

INSERT 1

So here I am...

I am getting ready to start my new job, I am beyond excited. I am going to teach at an independent private school in Johannesburg. I am quite excited, and nervous, considering the fact that I have been a public school teacher in Soweto for the last three years. People seem to have a weird perception of teachers. They think we're in it for money (I'm still trying to figure out where the money at), and all the holidays... I must admit though that I love the holidays! I don't even need a damn "leave" because I get to rest during school holidays... Kumnandi shame...

Unfortunately, people don't understand how intense and draining this profession is. Yes, I call it a profession, because I pride myself in it. Every doctor, lawyer, artist and every other professional out there would be nothing without teachers. They got there because a bunch of awesome superheroes facilitated their learning process. Powerful, I tell you... So anyway, like I was saying, people don't understand how draining and intense it is to be a teacher. Every day is unpredictable. We deal with children who come from various backgrounds, who have shocking learning barriers. It is our responsibility to ensure that every single child in the class feels loved, valued, and that they actually learn and are equipped with all the necessary skills to survive in this big bad world. It's not just about teaching them English, or Science. It's about instilling critical thinking skills, so that they are comfortable enough to deal with any challenges they face.

Anyway, today is my last day at Fundani Primary School, and I am going through the most. The thought of leaving these kids is driving me insane. I have become their mother. The love is so deep, that it scares me. I teach Grade 4 English and Life Orientation. My grade 4s are the cutest little things ever, and I am amazed at how much they have grown since I started teaching them at the beginning of the year. It's October now, and 90% of them are now fluent English speakers, and confident little rascals. It warms my heart, really.

My dad was the one who encouraged me to apply to a different school. According to him, I am 25 years old, and this is the perfect time to experiment, and figure out what works for me. My dad and I are quite close. He gets me. He is a business owner. He sells slaughtered chickens, and makes his own plates (pap and chicken), and also sells homemade mageu. On paper, this sounds shady, but I will have you know that his business is successful, booming, flourishing. Think of all those lovely synonyms that describe savagery. What I have learnt from him is that there is always a target market for anything. There are people out there who are not running after expensive food and drinks. My dad caters for those people. People who just want to spend less than 20 bucks to get a lovely (really lovely) plate of pap and fresh chicken. His target market grows daily, and I am very impressed. And people think uneducated people can't rebuild their lives?

I could praise this man 24/7 but I will stick to that for now...

Anyway, today. Last day. Love my babies. Sad day.

I am making my way to the staff room, when I get stopped by my usual “teacher’s pets.” Lol who wouldn’t love to have kids who are always excited (obsessed) to see you, and literally fight each other just so they can carry your bag to the staff room? See, everyone knew that wherever Ms Dlamini was, best believe there would be a mini-crowd surrounding her. Ms Dlamini is me, of course...

One of my babies, Lwazi, quickly grabs my bag before the others can. She laughs at them and sticks her tongue out.

Me: Haike Lwazi, don’t be mean.

Lwazi looks at me innocently and blinks.

Lwazi: You are my mother. They must leave you alone. They must leave US alone!

I laugh as she continues to blink, and then flash that beautiful smile that always warms my heart.

Me: You are ALL my children!

Lwazi grabs my hand and holds on to it. She is so possessive, and the other kids eventually got used to her. As much as I tried not to have favourites, she really made it difficult.

We both walk to the staff room, hand in hand, and she puts my bag in my locker. She turns around and sighs.

Lwazi: I don’t know how I’m going to survive without you.

Me: Aww baby, I’m not going to abandon you.

She gets teary and wraps her arms around me.

Me: I am so proud of how much you've grown. Will you continue to make me proud even though we won't see each other every day?

She nods and we stand there for a while.

"Ohhh savelelwa! You and that child of yours!" The other teachers say.

They laughed as Lwazi and I walked out and made our way to the playground. Honestly, if there is one thing I dislike in life, it has to be old teachers from the apartheid era, especially the ones who think they know it all, but are beyond lazy. They love making it seem like young teachers are a problem, just because we have more innovative ways of teaching children.

We get to the playground and I am immediately surrounded by my boys. Lol I have a very deep connection with boys. I get along better with them. Mind you, Lwazi is still holding on to me. She never fails to let people know that I am taken. Anyway, we stand there and I listen to their crazy and random stories. 60% of the time I am really interested in these stories, but 40% of the time I just pretend as if I'm interested. Kids are the most honest beings in the world. I don't know how many times I have been asked by the grade 1s and 2s why I am gaining weight, why I am losing weight, and why I love wearing dresses, and why this and why that. Honestly, you can't work with kids if you have a low self-esteem; because it would be easy take all these raw yet innocent questions personally. They don't have filters, and I love that. They know more about my inconsistent weight than me. They tell me when I am dressed to kill, and when I look a hot mess.

You want an honest opinion? Get yourself a kid. Brutal creatures, I tell you.

It's now 2:30pm and the tears have been flowing since 12pm, when it hit me that I won't be teaching these rascals. I have received hundreds of letters from kids that I don't even teach...

I'm with my grade 4s and they're busy delivering speeches about me: how much I have changed their lives, and how much they will miss me. The principal even organized a special assembly for me earlier... It was all so emotional...

I was now in the staff room, and the teachers had given me my gifts and popped a bottle of cheap champagne for me. I was done packing my things and I was now ready to leave. I said my goodbyes, and walked out. The school was now empty. Lwazi was obviously waiting for me. We were going to

walk together. She lived a few streets from me. She took my box of letters and we began walking... The sun was scorching hot, but it wasn't something we were not used to.

She is a yellow cute child, and she always wears her heart on her sleeve with me. Till this day, I am still shaken by our deep connection. If I could adopt her, I would.

Lwazi: Dad left again...

I sigh.

Me: How are you?

Lwazi: I'm more hurt about you leaving, than him.

Me: But Lwazi, you do understand that I'm not abandoning you, right?

She shrugs.

Me: I'm going to see you regularly, and we will still have our ice-cream dates.

She smiles and flashes her dimples.

Me: Nothing will ever come between us.

Lwazi: Okay mommy.

We both laugh.

Lwazi: At least I can call you that in peace now. I don't like sharing you.

I laugh and wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: You're too special.

She giggles and we continue chatting as I walk her home.

As soon as I got home, I took a bath and lay on my bed for a while, trying to cool off. It was now around 5pm.

There was a knock on my door, and I told that person to come in.

Dad: You won't believe how much I made today!

I chuckled.

Dad: R1500!

Me: Geesh how is that even possible?

He laughed happily as he walked out and closed the door. Shame, I'm so happy for him. I reached for my phone and saw that I have a missed call from Nikiwe, my best friend.

I call her and she immediately answers.

Me: Niki

Niki: Be ready in 30 minutes.

Me: I'm so tired-

Niki: Sisi ayifuni mina leyo. Get ready.

Me: Hmkay.

I dropped the call, and sighed. It has been an emotionally draining day, and I thought I'd cancel my plans with Niki, and just watch series while tucked nicely in bed. Unfortunately, this best friend of mine does not take no for an answer.

I get up and get ready... What to wear? Hmm... I pick a simple body hugging olive green dress, and black pumps. I am so far deep into this pump movement, that no one can tell me anything. I don't care if your feet get stinky occasionally... It's nothing a few secrets socks can't fix. I wash off my clay mask, and moisturize my face. Just then, my phone rings, and I answer without checking the caller id.

Me: Nikiwe, I'm almost done. Geesh sisi wenza kakhulu.

Person: This is not Nikiwe.

Me: Huh?

I check the caller id and roll my eyes.

Me: Hello Derek.

Derek: How are you?

Me: Good.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

I could literally die right now. I don't even remember this guy properly. All I know is that Niki, Wendi, and I were out one night, and we ended up getting a lift from him. He took us home, and I gave him my number. Now he is pestering me.

Me: Uhm listen, I have to go.

Derek: Any plans for tonight?

Me: Not really hey. Just gonna stay in.

Derek: Oh okay. Would you lik-

Me: I have to go. My dad needs me. Bye.

I end the call, and finally decide to block him. Weirdo.

I fix my face a bit. Add a little makeup here and there, just to confuse enemies.

Once I'm done, I call Niki and she answers.

Niki: The Uber is 3 minutes away. Phuma.

Me: K.

I end the call and get my bag and jacket. As I walk out, my mom walks in.

Me: Sthandwa.

Mom: Hello baby.

Me: Niki is on her way. I'll see you later.

Mom: Okay. Just be safe.

Me: Of course.

I walk out and find my dad packing up his tables and chairs. This yard has turned into some low cost restaurant. Good for him.

Me: I'll see you.

Dad: Have fun.

Me: Bye.

As I close the gate, the typical white Corolla stops right here. Niki lowers the window and smiles.

Niki: Hiii!

My dad waves and I walk to the car and get in.

Me: Sanibonani.

Niki: Heyii

Me: Someone's in a good mood...

The Uber driver chuckles and greets back.

Me: I'm sure this has been the loudest trip you've ever had. Thank goodness I won't be the one receiving 2 stars tonight.

Niki: Ahh man Zizi kanti why unje?

The Uber driver laughs quietly and continues to drive.

Me: We could have easily stayed at home and watched something.

Niki: But si-young. Si- fresh. Si-hot. Si-great.

I roll my eyes.

Niki: Don't be a Negative Nancy, please.

Maboneng was Niki's recent obsession. Now, her obsession had to be my obsession, whether I liked it or not.

I grunt as I sink back and look out the window...

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We get to the Maboneng and the Uber drops us off at Love Revo. We get a table upstairs and order our drinks.

Niki: I'm sure today was emotional.

Me: Too much.

I sigh as I think about my babies. I just wish I could put all of them in my bag and keep them forever.

Niki: How are you feeling about starting your new job?

Me: I'm just glad that I start the week after next. I need to rest and gather myself first.

Niki: How I wish I got a week to rest.

I chuckle.

Me: Is your work husband still bothering you?

Niki: Yazi I just don't understand why he would tell me he wants to be with me, and then turn around and act all cold.

Me: Friend, we all know that crap never works out. You can't date someone you work with.

Niki: Ya, but I don't work with him directly. He is in another department.

Me: Kuyafana.

Niki: Gosh.

Our drinks come and she makes her way downstairs to the bathroom. My phone rings and I answer after checking the caller id.

Me: Bongani?

Bongani: Hey, how are you?

Me: I'm well, thanks.

He laughs quietly. He always says I have my snobbish moments, especially when I say I'm "well" instead of saying I'm "good."

Me: How are you?

Bongani: I'm great. Ukuphi? It's quite noisy there.

Me: Love Revo.

Bongani: Is it?

Me: Mhm.

Bongani: I'm at Shakers.

Me: Is it?

Bongani: Got here about 30 minutes ago.

Me: Oh okay.

Bongani: I'll see you later.

Me: Sure.

Bongani: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I ended the call and took a sip of my drink.

Bongani... Hmm we will cover him later...

A few minutes later, Niki came back up, dancing to the music being played.

Me: I'm sure you got caught up downstairs.

She laughs happily and sits down.

Niki: We should go to Shakers once we're done eating.

I roll my eyes and she hisses.

Niki: I should find myself another bestie.

Me: One who will go with you to all these rowdy places.

Niki: Yazi you act like you never enjoyed this lifestyle.

Me: Once upon a time. In varsity. I'm over crowds now.

Niki: You're allowing yourself to age.

I ignore her and focus on my drink. About 30 minutes later, our food comes and we delve in. Her phone rings and she walks off to find a quiet space. I'm so used to this girl, that her actions don't shock or offend me anymore. She's a social butterfly, and loves this nightlife lifestyle. Me on the other hand, I can only take it in small doses.

She comes back after a while with Nelly, one of her other random friends. They sit down and I smile blankly.

Nelly: Hey Zi.

Me: Hello.

I'm trying by all means to not show annoyed I am. Niki knows very well that I hate being bombarded by random people. If I make plans with you, you have no right to drag all these other people into the situation without my consent.

Anyway, I finish up my drink and excuse myself. I make my way downstairs and go to the bathroom. As I walk out, I bump into Bongani, who was walking out from the male bathroom.

Bongani: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Hey...

We share a hug and walk out.

Bongani: Are you still at Revo?

I nod grudgingly and he frowns.

Me: Let's just say I'm tired, and I need a bed.

Bongani: Any specific bed in mind?

Me: Today was my last at school.

Bongani: Hmm. How were your kids?

Me: Emotional, of course.

Bongani: Who are you with up there?

Me: Niki.

He nods and scratches his head.

Bongani: I'm about to leave now. You want to-

Me: Don't even ask!

He laughs as I walk back to the restaurant and make my way up the stairs. I get to the table and look at Niki and Nelly, who are busy planning their night.

Niki: Friend, I think we should go to Shakers.

Me: Go ahead. I'm going home.

She frowns.

Me: I'm getting a lift from a friend.

She looks at me suspiciously.

Nelly: But it's not even 10pm, girl!

I ignore her and look at Niki.

Me: I'll see you around neh?

Niki: Uzoba-right?

Me: I'm a big girl.

She stands up and we share a hug. I then give her money, for my share of the bill.

Me: Bye bye ke.

Niki: Bye, boo.

Me: Bye Nelly.

Nelly: Bye!

I roll my eyes as I walk and make my way to the ground area. Bongani is nowhere to be found. I walk to Shakers, and see him at a table close by. He says goodbye to his people, and walks to me, with another girl. They get to me and he smiles.

Bongani: Ready?

Me: Yep.

We then make our way to his car. I realise that this girl is those North types. Snobbish and stuff. She sits in the front and I gladly go to the back and sit comfortably. Once we settle in, Bongani starts the car and off we go.

Bongani: By the way, Ziyanda, this is Melissa. Mel, this is Ziyanda. Ms Dlamini.

He chuckles and glances at me from the rear view mirror.

I was not about to acknowledge her. She gave me cold vibes from the get go, so I don't have any kindness to waste. I take out my phone, and play my usual Smurf game. That's how dull my life is. You will never find me chatting on Whatsapp, which I sincerely dislike. I'm legit that girl that is so focused on developing her career, that she doesn't have time for any other disturbances. I can't focus on multiple things at a time.

So yes, I am single. As single as they come.

Melissa: Where do you live, Zinathi?

I continue focusing on my game. I'm sure Zinathi will tell her where she lives.

Bongani: Ziyanda vs. Zinathi. Come on now.

Melissa: Oh I'm sorry. Ziyanda. Ziyanda. Okay. Got it.

She turns and faces me, with a smile.

Melissa: Where do you live?

Just then, my phone rings and I answer without checking the caller id, relieved that I won't have to interact with this snob.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Speaking.

Person: Hey, it's Derek.

Me: Really though? I'm busy.

Person: I ju-

Yoh I drop the call and grunt loudly. I mean really, this guy is a problem now... I'll deal with it later...

I focus on my game, and keep my mouth shut.

Bongani: Everything okay?

Me: Yep.

I glance at him and nod.

Melissa: So you're from Soweto?

Me: Yes.

Melissa: B, are you dropping her off?

Bongani: No, I'm dropping you off.

I look up and laugh to myself when I see her face.

After a while, we drove to Sandton, and dropped her off at her house. People have nice life problems out there, hey.

Bongani: I'm not an Uber driver. Woza.

I get out and sit at the front.

Bongani: Melissa is a lot.

Me: You don't say...

He keeps quiet and we drive in silence for the rest of the way. He drives in his complex, and we make our way out.

We get inside, and I sit on the couch and text my mom, letting her know that I'm safe. I then switch off my phone and focus on what's playing on TV. After a while, Bongani approaches me and gives me a drink.

Me: So you're serious about these cocktail classes?

He laughs.

Bongani: And you're the best guinea pig, because your feedback is brutal. Proper government teacher.

Me: You idiot.

I laugh as I take my first sip. He then looks at me excitedly as I take another sip.

Me: Hmm...

I take another sip and look at him.

Me: Is there Oros in here?

He nods.

Bongani: So?

Me: I like it.

I take another sip and nod.

Me: It's nice. I love the Oros.

He smiles proudly as he stands up and gets himself a beer. He comes back and we watch TV. I finish up my drink, and ask him for another one.

Me: Good job!

He makes me another one and sits down again.

He looks at me.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm okay hey. Same old same old.

He wants to say something, but he stops himself. I know he wants to ask me questions, so I can open up to him, but that will never happen.

Me: Are you well?

He laughs quietly.

Him: I am well.

Me: Good.

We watch some more TV, and we both finish our drinks.

Me: I'll take a quick shower.

He nods absentmindedly as I stand up and walk to the bedroom. I get my towel and make my way to the bathroom. I get in the shower, and reflect as usual.

I finish lotioning my body, and put on my pyjamas. As I clean up, he walks in and takes off his t-shirt.

Him: I can't believe Mehgan beat up those two girls at the same damn time.

I laugh.

Me: Amazing. Quite inspiring, really.

I had gotten him to love watching ratchet shows like Bad Girls Club, Love and Hip Hop, Real Housewives of ATL etc. At first he judged me, but after a month or so, he eventually warmed up. Now, he is a proud ratchet TV show lover. He takes the fights so seriously, more than me, at times. I love it!

Him: I mean, can you imagine if we did the same thing in SA? Got a bunch of angry girls to live in one house for a few months while the cameras roll?

Me: I'd definitely enjoy that.

He walked to the bathroom and cleaned himself up. I switched on my dialled Niki's number. It rang for a while, but she answered.

Niki: Hiiii!

Me: I'm guessing you're having fun?

Niki: Yaas! You're missing out!

Me: I was just checking on you.

Niki: I'm good, friend.

Me: Hmkay then. Bye.

Niki: Love you!

Me: Love you too.

I end the call just as Bongani comes back, and sits on the bed, lotioning himself.

Bongani: You really are a secretive person, hey. It's crazy.

Me: People don't need to know everything that takes place in my life.

Bongani: Not even your closest friend?

I smile.

Me: Nope.

He shakes his head in awe and finishes up.

Bongani and I have known each other for about 5 months now. We're friends. Yes, we're friends. It's a chilled vibe really, and I like it this way. I don't concern myself with what's happening in his life, and he doesn't as well. We meet up a couple of times in a month: watch cartoons and ratchet reality shows, drink his cocktails, and have sex occasionally. That's it. Everything just flows nje.

INSERT 3

When I wake up at around 7pm, I glance at Bongani, who was fast asleep. I stare at him, analysing every part of him. I notice a birthmark just below his belly button, and I find myself touching. It's funny how I'm an observant person, but somehow, with Bongani, I've managed to distance myself. I didn't know I was capable of doing such till we found ourselves in this arrangement. It makes things easier.

He opens his eyes and blinks a couple of times before looking at me.

Me: Morning.

He yawns and pulls me back down, so I'm lying on my back next to him.

Bongani: Why are you up, touching my groin area?

Me: I noticed a birthmark.

He yawns again and keeps quiet. I glance at him and realise that he fell asleep again. I get up, and make my way to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Once I'm done, I walk to the balcony, and sit on the couch.

Derek... How am I going to deal with that imbecile? Do I continue to ignore him until he gives up? Do I call him and tell him to leave me alone? Do I meet up with him, and tell him, face to face, to fuck off?

I shall go with the latter. I switch on my phone and read the messages I got from Niki, telling me that she had a good night, and was safe and sound. Lol safe and sound where exactly? I'll call her later to find out, once the hangover has stopped torturing her. I go to my contacts, and call Derek.

I expect it to ring for a while because it's still early, but I he shocks me when he answers.

Derek: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Derek. How are you?

Him: I am well, thank you. How are you?

I chuckle. I know Bongani always makes fun of me with this I am well thing, so I'm glad Derek is also within my team.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: I'm here.

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, thanks. Uhm listen...

I sigh.

Me: Can we meet?

There is silence for a while.

Me: Hello?

Him: I'm here.

Me: I'd like us to meet.

Him: When and where?

Me: I'm in Rosebank now.

Him: No problem. What time do you want to meet?

We decide on a time and place, and I end the call.

Great. I'll finally end this nonsense, and be able to live freely. There's nothing more annoying than feeling like someone is constantly trying to disturb your peace.

Bongani: It's Saturday, and you're up. You're annoying.

I laugh as I look at him, standing by the sliding door.

Me: Haibo go back to sleep.

Him: You've disturbed my peace.

I frown and he chuckles.

Him: I'm gonna make us breakfast.

Me: Great.

He walked back in and I sat there, enjoying the crisp morning breeze.

It was now around 11am, and both of us were showered and clean.

Me: See you later alligator.

Bongani: Bye Ms Dlamini.

We shared a hug and I got my bag.

Bongani: As usual, the orgasms are highly appreciated.

Me: I've ghat you.

I get out of the car, and he drives off. I put on my shades and smile to myself. Ahh I am in such a good space... No drama, no pettiness.

I have outpouring love from my family and friends, a career that completes me, and a few orgasms here and there. Who wouldn't want such? I cherish this space.

Which is why I need to deal with this person who is trying to disrupt my vibe...

I walk in the restaurant and he sends me a text letting me know that he is outside. I make my way there, and I have to try by all means to keep a straight face.

The first and last time I interacted with this man, I was tipsy and all over the place. Now if my memory serves me right, he was not like this... I don't even know how to describe him...

I clear my throat, and he looks up from the menu. I stare at him, and he stares back.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Derek.

He smiles warmly.

Him: Have a seat.

I sit down, and put my bag on the other empty chair. Thank the heavens I have these shades, because my eyes are popping.

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He frowns. He is so masculine and... I don't know... Handsome, perhaps?

Him: Just okay?

I nod absentmindedly. Just then, the waiter clears her throat, and I focus on her.

Waiter: Anything to drink, ma'am?

I cringe when she calls me that. I always tell my babies not to call me that.

Me: I'll have water, please.

She nods and then smiles at Derek.

Waiter: Are you good, sir?

Derek nods dismissively and looks back at me seriously. I shift uncomfortably, because this stare is a bit intense. He's looking at me like I'm some foreign object that he is trying to figure out. The waiter is nowhere to be found at this point.

Derek: Do you mind taking off your sunglasses?

Me: My eyes.

He frowns.

Gosh he really likes to frown.

Derek: What about your eyes?

Me: They are sensitive.

Derek: Hmm.

I desperately need water right now.

We sit in silence for a good minute. He is just looking at me, as if he is waiting for me to say something.

Oh, yes. I'm the one who called this meeting, right?

I clear my throat and look at him.

Me: Uhm the reason I asked to meet-

His phone rings, and he puts up his finger to stop me.

The nerve!

He switches it off and puts it down, then looks at me.

Derek: I apologise for that. I was unaware that it was on.

Yhu. I take a deep breath, and the waiter finally comes and I literally snatch the glass of water, and drink up.

Me: Do you mind bringing me a jug?

She nods tightly and then looks at Derek, who is still looking at me.

Derek: What are you going to eat?

Me: I've already eaten.

Him: Are you sure?

I nod and look at the waiter, who is rolling her eyes. This heffer...

Me: I'll just have the jug of water.

Derek: I'll have two well done eggs, and a slice of tomato.

Me: Geesh.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Nothing.

I decide to mind my own business, while he continues making his very specific order.

After a few minutes, the waiter walks off, and we are back to the staring contest.

Derek: You were saying?

Me: Oh ya. Listen, I'm not comfortable with your phone calls.

He immediately raises an eyebrow, and I'm not sure if he's trying to suppress a smile, or what.

Derek: Is it?

I nod.

Me: I would appreciate it if you would stop.

I finish off my water, and stare at him. He seems to be deep in thought. He is so weird.

Derek: My calls make you uncomfortable?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Do you mind telling me why?

Me: You call me every day. We don't even know each other. It's weird.

Derek: So you want me to call you less?

Me: Uhm no. Just stop calling me.

He is quiet for a few seconds.

Him: I'll be honest with you...

He brushes his chin lightly, and bites his bottom lip.

Him: I don't think I can... or want to, for that matter.

Hehe imihlolo.

Me: Haike.

Him: As brief as our interaction was that night, I genuinely feel drawn to you.

I stare at him in shock and confusion.

He keeps quiet and then sighs.

Him: However, I will respect your wishes.

He finishes up his drink, and looks at me more softly.

Him: I apologize for coming across as creepy or too persistent.

Me: Uhm thanks...

Suddenly, I feel guilty. I don't even know why.

Him: So you felt the need to tell me this face to face?

I nod, and stop myself. I always reprimand my babies for nodding, so why am I nodding so much suddenly?

Me: Yes.

Him: Why?

Me: I communicate better face to face.

Him: Is it?

I find myself nodding. Now I'm doubting myself. Do I really communicate better in person? I could have easily sent him a text telling him to disappear, instead of doing all of this. I'm sure I look and sound like a fool.

Him: Okay then. Your message has been received.

Me: Thanks.

I sit there awkwardly, not knowing if I should leave or what.

The waiter finally brings his food, and he delves right in. Now I'm starting to feel like I'm invading his space.

Like I am the imbecile... Imagine.

Me: Uhm I have to go...

He nods lightly and smiles.

Him: Goodbye.

I stand up and get my bag.

Me: Bye.

I walk away and find myself sweating a bit...

I immediately request an Uber, and it arrives in less than 5 minutes. I get in and off we go...

INSERT 4

I had spent the last 24 hours in the house, watching ratchet reality shows, and stuffing my face with food.

It was now Sunday, and my parents were at church. I had just finished cleaning myself, and was about to go back to bed, when I got a call from Bongani.

Me: What's up?

Bongani: I need to see you.

I could sense that he wasn't fine.

Me: Are you okay?

Him: Are you at home?

Me: Yes.

Him: Can I pick you up?

Me: Uhm...

I thought about how warm and comfy my bed was, and sighed.

Me: Okay.

Him: I'll be there in 5 minutes.

Me: 5 minutes? Kanti ukuphi?

He ends the call and I sit on my bed, wondering what the hell is wrong with him. I eventually get up, and get dressed. True to his word, he calls me in five minutes, telling me that he is outside. I thank the good Lord that my parents are not here, because they would not approve.

I finish getting dressed, and then make my way outside. I get to his car and get in.

Me: What's-

I keep quiet as soon as I see his face. He looks like he hasn't slept in ages, and his eyes are swollen and red.

Me: Bongani?

I start panicking, because I've never seen him like this.

He takes a deep breath, and then looks at me blankly.

Bongani: My mom passed away.

My eyes pop out and I keep quiet for a good minute, trying to process this. Why is he telling me this? Yes, we're friends, but are we that close? Where are his other friends? His real friends?

My thoughts are interrupted, when I hear him sob. I shake my head, trying to erase my thoughts, and then look at him. He has his head on the steering wheel. Do I comfort him? Do I say something? I am so used to dealing with children, that I can be quite awkward with adults. We aren't wired like children.

I keep quiet, and let him be. We sit there for about 20 minutes, until he seems to be better. He looks at me, and I reach over to his face and wipe his tears, with my fingers.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods lightly and we are silent again. As I remove my hand, he takes it and squeezes it.

Him: I'm sorry for bothering you.

Me: No, it's ok-

Him: My people are MIA.

I groan in frustration. The friends we keep sometimes... They disappear when we need them.

Me: It's fine.

He doesn't let go of my hand.

Him: Do you mind if we take a drive?

Me: Not at all.

I get out of the car to lock the gate and then we drive off. I keep glancing at him, and I can see how miserable he is. In this moment, I'm busy thanking God that both my parents are still here. I cannot even begin to imagine how it feels to lose a loved one.

We get to a park.

Him: Are you hungry? Sorry, we should have passed b-

Me: No, it's fine. I'm okay.

He nods absentmindedly, and we get out of the car.

Me: What happened?

Him: She had a heart attack.

Me: Did she always have heart problems?

He nods lightly and looks at me.

Him: She was supposed to come see me this week.

Me: Where does she live?

I suddenly feel ashamed of myself. I have been sleeping with this person for months now, but I don't know much about him. Yes, this is good, because it means we maintain a straightforward sex relationship, but how do I not know the person whom I share my body with?

I feel sick. Have I been lying to myself, trying to convince myself that such a relationship is good for me?

Bongani: Are you okay?

I blink a couple of times, and remember where I am.

Me: Ya, I'm just processing this.

He nods and we are quiet once again.

Bongani: So now I have to go home...

I didn't even hear him tell me where he is from.

Me: When?

Him: I'll go tomorrow.

Me: Are you going to drive?

Phela now I'm trying to figure out where home is. Is it another province? Country? Is it here in Soweto?

He frowns.

Him: I'm not going to drive to KZN.

Me: Oh...

I keep quiet.

Me: You'll fly?

He nods, and I decide to keep quiet with my stupid questions.

His phone rings, and he looks at it, angrily. He eventually answers it.

Him: What?

I take out my phone, and see a missed call from Niki. Seconds later, a message comes in.

Niki: You will not believe who I saw! The worm is back in town!

I roll my eyes. Then I remember why I committed myself to such a relationship with Bongani in the first place.

Men are trash.

I put away my phone, when I hear Bongani say bye to whoever he is speaking to.

He grunts.

Me: Everything okay?

Him: My siblings are just being annoying.

I keep quiet. At this point, I have accepted that I do not know this man next to me. For all I know, I could have been sleeping with a serial killer...

Him: I have to go.

Me: Oh okay.

We get in the car, and he drives off. After a while, we get to my house.

Him: Thank you for stopping whatever you were doing just to give me some of your time.

Me: You're welcome.

Him: And I know you're secretly pissed because I've crossed the line.

Me: I mean... It's okay... We didn't really cover what happens when people die and stuff.

I don't know if he's going to take that personally. I look at him carefully, and am relieved when he chuckles, and smiles.

Him: I'll see you around.

Me: Look, I know we're not that close, but if you need a friend, I am here.

Him: I know.

I smile and we share a hug.

Me: See you...

He nods and I get out of the car. To be honest, I am glad he brought me back home. That was very awkward, sad, and confusing.

Thankfully, my parents are not back yet. They'll probably be back in the evening, because after-church gatherings tend to extend.

I pour myself a glass of water, sit on the couch, and read Niki's message again. I snigger angrily as I think about this person who seems to be back in town...

I call her and she answers almost immediately.

Niki: Friend, are you okay? Did my message upset you?

Me: Not even. I'm over that situation.

She keeps quiet. I'm sure if she was here, she'd be looking at me all intensely, trying to figure out if I mean what I am saying.

Me: Niki, it's been over a year. I'm over the worm.

Niki: It came up to me last night when I was at Shakers.

Me: Hmm everything seems to be obsessed with Maboneng.

Niki: Anyway, it asked me how you were...

I keep quiet.

Niki: I almost slapped the shit out of it! The fucken nerve!

Me: Let it go.

Her: Hai suka.

Me: Ya well, it's all over now. It's been over.

She sighs.

Her: Wanna go to Bafokeng to chill?

Me: No thanks. Nikiwe, uxoshiwe ekhaya? Yoh.

She laughs and ends the call.

I finish my glass of water, and sit there laughing, as I think back to where I was, just a year ago...

Hai shame ngifundile.

Relationships can miss me.

INSERT 5

It's now Monday, and I am still chilling at home, doing nothing. I only start my new job the following week. My mom is at work, and my dad is busy outside, with his customers.

It is now around 11am. I have been calling Bongani, checking up on him. He seems better when we talk, and he informed me that he was going to KZN this evening. I told him I'd call him again later, just to wish him well.

I decided to take myself out... I had spent the whole night thinking about "the worm." That one was a real problem in my life yazi. To be honest, I'm surprised I made it out alive nje... The heartbreak was too much!

Anyway, I got dressed and made my way outside. The neighbourhood is chilled, people are at work. I understand why this Loxion Management lifestyle can seem appealing, but I guess people get tired of it after a while.

I tell my dad I am getting some fresh air, and he couldn't care less. He is too focused on his people. I get a taxi to town, and realise a bit later that I am subconsciously heading for Maboneng, which I thought I despised... I guess the place is convenient for us Soweto folk, because transport is easily accessible, and distance is not an issue. Anyway, I get there after an hour, and walk to Chalkboard. I get a table outside, and place an order.

I take out my reading book, and begin reading. This is actually one of my "me time" activities. I go to a restaurant by myself, read a book, write, or mark my scholars' work. The waitress brings my drink, and tells me that my pizza will be ready in 10 minutes or so. I focus on my book again...

A person clears their throat, and I look up.

I try not to roll my eyes.

I am immediately bombarded by his cologne, and part of me melts. I have always loved the way he smells. He flashes a smile, and I just stare at him blankly.

Him: Ziyanda Dlamini... Ms Dlamini...

Me: Hello Siyabonga.

He chuckles and I continue staring at him. This fucken worm. This sleezy, sneaky, sly worm...

He puts down his laptop bag, and sits opposite me on my bench. Life seems to be treating him right. This charismatic idiot.

Siya: I cannot believe this. I thought you're not in Joburg.

Me: Where would I be?

Him: I don't know...

I roll my eyes.

Him: How are you?

Me: I'm well.

Him: I'm also well.

He looks around and smiles.

Him: What are you doing here? Last time I checked, you weren't a Mabo fan.

Me: But you sure love it, don't you?

He rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Me: You seem to flourish here...

He looks at me almost shyly.

Me: Uyafeba phela wena. This was, or probably still is, your playground.

Him: Yoh.

He smiles, something he always does when he is a tad uncomfortable.

Me: Taking a lunch break?

He nods.

Me: Hmm.

I open my book and continue reading.

Him: Listen.

Me: Uh-uh I'm not listening to anything you have to say. I'm reading a very captivating book here.

Him: About what?

Me: The Four Agreements.

Him: Mind summarizing?

I look at him, and see his mischievous smile.

Me: No, actually...

He raises an eyebrow as I close the book and stare at him.

Me: These agreements are said to make life easier.

Him: Is it?

Me: Agreement 1- Be impeccable with your word. Say what you mean. Stick to your word, and avoid using words to speak against yourself.

He nods.

Me: Agreement 2- my personal favourite- Don't take anything personally. Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality.

Him: It's your favourite agreement?

Me: Yep. When I am immune to what others think, say about me, or do around me, I will not be a victim of needless suffering.

Him: Geesh.

Me: So if someone decides to go around handing out his dick to every Benny and Betty around town, I will not take it personally. It's not a reflection of me. It's their issue. Clearly they're fucked up.

He smiles even more, and I know he wants to crawl away.

Just then, the waitress brings my pizza, and I thank her. I then take a bite, and smile at him.

Me: Want some pizza?

He takes one and eats.

Me: I am now on the third agreement. "Don't make assumptions."

I take a sip of my drink.

Me: I should always find the courage to ask questions and express what I really want. Communicate clearly to avoid any misunderstandings.

Him: Hmm... I've never gotten you to communicate properly.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You're a bad communicator.

Me: Mxm.

Him: Seriously, you struggle with opening up.

Me: So was I supposed to open up to your lying and cheating self?

He sighs.

Me: Trust me, it has taken a lot of woosah to sit here, and not throw this drink on you. Trust me, I'm communicating very well right now...

Him: I see Love and Hip Hop and all that other nonsense has deeply influenced you.

Me: Please go. Angazi nokuthi ufunani la. Just go. Nxa.

He chuckles and looks at me seriously.

Him: I know we've been through this, but I'm-

Me: Stop right there... I'm not interested.

Him: Bu-

Me: Uh-uh. I've been done with you. You're a dog.

He rubs his chin again and nods.

Him: Okay.

Me: Hamba ke. I'm sure iphelile i-lunch hour.

He takes another slice of pizza, and stands up.

Him: You're so sour.

Me: Futsek!

He laughs, as he takes his bag, and walks off... Nxa that shady worm.

I focus on my food and try to regain my reading mood, but I struggle. Now I'm thinking about how annoying he is. He has never been one to take things seriously, which is one of the many reasons why I left him...

After 2 hours or so, I decide to leave. I walk all the way up to buy some ice cream at Cocobel. I marvel at how this whole place has been transformed. To think that this whole area was shady... now it looks like a completely different, vibey and safe space.

I bump into Siya again.

Me: You work here?

He nods.

Him: We're renting offices around the corner.

Me: Bye.

Him: Actually, why aren't you at work?

I ignore him and walk away... A minute later, he is driving slowly next to me.

Him: Lift?

Me: You know how cheap Uber is?

Him: Not really. I have my own car.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles.

Him: Come on.

Me: No.

Him: Are you being impeccable with your word?

I stop walking and look at him angrily, but end up laughing.

Me: Leave me alone, you serial cheater.

Him: Low blow.

I turn, and walk away. I then make my way to Main Street to get a taxi...

INSERT 6

It's now Wednesday, and I am still in my chill zone. I must admit that I was getting a bit restless. I miss working, and being busy. Maybe I should go visit my babies? Yes, I will do just that...

I finish cleaning up the house, and take a bath. As I lotion myself, I get a call from some unfamiliar number... I answer it hesitantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda Dlamini?

Me: Yes, this is she.

Person: Hi Ziyanda, how are you?

Me: I'm well, thanks, and how you?

Person: I am great, thank you. You are speaking to Lebo, from Shining Stars Primary School.

Me: Okay...

Lebo: I was calling to check if you are available for our pre-service training.

Me: Pre-service training?

Lebo: Yes, we usually have training sessions for our new educators, to ensure that they feel prepared.

Me: Do you mind if I ask why I'm only informed about this now?

Lebo: We only got confirmation of your post this morning. Our support office is responsible for placements.

Me: Hmm.

How shady... I could even sense her bitchy tone. To me, it sounds like this Lebo person was supposed to call me a week ago, but she didn't. Now she's blaming the head office...

Lebo: Anyway, will you be available?

Me: When did it start? Will I be inconvenienced in any way?

Lebo: No. We only have three new employees, and none of them were able to make it on Monday and Tuesday, therefore, our principal has decided to kick start your training session today. You will not start teaching till that other week. You will observe how our educators teach, and how we do things, before you can start teaching.

Me: Uhm okay.

Lebo: So will you make it today?

Me: Uhm sure. When should I get there?

Lebo: 11am.

Me: Okay. Thanks.

Lebo: See you soon.

Me: Okay, good bye.

Lebo: Bye.

She ends the call, and I stand there, annoyed as hell. How unprofessional!

I check the time and grunt. It's 8am...

I finish dressing up, in a simple yet professional navy dress, and put on a bit of makeup. Once I'm done, I get everything I need, call my mom and tell her what just happened.

Mom: Yoh so now you have to go to Randburg?

Me: Yes, traffic is probably intense.

Mom: You need a car yazi.

Me: Hmm.

I am not even thinking about a car right now. I'm not trying to rush into things, and find myself drowning in debt. I'll probably get a used car for now... We'll see...

Mom: Anyway, uhambe kahle baby. Let me know when you get there. I know you'll be the best.

I smile and say goodbye to her. I then make my way outside...

There's no place in the world I hate more than Bree. That whole area nje gives me so much anxiety. I was now in a queue, and my nerves were doing the most. I hate such crowded places, I have anxiety problems...

Thankfully, I get to Randburg on time, and am able to walk casually to my destination. Part of me regrets making this change, but I know it's all going to benefit me in the end... I just hate how far this place is... Maybe I should get an apartment close to the school? I'll dissect this issue when I get back home.

After a 15 minute walk, I finally get to the school, and it seems like some of the kids are on break. I stop myself from laughing as I think about what my babies would do if they were in such a space. They'd probably be overwhelmed by all this privilege.

I get in, and stand at the reception area.

I see some lady, probably in her 20s, sitting behind a huge concrete desk, and I assume that she is Lebo.

Lebo: Hello there.

Me: Morning.

I walk closer to the desk, and she smiles. But it's that coldish smile.

Me: I'm Ziyanda Dlamini, and I was called earlier this morning.

Lebo: Oh hi Ziyanda.

I smile.

Lebo: How are you?

Me: Great, thanks.

Lebo: Please have a seat. You're quite early...

I don't respond.

Lebo: The other two teachers are not here yet.

Me: Okay.

I walk to the long couch and sit down. I look around... I think I'll like this school; it's very intimate and small.

I take out my phone and text my mom and dad, telling them that I am safe and sound.

I saw a few kids walking around with their hands behind their backs, and smile. Clearly behaviour management won't be an issue here.

After about 10 minutes, I was joined by another girl, around the same age as me, if not the same. She sits next to me and introduces herself.

Her: My name is Lwazi.

I smile, as I think about my baby.

Me: Nice to meet you, Lwazi. I'm Ziyanda.

We smile at each other as we make small talk. I like her. She seems chilled. Shortly after, we are joined by another girl, and she is definitely lesbian. She is wearing a formal shirt, with chinos... I mean, I'm not judging or anything... Well I hope my prediction is correct.

She comes to us and shakes our hands.

Her: Gee. That's my name.

Me: Ziyanda.

Lwazi: Lwazi.

She smiles, and sits down next to us.

Gee: Were you guys also called this morning?

Lwazi: Yep.

Gee: How fucked up and unprofessional.

I chuckle. Exactly, Gee. Something ain't right with this Lebo chick, and I'm never wrong when it comes to shady people.

Lwazi: I had my interview in Pretoria, and they asked me which school I want to go to and I said this one, because it's closer to where I live. So I was very confused when I got a call from Lebo telling me that she only found this morning that I'm supposed to be here.

Gee: Doesn't make sense.

Me: Crazy...

Lwazi: Anyway, we're here now.

Just then, a coloured lady walks in and goes to Lebo. She has a chat with her, and then comes to us, smiling warmly.

Her: Good morning. My name is Camille Billings, I'm the deputy principal.

She is short, petite, and very pretty. You can tell she comes from a wealthy family- probably those coloureds who were spies during the apartheid era.

We all greet back.

Camille: I would like to apologise for today's misunderstanding. Our head support office is responsible for placing employees in all our branches. We had no idea that they had filled our posts here. They only informed us today. I apologise.

At least she's not bitchy like that one over there.

Camille: We usually have pre-service professional development sessions at the beginning of the year, for our veteran and new staff members. However, when I found out this morning that we'd be getting new members, I thought it was important to prepare you guys first, because you will soon find out that this is not an ordinary school. I know its October, but I still want you all to start teaching once you fully understand how things work. I don't want to throw you in the deep end.

Okay. I officially love this woman. She's very calm, but you can tell that she knows what she is doing.

Me: We were quite baffled when we got that call this morning, because it seemed too sudden. However, we appreciate the apology, thank you.

She smiles and then laughs.

Camille: Look at me babbling, while I didn't even give you the chance to introduce yourselves!

We introduce ourselves and shake hands.

Camille: Okay, now that we're on the same page, let me take you on a tour around the school.

Lwazi: Great.

We stand up and follow her.

Camille: This is Lebo Motaung. She is our receptionist. She deals with all the admin, and is basically the face of the campus.

I try not to roll my eyes.

Camille then leads us around the school, explaining the vision and mission of the school. I love every moment of it. I am definitely going to fit in here. All the teachers are young, and the kids seem kind.

We finish the tour, and then go back to reception.

Camille: Lebo, do you know where Ngidi is?

Lebo: He is the Grade 5 computer lab, doing his weekly observations.

Camille nodded and led us to the computer lab.

Camille: Oh, sorry for skipping this space. This is our Grade 5's computer lab. Like I explained, each grade has its own computer lab. We believe that our students (hehe I was shocked to discover that these kids are called students, not kids or children) need as much as exposure to online spaces as possible, because of the current internet buzz around the world. We're grooming them to be functional citizens who will have all the necessary skills to make it.

She smiles as she leads us into the lab. I look around, and see every student sitting quietly, focusing on their computer screens. Others have small whiteboards next to them, and they seem to be working on maths, online.

Camille: Hmm where is this man?

Camille looks around and just then, someone clears their throat, and we all turn around.

Camille: There you are! We have been looking for you!

What the actual hell?

Camille: Lwazi, Ziyanda, and Gee, this is our principal, Derek Ngidi.

I stare at him in shock, and he also does the same.

Njani guys? How did I not know this?

INSERT 7

Derek: Good morning. I assume you're our new teachers?

Lwazi: Yes.

Like, how is this happening? This man is the principal? I am going to be working for him? He's my boss? Njani guys?

Camille: And this is Ziyanda Dlamini.

I snap out of it and realise that his hand is out. I reluctantly shake it and then look at him. He is staring at me, but I can see he's finding all of this amusing. He's not shocked anymore.

Derek: Well I am glad you're all here. We were short-staffed.

Gee: Is it?

Derek: Yes.

He then went on to explain, and I just zoned out again. I just can't believe that this is happening. How is Derek a principal? How did I not know this? Clearly I didn't do enough research.

I feel Lwazi nudge me and I snap out of it.

Lwazi: Girl, what's wrong with you?

Where are Derek, Gee, and Camille?

Me: Nothing.

She giggles and looks at me suspiciously.

Lwazi: Derek is cute.

Me: Hmm not my type.

Lwazi: Really? Did you see that man? Tall, dark, and sexy?

I try not to roll my eyes.

Lwazi: Let's go before they fetch us.

Before we walk out, one student walks to us and smiles.

Student: Good morning.

Me: Hi dear.

Student: My name is Rori. Are you going to be our new teachers?

She is tall, dark-skinned and has long hair- very beautiful.

Lwazi: Yes, we're your new teachers. I am Ms Khoza, your Maths teacher, and this is Ms Dlamini, your English teacher.

Rori: That's nice.

She smiles brightly.

Rori: See you soon!

She walks off and we chuckle.

Lwazi: Clearly we won't have behaviour issues. These kids seemed well-trained.

Me: Yep. Thank God.

We walk out of the lab and make our way to the reception area again. We get there and find Gee.

Gee: Let's get some fresh air. We've been given a break.

Me: I want to start teaching.

Lwazi: Tell me about it.

Gee: And these people seem very serious about training.

We all laugh as we walk out...

It's now around 14:00 and we did some classroom observations. This school really is different, it will take some getting used to, but I am very excited.

We go to Camille's office, and say goodbye to her.

Camille: Thank you for your enthusiasm and cooperation. I will see you tomorrow.

We say goodbye and as we're about to walk out, Derek walks in.

Derek: You're leaving?

Gee: Yes.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

Lwazi: Yes, I love it here!

Derek: That's good to hear.

He then glances at me.

Derek: Do you also love it?

I clear my throat.

Me: Yes.

He nods lightly.

Derek: Goodbye then.

We all say goodbye, and I am beyond happy when we finally step outside.

Gee: Okay guys, I'll see you tomorrow. I live around the corner.

Me: That's nice. I still have to take two taxis.

Lwazi: Konje you're from Soweto.

I nod grudgingly.

Gee: Why don't you move?

Me: I think it's about time hey.

Lwazi: My offer still stands. I live by myself in a two bedroom apartment.

Gee: Why don't you invite me?

We all laugh.

Lwazi: Stop trying to get in my pants, you freak.

Gee: I'll get you one day.

She says goodbye and leaves.

Lwazi: Ngi-serious neh Zi. You can move in with me.

I nod.

Me: I will talk to my parents. I think it's a good idea because I can't be going through the most just to get to work every day.

Lwazi: And you also have to consider weather changes as well. You don't want to travel in the rain...

I sigh.

Me: I'll call you later.

Lwazi: Shap.

We hug each other and go our separate ways. As I am walking to the taxi rank, I get a call from an unsaved number. I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Person: Miss Dlamini.

Me: What, Siya?

Siya: I'm glad you haven't changed your number.

I groan.

Siya: Ukuphi?

Me: Randburg.

Siya: Ufunani e-Randburg?

Me: I work here now.

Siya: Is it?

Me: Mmm.

Siya: Manje uhamba ngani?

Me: Taxis.

Him: Did you just knock off now?

Me: Yes.

Him: Let me get you an Uber.

Me: Hmkay.

Him: Wait, you're not saying no?

Me: I'm being burnt by the sun as we speak. I'd accept a lift from a cannibal freak.

He laughs.

Him: Send me your location.

Me: I don't have your number.

Him: Wow.

Me: Angijoli nawe.

Him: Mxm. Just send it to this number.

Me: Hmkay. Bye.

I end the call and find a spot with some shade. I didn't feel this long walk in the morning, probably because I was so nervous and excited. Hayi liyashisa ilanga. I am being burnt straight, kuphele ukuphapha. I send the worm my location, and he tells me my Uber driver's details, and that the Uber will be here in 3 minutes. I wait, and sure enough, a white Merc comes through. I laugh as I get in.

I text him, telling him that I am safe and sound, then he tells me to enjoy my first Uber Black experience.

I sure did... I had never been in a Merc before.

We get to Maboneng, and I am dropped off at his offices. He is a property developer.

He walks out and comes to me.

Siya: Hello.

Me: Hey.

Siya: You look drained.

Me: I am exhausted.

As much as I love that school, it is very clear that I am going to be working my ass off. I haven't even started teaching but I am drained.

Him: So you changed schools?

Me: Ya.

Him: You want that private school money, huh?

Me: Do I really need it though? Seeing as you're out here getting me Uber Blacks.

He laughs and we make our way inside. He leads me to his office, and I look around.

Me: Still an OCD freak, I see.

Him: And you're still a sarcastic freak, I see.

I roll my eyes and sit down on a long L-shaped couch.

Him: Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

He nods as he goes and sits on his desk, and dials a number on his phone. I hear him ordering food, and then he ends the call. He focuses on his work, while I take a nap on his comfortable couch. A small part of me is wondering what the hell I am doing here, but the other part of me is chilled. I am over this man. Really, I am.

Anyway, the food is delivered after an hour or so, and he brings it to me. He then sits next to me and watches me eat.

Him: So why did you decide to change schools right before the year ends?

Me: I just felt like it.

Him: Very unlike you.

Me: You don't know me.

He chuckles and I eat in peace.

Me: You're not hungry?

He shakes his head and I shrug, and finish my food. Once I'm done, I drink the rest of my water, and give him the empty food container.

Me: Thanks.

He throws it away and then gets back to work, while I walk around the office, checking his space out.

I see a frame with a picture of his younger sister, who is 20 years old. We were very close, but after the breakup I distanced myself. I wasn't comfortable with being around her because she was a constant reminder of him. I needed to deal with the breakup in peace. Part of me still feels guilty for shutting her out like that, but I just had to, for my own sake.

Me: How is she?

He looks up from his laptop.

Him: She's fine, I guess.

Me: You guess?

Him: She hates me.

I frown.

Him: Angithi you disappeared because of me.

Me: She's still mad?

Him: Definitely.

Me: Yoh.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Is she doing well in school?

Him: She has no choice. I am paying for her fees.

I chuckle.

Him: Can't be wasting my money.

Me: You still keep tabs on her?

Him: I will stop once she has a sustainable job.

Me: Hmm.

He focuses on his work again and I go back to the couch and sit down. I take out my diary and begin reflecting on my day. I absolutely love journal writing. It's the only way I can fully express myself, and keep sane.

Him: You'll be happy to know that I still write on my journal.

Me: I'm sure you write about your hoe tendencies.

Him: Yoh.

Me: But I'm glad you didn't stop. Remember how difficult it was to get you accustomed to writing?

He nods.

Him: I'm not as consistent as I want to be.

Me: Well at least you do it.

He focuses on his work and I focus on writing. After a while, I'm done.

Me: I'm ready to go now.

Him: Let me just finish going through this lease agreement.

Me: Hmkay.

He's done in 30 minutes, and I watch him clean up his already clean space. We walk out and go to his car.

Him: So you're not objecting to a lift today?

Me: Nope. I'm too tired to resist.

Him: Hmm let's go then.

We get in the car and drive off...

I take another nap...

It's been a very weird day, and I am scared that this weirdness will not go away anytime soon...

INSERT 8

It is now Friday, and we are knocking off. I can't believe I have been so overworked, that time I haven't even started teaching. Lwazi and I decided I'd sleepover at her place tonight, so I could see it, and make a decision. I had spoken to my mom and she was okay with me moving, but my dad is the one who is giving me problems. He just refuses to let me go, poor man.

I have met all the kids I'm going to teach, and I must say we're getting along. As we say our goodbyes, Camille calls me aside, and we go to her office.

Me: Is everything okay?

She nods and smiles.

Camille: I just wanted to let you know that you have great potential.

I frown. Okay? Random much?

Camille: I can see that you work hard, and I want you to continue being like this. We have a lot of professional opportunities, and if you carry on like this, you will grow tremendously.

Me: Oh wow, that was unexpected. Thank you.

She smiles sweetly.

Me: You just made my day. Thank you!

She gives me a hug.

Camille: I can't wait to be your couch. It's going to be amazing!

Me: Yay!

Derek walks in.

Camille: D, I was just telling her that we recognize her potential.

"D" smiles. My heart. My heart, Lord Jesus of Nazareth.

Derek: We look forward to seeing you grow.

I look at him, and smile lightly.

Me: Thank you.

He nods, and takes whatever he needed from the office.

Him: Have a good weekend ladies. I have a flight to catch.

Me: You do?

I honestly have no idea where that came from. I just... Angazi...

He looks at me amusingly, and I realise that Camille is no longer in the office. Where did she go? Why did she leave me alone with this man? This sexy beast.

Derek: Ziyanda?

I snap of it and clear my throat.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Yes, I'm just tired.

Him: Get some rest on the weekend.

All I can do is nod at this point. I stare at him and sigh.

Me: Derek.

I also have no idea why the hell I just whispered his name like that. I am such a creep!

Him: Yes, Ziyanda?

I exhale.

Me: I feel-

I keep quiet. He stares at me a bit seriously this time around.

Him: I'm listening.

Me: I feel very awkward about all of this.

Him: Don't.

Me: So you don't feel awkward?

He shakes his head and steps closer to me. Heeyi the Devil is trying me!

