by Steers and get burgers. He's nervous; what if things don't go as he expect? Can he handle another rejection? He took it pretty bad the last time, even said things he shouldn't have said.

She got here first, her car is parked outside and the main door is open. He exercises a few breaths before climbing out of the car. He's really scared, there's a drumbeat rolling in his chest. He has to be mindful of what he says and how he says it. He also needs to clear his mother's name and pitch Phelo's first birthday ideas that he's already come up with.

He walks through the door with one hand in his pocket and another one tucked behind his neck. He's trying to look confident, like he knows what he's here

to say. Then he notices the little princess crawling towards him with juicy saliva running down her chin and suddenly forgets everything. His lips stretch into a huge smile, he holds his arms out and calls her name.

“Sphephelo sikaBaba!” He lifts her up and pecks her wet lips. This is the longest he’s gone without seeing his daughter and he’d forgotten how it feels to have her in his arms. How she completes his life by just being herself.

Even the fact that she’s hitting his forehead completes him. Being a father to this girl is fulfilling. He’s feeling guilty for letting his issues with her mother come between them.

“Baba missed you so much!” he tells her, even though he doesn’t understand what he’s saying, his tight hug gives her a clear message. Babies also understand body language, she starts staring at him in the eyes- they’re glittering with tears. Shit! He can’t cry in front of his daughter.

“I love you and your mother. I want to be your daddy

everyday. Do you want us to live here? Me, you and mom?" He kisses her cheek and chuckles when Phelo shifts her attention to something else; ignoring the question.

"Baba missed his girls," he continues.

Nomkhosi clears her throat standing by the bathroom door. It takes a deep breath and a minute for him to turn his eyes.

She's hurting. It's written all over her face. And she's not certain about being here. The letter got to her, Ndondo was right; she's fallen back into his trap.

"Sawubona," he says and their eyes lock for a long minute.

She sighs, "Yebo."

"I didn't think you'd come with her. Thank you, I really missed her...and you," he says.

No response.

She's staring into his soul. Why this one particular man? Out of all men in the world. Women date, dump and date. At their 30s they chase happiness,

even if it means changing men like underwear. Only happiness matters. She's had more bad times than good times with this man, yet she's here ready to listen to his undying love declaration and get fucked again. He has a wife at home, the one he's vowed to love till death. His wife that got impregnated by another man and still came back home to raise the child under his roof with him. She knows for a fact that if this man ever gets forced to choose between her and his wife he'd choose his wife.

Yes, he loves her too. She believes him. She makes him happy and in her he's found a place of comfort. But knowing him the way she does, she knows that Thakasa Mangele will never leave his wife for anyone, not even for himself.

"Does she have favorite cartoons yet?" he asks amidst the intense stare that's sending cold shivers down his spine.

"She watches anything," Nomkhosi says.

He chuckles, "Better than Londa who wants to watch the Sunlight dishwashing liquid advert. We deal with

consequences everytime it goes off.”

That’s a way to go. Mothers are always passionate in discussing babies.

“Can’t you record it or something?” She’s laughing.

“It doesn’t even play for two minutes. He needs to love real cartoons, not brief adverts.” He goes with Phelo to the lounge and switches the TV on. She’s still enjoying her time with her father, their issues can wait. Thakasa sits and plays with her until she finds a toy that’s worth all her attention.

He leaves her playing by herself and goes back to her mother. He can see her from where he’s standing.

He takes Nomkhosi’s hand and goes to the staircase and sits on the first step. She remains on her feet, he holds on to her leg and lifts his eyes to her.

“How have you been?” he asks.

“Fine,” she says and takes a deep breath.

“I was not fine. I was missing you, but more than

anything I was feeling guilty about everything that happened the last time I saw you.”

“Okay,” she says folding her arms and looking away.

“Nomkhosi, why do I feel like we’ve let people come between us? Yes we were never perfect but I feel like external factors are now playing a role in this. Firstly my mother, I know she’s somehow helped the situation gets worse. Then there’s your family and friends. I know they don’t like me and they may be motivating you to break my heart.”

She rolls her eyes. “You blame everyone except yourself.”

“I do blame myself, big time. That’s why I’m here laying myself to you and asking for forgiveness.”

“You said you don’t want my love back, you only want our friendship.”

“I didn’t say that. I said if you can’t love me back, can we at least continue being friends,” he rectifies.

“Our friendship had benefits. I don’t understand how you want to be friends with a whore,” she says.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know how I’ll ever take those words back, because I truly value our friendship and I love you,” he says.

She sighs and stays silent for a moment. He’s staring at her, desperately wanting her to grant him forgiveness.

“Please give me one last chance. If I mess things up this time I’ll let you leave,” he begs.

“You’ll let me leave? This is why I don’t like you, Thakasa!”

His eyebrow knit. “You don’t like me?”

“Yes, I don’t like you at all. I don’t know why and how I fell in love with you. I’m a grown ass woman, you can’t ‘let me’ do things that concern my life. I’m not your child.”

He looks down and chuckles.

“Okay, I’m sorry about that too. Do you think maybe we need a relationship counseling?”

“No, I think you need to change Manqele,” she says.

His lips stretch into a smile.

“Wangibiza kamnandi.”

“Mxm! What did you bring? I’m hungry,” she asks turning around to walk away.

“Yima kancane,” he takes a deep breath and tightens his grip around her leg. “Who is Njabulo?”

She frowns, “Huh?”

“Njabulo? What is he to you?”

“He’s my colleague. Why are you asking me about him?”

“I’m just curious.” He bites his lip and stares at her. Emotions are locked behind his eyelids. Just the thought of her with another man internally breaks him into pieces.

“Did you...” A deep breath! He swallows hard and forces his eyes to meet hers. “Did you sleep with him?”

“Even if I did, you and I were not together,” she says.

“So you did?” His voice shatters in pain.

“No, I didn’t. But you’re not entitled to my vagina,

refrain from asking me such questions if we are not together.”

He stands up and holds her arm. Their eyes lock, she’s angry at him and somehow it turns him on. He smiles and tears his eyes away from her for a second. He’s blushing.

“Why are you smiling?” She’s irritated.

“I’m just happy to be able to hold you like this again,” he says.

She rolls her eyes and pulls her hand back. But he grabs her again, his hand is around her waist. It slides under her panty, she gasps as his fingers tap onto her cookie jar.

“There’s a child here!” she exclaims frightfully.

“Later are you going to let me check how you’ve been treating her?”

Her eyelashes flutter rapidly.

“Check?” she asks.

“You know what I mean. Can we sleep here, please?”

“I didn’t tell Ma,” she says.

“I didn’t tell MaNtusi either, but that’s what phones are for, right?”

She doesn’t respond but she’s not walking out either. He walks behind her, holding her waist and typing a long text to his wife explaining himself.

Phelo has the lounge to herself and she’s making sure not to leave anything in order. She has the remote in hand that she’s trying to hit the TV screen with.

He bought this house before they had Phelo, there’s so much that needs to be done to make it child friendly.

Nomkhosi takes the remote from her hand and moves her to stand by the couch. Instead of crying Phelo makes a face; she’s a bit cheeky. Thakasa watches attentively how Khosi reacts to it. He’s protective of his daughter.

“Being Baby Nhla’s student is going to get your little ass spanked before you even turn one,” Nomkhosi warns Phelo going over the coffee-table to fix the

mess.