Him: I'm actually glad that I will work closely with you. You seem to be a good educator.

I keep quiet.

Him: You'll get over the awkwardness once you start getting really busy.

Me: It's going to get busier than this?

Him: Most definitely. This place will test you, and only the strongest survive.

Me: Is it too late to quit?

He chuckles, and I try by all means to keep my body intact. I'm not about to melt here.

Him: Yes, it's unquestionably too late to quit right now.

Me: Shit.

He chuckles again.

Him: And she curses...

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Him: I thought you were perfect.

Me: Uh-

I keep quiet. I want to run around naked at this point. Just run around naked like a mentally disturbed person. Don't even ask me why.

He smiles warmly.

Him: Anyway, have a good weekend. I have to go.

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

He walks out of the office, and I stand there, trying to stabilize my breathing. How the hell am I supposed to see this person every single day? I can't do this! This is not right!

I walk out and make my way outside, where Lwazi is waiting for me.

Lwazi: I have been waiting!

Me: Camille wanted me to resign my contract.

She nods and we walk out of the school. I want to tell her everything about Derek. I need to tell someone. However, I know that this is risky. It could get me fired. I'll tell Niki, because she is not involved and she will tell me the truth.

We get to her place, and I must admit, I love it. It's spacious and has two bedrooms, each with ensuite bathrooms.

Me: This is amazing.

Lwazi: We'll both have our privacy. We only share the kitchen and lounge area.

Me: Okay I'm convinced. I love it.

Lwazi: We can split rent.

Me: Cool. I just have to convince my dad first.

Her: Shap.

Me: Let me take a shower.

Her: Okay.

I walk to the bathroom, her bathroom, and take a shower...

It is now around 7pm. Lwazi is outside, dealing with her boyfriend. She told me that they were fighting... I didn't even have the energy to fully listen to her... I am that exhausted.

I miss Bongani.

I dial his number, and it rings for a while. He eventually answers.

Bongani: Zi.

Me: Hey there, unjani?

Him: I'm okay, just tired.

I sigh.

Me: Ubuya nini?

He laughs and I smile.

Him: Tomorrow night.

Me: So soon?

Him: This place is depressing. I'm leaving as soon as the funeral is over.

Me: Are you sure?

Him: Yes. Everyone is just so mellow. I want to get back to work.

Me: Okay.

Him: I'm going to see you tomorrow, right?

Me: Time?

Him: Probably around 8pm.

Me: Cool.

I guess I won't be spending my weekend resting at home.

Him: Ukuphi manje?

Me: I'm with my future roommate.

Him: So you're serious about moving out?

Me: Ya, the transport thing is tiring.

Him: I think it's a good idea. It's about to move out of your parents' house.

Me: Yeah yeah whatever.

He laughs and I smile again. I feel so sorry for him.

We go on and talk about random things for about 2 hours. We say good night and I go to the lounge, and find Lwazi sitting on the couch, crying. Gosh is this what I'm going to be dealing with when I live here? I am already dealing with exhaustion from work, now I have to comfort a lovesick person? Hai hai hai.

I sit next to her and she looks at me sadly.

Lwazi: How dare he come here and tell me I'm too busy for him? What am I supposed to do? Quit my job so I can cater to him?

I sigh and keep quiet.

There's nothing I hate more than comforting people who are going through relationship problems. I just can't deal with the melodrama. The constant crying and fighting. I'm not in a relationship because I want to live a peaceful life.

I love Lwazi, but do I really want to do this?

She stops crying and goes to the bedroom. Thank God!

I watch an episode of Real Housewives of ATL. I'm so used to watching it with Bongani. I know he'll want to catch up when he gets back, and I look forward to that. He is so drama free, and he gives me phenomenal orgasms.

My brain immediately flashes an image of "D."

Maybe I need his D in my life...

I immediately shake off that thought, and dial Niki's number. She answers.

Me: Friend.

Niki: Hey boo.

Me: You sound like you were sleeping.

Her: I'm chilling at home.

Me: Wow! Wow!

We both laugh and catch up. I go to the balcony and close the sliding door, as I fill her in on Derek. Her reaction angers me.

She legit laughs at me.

For a good 5 minutes.

Me: This is serious!

Her: Friend, clearly the universe wants something to brew between the two of you!

Me: No!

She laughs.

Her: I kid, I kid.

I sigh dramatically.

Her: Don't do anything stupid. If anything, he should be the one to make the first move.

Me: How unprofessional.

Her: How come I don't remember him?

Me: You were drunk, you idiot!

She laughs.

Her: Listen, just don't cross the line.

Me: Okay.

Her: Find another dick to distract you.

Me: Hmm.

She doesn't know much about Bongani.

He's my best kept secret.

And he will remain that.

Me: Okay, let me go and check on Lwazi.

She laughs again.

Her: That's what you get for making a new friend without me.

Me: Mxm!

I end the call and make my way inside.

At the end of the day, no one kicked me out of my parents' house, hey. I don't have any drama there... So maybe I should stay put till a man asks to marry me...

INSERT 9

The following day, Lwazi woke up feeling much better. I was beyond glad!

We decided to go out and have brunch with white people. We dressed up, and made our way to Mike's Kitchen in Parktown.

We get there, and order our food.

Me: So you think we'll survive?

She laughs.

Lwazi: Ya I think we're going to be a good team. Gee is also focused, so we'll be fine.

Me: True.

Lwazi: And who wouldn't survive with such a hot principal?

I want to slap her! She must stay away from my man!

Well... Argh you know what I mean.

Lwazi: I wonder if he's seeing someone.

Me: Uyam'funa?

She laughs and I join her. But trust that it's a fake laugh. I'm out here trying to mark my damn territory.

Lwazi: Nah he's too strong for my liking.

Me: Strong?

Lwazi: Ya, he seems a bit intense.

Me: So you like them timid?

We both laugh.

Her: I do, actually. I just don't like men who are too dominant. They scare the shit out of me.

Me: Well at least you know your type very well.

Her: Wena what's your type?

Me: Hmm I'm not sure yazi.

Her: I think you want the strong type.

Me: Thing is, I also have a strong personality. I don't want a man I can run over.

We laugh.

Her: Then Derek is definitely your type.

Me: No, he's too perfect.

Her: You think?

I nod. Inside, I know my ass is lying. That man is every woman's type.

Her: I'm sure he has a girlfriend though.

I take a sip of my drink as I imagine him with another woman wrapped in his arms. Disgusting.

Her: Or fuck buddy.

I groan. I need to change this topic, and I do... I'd rather listen to her whine about her man than imagine all these crazy things about Derek.

It was now around 7pm, and I had packed my things. I was ready to see Bongani now. I told him I'd get an Uber to his place, as usual, and he reluctantly agreed.

I say goodbye to Lwazi, and make my way to my Uber. Boy am I glad I'm leaving this place. I need to reconsider this moving thing. I am very big on personal space, so I don't know how I will survive with leaving with my colleague, whom I work with closely.

I get to Bongani's place, just he is driving in. I get in his car, and he parks it.

We get out and share a hug.

Me: Unjani?

He doesn't say anything, instead he hugs me tighter. We stand there for a while and then make our way inside. We get to his place, and I switch on the lights.

Him: I need to take a shower.

Me: Okay. If I could cook, I'd prepare a lovely meal for you.

I smile shamefully, and he laughs quietly.

Him: It's fine, I'm not hungry.

I nod and watch as he walks to the bedroom. Geesh, this is going to be intense and sad.

After a while, I walk to the bedroom, and find him lotioning himself. I walk to him, and take his lotion. I begin lotioning him.

Me: It will get better, Bongani.

Him: I hope so...

It is silent as I lotion up. I finish up and smile.

Me: Done.

He stares at me and my stomach churns. The vibe has definitely changed since his mom's passing. He's a sad person, and all I want to do is hold him until he feels better. I know we have a casual relationship, but I can't help but want to support him.

He wraps his arms around me and buries his head in my neck. We're hugging. We stand there for a long time, while he sobs silently.

Eventually, he lifts his head and I wipe his tears.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods as he brings his face closer to mine and places his lips on mine.

Him: Thank you.

I nod.

Him: I appreciate your support.

Me: You're welcome.

He bites my lower lip and we kiss. A very tender and slow kiss. I wrap my arms around his neck and he lifts me up. I had come to realize that men really are strong. Despite my weight, they always seem to manage to lift me here and there. Well I've only been with three men (excluding Bongani) so I'm sure there are men out there who would run at the thought of lifting me, not that they're my target market anyway.

He places me carefully on the bed, and we continue kissing. I reposition so I'm on top. I'm going to be as "loving" as I can in this moment, and hope that it will make him feel better...

We are now cuddling. Something we both hate doing. His head is on my boobs, and my arm is on his back.

Bongani: I had no idea your boobs are so comfortable.

I laugh.

Me: I mean, I've been told before...

Him: By who?

We both laugh.

Him: How many men have you been with?

Me: Three serious relationships.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Limited experience, I see.

Me: Not really. They were long term relationships. I don't count all the random men I've encountered throughout my life.

He laughs loudly.

Him: Random men?

Me: Yep!

He settles down again.

Him: Are you taking a break from relationships?

Me: Yep. The feelings are just too much.

Him: True.

Me: So how many relationships have you been in?

Him: A lot.

Me: Of course.

He laughs.

Him: Am I sensing judgement?

Me: No, I just think it's unfair how we expect women to be clean and pure, but men can do whatever they want.

Him: Double standards.

I grunt.

Him: But women are slowly gaining their own power. Sexual freedom is slowly becoming an individual thing.

Me: But we're still getting judged for loving sex.

Him: True.

He glances at me.

Him: But you seem confident.

Me: Ya. It's my life after-all.

He nods and rests his head on my boobs again. He shifts to the left boob.

Him: Oh but this left boob? Miraculous.

Me: You idiot.

We laugh and continue chatting about relationships.

Him: I also don't want a relationship. It's too taxing.

Me: At least we're on the same page.

Him: Definitely.

Me: Imagine coming back from work, tired as hell, and having to deal with another human who deserves your attention? Nope. Relationships can miss me.

He chuckles.

Him: I'm sure the past few days were taxing.

Me: Why?

Him: Because you were constantly checking up on me.

I sigh.

Me: With you it's different.

Him: How so?

Me: We're friends.

He nods and closes his eyes.

Him: And this friend is about to sleep like a baby because of this boob right here.

Me: You fool.

We continue chatting until both of us doze off...

I'm glad he's feeling better.

INSERT 10

It is now Sunday, and I am finally going home to sleep. My night with Bongani was productive as always, but I really need to rest because tomorrow I'm going back to work.

Bongani is now driving me home.

Me: I'm glad you're feeling slightly better.

Bongani: It must be the air...

Me: Hmm.

Him: You should get some rest.

Me: That's my plan.

Him: I'll see you again during the week, right?

Me: Yep.

We continue chatting till we get to my house.

Me: Argh my dad...

Why isn't he at church though?

Him: I hope he's not going to damage my car.

Me: As soon as I get off, drive off, okay?

He laughs and I roll my eyes. He stops by my gate.

Me: See you... Bye.

Him: Bye.

I get out of the car and he drives off, thank God. My dad is sitting with one of his loyal customers under the tent.

Me: Sanibonani.

Dad: You seem to love these Ubers of yours. Aren't they expensive?

I sigh loudly, relieved as hell that he's not questioning me.

Me: It's affordable.

Dad: Hai I don't see how paying R50 to go around the corner is affordable.

Me: Well at least it's safe.

Dad: That's the only good thing about it.

Me: Let me get it in. See you.

He nods and I make my way inside the house. I'm thankful that my mom is at church because I get some me time. I put on my pyjamas and go to the lounge to watch some tv. After an hour or so, I get bored and go to my bedroom. I take out my journal and chill for a while, jotting down my thoughts.

Just then, my phone rings and it's the worm.

Me: Hello?

Siya: Hey, unjani?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Him: I'm good.

He chuckles.

Him: I know you're rolling your eyes.

Me: Mxm.

Him: Ukuphi?

Me: At home.

Him: Can I see you?

Me: I'm tired.

Him: Okay.

Me: Ukuphi?

Him: I'm around Soweto.

Me: So you decide to call me, because?

Him: Don't be like this.

Me: Hai suka.

Him: Bye bye ke.

Me: Bye.

Him: I won't take this attitude of yours personally. It's not about me, it's about you.

I laugh lightly.

Me: Mxm bye.

I end the call and continue writing in peace...

It's now Monday and I am on my way to work. I'm so tired. Like, I don't understand why I have to work. Can't I just stay in bed forever? Argh I know I'm going to have a bad day.

I get to work and go straight to my class. I guess I'm going to start teaching today because Camille told me that I was ready.

The kids are playing outside while I am in the classroom prepping my resources for the day. I have to redecorate this class because right now, it's not motivating me at all. I know it is October, and the year is about to end, but I really hate dull classrooms.

Lwazi walks in and smiles.

Lwazi: Morning.

Me: Hey you.

We hug each other.

Me: I was busy sorting out some resources.

Her: I'll just do some introduction games and get to know them.

We walk to the playground and the kids run to hug us. Honestly, children are amazing. They can be from wealthy or poor backgrounds, but they are still children, and they love unconditionally. Especially in primary school because they haven't been influenced by the world that much. Their strongest emotion at this age is love, and teachers play an important role in ensuring that they continue to love everyone and everything around them.

After 15 minutes, the bell rings and the students line up to go to assembly. Lwazi and I go with our class...

Gosh I almost forgot about my work dilemma.

I watch as Derek walks to the front and does an attention grabbing signal. He places his index finger on his nose, and within seconds the whole school is quiet, and everyone is placing their index fingers on their noses.

Derek: If you can hear me, clap once.

Everyone claps once.

Derek: If you can hear me, clap three times.

Everyone claps three times.

He smiles warmly.

Derek: Good morning scholars.

Everyone: Good morning, Mr N!

Derek: And how are we feeling this Monday morning?

Everyone: Marvellous and how are you?

Derek: I am motivated, thank you.

He proceeds to lead assembly.

I have decided not to entertain my random and childish crush. This is my workplace and I am not about to jeopardize it because of some stupid crush. I made a vow to myself at the beginning of this year that I will focus on myself and not on men. I have been doing well so far and I am planning on accomplishing this goal.

Derek: Now as you know, we have new teachers, Ms Khoza will be teaching Grade 4 and 5 Maths, Ms Mbasa will be teaching Grade 3 Maths, and Ms Dlamini will be teaching Grade 4 and 5 English.

He looks over at us and smiles.

Derek: I know you will treat them kindly and help them when they are lost, right?

Everyone: Yes!

Derek: Excellent.

After 10 minutes we are done.

Derek: Have yourselves a Marvellous Monday.

I must say that I am enjoying myself here. Everyone is helpful and they take their jobs seriously. The passion for teaching is evident!

It's 2:30pm and the kids are packing up and getting ready to go home. Lwazi walks in my class and I can tell that she is annoyed.

Me: What's up?

She walks to my desk and rolls her eyes.

Lwazi: That Lebo chick is driving me crazy.

Me: Wenzeni manje?

Her: She's so annoying.

Me: Don't take it personally.

She sighs and walks out. I then tell my babies to line up so we can go outside.

The day is finally over. The kids are gone, others are playing sports, but they are not my responsibility anymore. I walk back to my class and sort out my things. As I prepare for the following day, there's a knock on my door.

Derek walks in.

Derek: Hello.

Me: Hi.

Him: How was your first day of teaching?

Me: It was good.

He nods lightly and looks around.

Him: You're changing the classroom?

Me: Yes.

He nods again and then looks at me more seriously.

Him: Are you sure you're okay?

Me: Yes, I am.

I look at him emotionlessly, I think.

Him: Okay then. I will see you tomorrow.

Me: Okay. Bye.

He nods and walks out of the class.

I stand there and re-evaluate my life.

His cologne has filled this entire space.

Mxm.

I take my bag and decide to leave, so I can get home early. I go to Lwazi's class and tell her that I am going home.

Lwazi: I'll see you tomorrow, friend.

Me: Shap.

We hug each other and I leave with Zama, the IsiZulu teacher, who also stays in Soweto. At least I have a travel buddy now.

Zama: This walk won't work once I'm 7 months pregnant.

Me: Wait! You're pregnant?

Zama: Yes! I thought I was showing?

Me: No!

I look at her and I can't see a thing. She laughs sweetly and then rubs her belly.

Her: I'm pregnant, love. 4 months.

Me: Aww.

Her: My husband is beyond excited. The only problem is that it's not practical for him to bring and pick me up every day.

Me: That's what he wants to do?

She nods.

Her: He doesn't want us to use taxis.

She rubs her belly again and I smile.

Me: How sweet.

We continue chatting...

Overall it was a good day. Weird here and there, but good...

INSERT 11

My first month here is done and dusted. It's Friday, and I am exhausted. I have decided that this weekend I am going to switch off my phone and shut out the world, while I work on regrouping my mental state. Being tired makes me grumpy and short-tempered. I don't want to be in such state of mind because it really does affect my interactions with people. I don't want my learners to suffer because my mood fluctuations. Therefore, this weekend will be used to recuperate. I have been such a bitch lately.

Lwazi left early because she had to go to Pretoria to see her family.

I haven't seen Bongani in three weeks. I've been very busy and he also seems busy. I'm honestly okay with that. Although I think the foundation of my grumpiness is lack of sex.

I finish cleaning up my class and as I walk out, I realise that everyone has left. Konje it's pay day. Everyone is out drinking, and I kindly declined all invitations. When I walk out, I say goodbye to the ladies who clean the school, and I hear Derek saying goodbye seconds later.

We end up walking out together.

Derek: I'm going to Joburg CBD. Would you like a lift?

Me: No thanks.

Him: I'm not asking you to cut off one of your limbs for me. I'm simply offering you a lift.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Ziyanda, relax.

I grit my teeth.

Him: As you can see, the weather is changing. Surely it will start raining in 10 minutes.

I look up and realise that he's right.

Me: Okay.

We walk to his car and get in. He drives off and I glance at him.

Derek: You okay?

Me: Ya.

Him: You've been very snappy.

Me: I'm tired.

Him: I am worried. Is your workload too much?

Me: I'm just adjusting to everything.

Him: Is there anything Camille and I can do to assist?

I keep quiet.

Him: The last thing we want is for you to experience burnout.

Me: It's not that extreme.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: Why do you like asking me that?

Him: What?

Me: "Are you sure?"

Him: Because I want you to be truthful. I need to know how you are feeling, and I need to ensure that you feel cared for. It's my job.

Me: You do that with all the teachers?

He nods.

Him: I don't want any of you to feel unsupported.

Me: How sweet.

Him: The sarcasm is unnecessary.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: This is why I feel like you're not being truthful. If you are so snappy with me, it means the kids are also receiving the same attitude. I don't want that.

I look down shamefully.

Him: They don't deserve that.

Me: I'm sorry.

He glances at me and smiles lightly.

Him: I know you won't be in a good mood every day, but I need you to be honest with me and Camille, so we can support you. Maybe you're not used to such, but this is how we do it here. We care for our staff. Parents trust us with those children so we have to give them the best at all times.

I keep quiet. He thinks he's helping me, but he has just made me feel 1000 times guilty. I've let go of myself. I've failed to take care of my mental being.

By the time we get to the CBD, it is raining cats and dogs.

Him: Do you mind if I get my lease agreement first?

I look at him confused.

Him: I'm driving you home.

Me: You don't have to.

Him: But I'm choosing to.

I decide not to argue with him. I need this lift anyway.

He drives to Maboneng, and I realize that he is parking right next to the offices that Siya is renting.

Me: Are you investing in property?

Him: Yes, here in Maboneng.

Me: Oh.

Him: I am not comfortable with leaving you here. Let's go in. It will be quick.

Me: Uh I'm fine here. I don't want to get wet.

He looks at me and laughs softly.

Me: What?

He shakes his head as if he's trying to erase his thoughts.

Him: I'll be back just now.

Me: Okay.

He gets out of the car and I take out my phone and immediately dial Niki's number. She answers.

Niki: Babe.

Me: I'm in Sexy Beast's car.

She squeals in excitement.

Me: He's just giving me a lift, you fool.

Her: Don't be a bitch ke nawe. I know you!

Me: Mxm.

Her: Where is he now?

I chuckle.

Me: I'll call you later...

Her: Shap.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and watch as Derek runs to the car. He gets in and he is dripping wet. I have to keep a straight face at this point because his shirt is all up in his skin, and his tight arms are just...

I clear my throat.

Derek: Shit. This rain is really intense.

He throws the black file- which I assume has the lease agreement- at the back.

Me: Got what you need?

Him: Yes.

He starts the car and drives off.

Me: You really don't have to drive all the way to Soweto.

Him: I know.

He focuses on the road and I keep quiet.

Him: I'm really wet.

I look at him.

Me: Where do you live?

Him: I have a place here.

Me: Where?

Him: Maboneng.

I look at him, confused.

Me: Don't you live in Randburg?

Him: I do. I also have a loft here.

Me: Oh okay.

Him: Maboneng is an investment pool.

Me: I can see...

He laughs to himself.

Two minutes later, we're parking.

Him: Woza.

Me: I'm fine here.

He gives me a look, and I sigh. We get out of the car and get in a lift.

As I walk in his loft, I'm amazed by this place. Somehow they've infused elements of shacks in a modern way. Like, imikhukhu.

Me: Well this is interesting.

Him: Nice hey?

Me: Hmm.

I look around and he nods for me to explore a bit. It's weird, in a nice way. I just can't get over how they used amazeke... White people stay making money from our struggles...

He disappears for a long time and then comes back, with fresh clothes.

Him: Sorry, I had to take a quick shower.

Me: It's okay.

The rain even stopped.

I walk to the balcony. The view isn't all that great to be honest. All I see is the shadiness of Jozi... It's obviously going to take a while for this Jonathan guy to fully develop this CBD area, but he is doing a good job. I'm certain he is filthy rich.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yes.

We head out and get in the car. I contemplate asking him to drop me off at Bree, but I honestly don't want to. I've been relaxed for the past 3 hours. I haven't felt like this in a damn month.

Angel of Mine by Monica starts playing and I can't help but laugh.

Me: Really?

Him: What?

Me: Angel of Mine? You listen to this?

I continue laughing and he joins.

Him: I love this song!

Me: How weird.

I sigh as I listen... It's one of those childhood songs that we wrote in our "Lyrics Books" and I haven't heard in years. I smile as I reminisce about my childhood days.

Him: I see you're enjoying it.

Me: It holds good memories. I'm only realising this now.

Him: This is one of my favourite songs.

Me: Hmkay.

I giggle and he smiles. I ignore that smile. I ignore it and look out the window...

All these old school jams play and I keep glancing at him, laughing quietly.

We eventually get to Soweto, and I remember that he once took me home.

Me: You still remember where I live?

He nods and focuses on the road. We get to my house, and I'm grateful that my dad's tent is not up. It's drizzling.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome.

Silence.

Me: Uhm I guess I'll see you on Monday.

Him: I guess so.

I take my bag from the back.

Me: Have a good weekend.

Him: You too and please get some rest.

Me: Okay.

He stares at me and I fidget uncomfortably.

Him: It's taking everything in me to stay in my lane. I have been trying my best to respect your wishes.

I am flabbergasted.

Me: My wishes?

Him: You told me to leave you alone.

My heart rate starts doing the most.

Him: Right?

I nod absentmindedly.

We sit in silence for the longest time till I finally gather up the strength to open the door.

Me: Bye.

Him: Goodbye, Ms Dlamini. See you on Monday.

I get out of the car and walk to the gate. I get in the yard and don't bother looking back...

INSERT 12

It's now Monday.

I spent the weekend in bed, because I randomly got flu. My mom tried her best to nurse me, but two days weren't enough. I needed an extra week!

Anyway, I get to work and go straight to my class to prepare my resources. My throat and sinuses are killing me the most, but I shall be strong. I don't miss work unless I'm severely sick.

Lwazi calls and tells me that she is running late because she's stuck in traffic. Zama knocks and comes in my class.

Zama: Hello sthandwa.

Me: Hey, unjani?

We share a hug and she looks at me with a frown on her face.

Zama: Are you okay?

Me: Flu.

She laughs and steps away from me.

Zama: These kids are disease sponges! Damit!

We both laugh.

Me: I haven't been taking my vitamins.

Zama: Then I don't feel sorry for you.

I sigh and take one packet of Med Lemon.

Zama: Eish we have 10 minutes till assembly. Let me prepare my class.

She rushes out of my class and I also walk out and make my way to the staff kitchen. I get a mug and as I pour some hot water, I immediately tense up.

Derek's cologne has filled the space.

Derek: Good morning, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Morning.

He walks to where I am and looks at me weirdly.

Him: You're drinking coffee?

Me: Huh?

He looks at my mug.

Him: I thought you don't like tea or coffee.

Me: Oh, no.

I show him a packet of Med Lemon.

Him: Are you sick?

Me: Yep.

I open the packet and pour the Med Lemon. I then look at him.

Me: How do you know that I don't like coffee or tea?

Him: I've never seen you drinking hot stuff. You're always drinking water.

So he's been observing me? I try to stop myself from smiling, but it's too late. I'm smiling at him, and he's smiling back.

Him: You weren't sick on Friday...

Me: I woke up feeling fluey on Saturday.

Him: Did you go out on Friday?

Me: Not at all.

Him: Do you have meds?

Me: Yes.

Him: Why did you come to work?

Me: I'm not dying, hey.

He chuckles and nods.

Him: Glad to know you're dedicated.

Me: Hmm.

I stir my Med Lemon and take a sip.

Him: So I'm correct in assuming that you dislike hot stuff?

Me: Yes. I don't get the point of burning my tongue.

Him: Your poor tongue...

Me: My poor tongue...

He chuckles and makes himself a cup of coffee. Just then, the bell rings and he looks at me.

Him: Have a good day. Try not to overwork.

Me: I'll see...

I walk out and go to my classroom. I will miss assembly namhlanje, I'm not in the mood.

It's around 11am and I am teaching one of my classes how to write a story.

Me: So what's the first thing we do before writing a story?

They all raise their hands.

Me: Rori.

Rori: We plan!

Me: Why is it important to plan?

They all raise their hands again.

Me: Yes, Amy.

Amy: Because we-

I shake my head and she knows that I am disapproving the way she started her sentence.

Amy: Planning is important because it is the first step of the writing process. It allows us to have a good idea of what we are going to write about.

Me: Excellent. Can someone remind me what the writing process is?

They raise their hands.

Me: Yes, Lwande.

Lwande: The writing process consists of different stages that we go through when writing stories, essays or any other pieces.

Me: Well done. What are these stages? I am going to use the miracle bucket.

I take a small bucket that has all of their names. I shake it and close my eyes as I pick a name.

Me: Hmm Thembi.

Thembi, who is one of my shy students, looks at me.

Me: What are the stages in the writing process, dear?

Thembi: Uhm... We have prewriting...

I nod.

Me: And what is prewriting?

Thembi: Planning?

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Thembi: And then w-

I shake my head.

Thembi: Sorry. Firstly, we have Prewriting.

Me: Good.

Thembi: Secondly, we have Drafting.

I nod.

Thembi: Thirdly, we have Editing.

Me: Good.

Thembi: Next, we have Rewriting.

I nod.

Thembi: And lastly, we have Publishing.

Me: Well done! Let's give Thembi a round of applause of using academic language, and full sentences! Excellent!

Thembi smiles brightly as we clap for her.

I carry on teaching till lunchtime.

I am now sitting, checking my phone. As sick and exhausted as I am, teaching always fuels me.

There's a knock on my door.

Me: Come in!

Rori, one of my secret favourites, walks in with a brown paper bag.

Rori: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Yes, baby?

Rori: Mr N has asked me to give you this paper bag.

I frown.

Me: Is it?

She walks to me and gives me the paper bag.

Rori: Yes.

Me: Thank you, baby.

She smiles and then walks out, closing the door. I put down my phone and look through this paper bag.

I smile as I take out all kinds of flu meds... There's everything you can think of...

I then find a note. I open it and it reads:

"Were you not taught in university that multi-vitamins are a teacher's best friend? Please take these meds religiously until you are healed. We cannot afford to lose excellent educators because of a lousy illness. Please eat, drink lots of water, and most importantly, get well soon. Regards, Derek."

I read it a hundred times.

I finally stop smiling.

I take some of the meds and then go to the kitchen to warm up my food. I hope to bump into him, but it seems like he is not even around...

I walk back to my class and eat...

It's now after school. Lwazi comes to my class, with more meds.

Me: You're so sweet!

Camille, my principal, even went as far as getting me a "Flu Basket." Apparently she does that every time someone gets sick. These people are so kind, man. It's beyond heart-warming.

Lwazi: We all know how inconvenient flu is when you're trying to teach. Drug yourself until you're better.

I didn't even tell her about Derek's brown paper bag.

I think he will also remain my best kept secret.

My secret crush.

Lwazi: Anyway, I have to go. My mom is visiting me.

Me: Is it?

She nods and rolls her eyes.

Lwazi: I'm her last child, so I'm treated like an egg.

Me: Cute.

Lwazi: Hai suka.

We share a hug and she leaves.

I begin to pack up, and Zama calls to tell me she is waiting for me outside. I finish up and walk out...

I go to Camille office, but she has already left. I then go to Derek's office and knock.

Derek: Yes.

I open the door and walk in.

He looks up and raises his eyebrow, as if he wasn't expecting to see me.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi. How are you feeling?

Me: I am feeling much better; thanks to all the meds I have received.

He puts down his pen and smiles.

Him: I'm glad.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome, Ms Dlamini.

I smile.

Him: Like I said, we wouldn't want to lose a great educator because of a lousy illness.

Me: We?

He raises an eyebrow again.

Me: You're speaking for Camille as well?

Him: Well, if you haven't realized, Camille and I come as one.

Me: Hmm.

He laughs lightly.

Him: So you feel better?

Me: Yes, sir.

He nods.

Him: Are you leaving?

Me: Yes.

Him: You're using taxis?

Me: Yes.

He frowns.

Me: Is there a problem?

Him: Are taxis not the cause of this lousy illness?

Me: Hmm I doubt.

Him: Are you leaving by yourself?

Me: No, with Zama.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Goodbye. Once again, thank you.

Him: Sure.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

I walk out and close the door. I then make my way outside and find Zama waiting for me.

Zama: Kunini!

Me: Sorry! I was tidying up my class.

We walk out and have our usual deep conversations...

INSERT 13

The week is finally over. It's Friday and I have fully recovered from the flu.

I've been thinking about Bongani all day. I haven't seen him in over a month. I need to see him ASAP because I am slowly losing control of myself. He needs to stabilize me once again.

During lunch time, I call him and it takes me straight to voicemail. I go to Whatsapp and type a message:

Me: "Hello there. Unjani? Are you available this weekend?"

I close Whatsapp and get back to work.

But now I can't focus because Bongani is flooding my mind. I'm thinking about all the things he could be doing to me right now. I can't believe I haven't seen him in such a long time. I've been so consumed by work... and my secret crush...

Unfortunately, Derek will never sniff my coochie. I doubt we'll ever get to that point...

Gosh now I'm thinking about Derek. I've tried my best to avoid thinking about him in this way, but right now? I am extremely hot...

I wonder if he is good in bed. He looks like he has a lot of experience, and would break my bones. Nxa, what if he has a girlfriend? Or a regular "friend", like I have Bongani?

I hear someone clearing their throat and I immediately get back to my senses and tense up.

Me: Uhm Derek?

I blink a couple of times and take a deep breath, trying to erase my inappropriate thoughts.

He is now looking at me weirdly. I can't seem to figure out the look, because I'm out here trying to be present.

I clear my throat and look at him, feeling extremely uncomfortable.

Gosh he really is sexy. The way his shirt is hugging his body, and his broad shoulders... The pants are tailored so perfectly and it's obvious that he has leg days, because he is not shaped like those lollipop-looking gym freaks that have weird lower bodies...

He is perfect...

For me...

Why isn't he mine?

I am disturbed once again by the clearing of a throat. I snap out of it and realize that I have been staring at his groin area.

Can the Earth please swallow me?!

What the hell is wrong with me??

Did he notice??

Gosh I am not going to look him in the eye.

Me: Uhm... How may I help you?

I am looking at him, but I am not looking at him. I am definitely not within eye contact right now.

Derek: Ziyanda, are you okay?

Me: Yes. How may I help you?

I realize that I am whispering. Why am I suddenly so shy?

I clear my throat and finally gather up the courage to look at him in the eye.

He is staring at me. Like, really staring. I try to look away but now I feel hypnotized. If he tells me to run around naked, I will gladly oblige. He's hypnotic. Sexy, magnetic, beast.

Me: Derek?

He is quiet for a couple of seconds, and then he switches up and smiles, a very mischievous smile.

Derek: I came to tell you that I'm going to Maboneng today.

I look at him, confused.

Me: I'm confused.

Him: I'll take you home.

Me: Oh. You don-

He shakes his head and I keep quiet.

Him: Be ready as soon as school is out.

Me: Uhm b-

He walks out before I can even say anything.

I sit there and try to process what just happened. I'm baffled, to say the least.

Within 5 minutes, my kids are back and I am forced to be normal.

It's now 15:00 and I am packing up my things. Zama had to leave immediately after school because she has to go somewhere. Lwazi also left because she and her man are going on a baecation.

People are all busy, and I'm just chilling here thinking about how much sleep I'm going to get this weekend. My life is boring and drama free. Just perfect for me.

I finish packing and cleaning up, and then I walk out. I honestly thought that if I do things slowly, Derek would leave without me, but of course he is still here.

The school is now empty.

Derek: Ready?

Me: You didn't really ask if I'm okay with this.

Derek: You don't want a lift?

Me: A decent thing to do is ask... What if I have my own plans?

Derek: I apologize.

I sigh.

Me: It's fine. Let's go.

Him: Seriously, I apologize.

Me: It's fine.

We walk out and he locks the school.

Me: So everyone has left?

He nods.

We're now in the car and my phone rings.

Shit, it's Bongani.

I clear my throat before answering. Derek is focused on the road.

Me: Hello.

Bongani: Hey stranger.

Me: I've been trying to contact you.

Him: It's been a busy month.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Are you okay? You sound reserved.

Me: Is it?

I clear my throat and he laughs.

Him: How have you been? I miss you.

Me: I miss you too.

I mistakenly glance at Derek and see him tightening his jaw.

Me: I'm okay hey. Just busy.

Him: I'm in KZN...

My heart sinks. Here I was thinking I'm going to spend the weekend sitting on Bongani's face, and now he's telling me that he is not even in the province? Damit!

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

I can't even hide the disappointment anymore.

Wow my life really sucks right now, hey?

Bongani: I'll be back next week.

Me: Is everything okay?

Him: Ya I just came to check on my mom's house and shit.

Me: And?

Him: Everything is intact, thankfully.

Me: That's good... And how are you?

Him: I'm okay, man... Surviving I guess.

My heart aches for him. I know he's not fine.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: I'll be fine... Geesh I didn't realise I missed you so much. Hearing your voice has made me feel some type of way.

We both laugh.

Me: This is the longest we haven't seen each other... Weird...

Him: See you soon?

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye. I'll call you again this weekend.

Him: Sure.

I end the call and immediately remember that I am not alone.

I am in Derek's car, with Derek next to me. I immediately tense up.

I completely forgot about him for a sec...

I look at him and he is totally focused on the road. I look out the window and keep quiet.

We get to Maboneng and he parks at Pata Pata.

Him: Come.

He gets out of the car and I sit there, not moving. I know for a fact that he is not talking to me.

He realizes that I am still in the car so he opens the door and looks at me.

Me: Come? Am I your pet?

He takes a deep breath.

Him: I'm sorry. I'm just worried about this property I'm trying to get.

I stare at him and his face softens.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: Fine.

Him: Please come with me?

Me: Where are we going?

Him: I just need something to eat. I'm really starving.

Me: I'll go to Bree... You don't have to take me home.

He looks at me seriously and I know that he is disapproving.

Me: Hmkay...

I take my bag and get out of the car. We walk to Pata Pata and get a table outside.

He places an order, while I ask for water. He looks at me weirdly and I shrug.

Me: I'm full.

Him: Are you sure?

I nod and he nods.

We sit in silence, and I avoid his eyes while he is staring at me coolly ngathi it ain't a thing.

Him: I asked my agent to meet me here for five minutes. I hope you don't mind.

I chuckle.

Me: Your property person?

He nods.

Me: Does he work at the offices we stopped by that other time we were here?

Him: Yes.

He looks at me weirdly and I shake my head lightly.

Me: What's his name?

Him: Uhm... Siyabonga.

I chuckle again and nod.

Me: Thought as much...

Him: As you would say... I'm confused.

Me: He's my ex.

He narrows his eyes and stares at me ngathi he's waiting for me to tell him I'm joking.

We sit in silence for a long time.

He then takes his phone and keeps busy while I drink my water peacefully.

He then clears his throat.

I think he has noticed that I zone out a lot, and clearing his throat brings me back to reality.

I look at him and he doesn't say anything.

When his food comes, he tells the waiter to make it take-away.

He seems restless now. All fidgety and stuff.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods and stares at me. I stare back at him and we just there staring at each other until the waiter comes back with his paper bag. He then pays the bill and stands up.

Me: Uhm? Agent?

Him: Cancelled.

Me: Oh... Okay then...

I stand up, get my bag, and follow him to the car. We get in and he drives off.

We drive in silence...

As we approach Soweto, he clears his throat and I look at him.

Him: Are you doing this on purpose?

I frown in confusion.

He then focuses on the road again and he exhales loudly...

Haike I am not about to question him.

I am already dealing with being sexually frustrated. The last thing I need right now is to play this inference game...

I want to go home and sleep...

I'm tired of masturbating...

INSERT 14

It's now Saturday, and I am cleaning the house. My mom and dad are out doing their own things and I am left alone. Honestly, I love living with my parents. I love how chilled they are, and how they trust me. I don't have to explain myself or convince them that I'm old...

In the afternoon, I get a call from Zama.

Me: Hey Zama.

Zama: Hey, love. Ukuphi?

Me: At home, what's up?

Her: Listen, are you up for lunch?

Me: Eish I have plans yazi. I'm meeting up with one of my previous learners.

Her: Really? Uyabhora yazi. I wanted to cook for you.

Me: A decent thing to do is tell the person a day before... Don't just pop out of nowhere.

We both laugh.

Me: How about tomorrow?

Her: I'll call you later to confirm.

Me: Cool cool.

Her: Bye.

Me: Shap.

I end the call and take a bath.

Lwazi runs to me and squeezes me for dear life.

Me: My baby!

She doesn't let go of me. We stand there for a long time until she lets go.

Me: Aww don't cry!

I wipe her tears and she smiles.

Lwazi: I thought you forgot about me.

Me: What? I would never!

She blushes and hugs me again.

Me: How are you?

Lwazi: I'm not fine. I miss you!

Our Uber arrives and she forces me to sit with her at the back. We get in and she squeezes my hand.

Lwazi: How is your new school?

I sigh.

Her: Is it bad?

Me: It's bad because you're not there with me.

Her: Well that's what you get for leaving me!

I laugh and she rests her head on my arm.

Me: How's school?

Her: Boring. Our new teacher is horrible! She hates kids.

Me: Really?

Her: She is always screaming and I feel like my ears have an infection. She's too much! Argh!

I laugh. I really missed this girl.

Me: She shouts at you guys?

Her: All the time! She dresses like a granny too!

I continue laughing as she updates me on what I have missed...

We're now in the north, because she mentioned that she wants to go to an expensive place. What Lwazi wants, Lwazi gets.

We get to a restaurant and place our orders.

Lwazi: At least I know how to eat with a fork and knife.

She giggles as she looks around in fascination.

Me: I have a surprise for you, but I'll show you later.

Her: Yay!

She flashes a smile and I wink at her.

As we're eating, I see Siya coming in with some girl. He talks to the waiter and they are led to their table. This one will never change... Thank God I'm done with him because he put me through the most.

Lwazi: I can't wait to grow up. I want to be just like you.

Argh this girl really has my heart. Maybe I should adopt her? Her parents don't even care that much about her.

Me: You're going to be better than me.

The waiter eventually brings our food.

I watch as Siya walks to our table. He stands by my chair and looks at me with a grin on his face.

Siya: Well, what do we have here?

Me: Hi.

Siya: Hello...

He then looks at Lwazi and glances at me.

Siya: Lwazi?

I nod and he smiles.

Lwazi: How do you know me?

Siya chuckles.

Siya: Ms Dlamini always talks about you.

Lwazi looks at me and smiles.

Siya: How are you?

Lwazi: I'm fantastic, and how are you?

Siya: I'm fantastic too.

He looks at me.

Siya: I get it now.

Me: Yep.

He is also caught up in Lwazi's spell. The girl's aura is contagious. She's loveable. While we were together, he never understood why I was so attached to her, but it took a simple introduction for him to get it.

Lwazi: Are you mommy's boyfriend?

Me: Lwazi!

She giggles and focuses on Siya, who seems amused.

Siya: I'm not her boyfriend.

Lwazi: Hmm.

She looks at both of us and continues to giggle.

Me: Siya, please leave. I can't have this forward girl getting the wrong impression.

Siya: I saw you and thought I'd say hi, as an old friend.

Lwazi: An old friend? You don't look that old.

Siya laughs and I am shocked when he sits down and gets comfortable. I try to give him the "go away" look but he ignores me.

Me: Lwazi finish up.

Lwazi: A lady takes her time when she eats...

She smiles innocently and continues eating.

Siya: So I don't look old?

Lwazi shakes her head.

Lwazi: You look youngish.

I roll my eyes.

Siya: Youngish?

I look over at Siya's table and the girl is busy on her phone.

I watch as they have a conversation, and I decide to let them be. They seem to be enjoying each other's company.

After about an hour, they brought our dessert.

Lwazi: This is yummy!

I look at her and my heart skips a beat. That's it. Siya has to go, I need my time with Lwazi.

Me: Siya.

Siya looks at me.

Him: But-

I give him a look and he sighs.

Him: Hmkay.

He looks at Lwazi and smiles.

Him: I have to go.

Lwazi: Ahh...

Siya really is a slick worm. He got this little girl to love him in an hour... Damn him.

Him: I'll see you around.

Lwazi: You promise?

Heeh.

Him: Yes.

He stands up, and she also stands and gives him a hug.

Haike.

He looks at me with a victorious smile and I roll my eyes.

Me: Bye.

Him: No hug?

Me: No.

He chuckles and walks back to his table.

I stare at Lwazi and she giggles.

Lwazi: Can I have more dessert?

I give her mine and she digs in.

Me: Eat up!

She finishes and I pay the bill because I have to get out of here. Siya really ruined my afternoon with his shady ass.

We walk to a Vodacom store and she looks around, confused.

Me: Don't you think it's time you get a phone?

Her eyes pop out and she squeals excitedly.

We go on to select an appropriate phone for her and I pay. I had to remind her that she's still a child, and that the main purpose of this phone is to contact me anytime, anywhere... I trust her.

As we walk out, we bump into Derek.

You know, sometimes I am convinced that the Devil is trying me. How did my life go from boring and peaceful, to this?

Derek is also out here looking at me all confused.

Me: Yes, Derek, I also occasionally make it to this side of the world.

He smiles and I smile back.

Him: What brings you this side?

Me: Spending the day with my baby.

He raises an eyebrow and looks down at Lwazi. He seems surprised and confused.

Lwazi looks up at him, and squeezes my hand. I look at her and realise that she is nervous. I have to keep myself from laughing. Lwazi, Miss Know It All, is scared of someone? Wow!

Me: I'll see you on Monday.

Him: Uhm sure...

Lwazi and I walk out together and get in our Uber. I decide not to ask her how she feels about Derek because I already know she doesn't like him.

She is now sleeping next to me, when my phone rings and I answer without checking the caller id.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda, it's me.

Me: Derek?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Oh.

I feel my insides churn.

Derek: When are you free?

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: When are you free?

Me: Uhm...

What's happening?

Him: I would like us to meet.

Me: Uhm... I'm on my way home.

Him: Do you have any plans when you get home?

Me: Uhm not really.

Him: Can I fetch you?

Me: Uhm sure...

Him: I'll let you know when I'm on my way.

Me: Uhm okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

He ends the call and I just sit there, zoned out.

INSERT 15

I drop off Lwazi and then make my way home. I obviously need to take a bath and freshen up a bit. My parents are still not back and it's now around 4pm.

As I am getting dressed, I get a call from Derek.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi, did you arrive safely at home?

Me: Yes.

Him: Good. I should be there in an hour or so.

Me: May I ask why you want to meet?

Him: I'm driving, can't speak.

Me: Oh.

Him: I'll see you soon. Bye.

Me: Bye.

He ends the call and I finish getting dressed.

I then call Niki and she doesn't answer. Damn I need to talk to someone about this because I honestly feel like I'm going crazy!

At around 17:30 he calls and tells me he is outside. I get my bag, lockup and then make my way outside. I approach his car and he unlocks it.

What does he want to talk about? I'm nervous all of a sudden.

I get in the car and he sighs quietly.

Me: Hi.

Derek: Hey.

Me: So what's up?

Him: I would like to eat first.

I find myself giggling.

Me: You love eating, don't you?

He chuckles and starts the car.

Him: I really do. However, it seems like you have a problem with seeing me eat in peace.

Me: Wait, what?

Him: The first time I ate in your presence, you were aggressive-

Me: Excuse me?

I look at him in shock.

Him: You sat there with your sunglasses, and snapped at me. You made it seem like I'm a creepy guy.

I am stunned!

Him: Am I lying?

I don't respond.

Him: And then the second time, you told me your ex is my property agent. I don't really know why you felt the need to tell me that.

He focuses on the road with a smirk on his face while I'm looking at him, still stunned.

Me: But...

Him: Come on now, Ms Dlamini. You know we don't start our sentences like that.

Really? Is he really doing this right now? I am still consumed by what he said first, and now he's being a clown?

I'm suddenly annoyed.

He keeps quiet and drives on. After about 30 minutes, we're walking to News Cafe, Maponya Mall. We sit inside and he places his order. He looks at me, expecting me to order food but I get water.

The waiter walks off.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Ya.

Him: You're offended by what I said?

Me: I wasn't rude when I met up with you.

Him: Then I obviously misinterpreted your actions. I apologize.

Me: So I think I was rude?

He sighs as if he is not in the mood to deal with me. I recognize this sigh because I do it every time I have to deal with that one annoying kid in class. Am I annoying him right now? Why the hell did he bring me here?

Him: Are you listening to me?

I snap out of my thoughts and stare at him angrily. Why am I so snappy and sensitive? I'm not even on my period right now.

Him: Ziyanda?

I look at him blankly.

Him: I'm sorry for offending you.

I sigh.

Me: It's fine.

He keeps quiet and stares at me intently. Now I'm uncomfortable.

Me: Why are we here?

Him: Can I eat first?

I try not to roll my eyes.

After a while, his food comes and he eats.

Him: You are awfully quiet.

Me: Wouldn't want to worsen my track record.

He laughs and nods.

Him: Okay...

I watch him eat and eventually ask the waiter for a cocktail. I think a bit of alcohol will calm me down because my emotions are running high.

He smiles as my drink is brought to me.

Me: Thanks.

I take a sip and he continues to stare at me.

Me: I need the bathroom. Please excuse me.

Him: Sure.

I stand up and go to the bathroom. I finish peeing and stand there for 5 minutes and try to keep my composure (which I feel like I'm losing). I wash and dry my hands, and as I open the door, Derek walks through the main bathroom entrance. I'm not sure if I want to go back to the ladies bathroom or what...

He walks towards me and just as I think that he is going to enter the men's bathroom, he walks to me and I freeze.

Me: Derek, what's the problem?

Him: You.

Suddenly, my anger has faded. I'm back to being nervous and uncomfortable.

Me: I'm the problem?

Him: Yes.

I look at him in confusion.

Him: I don't want to stay away from you.

Before I can even process what has happened, his arms are around me and I am pressed against the wall. Suddenly this little passage seems too small, but I don't mind.

Me: You're my boss.

Him: I know.

I groan as I inhale his cologne and my senses open up to him. My rationality is on 40% at this point and I'm afraid that it keeps decreasing bit by bit.

I was about to say something when the entrance door opened and some guy walked in.

He looks at us and laughs.

Guy: I would leave you guys but I'm pressed as fuck and I need to pee.

Derek lets go of me and we move out of the way. The guy gets in the guys' bathroom and Derek walks out. I contemplate following him but I need a few minutes to break out of his spell. I walk back to the ladies bathroom and go straight to a basin to sprinkle my face with some cold water. I stand there for a few minutes until I feel a bit stable. I walk out, and make my way to the table. When I get there, Derek is standing up, paying the bill.

Me: What's happening?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Siyaphi?

He ignores me and finishes paying the bill. He then takes my bag and gives it to me. I reluctantly take it and I follow him out of the place.

Honestly, I'm just trying to suppress all of my feelings right now. I'm not trying to be found dead in a parking lot. What will my parents be told? That I was killed by a damn sexy beast? I think not.

We get in the car and he glances at me before he starts it.

Him: I am not taking you home. Are you okay with that?

I just...I...

I must have said yes, because he is now driving the opposite direction.

Dear Universe, I do not know what awaits me, but please give me the strength and stamina, because I am ready to tear shit up.

INSERT 16

We get to his loft in Maboneng.

How am I feeling? Numb, perhaps?

He leads me to the lounge and I sit down on the long couch.

Derek: Would you like something to drink?

I'm quiet for a few seconds, trying to make up my mind.

Me: Wine?

He smiles lightly and nods.

Derek: Red or white?

I'm feeling very hot right now so white wine will do.

Me: White, please.

He nods and walks to the kitchen. I sit there, staring at nothing. I'm very uncomfortable right now. What the hell am I doing here? This man is my boss! What am I expecting? Sex? What happens afterwards?

He comes back with my glass of wine, and then sits next to me. He gives me the glass.

Me: Thank you.

He nods and I take a sip.

Lord, I can't deal with this awkwardness. Maybe I should just down this wine so I end up tipsy.

I look over at him and he is so chilled. Like, he is relaxed. I'm out here feeling like a little school girl, while he's so relaxed.

Why doesn't he switch on the TV? Is he enjoying all this awkwardness? I look at him again and I see him smiling. He is actually enjoying this.

Out of nowhere, he swiftly stands and I see him moving around. Before, I know it; he takes a stool and places it right opposite me, and sits. He drags it closer till my legs are between his. I realize that I had stopped breathing. I exhale quietly and look at him, trying by all means to remain calm.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Yes, Ziyanda?

Me: Did you know that I was going to work at that specific school?

He raises an eyebrow. I'm sure he didn't expect me to ask him that question.

Me: Did you?

Him: No. I was just as shocked as you were.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

He laughs quietly.

Me: So why exactly are you sitting here? Is there a problem with this space on the couch?

This wine is really doing the damn thing. I love it.

Him: I'd rather look at you from this angle.

I try to say something but words fail me. I take a sip of my wine and stare at him with embarrassment.

Him: If that random guy didn't walk in earlier, I don't know what I would have done to you.

Yhuuu I take another sip and keep my mouth shut. My insides are beyond agitated.

Just then, his phone rings and he gets up and walks to it. I sigh loudly as he answers it from a distance.

Okay, I have to leave this place. I cannot deal with all of this right now!

He walks back with a grin on his face.

Him: My dad and brother are coming up.

Me: What??

I stand up and stare at him in shock.

He laughs.

Him: Calm down. They're not monsters.

Me: Really, Derek?

I am now annoyed. Clearly the universe is punishing me for being so forward. I should have stayed at home.

I put the glass on the table, and get my bag.

Me: I will see you on Monday. I don't know what the fuck is going on here, but I am ending it. I can't deal with this shit.

He walks to me and blocks my way with his arm. He then wraps it around me and pulls me closer till our bodies are pressed against each other.

Him: Calm down. No one's going to bite you.

I groan in pain. I am in pain. I am in serious pain. This man hurts me yazi. I don't know what he is doing to me. Do I also make him feel this way? He is so calm and relaxed, while I'm just a hot mess.

Me: I don't want to meet your family.

Him: Well, now I am offended.

Me: I don't mean it in an offensive manner.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Stop stealing my lingo, Ngidi.

He laughs for a couple of seconds and then leans closer to my face. I honestly have no idea what happened... I just know that I died and came back to life when I heard a knock on the door.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it and he smiles playfully.

Him: They're here.

I exhale.

Me: Can I sneak out?

He laughs and shakes his head.

Him: You're not going anywhere.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and let go of me. He then walks to the door, while I stand there, frozen. I touch my lips and try to recall the kiss but I don't remember anything. Did I really zone out at such a crucial moment in my life?

Out of nowhere, I am hearing voices and laughter.

Gosh I need to gather myself. I can't have Derek's father and brother thinking I'm an idiot.

I take a deep breath and smile as they approach the lounge.

The older man, who is obviously the dad, looks at me weirdly, but eventually smiles. He then looks at Derek and smiles.

Derek: This is Ziyanda Dlamini, whom I work with...

Derek says that with a sly smile. I have concluded that he is a playful person...

Derek: Ziyanda, this is my father, Derek Senior.

I have to stop myself from laughing. How corny.

Me: Hi, Mr Ngidi.

Senior: Hi, dear. How are you?

Me: I am well, thank you. How are you?

Senior looks at Junior with the same sly smile and then looks back at me.

Senior: I am well, too.

Derek: And this is my brother, Xolani... Xolani, Ziyanda...