“Who spanks you?” he asks her.

“Nobody. I’m not naughty.”

He laughs, “I can testify against that.”

She rolls her eyes and walks away to fetch the mop to wipe the milk Phelo spilled all over the floor.

He takes Phelo and puts her on his lap. Just like any other child, his phone quickly gets her whole attention. It goes to her ear, armpit and wet mouth. But he trusts his daughter, she wouldn’t damage his phone, right? He puts her on the floor and follows the direction of Nomkhosi.

They bump into each other by the kitchen corner. Nomkhosi frowns,

“Are you following me around and leaving Phelo in charge after what she’s done?”

He grabs her waist and lifts her up. She tries to wriggle herself off his arms but he’s too strong. She gives up and wraps her arms around his shoulders

while her legs wrap around his waist.

“I’m not going to let you fall,” he says with his eyes locked into hers. “Can I kiss you?”

“No,” she says weakly.

He chases her lips with his until she has nowhere to turn her face. They kiss. At first she responds lazily to the kiss, he puts her down and pins her against the wall. His knee goes between her thighs, he tucks her neck in his hands and kisses her deeper. Her energy matches his, their lips passionately lock and their tongues chase one another. His hand grabs her hip, he doesn’t want to let go, he wants to rip her clothes off and lay her right here on the floor.

But they made a little human, she climbs on his leg and he quickly lets go of her mother panting heavily.

“I wasn’t ready to be a father,” he says picking Phelo up. Nomkhosi cracks into laughter. She’s turned on as well, her body always betrays her, but right now it’s Phelo time.

“Uyangichaza Mamakhe,” he says leaning over her face for a quick kiss before Madam Phelo dismiss

the meeting.

Nomkhosi frowns with a smile on her face. “Are you 20 now? What kind of language is that?”

“It’s a love language,” he says.

She shakes her head and walks away with a stupid grin on her face. Everyone close to her will wash their hands with Savlon antiseptic liquid when they find out about this. Snalo may even add Jik...this time she promised them she wasn’t giving him another chance.

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NKONZO

At the house of Mthonga II life is pretty simple. They say a couple that prays together stays together, but in this house they do everything together. They work together, pray together and do life together. Tema’s pregnancy may not be famous at the Mangeles, but really, she’s having a smooth journey with the

unconditional support of her husband-to-be. In the shadows she's being treated like a queen, one thing she loves about Nkonzo is his ability to separate himself from the crowd. As much as he has an element of control and dictatorship, he knows when to stop and let his woman take the lead. Women love feeling like they're in control, so every now and then he takes the backseat and lets Tema do what she thinks is right. Like any other couple, they fight, and hormones are not making it easy. But one of the rules in their house is; no matter how much tension there is, every issue is discussed and resolved before bedtime.

Today he's not sure what he did, hopefully he'll hear it before they go to bed. She dished for him and went to the guest room and locked herself there. He ate dinner alone, it was kind of harrowing. He missed home, how there's always drama with his mother trying to control everything and everyone around the table. But this is part of growing up, his parents lived alone before Thakasa and all of them came. Surely

they had these moments too. As time goes on they'll have a brood of children and this house will be filled with joy.

He stands next to the sink absent-mindedly after washing his plate. If he calls his mother she'll easily catch the sorrow in his voice, and knowing MaKhumalo he knows that she'll ask him to come home and definitely troll Tema for stressing her baby. Her babies are hers to stress and taunt, once other people do the same she comes for them gunblazing.

Soft hands touch his arm. He turns his head, his eyes land on his now calm-looking fiancée.

He doesn't say anything. She stands in front of him and runs her hands on his arm. He releases a deep sigh and brushes over her hand.

"Talk to me," he says.

She stands on her toes and steals a quick kiss from

his lips. He chuckles and steals a kiss from her too.

“You finished my peanut butter,” she says.

He frowns, “No, I didn’t. I don’t even eat peanut butter.”

“Then who finished it?”

“Ghosts, maybe.”

She rolls her eyes and wraps her arms around his waist.

“So I’ve been thinking about our future,” she says.

“Mmmh! I’m listening.”

“Would you ever consider moving away, maybe to a different province or country?”

He frowns.

“Why are you asking me this?”

“Because I think it would be good for us if we moved somewhere else after the wedding. I can’t be your brother’s PA my whole life, and you definitely don’t want to be walking in your father’s shoes and working under your brother your whole life, right?”

“Not right, I actually don’t mind. That’s our children’s legacy,” he says.

“So we are stuck in Mandeni our whole lives?” she asks mournfully.

“Baby...” He releases a sigh, “I know you’re not used to a big family and sometimes things get too much, but I’ll protect your peace at all costs.”

“That’s not the point. I want us to move away from everyone. Let’s buy a house in Durban or Pretoria, open another branch of Mthonga Holdings on the other side of the country. That would make your father proud as well,” she says.

“I don’t know, babe. That would be a huge step, I’m not even sure I want to be away from my family that much.”

“Can you at least think about it? I’ve seen how families get involved in people’s marriages and ruin everything. This is my second marriage and I want it to be the last. If anything ever happens I want to take full responsibility for it. I want it to be my fault, or yours. I don’t want to hate somebody, especially not

anyone from your family. And I think that's possible with some distance between us."

"I hear you, I'll think about it. Was there anything else bothering you?"

She sighs, "Yes, the peanut butter."

"Babe, the more you eat something, the quicker it finishes. Can this baby come out already?"

"You were in no rush putting him in there. Keep the same energy!"

"But today I want to rush you," he says.

She frowns, "Rush me?"

"Hanky-panky!"

Can he rush already? This promises to fulfill the peanut butter cravings.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 85

NKONZO

It's just a few weeks before he gets married. Nerves have kicked in, he feared this stage of life but there's no doubt in his heart that he's found a good wife. Before he takes time off work he needs to discuss his future with Thakasa. He's still in his office, before leaving Nkonzo goes to him with leftovers of his lunch.

"You and MaDube are driving separately today?" he asks as Nkonzo occupies a seat.

"Bandla lifted her, I have to go somewhere before going home. She hates the road and she needed to rest."

"I thought you would've told her to resign by now," he says.

Nkonzo chuckles, "I don't think that's what she wants. We've never talked about it but I think even if she resigns it would be because she's found another job."

"She's pregnant though. You make enough money for her to stay at home and not wake up everyday like umfazi wephanta."

"She will take maternity leave when it's time. I'm actually here to discuss something with you."

He raises his eyebrow. He's trying to finish what he's doing quickly, everyone has knocked off except him. This better be quick.

"We've been thinking about moving to Pretoria after the wedding," Nkonzo says.

"Honeymoon?" he asks.

Nkonzo shakes his head, "No, permanently."

"I don't understand," he says.

"Remember we once talked about expanding the company. Maybe I can move away and work on that."

“Even if we expand the company we’d open a branch here in KZN, not Pretoria. And we would have to employ full staff, we can’t just split.”

“Okay, maybe then I can just find a new job that side,” – Nkonzo.

“Both you and I refused to let Bandla move to Durban after graduating. Who changed the script and made it okay for you to leave? This is our father’s business, a legacy for our children, and I’m not going to run it alone. If you move away then Bandla has every right to resign and go for his dreams too.”

“But I have played my part...”