I look at Xolani and smile. He is clearly fashionable.

Xolani smiles kindly and walks to me.

Xolani: Hey babe. Nice to meet you!

Oh... I see what kinda party this is.

He hugs me and I inhale his lovely cologne.

Me: Nice to meet you, too.

He let go of me and then stares at me.

Him: You're beautiful.

Me: Thank you.

Senior: So you two work together?

Derek: Yes.

Senior walks to the couch and sits down.

Senior: Are you leaving, dear?

I remember that I am still holding my bag.

Xolani: Uyaphi? Don't let our presence interrupt you. We are just popping by to check on this scarce brother of mine.

I don't respond. Instead, I check the time and it's now 8pm.

Xolani makes me sit down and he glances at the unfinished wine on the table. He looks at me disapprovingly and I bite my bottom lip.

Xolani: We don't waste alcohol.

They all stare at me and I glance at Derek. I am beyond uncomfortable. So am I supposed to take the glass and gobble it down? Then they'll call me an alcoholic? Nope.

Senior: How old are you, Ziyanda?

Me: 25.

He nods and then looks at Derek.

Senior: Well, now that we know you're alive, we will leave you in peace.

Derek: I've been busy.

Senior: You know we don't allow work to consume our lives to such an extent.

Xolani: Tell him.

Derek rolls his eyes and I chuckle to myself.

Derek: I'll do better.

Senior: Good. Xolani and I are going out for dinner. Will we see you tomorrow?

Derek: Yes, I'll be there.

Senior then turns to look at me.

Senior: You can bring Ziyanda, if she doesn't mind.

How did I get brought into all of this?

Derek: Let's take it down a notch, dad. Thanks for the visit.

Xolani then looks at me.

Xolani: We're having a fundraising brunch for an orphanage our family has been connected with. Would you like to come?

Me: Uhm...

Now all three of them are staring at me. How do I say no to such a charitable thing? Would they think I'm an evil person?

Me: Sure.

Xolani: I know you'll come with Derek. However, you can bring an extra person. Even though it is an exclusive event, we could use a few more rands.

Niki.

The bitch will come whether she likes it or not.

Me: I'll come. Thank you for the invite.

Xolani smiles sweetly and nods.

Senior: Well there we have it then. We will see you both tomorrow.

Derek: Sure.

Senior and Xolani stand up and hug me.

Senior: It was lovely meeting you, young lady.

Me: Likewise, sir.

Xolani: Bye, love. See you tomorrow. The dress code is strictly classy...

He looks at me from head to toe.

Xolani: I trust that you will do the damn thing.

Hehe.

Me: I will try to surpass your expectations.

He hugs me again.

They say their goodbyes and Derek walks them out. I throw myself on the couch, reach for my wine, and then gobble it all up and sigh in defeat.

How in the world did I end up here?

INSERT 17

Derek walks back in.

Me: Can I use the bathroom?

Him: Sure.

I stand up and walk to the bathroom. As I get in, I'm not surprised when I see everything exceedingly organised. He does give me OCD vibes. I finish peeing and then stare at myself in the mirror.

Me: What the hell are you doing here, Ziyanda?

My reflection stares back at me.

Me: Damn fool.

I moisturize my lips and walk out, closing the door behind me. I then walk to the lounge and realize that he is at the balcony. I check the time and it is now 9pm. I'm sure my mom and dad are a bit worried because I didn't tell them I'd be out. I get my phone and see that I got their missed calls. I dial my mom's number and she answers.

Mom: Haibo sisi no sms, no phone call?

Me: I thought I'd be back my now. Sorry sthandwa.

Mom: Who are you with? Niki?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Alright then. You have your keys angithi?

Me: Yep.

Mom: Bye then.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and sigh. So what now? What happens?

I walk to the balcony and find him standing there.

Me: Nice view.

Of course I was referring to him, but the Joburg view wasn't that bad.

He turns, looks at me intently and smiles.

Him: Nice view indeed.

I walk towards him and we stand next to each other, looking at Joburg the view.

Me: How often are you this side?

Him: A couple of times a week.

I keep quiet. I am suddenly so calm. He's not making me nervous or uncomfortable. It's probably because we're outside and the fresh breeze is keeping me steady.

Me: I have to go...

He looks at me sharply.

Me: What?

Him: Please don't.

I am dumbfounded.

He sighs and focuses on the view. We stand there for a long time in silence... Eventually he takes my hand and makes me face him.

Him: Are you staying?

Me: Okay.

Him: Wait, are you serious?

I nod.

He smiles like a little kid and for once, I am reminded that I also have control here. This man has been driving me crazy for so long that I lost myself for a while.

Him: Great.

My stomach grumbles and I frown.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

He stares at me disapprovingly and I groan.

Me: I'm hungry.

Him: So what was your plan?

Me: I beg your pardon?

Him: Were you going to pretend you're not hungry?

Me: I only realised now.

He narrows his eyes and shakes his head.

Him: Why do I get the feeling that you don't like eating in front of me?

Me: No, I'm always full when I'm with you.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: You think I'm self-conscious?

He doesn't respond so I laugh quietly.

Me: I may be a lot of things, Ngidi, but self-conscious is most definitely not one of them.

He grins.

Him: Perfect. Then let's go eat.

I nod and we walk inside. I get my bag and wait for him to get whatever he needs. We then walk out and make our way to the lift. He places his arm on my shoulders and pulls me closer.

Him: Still okay?

Me: Yes.

I'm lying. He really does have an effect on me and I can't seem to control myself.

Him: I'm not.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: You.

The lift stops and he lets go of me, and walks out. I follow him and try my best to stay cool.

Him: I don't see the use of driving. We're close to everything.

I nod and don't say anything. We walk out of the building...

Him: I hope you're not too overwhelmed by my dad and brother.

Me: Not really.

Lies!

Him: My brother tends to be invasive.

Me: He's not that bad.

Him: Hmm.

He reaches for my hand and squeezes it. I think he's going to let go, but he doesn't. Weirdly enough, that calms me.

Him: I don't feel like being around a lot of people.

Me: Likewise.

Him: Then let's go to The Cosmopolitan.

I have never been there. I nod and we continue walking. When we get there, he tells them that we didn't make a reservation but they agreed because the place was practically empty. We get a table and look through the menu.

Him: What do you enjoy eating?

Me: Honestly?

He nods.

Me: I'm obsessed with burgers.

Him: Just burgers?

Me: Yes.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

He laughs.

We place our orders and they bring us a bottle of wine.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki. I look at Derek.

Me: I have to take this. Please excuse me?

Him: Sure.

I stand and walk out of the place as I answer.

Me: Niki!

Niki: Hey boo!

Me: I have been trying to call you!

Her: Kanti yini?

I quickly tell her what has happened and she screams.

Niki: Whaat?!

Me: Dude!

Niki: I'm actually at Shakers right now.

Me: Niki, I have to see you! For my own sanity!

She laughs.

Niki: Just find a way to come this side.

Me: No, Niki. He says he's not in the mood for people. You must come here! You're literally across the road!

She laughs.

Niki: Okay, I'll see you in a bit.

Me: Shap.

Her: Does this guy know how crazy you are? Has he seen the other side of you?

Me: Bye!

She laughs as I end the call. I don't need her negativity right now.

I walk back inside and find him busy with his phone.

Me: Sorry about that.

He puts down his phone.

Him: No problem.

Me: That was my friend, Niki. She's going to come see me shortly.

He looks at me confused.

Me: I haven't seen her in a while, and she told me she's in Maboneng.

Him: Okay.

He pours me a glass of wine and I take a sip.

Him: Do you like wine?

I nod.

Him: Anything specific?

Me: Chardonnay.

He nods.

Me: So why do you keep saying I'm a problem?

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki again.

Me: Sorry.

He nods and I answer.

Me: Niki?

Niki: Friend, I can't come. I'm not on my way to Melville.

Me: Wow.

She laughs.

Niki: This life chose me!

Me: I'll call you later.

Her: Okay boo. Please use a condom!

Me: Wow!

Her: Love you, bye!

She hangs up and I roll my eyes.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Turns out, she's won't be coming.

I look at him and realise that he is hiding a smile.

I put my phone away and drink some wine.

Him: You were saying?

Me: You keep saying I'm a problem.

Him: You are, to me.

Me: How so?

Him: Like I stated before, I can't stay away from you.

I try to keep a straight face but I fail dismally. I'm now blushing. At least I'm not the only one who is going crazy here.

Him: However, I feel like I'm bothering you.

Me: Huh?

Him: You're always cold.

Me: I am?

Really? So this man hasn't been seeing the effect he has on me? Does my body language tell a different story? Thank the Universe! I don't want him thinking he has a hectic effect on me.

He clears his throat and I snap out of it.

Him: Like now, for example. I can't seem to read your mood.

Me: Oh.

Him: So I'm going to have to rely on you to tell me what exactly is going through your mind.

My mind drifts back to when Siya and I always argued about my weird ways of communicating my thoughts and feeling.

Me: It's not like you do the same.

Him: Is it not obvious that I'm crazy about you?

Oh my goodness! I take another sip of my wine.

Him: I've felt this way ever since I met you, but obviously things are a bit intense because I work closely with you.

I bite bottom lip because I have nothing to say.

We stare at each other for a while.

Me: We work together. You're my boss.

Him: Stop calling me your boss. You make it sound like I'm a tyrant.

Me: Well...

Him: What?

He looks at me shocked and I laugh.

Me: You have your moments...

Him: I am highly offended!

I continue to laugh and he smiles.

Me: Don't be weird.

Him: Weird?

Me: Yes. That specific smile of yours makes me feel awkward.

Him: So I make you feel awkward?

Me: Mostly.

Him: Well that's not desirable.

I giggle and he smiles again.

Me: See? There's the weird smile.

Him: Or you mean this one? I'm afraid I can't help myself... You're the cause of it.

I keep quiet.

Him: We'll refer to it as a Ziyanda symptom.

Me: Oh wow. I'm a whole sickness now?

Him: More like a plague, outbreak, or epidemic.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and our food eventually comes.

Him: So how is your daughter?

I look at him in confusion.

Me: Daughter?

Him: Today you mentioned that that little girl is your baby.

Me: Oh, Lwazi?

I giggle.

Me: She's not my biological child.

Now he is the confused one.

Me: I used to teach her.

I had to stop myself from laughing when I saw the relief on his face.

Me: Would you be affected if she was really my child?

Him: Not at all. You just don't strike me as a person who has a child.

Me: Wow. Because?

Him: It's not meant to be an insult.

Me: Hmm.

We both focus on our food.

Him: I hope I didn't offend you.

Me: Just a little.

Him: I apologise.

I nod.

Him: How's the chicken?

Me: It's good. Would you like to taste?

He frowns and I sigh. Everyone in my life has mentioned this bad habit of mine. I can't focus on my plate of food only... I just feel like, if we're having separate meals (whether they're the same or different) we should taste each other's meals. Isn't that an act of kindness?

I push my plate closer to him and encourage him to taste. I then look at his plate expectantly and he pushes it closer to me. I cut some of his lamb and taste it, while he does the same with my chicken.

Him: Not bad.

Me: Do you like cooking?

Him: I was probably a chef in my past life.

Me: Oh wow. That deep, huh?

Him: Yep. What about you?

Me: I can't cook.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: I'll teach you...

Me: Hmm...

Him: Hmm indeed...

On that note, I focused on my plate...

INSERT 18

We're now making our way back to his place. I must say, I've learnt a few things about him today:

1. He is playful.

2. He hates being around a lot of people.

3. He enjoys travelling.

4. He studied Accounting, but ended up in the education sector.

At least I wasn't a nervous wreck anymore. Yes, there were moments where I felt like I was a little school girl, but overall it was a nice dinner.

We get to his loft, and he rushes to the bathroom. I check my phone and I'm glad to find no missed calls or messages. I sit on the couch and switch on the TV. I go to Vuzu Amp and sure enough, they're playing ratchet reality shows. I get lost in the ratchetness, that I don't even realise that Derek is sitting next to me.

Derek: How do you even watch such?

Me: Shh.

He raises his hands in defeat and keeps quiet while I focus on Kenya Moore's shade in RHOATL. The show ends after a while and I sigh.

Me: I don't think I can wait for the next episode.

He gives me a weird look.

Him: Go ahead...

I take the remote and go to my usual online series site. I get the episode and watch it while he is busy with his phone.

Him: Xolani is busy bothering me.

I pause the episode and look at him.

Him: Sorry, don't mind me.

He chuckles as I continue playing the episode... After a while, I'm done.

Him: You enjoy watching other people's lives?

Me: Yes, actually. Mine is very quiet, so these women's lives entertain me.

Him: Your life is peaceful?

Me: Yes.

Him: I guess we have something in common.

Me: Probably the only thing.

Him: Well aren't you feisty.

I look away shyly and realise that I may be tipsy.

Me: Sorry.

Him: You think we don't have anything in common?

I keep quiet and focus on the TV.

Him: Yabona ke? Why am I being ignored?

Me: Sorry.

I honestly don't like the way this man makes me feel. I just fail to understand when things changed. I didn't want anything to do with him at first, but now I'm affected by the sight of him, his touch, and whatever he says. How did I get to this point? I hate myself for this. This was never part of my plan, man.

I feel him pull me closer to him until half of my body is on him.

Him: Talk to me.

Me: Derek, as much as we're making each other blush and all that other rosy stuff, we still have to deal with the fact that we work together.

Him: Wait, so you like me?

Me: Really?

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Him: Then I'll quit. Will that make you feel better?

I roll my eyes again and he presses me against him. I let out a groan and rest my head on his neck. I can't deal with this anymore. I've lost control of my body. I am horny.

We don't say anything for the longest time. I don't know, I must have dozed off, because I hear him saying my name softly in my ear.

Derek: Dlamini.

Me: Hmm.

He nudges me lightly and I groan.

Him: Let's go to bed.

I open my eyes and look at him sleepily.

Me: I fell asleep?

Him: Yes.

Me: Manje why don't you pick me up? Is it because I'm fat?

He looks at me in shock and I laugh sleepily as I stand up.

Me: I'm just kidding. Don't get your panties in a knot.

I walk to the bedroom and take off my shoes and cardigan. Thank God I'm wearing leggings and a lose top, so I'll sleep comfortably. I take off my bra as well and get in bed. At this point, I'm not worried about Derek. My sleep is more important.

I didn't even hear him come in, but I now feel him besides me. He pulls me closer and I rest my head on his chest.

When I wake up the next morning, I am greeted by the worst headache on Earth. I blink a couple of times, confused as hell. Where am I?

I remember everything.

Shit.

I rub my eyes in frustration. I get out of bed and look around. Where is this man? Did I really pass out like that?

I begin making the bed. I'm going to get an Uber and go home. I don't even want a lift from him.

Argh konje there's that charity event I agreed to? I'll just pretend that I'm sick.

I finish making the bed and then look around for my things. I spot them on the chair and go get them. As I am about to go to the bathroom, Derek walks in.

Derek: Good morning, Dlamini.

Me: Morning, Ngidi.

Him: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

Him: You can take a shower. I have prepared toiletries for you.

Me: Thank you.

I walk to the bathroom and take a shower...

I walk to the lounge, feeling a bit better. I find him cleaning up the kitchen.

Me: Hey.

Him: Hey.

Me: Uhm, I'll get going.

Him: I made you breakfast.

Me: Oh.

My stomach grumbles and I rub it.

Him: Sit.

I do as I am told, and wait as he dishes up for me.

He comes with my plate and then gives it to me.

Me: Thank you.

It's filled with bacon, and my heart is just happy. I smile as I eat happily.

Me: Aren't you eating?

Him: I don't really enjoy my cooking.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: I do.

I look at him.

Me: Are you blushing, Mr N?

He smiles.

Me: Love the bacon.

He takes my plate and I protest.

Him: Relax.

He comes back with more bacon and I smile. I eat up and sigh happily.

Me: Thank you!

Him: You're welcome.

He takes my plate and walks to the kitchen. I follow him and look around.

Me: I was about to offer to wash the dishes, but I see you've got that covered.

Him: I hate untidy spaces.

Me: I see...

He finishes up and then looks at me.

Him: I have to go and help Xolani with something...

Me: It's fine, I'll get a taxi.

He looks at me with a weird expression.

Me: What?

Him: I'll get you an Uber.

Me: Really unnecessary.

He ignores me and walks away.

Me: Haike.

I get my bag and he comes back a while later.

Him: What's your physical address?

I tell him and he nods. After about 5 minutes he tells me that it's here.

Him: Come here for a sec.

I walk to him and he wraps his arms around me. My whole body tenses up. I thought I got over this vibe, but I haven't.

Him: Are you coming to the fundraising brunch?

I sigh and he looks at me questioningly.

Me: Uhm... I'll come.

He leans closer to me and I feel his lips touching me. I hold on to him for balance because I think I'm going to crumble. I can't believe we're kissing right now, this instant, and I am present. His tongue leads me and I follow freely... I let out a moan as I feel my whole body go light. Everything about this kiss is perfect.

I hear his phone ring, but I zone it out. I don't want to stop kissing. I want more.

I wrap my arms around his neck and he holds me firmly.

The phone rings once again, but now it's a distant sound.

Honestly, this is the moment. I'm not going anywhere until I release all these crazy emotions. I need to be sane, and this man that's been driving me insane is the only solution.

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We're now in the bedroom, and our clothes are all over the place. To be honest, I don't want to be held tenderly right now. I want it rough and thoroughly. It seems like we're both on the same page because he is also giving me an animalistic vibe right now. He stops kissing me, and I open my eyes to find him staring at me with an unfamiliar look. I'm too hyped up to even analyse his actions right now.

He spreads my legs apart and I wince. My whole body is already vibrating. I feel his tongue slid inside and I shift. I could burst any moment, that's how bad this situation is. He comes to my face and smashes his tongue in my mouth. It's all slimy from my juices. I feel him smile as he stops the kiss. I don't want him to stop, and he sees that, so he kisses me again. I feel his hand slide down, and a finger slide inside. I let out a moan and he stops kissing me.

Me: Derek, I need you. Please!

I am close to tears at this point. I have never craved someone and something as much as I am right now.

Derek: I need you too.

I wiggle under him and wince loudly.

Me: Please...

He shifts and reaches for something. A condom. Yes, that's good. I'm glad he's still rational because I could accept a million pregnancies right now.

I reposition, so that I'm comfortable.

Him: You okay?

I nod and close my eyes.

The second I feel him slide inside, I swear I lose it. My whole body tenses up. It's in complete shock. I flinch and he freezes.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: You're big.

He laughs.

Him: Am I supposed to apologize?

He moves a bit and I wince again.

Him: I'll take it slow.

I nod and shut my eyes. He begins to move and I bite my bottom lip. At first it's painful, but within a minute, it's a pleasurable pain.

Me: Ah...

He moans as well, and within seconds the desperation is back on. He quickens his pace and I pant like a hungry lion. I just want to cum, so I can come back to my senses. I don't like that this man has this kind of effect on me.

I feel his lips on mine.

Him: Zi. Look at me.

This damn sexy soul snatcher.

I open my eyes and find him staring at me like a hungry beast. Surely this combination is not good?

He grinds harder and I move to his pace. He pounds me more intensely and I let out a moan.

Me: I'm about to cum.

He pounds even harder and I tighten my grip on him. I hold onto him for dear life.

Him: Let go...

I roll my neck and feel that thrust... That thrust that led me to the Great Wall of China. I let out a cry and get lost for a while. He continues pounding me and within seconds, he also cums. He lets out a loud grunt and presses himself on me.

I lay there, feeling like I am in another world.

I want more.

Now that's we've gotten over the first intense round, I want more of him. I want to be more present this time around.

As I walk inside the yard, I feel like a different person.

Like, my whole perspective on life has changed.

I am a changed woman.

I have just been given thee best orgasms ever. I don't usually compare my sexual experiences, but come on now, Derek? Geesh!

I say hi to my dad and tell him that I have to be somewhere in 2 hours. He nods and dismisses me. I then walk in and am grateful that my mom is at church. I go to the bathroom and fill the tub with water. I then go to my bedroom to call Niki. She doesn't answer. Argh I'm so annoyed. I really wanted her to come with me to this brunch but she's probably out living her best life.

As I'm in the bath, my phone rings and it's Bongani.

Oh wow...

How could I possibly forget about him?

I sigh and answer.

Me: Hey you.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: Ngi-right. Wena?

Him: I'm good...

Me: Ubuya nini kanti?

Him: During the week... I'll let you know when I'm that side.

Me: Alright then...

Him: Shap ke.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

I end the call.

I don't even feel guilty. Bongani is not my boyfriend. However, I do have to think about this new phase in my life... I'll use this week to think things through...

I finish getting dressed and I must say Xolani would be proud. Lol as I was picking an outfit, I just kept thinking to myself, "What would Xolani say?"

I look at myself in the mirror and twerk just a little bit.

I get my makeup done and set my weave free, honey.

I check my phone, and I got a text from Derek.

Derek: Your Uber should be there in 10 minutes.

I finish up and make my way outside.

Dad: Heeeeh!

I laugh.

Him: This breakfast lunch of yours must be top notch.

I laugh.

Him: You must come back with a husband.

Me: Haike.

Him: And he mustn't be an Uber driver. I want someone who will be able to pay proper lobola.

Me: Uber drivers make up to 10 grand a week though.

Him: Really? Heeh I must join it!

I say goodbye and get in the Uber as soon as it arrives.

I text Derek.

Me: I'm on my way.

Derek: Alright, see you soon.

I sigh and look out the window.

My phone rings and it's Niki.

Me: Ha wena. You're a legitimate flop.

Niki: Friend! I got your text! So you're on your way to the event?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Argh and I would have loved to be there!

Me: Hai suka.

Niki: So did you guys have sex?

Me: Yes.

She screams and I roll my eyes.

Niki: Girrrr!

Me: I'm not in the mood to talk to you.

Her: I'm sorry!

Me: Hai suka. Bye bye.

Her: Love you!

I hang up.

We drive in the yard and I see Derek waiting... I have no idea whose house this is but it is huge as hell. I thank the Uber driver and he drives out. As soon as I am in close proximity with Derek, I am a mess all over again. He looks so good. Damn sexy beast.

Honestly, mina I don't know what needs to be done. Why does he make me feel this way? I honestly have never felt so crazy about another human being. This is on another level.

He wraps his arms around me and we share a hug. His cologne is different... It's refreshing... I inhale his scent and try not to get any makeup on his shirt. Thankfully, I'm not much of a foundation fan so I keep it very minimal.

Him: You look breathtakingly dazzling.

I giggle.

Me: Good use of an adverb and adjective. I'm a happy English teacher, Mr N.

He chuckles and stares at me.

Him: Umuhle.

Me: Thank you.

He smiles warmly and then I look around.

Me: Whose house is this?

Him: Family friend.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

We both laugh.

Him: Let's go, before my brother has an anxiety attack.

We walk to the other side of the yard. Gosh people are living good lives out there, hey.

As we walk to the table, Xolani, who is dressed to the T (even better than Derek) walks to us, smiling.

Xolani: She came, and she slayed! Stunning!

I smile happily. I knew he'd be pleased. I clean up nicely sometimes.

We share a hug and he leads us to our seats...

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Senior: Well what do we have here?

He smiles warmly and stands to hug me. We share a hug and he looks at me.

Senior: You look amazing.

Me: Thank you. How are you, sir?

Senior: I am well, dear. I'm glad you could join us.

Derek: Dad.

Senior: Nkanyezi.

His other name is Nkanyezi? I look at him and he rolls his eyes.

Before I know it, a woman is next to Senior. I instantly know that she's the wife. She assesses me from head to toe and I try my best to hide how discomfited I feel.

Derek: Ziyanda, this is my wife, Khwezi... Khwezi, this is Ziyanda Dlamini, Nkanyezi's colleague.

Khwezi, who looks like she's in her 40s, continues to assess me. She seems to be those typical housewives.

Khwezi: Colleague?

I keep quiet.

Khwezi: What's so special about this colleague that she is brought here?

Hehe. Haibo guys, I'm being referred to as "this colleague" now?

Derek: Mom, how are you?

Khwezi: I'm well, son.

She doesn't keep her eyes off of me. I even have to look away. What's wrong with this woman?

Senior: Have a seat... It looks like we're about to start.

Derek: Let's go sit on the other side of the table.

Just as we're about to walk off, Khwezi says Derek's name.

Khwezi: Where are you going, dear?

Derek: We're sitting on the other side.

Khwezi: No. Here are your seats here. I was unaware that you were bringing a guest, but your brother obviously knew, because he reserved two seats for you.

Derek grunts and we sit down. She sits opposite me, and Senior sits opposite Derek.

Gosh, Niki, where are you when I need you?

This woman hasn't greeted me. She clearly doesn't see me. I am a peasant in her eyes.

Hehe.

I feel Derek's hand squeezing mine under the table, and I snap out of it. I glance at him and he gives me a reassuring smile. I tighten my jaw and that stupid smile of his disappears.

I didn't come here to be disrespected by some middle-aged, bored and possessive housewife. My morning started off phenomenally with splendid orgasms. I refuse for the rest of my day to be ruined by this rude woman.

Khwezi: So, Zinathi... You're a teacher?

I keep quiet.

Zinathi will give her an answer wherever she is.

I see the shock on her face as she stares at Derek Junior and Senior. Senior has a grin on his face.

Derek: It's Ziyanda, not Zinathi.

Khwezi: So is this what happens at your school, Nkanyezi? Teachers are-

Xolani: Zizi, do you mind helping me with our gift bags? One of our helpers didn't pitch.

Where did he come from?

He smiles and I nod.

Me: Sure.

Derek lets go of my hand and I stand. Xolani holds my hand and we walk away and make our way inside the house. I am so relieved!

Xolani: I had to rescue you. I could tell that she was ready to eat you up.

I exhale loudly.

Me: Why though?

Xolani: She's naturally a bitch.

I look at him in shock. He said that so casually.

Him: I love her, but she's not a nice person...

I sigh and he smiles.

Him: Don't sit there and take it though. She hates weak people.

Me: Yoh.

Now I just want to go home, snuggle in my blankets while watching Little Women Atlanta.

He gives me a glass of champagne and laughs.

Him: Bamba, this should calm you down a bit.

I take it and drink.

Me: So you need help with gift bags?

Him: No, love. I was just helping you out. I could see that you were ready to burst.

Me: She called me Zinathi.

He laughs lightly and shakes his head.

Him: Classic.

I finish the champagne and he pours me another one. I'm not really a champagne lover, but this one seems to go down nicely. It's that opulent, lavish champopo.

Him: Finish up quickly because we have start in a minute.

I finish it and he looks at me.

Him: So are you and D dating?

I look at him as if he's speaking a different language. I don't understand.

Me: No.

Him: So you're just having sex?

Me: Xolani!

He shrugs.

Him: Are you really a teacher at his school?

Me: Yes.

Him: So how is this arrangement going to work? You'll fuck in his office?

Me: Xolani!

He is so chilled that time.

Him: I'm just asking.

I keep quiet.

Him: Asambe. Are you feeling better?

Me: Well I just went through an interrogation, so I don't know...

Him: Don't even worry about me. I'm not judging anyone. Derek can sleep with whoever he wants...
You're cute, so I don't have a problem.

Me: Cute?

He chuckles.

Me: What a tired adjective. Do better, Ngidi.

He laughs.

Him: Beautiful?

Me: Too common. Try again.

Him: Strikingly attractive?

Me: Hmm.

Him: Stunning!

I laugh. He seems to love this stunning word, and he says it with so much rigour, that it cracks me up.

Him: Let's go.

We walk out and make our way to the long table. I go to my seat and Xolani walks to the podium.

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Stunning!

I see him relax as he laughs.

I look over at Khwezi and find her staring at me. I smile kindly and she gives me a fake smile. Nxaa.

Xolani: Ladies and gentlemen...

Everyone quietens down and we all listen to Xolani.

Xolani: It's a pleasure to welcome you to our annual fundraising brunch. We started the Ngidi Foundation a few years back, because we felt the need to give back to the less fortunate. I am blessed to come from a family that is generous, and to have parents who stress the importance of values such as kindness and service. We are very grateful to have friends who are on the same page with us, because it allows us to reach more people. Thank you for joining us once again. We will have various speakers today, and I am delighted to let you know that some of the older kids from our orphanage are here to share their stories and interact with us. I hope you have a great afternoon. Thank you...

We all clap and I feel all warm and fuzzy. This family is really invested in giving, and that's admirable.

I look at Derek and smile.

Derek: What?

Me: I didn't know you were so invested in serving the community.

He laughs as he drinks his water.

Him: Well, you don't really know me...

Me: Hmm...

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

They bring the starters and we begin eating. People are having their different conversations, and I'm just grateful that Derek's parents are no longer focusing on me.

Xolani comes over to us and looks at Derek.

Xolani: You're up in 15 minutes. As soon as everyone is done eating.

Derek: Got it.

Xolani walks away.

Me: You're delivering a speech?

Him: Something like that.

Me: Should I assess you?

He laughs.

Him: So what will you assess?

Me: The usual...Quality of content and delivery.

He continues to laugh.

Him: Such pressure...

We continue chatting for a while, and then Xolani goes back to the podium.

Everyone becomes quiet.

Xolani: I would like to welcome my big brother, Derek Ngidi...

Me: Good luck.

Derek: What in the world is luck, Ms Dlamini?

He winks at me as he stands and walks to the podium with his sexy self.

Derek: Good morning, everyone.

They all greet back.

Derek: I am used to delivering speeches and talks to tiny ones, so please forgive me if you feel like I am addressing you like children.

Everyone laughs.

Derek: So this is what I would like us to do before we move on. In the classroom environment, we always do icebreakers as a way to get everyone comfortable and on the same page. At the moment, we're all still a bit tense, so I think I'll facilitate an icebreaker, just to set a good tone for the rest of the morning and afternoon.

I have to stop myself from smiling like a lunatic. My love for teaching is so deep; my heart literally warms up when I come across people who are just as passionate about it.

Derek: Okay... First, I will test your Maths.

They all laugh and I hear others complaining that their maths is horrible.

Derek: Don't worry, we'll do baby maths.

He laughs.

Derek: Can someone spell 158 000 in 30 seconds?

People raise their hands and it gets all rowdy. For a second there, I forgot that these people are old. Just like kids, their hands were high up and they were saying, "Pick me, pick me!"

Derek: Let's establish a few rules: firstly, if you know the answer, you should raise a silent hand. I will not give you the opportunity to answer if you are noisy. Secondly, when you answer my questions, you should use full sentences. I do not acknowledge half-answers.

They all laugh. He really is treating them like kids.

Derek: Now, raise a silent hand if you know how to spell 158 000 in 30 seconds.

People raise their hands and there's silence.

Derek: Well done...

He looks around and picks someone. That lady manages to spell it in 30 seconds.

Derek: Excellent. Give her three claps in the count of two... 1... 2...

Everyone claps three times and he smiles.

Derek: Such excellent learners. I am amazed.

Everyone laughs.

He continues for a while, and it is obvious that people are having a good time. They're relaxed.

Derek: Okay, I will ask you two bonus questions that are English related.

He looks at me and smiles.

Derek: The rules are similar to charades. I will choose a concept from English, and pretend that I am that concept. I will explain myself and you will have to use my clues to figure out what I am.

He looks around.

Derek: Do we all understand?

Everyone nods.

Derek: Give me a silent high five if you understand my instructions.

Everyone gives him a silent high five.

Derek: Great. Let's start with an easy one...

He keeps quiet for a while. He then clears his throat.

Derek: I am in every sentence...

Everyone seems to be trying to figure it out.

Derek: My main purpose is to ensure that your sentence makes sense.

Of course I know this answer. I look around and a few hands are up. He asks a couple of them to answer, but they don't get it.

Derek: I am also responsible for making your sentences more interesting.

He looks around, and they seem to have given up. I raise a silent hand and he stares at me.

Derek: Ms Dlamini.

Everyone turns to look at me. I clear my throat.

Me: You are all the punctuation marks.

They all exclaim when they realise how easy it was.

He asks another one and I get it once again...

People are now in high spirits.

Derek: Now, this is what I would like you to think about, for a minute... What are you truly grateful for?

He looks around.

Derek: I will give you one minute to think about it. What are you truly grateful for in your life?

He keeps quiet and everyone is silent.

What am I grateful for? Most definitely my mom and dad. They are my most valued treasure. However, I am also grateful for my friendships. I've reached a point in my life where I know who is here to stay. My friends are my extended family. I am also grateful for children. Honestly, my love for little ones is extremely deep. I am able to connect with children from various backgrounds, and build strong bonds with them. I strongly feel like they represent hope. I'm in a position to groom young minds, and that's a powerful position...

So I have concluded that I am grateful for the gift of love. As cliché and corny as it sounds, love really is a prevailing emotion. It makes it easier to survive in this horrible world we live in.

Derek: Alright... I would like to share what I am grateful for. I've decided to focus on gratitude, because it has been a constant factor in my life.

What is this weird feeling I'm feeling? I can't seem to explain it.

Derek: I am grateful for love.

Oh my goodness! Lol how coincidental.

Derek: I was 10 years old when I was adopted by my mother and father.

What? He's adopted?

Derek: Before then, I lived in an orphanage, Twilight Orphanage, the same orphanage we are connected with today. I know you're probably thinking that my life was a mess, and that I had a tough time in the orphanage. I will have you know that it was actually the complete opposite.

He smiles and looks at an old woman who is sitting next to Senior. She's wiping her tears.

Derek: For as long as I can remember, I grew up in a place filled with love and kindness. I don't know who my biological parents are. I have never met them. This goes for Xolani as well. One would think that this affected me, but it didn't. While living at Twilight, we received unconditional love from Mam'Thuli. She was my mother from the get go. She loved me from the moment she met me, which was when I was 6 months. She loved each and every boy and girl that stayed there. She was our mother.

He smiles at her.

Derek: When it was time for me to move in with my new family, she was very emotional, but she kept emphasising that I would benefit greatly. I didn't see it at first, but I sure did as time went by. The Ngidi family welcomed me wholeheartedly and it was easy to accept the love because it was genuine. There was never a moment when I questioned their love...

Oh my word.

Derek: This is why I decided to quit my job in Accounting, and work with children. Those little one will really get you thinking about life. You just get a different perspective. You start seeing the world in their eyes, and it blows your mind. You feel your heart open up in ways it has never done before, and the love just overflows.

He then looks at me, and I'm out here trying to make sense of what I'm feeling.

Derek: I am grateful that I get to interact with passionate people. People who genuinely love what they do. You see the love in their eyes, and you feel it whenever they interact with people.

Yhu nkos' yami.

Derek: Yes, the wealth is a bonus and it makes our lives easier. However, love just makes living worth it.

People are busy wiping their tears. Thankfully, I am made of steel. Crying is not my thing.

Derek: So as we continue living our lives, let's try to be kinder and loving. None of us truly know what the next person is going through, so let us give love. Be it a stranger, the person who works for you, your gardener...

He laughs quietly.

Him: Your boss...

Everyone chuckles and he glances at me with a smirk.

Him: Thank you for listening to me. I hope you have a good day.

The man gets a standing ovation. We are all shook.

He comes back to his seat.

Do I hug him? Shake his hand?

He sits down. Haike I guess I won't be hugging him.

Senior: You continue to make me proud...

Khwezi: Now my makeup is ruined!

He smiles at his parents and I feel the love. How sweet.

He looks at me with that smile of his.

Him: Did I do well, ma'am?

Me: That was beautiful.

Him: Stunning!

We both laugh.

Him: Thank you.

He looks over at Mam'Thuli.

She winks at him and he winks back.

At this point, I am very overwhelmed. Is this an appropriate time or place to be turned on?

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We're now having the main course...

Khwezi has been giving me looks and I have been ignoring her. I don't have time for this woman. Also, I am now feeling a bit irritable. I just want to go home and sleep. There's only so much social vibes I can take.

Derek: Are you okay?

I snap out of it and nod lightly.

He looks at me suspiciously and I give him a fake smile. He continues chatting to Mam' Thuli, who seems to like me. She has been raving about me, saying I remind her of her daughter. It was cute. She's a lovely woman.

I excuse myself and try to find the bathroom. I have no idea where it is, because this castle is just too much. Why don't they have signs to help us, unaware folk? I walked around downstairs but couldn't find one. I then went up the stairs and randomly chose a room.

I get in, and thank the universe that there was a bathroom in that bedroom. These people will have to excuse me for being so explorative, but a girl's got to pee. I dash to the bathroom and pee... How I wish I grew up in such places. The wealth is enticing.

Do people actually live here, or is it an event venue of some sort?

As I get out of the bathroom, I'm shocked to find Derek standing by the bedroom door.

He raises an eyebrow when he sees me.

Derek: What are you doing here, Ms Dlamini?

Me: I needed the bathroom.

He looks at me questioningly.

Me: I looked for it downstairs, but I couldn't find it.

Him: So you randomly chose this room?

Me: Yep.

Him: My room?

Me: Huh?

He closes the door and walks to me with a grin on his face.

Me: Didn't you say that this is a family friend's house?

Him: I may have lied.

I look around and see a huge picture of him, Xolani and the parentals above the headboard.

Me: Oh.

Him: Is there a problem?

Me: Not at all.

He gets closer to me, and places his hands on my shoulders.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: To be honest, I am tired.

Him: I wonder why...

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Him: Do you want to leave?

I look at him guiltily and he laughs.

Him: You don't have to pretend. I personally hate such events.

Me: You do?

He nods.

Him: Did I not tell you that I hate being around too many people?

Me: You mentioned it.

Him: I've reached my quota.

Me: Oh.

Well I'm glad he also feels the same way. I know this is a good event, but I'm tired.

Him: Thank you for coming.

Me: You're welcome. I learnt a lot about you.

Him: I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing.

Me: Me too.

His hands make their way to my waist.

Him: Ready to go?

Me: I'd like to make a donation.

Him: You can give it me and I'll pass it on to Xolani.

Me: He won't mind?

Him: He won't.

Me: Okay.

I stare at him, and for the first time in a while, I don't feel awkward. I see him quite differently now. He doesn't have a 'perfect' life after-all, and that makes him more intriguing.

He leans closer to my face and places his lips on mine.

Him: Don't look at me like that.

I don't respond. We begin to kiss, and I am instantly reminded why I always freak out in his presence. He has an alluring effect on me. I've never been so captivated by anyone, especially at such a short period of time. It's too overwhelming and addictive.

We're now lying on his bed, and I don't even care that it's his parents' house, and we've just had sex (sorry not sorry).

Me: Derek.

Him: Hmm?

I sigh heavily.

Me: At some point, we're going to have to talk about this.

Him: What?

Me: This.

He is facing the ceiling, with his head rested on his hands. He looks so relaxed.

Him: Do you want to talk now?

Haike naye. I'm not ready. I need to go home and think things through.

I keep quiet.

Him: We have already established that we like each other.

Me: We have?

Him: Don't do that.

Me: What?

He sighs.

Him: So you don't like me?

I keep quiet.

Him: You have sex with people you don't like?

I look at him sharply and he just glances at me casually.

Him: If we're going to discuss "this" as you call it, then I'd appreciate honesty.

I keep quiet and he puts up his head, so he can look at me properly.

Him: Ziyanda?

I grunt.

Him: You're not much of a talker, are you?

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Him: Don't try to digress.

I keep quiet.

Him: You said you want to talk about this...

I regret even mentioning it. I didn't think he would take it so seriously.

Me: I do.

Him: Do you want to facilitate the conversation?

Me: Why are you making it sound so deep?

He keeps quiet for a while.

Him: Maybe it's because my feelings for you are getting deep...

I swallow hard and avoid his eyes. He rests his head on his hands and faces the ceiling again.

Him: I've been trying my best to keep it together. However, I must admit that I am very shocked at how "this" has developed...

Me: Me too.

Pheew I have finally vocalized my feelings. Well, technically I didn't go in depth, but that "me too" is something, right?

Him: You feel the same way?

Me: Ya.

We are silent for a very long time.

I turn my back on him and rest my head on my hands.

I had promised myself that I was going to stay single. I was going to work on myself. How in the world did I end up liking a guy that irritated me? I wanted nothing to do with Derek. He was annoying. How did he become this admirable man?

He turns me around and looks at me oddly.

Him: Are you-

Me: No, I'm not crying, Derek.

Him: Oh...

He sighs in relief and I roll my eyes.

Me: And if I was, I wouldn't appreciate you asking if I'm crying.

He tries saying something, but stops himself. I sit up and look at him angrily.

Why am I acting like this? The rational and mature side of me is watching me in disgust, but the drama queen in me, Petty LaBelle, is flicking her weave telling me to keep the pettiness going.

Derek seems confused and conflicted.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: You confuse me.

Me: I confuse myself, too.

He chuckles as he pulls me closer to him. I place my head on his chest and he places his hand on my back.

Him: You don't want to talk?

Me: I'm tired.

Him: I won't be around the whole week.

Me: Huh?

Him: I'm going to Durban.

I put my head up and look at him.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

I put my head down again.

Him: So how about we use this week to do some individual introspection?

Me: How are we supposed to work together?

Him: We'll figure that out once we talk about 'this'.

Me: Okay.

Him: So you like me?

Me: Derek.

He laughs and repositions me so I can be on top of him.

Him: I'm sorry. I'll stop making you uncomfortable.

He slides his hand under my dress and I groan. As tired as I am, his touch has an electrifying effect, as usual...

I guess I'll use the upcoming week to figure out what I want...

INSERT 22

It's now Monday, and the day is dragging. I gave my kids work so I wouldn't have to teach them. I'm beyond exhausted.

It's now lunchtime and I've been locked up in my class...

The door opens and Zama walks in.

Zama: Babe.

Me: Hey.

She comes to me and looks at me with concern.

Zama: Yini sthandwa sami?

Me: Do I look that bad?

Her: No, you don't look bad. Are you okay?

Me: I'm just tired yazi.

Her: What did you get up to this weekend?

Me: My dad needed an extra pair of hands...

Lies! I was got pounded left, right and centre.

Her: You look good though.

Me: Is it?

She nods and I try not to think back to the last two days.

Me: I just want this day to end.

She laughs.

Her: Me too. I'm so grumpy and sleepy.

Me: If I were pregnant, I would use my baby as an excuse to not come to work.

We laugh and continue chatting...

Honestly, this day is dragging. I am bored and tired.

It's now Thursday, and I am honestly having the dullest week ever.

I'm in my class, getting ready to knock off, when I get a text from Derek.

My heart skips a beat when I see his name.

Derek: Hi, I hope you are well. Do you mind if I call you tonight? I miss hearing your voice.

I find myself sitting down.

Is this why my week has been so horrible? I haven't seen or spoken to him since Sunday.

I text him back.

Me: Hi. I am well, thanks. I don't mind the call.

I stand, get my bag, and walk out to the passage.

Me: Zama!

Zama: Coming!

Me: I'll wait for you outside!

Zama: Cool!

Lol I honestly thought that Lwazi and I would be close, but things didn't work out that way. Yes, we're cool, but we're not that tight. Zama, on the other hand, has become a good friend. Our walks to the rank solidified our friendship.

We're now walking to the rank.

Zama: So when are you meeting your sex friend?

I laugh.

Me: When he comes back, I guess.

I told Zama about Bongani. I had to tell somebody. If I can't tell anyone about Derek, for obvious reasons, then I need to vent about this Bongani situation.

Her: So you really want to end things with him?

Me: I think so...

Her: How I wish I was you. Getting married at a young age is a bad choice.

Me: So you're not happy in your marriage?

Her: It's not that I'm unhappy. It's just that I have my moments when I want to live my old carefree life.

Me: That's deep!

She laughs sweetly and rubs her belly.

Her: It's okay. I'm happy though.

Me: Are you sure?

Her: My husband is okay, I guess.

Me: Really?

Her: Men lie and cheat, Ziyanda.

Yhu I decide not to respond to that. I am not about to listen to someone's marriage problems. I'm not a good listener, especially if I have to listen to people's relationship problems.

Anyway, as I get home, I realise that my mood has lifted a lot. Konje I am expecting a call later...

I take a long bath, and take some time to think about this Derek situation.

I am already in it, so there's no point in acting like nothing is happening.

What exactly do I want? Am I ready for a relationship? Physically, yes. That man has proven he can take care of my sexual needs. I am sorted in that department. Now, am I ready emotionally? My relationship with Siya left me scarred for a very long time, and I am still shocked that I got over it. I thought I would take some time off, and I did. Bongani and I have managed to keep a civil relationship. Do I feel anything for him? Not really. I like him because we have sex. I don't see myself being with him in a serious relationship. He's a great person, but I don't have intense feelings for him. I'm actually proud of myself for sustaining that sexual relationship without falling for him...

And then there's Derek...

He has turned everything upside down. I never thought I'd even be in such a situation with him. What I'm trying to figure out now is whether I'm acting like this because of the sexual attraction, or because I really truly like him. It's obvious that we have some sort of connection, but do I really want to be "with" him?

I finish lotioning myself and get in my pyjamas. I decide not to watch TV with my parents because I am not in the mood to be around them. I say goodnight to them and lock myself in my room...

My only problem is that I get lost in his spell when I'm around him, something happens...

That sexy beast has bewitched me.

Just as I am about to doze off, my phone rings and I snap out of it.

It's him!

I clear my throat before answering.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi Ziyanda.

My stomach churns at the sound of his voice. See why I say he has bewitched me? He's not physically here, but he has me feeling all sorts of ways.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm well, and how are you?

Me: I'm well...

I keep quiet.

Him: How is your week going?

Me: Uhm it's fine, I guess.

Him: Lucky you.

Me: You're not having a good week?

Him: Not at all.

Me: Oh.

Do I have the right to know why he's not having a good week? Are we at that level where he can tell me about his bad days?

Him: At first I couldn't understand why I was so grumpy and unproductive... Then Xolani sent me some of the pictures that were taken on Sunday... I saw a picture of us, and it instantly clicked that it's because I haven't seen you.

I try to say something. I am speechless.

Him: I miss you.

He says that so sincerely, that I find myself telling him I miss him too.

Him: I'm so used to seeing you every day.

I laugh.

Him: Is the school still functioning without my presence?

Me: Yes, I think so...

Him: What about you?

I giggle quietly.

Me: I'm fine.

Him: Hmm...

Me: When are you coming back?

Him: On Saturday.

What?? But that's so far!

Him: Ziyanda?

I struggle to speak. What the hell am I going to do-

I stop myself from thinking all of these things. Why am I behaving like this? This man is not my boyfriend. Like, what the hell Ziyanda?

Me: I'm here.

Him: So have you been doing any thinking?

Oh gosh. Not this again.

Me: Kinda.

He chuckles.

Him: Kinda?

Me: Ya.

Him: Any progress report?

Me: Not yet.

Him: Okay then...

We are silent for a while.

Him: Enjoy the rest of your night.

What? Is he ending the call? Why?

Me: Thanks.

I end the call and sit up angrily. Petty LaBelle has come out full force and there is no stopping her. I want to let out a scream, but I know better. I can hear my phone ringing but I ignore it. Why does he have to be so far? Also, why am I suddenly so attached to him?

I hate all this uncertainty.

I hate him. It's his entire fault.

I take my phone as it's ringing, and reject the call. I then type a text quickly and send it. He must leave me alone, and stop calling.

Me: I'm ending this... whatever this is.

As I press send, my phone rings.

Bongani.

Shit.

I reject the call.

He must also leave me alone.

I lay on my back, facing the ceiling. I am going coo-coo right now. This is a side of me that I have tried my best to let go, but I guess it is what it is... Petty LaBelle is out to kill at this point.

INSERT 23

It's now Friday, and I am dreading going to work... I am in the worst mood.

I go straight to my class and decide that I will miss assembly.

As I am checking my emails, I see one from Derek. It was sent late last night, after we spoke and I hung up on him.

Dear Ms Dlamini,

I hope you are well. My brother has asked me send you some of the photos that were taken this past Sunday at our family's fundraising brunch. Furthermore, he thanks you for your donation towards our orphanage.

Please find attached the photos.

Kind regards,

Derek Ngidi.

I open the attachment and look through the photos.

Shame, I looked good, hey.

Out of nowhere, my heart sinks.

I'm now staring at us. I miss him.

I'm busy talking to Xolani, laughing (probably at something stupid he was saying), and Derek is looking at me, with his usual intense stare.

I've been staring at this photo for a while...

I eventually go through the other photos and my heart is all heavy now.

The photographer captured those moments so beautifully.

I close my laptop and get ready to welcome my kids...

It's now lunchtime, and I am ready to leave this place. I get a call from Bongani and I answer it.

Me: Hey.

Bongani: I'm outside.

Me: Okay.

I end the call, and get my bag.

I decided to meet with Bongani for lunch, because I just want to get this conversation over and done with.

I get in his car and realise just how much I missed his calm and collected self.

Me: It's been so long!

We share a hug and he smiles.

Him: Angithi you've been ignoring me.

Me: Me? Ignore you? Never!

He rolls his eyes and I laugh.

He drives to a restaurant and we place our order.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm fine. How are you?

Him: Fine? What's wrong?

I take a deep breath stare at him. I just want to get it over and done with.

Bongani: What?

I drink some of my water.

Him: You met someone?

My eyes pop out and I almost choke on my water. He laughs quietly and shakes his head.

Him: Thought as much...

Me: It's complicated.

Him: Is it?

I nod.

Him: Well I also met someone.

Me: What??

I stare at him in shock.

Him: Yep.

I sigh and nod.

Me: I guess this is it?

Him: I guess.

Me: How are you though?

Him: I'm okay...

Bongani and I had a conversation about this. We discussed that should one of us "meet someone," we will immediately cut ties, out of respect.

Our food comes and we continue chatting. I must admit that I will miss him, but I'm not trying to be a side chick.

After an hour, we're done. We get in the car and he drives me back to school.

Me: I hope she treats you right.

He laughs.

Him: Who would have thought?

I shrug. He seems to be more comfortable talking about this girl. I can't even tell him much about my situation because it confuses the crap out of me.

He gets out of the car and we share a long hug.

Me: I'm going to miss our ratchet TV moments.

Him: Me too.

Me: Treat her right, please.

He nods and we let go of each other.

Him: I hope he also treats you right.

I grunt.

Him: Bye Ms Dlamini.

Me: Bye.

We share another hug before I watch him drive off. I then make my way inside and go straight to my classroom. I get there and find my kids working quietly.

I sit down and just zone out...

Part of me is sad about cutting ties with Bongani, but it is what it is. I'll get over it eventually. Now that I've also cut ties with Derek, I guess I can slowly go back to my normal life.

I go through the photos again and my heart sinks deeper.

My kids can even sense my mood, because they keep giving me love letters. Lol they really know how to bring a smile on my face, these angels.

It's finally after school, and as much as I love my babies, I am beyond glad that they are gone. I pack up my things and get ready to leave. Today I am planning on leaving early. I want to go home and drown myself in my Rum and Raisin ice-cream.

As I am about to walk out, Camille calls me and asks me to come to her office. I start panicking.

Does she know about this situation with Derek?

What if someone told her?

Who told her?

Is she going to fire me?

At this point I'm a mess. I walk to her office and knock.

Camille: Come in!

I walk in and she smiles.

Camille: Hi, Ziyanda!

Me: Hey.

I sit down and she stops working.

Camille: I wanted to check on you.

I look at her in confusion.

Camille: I just wanted to let you know that I am here if you need to talk.

Gosh.

Me: Oh okay.

She smiles warmly.

Me: I've been helping my dad with his cooking business. It's been hectic lately.

Her: Oh... I'm glad it's just exhaustion.

I smile reassuringly.

Me: I'll get some rest this weekend.

She nods.

Her: If you need-

Just then, there's a knock. I'm glad because it means I can leave.

Her: Come in!

The door opens.

My heart stops beating!

Derek!

He stands by the door and seems shocked to see me.

Derek: Good afternoon, ladies.

Camille: D!

She stands and walks to him and they share a hug.

Must be nice.

I watch them have their little moment. They're like brother and sister, these two. I've heard that Camille's husband is one of Derek's close friends...

They let go of each other, and Derek looks at me. My throat is dry as hell.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I try to speak, but nothing comes out.

He focuses on Camille and they have a mini catch up session. I stand and clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, I'll see you next week.

Camille: Thank you. I hope you get some rest.

Me: I will.

Derek looks at both of us, confused.

Me: Bye.

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: Can I have a word with you, Ziyanda?

Me: I have to go...

Him: I'll be quick.

I nod lightly as I walk out.

Camille: Have a good weekend!

Me: You too.

I feel Derek following me. I stop, so that he leads the way. He opens his office door and I follow him in. He closes the door and then looks at me carefully, as if he is trying to figure out what to say.

We are silent for a while.

At times, I wish I was a person who wears her heart on her sleeve. Being an open communicator has its advantages... I'm the complete opposite...

I involuntarily step closer to him and find myself wrapping my arms around him. I rest my head on his chest and inhale his cologne. At this point, I'm not thinking about anything other than the fact that his absence has deeply affected me.

Does that say something about the way I feel about him?

I feel his arms around me and I smile. He lowers his head, and I feel his chin on my face.

Him: Hey.

Me: Hi.

We are quiet once again, and I am okay with that. I eventually put up my face and look at him.

I went a week without seeing him, and it was pure torture. I only spoke to him once. Once!

Our lips touch and I get lost in that kiss. Very tender and comforting.

He stares at me and smiles.

Him: I missed you.

He tightens his hold on me and I smile and kiss him again. He stops the kiss and looks at me, with a weird expression, as if he's remembering something.

Me: I'm sorry for the text.

I sigh.

Me: I didn't mean what I said. I was angry.

Him: Did I anger you?

I nod.

Him: What did I do?

Me: You wanted to end the call.

Him: But... Didn't you want to end it too?

Me: No!

He pouts and I laugh quietly.

Him: Miscommunication...

He let's go of me, but I'm still holding on. He realises this, and holds me again.

I am very clingy right now, and this rarely happens.

I'll just live in the moment for a few minutes.

Surely it won't hurt me?

I missed Nkanyezi...

INSERT 24

Everyone has left, and once again, it's just the both of us left.

I am in his office, busy with my phone while he is finishing up some work.

Derek: Did you get the pictures?

Me: I did. They're lovely.

He smiles and gets back to his work.

Him: I should be done in 10 minutes.

Me: Okay.

10 minutes, and sure enough, he is done.

Him: Asambe.

We get our things and make our way out. He locks up and we get in his car.

Him: So where am I taking you?

Me: Home.

He laughs as he starts the car.

Him: Home being my place?

Me: I won't respond to that.

He reaches for my hand and kisses it lightly.

We get to his apartment in Randburg, but he tells me we're going to the one in Maboneng.

Me: I thought you don't like the loft in Maboneng.

Him: I didn't, but now I do.

Me: What changed?

Him: It holds great memories.

He gives me his usual corny look and I blush.

Me: My parents will start thinking that I have disowned them.

Him: Really?

Me: I've been a house prisoner for months now. I'm sure they're worried because I haven't been around much lately.

Him: So what needs to be done? Should I ask for permission from them?

Me: If you want to die, then go ahead.

He laughs and I watch as he packs some clothes.

Me: I would like to go home and get fresh clothes as well.

Him: No problem.

He finishes up and we make our way out.

Him: I'm supposed to meet a few friends of mine for dinner. Do you mind joining me?

Me: Uhm...

Him: Please?

I sigh and nod.

Him: Thank you.

We drive to Soweto and he parks outside my house.

Me: I'll be back soon.

Him: Are you sure you don't want me to come in?

He laughs when I give him a threatening look.

Me: Stay in your lane, Uber driver!

Him: Wait, what?

Me: As far as I'm concerned, you're an Uber driver.

He laughs loudly as I get out and rush inside. I get in the house and find both mommy and daddy sitting in the lounge, watching Rhythm City.

Me: Hey good people!

They greet me back excitedly.

Me: I am spending the weekend at Thato's house.

Mom: Aww how is Thato? It's been so long!

Me: She's great! She says I must tell you guys that she misses you, and she'll visit soon.

Heeeh! Dick appointments will have you formulating some calculated lies!

Dad: Oh maan we miss her yazi. Is she still working at that law firm?

Me: Yep.

I walk to my bedroom and begin packing my things. My phone rings and I answer it without checking who is calling.

Me: Hello?

Person: I am charging you extra for making me wait, ma'am.

I giggle.

Me: Really?

Derek: It's been 10 minutes.

Me: I'll be done soon!

I hang up and finish up packing. Once I'm done, I go back to the lounge.

Me: See you soon, loved ones.

They both laugh and nod.

Dad: So is that your Uber out there?

Me: Yep.

He laughs and nods.

Me: Bye bye.

They say bye and I am out...

We're now in Maboneng, his loft.

Me: Can I take a shower?

He gives me a disapproving look.

Him: Are you also going to ask me to pee?

Me: Yes, sir.

Him: I'll throw you out.

I chuckle as I walk to the bathroom.

The mature part of me, Granny Zee, is just looking at me, with pride. She's busy telling me to keep things like this... Chilled... But Petty LaBelle? The bitch is sitting on her throne, with her tiara, looking at me critically. Petty just wants drama and she refuses to see the good in situations. Granny Zee has tamed her a bit, because although she is on her throne, with her diamond tiara, poor Petty's mouth is taped...

While showering, my thoughts are interrupted by someone's presence. I turn around and Derek is standing a few steps away from me. I quickly cover myself and look at him in shock.

He now has a confused look on his face.

Me: Privacy? Personal space?

Him: Oh...

He pulls me closer and I wince.

Him: Better?

Me: Argh.

Him: Are you not burning in here? Why is the water so hot?

Me: Because...

He groans as he reaches for the taps and adjusts the water.

Me: This is quite disrespectful. Do you usually disturb people when they're showering privately?

He laughs and wraps his arms around me. He then kisses me and my body instantly turns into jelly.

How I have missed thee!

We're done dressing up and having sex, for now...

We go to the lounge and sit down, because he says his guests are running.

He puts his arm around my shoulders and I look at him.

Me: How was Durban?

Him: It was okay...

I nod.

Him: The only highlight was meeting up with some friends.

Me: Hmm.

Him: And how was your week?

Me: It was okay...

Him: Why was Camille worried about you?

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Him: So it's nothing hectic?

I shake my head and he nods. I think he is trying to figure me out. I'm not much of a deep talker...

We continue chatting until his phone rings and he answers.

Derek: Hello?... Alright, I'll be there in 5 minutes...

He laughs.

Him: Hai suka calm down... Bye...

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

Him: Let's go.

We get up and make our way out.

Him: We're going to The Cosmo again.

Me: Hmm...

He winks.

Me: Is it too late to change my mind and stay in, while you entertain your people?

Him: Definitely too late.

Me: Gosh.

Him: Gosh? Is that part of your vocabulary, Ms Dlamini?

Me: Sometimes, a girl's got to pull out something different.

He laughs... We finally get to The Cosmo and walk in. He talks to a waiter and we are led to our table, which is already occupied.

I have to stop myself from staring at these people.

The man just looks intense...

Like, that's the only way I can describe him...

Hot and intense...

The woman, pregnant as hell, is beautiful, very beautiful.

Derek: Lose the face, idiot.

The man looks at Derek angrily, but within seconds, he is smiling.

Yhu I feel the earth shake a bit.

Derek: I'm glad you arrived safely.

The woman smiles sweetly and mentions that she wants nuts. The man quickly stands and disappears, but he is back in a flash, with a packet of nuts. The woman smiles at the man and they're staring at each other all lovingly.

They're in love. Cute.

Derek: Ziyanda, these are very good friends of mine, Dean and Nolwazi.

I look at Dean... Lord...

He looks at me blankly and nods.

Tjo. What's his deal?

Nolwazi, who is chewing her nuts, smiles.

Nolwazi: Hi, love. How are you?

Me: I am well, thank you.

Nolwazi: I would stand and give you a hug, but I'm immobile.

She smiles kindly.

Me: It's okay.

Derek and I sit down and I look over at that rude bastard. He's now rubbing Nolwazi's belly.

Derek: Liwa just texted me, he's 5 minutes away...

Dean: You idiots are disrespectful as fuck. You don't set appointments and then arrive late.

Derek: Lwazi, are you the pregnant one or is Dean carrying the third child?

Third? Are they having twins?

Before I know it, another couple walks in.

The wife? Beautiful as hell!

Gosh I am just overwhelmed at this point.

I can die, and I won't mind.

I feel Derek's hand on mine under the table. He brushes me lightly and I try my best to keep it together. At this point in time, Petty LaBelle is on her feet, eyes wide open, and pissed as hell...

Universe, do best, please...

INSERT 25

The man, whom I assume is the Liwa guy they were talking about, is holding his wife's hand as they walk towards the table. They get to us and Derek stands. They share a hug.

Liwa: What the fuck is this place?

Dean: Ask him...

Nolwazi: Can you all stop being snobs? This is Maboneng. The new hangout spot.

Dean: For kids...

Nolwazi: Are you finally admitting that you're old?

They all laugh, except Liwa's wife, who seems annoyed. I can't help but stare at her. Her beauty is striking...

Liwa: I'm definitely too old for this shit.

His eyes land on me and he gives me the weirdest look. I stare back at him and he eventually looks away.

I'm not about to be intimidated by these hot men and their gorgeous wives.

Derek looks at Liwa and they share some non-verbal vibes...

Derek: This is Ziyanda.

Liwa: Oh I see... Hi, Ms Dlamini.

Liwa smiles warmly and comes to my side. He pulls me up and before I can even process anything, I'm being hugged.

Him: I'm Liwa. It's lovely to meet you.

I clear my throat.

Me: Lovely to meet you too.

He walks to the other side of the table and pulls the chair for his wife, who sits down.

Liwa: This is my wife, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo looks at me and smiles. I'm surprised she can even smile.

Some people are just bitchy nje, it's in their blood...

I feel Derek's hand on mine again under the table and I am just too overwhelmed to even be pissed right now. Why did he bring me here?

Nolwazi: So Ziyanda, what do you do for a living?

Well damn. We're just going to focus on me?

I feel everyone staring at me.

Me: I'm a teacher.

She smiles as she looks at Derek.

Dean: You work with Derek?

Me: Yes, I do.

He looks at me blankly and I stare right back at him expressionlessly. If he thinks he's going to make me feel small then unyile.

Nomvuyo: Wait. You guys work together?

Oh this one has a voice after-all.

Me: We do.

She then looks at us in confusion.

Nomvuyo: So how-

Liwa clears his throat and tries to change the subject, but I'm still looking at Nomvuyo. What does she mean? Does she think we're in a relationship? Also, she seems like a very nosy person.

Liwa: Where are you two staying?

Nolwazi: My parents' house.

Liwa: What?

He laughs and looks at Dean, who seems annoyed.

Dean: I didn't even have a say...

Nolwazi: Why would we go to a hotel when we have a family home this side?

Dean: You think I enjoy being around your father? The man doesn't like me.

Derek: Who does?

They laugh once again and I'm just here thinking about getting drunk and forgetting about this night.

Honestly, being around wealthy people is not easy. They have a certain aura, and I can't deal with it.

Dean: My only problem is that Nolwazi's father hates me. He's civil, but he definitely hates me.

Nolwazi: No, he does not!

She punches him lightly and he rubs her belly.

Derek: We have to go.

Liwa: Huh?

Derek: We have other plans... I just came to make sure you've settled in this side.

Nomvuyo: Wher-

Liwa: Alright then. We'll see you tomorrow.

I am so confused right now.

Derek: Sure.

Derek glances at me and stands. I stand as well.

Nolwazi: Help me stand, Langa.

Dean stands and helps Nolwazi, who is quite big. Now I see that she is carrying twins. She wobbles to my side and gives me a hug.

Nolwazi: It was lovely meeting you, Ziyanda. You're beautiful.

Beautiful? Lol.

Me: Thank you. It was lovely meeting you too.

Dean looks at me and nods. Is that a smile I see on his face?

Dean: Enjoy the rest of your evening.

Me: Thanks.

Liwa and Nomvuyo stand, and they both hug me.

Liwa: See you soon, Ms Dlamini.

I can't help but think that this one knows more than he should. He smiles mischievously and then hugs Derek.

Nomvuyo: Bye, Ziyanda.

Me: Bye.

We finish saying our goodbyes, and before I know it, we're outside, and it's raining.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I shake my head. He must just shut up and leave me alone. I start walking fast and he follows me. My weave is getting wet, I'm getting wet.

Fuck Derek actually.

Derek: I can get us an Uber.

I ignore him and continue walking.

After 10 minutes, we get to the loft, and I go straight to the bathroom. I am so annoyed right now. I don't even know why I'm here. I take a quick shower just to get warm. Once I'm done, I lotion myself and put on my pyjamas. I put my towel around my weave, just to get it dry...

I then walk to the lounge, and find the TV on.

This sneaky man. An episode of Real Housewives of ATL is playing... I sit down and see a glass of white wine on the table. I look over at him, in the kitchen... He seems busy.

All I know is that he must stay away from me.

I take the glass of wine, and drink... Chardonnay...

Petty LaBelle sits down with her arms crossed.

Derek: I have to go somewhere quickly... I'll be back.

I ignore him as he rushes out...

I feel a bit better now that I'm watching my favourite show... I'm annoyed, but better...

Derek: Zi...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times. I find him staring down at me nervously.

Me: What?

Him: You fell asleep.

I yawn and sit up properly. Why is acting all nervous?

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing.

I stretch and sit properly. That nap was glorious.

Him: I cooked.

My tummy grumbles and I rub it.

Me: Okay.

He walks away and comes back with a tray.

Me: Oh...

He frowns.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing.

I take the tray and place it on my lap.

Me: Thank you.

I look at the plate and smile.

Me: Burger?

Him: You said it's your favourite food.

My tummy continues to rumble and I sigh.

Me: Thank you.

I take a bite and my tasting buds dance.

Me: Where did you buy this?

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: I made it.

Me: Wait, what?

He smiles and nods.

Me: It's delicious.

He sighs in relief as I eat quietly. It has all the important ingredients, more especially pickles and a well-done egg.

This chardonnay is also doing its job.

I finish after a while, and look at him.

Me: That was amazing.

He smiles nervously and I frown.

Me: What's wrong?

He sighs.

Him: You are angry.

Me: I was...

I put down the tray and look at him.

Him: Tell me what exactly angered you.

I grunt.

Me: I'm not angry anymore.

Him: I'm glad... However, I still would like to know.

Me: You put me in an uncomfortable position.

He nods.

Me: I hate being around strangers... Especially if I get thrown into that kind of situation.

He rubs his chin thoughtfully and nods.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm over it.

Him: So what works for you when you're angry or annoyed?

Me: Space.

He nods again and then stands and takes the tray to the kitchen. He then disappears to the bedroom and I'm just sitting here wondering what the fuck is going on...

I sit there for a while and eventually walk to the bedroom and find him putting on his pj pants.

Me: Derek?

He glances at me.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I just needed to take a quick shower.

Me: Oh.

I watch as he cleans up the space. I'm starting to feel like I've done something wrong. Am I invading his space? Did I make him angry?

Me: Derek, are you angry?

Him: No, I'm not.

He finishes what he's doing, and then sits on the edge of the bed. He pats the space next to him.

Him: Come here for a sec...

I go and sit next to him. We are silent for a while.

Him: I'm trying to get to know you.

I keep quiet.

Him: As soon as I figure something out about you, something else comes up. You have many layers.

I don't say anything.

Him: I care about you.

He takes my hand.

Him: We're adults. I don't want us to find ourselves in a complicated situation.

My heart starts beating. He wants to have this conversation now?

Him: What do you want?

He looks at me softly.

Him: Ziyanda.

I look at him.

Him: What do you want?

Me: You.

He keeps quiet for a while.

Him: Then I'm all yours...

With that said he makes me sit on his lap and holds me tight.

I want to tell him that I want to make this work, but the words can't seem to come out. I can't allow myself to do it...

Me: Derek...

Him: You don't have to say anything...

I sigh in relief and he chuckles.

Our faces touch and we kiss...

I'm tired of talking.

INSERT 26

Heartbreak is a unique feeling... not just heartbreak from a romantic relationship, but heartbreak in general... As you go through it, you find yourself thinking you will never make it. The healing process seems impossible. It's unfortunate that you come across people who you fall in love with, make great memories with, and then they turn around and hurt you. That pain cuts deep because you don't expect them to tear you apart.

What's even more frustrating is coming across people who don't understand why you behave a certain way: people who just don't empathise with you. Some people fail to understand that our experiences shape us. Just because they manage to survive their fallbacks and still have a positive attitude, it doesn't mean that the rest of us will be the same. Some of us struggle with dealing with fallbacks, and the intensity of those fallbacks ultimately change us in a negative way...

All these thoughts are running through my mind, and I find myself waking up. I check the time and it's around 3am. I get out of bed and walk to the lounge and switch on the TV.

I call Niki and she answers. She sounds sleepy.

Niki: Hey, friend.

Me: Nikiwe...

Her: What's up?

I sigh heavily...

Niki and I have known each other forever. She's been through it all with me. I don't even need to explain myself to her.

Her: Where are you?

Me: I'm at Derek's place.

Her: Where is he?

Me: Bedroom...

She sighs.

Her: I'm sorry I can't be there...

Me: It's fine, friend. I'll be fine.

We've been chatting for about 40 minutes, when I see Derek walking towards me.

Me: I have to go.

Niki: Is he there?

Me: Bye.

She laughs and tells me she loves me.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up just as he sits next to me. He opens up his arms and I get closer to him till I'm resting my head on his chest.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing. Just couldn't sleep.

He caresses my back and I feel myself relax again. Living with depression is not easy. It always creeps in when it wants to, but I've been living with it for so long, that I am able to identify my triggers, and when I'm about to get an episode.

Him: I'm worried...

Me: Don't. I'm fine.

I look at him and give him a reassuring smile.

Me: I'm just restless.

We reposition and end up on our backs, cuddling.

Me: Your friends, hey...

He laughs.

Him: What about them?

Me: Definitely not my type.

Him: Why?

Me: Firstly, Dean is rude. I strongly dislike him.

Him: No one likes Dean. He's a dick.

Me: Why is he so obnoxious?

Him: It's his personality. You either love or hate him.

I roll my eyes.

Him: Carry on... I'm very interested in what you have to say about them.

Me: Nolwazi is nice.

Him: Nice? Come on now, Ms Dlamini.

I laugh.

Me: She's kind.

Him: She is...

Me: They're cute together though.

Him: Dean is Nolwazi's boss.

I put up my hand and look at him in shock.

Me: Huh?

He nods.

Him: They're both economic analysts, and Dean is the head of their division.

Me: Wow. They met at work?

He nods.

Me: Are they still working together?

Him: Yes.

Me: Wow.

He smiles as I rest my head on his chest again.

Him: There's hope after-all.

I punch him lightly and giggle.

Me: Liwa seems forward.

He laughs.

Him: He's more sociable than all of us.

Me: How long have you known them?

Him: It's been many years...

I look at him.

Me: Do you even hang out with poor people?

Him: I beg your pardon?

Me: You heard me.

He chuckles.

Him: I don't really pay attention.

Me: Hmm... I'll be your first poor friend.

He repositions me so I'm on top.

Him: You're special.

I chuckle.

Him: You are an extrovert and introvert at the same time. You're honest and closed off at the same time.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Very special.

I lower my face and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: And you talk too much.

He looks at me in shock and I smile innocently.

Him: How dare you speak to your leader like that?

I laugh in disbelief.

Me: Wow!

He squeezes my butt and I squeal.

Me: Don't start something you won't be able to finish.

Him: Are you not familiar with my ways yet?

Me: Hmm. I don't think so.

He swiftly repositions so that he is on top. He kisses me passionately and I moan in between.

Me: Nkanyezi...

He looks at me amusingly and I smile.

Him: I hate that name...

Me: What? It's a beautiful name.

He frowns and I wrap my leg around him.

Me: Nkanyezi...

He smiles.

Him: Are you trying to make me fall in love it?

I giggle and nod.

Me: I love it!

Him: Not as much as I love you.

Wooooah!

Everything stops moving.

I feel like I'm sinking. Why is he saying this? Is he trying t-

I feel his lips on mine and he kisses me slowly. As much as I try to fight it, the kiss has a good effect on me. It calms me. How did he do that? I went from losing my mind, to feeling all warm and fuzzy.

He eventually stops the kiss and I open my eyes to find him staring at me.

Him: Relax.

I don't say anything.

Him: I don't intend on hurting you.

Me: Don't sell me dreams, Derek.

Him: I'm not.

I keep quiet and he kisses me again. Just as I'm about to freak out again, the kiss does its job. I feel his hand slide up my pj top. He massages my breast and I moan.

This was like nothing I have ever experienced before. The way he held me, and looked at me was intense yet soft at the same time. There were moments I felt like I was pulling back, but he managed to reel me back in and I found myself drowning in his spell yet again.

I don't know what this man is doing to me, and that's what's frightening.

As I reach my climax, I try to keep it together, but I fail dismally.

I am a sobbing mess.

I fight as he tries to comfort me, but I end up giving up. He holds me as I sob even more. After the longest time, I'm calm and I doze off in his arms...

Life really is unfair. You get damaged and hurt by people who claim to love you, and then the world struggles to understand why it's so difficult to open yourself up again, when all you know is pain... For some of us, loving openly is a luxury.

INSERT 27

I'm awakened by aches all over my body. I put up my head and remember where I am. Did I really sleep on this couch?

I sit up and groan. My body is achy.

I get up and make my way to the bathroom to pee. I don't even want to look at myself in the mirror because I know I'm mess.

I wonder where Derek is... My heart aches as soon as I think about him. I was so vulnerable last night and I'm genuinely scared of how things will be from now on.

He told me he loves me...

I brush my teeth and stare at myself in the mirror. My eyes are swollen and puffy... I wash my face, but I still look a mess. I walk back to the lounge, and see Derek in the kitchen. He sees me and smiles. This one has a really sincere smile.

He walks to me, opens up his arms and I wrap my arms around him.

Him: Morning, Dlamini.

Me: Hey, Ngidi.

We stand in each other's arms for a while.

Him: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm fine.

Him: Fine is not a feeling.

I sigh.

Me: I'm okay.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and we let go of each other.

Him: I had to get a few things for breakfast.

Me: You're cooking?

Him: Yes.

Me: Are you trying to make me fatter?

He laughs and spans my butt.

Him: Would you like anything to drink?

Me: I'll have water.

I follow him to the kitchen and he gets me water.

Me: Do you enjoy doing things for people?

Him: Well it depends on who they are.

Me: Hmm.

I'm happy he is not one of those traditional guys who expect me to cook and clean because I am the wrong person.

I take a sip of my water and watch him cook.

Me: Do you need help?

Him: No, thanks. Please go away.

Me: Rude much?

He chuckles and signals for me to leave him alone. I walk to the lounge and watch the news. I get my phone and text Niki, letting her know that I'm feeling better.

Derek's phone rings and it's right next to me.

Me: Your phone!

Him: Answer it.

Me: Huh?

He ignores me. I take it and roll my eyes as I answer it.

Me: Derek's phone, hello.

Dean: Hi, may I speak to Derek?

Me: He has asked me take a message.

He chuckles and I growl.

Arrogant man.

Dean: Well, tell him we're here and these receptionists don't want to let us in.

Wait, what?

Me: I beg your pardon?

Dean: Sisi, we are downstairs. Tshela uDerek ukuthi we're here.

Argh.

Dean: Never mind. We've been allowed access.

With that said, he ends the call.

I start panicking. They're here? Is it all of them? What are they doing here?

I quickly stand up and go to Derek.

Me: Derek!

He looks at me calmly.

Me: Dean says they're here!

Derek: Ah shit.

I look at him angrily.

Him: We were supposed to meet, but I forgot to cancel.

I narrow my eyes and he looks at me apologetically.

Me: I'll be in the bedroom.

Him: But-

Me: Zip it, Nkanyezi!

He looks at me in disbelief as I rush to the bedroom. Why would he invite these people here? Also, does he really think I'm dumb enough to believe that he "forgot to cancel"?

Nxa I go to the bathroom and take a long shower. I feel lighter. I don't know why, but I definitely feel lighter.

I moisturize my weave and it gets revived, but now I need a hairdryer just to revive it to the fullest. The rain from last night did the most. I decide to put a head wrap because I'm not feeling myself right now.

As I finish getting dressed, Derek walks in and looks at me in disbelief.

Me: What?

Him: You look beautiful.

Argh I'm annoyed, but the butterflies are busy having a party in my stomach.

Me: I don't feel beautiful right now. My eyes are red and swollen.

Him: They're not that bad.

Me: I hope you can see that I'm actually rolling them.

He laughs.

Him: Is it safe to get closer?

Me: Whatever.

He walks closer to me and hugs me from behind.

Him: I'm sorry about the unannounced guests.

Me: Are you sure they're unannounced?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Thought as much.

He nuzzles his head on my neck.

Me: Such a liar... How shameful.

He chuckles and I join him. I don't see the use of being pissed. I'm too tired right now.

Me: Why did we sleep on the couch? My whole body is achy.

Him: I was quite comfortable.

He turns me around and smiles.

Him: Breakfast is ready.

Me: Give me 5 minutes.

Him: Anything for you.

I blush and he smiles victoriously. I'm sure he keeps track of how many times he makes me blush, because I'm stone cold.

He gives me a kiss and then walks out. I clean up the space I was using and then go to the bathroom to look at myself in the mirror...

My eyes damit... I'm sure the universe is trying to keep me humble, because if it weren't for these swollen eyes, I'd be there next to Beyonce and the rest... Lol I kid, I kid... A girl can only dream...

I eventually walk out, but slowly. I am dreading this! I really don't like this Dean dude.

Dean: So what exactly is your plan?

Derek: I'm just following her pace...

Dean: And work? How will that work out?

Derek: I'm not thinking about that right now.

Liwa: Dean, stop acting righteous. You fucked Nolwazi while she was married, and working under your leadership.

My mouth drops. So this man is a home wrecker?! I knew he was shady! Sies!

Dean: I'm not acting righteous, you idiot. This fool needs to think things through realistically. Nolwazi may have been under my leadership, but she was high ranked. We're technically equals...

Liwa: So what's your qualm?

Dean: Derek and Ziyanda's work dynamic is completely different. They work with a lot of people, so this shit is bound to come out. I'm pretty sure your school has a strict policy on employee relationships?

Silence.

Dean: I'm not disputing your connection with her, which is very evident. My only issue is whether you'll be able to maintain a civil working relationship. Additionally, what happens when rumours start spreading and shit?

Liwa: True...

Dean: Just think about it, and have that conversation with her...

Derek: Hmkay...

Dean: And what's with the hmms lately? What's happening to your dialect?

Derek chuckles and I hear him telling Dean to leave him alone.

Liwa: Listen, I'm all for having conversations and shit, but at the end of the day, you love who you love. No amount of pressure or policies can suppress emotions... I'm happy for you buddy.

Dean: But you st-

I have heard enough.

I take a deep breath and walk in... They all stare at me as if they've seen a ghost.

It takes them a couple of seconds to snap of it.

Nxa damn gossipers.

Liwa: Ms Dlamini!

He walks to me and gives me a hug. He has such a positive aura that I can't help but relax and smile.

Me: Hi, Liwa.

Liwa: How are you?

He stares at me worriedly... It's the damn eyes.

Me: I'm well, and you?

He eyes me suspiciously.

Me: Had a rough night.

Liwa: I see... But you still look good.

Me: Hmm... Flattery...

He laughs loudly and looks at Derek, who looks nervous. Lol shame I'm sure he's waiting for me to act up. I'm proud to say that Petty LaBelle has been given sleeping pills... For now... But let a nigga try me though...

I look at Dean blankly. Bloody home wrecker!

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: Hi.

Dean: Slept well?

Me: Like a baby.

He raises an eyebrow and I see a slight smile.

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: I'll dish up now.

Dean: You cook?

They all laugh, as if they're referring to some secret joke. I look at them weirdly.

They're like brothers... It's so weird.

Liwa holds my hand and leads me to the couch. We sit next to each other, and Dean sits on the one-seater.

Liwa: So I have a 9 year old daughter...

Me: Is it?

He nods excitedly and then takes out his phone. He shows me pictures of her, and I instantly smile. She's a reflection of her mom and dad. So precious...

Liwa: She's cute neh?

Me: Too much.

He smiles proudly.

Liwa: Her teacher wants us to meet... Apparently she's too smart for her grade. I'm not surprised because she comes from a family of intelligent motherfuckers.

I laugh. He is so vile and loveable at the same time.

Me: So they want to take her up?

Liwa: Yes.

Me: Hmm...

He instantly turns to face Dean and they look at each other for just a second... I honestly don't understand these people.

Anyway, Liwa and I went on to discuss the pros and cons of skipping grades in primary school...

I admire how invested he is in his daughter's education. I wish more parents were like this...

INSERT 28

Liwa: So, do you see yourself doing anything else besides teaching?

I sigh thoughtfully.

Me: Not really... However, I would love to open my own restaurant.

Derek's eyes pop out and he swallows his food quickly.

Derek: What??

I look at him amusingly.

Me: Is there a problem?

Derek: You can't even cook!

Me: So?

Derek: That's like a blind man saying he wants to be an optometrist.

I burst out laughing and they join me.

Me: Well, I will handle the food side... tasting and stuff, while you deal with the business side of things.

Liwa: Heeh so you see yourself owning a restaurant with this fool?

Me: He's not a fool.

Liwa laughs loudly while Dean chuckles quietly. Derek on the other hand looks like he's blushing.

Liwa: Heeeh! You're defending him?

I roll my eyes playfully and we continue chatting. Just then, Dean's phone rings and he excuses himself...

Liwa: Listen, I know Dean is a dick-

Me: He is.

Liwa raises an eyebrow and smiles.

Liwa: You know what? I like you Zizi.

Zizi? Hehe.

Liwa: He's just testing you. He's really not a people's person.

Me: Hmm.

Liwa: Hmmm.

He imitates me and I smile. I look at Derek and he is just happy...

Dean walks back to the lounge and sits down.

Dean: That was Nolwazi...

Liwa: Everything okay?

Dean: Ya she was just asking me to bring some shit for her lunch shindig.

Liwa: Hmm.

Dean looks at Liwa weirdly and shakes his head lightly.

Dean: Anyway, Nolwazi is extending an invitation to you.

Me: Me?

He nods and finishes his food.

Dean: Liwa, let's get going. Lwazi won't be happy if I don't oblige.

Hmm so he jumps when it comes to Nolwazi? Clearly he loves her. Cute.

They finish eating and I offer to get their plates, but they refuse. Liwa takes my plate; they stand and go to the kitchen. Derek is next to me within a split second. He wraps his arm around me and asks me to kiss him.

I shake my head and he sulks.

Look at him being clingy... My sexy, clingy, soul snatching beast...

Liwa: Alright people, we will see you later?

Derek looks at me questioningly and I sigh.

Me: Okay.

Liwa: Great. Enjoy the rest of your morning. It was lovely getting to know you, Zizi.

Me: Thank you, Liwa.

I stand up and we share a hug. I look over at Dean, who's busy on his phone.

Derek: See you soon...

Liwa: Sure.

Dean: See you soonest.

He looks at me and nods, but this time, I see the smile.

Me: Bye.

They walk out and close the door. I walk to the balcony. I need some fresh air right now.

I feel Derek behind me. He wraps his arms around me and I feel myself relax.

I turn and face him. He has a very soft expression.

Me: Thank you.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: A lot has happened in the last 24 hours.

I hug him and we stand there for a while.

Him: I love you.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm here for you. If you need anything, Ziyanda, I am here. Please don't forget that.

We hug again.

This man is doing something to me. I can't even control myself anymore.

We are now driving to Lwazi's parents' house.

Derek: Let me fill you in on everyone...

I nod.

Him: So I already told you about Dean and Nolwazi.

Me: That was a very brief summary. I need details, Nkanyezi!

He laughs.

Him: So Nolwazi was married for 5 years or so... She couldn't have kids.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Then her husband decided to get a second wife.

Me: What?!

He nods and glances at me.

Him: She was hurt obviously, and Dean was there supporting her. That's how the relationship formed.

Me: You call it support?

Him: Huh?

Me: More like taking advantage of a vulnerable woman.

He chuckles.

Him: Well that's your opinion.

Me: You don't think so?

Him: Dean loved Nolwazi from when they started working together.

Me: So that makes it okay for him to interfere in her healing process?

Him: He didn't interfere. He was being supportive, and that led to something else.

I roll my eyes.

Him: Like I said, it's your opinion.

Me: Mxm.

He shakes his head lightly.

Him: So that's Nolwazi and Dean.

He takes my hand and kisses it.

Him: Don't be too consumed by other people's issues.

Me: I don't like him.

He brushes my hand.

Him: Dean is a good man. He may be arrogant and cold, but he loves very deeply.

I look at him blankly and he laughs.

Him: I guess there's no use trying to change your mind... Hopefully, you'll see for yourself through time.

I grunt.

Him: Anyway, Liwa and Nomvuyo...

Me: Liwa is amazing.

Him: He is, but don't mess with his family. He would kill for them.

Me: That's good. I'm glad he cares for them.

Him: His whole world revolves around Nomvuyo.

Me: The bitchy one?

He bursts out in laughter.

Him: Wow.

Me: I didn't even fully recognize her beauty because of her vibe... I don't like her.

Him: You know, Ms Dlamini, you aren't the kindest person either.

I look at him in shock.

Him: Does that shock you?

Me: I will have you know that I'm the kindest person ever.

Him: No, you're not. You're only kind once a person get to know you...

I sigh in disbelief.

Him: Maybe the reason you don't like these people is because you're a tad like them.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and shrugs.

Me: I am nothing like Dean!

Him: Hmm.

Me: Argh just tell me about Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Him: Okay... So Nomvuyo and Liwa grew up in the same house.

I look at him in confusion.

Him: Nomvuyo's grandmother worked for the Mzinyathis.

Me: The Mzinyathis?

Him: Liwa's family... Google them...

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles.

Him: So Nomvuyo's grandmother was their helper.

Me: Really?

And here I thought Nomvuyo also came from money.

Him: Nomvuyo's mother was Zodwa. She was very close with Zimkitha, Liwa's mother. They were like sisters.

Me: Okay...

Him: Zodwa had a sister, her name is Zukiswa.

Me: Okay...

Him: Are you following?

Me: Yes.

Him: So Zodwa, Zukiswa and Zimkitha became close... The Mzinyanthis even built a guesthouse for them in the yard... Zimkitha didn't even think of them as the help. She considered them family.

Me: So Nomvuyo's family lived there 24/7?

Him: Yes, it was the sisters and their mother.

Me: Okay.

Him: Zimkitha and Zodwa were very close, and Zukiswa and Zimkitha had a love-hate relationship.

I nod.

Him: Anyway, Liwa and his twin, Princess, were born. Zimkitha is their mother.

Me: Liwa has a twin?

He nods.

Him: Then Nomvuyo was born and she grew up with her mother, Zodwa. Zukiswa was now nowhere to be found.

Me: Where did she go?

He shrugs.

Him: Nomvuyo and Liwa were close, just like their mothers.

Me: Well clearly their version of close was different.

He laughs.

Him: So that's their love story... It's more complicated though because Nomvuyo found out that her mother was actually Zukiswa, and her father was Zimkitha's husband.

Me: What??? So their relationship is incestuous?? They share a father?!

Him: No, no! Turned out Liwa and Princess' father is out there somewhere.

I sigh in relief.

Me: So Zimkitha stole Zodwa's man? Her so called sister? Wow!

He chuckles.

Him: Their family history is extremely complicated.

Me: Wow.

We finally drive into Nolwazi's family house.

He brushes my hand and I glance at him.

Him: Relax.

Me: Too late.

He chuckles and we get out of the car.

He holds my hand as we walk to the front door, which is open.

A woman walks out with the biggest smile on her face. She looks just like Nolwazi, so I'm assuming she's her mother.

Her: My bright and shining star!

Derek: Mam' Thandeka.

She gets to us and they share a hug.

She seems nice.

She lets go of him and stares at me.

Her: Is this Ziyanda Dlamini?

Well damn...

Derek laughs.

Derek: Yes.

Her: We have heard so much about you, love! Welcome!

She gives me a hug and I try my best not to act awkward.

Petty LaBelle is also very confused right now.

Her: Please relax. I know we can be overwhelming, but it's all love.

Me: Okay.

I look at Derek and he's looking at me like he feels sorry for me. This is too much.

Her: I'm Nolwazi's mom, Thandeka.

Me: Pleasure to meet you.

She smiles.

Her: Everyone is on the other side of the yard...

I say a silent prayer.

Her: I'm busy in the kitchen.

Derek: Okay, we'll make our way to the other side.

She nods and walks away.

Derek wraps his arms around me and I groan.

Derek: We can easily go back home.

Me: We're already here...

He squeezes me and gives me a kiss.

Dean: Stop acting like love struck teenagers...

Where did he come from??

Dean: We're all that side... Wozani.

He walks off and we follow him. He really is hot though... But Nkanyezi is still leading, with 2 points.

We get to the backyard and a big round table is set...

It looks lovely.

Nolwazi: Zizi!

So we're just going to go with the Zizi name?

Me: Hello everyone.

They all greet back. Liwa, Nomvuyo, Dean, Nolwazi are there.

Liwa: I'm glad you came.

I smile and glance at Nomvuyo, who seems intrigued by me.

Nomvuyo: Sit next to me, Zizi.

I try not to look at her weirdly.

What's going on?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

What's happening?

She sees my confusion.

Nomvuyo: My husband tells me you can handle Dean.

They all laugh, and Dean chuckles.

Nolwazi: Anyone who can handle this bully is accepted.

I look at Dean, and he's looking at me coolly. He definitely intimidates me, but I don't go around showing people that they have that kind of effect on me. My parents would be ashamed.

Person: What the fuck is going on here?

We all turn and Nolwazi exclaims happily.

Nolwazi: Mdu!

What??

Mdu: Is this one of mom's stupid family reunions?

Nolwazi: Stop being mea-

Mdu: Hold on...

He looks at me.

Mdu: Ziyanda?

I'm sure my eyes are popping out.

Mdu: What the fuck is going on here?

Everyone looks at us in confusion.

Mdu: Why is my ex here? Is mom trying to set me up?

Silence.

Lord, take me! Take me now!

INSERT 29

The silence is so awkward that I have to clear my throat.

Even Dean is raising an eyebrow.

Mdu: Ziyanda? What's going on?

I look at Derek and he just looks like he is sick. He's not fine!

I touch his hand and he doesn't look at me. Is he angry?

Mdu walks away and makes his way inside the house.

Nolwazi: Uhm... Ziyanda, you used to date Mdu?

Me: Yes.

Everyone is now staring at Derek. He's expressionless.

Me: It was 5 or 6 years ago in varsity. We weren't serious.

Well it was kinda serious, but I'm not trying to make things worse here.

Nomvuyo: It doesn't matter now.

Everyone stares at her, including Derek.

Nomvuyo: It happened years ago, and like you said, it wasn't serious.

Liwa nods slowly. I think he's just shocked that his wife is on my side.

Liwa: Yes...

Nolwazi: Uhm ya. It's not a big deal.

Now we're all staring at Derek... I feel so sorry for him! He's obviously overwhelmed!

Derek: Excuse me...

He stands and leaves the table. Where is he going?

As I'm about to stand, Nomvuyo takes my hand.

Liwa: Give him time to process it.

Dean: Such drama...

They all laugh and I'm just sitting there, trying not to burst out in tears. Where is Derek? I want to assure him that I'm not attached to Mdu.

Mdu walks back and seems more relaxed.

Mdu: Sanibonani.

They greet back.

Nomvuyo: So you guys dated in varsity?

What I have noticed about this one is that she is very nosy. Even the bitch face disappears when she is fishing for information.

Mdu looks at me and smiles.

He chuckles and takes a bottle of champagne, and drinks it.

Mdu: Did you come with Derek?

I nod. I'm trying not cry at this point. I feel so guilty.

Mdu: This is very awkward. Where is he?

Nomvuyo: He left.

Nolwazi: I feel so bad. I'm sorry Zizi.

Mdu: What are you sorry for? That I'm your brother? How treacherous, Lwazi!

Dean chuckles.

Liwa: What a fucken small world!

I stand up. I can't deal with this. These people are too much, and I don't like how lightly they're taking this. I walk to the direction Derek took, and I see him on the other side of the yard, by the pool.

I walk to him and he glances at me blankly.

Me: Are you angry?

He keeps quiet for a while.

Me: Derek. Please say something.

He still doesn't say anything. My anxiety levels are shooting up.

Me: Okay then, I'll give you your space.

Just as I'm about to turn, he grabs my arm. I turn to look at him and he exhales loudly.

Him: I'm angry.

I want to cry.

Him: But not at you... I guess I'm pissed at the universe...

I sigh in relief.

The universe is not loyal. One moment it's on your side, the next it's against you.

Him: When did you...

He can't even finish the sentence.

Me: About 5 or 6 years ago, when I was in varsity.

Him: Was it serious?

I shake my head.

He nods slowly.

Me: I was in varsity...We dated for a couple of months, nothing serious.

Well we technically dated for 2 years but he doesn't need to know all of that. I don't want him to freak out.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: I'm not angry at you, baby.

My body turns into jelly again. I'm not a fan of pet names, but hearing him call me baby eased me up a bit. He notices this, and pulls me closer and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I can't seem to imagine you with another man. It makes me uncomfortable.

I completely understand. I mean, I've secretly had a crush on him for a while, and it always makes me cringe to think of him with another woman.

I plant a kiss on his lips and he smiles.

Me: We both have exes, unfortunately...

He chuckles.

Me: It's unfortunate that my ex happens to be linked to you.

He tightens his hold on me and we share another kiss. I'm trying my best to assure him that I'm not fazed by Mdu's presence. I don't want to him to start questioning "this." We're literally at the beginning stages.

He's a good man, and I acknowledge his efforts to get to know me. I appreciate him.

Him: Thank you.

I kiss him again.

Now I'm the clingy one.

I don't want to go back to those people, but I know we have to.

Him: Let's go back.

We walk back to the other side, hand in hand. As we sit, everyone continues with their conversation as if nothing happened.

I appreciate their maturity. They're clearly above drama and pettiness.

Petty LaBelle is now hiding behind her golden chair. She's not about to involve herself in this situation.

I look over at Mdu. This little bitch is still hot as hell. Damn whore of a man.

Petty LaBelle rises a little bit, but she stops herself.

Mdu: Derek, can I have a word with you?

I look at Mdu sharply, and he ignores me. What the hell is wrong with him? I've just tamed the beast, and now he wants to ruin everything?

Derek: Sure.

They stand and walk away. I just want to protect Derek. This must be embarrassing for him.

Nolwazi: We told him to clear the air. We don't want any unnecessary tension.

I ignore her.

I'm so annoyed right now. What is Mdu saying??

I feel Nomvuyo's hand on mine under the table and I glance at her. She smiles reassuringly.

Nomvuyo: Relax.

Somehow, I end up relaxing. Surely Mdu is not that dumb, right? He knows very well that I am not the one to test...

Eventually they come back, and they seem fine. I look at Derek and he smiles sweetly. The sexy beast is back. I don't know what that idiot said to him, but my Nkanyezi's back, and that's all I care about.

We are now eating and the vibe is much better.

I need the bathroom. I excuse myself and go inside.

As I am making my way back outside, Mdu calls my name and I stop. We're in the kitchen.

Mdu: Hi.

I keep quiet.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: Listen here, just because we are currently crossing paths, it doesn't mean we're fine.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: I don't like you. I doubt I ever will.

Mdu: Yoh.

Me: So do me a favour, and zip it, blabbermouth.

With that said, I walk off and make my way back outside.

Overall, it was a good lunch, but I was over it.

I want to go back to Nkanyezi's place and cuddle. As much as I hate that shit, it definitely sounds better than being here.

Derek senses my mood and announces our departure.

Liwa: We also have to get going.

Thandeka: We should do this more often!

I look over at Dean, and I know he hates all of this. I laugh to myself... At least we have something in common.

We say our goodbyes.

Mdu and Derek hug and I try not to vomit. Mdu tries to hug me, and I give him one look before he tries. He stops himself and focuses his attention on Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Nolwazi: Hope to see you soon!

I give her a smile. A fake smile. I need a few months away from these people...

INSERT 30

We get to Derek's place.

Me: It's been a long day.

He doesn't say anything. He's been quiet since we left Nolwazi's place.

He cleans up his kitchen, which is already clean.

Me: I'll take shower while you do your thing.

He ignores me and I make my way to the bedroom. I sit on the edge of the bed and sigh deeply.

The past 24 hours have been a rollercoaster. I went from wanting nothing to do with Derek, to wanting him, all of him. Seeing him embarrassed like that because of Mdu was just horrible. I know he needs his space, but I don't want to give it to him. What if he realises that I'm just a complicated person who will mess up his life?

I go to the bathroom and get in the shower. I start crying silently and hope that I'll feel better. I hate crying, but there's nothing else I can do.

After much wailing, I feel slightly lighter.

I feel him behind me and turn around to face him.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods.

Him: Thanks for giving me space.

I nod.

He wraps his arms around me and I hold on to him.

Him: I'm not angry.

Me: You're not?

Him: I'm not.

He leans closer to my face and I feel his lips touch mine. He presses me against the wall and I wince. I'm just going with the flow. There's still that part of me that doesn't want to open up, but Derek's presence always reassures me for some weird reason.

I let out a moan as I feel him inside me. I'm uncomfortable, because I hate shower sex, but this man is making it impossible to complain. I'm as loose as a jellyfish.

He pounds me so intensely, that I scream. I dig my fingers on him and he pounds me even harder.

As I reach my climax, he holds me tightly. He follows soon after, and we both just pant like vicious animals. He loosens his hold on me and I find myself sitting down. I know he's looking at me weirdly right now, but I'm exhausted. All that flexibility got a girl shook.

The hot water hits my face, and he adjusts the shower head so it's facing the other way. He then sits next to me.

Out of nowhere, everything sinks in.

Me: Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Fuck!

Him: Yini?

Me: We didn't use a condom!

He chuckles and relaxes again.

Him: We'll get you those pills.

Me: Those pills?

Him: What are they called?

I groan.

Me: After sex pills? No baby pills?

We both laugh and he pulls me so that I'm sitting in between his legs. I'll just act like I'm not so close to his dick.

He kisses my ear and I giggle.

Me: Stop!

Him: Is it ticklish?

Me: Yes.

He does it again and I try moving, but he holds me tight.

Me: Ngidi!

He continues to do it while I giggle away.

He eventually stops once I can't breathe.

I exhale loudly and relax.

Me: You want to kill me.

Him: I wouldn't dare.

We sit there for a long time...

Me: What's your biggest fear?

Him: My biggest fear?

Me: Uh-huh.

Him: Hmm I've never thought of that...

I keep quiet.

Him: I don't think I have a fear...

Me: Lies!

He chuckles.

Him: What's your biggest fear?

Me: Snakes. Spiders. Insects. Heights. Should I go on?

He laughs.

Him: You are so dramatic.

Me: Ohho.

Him: I think my biggest fear is meeting my real parents.

I freeze. I didn't expect that.

Me: Really?

Him: Mmm.

Me: I thought you don't want to meet them?

Him: I don't.

Me: Do you think about them?

Him: Sometimes...

He wraps his arms around my neck and kisses my cheek.

Him: I don't want to spend my days wondering what could have been... I have to live my life.

Me: That's very strong of you.

Him: I try...

We are silent once again.

Him: Why are you so closed off?

I tense up and he kisses my cheek again. I didn't expect this to be a serious Q and A.

I sigh.

Me: I've been through a lot...

He nods and we sit in silence for a long time.

Me: I was sexually abused for most of my childhood...

His body tenses.

Me: I was depressed most of my life, still am. I only got help when I was in varsity, because things just spiralled out of control.

I can't believe I'm telling him all of this...

Me: I was hospitalized for over a month because my depression was undiagnosed for many years...

He is still tense.

Me: And my first boyfriend, whom I loved dearly, turned out to be an abuser...

I stay silent for a while.

Me: I've been through a lot of shit, Derek. That's why I'm cautious with my heart.

We sit there for a long time. I can feel a thigh cramp approaching, so I stand and close the taps. I walk out of the shower and dry myself...

As I am lotioning myself in the bedroom, he walks in with a towel wrapped around his waist. I hold my breath. How is this handsome man with me?

Petty LaBelle instantly stands up and tells me to check myself. According to her, Derek is the one who should be asking himself how he got to be with a badass like myself. Petty really is a good girl. Always keeps the self-esteem in check.

I didn't even feel him next to me. He's now lotioning my arms.

He smiles when he sees that I've snapped out of it.

Him: You zone out quite a lot, don't you?

I look at him, feeling embarrassed.

Him: Why?

Me: It's a coping mechanism.

Him: I see...

He's now spreading lotion on my thighs.

Him: I need you to stay focused now...

He caresses my thighs and my heart skips a beat.

Him: Don't zone out, okay?

I nod.

I can't even speak.

One of his hands makes its way up between my thighs and I moan. He continues going up and I squeal.

Him: Ever so ready...

I feel his fingers massaging me, and I moan once more.

Him: Don't close your eyes, baby.

He continues to rub me softly and I hold my breath.

Him: Breathe, Zi.

I exhale and stare back at him. He's looking at me softly.

Him: I won't hurt you.

I don't say anything.

Him: Trust me...

He does something with his fingers and I moan.

He focuses on one area and I feel the pressure. My whole abdomen area is anticipating the quick climax. Seconds later, I'm holding on to him, craving more of him.

He lifts me and places me on the bed.

He lies down next to me, and I look at him in confusion.

Him: Do as you please...

Argh I love sex, but I'm really not a fan of being on top. Shit's too draining if you're carrying extra weight.

I reposition and slowly let him in... When I feel him in my womb, I forget my dislike of this position, and get to work...

As we both reach our end goal, he wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

I feel him smile, but I'm too tired to look at him. I'm sleepy.

Him: I'll take good care of you, I promise.

I try responding but end up dozing off, safe in his embrace...

One of the precious things about love is that it heals... The process may not be easy or quick, but it heals.

I am going to take this chance...

INSERT 31

It's now 10am Sunday morning, and we've been in bed since last night.

Derek: What are we going to do today?

Me: I don't know.

He gets out of bed and disappears.

I take my phone and call Niki.

Niki: Babe.

Me: I told him I love him.

Niki: Whaaat?!

I sigh.

Niki: Friend!

She laughs in disbelief.

Me: I still can't believe it.

Her: Are you still with him?

Me: Yep.

Her: Wow, I need to meet this man ASAP!

Me: Definitely.

Niki's judgement is always accurate. I need her to meet Derek, so she can give me her honest opinion.

We continue chatting for a while and then Derek walks in.

Me: Bye bye ke.

Niki: Bye bye Juliet.

Me: Eeuw she died! Don't compare me to her!

Niki: But, she died in love!

Derek pulls me closer and I wince, because his cold.

Me: Bye, Niki.

Niki: Shap love.

I end the call and Derek rests his head on my chest.

Derek: These boobs.

Me: I know.

He groans happily.

Right now, I'm not going to entertain negative thoughts. I am happy. This man makes me happy, and that's all that matters right now.

Me: Are you falling asleep?

He moans and is gone minutes later...

I browse through my phone and it rings. It's an unfamiliar number.

I answer.

Me: Hello.

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda?

The voice sounds familiar.

Me: Yes, who am I speaking to?

Person: Hi, Zizi. You're speaking to Nomvuyo.

Nom-who? Nom-what?

Me: Uhm okay...

She laughs lightly.

Nomvuyo: I know I'm the last person you'd expect a call from.

Me: Hi.

Her: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Her: I'm well, thanks. I just wanted to check if you're fine.

Me: Oh.

Her: I know yesterday was awkward for you...

Me: I'm fine...

Her: Okay...

Me: Uhm thank you. That's very sweet of you.

Her: Well I know you had a bad first impression of me... Unfortunately I'm not as sociable as everyone in this group. Additionally, I'm overprotective...

Me: I can relate.

Her: I know... You remind of my young self.

Me: Surely you're not that old.

Her: I'm 34.

Geesh, she's 9 years older than me? These people aren't young, are they? Also, how old is Derek? I should ask him.

Her: I'm old...

She laughs and I smile. She really is loveable a bit.

Her: Anyway, how is Derek?

Him: He's fine.

Her: Distract him with sex. This group of men tends to be very dramatic at times.

Me: Really?

Her: Yes! They love sulking. You just have to learn a few ways to distract them.

Me: Oh.

I chuckle.

Her: On a serious note though, Derek has been a family friend for years. He's a very good man.

I keep quiet. Maybe Nomvuyo can give me some insight on him.

Her: If you haven't noticed yet, they love wholeheartedly. Derek is literally the only one who is not married with kids in our group of friends.

Me: Oh.

I'm glad he doesn't have a baby.

Her: He wears his heart on his sleeve, and that has landed him in some hurtful situations.

Nxa why would anyone hurt this sweet man? Damn whores!

Her: He told us briefly about you some time ago. Apparently you kept telling him to leave you alone?

Me: What??

Her: He was acting like a love struck teenager. It was so random, seeing as he was on a break.

You know what? I officially love Mrs Gossip Girl! She is out here spilling all the tea! I obviously don't need to stalk D because Vuvu the tea spiller is doing the most. Love it!

Me: Break?

Her: His last relationship ended badly.

Me: Is it?

Her: The girl was just busy...

Me: Oh...

I brush Derek's face. He's sleeping peacefully here.

Her: He decided to take a break, and I guess you came into the picture.

Me: For how long?

Her: About 2 years.

Me: Hmm.

Her: Anyway, don't put pressure on yourself. My advice for you is to accept the love. All these men were raised well, by strong women, and they don't think it's a weakness to love wholeheartedly. I'm sure you've noticed this.

Me: Yes.

Her: Don't drive yourself crazy, questioning things. If it feels right, then go for it.

Me: Thank you.

Her: I have to go... You should come visit us.

Me: Will do.

Her: Enjoy your day, love.

Me: Thanks, you too.

Her: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and end up falling asleep...

I'm glad I got to know about this one a bit...

When I finish showering, I find him making the bed.

Derek: Why didn't you wake me up?

Me: You were sleeping so peacefully.

He yawns.

Him: I wanted to shower with you.

Me: Haiké.

He finishes up and goes to the bathroom while I get dressed.

I am starving.

It's now around 2pm, and I assume we're driving to a restaurant.

Me: Are you trying to kill me?

Him: What's wrong?

Me: I'm starving, Nkanyezi!

He chuckles and focuses on the road.

We're driving to Zoo Lake.

Him: I just need to meet someone quickly.

Me: Derek!