“Who didn’t? I started working here at the age of 23, my father was just a manager. I had a degree and he still insisted on me working here as an errand-boy because he knew this place would be a legacy that we’d pass down to our kids and grandkids. 14 years of hard work and you think I haven’t played my part here? If that’s how things work then I should be the first one to leave.”

He nods and eats his food. He's not that disappointed, he wanted to give it a try for Tema's sake. He loves having his own place and privacy, but he's never thought of being a thousand miles away from home.

As far as the management of the company and family matters go, Thakasa has the final word. It is what it is; Tema has to forget about Pretoria and accept the package that comes with marrying a Manqele.

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THAKASA

MaNtusi is lying with her feet on his lap. It's almost 23h00 and neither of them has gotten any sleep. Seeing how free Thakasa was, she told him to get the massage oil and massage her feet. Men's hands should always do something, he can't just sit there and stare at her.

“I think you were right about MaDube,” he says and takes a deep breath.

She raises her eyebrow, “What did she do?”

“Nkonzo wants to move to Pretoria. If it was Bandla I would’ve understood because he’s always hated the village. Nkonzo and I were hell-bent in keeping him here and we succeeded. Now all of a sudden he wants to move to Pretoria and even considers resigning.”

Shut the front door!

Her eyes are widen out of their sockets.

“I knew she was going to do something like this. This girl was born in Ghana, raised in Tembisa, married at Inanda Township, got divorced and moved to Mandeni. Now she’s marrying Nkonzo and you think she’s going to stick around? She’s a vegabond.”

Thakasa chuckles, “No, I think she’s just scared of commitment. She can’t even commit herself into staying in one place.”

“And marriage too,” MaNtusi adds and rolls her eyes. Yes, she understands that her first husband was abusive, but still, Tema doesn’t have what it takes to be a wife, a Manqele one for that matter. Khanyo can survive, she trusts her. Khosi as well, she’s family-oriented, which is a necessary quality of being a Manqele.

“Let’s see how Nkonzo handles this one. I hope she will go ahead with the wedding and accept her fate. I don’t want it to go to the point where my brother has to choose between his legacy and her. He really loves her,” - Thakasa.

“Whether she leaves or not the child she’s carrying is a Manqele and will be raised as one.”

He pulls her other foot and squeezes the heel while rubbing the arch. “I hope it doesn’t get to that because I really like her, I wouldn’t want us to fight, I know what she’s been through in life.”

“I thought you’d put Nkonzo first. He’s your brother for crying out loud. He’s been through a lot too.”

“What has he been through?” he asks with a chuckle.

“You should know what he’s been through instead of knowing what your PA has been through. Look at yourself!”

He laughs, “You’re making me look like a bad brother. Am I done now? I’ve massaged both of your feet.”

“I want some-more,” she says.

“You never give me some-more when I ask,” he says pushing her foot off his lap.

“You’re not being truthful. When have I ever denied you some-more?”

“Not even some-more, you’ve been denying me sex and I don’t even know what I did wrong because I hit any spot you tell me to hit.”

She playfully kicks him, “Stop! You’re abstaining, it’s good for your health.”

“Abstaining?” He raises his eyebrow.

“Well, in this bedroom. I don’t know when you are in Waterways.”

“Come on, our connection was great, you’re thicker and tighter. If staying away from that leads to good

health than I'd rather get sick."

She laughs, "Then who'd father our children?"

"Nkonzo," he says and clears everything and lies next to her. There's something important he needs to tell her, and maybe now is the only right time to do so.

"MaNtusi," he holds her hand and rubs her fingers.

Here it comes!

"I know Manqele, you two are back together," she says and heaves a sigh.

"Ummh, yeah. But there's something else." He's staring at her, trying to read her emotions.

"Okay, I'm listening."

"I want to send a delegation to ask for Nomkhosi's hand in marriage."

"Did she agree?" she asks.

"No," he says.

She frowns.

“How are you going to do that?”

“I’ll just do it. If she turns them back then...I don’t know. I don’t want it to look like I’m still doing things behind your back, you gave me your blessing to marry her, not to fool around.”

“I don’t think that’s smart, but you’re a grown man and you know your girlfriend better than I do.”

“Thank you,” he says and pulls her closer. He kisses her lips and looks deeply into her eyes.

“Don’t ever doubt, even for a second, that I love you. You’re my forever,” he says.

“Prove that to me.”

“How?”

“Event-planning.”

He sighs, “Not now. Can we talk talk about it after you’ve given birth?”

“What if we talk about it and you don’t agree? I need your word. Are you going to let me pursue this and see where it goes?”

“We are about to have two kids, if you insist on doing it then we are going to lay some ground rules. Like how many jobs you can take and which days you can’t compromise because of work. I want my kids to grow in a warm home with their mom around.”

“I promise I’ll always put them first,” she says.

“And me too, right?”

She laughs, “Yes, my first son.”

“Your first son is cold. Please warm him a little bit, maybe we’ll be able to sleep afterwards.”

It’s very late, Londa is asleep and they’ve talked about everything, there’s nothing they can do except having some adult fun.

“How bad do you want it?” She rubs his leg with her foot.

“Very bad. If I get access I might sleep with Mthonga inside you.”

“Let’s see if you’ll remember all that or you’ll pass out.” She gets up, kneels and pulls his short down.

He inhales sharply as her hand massages around his

manhood. His hand reaches to her nipples and tweaks them. Hers wraps around his manhood, slides down to its base and swirls up to the head. He pre-ejaculates and howls. "Oh, yes!"

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It's Friday morning, everyone is getting ready for work except Snalo who took a day off to spend time with Maqhingga who just recently came back to life. Things have settled back to normal, there are no more riots at the taxi rank, so they released the security guard. When the man who rang the intercom introduced himself as Phelo's grandfather they just opened the gate without thinking twice.

But it's not just one man, there are four of them. They leave the car outside the gate and stand just two feet away from it reciting the Ngidi clan names.

"What's going on?" Phumzile asks tying her gown and rushing down the staircase.

“Maybe Ndlalifa is pulling a prank,”- Maqhinga.

“No, that sounds more serious,” Khosi argues. She was just getting her phone and car keys, ready to go to work.

Phumzile goes out to check followed by Maqhinga. Her brows furrow when her eyes land on four men in suits with their heads bowed by the gate.

“This needs you and Ndlalifa,” she says taking a step back.

“Who are these people?” – Maqhinga.

No answer.

She rushes back inside the house.

The girls look at her with their eyes widen.

“Who was expecting people?”

“Me. Aramex delivery people,”- Snalo.

She looks at Khosi, “And you?”

“No one,” she shrugs.

“There are people here and they look like

abakhongi.”

Eyes widen!

“Is it Phelo’s father?” Both of them ask Khosi simultaneously.

“Ummh...no. I don’t know anything about this. It can’t be them!” There’s so much confusion on her face. Her and Thakasa didn’t sleep together even though they slept in one house. They talked about him changing his character and possibility of therapy. Nothing about lobola was mentioned.

“They’re the only Manqueles we know. One said he’s Phelo’s grandfather,” Snalo says.

“Okay, let me call him and find out what’s going on.” She quickly unlocks her phone and notices a new message alert.

It’s from him:

“I’M DOING THIS BECAUSE I LOVE YOU AND I KNOW YOU DESERVE BETTER THAN WHAT YOU’VE BEEN GETTING. I FEEL LIKE I HAVEN’T BEEN BREATHING

SINCE I WOKE UP, PLEASE SAY YOU KNOW THEM.”

“Wow, Thakasa!” she’s stunned.

Snalo and her mother are glaring her. Maqhinga is walking back in. They need answers.

“Yeah, he sent them,” she says in a shattering voice and kicks off her shoes and marches up the staircase angrily.

“I can’t believe this!” – Snalo.

Maqhinga sighs in defeat, “Do I let them in or give them a date to come back again?”

“Let them in, I think you can all negotiate here then lobola can be delivered at the Nseles. Call your brother and uncle, they need to be here as well.”

This means everyone’s day is canceled. What’s confusing everyone is how come Khosi didn’t know anything about this? Are they back together again? She’s upstairs in her room and not willing to explain anything to anyone.

Ndlalifa arrives. Everything is happening fast and unexpectedly. He had to go find Nhleko from his place of work and beg his boss to give him a few hours off.

Maqhinga has put a chair on top of the table and sat high, which is disrespectful in front of the guests. He's not drunk, what's gracing his childish mind?

"Bafo put the chair down and sit," Ndlalifa says in a firm voice.

Nhleko doesn't know how to discipline Maqhinga. He feels like it's not his place. He just met them and doesn't know them that well.

"I'm only getting down if they give me inkwelamthini," Maqhinga says.

Ndlalifa frowns, "What???"

"Shhh!" He places his finger over his lips. There's ingqaqamazinyo that needs to be paid before any of them speak. He's been sitting here for almost an hour with his mouth shut, Ndlalifa mustn't come with his stupid ass and ruin his game.

“Let him be,” Nhleko tells Ndlalifa.

They sit on the chairs. Maqhinga remains on top of the table.

Greetings are exchanged and introductions begin. Ndlalifa doesn't look happy but this is about his sister's feelings, not his. He has to accept Thakasa as his brother-in-law whether he likes him or not.

“We would like Mr Ngidi to climb down so that we can talk, and also open his mouth with whatever amount is required,” one of the men says. He goes to the same church as Thakasa, one of Manqele Snr's oldest friends.

Ndlalifa has never done this before, and Nhleko on the other hand wants him to take the lead.

“R500 both,” he says.

Maqhinga's face turns purple. Wtf is wrong with Ndlalifa?

“Mmmmh mmmmh!!!” he points his finger at him angrily. He can't break the rule and open his mouth now. If Ndlalifa is clever enough he'll increase that

amount immediately.

“Okay, R1000,” - Ndlalifa.

Still cheap, but better than R500.

A bag full of money is taken out. One man counts ten R100 notes and places them in front of Ndlalifa.

“We ask for Mr Ngidi to climb down and talk to us,” he says on his knees.

Ndlalifa looks at Maqhinganga and he climbs off the table immediately.

“You need to count as well,” he tells Ndlalifa.

Ndlalifa is not bothered nor impressed by the money, or anything that’s happening here.

“Okay, okay, I’m here now. We can start, remind me which flower did your son see here? We have many of them,”- Maqhinganga.

“Her name is Nomkhosi Nsele but she lives here, so we were asked to come here and get the directions from the family.”

“Okay, 11 cows,” – Maqhinganga.

“This is not our first time here, Hlomuka. We did pay the first three that included ukugeza umuzi.”

He laughs, “Oh, that means you owe 8 now.”

Nhleko clears his throat, “I cannot recognize any of them. Maybe they’re different Manqeles or even chancers. Kindly call your sister and let her confirm to us if she knows these people or not.”

Ndlalifa stands up before Maqhinga. He wants to see Nomkhosi, she has to look at him in the eyes and confirm to him first.

He finds her barefooted and pacing around her room like a madwoman. She sees him walking through the door and stops.

Heavy sigh!

“I know what you want to know,” she says.

“Okay, then tell me,” Ndlalifa.

“He was genuinely sorry and I gave him one last chance. I gave him a hard time though, he still needs to prove himself to me.”

Ndlalifa frowns, “So this is part of him proving himself?”

“I think he’s just scared that I’ll leave him again,” she says.

“Can’t you leave him after he’s paid lobola?”

“I can, trust me.”

“Then what’s the point?”

She sighs, “Respect, that’s the point.”

“Alright then, let’s go. They’re waiting for you. Cover your head, the point is respect after all.”

He’s disappointed in her, and he has every right to be, she’s been venting to him about her relationship problems ever since Phelo was conceived.

She wraps a scarf around her head and goes downstairs to join them in the lounge. It’s the same men who were comforting Thakasa on the day of Sqalo’s death.

“Are you well, ndodakazi?” Nhleko asks.

“Yebo,” she says with her eyes dropped.

“These people are calling themselves the Manqueles and they were sent to you. Do you recognize them?”

Fuck you, Thakasa!

This stunt is one of many reasons why they always fight.

“Do you?” - Ndlalifa.

Deep breath. In and out!

“Yes, I know them,” she says.

“Thank you, that’s all we needed to know from you. You may go.”

She walks out and murmurs a curse. It’s done now, there’s nothing she could’ve done differently because it would’ve led to drama.

She gets inside her room and shuts the door. Now more than ever, she’s scared. She just accepted a marriage proposal, soon she’ll be someone’s second wife and someone’s sisterwife. Not to mention being MaKhumalo’s daughter-in-law.

LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE

THE END

Thakasa woke up in Waterways, today his daughter is turning one year old. It's been exhausting weeks of planning and endless fights with her mother. Yesterday they finally agreed on everything and focused on getting ready for the 1st birthday of their princess. MaNtusi helped by organizing décor, her event-planning passion is growing and there's nothing Thakasa can do if she helps plan family events.

The party starts at 12 but they're awake before 6am and panicking. Thakasa has been on some strict diet of some sort; eating a lot of fruits and peanuts. He's attending the gym and leading a surprisingly very healthy lifestyle. Both Nothile and Nomkhosi have talked about it, they actually find it hilarious and believe it's just a passing phase.

He steps out of the shower with a towel wrapped

around his waist and goes to Nomkhosi wrapping gifts on the bed. She's wearing a gown, and hopefully there's only her underwear beneath it. Phelo is still asleep, she woke up at 2:44 and kept her father up until 3:30. Nomkhosi was deeply asleep, he knows how important sleep is for her beauty so he didn't disturb her and just stayed up with Phelo alone.

"I didn't sleep well, yazi."

Khosi raises her eyebrow, "What happened?"

"Sphephelo was up and playing at 2am," he says.

Nomkhosi laughs, "That's been my life for a year now. Welcome to my world!"

"Ah, come here and welcome me properly." He pulls her off the bed and kisses her lips. Their sex life is kind of slow, it took her a week to let him in after the lobola negotiations, after that it happened once in a blue moon. Things are better and brighter at MaNtusi's bedroom, that's where he gets satisfied the most.

"This is a very important day to me. You wiped out

all the insecurities and doubts I had about my manhood. I pride in myself very much for this day," he says to her.

"And you're doing a great job as a father. You're present, I'm happy knowing that my daughter has a different life from mine. I thank you for that," she says.

"She's my life." He unwraps the towel and stands in his birth-suit.

She's seen him naked many times before, but not in the morning while their daughter is sleeping in the next room. She could wake up at any moment.