Him: It won't even take 5 minutes!

I look at him angrily.

Him: I promise!

We get out of the car and begin walking.

Me: I'm tired of your people. This is the last time.

Him: Offensive much?

Me: I don't care how you take it.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Him: Hungry Lion.

Me: Argh.

We get to a spot, where there aren't people. There's a girl standing under some tree.

Derek: Sindi.

Sindi smiles and hugs him.

There's a blanket, and a cute picnic setup...

Derek: Thanks.

Sindi: You owe me!

She looks at me and smiles.

Sindi: Bye.

She walks off, and I'm just standing there, confused.

Derek: Sit, and eat.

I look at the setup.

Me: Is this for us?

Him: Yes.

Me: Aww this is so cute!

Him: Cute? Come on now.

Me: Delightful! Charming! Lovely! Enchanting!

He laughs.

Me: Aww man, thank you!

I give him a hug and sit down. A girl has got to eat.

Me: Who was that girl?

He sits down.

Him: My cousin, Sindi.

He opens up the food and dishes up for us.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome.

We begin eating.

I've decided that I won't mention Nomvuyo's call. She'll be my secret spy...

Me: So... Can we please discuss how we're going to make this work?

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What?

Him: I didn't think you'd be the one to start this conversation.

Me: Listen, things are great and shit, but I'm still realistic.

He nods.

Me: So what are we going to do at work?

Him: You just have to stop looking at me with puppy eyes.

Me: Excuse me??

He laughs.

Me: You are the one who stares at me with the soggy eyes. Please check yourself.

He sighs.

Him: I do, don't I?

Me: So does this mean we can't interact?

Him: I think we should stay away from each other as much as possible. I'm afraid I can't control the way I look at you.

I blush.

Him: Am I supposed to look at you like you're some enemy?

Me: Maybe try to imagine me in a negative way.

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Him: The bottom line is that we should keep it as professional as possible...

I nod.

Him: I'm thinking of telling Camille about us.

Me: What??

Him: She's a close friend.

Me: What if she tattles?

Him: She would never.

I sigh.

Him: It would make things easier.

Me: You think?

He nods.

Him: I've known her for years. I trust her.

Me: I'm not comfortable with that...

Him: You're not?

I nod.

Him: Okay... Let's see how this week goes...

Me: Sounds like a plan.

We continue eating and chatting.

Honestly, I am very interested to see how this work dynamic is going to turn out...

INSERT 32 (Couldn't edit)

It's now Monday and I am actually having a great day.

Lol life is good.

I've been cooped up in my class, teaching my babies happily.

During lunchtime, I'm in the staffroom warming up my food. Zama, Lwazi and two other teachers are there.

Derek walks in.

Zama: Mr N, we're having a debate here, and I think we need a man's perspective.

Derek: What's up?

I decide to add an extra minute for my food; I don't want to be part of this conversation.

Zama: So we're having a discussion about marriage... I personally think people should move in together before they get married, and these three think moving in will just delay the marriage process.

Lwazi: What do you think?

Derek: I think it depends on how traditional you are...

Zama: Elaborate.

Derek: Well if you're a traditional couple, you won't live together before getting marriage because you think it's a sin.

Lwazi: And it is a sin!

Derek: However, I think moving in together for a while will allow you to learn different things about each other. That learning process might be a deal breaker for one of you, so it will be less complicated to leave because you aren't married, you know?

Zama: Exactly!

They continue to discuss this and I get my food. Derek is now walking towards the microwave. I can smell him. My stomach churns.

Him: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Hey.

Him: Your food looks delicious.

I chuckle.

Me: I have a personal chef.

Him: Is it?

Me: Yep.

I make my way out and walk to my class. I'm not trying to have a staring contest with Nkanyezi, because people will notice. What I will do though, is chow the food he cooked for me.

It's now after school, and I can't wait to go home. I just want to watch TV with my parents and sleep. I miss them. As I am packing up, there's a knock on my door.

Me: Come in.

Derek walks in and I have to stop myself from wrapping my hands around him. Honestly, this professionalism thing is not going to be easy.

Derek: Hi, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Mr N.

He smiles and I pull myself towards myself.

Derek: Had a good day?

Me: Yes, and you?

Him: It was okay...

I finish packing my things and he frowns.

Him: Leaving already?

Me: Yep. See you later, alligator.

I quickly walk out and yell for Zama to hurry up. Within 5 minutes, she's out and we're walking to the taxi rank.

I don't want to be tempted to do some crazy crap at work. Furthermore, I need a break from Nkanyezi, so I can break away from his spell a bit.

Zama: How was your weekend, sthandwa?

Me: It was great yazi.

Her: Mine was also great.

Me: Really? What did you get up to?

Her: Hubby took me to Haarties.

Me: Aww how sweet!

She smiles and rubs her belly.

Her: He tries shame yena...

We continue chatting, and I listen to her marriage stories. *rolls eyes*

It's now Wednesday, and I am still feeling fantastic. I've been avoiding Derek as much as possible, and he's being such a baby...

I thought I would be the clingy one, but hai umuntu is doing the most. Can I say he's my man now? Are we there yet? *blushes*

As I am packing up and getting ready to leave, he comes in my class and shuts the door.

Me: Hey stranger danger.

I laugh when he rolls his eyes.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I don't like this...

I chuckle as he steps closer to me.

Me: Don't you dare touch me! I am not trying to get fired!

I move away and he stops and looks at me sadly.

Him: Are you enjoying this?

Me: Go away.

I quickly get my bag and rush out of the classroom...

I guess this is how it is. I'm going to spend my time here running away from him.

That night when I was busy journaling, I get a call from him.

Me: Hello.

Derek: You are evil.

I chuckle.

Me: Just because I can shut my emotions, it doesn't mean I'm evil, Nkanyi.

He groans dramatically and I laugh.

Him: Pack an overnight bag tomorrow.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Pack an overnight bag, Ziyanda. I'm tired of this shit.

Me: Uhm feisty much?

Him: Ziyanda don't test me. I'm even considering driving to Soweto right now.

Me: Geesh relax, tiger.

I continue laughing at him.

Him: I'm glad to know that this is entertaining.

I listen to him complain for a few more minutes.

Me: Are you okay?

He sighs.

Him: I miss you.

Me: I miss you too.

Him: Please pack an overnight bag?

Me: What will I even say to my parents? It's during the week, and I don't usually sleep out.

Him: Tell them you're going to Niki's or something.

Me: Niki literally lives around the corner.

He moans and I laugh.

Me: I'll see what I can do...

Him: Okay.

We continue chatting until I doze off...

It's now Thursday. I have managed to avoid him this whole week, and I am proud of myself. I know he's suffering, but he'll get over it eventually. During lunchtime, I go to his office and knock.

Derek: Come in.

I walk in and close the door.

Me: Hi, Mr N.

I smile warmly and he looks up from his work.

I walk to him and he stands and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I miss you.

We stand there for a while, until he eventually kisses me. I must admit, I missed him as well.

Him: Are you good?

Me: Uh-huh.

Him: I'm not.

He pouts and I giggle.

Me: Stop being a baby.

Him: But I miss you.

He squeezes me and nuzzles his head on my neck.

Him: Did you pack an overnight bag?

Me: Say what now?

He freezes and lets go of me.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Did you?

Me: Huh?

He lets go of me and looks at me angrily.

Him: Go away from me.

Me: But-

He gives me one look and I know he's not about my life right now. I make my way out of the office, and go to the bathroom.

I made him angry!

I just wanted us to go a week without being in each other's spaces, so we can get used to this... I didn't mean any harm.

I go back to my class, and find my babies there. At least they'll distract me...

Just as I am packing my things, I get an sms.

It's from him.

Derek: Please come to my office.

Zama is busy with something in her class and she says it's going to take her 30 minutes max. I tell her I'll wait for her outside...

I make my way to D's office and close the door.

Him: Lock it.

I do as I am told.

I walk towards him, and he stands. I walk to his side.

Him: You've made me angry.

Me: I know.

He grunts.

Me: D, this is all for the best. We have one week left of school! We have the December holidays to be love struck. We need to establish a professional working rela-

He slams himself against me, and before I know it, my butt is pressed against his desk. I try to keep it together, but my body is not playing along. I turn into jelly instantly.

He kisses me strongly and I wrap my legs around him.

Damit my body really missed this man.

After a quick pounding session, I am now fixing my dress. He sits down and looks at me with a smile on his face.

Me: Uhm I'll see you... tomorrow.

Him: Bye, baby.

I carefully walk out and make my way to the bathroom. I fix myself...

Why is Derek doing this? Now I just want more of him. Did he do this on purpose?

I go to Zama's class and find her packing up.

Me: Done?

Zama: Yes, love.

I wait for her and then we walk out. We bump into Derek.

Zama: Bye Mr N!

Derek: See you tomorrow, ladies.

Zama: One more week and we're done for the year!

Derek: Hmm...

I'm very angry at him, and I can tell he knows, because he has that stupid smug smile of his.

Zama and I walk out and vent about our day. Zama is one of those people who are so self-consumed that they don't even pay attention to what's happening around them. I love listening to her because she never tries to get me to open up and shit.

When I get home, I see a few texts and missed calls from Derek. I decide to ignore his inconsiderate ass.

INSERT 33 (Couldn't edit)

That Friday as I get to work, I am still very much pissed at Nkanyezi. I can't believe he used sex to make me crave him like that! How low!

My babies run to me as usual and take my bag to my class. They go back to the playground and I thank them for their service.

As I walk into my class, I find a basket on my desk. I open the wrap, and find all of my favourite things: Pringles, Speckled Eggs, Biltong and a few other things.

What's happening?

I take the card, and it reads:

Zizi,

I apologise for yesterday. However, you were partly to blame, because you decided to not bring an overnight bag when I asked so kindly.

Will you forgive me?

Love,

Your Star

If he thinks this shit will make me feel better, he's wrong... Well, I am a bit happy that he got everything I like, but still! Petty is not letting this go!

I put the card in my bag, because I know Zama is going to walk in here. I can't have people know my business.

Anyway, I make my way out just in time for assembly.

I see him from a distance, and my heart skips a beat. I can never get over how handsome he is. He's perfect.

Once we're done with assembly, he walks to me and smiles. I keep a straight face, just in case anyone is watching. It seems like I'm the only one who cares about my job! This fool is too chilled.

Derek: Good morning, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Morning.

Him: How are you?

Me: Great.

I get my kids to quieten down and then lead them to class. I don't have time for Derek right now.

It's now lunchtime, and I am in my class sending a few emails to parents about final exams. Someone knocks, and I tell them to come in. Lebo, the receptionist, walks in.

Lebo: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes.

I really don't like her.

Lebo: There's a delivery for you.

I frown and she walks away. I'm sure she's just annoyed that she had to walk all the way to my class to tell me this. Anyway, I get up and make my way to the reception area. Some guy is standing there with a brown paper bag.

Guy: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

Guy: This is for you.

Me: From?

He looks at me weirdly and hands me the paper bag before walking off. Mxm how rude.

I walk back to my class, knowing very well that Nkanyezi has something to do with this.

He got me a burger. A scrumptious burger.

I smile lightly as my tummy grumbles. I didn't even bring lunch today, so this is just perfect. I eat half of it and feel much better. A hungry Ziyanda is a vulture... At least he tamed me a bit.

I get my shit together and get ready to teach...

It's now after school and I am finally knocking off! I am exhausted, but overall I had a good week. I am also excited that I'm done teaching. The kids will be busy with assessments next week. I'm also thankful that marking won't be a train smash because this is relatively a small school.

Zama walks in my class.

Zama: Babe, are we leaving together?

Me: No, friend.

She smiles mischievously.

Zama: You found another sex buddy?

Me: Yep.

Her: How I wish!

She says goodbye and leaves...

As I clean up my classroom, I get a text from Derek, whom I managed to avoid throughout the day.

Derek: Let me know when you're ready to go home.

Me: If by "home" you mean my parents' house, then sure- I will let you know.

I chuckle. I'm going to play hard to get. This one did me wrong yesterday, and I don't forgive easily.

My phone beeps.

Derek: Please don't do this. I love you, and I miss you.

Swoons!

I begin packing up.

My phone beeps again.

Derek: I'm sorry about yesterday. I was frustrated.

I don't respond.

I finish packing up and as I'm about to make my way out, my door opens and he walks in and closes the door.

Derek: Are you leaving?

He looks at me all sad and shit.

Me: Let's go...

His face immediately softens and he steps closer to me.

Me: Check yourself.

He stops and turns.

Me: 5 minutes, Ngidi!

He walks out and I smile. Every Friday, people knock off right on time hey. As soon as the clock strikes 3pm, people are gone and the school is empty...

I walk to Derek's office and find Camille there.

Camille: Hey Ziyanda.

Me: Hey...

Camille: D, I'll see you on Sunday.

Derek: Cool.

Camille: Have a great weekend, Ziyanda.

Me: Thanks, you too.

They share a hug and she walks out. Our school leaders have an open door policy, so teachers can literally come in and out of their offices. This is why people haven't suspected anything.

I watch as he packs up and cleans his space, which is already clean.

He finishes up and we walk out of the office, and he locks up the school. We then get in his car and he drives off.

Derek: Am I taking you home first?

Me: Yes.

He nods and focuses on the road.

I take a nap and he wakes me up when we get to my house.

Me: I'll be back.

He nods.

Just as I am getting out, my dad walks to the car and I cringe.

Dad: Ziyanda, let me have a word with this Uber driver of yours! I really want to get a car, and get someone to drive. Make extra money, you know?

Me: Huh??

I look at Derek in shock, and he is also shocked.

My dad walks to the other side of the car, Derek's side.

He knocks lightly on the window and my heart stops beating. I am ready to die!

Derek opens the window and my dad bends.

Dad: Hello...

Derek clears his throat.

Lord!

Derek: Hi, sir.

Dad: Awusho, how do I apply to be a driver for this Uber thing?

Really??

Derek: Uhm... The website.

Is it really the website? This is so awkward!

Dad: Hmm... Write it down for me, please. My daughter tells me you people make money...

Derek smiles awkwardly and scratches his chin.

Me: Uhm I know the website, dad... He has to go. Phela he has other trips.

Dad: How does it work?

Me: I'll explain it to you.

Dad: But I want to get the explanation from him, seeing as-

Me: Don't worry! Woza!

I quickly get out of the car and get my dad.

Me: You have to call their customer care first angithi...

Dad: Is it?

Me: Yes!

We walk in the yard and I continue entertaining him with lies! Lies, I tell you!

Once inside, he gets distracted and focuses on his pap that almost got burnt. I pack up my things and rush out. I had already told them that I was spending the weekend elsewhere so there was no need to explain myself.

I get in the car.

Me: Drive, now!

He does as he is told and once we're out of my neighbourhood, I sigh heavily and sink on my seat.

Me: Shit.

He chuckles.

Him: Talk about awkward...

Me: Zip it, Uber driver!

He laughs and I join him...

INSERT 34

We drive to his place in Maboneng.

Me: Did you manage to get the property?

He looks at me.

Derek: Yes.

Me: Well that's good. Congratulations.

We get to his place, and chill at the balcony.

Me: I feel like going out tonight.

He gives me a weird look.

Me: Yini?

Him: You're random.

Me: I'm serious.

Him: What do you want to do?

Me: I don't know.

Him: But I want you all to myself. It's been a rough week.

I laugh and wrap my arms around him.

Me: Such a baby.

He plants kisses on my face and squeezes me.

Him: We'll go out tomorrow. I want to cuddle tonight.

Me: Gosh.

He continues being all touchy until his phone rings.

Him: It's Dean...

He answers.

Him: Dean... Yes, I'm at my place in Mabo... No, man I don't want to go out... Ya, I'm with her...

He chuckles.

Him: Okay... I'll get back to you...

He hangs up and I look at him.

Him: Dean wants to meet. He says he can't stand being in that house.

Me: Kanti why are they this side anyway?

Him: Nolwazi is about to give birth. Her parents want her this side.

Me: So Dean doesn't have a say?

Him: He's been planning on moving this side anyway.

Me: Hmm.

Him: He just doesn't like sharing his space.

Me: Shame uzoqina. That's what he gets for knocking up Nolwazi.

Him: You are so mean.

I roll my eyes and he holds me again.

Me: You can go out.

Him: Angifuni.

Me: I really don't mind...

Just then, my phone rings, and I recognise the number. I answer.

Me: Hello.

Person: Hi Zi, it's Vuvu.

Me: Hey, unjani?

Nomvuyo: Ngiyaphila. Are you with Derek?

Me: Yes, is everything okay?

Her: Yes, is he going out with the guys?

The guys? I thought it was just Dean.

Me: He hasn't really confirmed.

Her: I wanted to invite you to my house for dinner...

Me: Oh...

She is really random, hey.

Me: I'll talk to D, and let you know.

Her: Alright. Bye.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek weirdly.

Him: What's up?

Me: That was Nomvuyo.

He frowns.

Him: Really?

I tell him about the call and he sighs.

Him: Are you comfortable with going to her?

Me: I don't mind.

Of course I don't mind. Mrs Gossip Girl will give me more important details.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: I told you I want to go out. This is fine, really.

He nods.

Him: Let me call Dean then...

He calls Dean and tells him he's available. He stands up and then looks at me.

Him: Come.

I follow him inside and we go to the bedroom.

Him: I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Him: You need to bring some of your clothes here... You should have clothes this side, and my other apartment.

I chuckle.

Him: Secondly, don't ever do what you did this week.

I laugh and he sulks.

Me: You are so dramatic.

Him: I'm serious, Zi. I missed you and you dismissed me.

Me: Will you ever forgive me for that shit?

Him: I doubt.

He makes me sit on his lap.

Me: I'm sorry neh?

He nods and I plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I'll bring as many clothes as you want! You want me to move in? I'll move in! You want me to have your kids and marry you? I will do it all!

Him: Stop mocking me.

I laugh and plant another kiss on his lips.

Me: On a serious note though, I'll bring some clothes.

He smiles.

Me: Can you believe I was planning on moving in with Lwazi?

Him: Really? What happened?

Me: I didn't feel her.

Him: I'm glad you didn't.

Me: FYI it would have been convenient for you if I moved in with her because it's closer to your place that side.

Him: I love that you live with your parents. I know you're loved and safe there.

Me: Aww!

We then got ready for our evening...

We make our way inside Nomvuyo and Liwa's house and I marvel at how lovely it is...

Me: You people are rich huh?

Derek: Just a little bit...

We walk in, and Nomvuyo welcomes us. She really is beautiful... She makes a plain white t-shirt and leggings, seem like couture...

Nomvuyo: Sanibonani.

We share a hug and then she hugs Derek.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: Relieved... My daughter just went to her grandma's house.

Derek: Is Zimi this side?

Nomvuyo: She got here this morning.

Derek: How is she?

Nomvuyo: Uyajola.

Derek: No surprise there...

They both laugh.

Nomvuyo: She's never been one to not have men chasing after her.

We walk in and she leads us to the lounge.

Derek: I'm just dropping off Zizi. I'll fetch her later.

Nomvuyo: Liwa is still at the office, but he said he'll meet you there.

Derek: No problem.

Nomvuyo: See you later then.

Derek looks at me.

Nomvuyo: You'll find me in the kitchen, Zi.

She walks off and Derek wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Ditto.

We share a hug and a kiss.

Derek: See you later.

Me: Enjoy yourself. Don't act like a lost puppy.

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Him: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

He lets go of me and walks out of the car. I sigh. I miss him already.

I walk to the kitchen and find Nomvuyo stirring a pot.

Nomvuyo: Uhambile umuntu wakho?

Me: Yep.

Her: He is really lovesick huh?

Me: I guess.

She looks at me.

Her: You have told each other, right?

Me: That we love each other?

She nods.

Me: Yes.

Her: Good.

She finishes stirring and then closes the pot.

Her: Should be ready in 10 minutes. Would you like something to drink?

Me: Yes, please.

She leads me to the bar, and I'm amazed. There's everything an alcoholic needs.

Me: Wine?

Her: Alright.

She leads me to the wine cellar and asks me what I would like. I tell her to choose anything good, and she chooses red wine. We walk back to the lounge.

I can't stop staring at her.

I think I have a crush on Nomvuyo.

I have a girl crush.

She pours me a glass.

Me: What about you?

She rolls her eyes and sighs.

Her: I'm pregnant.

My eyes pop out.

Me: What??

She groans.

Her: I don't want this baby... It's for Liwa.

Me: Does he know?

She shakes her head.

Her: He's been bothering me for a while now.

Me: How far along are you?

Her: I don't know. I'm only seeing my doctor next week.

Me: What made you think you're pregnant?

Her: I know my body...

Me: Geesh.

She sighs.

Her: We'll see...

Me: I'm sure he'll be thrilled.

Her: You don't know him... He'll be dramatic.

I laugh.

Her: So do you think Derek is the one?

I almost choke on my drink. I didn't expect that.

Me: Uhm...

She smiles.

Her: You don't have to answer... However, you must think about it.

I take a sip of my wine.

Her: When I found out about Nyami, I was so shocked...

Me: Really? She wasn't planned?

Her: What? My baby was definitely not planned. Liwa was also in a relationship with some stray dog.

I laugh.

Her: I resent her.

I continue laughing.

Me: So you didn't know you were pregnant?

Her: Nope. I guess we forgot to use protection, because I don't remember being-

And then the world stops.

Every-fucken-thing-stops-fucken-moving.

I keep hearing her say my name, but I am now panicking.

I put down the wine and stand.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I start pacing around the space.

Nomvuyo: Zi!

I'm crying.

I'm crying uncontrollably.

I'm panicking.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I feel her shake me, and I stare at her.

She's also panicking.

Me: We forgot...

Her: Ziyanda?

Me: Oh my God! We forgot the pills! We forgot to use a condom!

Yhu I cry all over again.

What have I done?

How could I be so stupid??

My parents?

What have I done??

INSERT 35

Nomvuyo is now forcing me to drink water.

Me: What if I'm pregnant?!

Nomvuyo: I need you to calm down...

I feel her brushing my back and I take a few deep breaths. I eventually calm down, and look at her.

Nomvuyo: When was this?

Me: Last weekend, and yesterday.

She sighs.

Her: We can't even use a pregnancy test to find out.

Me: Why?

Her: It's too soon.

I sink on the couch and huff heavily.

Me: What am I going to do?

Her: Ziyanda, calm down.

Me: Calm down? Nomvuyo, do I look like I am ready to have a baby?!

She keeps quiet.

Me: Call, Derek. Tell him to come, now!

Her: There's noth-

Me: Nomvuyo, please don't. I'm not in the mood to listen to a prep-talk.

She sighs.

Her: There's nothing any of you can do.

I look at her angrily.

Her: When are you supposed to be on your period?

Me: Next week.

Her: Okay, let's wait until then. You can even come with me to my doctor and we can both do our blood tests.

She smiles and I sigh.

Me: I'm not ready to be a mother. I can't! I won't!

Her: So what will you do-

Me: Don't even go there, please.

She sighs and nods.

Her: At least you have a solid career.

Me: I am not ready, Nomvuyo! Physically! Mentally! Emotionally! Zonke!

She keeps quiet.

Me: My parents are going to kill me... I am going to die...

Her: Let's not over think, okay?

I sigh heavily and she stands and pulls me up.

Her: Let's eat.

We walk to the kitchen and I watch her dish up for us. We then walk out to the veranda.

Her: Ziyanda, the world is not going to end. Stop stressing.

Me: Do you have a pregnancy test?

Her: Ziyanda-

Me: Nomvuyo, give me a pregnancy test!

Her: Love, listen...There's no use taking it. You need at least 8 days.

I sigh and reach for the wine, and then I remember that I COULD be pregnant.

Me: Fuck.

I try to eat, but end up losing my appetite.

Me: I can't focus right now.

She takes my plate and comes back with a cup of tea.

Her: Woza. I think you need to take a nap.

She leads me up the stairs and we walk into a bedroom. She puts down the cup of tea and then prepares the bed. I get in and she gives me the tea.

I have never thought of having children. This is the first time I'm confronted with such.

I take a sip and she sits on the edge and watches me.

Once I'm done, she takes the cup and I settle in. I check my phone and see a message from Derek, telling me that he misses me.

I close my eyes and pray that this is just a wakeup call from the universe. I'm not trying to have a baby right now. I have learnt my lesson. Sex is bad. Sex gets you kids. I have learnt my lesson, I will stop having sex!

I doze off...

When I wake up, I hear loud laughter...

I try not to think about why I was put to sleep in the first place.

I walk down the stairs...

Derek, Liwa, Dean and two other men are in the lounge watching a soccer match.

They're loud. A bit too loud.

Where is Nomvuyo?

As soon as Derek sees me, he jumps up and staggers towards me.

Wait a minute, is this one drunk?

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Are they that drunk? Geesh.

Derek wraps his arms around me and plants kisses all over my face.

Him: The love of my life...

I am really not in the mood for this. I need him to sober so I can tell him about this nonsense.

Him: Baby, do you understand how much I love you?

Suddenly there's noise and chaos.

It seems like there's a team that scored or whatever.

Derek squeezes me and I just look at him blankly.

Him: Baby.

He is so drunk. Like, I can't deal right now.

Nomvuyo: Derek, go sit with your friends.

Derek: No.

Nomvuyo: Please don't make me ask again.

He lets go of me and staggers back to his fellow drunkards.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo takes my hand and we walk to the kitchen. I'm shocked to see Nolwazi.

It seems like she grew even bigger.

Nolwazi: I can't believe you guys had dinner without me!

I don't respond.

I have bigger shit to worry about. There's a possibility that I'm also going to be in her position. The mere thought of that makes me want to cry. Nomvuyo gives me a bottle of water and I drink it.

Nolwazi: Zi, what's wrong?

I look at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: She has a headache.

Nolwazi: Aww man, sorry. Did you give her something?

Nomvuyo nods and I sit on one of the high stools.

Nolwazi: These men are so drunk.

Nomvuyo grunts angrily.

Nomvuyo: Annoying nje.

Nolwazi: I've never seen Dean this drunk.

Nomvuyo: Konje he was your boss...

Nomvuyo! This woman is so spicy!

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Is that what he is telling you people?

Nomvuyo: Kanti what's the story?

I have to stop myself from laughing. Here's the Gossip Girl that I love.

Nolwazi: We're equals... The only reason it seems like he's my boss is that he is a man and I am a woman. That's how it is in the corporate world.

Nomvuyo: Hmm I'll stick to being a housewife.

I find myself chuckling. It is very clear that Nomvuyo doesn't particularly like Nolwazi. I wonder why...

Nomvuyo: Are you hungry?

Nolwazi: Can I have some nuts?

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Nomvuyo walks away...

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles. She's just like Liwa, but she's not out there. She's a very kind and lovable woman.

Nomvuyo comes back with a packet of nuts.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Just then, I feel someone wrapping their arms around me.

Derek doesn't understand that now is not the time?

Nolwazi: Weeh.

Derek: Baby, let's go home.

Nomvuyo: Ungazobheda wena. You're not going anywhere this drunk.

Derek groans.

I shift and he lets go of me.

Nolwazi: Go away. We don't talk to drunk men.

Nomvuyo: Hamba, please.

Derek: Sour and bitter...

He kisses me and walks away...

Ngiphethwe yi-stress yazi and lesdakwa is not helping right now. I can't right now. I just can't.

Nolwazi: I need to sleep...

Nomvuyo: Woza...

As Nolwazi stands, she frowns.

Nolwazi: Oops.

Nomvuyo: Yini?

Nolwazi: Uhm...

She laughs innocently.

Nolwazi: I think my water just broke...

Nomvuyo walks to her and sure enough, there's water on the tiles.

Sweet baby Jesus!

I sit there, frozen. This cannot be happening right now.

Nomvuyo: Okay. Are you experiencing any pains?

Nolwazi: Not really.

Nomvuyo: Let's take you to the hospital.

Nolwazi looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: Breathe, Zizi.

I think I'm too young for all of this shit.

They walk to the lounge and I don't move an inch.

I hear silence...

Out of nowhere there's rowdiness.

Dean: WHAT?!

Liwa: OH SHIT!

The rowdiness continues.

Nomvuyo: Shut the fuck up! All of you!

There's silence again.

Nomvuyo: I am driving her to the hospital...

Derek: Where's Ziya-

Nomvuyo: Shut up.

Silence.

Nomvuyo: I need all of you to get your shit together. Nolwazi is not experiencing any pains, so we can all calm down.

I stand and walk to the lounge and see everyone standing.

These men are so drunk, but now they're busy pretending they're sober. If I was not going through the most, I'd be laughing at this scene.

Nolwazi is now busy on her phone.

Why is she so calm?

Derek staggers towards me.

Derek: Baby, did you hear the good news?

Nang'omunye...

It's obviously going to be a long night...

INSERT 36

We're now driving to the hospital. We get there, and Nolwazi is taken to her room, so the doctor can check her. Nomvuyo goes with her, and the rest of us are sitting in some fancy lounge area.

I'm sure I'll give birth at Bara...

I really need Derek right now, and he is not here. Yes, he's here physically, but this fool is drunk. Uphelile. I need him to hold me...

But now, he's the one resting comfortably on me...

Dean is trying his best to be sober, and it's funny to watch. Whatever they drank, is defeating him. I keep looking at him and stopping myself from laughing. For a man who always has his shit together, this is hilarious.

All these men are lying on these couches ngathi they're in their houses.

Liwa: Dean, you're going to be a dad...

There's silence.

Liwa: I can't believe this shit...

I'm sure in his mind Liwa thinks he sounds deep and inspirational, but he's out here slurring his words.

We sit in silence. Derek's head is now on my lap. I keep pinching his nose, so he doesn't pass out.

Derek: Baby, you're hurting me.

Me: Don't close your eyes.

Derek: I'm just going to close them for five minutes. I promise.

I sigh and let him be. The others seem to have passed out as well.

So is this my life? I'm just going to sit here and guard grown ass drunks?

Just then, I hear voices and snap out of my stressful thoughts.

I see Nolwazi's mom.

Thandeka: Hi Zizi, what's going on here?

Me: They're drunk.

She hisses and looks around... You'd swear a massacre took place. Five men lying there like they're done with this thing called life.

Thandeka: Dean must just be grateful that Lwazi's father will only join us in the morning.

I keep quiet. Angizingeni ke lezi.

Thandeka: So why are you sitting here?

Me: Uhm...

Thandeka: You're not going to babysit old men... Woza...

I carefully reposition Derek and then follow Nolwazi's mother to Nolwazi's room. She's so calm.

We get there and find Nolwazi sitting on the edge of the bed.

Nolwazi: Mommy!

Thandeka: Baby.

Nolwazi smiles and Thandeka hugs her daughter.

Thandeka: What's the scoop?

Nolwazi sighs.

Nolwazi: I still have a very long way to go...

Nomvuyo: She's nowhere near ready to give birth.

Thandeka nods.

Nolwazi: However, I want to stay here once... Considering my history of stress, the doctor suggests I stick around vele.

Thandeka: How long do we have to wait?

Nolwazi: Probably 24 hours.

Thandeka nods thoughtfully.

Thandeka: Your father will be here in the morning.

Nolwazi nods.

Thandeka: And at least Dean and his tavern people will sober up.

Tavern people? I know she's not talking about my star.

Nolwazi laughs and lies comfortably on the bed.

Nolwazi: I thought I would freak out...

She smiles at Nomvuyo.

Nolwazi: Nomvuyo, you're a life saver. Thank you.

Nomvuyo: It's a pleasure.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry you got dragged into all of this.

I clear my throat.

Me: It's okay.

Thandeka: My suggestion right now is that I go back to the house to prepare and get your things. Nomvuyo and Zizi can stay with you.

Nolwazi: No problem.

Thandeka: I'll also get stuff for those men, because they'll be a mess when they wake up.

Nolwazi: Sounds like a plan.

Thandeka: Okay then, I should be back in a few hours.

Nolwazi: Thank you, mommy.

They share another hug, and I can't help but smile. Nolwazi's like a little girl next to her mommy. Cute.

Nomvuyo: I just need some fresh air...

Thandeka nods.

I decide to walk out with Nomvuyo.

Me: Wait for me phela. I'm pregnant and can't walk fast.

She smiles as I catch up. We then make our way outside. The cold breeze hits me and I wince.

Nomvuyo: What a night.

Me: What a fucken night...

We chuckle.

Nomvuyo: These babies just had to make their debut today, when those men are drunk...

Me: Good timing...

We sit on a bench.

Her phone rings and she answers.

Nomvuyo: Hello?... Ivy...

She laughs for a good minute. I've never heard her laugh like this. She must love this Ivy person...

Nomvuyo: Okay then, bye... Love you too...

She ends the call and sighs lightly.

Me: Why are you such a bitch?

She looks at me in shock. Surely she has heard this before, so why is she acting surprised?

Me: You're a bitch.

She's still looking at me in shock and I shrug.

Me: I'm not judging you though... But you're a bitch.

We're silent for a while and she eventually chuckles.

Her: I don't want to be a bitch.

Me: She says sarcastically...

She laughs and looks at me.

Her: You're also a bitch.

Me: I know. I fully own it.

Her: Oh wow.

Me: I'm not a fan of people. They drive me crazy.

Her: They're annoying, aren't they?

Me: Argh.

We laugh quietly.

Me: So why exactly do you dislike Nolwazi?

Her: What??

Me: Oh please Vuvu. Save that gasp for Dr. Phil...

She laughs.

Her: It's not that I don't like her...

Me: Hmm...

Her: I'm just getting used to her.

Me: Hmkay.

Her: But her younger sister and I get along.

Me: Is it?

Her: Part of you reminds me of her. She's also dramatic.

I sigh.

Me: Bitchy and dramatic... Girl, we've got to change.

We continue chatting for a while...

It's now 7am. Nomvuyo and I crashed in Nolwazi's room. My whole body is achy and I know my mood won't be chirpy. I just want to go home.

Why are my weekends with Derek so dramatic?

I go to the bathroom to freshen up a bit.

God bless these VIP hospitals, hey. A girl can only dream.

Just then, the door opens...

Nazoke.

Dean runs to Nolwazi and the rest of the crew follows.

They are so predictable.

Dean: Nolwazi. Baby, are you fine? What's going on? When d-

Nolwazi: Woooah can we chill a bit.

They're all surrounding her bed, except for Derek.

Where is Derek?

Dean: What happened? When did you get here?

Nolwazi: You seriously can't remember?

Liwa: Where the fuck is my wife? Is she fine?

Now Liwa is panicking. He looks at me and I don't say anything. I'm overwhelmed as fuck.

I decide to ignore him and walk out. I need to get out of here.

How am I losing my sleep over these people? Heck, I also have my own crap to deal with!

Just as I walk out, Derek yells my name and rushes to me. Before I know it, I'm bombarded with thousands of questions.

I just keep quiet and let him ask these questions until he is satisfied. Once he's done, he exhales.

Me: Are you done?

He avoids my eyes and looks down, a bit embarrassed.

Gosh now I feel sorry for him. It's clear that a hangover is killing him, but he's acting strong. Also, he seems to be worried about me.

Just then, Nomvuyo approaches us on the passage. Liwa walks out of the room and spots her.

Liwa: Baby!

Nomvuyo gives him one look, and the bold man instantly becomes a puppy.

Liwa: Vu-

She walks to us and looks at Liwa uninterestedly.

Nomvuyo: We don't have time right now. Nolwazi is probably going to start getting contractions. Furthermore, her father is on his way. What I suggest is that instead of bombarding us with your foul smells, you go home and clean yourselves up.

Eisaan.

Liwa: Uhm...

She walks in the room and I look at Derek. I don't feel sorry for him anymore!

Derek: Baby-

Me: Zip it, Stinky!

I quickly walk in the room before he tries to grab me and bewitch me with his usual spell.

Nomvuyo: Dean, Malusi and Joe, I suggest you go to the house and freshen up. Nolwazi's father is on hi-

She didn't even need to finish her sentence. They were out of that room within a second.

As soon as they are gone, Nolwazi sighs lightly.

Nomvuyo: What's wrong?

Nolwazi: Just a little contraction...

Nomvuyo: Walk around a bit. You've been in bed for a while...

I walk to Nolwazi and help her stand. She then walks around.

Nomvuyo: I'll call your mom and doctor...

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Nomvuyo walks out and I sit on the bed and stare at Nolwazi, who seems to be groaning more...

I don't need this negativity in my life. I cannot deal.

INSERT 37 (Couldn't edit)

It's now around 8am and things are getting a bit intense. Nolwazi's contractions are getting worse...

I decided to exclude myself from this situation, because firstly- I don't know these people like that, and secondly- I don't want to be left more traumatized than I already am.

I am sitting outside, on a bench by the garden.

Derek: Zi.

I keep quiet. When did he get back?

He sits next to me.

He smells good. However, I am so overwhelmed right now, that I can't even move. The past few hours have been such a rollercoaster...

I feel him get closer to me and he wraps his arms around my shoulders. I want to resist, but I can't. I relax next to him and I feel him relax as well.

Me: I'm not angry.

He keeps quiet and I look at him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I just spent the past two hours thinking you hate me.

I grunt.

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

Him: I was really drunk.

Me: Drunk is an understatement.

Him: Don't make me feel worse.

I chuckle.

Me: What the hell did you people drink? You were finished.

He tightens his hold on me and kisses me again.

Him: I promise- this is our last dramatic weekend.

Me: Well, it's not really your fault.

Him: What the fuck happened?

I go on to tell him about last night, leaving out my little problem.

Him: Baby, you must be overwhelmed... I'm sorry.

Me: Kinda...

I feel myself getting emotional at the thought of being pregnant... When should I tell him? This is definitely not the place.

Just then, my phone rings, and I answer it.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Where are you?

Me: Outside.

Her: Woza.

Me: Is everything okay?

Her: Ya.

Me: Okay.

I end the call.

Me: Let's go see how things are going.

He nods and we stand. He then wraps his arms around me and we share a warm hug.

Him: I keep putting you in strange situations.

Me: You do.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

He kisses me and I feel my whole body ignite. I haven't had sex with him since that quickie in his office- and even before that, we hadn't done it since the weekend.

He breaks the kiss when he realizes that we might just end up having sex this instant.

Him: I think we should leave.

Me: Me too.

He wraps his arms around me and we walk inside. We make our way to Nolwazi's room and find all of them there. Where is Nolwazi's dad kanti? I want to see this man who scares everyone.

Nolwazi is on her bed. I can see she's in pain, but she seems fine. She's not acting like those people we've seen on TV. I'm sure they've medicated her.

I look at these men, and I am amazed. One wouldn't even know that they had a rough night.

Who are these other two konje?

Liwa: Hey Zizi Dlamini.

Me: Hi, Liwa.

Liwa: Have you met our two friends?

He looks at the two men.

Liwa: This is Ziyanda...

One of the men smiles and the other one chuckles.

Liwa: Ziyanda, this is Malusi, and that is Joe.

Malusi... He is out here trying, but Derek is still 2 points ahead. Where do all these hot men hide?
Geesh!

Joe: It's a pleasure to meet you, Ziyanda.

Malusi: You two work together? Is this a trend in this group?

Liwa: He's recently divorced, Zi. Bitter and divorced.

They all laugh happily.

I can't help but feel the love in this room. It's heart-warming.

I look over at Dean, who is right next to Nolwazi. These two should just tie the knot already. They're adorable. I still don't like him though.

Also, where is Nomvuyo?

I look around.

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Nolwazi: She's outside.

Liwa: You two have become inseparable huh?

Nolwazi: At least she likes someone... I mean, we all know she hates me.

Malusi: The Ice Queen...

They all laugh. I don't find this funny one bit. They shouldn't talk about my girl like that.

Just then, Nomvuyo walks in with ice cubes. She walks to the bed and gives the glass to Nolwazi who thanks her.

Nomvuyo: The doctor is on her way.

Nolwazi: Okay.

She walks out and Liwa follows her. I also need some fresh air. I can only take these people in small doses. As I close the door, I find them hugging each other.

Nomvuyo: I'm tired.

Liwa: Let's go home.

Nomvuyo: And leave Nolwazi alone?

Liwa: Kanti where are the parents?

Nomvuyo: Her mother was busy preparing the house. They should be here soon.

She then looks at me and smiles.

Her: Come take a walk with me.

She lets go of Liwa.

Liwa: Are you trying to steal my wife?

I think I am.

I really have a crush on her.

The door opens and Derek walks out.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Nomvuyo grabs my arm and we walk away.

Nomvuyo: So clingy.

Me: But I like that.

Nomvuyo: Now is not the time.

I chuckle as she yawns.

Me: You haven't even slept. How are you still functioning?

She shrugs.

Her: Strong black woman things.

I laugh.

Me: When is she giving birth?

Her: Probably in a few hours.

We get ourselves some water and go outside.

Me: So who'll be taking care of you when you give birth?

She laughs.

Her: What I know for sure is that no one except my husband and mother will be there.

Me: Mother?

She nods.

Her: Zimkitha.

I keep quiet. Konje she doesn't know that I know about her life.

Me: So you just want Liwa and Zimkitha?

Her: Yes. I don't know how Nolwazi is coping right now with so many people there. I'd kill all of them.

Me: Well, she's more of a people's person.

Her: Hmm.

After about 15 minutes, we walk back to the room, and they're chatting.

Nolwazi looks genuinely happy. I think back to what Derek told me about her and how she thought she was infertile. I'm sure this is a precious moment for her.

Dean is super quiet.

I think he's nervous...

Out of nowhere, the door opens and everyone stops talking.

It's silent.

A man stands there, and looks around coolly. He looks just like Mdu... He's an older version of Mdu...

Everyone immediately stands and takes their things.

One by one, they walk out the door like little boys, greeting the man on their way out.

I feel Derek's hand on mine. He leads me out and says a low "Sawubona" on our way out.

Is this Nolwazi's dad? Geesh.

Once we're out of the room, everyone exhales loudly. Dean and Nomvuyo are still in there.

We then see Thandeka with a 20-something year old girl walk towards us.

They all greet her with their heads bowed.

Thandeka: Hai suka.

She walks in the room...

The girl looks at the guys.

Girl: I can't believe you idiots got drunk without me!

With that said, she walks in, and the door is closed...

I think this is the perfect time for us to leave. The family is here mos...

I want to sleep and be fed by this here drunkard of mine.

INSERT 38

We get to his loft.

Derek: Take a shower while I cook, okay?

I nod and make my way to the bathroom. I take a long shower, and I swear I feel 100 times better.

I put on my pyjamas and get in bed, dozing off immediately.

Derek: Baby.

I groan and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Wake up, love. The food is ready.

I blink a couple of times and he plants another kiss. I sit up and he walks off. How long have I been gone? I check the time and it's around 1pm.

Derek walks back with a tray and places it on my lap.

Me: Thank you.

He kisses my forehead.

I deserve to be spoiled right now. After what I've been through, I deserve all of this pampering.

I groan and he chuckles.

He begins feeding me.

Him: Such a baby...

He continues feeding me until I'm done eating.

Me: Thank you.

He takes everything back to the kitchen and comes back with a glass of chardonnay,

I take a sip and feel my whole body relax fully...

Me: How is your hangover?

Him: I don't get that shit.

Me: Hmm lies.

He gets in bed and rests his head on my thighs.

Just then, his phone rings and he asks me to reach out and get it. I give it to him and he answers.

Him: Hello... Is it?

He smiles.

Him: That's fantastic... Okay, we'll see you soon... Bye...

He hangs up and smiles.

Him: The twins are safe and sound.

I find myself smiling as well. Part of me is a bit disappointed that I left, but I was too overwhelmed.

Me: To God be the glory!

Him: Amen!

We laugh and he repositions and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I love you more every single day...

My insides curl up and I smile.

Him: I think we've also established that my friends love you.

Me: They're good people.

He places his lips on mine and smiles.

Him: Do you want to know why I love you?

I keep quiet.

Him: Besides the fact that you're stunning, and spectacular...

I giggle.

Him: My heart is now regulated by you...

Swoons!

Him: I love how you've managed to show me your vulnerability... Your moments of weakness have made me love you even more. You've let your guard down with me, and I appreciate that.

Argh. This drunkard of mine.

Him: I hope being around my friends has given you an idea of who I am...

Me: It has.

He smiles and we start kissing. Within a few seconds, I'm already panting like an unfed dog.

This man goes on and makes love to me... The sweetest love...

As I reach all those climaxes, my heart continues to open up and let him in.

Being around his friends has really given me an idea of who he is. They love whole-heartedly. These men are not afraid to love their women openly. They are proud of being in love. Who doesn't want a man like that? A man who constantly tries to figure you out, so that you find yourself living comfortably in your skin? A man who prioritises your heart, and tries his best to keep it safe? Who doesn't want that?

I certainly want that... And I think I've found it.

Derek is it.

We eventually doze off in each other's arms. I wake up in the middle of the night to pee. He's up working on his laptop.

I quickly get up and as I am peeing, I remember the pregnancy thing, and my heart rate increases. I walk back to the bedroom and get in bed and face the other way.

Him: Baby.

Me: Mmm.

Argh I know I said I deserve to be figured out and shit, but I don't want him to figure out that I'm freaking out right now.

Him: Zi.

I keep quiet and seconds later, I feel him pulling me. I reluctantly turn around and stare at him. He looks startled and confused.

Him: Angel, what's wrong?

Me: We haven't been using condoms...

He looks at me blankly, and then his face changes, as everything sinks in.

Him: Fuck.

I feel myself getting emotional again.

Him: Shit.

He gets out of bed, and turns to look at me.

Me: I could be pregnant.

He sits on the edge of the bed and rubs his forehead thoughtfully.

Him: We have to get those test stick things.

Me: Nomvuyo says it's too early to detect using those. We have to go see a doctor.

Him: Nomvuyo?

Me: I remembered all of this in her presence last night.

Him: Fuck.

He stands and walks out of the room.

Why is he acting like this?

I know all of this is shocking, but his reaction is throwing me off a bit.

I get out of bed and find him in the kitchen, drinking cold water.

Me: Listen here, if you want to break up with me, then do so!

He gives me a confused look.

Me: I will take care of this kid by myself! I won't run after you!

He tries saying something, but he seems speechless.

I am now an emotional mess.

Me: My parents are going to kill me!

I feel him wrapping his arms around.

Me: I am not ready for a baby! What the fuck am I going to do?!

Him: Baby, breathe.

I feel an anxiety attack approach. I can't breathe at this point.

I don't even know how I ended up on the couch. He gives me a glass of water and I gobble it all down.

Him: Zi, are you okay now?

I take deep breath and he pulls me closer to him.

Him: Listen to me, and listen carefully.

He stares at me seriously.

Him: If you think I am going to leave you, then you're obviously fucked up.

Well damn.

Him: I'm shocked as fuck right now. I'm pissed at myself for not being responsible.

He sighs and then looks at me more softly.

Him: I am not going anywhere...

He takes my hand.

Him: I'll stay, pregnant or not.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: You were having an anxiety attack, I understand.

I keep quiet.

Him: But don't ever, even for a split second, think that I will make you pregnant and then walk away. I'm not that fucked up.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods and then pulls me in for a hug.

Him: We'll go to a doctor and see what happens.

Me: Okay.

He kisses my forehead.

We then reposition and I rest my head on his chest while he brushes my back.

Him: What a weird weekend.

I close my eyes and decide that sleep will just do the damn thing...

INSERT 39

It's now Monday, and I don't know how I feel about going to work. I still feel like I didn't get enough rest. As I walk in, my kids run to me as usual, and they tell me how excited they are that it's the last week of school. I go to my class and prepare my assessments...

It's now lunchtime and I have not seen or spoken to Derek. Apparently all the principals had a meeting to attend so he would only come in a bit later... I miss him.

I decide to call him and it takes me straight to voicemail.

Zama walk in and we have lunch together. She tastes some of my food and then looks at me in shock.

Zama: Who cooked this? This is amazing!

Me: My mom...

Zama: Oh wow, you should invite me for lunch sometime.

Me: Sure.

Hehe she'll eat my dad's pap and chicken, because my mom sure as hell did not cook this food.

Just then, my phone rings and I find myself smiling as I answer.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hi, baby. How are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Him: I'm miserable.

Me: I know...

We go on to chat for about 5 minutes and then he tells me that he has to go. I end the call and focus on my food.

Zama: Hmm uyajola wena.

Me: I think you're right yazi.

She squeals in excitement.

Her: Tell me about him!

Gosh Zama, what happened to minding your business?

Me: There's nothing to tell...

Her: What does he do for a living?

Me: Accountant.

Kahle kahle this is not a lie. He was an accountant mos?

Her: Hmm I'm sure he is filthy rich!

I frown.

Me: It's not about money though.

Her: Oh please. As if you'd date a peasant.

I chuckle.

Me: No, man.

Her: Realistically speaking, you can't settle down with someone who won't be able to take care of you in the long run. Yes, love is important, but once you're married, you realise that you need more...

Me: So wena your husband is rich?

Her: I mean, it's our money now...

We both laugh.

Her: He's not filthy rich, but we are well-off. I don't have to stress about money. We're at that level.

Me: That's good.

We hear a knock on my door and I yell for the person to come in.

Lwazi walks in.

She gets a chair and sits down.

Lwazi: Argh relationships are really tiring.

Nazoke.

I try my best not to roll my eyes.

Zama: What's wrong?

Zama loves giving people relationship advice. I'm actually glad she's here because it means I can zone out and think about my man, while she listens to this nonsense and gives advice.

Lwazi: He's been so distant lately...

Zama: Really? Why?

This is the perfect time to zone out...

As I'm packing up and getting ready to go home, my phone rings and I answer.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: I'm still stuck in Pretoria. I thought I'd be able to see you...

Me: It's okay. I'll see you tomorrow.

He grunts.

Him: Let me know when you get home, okay?

Me: Okay. I love you.

He laughs lightly.

Me: What?

Him: You've never said it before me...

Me: Argh whatever. Bye.

Him: I love you too, baby. Bye.

I hang up and finish packing up. I have a lot of marking to do, so I'm going straight home, and locking myself up in the room.

The following day, I get to school and go to my class. I'm not in the mood for assembly... They can sketch me...

When I walk in my class, and see Nkanyenzi sitting on a desk, I squeal excitedly.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: I haven't seen you in 1 day!

We both laugh. This is actually ridiculous. There are people who don't see their partners for weeks, and we're out here suffering from separation anxiety after one day.

Me: I'm so tired. I was up the whole night, marking.

He kisses me and then we let go of each other.

Him: Are you done?

I nod.

Me: Camille tells me you're going to another meeting today?

He nods.

Him: We're planning shit for next year.

Me: Sorry.

He sighs.

Him: I'll come by before I leave.

Me: Okay.

He walks out and I submit some papers for moderation...

It's now the last day of school. Boy, am I happy!

We all had to dress up like book characters, and I chose to be Waldo, that guy who's dressed in a red and white sweater, and the reader has to find him in various crowds...

Overall, it was a great day. I had been avoiding Derek like a plague, for a very corny reason...

I decided to have a party with my kids and watch movies the whole day. While we were watching Annie, the door opens and someone walks in. My kids are too focused to even notice anything. I watch as Derek walks to the back and sits next to me.

Derek: Why am I being avoided?

Me: I wanted you to find me...

He looks at me weirdly and I chuckle.

Me: Finding Waldo? Get it?

His face relaxes and he laughs a little too loud. Some of my kids say “shhh.” Lol at this point they don’t even care whose speaking, everyone just needs to shut up and focus on the movie.

I turn up the volume so they can’t hear us.

Me: Go away. You’re pissing off my babies.

He sulks and takes a packet of popcorn.

Him: You don’t like movies neh?

Me: Can’t concentrate for too long.

Him: Weirdo.

Me: Mxm.

We focus on the movie till it ends...

Him: We’ve just had our first movie date.

Me: How romantic.

He gets up and walks out of the class.

My kids and I then clean up the classroom and I give them their party packs. The rest of the day was spent having a talent show...

School is out! Finally!

Classes are clean, and we're all ready to leave. The rest of the staff is going out for drinks, and I have kindly declined.

Nolwazi has invited us for dinner.

As I'm packing up, Lwazi walks in and says goodbye to me.

Lwazi: I hope we'll meet up for lunch dates.

I give her a fake smile.

Me: We'll see.

I am going to block her number as soon as she walks out of this classroom. I'm not trying to be a personal adviser.

Her: Don't you want to meet my boyfriend?

Me: Uhm-

She's already pulling my hand. We walk to her class.

Lwazi: I had to force him to come inside. I don't know what his problem is...

When we get in, and I see Bongani standing there, I swear the world stops moving for like a split second.

I keep telling myself to keep a straight face.

What the fuck is going on here??

Lwazi: Baby, this is Ziyanda- my friend and colleague.

Bongani is also trying to keep a straight face.

Lwazi: Ziyanda, this is Bongani...

Me: Hi, Bongani.

Bongani: Hey... Nice to meet you.

Me: Likewise.

I then focus on Lwazi.

Me: Alright then... Have a good vac.

She gives me a hug and I walk out quickly.

When I get to my class, I have to sit down, to process this shit.

Bongani was in a relationship while sleeping with me?? What the actual fuck?!

Men!

Fucken men!

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What do you want?

I didn't even see him come in. He gives me a confused look.

I get my things and walk to the door.

Me: Asambe.

Him: Uhm... Okay...

I walk out and wait for him outside...

I cannot believe this shit. That idiot played me!

INSERT 40

We haven't said a word to each other since we left the school. We're now in his apartment in Randburg.

After I finish showering, he goes to the bathroom.

I cannot believe this! Bongani is Lwazi's boyfriend? He lied to me and gave me the impression that he is not "into" relationships kanti that whore was busy two-timing me!

I was the side-chick!

Sies!

I didn't even see that Derek is now sitting next to me.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He sighs and goes back to the bathroom. I finish getting dressed and then unpack my bag. I've brought quite a few clothes: formal (for work) and casual for weekends. At least I'll be covered if we ever have spontaneous sleepovers.

Nxa Bongani. That disrespectful pig!

Derek is now done getting dressed. I can never get over him. I don't think I ever will. He looks so good.

He takes my hand and leads me to the lounge, where he sits me down.

Derek: Ready to talk?

I sigh.

Him: Because we're not leaving here until you tell me what's happening.

Me: I'm just annoyed.

Him: What did I do?

Me: Not everything is about you.

He tries saying something but stops himself. I take a deep breath.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: It's okay. Just tell me what's bothering you.

Should I tell him?

I sigh again.

Me: Lwazi just keeps pestering me about her boyfriend issues and I'm not interested.

He narrows his eyes and I keep a straight face.

Me: I can't deal with the drama!

Technically, this is not a lie. I don't want to ruin his evening by telling him the truth. I'll talk to him after dinner, once it's just him and I, no disturbances.

Him: So you're snappy because you were asked to give relationship advice?

I nod. I'm sticking to this.

He stares at me, as if he's trying to figure something out. He then exhales and shakes his head.

Me: What?

I feel offended for some odd reason.

Him: I just... You amaze me...

He chuckles and stands me.

Me: Are you judging me?

Him: Not at all...

Me: Mxm.

Him: It's weird how this dramatic side of yours has grown on me... It's scary and entertaining at the same time.

Me: Argh whatever. Let's go.

We get our things and leave.

While he's driving, I get a call from Bongani. I ignore it and put my phone on silent.

Me: I'm sleepy...

Him: Nothing new...

I doze off and take a quick nap.

Derek: Zi.

He shakes me lightly and I wake up.

We get out of the car and he takes my hand.

Him: Feel better?

Me: Yes.

We get to the door and we are led in by some oldish lady. I think she's their helper.

We walk to the lounge and find Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Zizi!

I did miss her, hey.

We share a hug and she smiles.

Nomvuyo: Hey D.

They share a hug.

Nomvuyo: Liwa is in Dean's office. He said I should tell you to meet him there...

Derek: Sure.

He then wraps his arms around me.

Nomvuyo: She won't go anywhere.

He ignores her and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He walks away and Nomvuyo sighs.

Nomvuyo: Love...

Me: Love indeed.

We sit down and she looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Did you have a good week?

Me: It was okay, I guess.

She nods.

Nomvuyo: I'm 2 months pregnant.

My jaw drops and she laughs quietly.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

I've been avoiding this baby thing for the whole week. Derek didn't even bring it up because he knew not to. I think I'm still in denial.

Nomvuyo: I wanted to call and ask you to come with, and then I remembered that you're a working citizen.

We laugh.

Me: Don't you want to work?

She shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: Not now... I'm still enjoying being a housewife.

Me: I'd go crazy.

Nomvuyo: Being a mother is a full time job. It's weird that people think I sit in the house for the whole day.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, I'm going back to school. Liwa's been nagging me.

Me: Is it? Ufundani?

Nomvuyo: I'll see... I was studying medicine, but I dropped out because I couldn't afford it.

I look at her in confusion and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: I ran away from home and thought I could do everything alone... I refused help from the family.

Me: Geesh.

Nomvuyo: I should probably tell you my life story. I didn't have a perfect upbringing, unfortunately. Also, Liwa and I faced a lot of shit.

Me: Well now I'm definitely interested.

Nomvuyo: Such an inquisitive girl!

Me: Excuse me? Gossip Girl?

We both laugh and then someone clears their throat. This is the same girl who came to the hospital last weekend.

Nomvuyo: Zamo, please get me water.

The girl complains as she heads to the kitchen.

Nomvuyo: That's Ivy, Nolwazi's sister.

Me: And your fav.

I try not to act like a jealous girlfriend.

Ivy comes back and gives Nomvuyo the glass.

Ivy: Why are there so many strangers in this house? For fuck's sake.

Hai phela, surely she is not referring to me. That's impossible.

Nomvuyo: Ivy, this is not a stranger. This is Ziyanda, Derek's girlfriend.

Ivy stares at me.

I stare right back at her. Rude bitch.

Ivy: I need a drink, honestly...

She walks off and disappears.

Nomvuyo: Please don't mind her... She's not- uhm what's the word- refined... Yes, she's not refined.

I roll my eyes. Ivy, or whoever she is, better stay in her lane. Today is not the day.

I will gladly slap the piss out of anyone who disrespects me.

Me: Yazi I have a problem.

Nomvuyo: What's up?

I tell her all about the Lwazi and Bongani situation. She has proven before that I can trust her.

Me: What should I do?

Nomvuyo: Yoh just tell him once.

Me: Eish.

Nomvuyo: Don't lie about irrelevant things. You're not with Bongani anymore, right?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: Ya so tell him and move on. It's not that deep.

Me: Men are fucked up yazi.

Nomvuyo: Definitely. Garbage.

Suddenly, someone clears their throat, and it's Mdu.

Kanti kahle kahle what did I do to spite the Universe? Universe ngakwenzani? Hai man dis tew much.

Mdu: Sanibonani.

Nomvuyo: Hey, Mdu. Have you seen Ivy?

Mdu: Outside.

Nomvuyo stands and then looks at me.

Nomvuyo: I need to check on her.

This bitch! How the hell is she going to leave me with this idiot?

She walks away and Mdu stands there, looking all sheepish. I can tell that something's up.

I grunt.

Me: Yini?

He exhales and sits next to me.

Mdu: You've always been a problem solver.

Me: But I sure as hell couldn't solve you now could I?

Mdu: Eish awume man Ziyanda.

I look at him weirdly. Something's definitely bothering him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I made a girl pregnant.

Me: What?!

Him: Shhh!

I stand.

Me: No, fuck you! Why is this any of my business?!

He pulls me back down and I sit.

Mdu: I'm in fucken shit.

I look at him in shock.

Mdu: The girl was partly responsible for my sister's divorce.

Me: WHAT?!

What the fuck is wrong with him?!

Mdu: Ziyanda, focus.

Me: Uh-uh. Fuck you! Don't involve me in your shit.

I stand and find the nearest door. I need to get out of here.

What the fuck is wrong with everyone?!

Universe, screw you, fam!

INSERT 41

I've been on the other side of the yard for about 15 minutes, when Mdu comes.

Me: Leave me alone!

Mdu: No, I'm not going to leave you alone.

Me: Mdu, really??

Him: Yes, really.

Me: Why are you telling me all of this?

Him: Because I trust you...

He looks at me so innocently, that I soften up just a little bit.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Uthi kwenzakalani?

He scratches his head.

Him: Nolwazi is divorced...

Me: I know.

Him: I'm currently in a relationship with the girl who Kwanele, the ex-husband, married.

Me: The second wife??

Him: Her name is Tholi.

Yoh nkos' yami! What in the world??

He waits for me to process this nonsense.

Me: Mduduzi what is wrong with you??

He looks at me guiltily.

Me: How could you be so stupid??

He keeps quiet.

Me: So you made her pregnant?

Him: I love her, Ziyanda.

Yhu yhu yhu I need a drink.

Suddenly, I remember this baby dilemma that I am also facing, ngaphathwa esinye i-stress same time.

He leads me to the gazebo and we sit down.

Me: You fucken idiot!

He keeps quiet.

Me: You think you can just go around acting recklessly without thinking about how those close to you will be affected? Selfish bastard!

He listens while I shout at him for a good 5 minutes. See now I'm going off. I'm shouting at him for all the hurt he brought me when we were together, I'm shouting at him for Siyabonga's bullshit, and I'm also shouting at him for Bongani's fucked up-ness.

I am just letting it all out.

After I am done, he looks at me.

Him: Are you done having your seizure?

Me: No! I am far from done. You are so stupid! Why would you even do such a dumb thing?!

I go on for another 5 minutes telling him how stupid he is.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Now, I'm done.

He sighs.

Him: I fucked up, but I don't regret it.

Me: Mduzuzi, do you realize that you're telling me this? Your ex?

He sighs.

Him: Like I said, I trust you.

He then looks at me intently.

Him: I'm sorry for all the hurt I've caused. I was not ready to be serious... I should have told you earlier on instead of dragging you along.

Me: Mxm.

He keeps quiet.

Me: So what is your plan?

Him: She's going to give birth soon.

Me: Where is she?

Him: We're moving to Joburg permanently.

Me: So all of you people are relocating to this side? Nifunani la? Our lives were very peaceful without you. Nonke futhi.

Him: Stop with the low blows.

I grunt.

Me: You have two options: you tell your family and deal with the consequences, or you hide your pregnant home-wrecker and live in exile forever.

Him: Ziyanda!

Me: Heyi let me have my moment.

He exhales.

Me: What do you want to do?

Him: I don't know.

Me: My suggestion is that you tell them now. Everyone is too focused on the babies right now, and they're over the moon. They probably won't take it too harshly...

Him: You think so?

I nod.

Him: I'll talk to Tholi...

I look at him and see how stressed he is.

Unfortunately, I don't really care that much because nami I am dying of stress. Phela mina I am going to be a single mother living in the streets. The thought of being under a bridge begging for nyaope money is very traumatic, so Mdu's problem is not my concern right now...

Ngixakekile nje nami some-self. It's a dog eat dog world, so Mdu must find his own way. I can't be dealing with someone else's pregnancy when mine is going to ruin my entire existence.

As Mdu and I walk in, we hear laughter. Good times.

Mdu and I look at each other sadly. Impilo inzima yazi. Sifile yi-stress and people are out here living their best lives.

Nolwazi: Zi!

Me: Hey, Lwazi!

She's holding a tiny human. I walk to her and bend, to see...

She uncovers the tiny human, and I see the tiny face.

I smile.

Me: How cute...

He still looks like a little mushroom though...

For a person who loves teaching, I'm not really a fan of really tiny humans. They look like aliens and I'm always so scared of dropping them.

Nolwazi: I just brought them down so you guys can see them. We're taking them back up in 5 minutes... Dean will kill me.

I look over at Dean, who is holding the second megabyte.

Derek is busy smiling like a lost sheep. Angazi uchazwa yini.

Me: So both of them are boys?

Nolwazi: Yep. I thought we'd have a girl and boy...

Dean: Okay, now that everyone has seen them, they can be taken back to their room.

He needs to chill. No one here wants to steal those babies. We all got our problems... In fact, everybody up in this bitch is either pregnant or has a child. Children overfloweth in this room right now, and his babies are honestly the least of my problems.

Nolwazi and her mom walk upstairs with the babies, and Dean relaxes a bit. Mxm.

Dean: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello.

Dean: You good?

Me: Yep, and you?

Dean: Holding up.

Me: Hmm.

I feel Derek next to me.

Derek: Missed you...

Nazoke...

Derek's clinginess always comes at the wrong time. I'm trying my best to avoid Mdu right now...

Me: Missed you too, Nkanyi.

Thandeka emerges and tells us that dinner is ready.

We go to the table and sit.

Ivy: Am I the only one who's going to drink?

Liwa: We're taking a break from alcohol.

Ivy: Booo!

She takes the bottle of champagne and opens it. She then looks at me.

Ivy: Uyaphuza?

Me: No, thanks.

Ivy: How boring.

Me: No one wants to drink 24/7...

There's awkward silence for a few seconds.

Nomvuyo: So Dean, when are you going back to work?

Dean: When I feel like going back.

Liwa: Joys of being the boss, huh?

They go on with their conversation. I look over at Ivy and she's staring at me. I stare right back at her.

I did say that today is not the day to try me, right?

She pours herself some champagne and drinks it slowly.

I roll my eyes and look away.

Derek puts his arm around my chair and I look at him.

Derek: Don't lose it.

Me: I'm going to slap her... Don't stop me, okay?

He looks at me in shock and then I smile. I can't be mad around this one for too long. He's too cute right now, because I know he's trying not to step on my toes.

Me: I'm joking, Star.

He sighs and I laugh.

It's a fake laugh, because I really do want to shake that Ivy girl up a bit.

I then glance at Mdu, and I see him chuckling.

Now, he knows me very well...

He probably sees how much I don't like he's sister...

I don't even know why he's smiling because if his family finds out about his shit, he'll be sniffing nyaope with me.

INSERT 42

We're now eating and the conversation is flowing...

I'm still a bit uneasy, but Derek keeps brushes my back and thigh. He really does have a good effect on me. I could just look at him the whole day.

Derek: Baby.

I look at him.

He takes my hand and places it on his lap.

I choke on my drink and he chuckles.

Him: It's been a week.

Me: I know...

I brush his thigh and continue eating. Geesh now my fat inner thighs are sweating and I desperately need some form of release.

I excuse myself and make my way to the bathroom. It's not like any of them even noticed, because they were too engaged in some deep conversation.

As I pee, I'm not sure if I'm experiencing a mini-orgasm or I was pressed nje.

The door opens and my man walks in. Now I know for a fact that I'm about to get this orgasm. He locks the door and doesn't even waste time.

Within 5 minutes, I'm good- for now. We make our way back to the table and these people are still having some deep conversation.

I look over at Ivy and she seems to be laughing at something. Wow, I don't think I've ever disliked a person like this, hey? I don't even know her that well, but she rubs me the wrong way. Angim'funi.

After a while, we all finish up and do our own thing. Others are chilling outside, others in the lounge. I wonder where Nolwazi's father is. Lol I'm sure it would be tense right now.

Nomvuyo steals me from Derek and we go outside.

Nomvuyo: Bitchy, much?!

Me: Awume man, Nomvuyo.

She hisses.

Nomvuyo: Also, you two are busy sneaking off for quickies. Are you even using condoms?

Yhu and then it hits me. Why the fuck am I so stupid? You know what, Universe? I deserve this shit! I'm stressing about a pregnancy that hasn't been confirmed, yet I'm busy getting pounded left, right and centre.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo: Are you okay?

Me: I think I'm losing my mind.

She gives me a hug and laughs sweetly.

Nomvuyo: Oh sweetie, you're in love. You're crazy in love.

Me: That man is my drug.

Nomvuyo: And he's not the toxic type of drug.

Me: Exactly.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Now why are you being bitchy towards my Ivy?

Me: I don't like her.

Nomvuyo: Wow, just like that.

Me: Yes, and it will end there. I don't like talking about people I don't like. Waste of energy...

She looks at me in shock.

Me: And don't try to make us friends. I'll resent you for the rest of my life.

She tries to say something, but keeps quiet.

What people need to understand about me is that when I unleash the drama, it comes out full force. I go all out. Don't cross me when I'm in my drama zone. Don't talk to me or try to be funny, because I will sort you out, and I don't give a rat's ass if it comes across as childish. Petty LaBelle should never be tested. The bitch is crazy.

Nomvuyo: Uhm okay...

Me: I love you, but don't overstep some boundaries.

Nomvuyo: Wow, fuck you.

Me: Fuck you too.

We stare at each other for a while and end up laughing.

Nomvuyo: You dramatic piece of shit!

Me: Eish I'm going through the most. Have mercy on me.

She laughs and we walk back to the house.

I need my dose of Nkanyezi. Where is he?

I spot him.

I say a silent prayer.

I walk to him and he smiles as I stand next to him. He places his arms around my waist and I look at Ivy blankly.

Ivy: Derek tells me you're a teacher...

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Ivy: Nice...

Me: Hmm.

I then focus on Derek.

Me: Liwa has asked me to tell you to meet him outside.

Derek: Thanks.

Me: Sure.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and walks off.

Now is the perfect time to punch this heffer, and make it seem like I was stretching. Confuse the enemy a bit. I can't have these people seeing my ghetto side.

Ivy: Ziyanda.

I realise that I was too busy visualising the punch, that I completely zoned out.

Me: Yes?

Ivy: You're beautiful.

Okay. What's happening?

Ivy: We should probably start thinking of ways of getting rid of this sexual tension between us, don't you think?

Wait, what??

I can't even help but be shocked.

She smiles sweetly and walks away.

What the hell??

I need a drink! Surely this unconfirmed baby won't be affected by a little bit of wine? Let's just pretend I didn't know about him/she. Universe, forgive me, but I need something strong to ease all these crazy emotions.

I go to the bar and as I'm about to take a lil sumfin, Nomvuyo stops me.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: You're not touching alcohol until you go to the doctor!

Me: Do you see how this baby is creating problems in my life?

Nomvuyo: Well you seem to have created a connection.

Me: Girl, bye. I may be crazy, but not enough to be making connections with my empty lungs and womb.

She laughs and we go to the kitchen.

Nomvuyo: Have you come to terms with the possi-

Me: Vuvu.

Her: Okay, I'm sorry.

She drops the subject. Nolwazi walks to us...

Nolwazi: You two have been hiding...

Me: Not at all.

I look at Nomvuyo and I know what's going through her mind. Nomvuyo is me. I am Nomvuyo. The only difference is that I really like Nolwazi.

Nolwazi is that woman you aim to be. Chilled and comfortable with her life. She's career-driven and is just amazing.

Maybe that's why Nomvuyo doesn't like her. Maybe deep down, Nomvuyo is a bit bitter about not finishing school and building her own career.

I don't care though. Vuvu is still my girl.

She's the type of lady who'll give you a hair tie/gutter so you can tie your hair, before she gives you an ass whooping... A considerate bitch. A generous bitch.

Me: Are the megabytes behaving?

Nolwazi: Megabytes?

Me: The twins.

She laughs and sighs.

Nolwazi: Megabytes? Oh my goodness!

She then goes on to tell me about their sleeping patterns and shit. I love Nolwazi, but I had to zone out here and there. Listening to her go on about her angels was very triggering.

I need to go to the doctor ASAP.

After a while, Liwa calls us and tell us to meet at the lounge. We all sit down and he stands...

Liwa: Okay... Are we all here?

Thandeka: Yep.

Liwa: So the past week has been something...

They all chuckle.

Liwa: We've been looking forward to the birth of these twins for so long, that none of us thought they'd decide to pop out on the day we're all out and about...

Thandeka: Sies!

Liwa smiles shyly.

Liwa: Anyway, I just wanted to say that I am very happy that our families are blending. The love that that is felt when we're together is just magical, and it just proves that above all else, love is important.

He then looks at Nolwazi.

Liwa: I speak for everyone when I say we admire your strength. You carried two babies, and delivered them naturally. They're both healthy and happy.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Liwa: If you need anything, please let us know. We've been parents since our early 20s, I think we're now experts at this parenting thing.

Everyone laughs. I'm just sitting there, zoning in and out. I can't deal right now.

Liwa: Congratulations on this new journey, and we wish you all the best.

Nolwazi: How sweet! Thank you.

Everyone claps and drops the usual “ooo’s” and “aaah’s.”

Liwa: Dean was supposed to speak, but we all know he’s a pig. Right now, he’s twitching- he wants to go to his babies, so I think we should finish up.

I look at Dean and he really does look like he is suffering from separation anxiety.

Liwa: We decided to get you ladies a little something...

Derek stands and gives us hand-sized boxes.

Liwa: This is just to thank you, as the women who keep us sane, for being so strong and fearless last weekend, when we were somewhere else...

Thandeka: You were drunk and lost. Say it!

Liwa: We were just too excited, that’s all. No one was drunk. I plead the fifth.

Everyone laughs.

Liwa: That’s it... Have a good weekend... I’m very excited that all of us are now in Jo’burg. We’re just waiting for Zimi and Lindelwa.

Thandeka: Yaay!

Maybe I should relocate.

Everyone hugs and say their goodbyes.

Mdu comes to me.

Mdu: I'll call you.

Me: Mxm.

I find Derek and we head for the door.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Hai this one...

Me: Liwa...

He gives me a big hug.

Liwa: You see, you?

He chuckles.

Liwa: I'm watching you...

Me: Haibo what did I do?

Liwa: Hmmm.

I laugh and we share another hug.

Me: Bye!

Nomvuyo: Bye, love. Chat later.

Derek and I make our way to the car.

Me: That was sweet.

He nods and smiles.

We get in and he drives out of the yard.

Me: What did you get me?

I open the box, and it's a Cartier watch.

Me: Aww I love it!

Him: Good.

He brushes my hand and then focuses on the road.

Petty can go back to sleep now...

I'm finally going to my calm and safe space...

INSERT 43 (Couldn't edit)

That weekend was spent indoors, cuddling and getting to know each other even more.

My heart is filled with so much peace, love and happiness right now. Yes, I have my low moments, but overall, I'm happy.

Derek had to go to some meeting in Pretoria, and I refused to go with him. I am going to meet with Mdu... He's been calling me nonstop, asking me to meet him.

I finish getting dressed and make my way to the Uber.

I get to his complex and call him. He fetches me and we make our way to his place.

Mdu: I didn't think you'd agree to come.

Me: Me too.

We walk in and he offers me something to drink.

Me: I'm not here for drinks, Mduduzi.

He leads me to the lounge and we sit down.

I look at him, and he genuinely seems stressed.

Me: You didn't think things through, did you?

He sighs.

Me: So you just thought you'd hide forever?

Mdu: I wasn't thinking about all of that.

Me: What was going through your mind?

He scratches his head and groans.

Me: You fell in love with her?

He nods.

I've never seen him like this. He must love this girl.

Me: What about her family?

Him: She doesn't have a family.

Me: Huh?

Mdu: Her mother died when she was young, so her aunt took care of her.

Me: So where is the aunt?

He shakes his head angrily.

Mdu: There's no way I'm letting her go back to that woman. She's the one who sold Tholi in the first place.

Me: Sold?

Mdu: She linked up with Thenjiwe, Kwanele's mother-

Me: Kwanele being Nolwazi's ex-husband?

He nods.

Mdu: She linked up with Thenjiwe, and they decided to make Tholi the second wife, so she can produce children- seeing as Nolwazi was considered infertile.

Me: Wow.

Him: Tholi has been through a lot, Zi. I'm the only person who has shown her true love.

Me: Wena na.

Him: Not now, please.

Me: So how did you guys even start dating?

Him: I went after her for fun, but I could see she was miserable... Kwanele disappeared after Nolwazi told him about the divorce, and I spent all that time with Tholi...

Me: Does Kwanele know about you guys?

He nods.

Him: He thought he was the father, when he found out- but he figured it out...

Me: And did he threaten to expose you?

Him: I think his world just shattered permanently after that. He didn't even bother fighting.

Me: Wow...

We sit in silence while I process everything.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Bongani. I decide to answer.

Me: Bongani?

Bongani: Hey.

Me: Hello.

There's an awkward silence.

Me: What do you want? I'm really busy right now, and the last thing I want is to sit here and listen to you breathing heavily.

Him: Oh.

Me: How may I help you?

He sighs.

Him: I want to apologise.

Me: For playing me? So all this time I was your side chick?

Him: Uhm no-

Me: At this point I'm over it. Thankfully, I wasn't that invested in you, so I'm not that touched.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I won't mention this to anyone, especially Lwazi- so don't stress.

I hang up, block his number, and then focus on Mdu, who seems surprised.

Me: Don't act surprised. Niyafeba nonke.

Him: What about Derek?

Me: He's special. He's a real man.

Him: You'll never forgive me, huh?

Me: Not at all. I'm just tolerating you, because I have no choice.

He sighs in defeat, and then looks at me seriously.

Him: So you think I should tell them?

Me: Yes.

He groans.

Me: Start with Thandeka. I think she'll be more forgiving because you're her baby. She'll find a way to break the news to Nolwazi in a better way, because she doesn't want her to stress.

Mdu: I can't tell them now. I don't want to ruin my sister's vibe right now. She is really happy.

Me: True...

Mdu: But Dean knows.

Me: He does??

He nods.

Me: And??

Him: Dean doesn't involve himself in other people's shit.

How noble of him.

Him: I don't know hey... I'll talk to Zimkitha, because she also knows.

Me: Liwa's mom?

He nods.

Me: I'm really sorry that you're going through this...

Just then, someone clears their throat, and I turn around.

This must be her.

Oh my goodness, she is so adorable and round.

She wobbles to us and sits down.

She then looks at me nervously and her face turns red. Thank God, I'm not a yellow bone. I'm too emotional, and my poor skin would complain with my constant moods.

Me: Hi.

She looks at Mdu, as if she wants permission to speak.

Mdu: Chubby Cheeks, this is Ziyanda, a friend from varsity.

Tholi: Your ex.

Haike angizingeni.

Mdu: Chubby Cheeks-

She raises her hand and he stops. Lol people know how to control their men out here, hey.

She then looks at me.

Tholi: Why are you here?

What a wow.

Me: Mdu asked me to come.

Tholi: But you're his ex.

Me: And I want nothing to do with him.

She looks at me in confusion.

Mdu: Baby, it's nothing deep. I just wanted her perspective about this situation.

Tholi: So I'm a situation? That's what you think of me, Mdu?

I have concluded that the universe is putting me in these situations, to show me that pregnancy is not the way.

Mdu: Come on, Tholi.

Tholi: No, I-

Mdu: Do you know how stressed I fucken am, Tholakele? I'm in this with you! Why the fuck would I turn my back against you, and do stupid shit? I am trying to figure out how we can start living our lives freely!

He stands and walks away.

Lord...

Tholi's face turns red and I see tears approaching her eyes.

What did I ever do to deserve such?

I stand and sit next to her.

Me: Uhm... Sorry...

Tholi: I'm sorry for being rude.

She sobs quietly and my heart sinks.

Tholi: I'm so scared. I've been scared since I met Mdu. I have been living in fear that we're going to get caught, and his family will disown him. I don't want him to be like me. I know how it feels like to lose loved ones, and I also know that he would never survive without his family.

Shame, man.

She wipes her tears.

Tholi: Whenever he leaves me, I always panic and think he won't come back...

Me: He loves you, and he's obviously willing to fight for you.

Tholi: But how am I supposed to live with myself knowing that I separated him from his family?

I sigh...

People have real problems, hey.

My life is very peaceful compared to this shit.

Her: Sorry, I need the bathroom.

Me: Okay.

As she stands, she lets out a scream. My heart skips a beat.

Me: Thol-

She lets out another one, and then touches her belly.

Mdu is here within a blink of an eye.

Mdu: Tholakele.

She groans and starts crying hysterically.

Tholakele: What's happening??

Oh hell no! I am not about to be part of another stranger's birth!

INSERT 44

We're now driving to the hospital.

What the hell is going on?

Why am I driving with these people?

Why the fuck am I here?!

We get to the hospital, and Tholi is taken to her room.

The doctor then confirms that they have to perform an emergency caesarean.

Mdu is a nervous mess, and as much as I am also freaking out, I know that I have to be more rational.

Me: I'm calling Nomvuyo.

He's so freaked out, that he probably didn't even hear me. I quickly dial Nomvuyo's number and she answers.

Nomvuyo: Lo-

Me: Vuvu, I need you!

Nomvuyo: Wha-

I quickly tell her where I am, and to drop whatever she's doing. She assures me that she'll be here shortly, and then I hang up.

I wake into the room, and the doctor and nurses are busy preparing everything. I am so overwhelmed and confused. Tholi has stopped crying, but you can tell that she's scared. Mdu is holding her hand, comforting her. I just want to hug both of them at this point. Poor souls just have each other...

The doctor confirms a few things, they run more tests, and then prepare for the operation...

I decide to go outside; I'm not trying to witness any of this.

I see Nomvuyo approaching me and I hug her as soon as she gets to me.

Nomvuyo: What the hell is going on??

She gives me the bag with baby stuff and I just sigh.

Nomvuyo: Let me get you some water...

She rushes off somewhere and then I knock on the door. A nurse opens, and I give her the bag. She shuts the door and I sit on the couch just opposite the door. Nomvuyo walks back and gives me a bottle of cold water.

Me: Thanks.

I drink some and we sit in silence for a while.

Me: Mdu made a girl pregnant.

Her: What??

I nod.

Me: Tholi is the girl.

She looks at me in confusion.

Me: Tholi, Kwanele's second wife.

She stands and looks at me in complete shock.

I drink my water and keep quiet. I am so overwhelmed, I feel like I'm going to faint.

I feel an anxiety attack approaching. What's worse is that I didn't even take my medication, because I had such a relaxing weekend. I didn't think I'd need my meds. My psychiatrist will definitely feel some type of way about this.

Nomvuyo sees this, and I start hyperventilating. I genuinely feel like I can't breathe... She calls one of the nurses and I am led to one of the rooms.

I blank out at this point...

When I wake up, my mouth is super dry, and as usual, I feel like I am in another world.

It takes me a few minutes to recall everything, and come back to my senses.

Nomvuyo: Zizi...

I feel her warm hand brushing my cheek.

I sit up and my heart pounds as soon as I spot Derek, standing by the door.

He sees the panic on my face and quickly walks to the bed.

Derek: Calm down.

Me: I'm sorry!

I feel another anxiety attack approach.

Me: I wasn't thinking! I'm sorry for lying!

Derek: Ziyand-

Me: Derek, I'm sorry!

Nomvuyo: Zi, calm down. He's not angry.

Me: I was just trying to help!

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: Breathe.

She takes my hands and stares at me.

Her: Take a deep breath in...

I can't really focus right now.

Her: Ziyanda, listen to me... Take a deep breath in... In 1... 2... 3...

I find myself taking a deep breath in.

Her: And out...2...3...

She continues making me breathe until I feel better.

She then gives me a glass of water and pills.

Nomvuyo: Feeling better?

I put my head down and close my eyes.

Me: I'll be fine.

They let me be for a while, until I feel stable. I then get out of bed, and put on my shoes. I need some fresh air. I walk out and find the nearest door. It leads me to the garden.

I've been standing there for a while.

Where is Derek?

I need to talk to him and make him understand that I didn't mean for any of this to happen.

As I move, I see him approaching me. I stand and wait for him to get to me.

He stares at me blankly. I can't read him.

Is he angry?

Me: I'll understand if you want to break up with me.

He doesn't say anything. I want to cry, but I'm not trying to be dramatic right now. I genuinely feel bad for lying to him.

Me: I didn't mean to lie to you. I was going to tell you.

Him: But you didn't.

Me: I'm sorry, Derek.

Him: How am I supposed to trust you if you keep things from me?

I try to say something, but stop myself. I realise that defending myself will just make things work. I'll just keep quiet and take responsibility for my actions.

Him: You know you can't handle tense situations, because of your anxiety. Why would you even put yourself in such a position?

Me: I was just trying to help.

Him: By doing what? Tell me how you've helped these people.

I keep quiet.

Him: Instead of helping, you've just involved yourself in their business, and you're now part of this lie, that could potentially damage family ties.

I sigh.

Me: That poor girl has no family, Derek!

He keeps quiet.

Me: I regret not telling you- I really do, but after meeting her, and seeing how dependent she is on this one person, I felt the need to be there. She only has Mdu, Derek. She literally has no one she can depend on.

Him: But it's not your responsibility to carry their problems.

Me: I didn't even have time to think about all of this. Everything happened so fast.

He sighs.

Me: I feel bad for her. She's a bruised person. You can just see it in her eyes.

Him: So what are going to do?

Me: I don't know...

He looks at me intently and I look down.

Me: Don't look at me like that.

Him: You try to act like you don't care about people, but you actually have a good heart.

I sigh.

He then wraps his arms around me and I melt. He sees this, and chuckles.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you.

Him: I forgive you.

I look at him.

Him: I know you thought you were protecting them...

Me: I just didn't know how to tell you.

Him: Next time, just tell me... I want to be there for you, as much you want to be there for everyone else.

Swoons!

Him: I want to support you as much as I can... I'm glad I witnessed how Nomvuyo handled your attack; at least I will be able to help you in future.

This man...

Him: Just don't lie to me, Ziyanda. I value honesty.

Me: Okay.

We stand there for a while, staring at each other all lovey dovey.

Him: I love you so much...

We share a hug and I honestly just want to cry. What did I do to deserve such a wonderful man?

Me: I love you too.

We share a kiss.

Nomvuyo: Heyi nina wozani...

We let go of each other.

Nomvuyo: Come see the twins. They're so cute.

Me: Twins???

She laughs and nods.

Derek: For fuck's sake.

Nomvuyo: Come!

Derek: This is just fucked up...

We walk back in, hand in hand...

INSERT 45

Derek and I are now in his apartment.

Me: This is crazy.

Derek: Fucked up.

Me: I wonder how all of this will unfold.

He goes to the bathroom and I throw myself on the bed. He then comes back and rests his head on my thighs.

Him: It's a mess.

Me: Do you think Nolwazi will be fine?

Him: I don't know...

Me: I think she'll understand.

Him: Hmm but this is a bit deep. Mdu messed up.

Me: He's always been impulsive, I'm not surprised.

I regret that as soon as I say it. Who wants to sit here and listen to their partner talk about an ex?
How dumb, Ziyanda!

Him: He's impulsive?

Oh... He doesn't seem mad.

Me: Yes, very.

Him: So how the fuck did you deal with each other?

Me: What do you mean?

Him: Seeing as both of you are impulsive.

Me: Excuse me??

Him: Wait, is this news to you?

Me: I am not impulsive, Derek!

He chuckles and I punch him lightly.

Me: I'm offended.

Him: Don't be. I love your impulsiveness.

Me: Argh.

Him: You don't think before you act.

Me: Stop!

He laughs.

Him: So how was your relationship?

Gosh, here I am trying to change the subject and this one keeps reeling me back in.

Me: It was a very dramatic relationship.

Him: How so?

Me: We fought every second.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Hmm.

I punch him again.

Me: Can we stop talking about this?

Him: Baby, you are the one who dragged us into this whole mess.

Me: I wasn't thinking!

Him: Impulsive...

Me: Argh.

He repositions and then gets on top of me.

Him: We need to go to the doctor.

I groan.

Him: Why are you avoiding it?

Me: I'm not.

Him: Ziyanda.

I sigh.

Me: I just don't want to face the results.

Him: Okay, but you do realize that we'll face them anyway?

I keep quiet.

Him: What are you scared of the most?

Me: Duuh! Being pregnant!

Him: What scares you about being pregnant?

Me: Derek!

Him: I just want to know.

Me: So wena you're okay with me being pregnant?

He sighs thoughtfully.

Him: I'm okay with anything. Like I said, pregnant or not, I'm here.

I groan.

Me: I don't want to be pregnant.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'm not even going to sugar-coat it, or lie- I don't want to be pregnant. I am not ready!

He still doesn't say anything.

Me: We've been irresponsible. Contraceptives are must.

Him: This is why we need to go to the doctor.

Me: Hmkay.

We lay there for a while, and I even feel myself doze off.

He gets up.

Me: Where are you going?

Him: Need some air...

Me: Oh.

He puts on a t-shirt and walks out.

Uhm...

What the hell just happened?

I dial Niki's number and she answers.

Me: I need to see you ASAP!

Niki: Angithi uyajola!

I sigh heavily.

Me: So much shit has happened.

Her: Let's have our usual indoor weekend.

Me: This weekend?

Her: Yes, love.

Me: Okay then.

Her: Hopefully, your man won't hate me for taking you away from him.

Me: I think I need some distance and alone time, just to reflect on everything that has happened.

Her: Good, you'll use this weekend, and tell me all about him.

We laugh.

Her: Take care of yourself.

Me: Hmkay bye, friend.

Her: Bye!

I hang up and am startled by Derek's phone ringing. I reach for it and see Xolani's name. I think of answering it, but stop myself. I can't be answering other people's phones...

It stops ringing.

Where is Derek? Why did he even need some air? Is he tired of me? Am I invading his space?

I stand and make my way to the lounge. I am definitely going back home tomorrow. I haven't been there since last week Friday. It's now Tuesday.

My thoughts are interrupted by the knock on the door. Did he forget the key?

I open the door, and am shocked to see Xolani, standing there.

Me: Xolani!

He looks at me from head to toe and frowns.

Xolani: What's wrong with you?

Me: What do you mean?

He walks in and I close the door.

Him: You have eye bags and-

Me: I have eye bags??

He laughs and nods.

Me: It's been a rough couple of weeks.

Him: Is my brother putting you through the most?

Me: Not him per se.

He looks around.

Him: Where is he?

Me: He is out.

He raises an eyebrow.

Him: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Well... I think so.

He opens the fridge and gets a bottle of water.

Him: Are you guys fighting?

Me: No.

I don't even see myself fighting with Derek. I just refuse to put us in that position.

Him: Well, let me give you some insight on my beloved brother.

He goes to the lounge and I follow him. We then sit down and he looks at me intently.

Him: What have you learnt about him so far?

Me: Uhm...

Really? I thought this would be a time for me to get more information about Derek, and now Xolani wants me to tell him things.

Xolani: Derek is a very loving person, I'm sure you've seen that.

Me: I have.

He smiles.

Him: I don't know how he manages to love so much, even after people screw him over.

Me: People screw him over?

Argh I can't imagine why anyone would want to hurt him intentionally.

Him: I'm sure you've also been through your share of heartbreaks.

I nod.

Him: But D doesn't seem to hold those experiences against anyone.

He sighs.

Him: Please take care of him, Zi. I'm asking this from the bottom of my heart. I've watched him trust people, who don't even give a shit about him. He's too much. Too generous, too loving, too kind...

He drinks some of his water.

Him: And you know what they say about such people... Once they reach their breaking point, shit gets too real.

Me: I love his circle of friends though. They're good for him.

He nods.

Him: They are... He just has bad luck when it comes to romantic relationships. They always take advantage of him.

Me: Well that's unfortunate.

Him: He always puts other people's needs before his. He's been like that forever. He has never been one to ask for help, or show how affected he is by hurtful situations.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not telling you this to make you feel guilty. I just want you to know that you're with an amazing person, who'll love you deeply. However, I also ask that you take care of him. Try to let him open up... None of us have been able to get him to open up...

All this time I thought I was the closed off one, but maybe both of us are the same- or he's worse, but he just knows how to make it seem like he's fine...

Me: Thank you...

He nods and then looks at me from head to toes.

Me: Stop looking at me like that!

Him: Tomorrow, you're spending the day with me. I cannot have you looking like this, Zi.

Me: Do I even have a choice?

Him: No.

Me: Okay then.

Him: Stunning!

I laugh and we continue chatting.

Just then, the door opens and Derek walks in.

Xolani: Brother!

Derek: Hey. When did you get here?

Xolani: It's been a while.

Derek walks to the lounge and looks at me.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Me? Yes.

He nods and looks at Xolani.

Derek: What's up?

Xolani: Was in the area...

Derek: Hmm. I'd like to crash, if you don't mind.

Xolani: Of course not. Zi and I are good.

He nods and walks away to the bedroom.

As I am about to stand, Xolani stops me.

Xolani: Give him space.

Me: No...

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: See you tomorrow.

Him: Well damn!

I pull him up and push him towards the door.

Me: Bye, see you tomorrow!

He gets out and I lock the door. I then make my way to the bedroom, and find Derek lying on the bed, facing up.

I sit on the edge and look at him.

Me: Do you want space?

He shakes his head and I keep quiet. I don't really know what's happening. We were fine mos?

He pulls me and I relax next to him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I'm just tired.

That's what I also say when something's bothering me and I don't want to talk!

Me: Just remember... We value honesty, right?

He keeps quiet and I decide to let him be. Hopefully he'll let me know what changed his mood.

INSERT 46 (Short Insert)

It's now around 7pm, and I am starving.

As I get out of bed, he groans and I get back in and look at him. He looks so peaceful, but I can't help but think, he's not as happy or "put together" as he makes it seem. Maybe it's time for me to put on my big girl panties (excuse the pun) and get him to fully open up. I mean, he has managed to get me to trust him and open up; surely I can do the same for him?

After a while, he wakes up and looks so innocent, that my heart dances.

Me: Hey, sleepyhead.

He looks at me and smiles lightly.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm okay.

I want to ask him, but decide not to. I don't want to corner him.

Him: Are you hungry?

Me: Just a little bit.

He gets out of bed and walks to the bathroom. He seems better, but still a bit down.

Him: Let's go out. I'm too lazy to cook.

Me: Or we can order something.

Him: I'd like some fresh air.

Me: Oh. Okay.

I go to the bathroom and get in the shower. He then comes in and we clean ourselves, without exchanging words. I am so awkward when it comes to such situations. We finish showering and he leaves me in the bathroom.

When I'm done, I walk to the bedroom and find him getting dressed.

Me: Derek, is it me?

He stops and looks at me.

Me: Did I say something to make you feel like this?

Him: We'll talk later.

I nod and get dressed. Now I definitely know that his mood has to do with me. I'm now trying to think of everything I said to him.

Was it the Mdu thing?

We finish up and then make our way out of the place.

While driving, his phone rings and he gives it to me.

Him: Please answer it.

I look at the caller id. It's Dean.

I sigh before answering.

Me: Hello.

Dean: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

Him: Is he there?

Me: Yes, he's driving.

Him: Is he okay?

Me: Uhm yes...

What's happening?

Him: Alright. Please ask him to call me back.

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call.

Me: He has asked you to call him back.

He nods and then glances at me.

Now I'm down. His mood is affecting me.

I feel his hand on mine, and he brushes my knuckles.

Him: I'm not angry.

I keep quiet and look out the window.

We get to a restaurant in Rosebank and get a table, despite not making a reservation.

We've been here for about 30 minutes, and haven't really spoken.

Me: What did I do?

He sighs.

Him: You didn't really do-

Me: Don't lie to me. I obviously said something to offend you.

He rubs his chin and looks down.

Him: I don't know... I just felt a bit down after that pregnancy discussion.

Wait, what?

I look at him in confusion.

Him: It's fine actually, let's drop it

Me: Don't do that.

He sighs.

Him: It's petty.

Me: Derek, come on.

He looks at me.

Him: I just felt a bit weird after you told me that you don't want to be pregnant.

Me: I don't vele.

He tries to say something, but stops himself.

Our food comes and we begin eating.

Me: Derek, I don't like what's happening right now. I feel very disconnected to you, and I hate it.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Please talk to me. How did I offend you?

Him: I didn't really think about having children until you brought the whole pregnancy thing up.

I keep quiet. Now it makes sense, I think...

Him: I know it's not a big deal, but I am a bit hurt by how you're reacting to this whole thing.

I decide to keep quiet and let him explain himself. I know I can come across as insensitive at times.

Him: And hearing how you talk about this unconfirmed pregnancy, as if it's something disgusting... It just threw me off.

Me: So... You want a baby?

He looks at me, a bit embarrassed.

Me: But...

When did this happen? How did we get to this?

Me: Derek, I'm not ready to have a baby.

Him: I know. You've made that clear.

Me: But here's what you don't comprehend, just because I don't want a baby, it doesn't mean I don't want a baby with you.

He stares at me.

Me: I do want children, but I don't them now. I'm not ready emotionally or financially. I'm not in that phase yet.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Derek, I love you. I may be shitty at times, but I really love you. Furthermore, you already have a place in my future. I love you that much.

His face softens and I sigh.

Me: Maybe I'm not expressive enough, and that's why you're behaving this way.

I look at him, and now I'm the emotional one. I hate the fact that he doesn't understand the depth of my love for him. I just want him to get it through his thick skull that I love him. A baby won't make any difference.

Me: You don't need a baby to make me stay. I want to be with you regardless. I love you.

We are silent for a while.

Me: I apologise for making you feel like this. I was just trying to emphasise how worried I am about the situation. I'm sorry for coming across as insensitive.

Him: Your apology means a lot to me.

Me: And I hate apologising.

Him: I know.

I smile.

Me: I don't care how long I've known you... My love for you is incalculable, and it scares me at times.

He reaches for my hands and brushes them.

Him: Thank you.

Me: Can we stop being sad now? It's too draining.

He stands and I give him a weird look.

Him: Come here.

He pulls me up and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I love you so much, Ziyanda.

Me: I love you too.

We squeeze each other and share a kiss.

Him: I've run out of condoms.

I squeal and he laughs. We then sit down and finish up eating.

Me: You know, I thought it was about Mdu.

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: I'm not that insecure.

Me: Yaas!

He laughs and we continue chatting...

INSERT 47

Me: Derek.

Derek: Yes, baby.

Me: I'm going home today.

He stops typing whatever he is working on, and stares at me.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Star, I haven't seen my parents in 4 days!

Him: Are you dead?

Me: Argh.

Him: I don't want you to leave.

Me: Heeh so I am must die first?

He smiles and nods.

Me: I need to see my baby, Lwazi.

He raises an eyebrow.

Him: Your daughter.

Me: Yep.

Him: Hmm.

He continues typing and zones me out.

He's now driving me back home.

Derek: So when am I going to officially meet your parents?

Me: Uhm excuse me?

He chuckles.

Me: How about never?

Him: Uyahlanya.

Me: They're going to freak out. They've never met any boyfriend of mine.

Him: I'd like to think that I'm not just any boyfriend.

Me: Hehe! Wena na.

He smiles and my heart jumps.

Me: You have the cutest smile.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: I thought you said it freaks you out.

Me: That was when I was in denial about how I feel about your ass.

Him: Hmm I'm glad to know that I have an effect on you.

Me: What?? Are you telling me that you're not aware of the effect you have on me?

Him: I've said this before... You're stone cold.

Me: Derek!

Him: I'm serious. There are times when I think I'm winning, and then most of the time I'm just hopeful...

I laugh. So my craziness is not evident in my actions? Does he not see how insane he makes me?

Me: Wow.

Him: But I know how to win you over.

He smiles mischievously and I giggle. He then slides his hand between my thighs and I hit him.

Me: Disgusting human being.

He laughs and focuses on the road.

Me: You think my parents want to meet the man who's always spreading my legs?

Him: If only they knew how loud you moan.

Me: Derek!

He continues teasing me until we get to my house.

Thank God my mom is still at work. My mom is a bit intense compared to my dad...

My dad is outside, as usual- taking care of his customers.

As I get out of the car, Derek gets out as well.

Me: What the hell??

He smiles.

Him: I would like to taste your father's food.

Me: Dere-

Him: Zip it, drama queen.

I look at him in complete shock.

My dad exclaims as soon as he sees me.

Dad: I have missed you!

Me: Me too!

I am uncomfortable as hell right now.

He spots Derek, and is a bit confused... Then he smiles.

Dad: Hawu kanti wena you don't change your Uber driver, Zizi?

Me: Uhm...

Derek: Sawubona.

Dad: Hello.

My dad looks at me briefly.

Me: I mentioned that you sell amazing chicken, now he wants to get a plate.

Dad: Ohhh kanti?

He smiles.

Dad: Hlala phansi... Futhi I have many questions ngaleUber yenu...

Gosh I want to go, but at the same time, I want to stay-just to make sure that Derek doesn't say anything stupid.

My dad then looks at me.

Dad: And then?

Me: Huh?

Dad: Go inside phela. Angithi the Uber driver got you home? You've reached your destination, so he's no longer your concern.

I look at him in shock. Derek is stifling a laugh.

Dad: Bye bye.

I reluctantly turn and make my way inside the house. My heart beat is on another level. I'm freaking out!

As soon as I get inside, I go straight to the window and take a peek. I see Derek is sitting down, and my dad is busy preparing his plate.

If Derek thinks he'll get some from me, then his ass is playing. He won't even get a sniff!

He's now eating... I know for a fact that he's enjoying the food. My dad does the damn thing phela.

Argh I give up.

I go to my bedroom and unpack some of my shit.

I eventually go out and people are out here having fat chats and laughs ngaphandle.

Dad: Uyaphi?

Me: I'm going to fetch Lwazi, and take her to the mall.

Dad: Hamba neUber driver yakho phela.

I try by all means to keep a straight face.

Dad: He has explained everything to me...

He smiles and now I'm just confused. What exactly did this man explain to my father?

I watch as Derek stand, shake my dad's hand and give him money. He then comes to me with two plastics that have 6 takeaways.

Me: What's happening?

Derek: Nothing.

Derek and I walk to his car and get in.

Me: You better start ta-

Him: Shhh...

Me Excuse me??

He chuckles as he starts the car and drive off.

Me: You better check yourself!

Him: Ukhuluma kakhulu sometimes.

Me: Derek!

He looks at me and smiles playfully.

Me: What did you talk about?

Him: Uber.

Me: Uber?

Him: I'm your Uber driver, remember?

I groan and roll my eyes.

Him: Ngiyadlala, baby.

He slides his hand under my dress and strokes my thigh.

Him: He just asked me questions about joining Uber. I had to make shit up.

Me: He doesn't suspect anything?

He shakes his head.

Me: Why the fuck would you even get out of the car? How dare you?!

Him: Your father has a business, and I'm a supporter of black businesses.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles and I direct him to Lwazi's house.

Me: I'll see you around.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: Derek, I'm not spending the afternoon with you, I'm spending it with Lwazi.

Him: What about me?

Me: What about you?

He sulks and pouts.

Me: Go away!

Him: I'll go back to your father. Those old men are good company.

Me: Asingaphaphelani, Derek.

Him: But I want to be with you...

He continues sulking till I agree.

Me: I'll be back.

I get out of the car and make my way inside Lwazi's yard. As soon as she sees me, she squeals excitedly.

Lwazi: Mommy!

Me: Hey sweetie, are you alone?

She nods and locks up. We then make our way out.

Me: How have you been?

Lwazi: I'm well, and you?

Me: I'm well, too.

I open the door for her and she frowns as she gets in and sees Derek.

Lwazi: Is this the driver, mommy?

I laugh.

Me: Yes, baby. This is our driver, Uncle D.

Lwazi: Uncle D?

Me: Yes.

She keeps quiet and I get in the front.

Derek: Hi, Lwazi.

Lwazi: Hello.

It is very clear that she doesn't feel this one.

I look over at Derek and I know he's a bit touched. Lwazi doesn't fail to make it clear if she doesn't like you.

Me: We're going to Maponya.

Derek nods and drives...

Lord, this is going to be an interesting afternoon...

INSERT 48

We're now at Maponya Mall and Lwazi has been on her phone...

Gosh she's such a mini-me. I'm sure there's a mini-Petty LaBelle in there telling her to act up and wait for me to shower her with love and attention.

Me: Baby, let's go.

We get out of the car.

Lwazi: Are we watching a movie, mommy?

Me: Yes, we are. Let's eat first. I can't have you eating junk in an empty stomach.

Her: I haven't eaten at all today.

My heart aches immediately.

Me: What happened to the money I gave you?

She shrugs.

Her: Someone took it...

I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: Well we'll stuff your face now now.

She giggles.

Me: What do you want to eat?

Her: Duuuh! McDonalds!

Me: McDs it is.

We walk to McDonalds and I look at Derek. I can't seem to read his expression.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods.

Him: Lwazi, what are you going to have?

Lwazi looks at him blankly and I chuckle. She then tells him what she'll have.

Derek: What will you have, Zi?

Me: Uhm... I'll have a Big Mac.

He nods.

Him: Go get a table.

I nod and walk upstairs with Lwazi. We get a table and sit.

Me: Where's mom and dad?

Lwazi: I don't know. They've been gone for two days.

Me: What?? You've been living by yourself for two days?

Lwazi: My brother was around, but he was outside with his friends. They were so loud and drunk.

I groan.

Me: Did you eat yesterday?

She nods and smiles.

Lwazi: Mommy, I'm a big girl. Stop stressing.

Me: You're coming to my house, until they come back. I can't have you living by yourself with no food.

Lwazi: Or electricity.

For fuck's sake, man.

Derek walks to the table with our food, and sits.

Derek: There you go.

Lwazi: Thank you.

She delves in immediately and I try not to show her how stressed I am. Derek looks at me questioningly and I just sigh and focus on my food.

We listen to her tell us her usual crazy and dramatic stories until we finish eating. We then make our way to the cinema and she decides what she wants to watch.

She decided that yena she doesn't want to sit in the middle, because she wants "breathing space" and doesn't want to listen to us talk during the movie, so she skipped a seat and focused on the movie, while Derek and I sat next to each other.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Not really.

He glances at me.

Me: She comes from a very fucked up family.

Him: Really?

Me: The parents are alcoholics. The mom and dad constantly fight, and then the dad leaves for days on end... The mom will then leave as well, looking for the dad... It's just a messy environment.

Him: They leave her all alone?

Me: Yes, she's been by herself for two days now. The brother is 25, but he is also drowning in alcohol.

Him: That's fucked up.

Me: My heart breaks every time I see her. She's not safe in that house.

I look at her, and she's giggling away.

Me: She's going to stay at my house until we find a way forward.

Him: Are you going to call child protection services?

Me: I don't want her to go stay at some orphanage where she'll be treated badly. She'll stay at my house for now, while I make a plan.

Him: Hmm.

He reaches for my hand and strokes it.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: I love this girl so much. I'd kill or die for her, honestly.

He keeps quiet and I try to focus on the movie...

Me: Let's get you some new clothes...

Lwazi: Really??

I nod and she squeals.

Lwazi: Yaay!

We walk to different stores and Derek insists on paying...

Lol Lwazi went all out, I was even jealous a bit. The girl got everything she wanted and needed. From, clothes, to shoes, to underwear... She got it all.

By the time we were done, we (Derek) had spent a few thousands... I was just glad that this shit didn't come out of my pocket.

It's now around 5pm, and we're making our way to the car.

As soon as we get in the car, Lwazi passes out.

Me: Well aren't you sneaky.

Derek: What?

Me: You know a girl can't be mad at you after such a shopping spree.

He chuckles and drives off.

Him: I'm just being a kind person...

Me: Lies!