"A year ago on this day you went through unimaginable pain delivering what I call iSphephelo sami today. I want today to be different, I want your body to experience the complete opposite of what you were experiencing last year."

A huge swallow! His shaft is already thick and bouncing up.

He bites the side of her neck. A moan escapes her throat. Then he whispers; "Please allow me to say

hello.”

“Okay, but we have to be quick, Phelo will wake up any moment from now,” she says with her neck stretched. His tongue licks her flesh and sends tingles throughout her body. He unties her gown and finds her bra-less, he squeezes her nipple and rolls it with his thumb.

“You know that you are about to become my wife, right?” He looks into her eyes while brushing the back of her neck and playing with her nipple.

“Yeah,” she says with a moan.

“So you have to understand my needs when I’m sharing a bed with you. There’s a drought season in this bedroom, things have changed. Don’t you feel me anymore?”

“I do feel you,” she says in a low whisper.

“Then why do you reject me? You’re scared of falling pregnant?” He slides her panty to the side and rubs her clit with the head of his shaft. It’s wet already, he rubs between her folds and bounces it up on her clit again.

“Huh?” He locks his eyes into hers. She’s where he wanted her to be; horny AF.

“Your comments are still stuck in my head; what you said about me the other day. Sometimes I just feel like you invite me here to do things you can’t do to your wife.”

“And what are those things?” He inserts one finger in her core and rotates it inside her. She’s dripping wet and he’s bursting with lust, but this is the conversation they need to have.

“Do you really want me to go into details?”

“Yes. I want to know if anything we do makes you uncomfortable. I said what I said out of anger, you said you were going to look for another man and I didn’t want that. I don’t want you to sleep with other people, if it was up to me I’d hunt every man who’s put their things in you and chop their heads.”

“Why does it matter if we are not an item?” she asks.

“I don’t want to share you and it makes me happy to know that you’ve been faithful to me. It makes me comfortable to share myself with you and go as far

as I can.”

“Okay, I hear you.”

He kisses her lips and pulls down her panty. He needs her in full display. They’re standing in the passage because Phelo slept in their bedroom. Doors are locked and it’s still early in the morning, there’s no possibility of anyone arriving at the moment.

“Let’s go to the couch,” he whispers to her and lifts her to his waist. He takes her to the lounge and lays her on the couch with her legs separated.

He goes down on her. A few licks send her to the cloud of joy. He muffs her until she bursts on his face.

Quickly, before she bounces back, he inserts his shaft and pushes it until his balls balance on the perineum.

“Last year pushed harder, so today I’ll fuck you harder. Okay?” He smiles down at her.

“Okay,” she smiles back.

They share a brief kiss. She feels his shaft poking in the depths of her core and lets out a shallow scream. He lifts her leg to his shoulder and pounds her like he aims to rip her core into pieces.

Her brain starts floating. She can't make out what she's saying to him or where sensations are pulling her. Her orgasm builds up faster than she expected, she sees double of his bearded face before losing control of her muscles.

"Ah, baby!" he cries and increases his pace. He lets her leg down and lies on top of her; breathing her air with their bodies sweating together.

He slams inside her harder and grits his teeth firmly before letting his body loosen up. His cum fills her core, he grunts loudly and pushes his shaft further inside her.

They're still lying on the couch with their bodies collided onto one another. A loud cry comes from the bedroom, Nomkhosi moves under him trying to break free.

He holds her down, "Wait, you're going to break my

penis.”

“Oh, sorry!”

He chuckles and pulls out. His hand brushes her cookie-jar and gives her clit another rub. He plants a soft kiss on her lips and gets up.

“I’ll check on her, don’t worry.”

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MANTUSI

Everyone is ready for the princess’ first birthday. Even Phethy is home- that’s how huge it is. Mawande will meet everyone at the venue, which is Thakasa’s backyard at Waterways, there’s been some talk that she’ll be bringing Bhambatha to the party. It’ll be his first time attending a Manqe family event and hopefully there won’t be any issues. Both families are now aware of his relationship with Mawande.

Khanyo has grown comfortable with everyone, except Thakasa of course. Chances of them ever getting along are slim, both of them are stubborn and neither one of them wants to bow down for the other. But they can share a dining room and watch TV together, that's something right?

MaKhumalo is not hard on her as they thought she would be. Maybe it's because Khanyo doesn't take anything to the heart, she has a strong unbreakable character.

"Oh my goodness, look at this boy!" she chimes happily and takes Londa from MaNtusi's arms. She's gaining a lot of weight, but that's not a comment you can make to someone like her. Whatever she's eating in Bergville is not good for her body.

"He's now getting fat again." But it's a comment she can make to other people because she's Khanyo. She's commenting on Londa's weight. It's not offensive to make weight comments on babies, right?

Talk about a pot calling the kettle black!

"He's naturally big," MaNtusi says.

“Yeah I know, my mother was big too. Can I leave with him? Bandla and I are going now, I’m sure he’d love to get there earlier. Angithi baby?” Londa just stares at her.

“You can’t call him Bandla, your kids will do the same thing. He’s Manqele and Bandla in your bedroom,” MaNtusi tells her.

“Come on, that’s his name mos,” Khanyo argues.

“I’m also Nothile but you don’t hear Manqele calling me like that in front of people. You are hereby instructed to start practicing calling your fiance Manqele.”

“Oh damn, okay madam!”

She laughs, “Now you know. Let me get this boy’s bag then.”

She gets the bag from her bedroom and finds Khanyo already waiting outside the car with Londa.

She kisses his cheek and bids them goodbye. She’s almost ready too, she’ll be following them in a few minutes.

She goes to her bedroom to wrap her head stylishly and put her earrings on. Thakasa is calling...

“Manqele,” she answers.

“MaNtusi where are you? I thought Londa would be here by now, other kids are already here and Phelo’s brother hasn’t arrived.”

“He’s coming with Bandla, I woke up late,” she says.

A heavy sigh!

“You’re still home?”

“Yes but we are about to leave. Just waiting for Nkonzo to come and get Ma, then Phethy and I will come with my car.”

“Okay please hurry up. Come with warm clothes for later, it might be cold.”

“Alright, bye!” she ends the call.

Where was she? Okay, earrings.

Her face is oily. This is going to be one of those ugly pregnancies. She powders her nose and applies

mascara, that's enough make-up for the day. Alright, good to go!

Nkonzo has arrived. Hopefully MaKhumalo is done dressing up, she can take forever but you can't recognize any effort when she's dressed up. No shade!

She walks into her standing in front of the mirror and adjusting her dress.

"Ma, are you done?" she asks.

"Not yet, tell Nkonzo to give me a few minutes. I can't be ugly in my granddaughter's pictures, what if I don't get to see her next birthday?"

"Don't speak like that, Ma. You're still going to wait for all our children and their grandchildren," MaNtusi says and leaves to deliver the message to Nkonzo.

He's not anywhere in sight, that means he's in his rondavel. Not a place she'd go to randomly, in fact not any of her brother-in-laws private spaces, unless if it's necessary.

She knocks at the door which is slightly open. There's no answer but she can hear that someone is inside.

"It's MaNtusi, I'm sent by Ma," she says.

There are footsteps.

He opens the door and drops down his eyes. Too late, she's already seen that he's been crying. So weird for a new husband!

It's been only a month since he got married, he's staying with his wife, everything should be okay. There was no drama in their wedding, it was beautiful and memorable.

"Is everything okay?" she asks.

"Yeah, tell Ma I'm coming in a few minutes." He attempts to shut the door but her one foot is already inside.

"Nkonzo what's going on?" She walks in and stands with her arms folded staring at him. She's not leaving until he tells her the truth.

He releases a deep sigh and goes to sit on the bed.

“It’s hard,” he says and buries his head in his hands.

She waits.

There’s no explanation coming.

She asks, “What’s hard?”

“Proving myself to someone everyday. I feel like I’m drowning, and when she says sorry I forgive, but then she does the same thing all over again. I don’t know what to do anymore. I’m just trying my best.”

“What is it that she does?” This needs her to sit and the only place to do so is the bed.

She sits and looks at him trying to fight back tears.

“Little things she does. I understand that she’s been hurt before but we are married now, there should be a difference between a doubtful girlfriend and a wife. I can’t be trying to win my wife’s trust, she’s married to me.”

“Nkonzo this is the honeymoon phase, you are not supposed to be crying. You should be happy.”

“My happiness is always short-lived. I never thought once I move out of home I’d miss my family this

much.”

She rubs his back, “Maybe it’s the pregnancy. Give her time, if she continues with her attitude even after giving birth then you’ll have to make a decision.”

“What decision? I’m married, I vowed to love and stay with my wife.” He’s looking at her with moist eyes. He’s the most free-spirited brother out of them all. He laughs a lot and makes sure everyone around him is okay. Seeing him so broken because of Tema is infuriating.

“Take another wife or move back home. That way you can get all the support you need and maybe she needs a few lessons on how to act as a Manqele wife.”

“I can’t take another wife because the first one is not behaving. What if the second one does the same thing? I will take a third one again. I’d rather work things out with her and give it my all.”

“Then move back home. Doors are always opened for you.”

“I don’t know, I’ll see as time goes on.” He blows out

a sigh and wipes his face. He can put a smile on throughout the day, hopefully Tema won't raise their private issues in front of his family because it'll become their issues too.

"Thank you," he says and looks at her. "What about you? Are you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Just cravings and nausea, nothing hectic."

"You and my brother?"

"Everything is good."

They exchange a brief stare.

"Trust me, all is well," she emphasizes.

He nods, "Okay."

"Let me go before MaKhumalo thinks I've been swallowed by MaGumede's tikoloshes."

Nkonzo laughs, "You two will be arrested for gossip one day."

"It's not a secret, everyone knows about the tikoloshes," she laughs and walks out.

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This looks bad. Everyone is here, her and Phethy are literally the last ones to arrive. She has to find Nomkhosi and apologize, it wasn't intentional at all.

She organized the décor and she's happy about it. It screams, "The Princess Birthday." Kids are already running around with balloons. There are clowns entertaining them with their funny dances and all kinds of games. It's just a kids thing, they're here as adults to congratulate Khosi and Thakasa for raising a 1 year old.

She bumps into Mawande. Looking all good, no head-wrap today, dating Bhambatha must be amazing.

"Hello Mrs Myeza," she says.

Mawande smiles, "Hey, you're late."

"What did I miss?"

"Your mother's prayer."

They both laugh. Sounds just like MaKhumalo!

“Where is Nomkhosi?” she asks.

“I think I saw her getting inside that room,” Mawande shows her and walks on to wherever she’s going.

She’s been to this house before. It’s a double-storey with sliding doors, double garage and a spacious kitchen that’s occupied by a two-door fridge and Miele appliances. It hurts that she got all this while she was just a side-chick, and she was slaving in the tiny kitchen with Hisense fridge for his family. But she’s forgiven them, right? She has to get over it. She’s getting her own house too, Thakasa will make up for it.

The door is open, she lets herself in and walks into Thakasa shoving his tongue down her throat. His hands are squeezing her butt. It’s a private moment but....

“Ummm...hello,” she says.

The kiss breaks quickly. Neither one of them can look at her in the eyes.

“I wanted to apologize for being late, Mawande didn’t tell me you had a company.”

“Sorry about this, I was just getting my cellphone and...” Phewww!

“And he kissed you. It’s fine you are becoming his wife too. Is everything okay? Food and drinks?”

“Yeah, I have people taking care of that,” Nomkhosi says and grabs her phone. Thakasa is still standing with his eyes dropped. She makes her way out and tells MaNtusi to follow her to the balcony once she’s done.

Her husband stands there, next to the bed, with his erection poking out.

“You’re not going to greet me?” she asks him.

“Hi,” he says.

“Hi, are you good?” She chuckles, “Why am I even asking? You are clearly not okay between your legs.”

“This feels awkward!” he sighs.

“And it’s the life you chose for us. Heal and come join your daughter’s birthday.” She turns around and

walks away.

It's not their party. They just sit and watch kids play. Some parents are helping their kids with games, Phelo is snuggled on her uncle's hip, Ndlalifa. She's still caught between two men; her father and her uncle.

It's not awkward as she thought it would be having the Mangeles and the Ngidis under one roof. There's no obvious tension, MaKhumalo and Phumzile have shared a few jokes.

Phelo has aunts, uncles, cousins and a grandfather. And every one of them looks sophisticated and monied. It's a lot to take in watching everything going down. Nomkhosi has brothers, they hold her hand and joke with her. Her mother looks happy today, sadness is still there in her eyes but you can see that she's a happy mother.

Her and Thakasa have so many things in common, one of them is having the family love and support. Yes Khanyo is there for Londa, Mawande and Phethy

too, but that's different. Nomcebo doesn't have what all these aunts have. Their lives are different, even different from Mawande's because she has brothers who'd kill for her.

Damn, she shouldn't be sitting here comparing her life to others on her husband's daughter's birthday!

"Thank you," someone says.

She snaps out and looks at her. It's Nomkhosi.

"Thank you for helping me raise her, and for allowing her to have a father. It takes a real woman to do what you did for me. I feared she wouldn't have her father around because of how she came, least did I know that she'll grow up with two loving mothers." Gratitude is written in her eyes. Everything she felt walking into this house fades away. Nomkhosi may have it all in the eyes of a stranger but she's had her own difficulties with life too.

"You're welcome," she says.

A deep breath and a chuckle.

"And thank you for allowing me in your husband's

life. I know it's not easy but just know that I'll never intentionally disrespect you. I know who you are and where you stand in his heart. I've known that from day one, he's never made it a secret."

A deep breath from her too.

"It'll take time to get used to it, especially now that he's yours as much as he's mine, but we'll coexist. You inspire me in so many ways, I'll enjoy having you in my life."

"Role model?" Nomkhosi asks with a smirk.

"Well, kind of."

There's some commotion. It looks like there are people disturbing the party. Police?!

"What's going on?" they ask one another. Thakasa is rushing to the braai-area where most guys are gathered.

The police are going there too.

What the hell?!

They pull someone aside.

“Who is that?” Khosi asks.

“Mawande’s brother-in-law slash husband. This is bad!” – MaNtusi.

It looks like they’re taking him. Mawande runs after them asking where they’re taking him. She’s crying and begging.

MaKhumalo has her hands over her mouth. What a shame!

Everyone is asking questions, nobody has answers.

“Thakasa khuluma!” his mother shouts.