He looks at me seriously.

Him: Am I taking you home?

Me: Where else would you take me?

Him: Your other home.

I laugh and shake my head.

Me: I can't leave Lwazi right now.

Him: She can come with us.

Me: I don't want to overwhelm her, Derek.

He nods and keeps quiet.

We eventually get to my house and he parks outside. I pat Lwazi and she wakes up.

Me: We're here, baby. Go inside.

She blinks and looks at me so innocently, with her cute self.

Lwazi: Okay.

She sits up and then looks at Derek.

Lwazi: Thank you for buying me everything, Uncle D.

Derek: You're welcome, love.

Lwazi: Goodbye. Enjoy the rest of your evening.

Aww man.

Derek's smile is just out of this world.

Derek: Thank you, you too.

Me: I'll bring your things...

She nods and gets out of the car. She then walks in the yard...

Derek: Your parents know her?

I nod.

Me: She's part of the family.

He smiles.

Me: At least she's not mean anymore.

He groans.

Him: She's exactly like you.

Me: Right?

He chuckles.

Me: She'll eventually open up to you, don't worry.

Him: She has no choice. It's not like I'm going anywhere.

Me: Gosh.

He then looks at me seriously.

Him: So I'm only seeing you on Friday?

Me: Yes, for our appointment with the doctor.

He nods thoughtfully.

Me: See you then.

He sulks.

Me: Derek, it's unrealistic to think we're going to spend every single day together.

Him: Why? There's nothing unrealistic about that.

Me: Well, unlike you, I live with my parents. I can't disappear nje just like that.

Him: Then maybe you should move out.

Me: Were you not the one who said you love the fact that I stay here?

Him: Argh.

I laugh and lean closer to him.

Me: I love you.

Him: No, you don't.

Me: Such a baby.

I plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: Thank you for today. Lwazi and I are very grateful.

He smiles and we share a kiss. My insides churn.

After a long kissing and touching session, I finally get out of the car and make my way inside the house. I want to go back and be with him, but I'm also glad that we're going to be apart for a bit. I'm worried that I might be addicted to him.

As I get in the house, with thousands of plastics, Lwazi runs and helps me.

Mom: Oh wow!

Me: Hey ma.

Mom: Hey, baby. I see you had a fruitful day.

Me: Quite.

Mom: Lwa, try on some clothes for us phela.

Lwazi hops happily to my bedroom, and we all laugh.

Dad: Did they disappear once again?

Me: Yep.

Mom: Mxm.

I sit down and sigh.

Me: I'm thinking of adopting her.

Both of them look at me, a bit startled.

Me: I don't want her to stay in that house, with those messed up people.

Just then, Lwazi walks to the lounge, dressed in a lovely dress.

We all clap and she smiles brightly.

Dad: Beautiful!

Lwazi: Uncle D loved this one!

I swear the world stops moving!

Lwazi: Let me try on the other dress!

She walks away and I'm just out here trying to keep a straight face.

I look at my parents, and they're both staring at me.

Me: So yes, I want to adopt her...

I stand.

Me: I'm sure she needs my help...

I quickly walk away.

Universe, swallow me!

INSERT 49 (Couldn't edit)

Lwazi and I spent the following day in bed, cuddling.

Me: What are we going to do today?

Her: Watch cartoons.

Me: Perfect!

She smiles and rests her head on my chest.

Lwazi: I love you, mommy.

Me: I love you even more.

She giggles and dozes off once again...

My phone rings and it's Derek video calling me. I answer.

Me: Hey...

He's also in bed.

Derek: I had the longest, toughest night ever.

I giggle quietly and he groans.

Him: I'm miserable. Come back!

Me: I can't.

Lwazi repositions and I get out bed and go to my parents' bedroom. I close the door and sit on the bed.

Me: You're so cute.

Him: Can I come fetch you?

Me: No.

Him: Yoh.

I laugh as he continues being dramatic.

Me: I want to spend the day with Lwazi.

Him: And I want to spend all my days with you.

Me: So dramatic!

He sulks.

Me: Okay Derek, you can spend the day with us.

He smiles and I roll my eyes.

Him: Let's go to Gold Reef City.

Me: Hmm that's actually not a bad idea.

Him: I'm sure Lwazi will be ecstatic.

Me: Definitely.

Him: I'll fetch-

Me: No, you won't. I'm still dealing with the repercussions of what you did yesterday. I will meet you somewhere.

Him: What happened?

I tell him about Lwazi mentioning him, and he laughs.

Him: It's about time.

Me: Hell no!

Him: So what did you tell them?

Me: Nothing. They didn't ask me.

Him: Are you a coward, Ms Dlamini?

Me: I am not ready to introduce to my parents.

Him: Ouch.

Me: Zip it, Sensitive Susie.

Him: So when are you planning on introducing me?

Me: The day you take me as your wife. Bye, see you later!

I hang up before he tries to convince me to introduce him...

I go to the bathroom and clean myself up. Once I'm done, I wake Lwazi up and tell her to take a bath.

Lwazi: Where are we going?

Me: It's a surprise.

She smiles and gets out of bed. I clean up the room, and then get dressed.

We're now in Derek's car... We met up some other place, away from my house. I can't have my father seeing me with him ever again.

Derek: How are you, Lwazi?

Lwazi: I'm great, and how are you, Uncle D?

Derek: I'm fantastic, thank you.

I look at Lwazi, and she's smiling sweetly. Cute girl, this one.

He drives off and I listen to them chat about her favourite music.

We finally arrive at Gold Reef City, and Lwazi is beyond excited. We follow her while she goes on the rides. I didn't even want to try anything; the thought of twirling around is enough to drive me crazy.

Derek wraps his arms around me and we share a hug.

Derek: Ms Dlamini.

He gives me a kiss and I blush.

Me: Staaap.

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Him: I can't seem to stay away from you. I was in a foul mood the whole night.

Me: Such a baby.

Him: You didn't miss me?

Me: I did.

He groans and kisses my forehead.

Him: I want to be with you 24/7. You've bewitched me.

Me: You are the one who's bewitched me.

He smiles and we share another kiss.

Me: I've been thinking...

Him: Hmm?

Me: I want to adopt her.

His body tenses up, and he looks at me in disbelief.

Him: What?

Me: I want to adopt her. I just want to take care of her.

Him: But... How?

Me: How?

Him: I thought... I thought you don't want children.

Me: Lwazi is different, Derek. She's been in my life for years. I am all she has.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I told my parents and they don't disagree.

He sighs.

Him: That's... That's a lot...

Me: I know...

Him: Are you sure about this?

Me: I don't know.

Him: So you're against orphanages?

Me: Yes.

Him: But I turned out alright.

I keep quiet.

Him: Maybe you could get her to stay at Twilight Orphanage.

Me: Your orphanage?

He nods and I keep quiet.

Him: I could help you.

Me: I'll think about it.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: What?

Him: You love this child.

Me: I do. A lot.

Him: She's lucky to have you.

I sigh and relax in his arms.

Me: I want her to live comfortably.

He kisses my forehead and we watch as Lwazi runs to us.

Lwazi: That was amazing!

Derek: Great. Where do you want to go next?

Lwazi: Tower of-

Me: Nope. You're too young.

Lwazi: But mommy!

Me: Uh-uh.

She continues begging me but ends up giving up. We then went to the more kid-friendly rides.

Derek: She's adorable.

Me: Too much, but she thinks her cuteness will allow her to do as she pleases.

He chuckles and looks at me intently.

Me: What?

Him: Nothing.

Me: We should probably get something to eat now... We've been here for a while now.

He nods and we continue chatting as we wait for Lwazi. She eventually comes and wraps her arms around me.

Lwazi: You're the best!

I squeeze her.

Me: Ready to eat?

Her: One more ride? Please?

Me: Nope. You have to eat.

Her: Pleeeeease?!

I shake my head. She then looks at Derek and blinks innocently.

Her: Uncle D, please?

She lets go of me and wraps her arms around Derek.

This child!

I watch as Derek gets lost in her spell.

Derek: Okay, one last ride.

Lwazi: Yaaay!

She runs off and we follow her.

Me: Gosh! Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Uyabhora yazi. Why in the world would you give in like that??

Him: But... But I was just...

He sighs.

Me: Argh.

Him: She's so cute.

Me: Hai suka.

He puts his arm around my shoulders and we wait for Lwazi.

Him: Did I really give in?

Me: Yes!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Me: Channel your inner strictness, Daddy D.

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Me: You can't be out here falling for dimples and sparkly eyes.

Him: Whatever, Nanny McZee.

Me: Wow!

Lwazi finally comes back...

Me: Can we get out of here? I'm over the crowd.

Derek: Sure.

He then looks at Lwazi.

Derek: Did you have fun?

Lwazi: Yes!

She is just on another level right now.

We've now eaten, and it's safe to say that Lwazi and Derek have formed a little relationship that I don't like. Derek is proving to be spellbound here. I just can't deal.

As we're driving to Soweto, my phone rings. It's Nomvuyo. I answer.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Hey, you!

Me: How are you?

Her: I'm well, and you?

Me: Ngi-right.

Her: Ukuphi?

Me: On my way home.

Her: Are you with Derek?

Me: Yes.

Her: Say hi to him.

Me: Okay.

Her: When am I seeing you?

Me: I'll call you later.

Her: Okay, love.

Me: Bye.

Her: Bye.

I hang up.

After a while, we get to Soweto, and he parks outside my house.

Lwazi: Thank you, Uncle D!

Derek: You're welcome, baby.

Lwazi: Byeee!

Derek: Bye.

Me: And remember, you do not mention anything about Uncle D.

She giggles and nods.

Lwazi: Your secret is safe with me!

She giggles as she gets out and makes her way inside.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow...

He sighs and nods.

Me: Love you.

Him: Love you more.

We share kiss and I get out of the car... When I walk in the house, Lwazi is now watching TV with my mom.

Me: Ma.

Mom: Hi, baby.

Me: I'm exhausted...

She laughs.

Mom: Kids tend to have that effect...

Me: Hmm...

I go to my bedroom, and throw myself on the bed...

I'm glad I'm finally seeing the doctor, but I honestly don't want to face the results...

INSERT 50

The following day, Lwazi begged me to come with to the doctor, and I declined.

I don't want her to be around when I am told the results...

As I am walking out of the yard, my dad calls me. I walk to him and he smiles.

Dad: You've really grown yazi...

I smile.

Me: I don't know if that's a good thing.

Him: Of course it is... I am very proud of you. You've been respectful all your life- we've never had any problems with you.

Me: Thank you.

He chuckles and nods.

Him: Hamba ke. I'm sure Derek is waiting...

My eyes pop out.

Me: Huh?!

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: Did you really think that I'm that dumb kodwa Ziyanda?

Me: But... He... He's...

Him: He's your boyfriend.

I try to say something, but words fail me. He looks at me playfully and I still don't say anything.

One of his customers walks to us and greets. They begin having a conversation, and then he looks at me.

Dad: Bye bye, sisi.

He focuses on his customer and I find myself walking away.

As I get in Derek's car, I find him smiling brightly.

Derek: Sthandwa sami.

Me: I want nothing to do with you.

His facial expression changes and he looks at me in shock.

Me: How dare you tell my father about us? How dare you?

He tries to say something but stops himself.

Me: I told you I'm not fucken ready! Why do you always feel the need to be forward?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: I told you I'm not ready to introduce you to my parents, and you blatantly disregarded that. Why, Derek?

He keeps quiet.

Me: I don't care how much we love each other, I told you I'm not ready, and you decided to do your own shit and go against my wishes.

I see his jaw tighten.

Me: Is this how our relationship is going to be like? I express my wishes and you go against them?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Mxm.

He starts the car and drives off.

To be honest, I really don't appreciate what he did. I made it clear that I don't want to introduce him to my parents, so why would he do such? I don't find it cute at all. I know that my parents will love him; I know this for a fact. However, I wanted to sit them down and explain everything properly. He might not understand this, but I wanted to introduce him properly.

What annoys me more is that I told him not to do this, but he decided not to listen, and do his own shit. That's what pisses me off more. His intent may have been innocent, but he still went against my wishes.

We get to the doctor and the tension between us is as thick as my thighs.

He speaks to the receptionist and we are led to some room.

The doctor walks in and smiles. She sits on a chair and looks at us.

Doctor: Good afternoon.

Derek: Hi.

She looks at both us and smiles awkwardly.

Doctor: Uhm so you're here for a pregnancy test?

Derek nods.

Doctor: Okay... I have to ask you a few qu-

Derek: We don't have time for all of that. Surely this is not a HIV test.

Both the doctor and I, stare at him.

Whoa.

Doctor: Oh... Uhm...

She tries to keep a straight face, but I can tell that she felt that.

She stands.

Doctor: I will be back shortly.

She walks out of the room, and there is complete silence. I'm still pissed, and he is obviously feeling some type of way, and I really don't care. Screw him.

The doctor comes back and sits down.

She stares at us.

Doctor: There are two main types of pregnancy tests- blood tests and urine tests. These tests identify pregnancy by detecting a hormone called Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hGC) which is

commonly known as the pregnancy hormone. This hormone is created soon after the embryo has attached itself to the uterine lining in the womb. This hormone is easily measurable in the blood and urine within 10 days of fertilization, or 1 or 2 days after implantation has taken place.

My heart rate at this point is out of this world. I'm shocked I haven't peed on myself.

Doctor: There are two types of blood tests for pregnancy: a quantitative blood test, and a qualitative blood test. A quantitative blood test measures the exact amount of hCG in the blood. In other words, we are able to tell the age of the fetus. The qualitative blood test, on the other hand, gives a simple yes or no answer to whether you are pregnant or not.

I am so overwhelmed right now; that I don't know what is happening to my body. My anxiety is doing the most.

Doctor: Are we all on the same page?

Derek nods, and she looks at me. I nod.

Doctor: Alright, so which blood test do you want us to conduct?

Derek: A qualitative blood test is fine for now.

The doctor looks at me and I just nod.

She nods.

Doctor: Alright then, we need to draw your blood...

Derek: When will we get the results?

Doctor: In 2-4 hours.

We are now in another room... A nurse walks in and they explain what they're going to do...

I can't even hear anything right now. My brain and body is not functioning properly.

She first cleans the area with an antiseptic, and then she applies something that apparently enlarges the vein... She then withdraws the blood from my forearm and at this point I'm a sobbing mess.

I hate needles, I hate blood...

Derek is now by my side, holding my hand. Once they're done, I cry even more. Now I'm crying because of our fight earlier. I'm still pissed at him for what he did, but now I'm so scared about the possibility of being pregnant, that I'm just an emotional mess.

The doctor brings a glass of water, and they try to calm me down.

Derek asks her to leave us, and she walks out. He then wraps his arms around me and I rest my head on his shoulder. I can hear him breathe, as his mouth is by my ear.

Him: Zi, breathe...

The warmth of his body is comforting... I concentrate on his breathing, and slowly follow his pace...

I concentrate on nothing else but his breathing...

After 5 minutes, I feel myself stabilize again.

He strokes my back gently and I look at him.

He looks a bit frightened, but I can tell his trying not to show me.

Him: Are you okay?

I rest my head on his shoulder again and close my eyes. I just need to fully gather myself.

I feel his lips on my cheek and I look up at him again.

Him: I'm sorry for going against your wishes.

I nod.

Him: I didn't mean to-

Me: I'm sorry... I overreacted. I know you didn't mean any harm.

He plants a kiss on my forehead, and then plants another one on my nose. Then he gets to my mouth.

Him: Feeling better?

I nod and we share a slow kiss.

It seals the deal.

I feel more stable.

Him: I love you.

Me: And that scares me.

Him: I would never hurt you intentionally, Ziyanda. You need to trust me.

My eyes tear up again and he kisses my forehead.

Him: I will make mistakes, I'm only human. However, I don't go around hurting my loved ones deliberately.

We stand there for a while and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Him: Let's get a milkshake, while we wait for the results.

Me: Milkshake?

Him: Yes.

Me: Uhm okay...

We let go of each other and the doctor walks in. She confirms that the results will be ready in about 2 hours, and she'll call us.

We walk out...

INSERT 51

We're now in his car, drinking our milkshakes.

Me: You are quite random.

Derek: Why?

Me: Milkshakes?

He chuckles and we sit in silence.

Me: You were so mean to that doctor.

Him: She was quite annoying.

Me: She was following procedure.

Him: I wasn't in the mood.

Me: I pissed you off that much?

Him: You didn't piss me off per se... You just threw me off.

Me: Sorry.

Him: Your father told me he knows about us.

Me: What??

Him: He said I have two choices: I continue lying and get beaten, or I tell the truth and stay alive.

Me: My father said that??

He chuckles and nods.

Him: I was a bit freaked out because he was quite serious.

Me: Whoa...

He sighs.

Him: I had no choice but to tell him.

Me: What did you tell him?

Him: That I'm in love with you.

I sigh.

We sit in silence once again, and his phone rings, and he answers.

Derek: Yes?... No, I'm not at my place, ma... No, I won't be able to see you today, maybe tomorrow... Yes... I am with Ziyanda... No, I can't meet you today, I'll see you tomorrow... Bye...

He hangs up and grunts.

I won't even bother asking what's up.

He then reaches for my hand and brushes it.

Him: I'm sorry for angering you...

Me: It's okay... I guess you had no choice.

Him: Give me a kiss.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss. I feel myself relax even more, and he smiles.

Me: I'm meeting my psychiatrist on Monday.

Him: Really?

I nod.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I see her once or twice a month...

He nods and we sit in silence once again.

His phone rings again, and he answers.

Him: Hello?... Oh... Okay, thanks, we'll be there shortly...

My heart starts beating fast.

Him: Baby, that was the doctor... The results are ready.

I groan and he brushes my hand.

He then starts the car and drives off...

We get to the room we were in earlier, and sit next to each other. The doctor walks in with an envelope and sits as well.

Doctor: Hi again.

Derek and I nod.

Doctor: I have your results here...

Derek puts his hand out and the doctor gives him the results.

At this point I have zoned her out.

Derek opens the envelope and reads silently...

Why isn't he saying anything?

He gives me the paper, and my hand is shaking...

I read it...

I don't really understand what is happening...

She begins to explain the hormone levels or whatever...

Me: Am I pregnant or not?

Her: According to your hCG levels, you're not pregnant.

Father God! Lord Jesus!

I exhale very loudly, and feel the whole world spin for a couple of seconds.

Me: I'm not pregnant??

The doctor nods and I exhale again.

If this whole experience was supposed to teach me lesson, I have definitely learnt it.

Doctor: Would you like me to tell you about the different contraceptives available for you?

I look over at Derek, and he literally looks like he has been punched in the face multiple times.

I understand that he wanted this child, but it's still early. We're still getting to know each other, and a baby would come in between that.

Me: Uhm, please excuse us for a moment?

The doctor nods and stands. She then walks out and closes the door.

I look at Derek and it doesn't take rocket science to figure out that he is disappointed.

Me: Derek.

He glances at me.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods.

Him: I'll wait in the car.

He stands and walks out of the room. Shortly after, the doctor comes back and we discuss an appropriate contraceptive plan...

After a while, we finish up, and I make my way outside.

As I walk to the car, I'm not going to lie, I'm beyond happy about this. I am not ready to carry a child and be a mother... I then think about Lwazi... I think my parents should be the one to adopt her. She can live with us...

I get in the car, and find Derek sleeping...

Me: Derek, let's go...

He adjusts his seat and starts the car.

Derek: I'll drop you off at home...

Me: Okay.

We drive in silence.

I know he's not happy about this, but it's honestly better this way. He'll get over it. I'll give him some space, and he'll come to terms with it.

We finally get to Soweto, and he parks outside my house.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

I plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: Love you.

Him: Love you too.

I get out of the car and make my way inside the house. I find Lwazi dancing in the lounge, listening to Justin Bieber.

Me: Hey, baby.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy!

We share a hug and she continues dancing. I sit down and watch her... I feel so lighter...

She eventually stops and then sits next to me.

Me: Lwazi.

Her: Yes?

Me: You know that I love you, right?

She nods.

Her: Duuuh!

I smile and she stands and continues doing her thing. I walk to my bedroom and throw myself on the bed.

I then get a call, and answer it sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda?

Me: Yes... Who am I speaking to?

Person: Derek's mother, Khwezi.

I quickly get up and my heart starts racing.

Khwezi: I would like to meet with you.

Me: Excuse me?

Her: When are you available?

Me: Uhm...

Her: Would you like me to send a car to fetch you?

Me: Uhm sorry... I'm not available right now.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: We can meet tomorrow.

Her: Okay. 10am, Wanderers Club.

Me: Bu-

Her: I will send a driver for you...Goodbye.

She hangs up and I sit there, still confused and shocked.

Seconds later, my phone rings and it's Niki.

Niki: Babe.

Me: Hey, you.

Her: I'm knocking off early today. Ukuphi?

Me: At home.

Her: Can we just have a few drinks eVilakazi? I miss you.

Me: Uhm okay.

Her: I'll let you know when you should leave the house.

Me: Okay.

Her: Bye.

Me: Shap.

She hangs up and I throw myself on the bed again.

I guess I could use a few drinks...

INSERT 52 (Couldn't edit)

I arrive at Vilakazi, Nex Door, and find Niki already there.

Me: Nik Nak!

Niki: Ziyaya!

We share a long hug and sit.

Me: It's been so long!

Her: Angithi uyajola.

I groan as I think of Derek. I really miss him. We haven't spoken since the pregnancy thing.

Her: So fill me in!

Me: Gosh where do I even begin?

I start from scratch, just so I can build context of everything. I tell her every single thing...

She sips her drink and sighs dramatically.

Niki: Friend, that is crazy! So Mdu is part of the family?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Why are all your exes like this? They all have to be part of your life somehow.

Me: So annoying!

Her: So you want to adopt Lwazi?

I nod.

Her: I think it's a good idea, but I don't think you should be the adopter. Your parents should...

Me: That's what I was thinking vele.

Her: That would change her life for the better. Those parents are horrible.

Me: There's no way I'm going to let her live in an orphanage. She should live with us officially.

She nods.

Me: This pregnancy thing almost killed me.

Her: I can only imagine.

She then looks at me seriously.

Her: That's the disadvantage of being with someone older, and more experienced. He's ready to settle down, and you're not.

Me: True.

Her: Don't allow him to make you feel guilty for not walking at the same pace as him. You two haven't even been dating for six months, yet he wants to have children? Haibo he needs to chill.

I chuckle.

I can always trust this one to put things in perspective.

Her: Has he dealt with you when you're experiencing a depressive episode? Can he confidently say that he accepts you and your mental illness?

I sigh.

Her: You guys still have a long way to go. Use this time to get to know more about each other. A baby was just going to get in the way.

Me: True...

Her: He needs to understand how difficult it is to be close to someone with a mental illness. I don't think he fully understands...

Me: He tries...

Her: Good. He should stay longer, and completely understand the type of person you are, and how to deal with you when things are not so great.

I nod.

Her: He seems like a good person... I hope he is...

Me: He is...

Her: Then I am happy for you... I'm just here to protect you, at the end of the day.

Me: Yes, ma'am.

We continue chatting for a while, and then my phone rings.

Me: It's him.

Her: Hopefully, he is over it. He must stop being a baby...

She chuckles.

Her: Excuse the pun.

Me: Argh. He is my baby.

Her: Weeeh!

I stand and go to the bathroom as I answer.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Where are you?

Me: Vilakazi, with Niki.

He is quiet for a few seconds.

Him: Can I come?

Me: Of course.

Him: Thank you.

Argh this one is so sweet though. Such a big baby.

Me: See you soon.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and walk back to our table.

Niki: How is he?

Me: He's on his way.

Her: Good. It's about time I meet this sexy beast.

Me: Sexy soul snatcher.

We laugh and continue chatting.

After an hour or so, he texts to tell me he's arrived. I walk to the entrance and see him. He spots me and walks in.

Me: Hey.

He wraps his arms around me.

Him: Hey.

As he's about to kiss me, the security guard asks us to move, because we're blocking the way.

Mxm jealous idiot.

We walk to the table and find Niki, on her phone.

I clear my throat and she looks up. She looks at Derek, and I know what she's thinking.

Sexy motherfucken beast.

Me: Star, this is Niki, whom I've told you about...

He smiles.

Me: Niki, you know who this is...

Niki: Uh-uh, introduce us properly!

I laugh and she stands.

Niki: Hey Derek, how are you?

Derek smiles warmly and they share a hug.

Derek: I'm well, thank you. How are you?

Niki: I guess I'm well too.

He chuckles and we all sit.

Niki: Geesh you are really easy on the eye, hey.

Derek: Thank you.

The waiter comes and Derek orders a beer. Niki then asks for another bottle of wine...

Derek glances at me and smiles lightly.

Derek: Drinking spree?

Me: Not really.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we share a kiss.

We stop, and Niki rolls her eyes.

Niki: So Derek, let's get down to it...

Derek: Oh shit...

I laugh.

Niki goes on to ask him lots of questions, while I chuckle away.

After about an hour, I think she is satisfied. We're now talking about random things.

Niki: Have you ever dated someone with a mental illness?

Derek shakes his head.

Niki: Hmkay...

Derek seems uncomfortable.

Niki: Don't be uncomfortable. We accepted a long time ago that Zi has this, and we pledged to never be ashamed or sugar coat things.

Derek: Oh...

He looks at Niki seriously.

Niki: I'm very happy for you two... Just know though, that if you hurt her, I'm right here, ready to fight...

Derek: I'm not safe, am I?

Me: First my dad, now this one... Askies...

He looks at me and smiles. We then share a kiss.

Niki's phone rings and she walks away...

Me: I hope she didn't overwhelm you.

He shakes his head.

Him: I like her... Straightforward.

Me: She's like a sister.

He nods.

Him: I love her for loving you... Very heart-warming.

I smile and he kisses me.

Him: I'm sorry about earlier.

Me: It's okay.

Him: Was a little disappointed.

I keep quiet.

Him: How are you?

Me: Honestly?

He nods.

Me: I'm relieved.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: The idea of having a baby is great, but realistically we're not ready. I think we still need to spend more time together, and get to know each other, you know?

Him: Yes.

Me: I still want you all to myself.

Him: You do?

Me: I was going to be a very jealous mother.

He smiles.

Me: I would have a love-hate relationship with your child.

He laughs and I kiss him.

Me: I'm now on contraceptives...

Him: Good.

I smile.

Him: Now can we go home? I'd like to get drunk as well.

Me: Yaas!

He chuckles.

Me: I'll be drunk in love with you...

Niki comes back.

Niki: Do you guys want to com-

Me: Nope.

She rolls her eyes and Derek looks at me questioningly.

Me: She wants us to go paint the town red with her.

Derek: Oh... No, thank you.

Me: That's not our thing.

Niki: Starting to sound like an old married couple. Check yourselves, my loves.

We laugh.

Niki: See you...

She packs her things.

Niki: Derek, I hope to see you soon. It was lovely getting to know you.

Derek: Likewise.

He stands and they share a hug.

Niki: I'm guessing you'll cover the bill? Coz I mean, you have to score brownie points, fam.

Derek: I've got you.

Niki: You see, you? You is kind and you is important.

She blows me a kiss.

Niki: Bye!

Me: Bye.

She rushes out and I shake my head.

Derek: She reminds me of Ivy...

Me: Ewww my best friend is nothing like that girl.

He laughs and calls the waiter...

We're now heading to his place in Maboneng, and I am beyond thankful that he's feeling better...

Me: I think we've now established how to deal with conflict between us?

He reaches for my hand and nods.

Him: But don't give me too much space...

Me: Wow dramatic much?

Him: I did say you bewitched me...

I smile and squeeze his hand...

Universe, you is great!

INSERT 53 (Short Insert)

When we get to his apartment, we take a shower, and go to the lounge and watch some TV.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Him: I think we should move in together...

Me: Excuse me?

I look at him and he seems serious.

Me: Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Are you crazy??

Him: What's wrong?

Me: I am not moving in with you. That's like forbidden in our culture.

Him: Why? I want to be with you all the time.

I look at him in shock.

Him: And it's not like I'm not going to marry you.

I chuckle.

Me: You're going to marry me?

Him: You think I'm going to allow another man to be with you?

Me: Hehe.

Him: So you don't see yourself as my wife?

Me: Uhm... I'm not thinking that far.

Him: Well, too bad...

He kisses my forehead.

Him: We're in this till death.

Somehow, I believe him...

Me: But we can't move in together now.

Him: Why?

Me: Because!

He chuckles.

Him: I don't give a shit about traditions and shit. I want to move in with you because I love you and want to be with you every day.

Me: And my parents?

Him: What about them?

Me: Derek!

Him: They can't complain. I'm sure they're tired of you. You've been invading their space since birth. You're 25 years old now.

I keep quiet.

Him: You want me to ask them?

Me: Don't even test me, Nkanyezi.

Him: I'm serious. I think it's the perfect way to get to know each other.

I groan and he laughs.

Him: Hmkay I'll drop it.

Me: Please.

He kisses my forehead.

Me: So about the Lwazi situation...

Him: Yes?

Me: I think my parents should be the ones who adopt her...

He nods.

Me: And she can stay with us.

Him: You're against orphanages?

Me: Definitely. I think it would harm me more than Lwazi.

He chuckles.

Me: I love her.

Him: And I love you even more for that. You're amazing.

Me: Really? Silly old me?

He makes me reposition, so I can face him.

Him: This child will never forget what you've done for her.

I smile and kiss him.

Me: Just like I won't forget what you've done for me.

Him: What in the world have I done?

Me: You'll always be the guy who taught me how to love again.

Him: Really? Silly old me?

We share a kiss and continue chatting...

Me: Oh BTW, your mother called me.

His body tenses up and he looks at me seriously.

Me: She wants to meet...

Him: What?

Me: Even sending a driver, honey. Lavish lifestyle!

Him: What the fuck does she want?

Me: I don't know. I hope she's not trying to shoo me away, because it won't work.

He smiles.

Him: It won't?

Me: Boo, I'm here to stay. Ain't no way imma let you go!

He laughs.

Him: Well that's comforting.

Me: Let me tell you something interesting about myself...

Him: I'm all ears.

Me: I used to beat people up.

Him: Huh?

I chuckle.

Me: I used to fight a lot.

Him: Fight who? Fight for what? Ziyanda!

Me: I couldn't control my anger. I used to have quick hands. Punch bitches left, right and centre.

His eyes pop out and I smile innocently.

Me: But that was back in varsity... I've outgrown fist fighting.

Him: What the fuck??

I chuckle.

Him: But why?

Me: Haibo Star, why do people fight? I had a lot to be mad about...

He looks at me in shock.

I laugh at him for a few minutes until he snaps out of it.

Me: But you can't possibly be shocked.

Him: I know you're strong and-

Me: Crazy.

He smiles.

Him: But I didn't think you'd physically hit people.

Me: Ya well...

Him: So you've stopped?

Me: Yes.

He chuckles.

Me: Ivy, tested me a bit... If I met her years ago, I would definitely beat her...

Him: Really?

Me: She rubs me the wrong way.

Him: Ohh yes, I remember. You didn't like her.

Me: Argh, so annoying.

He kisses me and spans my butt.

Him: She also annoys me.

Me: Really?

Him: Your enemy is my enemy.

Me Yaas!

I kiss him.

Me: Can you believe she said that we have sexual tension?

Him: Who??

Me: Mina naye.

Him: Uyanya.

I giggle.

Me: Sizom'nyisa neh?

Him: Angasinyeli.

We share another kiss...

The following morning, I decided to wake up early and make breakfast for him.

I look at all my ingredients, and smile. This will be amazing!

After about 2 hours, I manage to make bacon, eggs, toast, and hash browns.

I dish up for him and make my way to the bedroom, with a tray.

Me: Wakey wakeeey!

He opens his eyes and blinks.

Me: Wakeey!

He smiles and sits up.

Me: Morning, snore face.

Him: I do not snore!

Me: Well...

Him: You should be the last person talking, snorey.

Me: Fuck off, fam.

We laugh and I place the tray on his lap.

Him: Oh...

He smiles...

Him: Looks... Uhm... Very delicious.

Me: Really? Yaay!

He smiles.

Me: Eat up, soldier.

Him: I'd like to eat you first...

I blush.

Me: No, eat this first.

He sighs and takes a bite of the toast.

Him: Hmm...It's so...well-done.

I smile proudly.

He then takes a bite of a hash brown.

Him: Delicious...

Me: Try the bacon, it's to die for!

He takes a bite of some bacon and smiles.

Him: Stunning.

I smile and stand.

Me: Yaaas! And they said I couldn't cook! Mama I made it!

I twerk playfully and within seconds, he pulls me and the tray has vanished.

Me: D-

Him: You can't be shaking your ass like that, and expect me to focus on bacon and eggs.

I squeal and he chuckles.

Me: That was a joyful twerk...

Him: Joyful twerk?

Me: Yep.

He repositions and I find myself on top.

Him: How about you twerk right here...

I feel his erection between my thighs.

Me: Yaas!

INSERT 54

It's been a week, and Derek and I have been locked up in his place...

We're now having lunch on the balcony.

Me: Can I go home to my mom and dad, please?

He groans.

Me: Your pouting won't help anymore. I won't fall for it.

Derek: But, I don't want you to leave...

He sulks and I smile.

Me: As cute as you are right now, I refuse to fall for it.

He focuses on his food and I stand.

Me: Don't be pouty; I'll see you in a couple of days.

I walk in, and go to the kitchen. He follows me, and I move aside, so that he can wash the dishes. Derek refuses to let me do anything when we're together. I volunteer to clean, he refuses. I volunteer to cook, he refuses... He insists that I need to "rest" and that doesn't even make sense.

He finishes cleaning up and then looks at me.

Derek: Uhamba nini?

Me: Today.

He sighs and nods.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I love spending time with you.

He says that so innocently, that I smile.

Me: You're cute.

He wraps his arms around me and I melt.

Me: It'll only be a couple of days. I just don't want them to feel abandoned.

He nods lightly and kisses my cheek.

Him: You've become my drug.

Me: I don't know if that's a good thing.

Him: Not the toxic kind.

I smile and we share a kiss.

Him: Get ready...

Me: Okay.

I walk to the bedroom, to get some things...

As I am busy, something tells me to go to the lounge...I walk back there, and my jaw almost drops when I see Derek's mom, Khwezi, sitting on the couch.

Derek and I had decided that I shouldn't even meet with her. I told him I was not in the mood to deal with his mom, because let's face it, the woman is not that kind.

Me: Good afternoon.

Khwezi turns and looks at me from head to toe, expressionlessly.

Argh.

Khwezi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

Her: I am well, and you?

Me: I am well, thanks.

She stares at me and I squirm.

Derek walks to the lounge and looks at me with a smile on his face.

Derek: Ready to go, baby?

Me: Yes.

Khwezi: I find it rude that you decided to cancel on our meeting so suddenly.

Me: Oh... I a-

Derek: She was busy.

She looks at him sharply, and he seems unaffected.

Derek: Remind me why you're here?

I look at Derek in shock. I have never heard him address someone like this, especially his mom!

Khwezi: How disrespectful! Is this what she is teaching you?

Derek: Excuse me?

Khwezi: Is she influencing all this disrespect?

Derek: Mom, how may I help you? What I won't do is sit here and listen to you disrespect Ziyanda.

At this point, I am watching a movie. This shit right here is deep!

Khwezi: Wow!

She looks at him in shock.

Derek: We really have to go... I thought we agreed on calling before we pitch at someone's place?

Khwezi: Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi!

Derek keeps quiet.

Khwezi: How dare you?!

She stands and walks to him. She lays a good slap, and I instantly walk to her. She's not about to hit my man! I don't care if she's his mama.

Khwezi: How dare you disrespect me?! How dare you?!

Derek rubs his cheek lightly and looks at her unemotionally. I have never seen him like this! This is not my Nkanyezi! This woman is bringing out a side of him I am not familiar with!

Khwezi: I raise you, and then you talk to me like I'm some whore in the streets?!

Derek keeps quiet.

She slaps him again.

Me: Mrs Ngidi!

She looks at me and I shudder. She also looks unfamiliar at this point. The class and poise is gone with the wind.

Khwezi: You, shut up!

Me: Why are you doing this? I haven't bee-

I feel a piercing hot sensation on my cheek, and I swear to the Universe, I lose it. Did this woman really slap me?

As I try to reach for her, Derek is already blocking my way. He wraps his arms around me, and I hear Khwezi throwing insults left, right and centre.

What the hell is this woman's problem? She physically assaults me, and then goes on to do the most verbally? What is wrong with her?

Derek: Ziyanda...

At this point, I have completely zoned out.

Derek: Ziyanda...

I finally snap out of it, and walk to the bedroom. I throw myself on the bed, and count to a 100.

This woman is still out there throwing insults. I learnt today that I am a peasant whore, who sleeps with men, just to get a taste of the good life.

Really? Is this why she wanted to meet with me? To insult me over mimosas?

I must have dozed off, because I feel Derek planting kisses on my face. I open my eyes and groan.

Derek: Finally.

He plants a kiss on my eye lids, and I snuggle closer to him.

Me: How long have I been asleep?

Him: About 2 hours.

I inhale his scent and my body relaxes further.

Me: Where is your psycho mom?

Him: Threw her out.

Me: Threw her out??

He grunts.

Me: What was that about?

Him: She's a crazy woman.

Me: Well duuh.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Him: I'm sorry you had to go through that.

Me: She actually slapped me!

I look up at him in disbelief and he smiles.

Him: Your reaction was priceless...

Me: The nerve!

I snuggle and inhale him again.

Me: Fucked up.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I thought you guys had a good relationship?

Him: Mxm.

I want to know more, but I don't think he wants to talk. Also, I'm not in the mood, myself. I'm a bit drained.

Him: Are you still going home?

I shake my head, and I know he is smiling.

Me: Tomorrow.

He repositions me and I find myself on top of him.

Him: No one will ever disrespect you, so long as I live.

I blush.

Him: I don't give a shit if it's a family member or a random person. No one will disrespect you.

Me: You don't have to defend me...

Him: I know you can fight your own battles, but I'm not going to tolerate bullshit when it comes to you. She really tested me today.

Me: I'm okay.

I kiss him.

Me: Has she always felt this way about me?

Him: Since that fundraising lunch.

Me: Wow. Just because I'm poor?

Him: Mxm.

Me: How shallow...

Him: She's been bothering me since...

Me: She wants you to end things with me?

He nods.

Him: As if I'm some teenager who'll follow whatever she says... Imagine...

I sigh.

Me: Well that's unfortunate...

Him: Let's stop talking about her.

Me: Okay.

Him: And let's talk about us...

Me: Us?

Him: I really want you to move in with me.

Me: Derek!

Him: I'm serious.

I keep quiet.

I don't want to tell him that part of me also wants to live with him... I've been thinking about it, and I kinda get what he's saying. But I know that shit ain't right.

Me: Let's date for a while.

Him: I just think that...

He keeps talking...

I start dry humping him slowly...

I need to distract him, so he can stop talking about this living situation...

He falls for it...

Soon, we're rolling around the bed, making out...

INSERT 55

Melinda looks at me and smiles.

Melinda: I'm happy to see you!

Me: Me too!

We get to her "office" and sit on the single couches opposite each other.

Melinda: How have you been?

I sigh and try to find an appropriate word to describe how I feel...

Melinda is my psychiatrist... I've been under her wing for a couple of years now. She's the only person in my life who truly knows and understands what I go through. She has helped me a lot!

Me: Hmm I think I feel content.

She raises an eyebrow and smiles.

Her: Content?

Me: Yes, a huge part of me is at ease.

She smiles and nods.

Me: A lot has happened since I last saw you.

Her: Really?

Me: Yep.

I begin to tell her about Derek, and how our “love story” began.

She listens attentively, as usual, and I find myself talking nonstop. She likes it when I’m like this, considering how closed-off I am.

After a while, I finish up, and she nods.

Her: So you’ve found love?

Me: I think so... Yes...

She smiles.

Her: You look and sound happy. That is great.

Me: I guess...

I sigh.

Me: I have a couple of things bothering me though.

Her: Go on...

Me: He knows about my issues.

Her: You told him?

Me: Yes.

Her: How did that conversation go?

Me: Uhm it wasn't really a conversation. We were just having a deep moment and I briefly mentioned some of the things I went through.

Her: So it wasn't a full-on conversation?

I nod.

Her: And does he know about your anxiety?

Me: Yes. He has seen me go through a few attacks, but they weren't that bad.

She nods.

Me: Do you think I should have a conversation with him?

She nods slowly.

Her: From what you've told me, it seems like this is a serious relationship. I think it's only fair, for you and him, to be on the same page about you.

I nod.

Her: People have a lot of misconceptions about depression. Firstly, they think there's only one type of depression, whereas there are various types. Secondly, they think depression is as simple as feeling sad. They think you're just going through the blues, but they aren't aware that the symptoms can even manifest themselves physically. Additionally, they think antidepressants are the easy answer, and that they solve the illness instantly. They have no idea that it takes time to find the right medication for each individual- it's trial and error.

Me: Or that people are always depressed for a reason.

She nods.

Her: They always need a definitive source to explain the illness. Depression can be genetic; it can be caused by no reason at all. However, on the other side of the coin, going through something difficult or tragic can cause depressive symptoms without you actually being depressed...

Me: I guess that distinction between being depressed vs. deeply sad is confusing...

Her: Yes, but depression is an interior struggle, rather than one that's on the surface. You relentlessly feel empty.

I nod.

Her: Another misconception is that it's obvious when people are depressed. Other people are pros at hiding it. That's why it's more of an interior struggle...

Me: But the one misconception that annoys me the most is that depressed people can snap out of it. People think it's possible to regulate your "mood swings" if you "try harder" but they don't understand that it's not that simple.

She sighs.

Her: So does Derek understand all of this?

Me: We haven't talked about it.

Her: This is why it is important to have the conversation. Do you remember how confused your parents were at first? They didn't understand depression, and they didn't even know how to support you.

Me: Those were some dark days...

I sigh as I reflect back...

Her: It took them getting plenty of information, and understanding how to support you. Look at how much progress they've made!

Me: True...

She looks at me intently.

Me: I'll talk to him.

Her: Explain what Bipolar Disorder is, and fill him in on your type, which is type 2. He'll then understand that your "mood swings" are not just based on the fact that you're a woman, or whatever misconception there is about Bipolar.

Me: Okay, I'll try.

Her: I'll give you all the necessary information, for him. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of being educated on mental illnesses. It's not fair for you to surround yourself with people who don't understand what you are going through, because those relationships won't benefit you... They'll constantly be frustrated towards you, and you will also be frustrated, because there is a lack of understanding.

I nod and she smiles.

Me: So I shouldn't move in with him?

She chuckles and sighs.

Her: Well, you two still need to know each other.

Me: And I think being that close to each other will help us figure each other out.

She nods.

Me: Is it weird that I already want to move in with him?

Her: It's what you want...

I sigh.

Me: I just know that he's the right one, you know?

She smiles.

Me: But I hear you, he needs to be schooled first.

We laugh and continue talking...

Derek: I've missed you.

He squeezes me and I inhale his scent.

Me: Me too.

He lets go of me and looks at me weirdly, like he's uncomfortable.

Him: Uhm how did it go?

I laugh.

Me: It went well.

He sighs.

Me: You can stop acting weird. I don't come back from my psychiatrist feeling down. She has a very good effect on me.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Me: She's amazing. Helps me figure out a lot of shit.

Him: That's good.

Me: Uh-huh.

He wraps his arms around my shoulders and we walk to Mike's Kitchen. We are led to our table, and then sit.

Me: We talked about a lot of things...

He looks at me intently.

Me: Her name is Melinda, by the way.

He nods.

Me: We even talked about you.

Him: Me?

He looks nervous.

Me: Yes.

He hesitates.

Me: She suggests that we go our separate ways, because we're not compatible.

I watch as he processes this.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: She says, from her perspective, our relationship will never work.

Him: What?

I sigh.

Him: Why the fuck would she say that? Is she even allowed to tell you that?

I try to keep a straight face because I can see that he is losing it. I don't know if he wants to break down and cry, or he wants to drag this table and cause a scene.

Me: What do you mean is she allowed to tell me that?

He stands and hesitates. He seems to be going through the most.

Me: Derek?

Him: Are you... Are you breaking up with me?

Okay. I didn't expect him to react like this.

Him: Ziyanda? Are you ending things?

Me: Derek-

Him: I need some air.

We're outside, mind you.

Me: Woooah bhuti, don't even move.

I quickly stand and walk to his side.

Me: I was just joking.

He stares at me, and I think he's going to cry.

Me: Derek! I was just joking!

I wrap my arms around him.

He is silent for a while.

Me: Nkanyezi.

He looks at me.

Him: You were joking?

I nod slowly. This is definitely a sick joke. I feel bad.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Why?

Me: I'm sorry! I didn't think you'd take it this badly!

Oh my goodness, he really looks like he got bumped by a bus.

He keeps quiet for a while and I squeeze him.

Me: Nkanyezi, askies!

He sighs and nods.

Him: Don't joke like that...

Me: First and last time!

He wraps his arms around me and we hug.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods and we let go of each other and sit.

Him: I need a drink.

I smile and he grunts.

Him: I was about to have a major breakdown. Fuck you, actually.

I giggle.

Me: Geesh!

Him: I was about to go to that Melinda, and ask for a consultation.

Me: Aww!

He smiles.

Him: Please don't joke like that...

Me: Okay.

Our drinks come...

Me: Anyway, we did discuss you.

Him: And?

Me: I think she has an understanding of how much I love you.

Him: Really? How much do you love me?

Me: I love you so much, that I'm even considering moving in with you...

His eyes pop out and his jaw drops.

Him: What??

I sigh.

Me: I'm considering it. I'm not confirming.

He smiles brightly.

Him: Are you serious?

I nod.

Me: However, you still need to know about me, my triggers and shit.

He becomes serious.

Me: It won't be easy.

He reaches for my hand and squeezes it.

Him: Like I always say, I'm not going anywhere.

I smile.

Him: I'm more than willing to educate myself, so I can support you properly.

Me: That means a lot to me.

Him: I'd do anything for you...

The waiter eventually comes with our food, and I stuff my face...

INSERT 56

We're now getting ready to go to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place for lunch. It's now the 23rd of December.

I've been so caught up in Derek's spell, that I completely forgot about other people- especially his friends.

As we're heading out, my phone rings, and it's my mom.

Me: Hello, mommy.

Mom: Hi, love. Are you spending Christmas here?

Me: Hawu, why are you asking me such? Of course I am.

Her: Angithi you've been hiding with that boyfriend of your...

Me: Mama!

She laughs.

Her: Hai sisi I'm just saying... When are we meeting him?

Me: Uhm...

Her: Invite him for Christmas lunch.

Me: No!

She laughs.

Me: Bye!

I quickly hang up and grunt. Derek, who is focusing on the road, glances at me.

Him: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

He nods and focuses on the road again.

We finally get to the Mzinyathi's...

As soon as we get in, I hear Liwa's bold laugh.

I really missed these people, weirdly enough.

As soon as I see Nomvuyo, I squeal excitedly.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Zizi!

We share a long hug and she plants a kiss on my cheek.

Nomvuyo: You are such a ghost yazi!

Me: Excuse me?? You're the ghost here!

She laughs.

Me: So how was Thailand?

Her: Great. We got to relax a bit.

Me: Must be nice.

Her: Hai suka. Derek is going to take you wherever you want. Aim high ke nawe, not Durban and shit.

Me: Wow!

We laugh and I see Nolwazi, sitting alone. She seems to be on the phone.

Nomvuyo: Work related.

Me: Oh... Are the twins here?

She smiles and nods

Me: Did they end up deciding on names?

Nomvuyo: Khulekani and Simosihle.

Me: Aww!

Nomvuyo: Too sweet.

Me: Beautiful names.

Just then, Nolwazi walks to us and my jaw drops. Where did all the weight go?

Me: Nolwazi, you look amazing!

She smiles sweetly and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: Thank you, Zi. I've been going crazy.

Me: Geesh.

Nolwazi: Come see my babies.

She looks at me excitedly, and for once, I am also excited- genuinely. Phela the last time I saw her, I was stressed about my potential pregnancy.

She leads me to one of the guest bedrooms and we walk to the bed. Of course Dean is watching over them.

Me: Hi, Dean.

He looks at me and smiles.

Geesh he also looks good.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Him: I'm good.

He looks at Nolwazi lovingly and they share one of those eye contact moments where you just look at your person, and realise how lucky you are. Yes, I know these moments very well.

Me: Vuvu tells me you named them Khulekani, and Simosihle. Who named them?

Nolwazi: My dad.

Me: How sweet. I love them.

I walk towards the bed, and Simosihle, the girl, is now up. She is groaning and squirming.

Dean: This one is an attention seeker.

Me: I can tell...

He looks down at his daughter and smiles. How cute.

Dean: You can take her.

Me: Okay.

I carefully reach down and take her. She smiles and sneezes.

Me: Hey you...

Argh she smells so good. She stops squirming and relaxes in my arms.

Me: She loves being held?

Nolwazi: Yep. Her brother, on the other hand, is always grumpy.

Me: Just like his dad.

I regret that as soon as I say it. I thought I said it in my head.

Nolwazi: He is definitely like his daddy.

Dean: Ohho.

He gets up.

Dean: I'll be downstairs.

Nolwazi nods and Dean walks out.

Me: He's so overprotective.

Nolwazi: You have no idea.

Me: It's cute.

Out of nowhere, Simosihle starts crying, and Nolwazi takes her. I watch as she sits on the bed and breastfeeds her.

Nolwazi: Simo is really a problem, hey.

I smile.

Nolwazi: Everyone has concluded that she will be just like Ivy.

I try not to roll my eyes. These people must try by all means to raise this child to be a normal citizen, and not that train wreck, Ivy.

Nolwazi: They also get along...

Simo calms down, and is asleep in 5 minutes.

As she puts her down, Khulekani starts squirming as well, but he doesn't cry. He moans quietly, and I see myself taking him.

I think I'm in love with him, not the diva. I give him kisses and he smiles.

Me: I'm officially in love.

Nolwazi: He's adorable.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

Nolwazi: Hey, Derek.

Derek: How are you? You look amazing.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

He walks to me.

Me: D, he's so cute.

Derek looks at Khulekani and smiles.

I give him to him and he also gets lost in his spell.

Nolwazi is just sitting there like a proud mom. I'm sure her life is complete- considering how tough her journey has been.

After a while, Dean walks back in.

Dean: Lunch is ready...

Nolwazi: Great!

Dean: I'm glad it's your cheat day.

They both chuckle, as if that was some kind of secret joke.

Dean: Let's go.

Derek walks out with Khulekani and leaves us there.

Me: I think he's a bit obsessed.

Dean: Who wouldn't? My genes are fucken phenomenal.

Me: Wow!

Nolwazi: You just had to make this about you!

He chuckles and we all walk out, Nolwazi is now carrying a sleeping Simo.

We get to the table that is set outside, and I am shocked by the crowd. I thought this would be a small nyana lunch, but now there are too many people.

Nomvuyo: Let me introduce you to everyone, before you run off.

I grunt and she takes my hand.

Nomvuyo: Okay, so you know Malusi and Joe. This is Gabi, Joe's wife.

I look at Gabi, and I try not to gape.

She looks like a cast member of Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. She's a typical gorgeous woman who looks and smells like money: hair nails, shoes, bag, everything...

Gabi: Hey, Zi. I'm glad we're finally meeting you. I've been hearing about you!

How am I supposed to respond to that?

Me: Uhm hello.

She smiles sweetly and focuses on her husband, who smiles at me as well.

Gabi: Baby, so as I was saying, that bitch of an assistant has to go...

Oh wow...

I look at Malusi.

Me: Hi.

Malusi: Unjani Ms Dlamini?

Me: Ngiyaphila, and how are you?

Malusi: Holding up...

Nomvuyo: And this is Dean's mother, Lindelwa.

I look at the woman and smile. I mean, they don't really look alike.

Me: Hi ma.

Lindelwa: Hi, baby. How are you? We've heard a lot about you.

Kanti?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

Nomvuyo: Where's Zimi?

Lindelwa: She had to answer a call...

I then said hello to Thandeka, and greeted Ivy briefly. I was shocked at how quiet she was. She seems to be mama's girl today, because she is clinging to mommy dearest.

This was a big round table.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hey, Liwa.

We share a hug.

Liwa: How have you been? It's been a while.

Me: I'm great, and you?

Liwa: I'm fantastic. Got to relax a bit, you know.

Me: Hmm.

I sit next to Derek, who is still holding Khulekani.

Me: Look at you...

He smiles and drinks some water.

Derek: He's cute.

Me: Hmm.

Overall, it's a good vibe.

I stand to go to the bathroom...

I go to one of the many guestrooms, and use the ensuite bathroom.

Woman: You don't understand...

Who is this? I've never heard this voice before.

Woman: No, you don't understand. This will break my family...

Oh gosh. I know for a fact that I am not supposed to hear any of this. What am I supposed to do now? I can't walk out, she'll see me. I decide to not flush.

I'm now sitting on the toilet seat, waiting for this woman to finish her conversation, and leave.

Woman: If these kids find out, they will hate me. I will lose them forever.

Which kids?

She sounds so calm.

Woman: No, Zweli, I am not going to ruin my family.

She is quiet for a while...

Woman: No, they've built great lives for themselves. You're taking us many steps back...

She is quiet.

Woman: Zweli, no...

There is silence for a while.

Woman: You don't seem to understand the depth of this situation...