Being the eldest also requires you to know everything, you just can’t be clueless even when situations don’t concern you that much.

“They are taking him to the station to ask about the traditional doctor’s death, Nxumalo.” He looks different, not in a good way. More like he’s about to murder someone.

“Wait, who?” someone asks from the crowd. She has a baby strapped on her back, she’s the only normal-

looking woman from Khosi's side of the family. No weave, no make-up, no high-heels and no Zulu minced with English.

"Nxumalo, he was killed a few months ago," Phethy answers.

MaKhumalo gives her a look. She's supposed to be in the jumping castle or playing swings. This is an adult matter.

"He was killed. Oh, wow!" Thamente looks rather impressed. She pushes her way to where her husband is.

That man cannot go to jail for killing someone who stole 25 years of her father's life. That can't happen!

"Babe," she pulls Ndlalifa to the side.

"I'm standing with other men. Can't you stick with women and see me later? I'm not going anywhere."

"Oh, stop! Someone just got arrested."

"Taken to the station for questioning, not arrested," he corrects her.

"Whatever! You know he's being accused of killing

Nxumalo.”

Ndlalifa frowns, “Nxumalo?”

“The one and only. I need him to be saved, whether he killed him or not, he’s innocent.”

“Okay, and how am I supposed to make him innocent if he’s not?”

“The same way you do for your shady dealings,” she says.

“What? I have no shady dealings.” He’s laughing. His wife has spoken, even though he has no idea who the guy with tattoos is. He did something not even Ngidi was brave enough to do- killing Nxumalo. Justice needs to be served.

The killer is innocent!

REPERCUSSIONS OF LOVING BEYOND THE TEMPLE KHANYO

You know when you're hurt and trying to heal your pain by being angry at the particular person. Yeap, that's me right now. I'm angry at Gugu for disappearing on us. We had a deal, in fact she made a deal. She was going to inform us before leaving and then contact us to let us know where she is, how long she'll be there and brief us on everything that happened. We are left with so many unanswered questions. Strangely Mike has been confirmed to be still in prison, which leaves us with so many questions. Why did she leave the country if Mike didn't escape from prison? What's the real issue here? What's going on?

Nolwazi is stressed as I am. I'm worried, hurt and disappointed. For years this girl was my pillar of strength, she assumed the role of a bigger sister even though she's the same age as me, that's how protective she is. It was our turn to protect her and I

guess she didn't trust us enough. I have connections too mos. Well, I mean I can get them if I want.

Anyway, moving on. I'm taking the girls out for lunch, and by the girls I mean Mawande and Phethy. I'm their rich brother's wife-to-be. He asked me to work on getting to know everyone better. I already know the Mufasa of the family, and Tema has told me everything about Nkonzo. God help them work everything out! I understand why she's scared, it's something she can work on and I'm glad Nkonzo is with her every step of the way.

So now I have to get to know Mawande and the little brat better. I know a brat when I see one. Birds of the same feather recognize one another. I was like her growing up, minus passion and money.

"What's this restaurant?" she asks looking around with a huge grin. She loves things too!

"Royale, Bhambatha's friend owns it," Mawande says. It sounds like she's bragging, which is definitely very fitting. It's a huge milestone to have beach

restaurants owned by black people.

I take the opportunity to ask. I'm here to get to know them after all. "How is Bhambatha?" I ask.

"He's good. Great, actually."

"Did those police officers apologize for accusing him of murder?"

She laughs, "Do that ever happen in this country? The wife changed her statement, apparently there was no one at their home that night. Strange enough!"

I'm not judgmental, I know nothing about the law except that no one is above it, but this sounds too shady. The wife was threatened, period! Now I'm scared of this Bhambatha person.

"I'm happy for him. Now he can take care of you and give you some love," I say.

"Well, he wants me to move in with him. That means I'll be moving to the suburbs soon." Her face beams with joy.

Funnily her sister is rolling her eyes. I've never

sensed any close relationship with them, which is strange because they're the only girls in the family.

"Are you two okay?" I'm older, I can discipline them.

"Yes," Mawande says.

Phethy yawns, "Really? She doesn't know shit about me and she doesn't give two fucks!"

Okay, language Nazareth princess!

"What do you mean?" Mawande frowns. She's shocked as I am.

"Do you know me?" Phethy asks her.

She's still frowning, "Duh! You're my sister."

"Because we share parents, other than that you don't give shit. Even Sqalo didn't like me, only Bhut' Nkonzo and Sis' Tema care about me in this family."

Wow, okay!

She grabs her drink and noisily drinks from the straw.

"Yeap, yeah, that's the truth. I'd excuse you Sis' Khanyo because you are yet to become my family legally but you also don't care whether Bhut' Bandla

checks on me or not. Do you ever ask him about me?"

I can't believe this!

"Yes, I do. I ask if you're fine and doing well in your studies," I say.

"And that's it? How about he takes a phone and calls me to say good morning or good night?"

Honestly I don't know how to defend him. In their eyes she's still a little baby, I don't think they give too much attention to her life.

"Can we talk about this?" I look at Mawande and she nods.

"Phethy what's your main issue with her?" I can't believe I'm the peacemaker in this family.

"She cares about all my brothers. I don't know if I'm the problem or they are. I've never seen my sister as someone I can lean on to, before she even got married she was closer to all the siblings except me."

I look at Mawande, "Were you aware of that?"

“No,” she takes a deep breath. “It was just natural. I always get along with people older than me.”

“Sqalo was older than you?” Phethy.

“He opened up to me. Maybe I don’t know how to be a sister to a sister. I don’t know.” Mawande hurts easily. I can pick hints of heartbreak from her voice.

“It’s not too late. You guys can still try, you’re one blood, you can’t hold grudges against one another.”

She nods and looks at Phethy.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know you felt like that. I’m going to make an effort.”

“Start by listening to me telling you about my boyfriend.”

Ummm...I don’t think so.

“A boyfriend?” Mawande is a Manqele after all.

“Yes, we are just cruising.”

“Are you a boat now? Are you having sex with him?”

“Not yet.”

“What do you mean yet?”

“I don’t know if I want to try it or not. I promised Nkonzo I won’t do it.”

Wait a minute, what on earth?

“Nkonzo knows?” I ask.

“Yeah, he caught me red-handed.”

Mawande and I look at one another stunned.
Children of today!

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My house is next to Nkonzo’s. Yes, my house. Bandla still lives here and he’ll keep this house even after the wedding as our place of sanity. I change into a shirt dress; one of the few clothes that still fits me. It’s still early, Bandla comes home around 5. I have to catch up with Tema before coming back to start with dinner. I don’t know why I didn’t bring something from the restaurant.

Nkonzo's house is not even five minutes away. I do need a bit of exercise to get back in shape.

I know the balcony door is never closed so I use it to enter.

"Girlings!" I yell making my way to the kitchen. Nkonzo told me to be comfortable in his house, I open the fridge and grab two slices of Parmalat cheese.

"I thought you'd be back late," she says coming from the room, dragging her feet. She's now heavily pregnant and walking like a penguin.

"No, Mawande had to go somewhere. How are you?"

"I'm good, just exhausted from sleeping all day."

"Missing work?" I ask.

"Yes, and my husband."

"Oh, okay! Woza nazo." I pull the chair and sit. I haven't seen her mentioning her husband with a smile in a long time.

"Basically, we've been talking to some elders. I understand why he's frustrated with me. I just wish

we could've dated longer before jumping into marriage, but we are progressing."

"Progressing?" I ask curiously.

"I know what he doesn't like and he knows my triggers. We've connected again, sex life is good."

"Okay, I'm a child stop."

She laughs, "I'm telling you. He's even canceled taking me to the village."

I roll my eyes. I'm a bit disappointed, I thought Nkonzo would force her to go and become a village wife too.

"Give him more attitude," I tell her.

"And go live with MaKhumalo and MaNtusi? No, thank you. I'd rather behave and see them on Christmas."

"Why do they scare you so much? Especially MaKhumalo because she loves you," I ask.

"Everyone is into each other's business, I'd be crazy if I stayed in such environment. I don't want my mother-in-law involved in my marriage. I already

have insecurities and trust issues, my confidence would be crushed. It has taken a lot for me to love again.”

I nod, “Yeah, I understand.”

That sharp abdomen pain again.

“Don’t you have pain tablets? I’ve been having this sharp pain in my abdomen,” I ask.

“Let me check. How long has it been there?” She goes to the drawer and takes a bottle of pills out.

“Since morning, but it’s not that bad, I just hate pain,” I say.

I get off the chair and pour myself a glass of water. I swallow the pills and feel the immediate need of the toilet. What did I eat at the restaurant? There was nothing strange mos.

I get in the bathroom and sit on the toilet-seat. I’m pushing but nothing comes out. When I check myself before flushing the toilet I notice a very sticky fluid dropping from my cookie. Hebana!

“Girl, you need to take me to the doctor. Something

is wrong with me.” I’m trying not to panic.

“What’s wrong?” she asks.

“I don’t know whether it’s kidneys or bladder or stomach, but I’m in pain,” I say.

She’s confused. So am I.

I feel bad for making a pregnant woman drive but I have no other choice. We drive past my house, I grab my jacket and phone from the charger.

There’s only one man seeing the doctor with us. The nurse registering coming patients quickly assumes that Tema is the one with a problem.

“It’s me who’s here to see the doctor,” I say.

“Oh, sorry. Can I have your name and surname?” I fill in my details and pay upfront.

“What are you here for? You’re sick?” she asks.

“I think so.”

She’s confused. Who wouldn’t be?

“I have pain in my kidneys or bladder or stomach. It’s somewhere there, and I had a very weird fluid coming out of my vagina,” I say.

She looks at me from head to toe. Nurses and thinking they can see HIV crawling on your skin!

“Follow me,” she says.

We follow her to the room, she tells me to sit on the bed and Tema on the chair.

After a moment she comes back with the BP monitor and thin white tube.

I get my BP checked and stand on the weight scale. Bandla has it in the bathroom but I’ve never cared to check. I close my eyes and wait for her to tell me to step down. My weight is for her to know, I know how I look.

“Please pee and take this test.”

Umhlola!

“Pregnancy test?” I’m in awe.

“Yes, please hurry. Sisi, just keep an eye on her for me,” she’s telling Tema.

Wow! Tema accompanies me to the toilet to take the pregnant test. I'm not liking this. I can't be pregnant now. I have a wedding coming up and many great things.

I give it to her to hold while I wash my hands in the sink.

I hear her gasp.

"What are the results?"

"Two lines."

No ways! This test came with its lines.

"You're pregnant!"

"I know what it means." I don't know whether to faint now or wait until I get home.

This nurse already knew. She doesn't look surprised at all.

"So I'm pregnant?" I ask.

"Yes, and giving birth."

Now stop the sun and everything. This woman got jokes!

“Please remove your underwear and lie in the bed. Doc is coming to check how far you are, I’ll book you into the hospital.”

“I’m not pregnant,” I say.

“You are pregnant.”

“Yes now, but I haven’t been pregnant to the point of giving birth today.” I look at Tema and she’s more pregnant than me. This is pure witchcraft!

I don’t disobey the nurse, I lie in the bed and wait for the doctor. Tema steps out of the room and names calls. The doctor comes and does his things to me.

“You’re giving birth today. Your contractions are close now. You’ll be admitted to the labor ward immediately.”

I still don’t get it.

“How can I be pregnant and not know for nine months? Where was my belly?” I ask.

“Do you have PCOS?”

“Right now I don’t have anything, not even my common sense.”

He chuckles, “Do you have a normal menstruation circle?”

“No, you know how birth control injections are,” I say.

“You weren’t conscious of the pregnancy signs. Hormone fluctuations and polycystic ovary syndrome can lead to encrypt pregnancy. Your hCG does not accumulate in a normal way that gives away clear pregnancy signs. It’s a rare pregnancy case but it’s not new. Your baby’s heartbeat is normal and healthy.”

My life is over! I see the life I know and dreamed of flashing right in front of my eyes and becoming history.

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It’s 23h33, I’m lying in the postnatal ward’s bed with a brand new little girl wrapped in the blanket that Tema donated to me. I cried for hours, every nurse

was annoyed by me but I didn't care. They say Bandla fainted when he heard the news through phone calls. I don't know how true that is. I'm yet to see him. I don't know about him but now that I'm holding her in my arms it has sunk in that I'm a mother. This little girl's life depends on me, there's nothing I can do to reverse the situation, she's mine. These are repercussions of loving beyond the temple.

I keep touching her fingers and then freak out when she moves them. I don't know if I'll be able to sleep. What if I sleep on her little face? The hospital bed is too small for both of us.

Someone is here. I see her through my eyelids folding down. He's standing next to my bed, staring at me and the brand new girl in my arms.

"Khanyo," – it's him.

I open my eyes and look at him. I've never seen his eyes so bulbous.

"I'm here," I say.

“This is her?”

No, it’s not her, I borrowed someone else’s baby.

“Can you believe it?” I ask.

“Now I do. I couldn’t sleep without coming. How are you?” His eyes are on the brand new girl. The fear in his eyes is going to break stitches in my vagina apart.

“I’m good, learning to breastfeed and all that.

Tomorrow you have to go buy her clothes, bath sets, blankets and set-up a room for her.”

“Where must I buy all that?”

“I don’t know. You’ll ask in the mall or get MaNtusi to help you.”

“Okay!” He shuts his eyes.

“They said they’ll provide free counseling for us,” I tell him.

“I’m not stressed or sad. I just don’t know what to say.” He’s tearing up. “Can I hold her?”

“Yeah, be careful.” I give the brand new girl to him.

He lifts her closer to his face and stares at her.

There are thousand emotions going through him.

“Hello Ntandoyethonga.” His voice is lowered, I raise my eyebrow.

“That sounds boyish,” I say.

“No, it doesn’t.” He pulls down the blanket a little bit and continues staring at my daughter. “Hey Ntando.”

She’s only a few hours old, I can’t believe he wants her to return greetings already.

“I can’t believe I’m a father. She’s so beautiful and perfect,” he says and looks at me with a smile.

“When do you think I got you pregnant?” Wow, the pride in his voice!

“Nine months ago,” I say.

“This is a magic baby.”

Well, I agree with that. I undermined the importance of condoms until today.

“Thank you. I’d let you hijack me over and over again.”

“I didn’t hijack you.”

“You did.”

Urgh, Maka Ntando don't get into silly arguments!

THE END!!!

THANK YOU TENANTS.