I didn't even realise that I had stopped breathing.

Woman: I'll see you soon... Goodbye...

I hear silence...

After about 5 minutes, I open the door and take a peak. She's not here. I flush the toilet and wash my hands. I then make my way out...

When I get to the table, they're already having their starters.

I sit next to Derek and he is too focused on Khulekani.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo: Zizi, this is Zimkitha, my mom.

I look at Zimkitha.

My stomach churns.

She smiles sweetly.

Zimkitha: I'm glad to finally meet you.

The voice. It's definitely her...

I try to keep a straight face.

Universe, why do you always come for me? Hai man!

INSERT 57

We're now having dessert...

Nomvuyo is quite the cook. Maybe I should partner up with her, so I can cook for Derek as well.

Nomvuyo: So tell me, Malusi. How is Nandi?

Nomvuyo already informed me about Malusi's situation. He's basically as divorced serial cheater.

Malusi: She's okay.

Zimkitha: Do you see yourself getting married again?

Malusi: Yes.

Nolwazi: Really?

Malusi nods.

Liwa: To whom?

Malusi: Nandipha.

Everyone laughs and he grunts.

Nolwazi: You expect her to marry you again?

Malusi: Laugh all you want... Nandi is my soul mate.

Zimkitha: So what's your plan?

Malusi: I'm giving her space, for now.

Dean: I don't think you should.

Nolwazi: What do you mean?

Dean: If we were in the same position, I would follow you till you give in.

Nolwazi: Oh wow!

Nomvuyo: It's not that simple.

Thandeka: You can't cheat continuously and then expect her to not get hurt.

Dean: I think this fool has learnt from his mistakes.

Me: Cheating is unforgiveable though.

Everyone looks at me and I keep a straight face. I may be a bit intimidated right now, but I don't care. Cheating is bad, and I'm prepared to shout it out loud!

Me: It's unfair to expect her to forgive and forget. Did anyone force you to cheat?

There is silence. An awkward silence.

Me: You're selfish.

Everyone is staring at me. Lord, what have I done?

Me: You were married to her. You chose to spend the rest of your life with her. Deal with the consequences and leave her alone.

I want to stop talking, but this champagne is really loosening me up.

Nomvuyo: I agree 100%. Leave her alone.

Thandeka: I would kill Vusi if he cheated on me.

Nolwazi: You messed up. Instead of being in denial, be a man and be accountable for your actions.

Thandeka: As far as I am concerned, you were a bad husband.

Zimkitha: Haibo can we not attack him though? He regrets messing up.

We all look at Zimkitha. She can't possibly be sympathetic to this selfish man!

Zimkitha: He made a mistake-

Nolwazi: Mistakes.

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: Let's not sit here and pretend we're perfect.

Thandeka: No one is saying we're perfect. We're just not going to sit here and pretend as if Malusi respected his vows. His mistakes ruined his family, and he needs to take responsibility.

Zimkitha: But who says he's not? He is regretful, isn't he?

We keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I don't condone what he did. However, I'm not going to sit here and attack him every chance I get. That's counterproductive. We need to help him move on as well, so he can live properly, having learnt from his mistakes.

At this point, I'm just over this conversation. I have decided that I don't like this Malusi guy. In my eyes, he's a grown ass man who asked a woman to spend the rest of his life with him. Now why the hell would he turn around and cheat? Selfish.

Malusi stands and walks away.

Liwa: Okay, I get that we're opinionated, but can we also be empathetic? I don't think sitting here as a family, attacking him, will help.

Dean: We all know he's wrong, so there's no use pointing it out.

Me: Well it's clear that he is struggling to acknowledge what he did. And for me, that means he is not remorseful. He's just sorry that he was caught and dumped.

Zimkitha looks at me seriously. She doesn't scare me one bit. Nxaa I could easily expose her shady ass in front of her people.

I look at Derek and he is just looking at me coolly. I think he has figured me out a bit. He knows that I have my "mbokodo" moments, and that I get fired up when I'm in that zone.

I decide to back off. These people are not ready to see my crazy side. However, I'm glad it is clear that I don't condone cheating. I hope Derek was listening, because if he even attempts such, kuzonyiwa straight. He will run barefoot to the walls of Jericho.

Nolwazi changes the subject, and we all move on swiftly with no beef...

I feel Derek's hand on mine and I look at him. He smiles and I smile back.

Derek: I love it when you're feisty.

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles and winks at me. I honestly just want him inside me 24/7.

Malusi comes back and we continue chatting, as if nothing happened. I appreciate these people's maturity. They don't entertain awkward moments.

Liwa: Where's Mdu?

My whole body tenses. I avoid Derek, because I know he is also tense.

Nolwazi: He's out and about.

Thandeka: We think he's in love somewhere.

Ivy: He better not spend my parents' money on random bitches.

Everyone laughs.

I don't find that funny. Why is she talking? Who asked her for her opinion? Because I sure as hell don't value it. I had even forgotten about her.

We continue chatting for a while...

Good varbz...

Once we're done eating, the chats continue in the lounge, and outside.

I'm standing with Nolwazi by the garden.

Nolwazi: When my husband introduced a second wife, I really thought my world was ending.

Oh gosh.

She sighs and smiles.

Nolwazi: But look at me now, I managed to move on.

Me: Have you forgiven them?

Nolwazi: I've forgiven Kwanele... He was just so fragile after everything.

Me: Really?

Nolwazi: His mother is the one who infiltrated everything, and he was just a pawn in her chess game.

Me: And the second wife?

Nolwazi: I don't know...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: She allowed herself to be used.

Me: Maybe she was forced?

Nolwazi: I have avoided thinking about her. It's just better that way.

She shakes her head lightly and then smiles.

Nolwazi: But, I see you and Derek are going strong.

Me: Quite.

Nolwazi: You guys are cute.

Me: Hmm...

Just then, someone clears their throat, and it's Zimkitha.

Argh.

Zimkitha: Can I have a word with you?

Me: Me?

She nods.

Nolwazi walks off and I am left alone in the lion's den.

She looks at me intently and then smiles.

Zimkitha: Derek really loves you...

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: Do you also feel the same?

Me: Yes.

She nods.

Zimkitha: Well, I'm happy that he has found someone special. I love him dearly.

Me: Like his mother?

She chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: They're all my babies. I'd die and kill for them...

I keep quiet.

Suddenly, my heart is beating fast. This woman really freaks me out.

Zimkitha: Take care of him, okay?

Me: Okay.

She smiles sweetly, and walks away.

I'm not even going to entertain what I'm thinking. I refuse!

I miss Nkanyezi. Where is he?

As I'm about to walk back inside the house, I see him approaching me. He gets to me and I wrap my arms around him.

Me: Missed you.

He kisses my forehead and stares at me.

Derek: You okay?

I nod and he smiles.

Derek: Would you like something to drink?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm too full.

He chuckles.

Me: I think I'm going to cook something for you tonight... I have a great idea.

He clears his throat.

Derek: Oh... You do?

I nod excitedly.

Derek: But, I'm so full...

Me: No, silly! You'll be hungry later on.

He plants a kiss on my lips and I melt.

Just then, my phone rings and I answer it.

Me: Mama?

Mom: Hi, baby.

Me: What's up?

Mom: I cooked such a lovely meal... Please come for dinner?

Me: Uhm sure...

Mom: And bring Derek.

Me: But I-

She hangs up and I stare at my phone in shock.

Derek: Zi?

I look at him.

Derek: Is everything okay?

Me: Uhm... My mom...

He looks at me intently.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: Uhm, she wants me to come home for dinner.

Derek looks at me sadly.

Me: With you...

His eyes pop out and he smiles.

Derek: Finally!

Me: No! Not finally!

He chuckles and hugs me.

Derek: I guess you'll cook another time, angel... I'm having dinner with the future-in-laws.

I groan and he takes my hand and leads me back to the house.

Like, really? Universe, why you gotta do me like this? I thought we were on the same page!

I suddenly feel like vomiting. That's how anxious I am about this "dinner."

Derek, on the other hand, is beaming.

INSERT 58 (Short Insert)

It's now around 4pm, and everyone is getting ready to leave. Derek is now glued to one of the megabytes.

Dean: Have your own kids and leave mine alone.

Derek: Mxm.

Derek kisses little Simosihle, and I swear the little diva is in heaven. She's giggling away. Thanda amadoda.

Thandeka: I'm afraid these kids are going to be spoilt rotten.

Nolwazi: I mean, I'm already struggling to keep up with the gifts.

Ivy: How about they send money instead of gifts? It's not like we need all the shit they're buying.

Everyone laughs.

Mxm.

Dean: And I guess the money has to be transferred to you?

Ivy: Of course!

I look at Derek, and he knows it's time to go. He gives Dean his baby, and clears his throat.

Derek: We have to get going... I have dinner plans with Ziyanda's parents.

Everyone gasps.

Really, Derek?

Nolwazi: That's amazing!

Zimkitha: When are we meeting them?

Uhm excuse me? I don't want this gangster woman in my mommy and daddy's house.

Derek: See you later, people.

Dean: Make a good impression ke nawe.

Liwa: Ungasihlazi.

Derek: What the hell is wrong with you people? Am I kid?

Liwa: Well, you are the youngest, so...

Oh shit. I don't know this man's age! Heeeh!

Derek: Mxm, baby, let's go.

Me: Goodbye, everyone. Thank you for a lovely afternoon.

Derek goes to the bathroom.

They all say goodbye, and I hug them. When I get to Dean, he wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: I'll walk you out...

Me: Lucky me.

He chuckles, and we walk out.

Dean: Derek tells me you're considering moving in with him?

Me: He did?

Dean: Well we're close...

Me: Hmm I see...

He chuckles.

I feel like I'm being charmed by this man, and I thought I didn't like him? What's happening?

Dean: So you want to move in with him?

Me: I think so...

Dean: He's a great guy, if you haven't noticed.

I chuckle.

Dean: Move in with him.

Me: Are you now our counsellor?

Dean: Shit, I'd be excellent, right?

Me: You don't strike me as stable.

Dean: Excuse me?

I chuckle.

Dean: I'm just overprotective of the people I love.

Me: I see...

Dean: Stop trying to change the subject.

Me: I'm not!

We get to the car and stand there, with his broad arm still around me. I'm surprised I haven't melted.

Dean: So we agree that you're going to move in?

Me: I'll think about it...

Dean: And then he'll resign and work somewhere else.

Me: What?!

Dean: Sisi, I know you're not that stupid.

Me: Bhuti, I don't need your negativity right now.

He chuckles and nods.

Dean: Alright then.

I grunt.

Dean: How are your parents? Are they extreme?

I laugh.

Me: Why?

Derek: We need to know... We might be meeting them soon.

Me: Shame.

Dean: You obviously don't know us. We are persistent people.

Me: Dean, you're doing the most right now.

Derek walks to us and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yep.

He then looks at Dean.

Derek: Fuck off.

Dean: Hai suka.

I look at both of them and smile. They really are close, and it's cute.

But still, I push aside these thoughts that are bothering me. I refuse to even go there.

Derek: Let's go, baby.

Me: Bye Langa.

Dean: Bye Mrs Ngidi.

Me: Haike. I'm too expensive... My surname will not be removed by just love.

They both laugh.

Me: Wena when are you marrying Nolwazi?

Dean: Heyi, mind your own business.

I laugh.

Me: So our business is open for all?

Dean: Yes.

Me: Wow.

Derek: Vele when are you planning on proposing?

Dean: Her 30th birthday.

Me: When is it?

Dean: In a month.

Me: Really?!

He nods.

Me: Can I help??

Dean glances at Derek and they laugh quietly.

Derek: And she's quite good with secrets.

Dean: I don't know if that a good, or bad thing.

Me: Definitely good, in your case.

He nods.

Dean: I shall contact you.

Me: I already have plans! Hmmyghad!

Derek: Uhm, okay, baby. Let's calm down.

Me: Call me!

Dean: Hehe.

Derek: We have to go.

I groan loudly.

Dean: I didn't know you were so dramatic.

I gasp.

Me: Silly old me?

He chuckles.

Derek: Baby, let's go.

Me: Derek, I'm bonding with Dean. Leave me alone!

Dean: No, you're trying to pass time...

I really don't want to go home right now.

Me: Also, you had a few drinks, Derek. You can't drink and driv-

Derek: Sisi... Don't try me.

I gasp as he pulls me and opens the door for me.

Me: Star, I don't wanna!

He ignores me and closes the door. He chats to Dean for a minute, and then gets in and starts the car. I wave goodbye, and we drive off...

Me: I need to pee.

I sink on my seat and he ignores me.

We're now back at his place, because he insists on freshening up.

Me: I'm not freshening up for anyone.

He ignores me and goes to the bathroom.

Mxm he is so excited. Like, I really don't get it.

After 10 minutes, he's back, naked.

Me: I'm horny.

Derek: Now is really not the time.

My eyes pop and he lotions himself.

Me: Wow!

I sulk and he continues to ignore me.

Derek: I'm not going to allow you to sabotage this shit. I know you're trying to distract me. Thankfully, I can spot the Devil, before he attacks.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles and gets dressed.

He looks so good though.

Me: I miss seeing you in formal clothes though.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: I'll have a fashion show for you later.

I giggle and watch him finish up.

After a while, he's done, and looks fresh. Sexy and casual. My man, people!

Him: Ready to go?

Me: No.

He pulls me up and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Whatever. Let's just go.

He kisses me and we walk out...

We're now parked outside my house. The gate is even open...

Just then, my phone rings and it's my mom.

I answer.

Me: Ma?

Mom: Tell him to park inside.

I groan.

Mom: See you now now.

Gosh.

I end the call, and look at Derek.

Me: Ngena.

He does as he is told...

I sigh and look at him.

Me: I guess this is it...

He nods and smiles.

Derek: Everyone loves me, Ziyanda. This is standard.

Me: Wow!

He laughs and takes my hand.

Derek: But I love you more than anything.

Me: Yeah yeah whatever.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go...

He nods and we get out of the car...

Universe, I'm really not a fan of you right now. I hope you redeem yourself as time goes by. Prove your loyalty, fam!

INSERT 59

As we walk inside the house, my whole body is just numb. This whole thing is just making me very uncomfortable. I've never introduced a man to my parents, especially a man who seems to have stolen my heart (corny, I know).

We get to the lounge, and find my dad.

He is watching the news.

He looks up and I struggle to read his expression.

Derek is right behind me. I'm not even going to turn around and figure out what he is going through. Every man for himself...

Dad: Oh... You're here already?

I keep quiet.

Derek: Sawubona, baba.

Dad smiles and looks at Derek.

Dad: Yebo, Ngidi. How are you?

He even knows his surname? How? Did they really have a fat chat that day?

My stomach growls.

Derek: How are you?

Derek walks past me, and I watch as he shakes my dad's hands.

Gross.

Dad: I'm good... Just trying to make a living, that's all.

They both laugh.

What in the world is happening?

Dad: Have a seat...

Derek: Thank you.

He walks back to me, takes my hand, and pulls me to the couch.

Really? So he's bold enough to hold my hand in front of my dad? This man.

Dad: Ziyanda.

I look at my dad. Now, I feel like the intruder. Lord!

Dad: You are awfully quiet. U-right?

Me: I'm tired.

Dad: Hmm I see December is treating you well.

I keep quiet and focus on the TV.

I feel like a school girl. I feel like I'm in trouble and I'm waiting for my parents to scold me.

Mom: Heehh!

Oh gosh. I really don't need this right now.

Mom: Heheeee!

We all look at her. Derek thinks I'm dramatic? He is about to understand that the drama runs deep in the fam-bam.

Mom: Is the Uber driver here??

She walks to us and looks at Derek. I also decide to finally look at Derek, and the man seems to be chilled. He is flashing that beautiful smile of his that sends waves of shivers all over my body.

Dad: The Uber driver is here indeed.

Mom: Hmm.

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello ma.

Mom: Wathula nje sisi? U-right?

Me: I'm fine.

She looks at my dad and they chuckle.

Mom: So you have a personal Uber driver?

Argh.

Mom: Hello, Uber driver.

Universe, please swallow me? I swear we'll be best friends from now onwards!

Derek: Hello, ma. How are you?

Mom: Hai siyazama yazi. How are you? You sure look good...

Derek chuckles and I feel his hand on mine. I slide my hand away from him. Can he not be so forward though?? Uphapha too much.

Derek: I'm well, thank you.

Mom then looks at me and smiles.

Mom: Are you okay? You look like you are ready to collapse.

Me: Maybe I should.

My parents laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: And let the poor driver hold your hand!

Really??

I stand.

I need to get out of here.

I walk to the bathroom, and lock myself in there... I feel so awkward.

After about 5 minutes, I walk back to the lounge and sit. They are having a conversation about what's happening in the news. I just zone them out, because I can't deal.

Mom: Let me prepare the table...

She stands and does her thing.

Derek and my dad are having a fat chat about the currency and whatever.

Eventually, my mom walks back and tells us that everything is ready. We all get up and go to the table, and sit.

She really did the most, hey. This is a feast phela.

She dishes up for dad and herself. Derek then dishes for himself and me.

Mom: I see you've discovered how much of a baby she is...

Derek: Definitely.

Me: Wow.

Dad: More like spoilt.

Me: Wow.

Mom: I guess we're partly to blame... We didn't torture her that much while growing up.

Derek: Only child privilege?

They all laugh, and I'm just sitting here, on some...?? Dis tew much.

Derek finishes up.

Me: Thanks.

Mom: I wish I also had a driver who dishes up for me...

Me: Your husband cooks slaughtered chickens... I think you're well on your way.

They laugh and I grunt.

Mom: She is so tense, man. Angisathandi.

Me: You're all making me uncomfortable.

Mom: Really?

Me: Yes!

Dad: Uzoba strong.

I groan and they laugh.

Mom: Let's pray first...

Dad: Derek?

Derek: Sure.

We all bow our heads and listen to Derek say a short prayer.

We all say amen, and begin eating.

Mom: So what do you do besides drive an Uber, Derek?

Derek: I'm a principal at a primary school.

Mom: Really? Which school?

Derek: The same school as Ziyanda.

Mom: Haibo! Are you serious? Kanti where did you two meet?

Derek: We met a while ago... We both didn't know that we'd be working together.

Mom: Interesting... Manje niqale nini ukujola?

I just want to disappear, honestly.

Derek: Shortly after she started working there.

Mom: Yoh so isn't that illegal? Phela my child could lose her job!

Derek chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: I'd never allow that.

Mom: Hmm.

Dad: What did you study?

Derek: Accounting.

Mom: Is it?

Derek: Yes, I am a qualified Chartered Accountant.

Dad: Interesting... So what made you change lanes?

Derek: I wasn't happy. I had to change, and do what I love.

Mom: So you decided to do education?

Derek: Yes, that was probably one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.

Mom: Good for you.

Dad: I have always encouraged Ziyanda to do what she loves as well.

Mom: We didn't really want her to do teaching, for obvious reasons, but we had to allow her to make her own decisions. I'd like to think that she's happy right now.

Me: You didn't want me to do teaching?

Mom: Yes.

Me: Oh wow.

Dad: We hid it well, right?

Derek: At least you didn't push her to do something she doesn't want to do.

Mom: There's nothing worse than parents who want to live their own dreams through their children. We're not that ignorant.

Dad: So, your colleagues don't know about this relationship?

Derek: No, they don't.

Mom: And what will happen when they find out?

Derek: I'll leave.

Me: Huh??

Mom: And she speaks!

They all laugh and I look at Derek seriously.

Me: What do you mean?

Derek: One of us will have to go. Employee relationships are frowned upon, more especially if one of us is in a superior position. It comes across as unethical.

I look at him blankly.

I have never really allowed myself to think about what will happen when we're exposed at work. I've been so spellbound, that I didn't even give it a thought.

Dad: Well, it only makes sense that one of you leaves...

Mom: But it definitely won't be Ziyanda.

Well, at least she still has my back. I know she doesn't want to deal with an unemployed Ziyanda, because she drives everyone crazy.

Derek: I have already accepted that I'll be the one to leave. I'm okay with that.

Mom: How noble of you.

Derek looks at me and smiles. I don't smile back. I'm not about to be caught up in his spell, in front of my parents.

Dad: So what are your career plans?

Derek: I would like to open my own school.

Mom: That's amazing!

I am also finding this interesting.

Derek: I think I have enough business and education knowledge to start from scratch.

Mom: And Zizi will obviously help you. Phela she is well-informed!

Oh wow.

Derek: She will definitely be involved.

Hehe.

We focus on our food while chatting about the South African education system. Because of my passion in education, I find myself taking part in the conversation as well.

Mom: Do you have any kids?

Derek: No, well, not that I know of...

They all laugh, and I chuckle.

Mom: That's great.

Dad: Do you want to have children?

Derek: Most definitely.

My mom glances at me with a smirk and I ignore her. She seems to be captured by Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi. The sexy beast should just snatch souls for a living.

Dad: And marriage?

Derek: Ziyanda is going to be my wife, and the mother of my children...

I choke on my food and I look at my mom, who is blushing. Lord!

Dad: Well, that's a conversation for another day...

Derek chuckles.

Dad: Alright.

Mom: So has she met your parents?

Derek: Yes.

She then looks at me.

Mom: And? Did they like you? I know you can come across as intense.

Me: Excuse me?

Mom: Surely this is not shocking news.

I grunt.

Derek: They're my adoptive parents.

Dad: You were adopted?

Derek: Yes.

Mom: Oh wow...

Dad: Do you know your real parents?

Derek: No, I have no desire to.

My stomach churns.

Mom: I don't blame you.

Derek: I think my reason for wanting to build a family is based on my situation... I want to be there for my children, the way my biological parents weren't.

My parents nod.

Suddenly, I don't feel well.

I excuse myself and go to the bathroom. I need to vomit... I don't know why I feel so uncomfortable. He's doing a great job, and my parents seem to love him...

INSERT 60

I'm now back at the table, and I'm still feeling uncomfortable. I'm still caught up in the fact that Derek is the first man who's been in this house because of me.

My mom is now serving dessert.

Mom: Are you okay, love?

Me: Yes.

They all chuckle and I shrug.

Mom: So, Derek, you have no desire whatsoever to meet your real parents?

Derek: Not at all.

I look at him, and I can't help but smile. I love him so much, and I genuinely want the best for him.

Mom: Well, as long as you grew up surrounded by loving people, I think your life is more fulfilled.

Me: And he definitely has a lot of love around him.

Mom: Is it?

I nod.

Mom: So you've met his friends as well?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Did you get along with them?

Me: Mama kanti? I'm not that bad!

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: Well, I'm glad they love you, sthandwa sami. Has Derek met Nikiwe?

Me: Of course.

Mom: I'm sure she was too curious?

Derek: Yes...

We all chuckle.

Mom: So do you know about Ziyanda's mental state?

Me: Gee, thanks for making it seem like I'm a nutcase.

Mom: Well, you have your moments...

Derek chuckles.

Derek: We've been talking about it...

Mom: That's good...

Derek: How did you take it as parents?

My mom looks at my dad, who sighs.

Dad: It has been a scary journey, I won't lie. Seeing how sick she was when we were first introduced to what she has, was very traumatic. When we grew up, we didn't know anything about mental illnesses. We always say people are just being dramatic, and attention seekers. We didn't have enough information.

Derek: And that still happens.

My dad nods.

Dad: Ziyanda went through some disturbing things as a child and young adult...When we finally took her to a doctor, and they told us she was badly damaged, we knew we had to pull up our socks and find help. The doctor transferred us to a psychiatrist and Ziyanda was hospitalized for months.

Mom: It was the scariest moment of my life.

I glance at Derek, and he is expressionless.

Dad: We didn't think she would be fine. We couldn't even recognize her... It seemed like she had also given up on herself.

I sigh quietly as I also think back... I'm still shocked that I am alive today. I thought I was dying.

Dad: Yes, we prayed, and did all we could, but we also knew that she needed medical assistance.

Mom: She attended various classes that helped her regain her power. We also took part in some of those classes, because we were clueless on what was going on.

Dad: Years later, she is alive, and has regained her power.

They all look at me. My mom is teary, and my dad has a proud smile. Derek, on the other hand, I can't read.

Dad: As parents, all we have to do is support her like no else in this world. A lot of people are secretly dying, because they can't really explain what they are going through. They know that they will be misunderstood and judged, because mental illnesses are still frowned upon. People need physical prove for a sickness to be validated. They cannot fathom how a person can suffer internally, while looking healthy on the outside.

Mom: And that's why it is important for Zizi to surround herself with people who truly understand her. I don't want her to leave this loving home, only to be mistreated by people who love her, besides us.

Dad: That's why it is crucial to have a strong support system, and I don't think that will happen with large groups of friends. A lot of miscommunication takes place in such groups. Ziyanda has managed to narrow down her friends, and be aware of who is worth her love.

We are silent for a while.

Mom: Anyway, we are very supportive... That's all we can provide...

Derek nods and then glances at me. Are those tears I see??

Derek: Please excuse me for a second...

Mom: Sure, baby.

He stands and walks out of the house.

We all sigh.

Dad: I hope he understands you, Ziyanda. That's all I need to know... I don't want you to get hurt.

Me: He won't hurt me.

My dad nods and keeps quiet.

Mom: Go check on him, shame...

I stand and walk out of the house.

I find him leaning against his car. I walk till I'm standing opposite him.

Me: Hey.

He looks at me sadly, and I wrap my arms around him.

Me: Sorry about that.

He still doesn't say anything; instead he wraps his arms around me, and buries his head on my neck.

We stand there for a while, until he lifts his head and looks at me. I forgot to switch on the lights, so now I can't see his face, but I think he's crying.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Why are you apologizing?

Me: You're sad.

Him: I'm sad that you had to go through all that shit...

I sigh.

Him: And I wasn't there...

Me: There's nothing you could have done.

He sighs and we are silent once again.

Me: At least I'm much better now. I made it out alive.

He nods and kisses my forehead.

Him: And I thank God for that. I can't seem to imagine my life without you anymore.

I giggle and I feel him smile.

Him: You're a strong person...

Me: I am.

Him: But I don't want you to be strong around me.

I sigh.

Him: Don't feel the need to protect yourself when you're with me. Be yourself, your true self.

Me: Crazy and all?

Him: Crazy and all.

I sigh.

Him: I know it won't be easy, but I'm here. 100%.

I look at him.

Him: I will never hurt you intentionally. I may make mistakes, but my intentions will never be hurtful. I need you to understand this, Ziyanda.

Me: Okay.

He plants a kiss on my nose, and I groan.

Me: Can we go back in? I'm cold.

Him: And you sound like you're coming down with a cold.

Me: I think I am...

He squeezes me and we share a kiss. We then make our way back inside the house, and he asks for the bathroom, and I lead him there. I go back to the table, and find my mom cleaning up.

Mom: **whispering** Is he fine?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Shame, he's emotional neh?

Me: Quite.

Mom: Cute. Now I'm blushing on your behalf.

Me: Mama!

She giggles.

Derek walks back, and smiles.

Derek: I should get going.

Mom: Okay, love. It was lovely meeting you.

Dad: I knew this Uber nonsense was a lie from the get go.

I blush.

Dad: She has never brought a man here... I'm shocked she's still alive. I'm sure she was panicking all day?

Derek: You have no idea.

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: What are your plans for Christmas?

Derek: I always spend Christmas at the orphanage.

Mom: That's great! Maybe Ziyanda should join you.

Derek looks at me and smiles.

Derek: I was going to ask...

Me: Uhm sure...

He smiles brightly and I smile back.

Mom: I love that you're so charitable.

Derek: Thank you.

Dad: Is there any way we can contribute?

Derek: You can donate clothes and toys.

Dad: Alright, you can fetch them tomorrow.

Derek: Thank you.

Mom: No problem...

Derek: Thank you for inviting me. I'm happy that I got to spend some time with you, and have the opportunity to know more about you.

Mom: It's a pleasure, dear. We're also glad that you came. I'm sure Zizi tried to sabotage everything.

Derek: You know her too well.

They all laugh.

Dad: See you soon...

Derek: Most definitely...

They shake hands, and then my mom goes in for a hug.

Gosh.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Dad: Enjoy the rest of your evening...

Derek: Thank you.

Mom: Walk him out ke Yanda...

Me: Hmkay.

Argh now I can't go with him, because "respect" and shit. Bleh.

We walk out, and get to his car.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow, Star.

He groans.

Me: Uh-uh. This is your fault bhuti.

Him: Yoh I was planning on making love to you like never before.

Me: Derek!

I feel my insides churn.

Him: I guess we have something to look forward to tomorrow...

He kisses me tenderly, and I melt in his arms.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Him: See you, tomorrow, okay?

I nod.

Him: Sleep tight.

We share another kiss, and let go of each other. I watch as he gets in the car, and drive out of the yard. I close the gate, lockup, and make my way back inside the house...

INSERT 61

The following day, I wake up in such a foul mood. Not only am I feeling fluey, I'm not in the mood to interact with anyone. I decide to switch off my phone, and stay in bed.

I hear a knock on my door, and my mom walks in.

Mom: Baby.

I keep quiet.

Mom: I've left your breakfast in the oven. She plants a kiss on my forehead.

Mom: I'm going to town...

I nod and she walks out, and closes the door...

At around 1pm, I wake up, and my flu seems worse. My throat is on fire.

I groan, as I reach for my phone and am immediately flooded with Derek's missed calls and messages. I dial his number, and he answers within a second.

Derek: Ziyanda, really?

Me: Sorry, I just woke up.

He exhales loudly.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: I woke up in a bad state mentally. I'm okay now.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: I took my meds.

Him: But you don't sound okay.

Me: This flu sprung up. My throat is on fire, and nose is blocked.

Him: I'm driving to your house.

I sigh.

Him: Bye.

He hangs up and I groan. So I guess he's now comfortable to pop by anytime? Must be so nice.

Anyway, I get out of bed, and sit there for a while, trying to get myself together. This illness is the Devil, honestly. It hits you when you're least expecting it... The lows are just something I can never get used to.

You find yourself questioning why you're even alive. You lose your senses for a while, and just sink deeper and deeper into a pit of nothingness. I can never get used to it. It's painful and haunting.

After I'm done bathing, I get dressed and clean up my bedroom. I then call my mom, just to tell her that I'm feeling better... My dad is outside, dealing with his customers.

As I warm up my food, there's a knock on the door.

I open and there he is...

I smile and he smiles.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hi, baby.

He's carrying a paper bag. He gives it to me and I look inside.

Me: How thoughtful...

Him: I came to pick you up... I'm not comfortable enough to take care of you in your parents' house.

I giggle.

Him: Get your things and let's go.

Me: Kanjalo nje?

Him: Kanjalo nje.

I chuckle and nod.

Me: Can I eat first?

He sighs and nods.

He watches as I dish up for myself and we walk to the lounge and sit.

Me: Did my dad see you?

Him: I was with him for about 15 minutes before I came in.

Me: Must be nice.

He watches me eat.

Me: Are you hungry?

Him: Definitely, but I'll eat you later.

I squeal and he laughs.

Me: Don't say such things... You scare me sometimes.

Him: Ohho.

He watches me eat and I finish up. Once I'm done, I pack my things and walk back to the lounge. I find him looking at some of the picture frames around there. I catch him taking out his phone and snapping away.

Me: What the hell do you think you're doing?

He ignores me and chuckles.

Him: You're so cute. Look at this...

Me: Let's go.

He finishes up and we walk out of the house. We go to my dad's tent, and find him talking to a customer.

Dad: Derek, Ziyanda's mom is still not back. I guess we'll give you our donations some other time.

Derek: No problem, sir.

Dad nods and looks at me.

Dad: Have a good day.

Me: Thanks.

We say goodbye, and make our way out. We then get in his car and drive off.

Derek: You had a rough morning?

Me: Quite.

He brushes my hand and focuses on the road.

I then sink on my seat and immediately doze off. The medication is doing the damn thing.

We finally get to his place and I go straight to bed.

Me: Did you drug me on purpose?

He laughs.

Him: That's the only way you'll heal. I'll make your some Med-Lemon before you sleep.

He walks off and comes back later, waking me up.

Me: Ang'funi...

Him: Hai phela you have to drink this for your throat and shit.

I groan as I drink it...

Once I'm done, I doze off again, with my sore throat...

When I wake up, it's around 5pm, and it's as if I've never been sick before. Yes, I still feel a bit fluey, but I'm much better.

Derek is sitting next to me, on his laptop.

He looks down at me and smiles.

Derek: Hey, Snore Face.

Me: Fuck you.

He chuckles as he puts away the laptop and repositions. He wraps his arms around me and I get closer to him.

Him: How are you feeling?

Me: A bit better.

Him: A bit?

I've decided that I will make him think I'm still sick. I love all this extra attention that I'm getting.

Me: I need a massage.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: Will that make you feel better?

Me: Maybe.

He kisses my forehead and repositions. He then sits on the edge of the bed, and places my feet on his lap. He starts massaging them, and I sigh happily.

Me: Ahh...

Him: So dramatic...

He continues massaging me, and eventually gets to my big ass thighs...

It's safe to say the Universe and I are now aligned. I'm out here getting massages and orgasms. Life is good.

Universe, I forgive you. You and I are back together now.

Derek and I are chilling, watching TV, when my phone rings and I answer.

Me: Hello.

Niki: Hey boo!

Me: Hey, friend.

I smile.

Niki: So, you're inviting me to your man's Christmas charity thingie?

Me: Yebo.

Her: I'll see you there ke.

Me: Perfect.

Her: And I have to tell you about someone I met.

Me: Heheee!

She giggles.

Her: He's very different, but I like him.

Me: Hmm, I can't wait!

Her: Bye bye ke. Say hi to Daddy D.

I laugh.

Me: Bye, boo.

I hang up and chuckle.

Me: Niki says hi.

Derek smiles and nods.

Me: She'll come ksasa.

Derek: Perfect.

He looks at me and smiles.

Me: What?

He shakes his head and focuses on the TV.

Me: My mom can't stop raving about you.

Him: Really?

He looks at me excitedly.

Me: She is obsessed.

Him: But, I told you that they'll love me. This is me we're talking about... The adorable Uber driver.

Me: Argh!

He laughs.

He gets up and goes to the bathroom. Seconds later, his phone rings and it's Dean. I answer.

Me: Derek's phone, hello.

Dean: Ya Mam'Dlami.

Me: Hello Langelihle.

He chuckles.

Him: How are you? Are you feeling better?

Me: Yes, I am.

Him: Nkanyezi was a bit worried.

Me: Of course he was...

We both chuckle.

Him: I hear the meeting with the parents went well...

Me: Uzithembe too much uDerek.

Him: Hai phela it's not our fault that we're the shit. We can't be blamed for our awesomeness.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles.

Me: So when are we discussing the proposal?

Him: We'll talk tomorrow.

Me: You're coming?

Him: It's Christmas, of course we'll be together.

I groan.

Him: You'll just have to get used to the crowd. It also gets overwhelming for me at times.

Me: Argh.

Him: See you tomorrow... Tell Derek that everything is sorted on my side.

Me: Okay.

Him: Have a good night.

Me: Thank you. Bye.

Him: Bye Dlams.

I end the call and sigh. Dean has really managed to make me like him? Kanjalo nje? What is it with these charismatic bastards? Damit.

Mdu crosses my mind, and I sigh. I need to call and see how he's doing...

Derek comes back and we cuddle.

Me: Dean called.

Him: Is everything sorted?

Me: Apparently.

He chuckles.

Him: He was in charge of gifts.

Me: Nice...

Him: I'm so happy we're spending Christmas together.

Me: Hmm.

Him: We still have many more to come...

He plants a kiss on my lips and we watch TV...

I don't think I've ever been this happy in my life. I feel loved. My family has my back, my friends are awesome, and my man is just the icing on the cake. Love is a powerful emotion, man. This shit feels good: more especially if you have been through your fair share of falls and suddenly you wake up

and find yourself drowning in it. Love just makes life worth living. All the frogs I've kissed throughout my life were moulding me for this exact moment. I love my Star.

INSERT 62

The following morning, I decided to wake up and make breakfast. I looked up a few recipes... Nkanyezi was still fast asleep.

As I am busy, my phone rings, and it's my mom wishing me a Merry Christmas.

Me: Thank you, sthandwa.

Mom: Uphi u-Uber?

Me: Usalele.

Mom: Have a good day, my love. Enjoy yourself.

Me: So you approve?

Mom: He seems genuine. It's worth a try.

Me: True.

Mom: However, I do think he is also battling a few things, but he hasn't really opened up.

Me: Really?

Mom: Definitely. Akekho right.

Me: Oh wow.

She laughs.

Mom: Try your best to get him to open up, the same way he got you to.

Me: I'll try.

Mom: I'm happy for you yazi. I was starting to think uyis'shimani.

Me: Mama!

She laughs and I join.

Mom: Bye bye ke baby.

Me: Bye.

Mom: Say hi to him.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and finish up making breakfast. As I'm cleaning up, I feel Derek's presence. I turn around, and sure enough, he's standing there.

Me: Morning!

He smiles lightly.

Fake smile much?

Me: Merry Christmas!

We share a hug.

Me: Grumpy?

He nods and I kiss his cheek.

Me: I'll dish up for you.

He looks around the kitchen. It's such a mess...

I can tell that he is not happy about this. He lets go of me and starts cleaning up.

Me: Hold up, OCD freak. I'll clean.

He ignores me and I let him be. I'm in a good mood and I can't deal with his grumpiness.

After a while, he comes to the bedroom and sits on the edge of the bed. His face is all tightened, ngathi he's pissed.

Me: Derek?

Him: What?

I raise an eyebrow.

Surely he is not addressing me like this?

Me: Derek?

Him: You made a fucken mess.

Me: Excuse me?

He looks at me sharply and grunts.

Me: Derek?

He stands and walks to the bathroom, leaving me shocked as hell.

What the fuck just happened?

I sit there. I don't move an inch. I'm waiting for him to come here and tell me what the hell is wrong with him.

After a long time, he finally comes back with a towel wrapped around his waist. I don't even care that he looks yummy.

Me: Derek?

Derek: I'm in a bad mood.

Me: Do you want space?

Him: Yes.

I stand and walk out, pissed. I go to the kitchen and eat some of the food I cooked. As soon as I bite the omelette, I spit it out.

What the fuck did I make? This shit is gross.

I drink water and go to the lounge to watch TV. I've never seen him like this. That was mean! He is mean!

I eventually doze off, feeling very angry.

I'm awakened by Derek caressing me. I look at him, and realise I'm still angry.

He looks at me and smiles.

Me: Mxm.

I sit up and look at him grudgingly.

Me: So now you don't want your space?

He frowns.

Me: Mxm.

Him: So I'm supposed to be in a good mood 24/7?

I keep quiet.

I have a feeling I'm going to lose this argument.

Him: Don't be silly.

Me: Excuse me?

He sighs and looks at me softly.

Him: You're being unreasonable. Am I not allowed to have a bad morning?

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not a robot.

Me: No one said you are.

Him: Good.

I stand and he pulls me back down.

Him: I'm sorry for being rude. Like I said, I just woke up in a bad mood.

I sigh.

Me: I wasn't expecting it.

Him: I had a bad dream... Woke up feeling shitty.

Me: I understand.

Trust me, out of everyone in this world, I definitely understand mood swings.

Him: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: It's okay. You've been dealing with my mood swings since day one. I guess this is your moment to shine.

He laughs and I smile.

Me: So I should give you space when you're like that?

Him: Just don't pester me.

I nod.

Him: But, like I've stated before, don't give me too much space. I'd die.

I nod and he pulls me closer and we share a kiss.

Him: Merry Christmas.

Me: Happy!

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Me: I tasted my food, and it was horrible.

Him: Really?

Me: I'll cook another day. For now, do you mind making something? I'm starving.

He smiles and nods.

Him: Anything for you. What would you like?

Me: Whatever it is, should have lots of eggs.

He nods and stands.

I then go to the bathroom to clean myself up. It seems like today may be a long day.

As we're eating, he keeps looking at me and smiling.

Me: And then?

Him: I'm just recalling how you reacted this morning. You were pissed.

Me: I was!

Him: But, why?

Me: Coz you're Derek. You don't get pissed or moody.

He laughs and shakes his head.

Him: I'm not perfect, Ziyanda.

Me: You are, to me.

He smiles.

Me: What if you're also Bipolar? We'd be twinnies.

Him: Urrr I don't think so...

We laugh and continue chatting for a while...

Just then, there's a knock on the door. He goes to open, and in walks Xolani with a very gorgeous girl who looks like she's my age.

Xolani: Hey, people!

Me: Hey!

I stand and we share a hug.

Xolani: Zi, this is Fifi, a good friend of mine.

Me: Hello.

Fifi smiles and gives me a hug.

Uhm okay then...

Fifi: Hi, Ziyanda. I've heard a lot about you.

Me: Oh...

Derek: So is everything sorted?

Xolani: Yes... I'm just waiting for the caterers to finish setting up.

Derek nods.

Fifi: So Ziyanda...

I look at her.

Something ain't right with this girl.

Fifi: You're obviously coming to the luncheon neh?

Me: Yes.

Fifi: D has been so scarce lately. Clearly you're keeping him busy.

Me: Hmm.

I look at Derek, and he knows what to do.

Derek: We'll see you there...

Fifi is staring at me, and I feel uncomfortable.

Xolani: Okay... Zizi, remember- we dress for success.

Me: Yes, sir.

He gives me a hug and walk off. Fifi tries hugging me but I cross my arms and give her that smile white people always give us.

Me: Bye.

Fifi: Bye!

She then looks at Derek and smiles.

Fifi: See you.

Derek: Hmm.

She follows Xolani, and soon, they're both gone...

Me: I guess we have our first name for the No-Hoe-Zone List.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: See all the women I don't gel with?

He keeps quiet.

Me: A list is compiled, and you stay away from them. Surely you know this, Mr Principal Accountant?

He looks at me in shock and I walk away.

Me: Don't make me fight skanks, Ngidi...

I go to the bathroom to get ready...

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We're now dressed and ready. We didn't even plan on matching, but we are. I just feel like we're getting ready to walk down the aisle. The Universe is probably preparing us...

I kid, I kid... Marriage is the last thing on my mind.

Derek: Wow.

Me: I know.

Him: You look stunning.

Me: You don't look too bad yourself, Ngidi.

He smiles and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I must admit though, the makeup makes it hard to kiss you thoroughly.

Me: Hai manje you want me to walk around looking plain?

He laughs.

Him: You're beautiful, baby.

Me: I know, but I can't go to functions looking like a hoodrat.

Him: A hoodrat?

Me: Phela that's how Fifi and them take our men...

Him: What??

Me: Hmm you know very well that I'm right.

Him: Baby, I don't condone cheating.

Me: Is it?

Him: I'm too grown for that shit.

Me: Even 50 year old men cheat.

Him: Selfish 50 year old men.

Me: So wena you're not selfish?

Him: Hmm.

I giggle.

Him: I am very selfish... When it comes to you.

Me: How so?

Him: I want you all to myself.

I blush.

Me: Good, because I also want you to myself.

Him: You do?

Me: Derek, I may not communicate properly, but I'm really crazy about you.

I watch him blush and I laugh.

Me: Now, can we go?

Him: Of course.

Just then, there's a knock on the door, and I frown.

Me: And then?

He shrugs.

He goes to the door and opens it. In walks Dean, looking all scrumptious...

Dean: Ya nina.

Derek: So who exactly did you tell that you're coming here?

Dean: I had to drop off my mom at her sister's place...

Me: Are you not spending Christmas with her?

He shakes his head.

Dean: I have my own family now, Dlamini.

Me: Yeah, yeah, whatever.

He chuckles.

Dean: You clean up nicely, don't you?

Me: Excuse me?

Both he and Derek laugh.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Baby, you know he's talking shit.

Me: Mxm!

Just then, my phone rings and I see my mom's name. I answer.

Me: Mama?

Mom: Baby, there's a problem here.

Me: What's wrong?

She sighs.

Mom: Lwazi's parents don't want her to come to us.

Me: Kanjani? Angithi we spoke about this, and they agreed ukuthi she'll spend the day lapho?

Mom: They refuse...

I sigh heavily.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and dial Lwazi's number.

Derek: Is everything okay?

I ignore him. It rings for the longest time, but she eventually answers.

Lwazi: Mommy.

My heart instantly sinks. I know she's crying.

Me: Lwazi, what happened?

Lwazi: I had just gotten dressed, and as I was about to leave to go to your house, they stopped me.

Me: Batheni?

Lwazi: They just said I must stop spreading our secrets to strangers.

That doesn't even make any sense! These idiots know me very well, and they always dump Lwazi at our house when they're tired. What the fuck has gotten into them?

Me: Ukuphi manje?

Lwazi: I'm in the bedroom.

Me: Have you even eaten?

She sobs quietly and I sigh.

Me: I'm coming, okay? I will be there in no time. Don't leave the house, okay?

Lwazi: Okay.

Me: Bye bye baby.

Lwazi: Bye.

I end the call and find Derek and Dean staring at me.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: My dad was supposed to fetch Lwazi, so she could spend Christmas with them, but the parents are suddenly not budging.

Derek: Why?

Me: They're probably drunk and irrational.

Dean: Is this the little girl you-

Me: Yes, and I have to go to her.

I look at Derek. I know this event means a lot to him, but I won't be able to join them. Lwazi needs me.

Derek: Let's go.

Me: Derek, no.

Derek: What?

Me: I'll be fine. I'll get an Uber. I can't make you miss your event.

He ignores me and takes his keys.

Dean: We can use my car...

Derek: What about Nolwazi?

Dean: She's coming with her mother and sister later...

Derek nods and they both look at me.

Derek: Let's go...

Me: I really don't want to b-

Dean: Haike, Ziyanda. We really don't enjoy repeating ourselves- especially if we're offering to help.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Is she in Soweto?

I nod.

Dean: Let's go.

I get my bag and we're out...

As we're driving, I call my mom to tell her I'm on my way.

Mom: I'm sorry. I know you were looking forward to Nkanyezi's event.

Me: It's okay. Lwazi needs me.

Mom: I don't understand why those fools are being difficult.

I sigh.

Mom: I'll see you soon ke.

Me: Okay, bye.

Mom: Bye.

I end the call.

Dean, who is sitting in the front, glances at me.

Dean: Are the parents negligent?

Me: Negligent is an understatement.

Dean: So does she always spend Christmas at your house?

Me: For the past two years.

Dean: So how's your relationship with her parents?

Me: We're okay... However, they become problematic when they're drunk.

Derek hisses.

Derek: And that's most of the time.

Dean: Wow...

We drive in silence till we get to my house. Derek leads the way, and I find myself chuckling, despite my anger towards this Lwazi situation.

This one is out here leading the way ngathi this is his house...

Dean is right behind me.

As we get in, we find my mom busy in the kitchen.

Mom: Oh wow!

Derek: Hello, ma.

They share a long ass hug, and I refrain from rolling my eyes.

Mom: I'm so sorry for this. Lwazi is an important part of this little family of ours.

Derek: It's okay. We'll go fetch her. Ziyanda will speak to her parents.

My mom glances at me and smiles.

Mom: Howzit?

Me: Quite angry.

Mom: I'm sure they'll-

Her eyes zoom in on Dean, and she stops speaking for a few seconds.

Mom: And then? Derek, you didn't mention that you have a twin!

Derek chuckles, and so does Dean. These men make our kitchen seem so tiny, with their overpowering presence.

Derek: This is Dean, a close friend.

Dean pushes me aside gently, and steps closer to my mother, who is smitten.

Dean: Sawubona, ma.

Mom: Dean? You even have similar names.

Derek: He's Langelihle.

Mom: Beautiful name!

Dean groans.

Me: Can we all focus?!

They snap out of it and nod.

Derek: Yes, let's go...

Me: Where' dad?

Mom: He went to Shoprite... I need a few things.

Me: Hmkay. Shap ke.

Mom: Shap.

Dean: Derek brought us some of your husband's chicken. It's amazing. Can I buy some?

Mom: Hehe I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that.

Me: Focus!

Derek: Okay, let's go.

Me: You've said "let's go" 100 times now!

Mom: Wooo i-drama engaka sisi?

I grunt and walk out of the house. I can't deal with these people right now. I need to talk to Lwazi's parents k'qala.

We're now outside. We get in the car, and Derek drives to Lwazi's house.

As soon as we're outside, I try to open the door, but Derek locks it.

Derek: Baby, you need to stay calm.

Me: I am.

Dean: If you want to adopt this child, you need the parents' buy-in. Play nice, until we get her.

I sigh and Derek turns to look at me.

Derek: If we play nice, they'll be open to whatever you want to do. If you attack them, they'll continue refusing to let Lwazi go.

Me: Okay.

He unlocks the door and we all get out...

I just want to get Lwazi, and leave these careless alcoholics.

INSERT 64 (Short Insert)

We make our way inside the yard, and Derek holds my hand. God knows how grateful I am that Derek is here with me. He has become such a pillar of strength lately...

As we get to the back door, we hear loud music.

Dean: Is this a shebeen?

My heart is aching at this point. I just want to get this child out of here.

We knock, but obviously no one hears us.

Derek walks in first and I follow, while Dean is right behind me. We get to the lounge, and find Lwazi's mom sitting on a chair...

There's no furniture, just plastic chairs.

She looks up and stares at me. She was once such a beautiful woman, but now? She looks like the Devil.

She switches off the music.

Me: Hello, Mam'Sindi.

Sindi: Ufunani?

I feel my blood boil.

Derek: Can we have a seat?

Sindi looks at Derek sharply.

Sindi: Mpendulo! Woza!

We hear Lwazi's dad complain, but he eventually walks in the lounge, and stares at us.

Mpendulo: And then?

Sindi: Ask them...

Mpendulo: What's going on?

Me: Hello.

He looks at me.

Mpendulo: I already told that father of yours that our daughter is not going anywhere!

Me: She hasn't even eaten!

I feel Derek's arm around me, and I remove it.

Me: How are you both sitting here while this child is locked in the bedroom, hungry?!

Sindi: Futsek wena!

Dean: We came to fetch Lwazi.

Sindi: And who are you?!

Dean: Someone you do not want to cross. Now, stop this nonsense, and let go of the child.

Mpendulo laughs boldly, and I swear I lose my mind. Thankfully, Derek is holding me back.

Mpendulo: Heeh man! Fuck off!

Me: I am going to take you to jail!

They both laugh.

Sindi: You think you are Mother Theresa, huh? Not here ke sisi!

Dean: Derek, take Ziyanda outside.

Me: Dean-

He gives me one look, and I shut up. Derek takes my hand and leads me out of the house. Once outside, he makes me face him.

Derek: Breathe...

He lets go of me, and I step away from him. I explicitly told him not to hold me when I'm having an anxiety/panic attack.

I start counting to 100...

Derek: Ziyanda...

I look at him. I can see him, but my whole body is on panic mode.

Derek: Ziyanda, listen to me.

I lean against the wall and close my eyes.

Derek: I need you to tell me five things you can see...

I take a deep breath and open my eyes.

Derek: Five things you can see...

I look around and continue breathing.

Derek: Tell me, baby.

Me: Trees... houses... street... wall...car...

My heart rate is still high.

Derek: Four things you can hear...

I close my eyes and focus on my breathing.

Derek: Ziyanda...

I sigh

Me: I can hear the cars hooting and driving past...

Derek: And?

I sigh.

Me: The birds chirping... kids yelling and laughing... and your voice...

Derek: Good.

I can feel my heart rate improving.

Derek: Now tell me three things you can touch.

I open my eyes and look around.

Me: The flowers... the gate... you...

He smiles and steps closer to me.

Derek: Two things you can smell...

I inhale and focus.

Me: Braai meat... your cologne.

He smiles even more.

Derek: And one thing you can taste...

I take a deep breath.

Me: You...

He chuckles.

I'm back.

I'm back to my senses, and this man helped me. Where did he even get this technique?

I stare at him, and I find myself getting emotional. He looks at me weirdly.

Derek: Ziyanda?

I feel the tears approaching.

Derek: Can I?

I nod and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: You calmed me down...

Derek: I didn't think it would work.

Me: But how did you know?

Derek: I did some research on how I can support you...

My heart.

My heart, Lord!

I rest my head on him, and don't even care that my foundation will ruin his shirt.

We stand there for a while, and I eventually look at him.

Me: Thank you.

He smiles and nods.

Derek: My love for you is overwhelming.

I giggle.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you.

We share a kiss.

Me: What is Dean up to?

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean is a passionate man... I'd rather you not see that passionate side of him.

Me: Passionate?

He nods and kisses me.

Derek: We'll get Lwazi. We'll make sure of it.

Somehow, I believe him.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: I'll enrol her in another school, and make sure she has access to the best shit.

Me: Derek!

He smiles.

Derek: And please don't try to stop me. I've fallen in love with her as well.

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: We'll discuss this later...

He groans.

Just then, we hear footsteps and Lwazi runs to us.

Lwazi: Mommy!

I let go of Derek and open my arms for Lwazi.

Me: Hey, baby!

I squeeze her, and find myself getting emotional again.

After a while, I let go of her, and she looks up at Derek with a huge smile on her face. Her eyes are red and swollen from all the crying, but the bright smile of hers remains intact.

Lwazi: Hello, Uncle D!

Derek: Hi, sweetie.

He opens his arms and they share a hug.

Derek: I have a surprise for you. You'll eat first, and then I'll show you...

Lwazi: Yaay!

I look at him in confusion, and he ignores me.

After a while, Dean walks out, and comes to us. He looks calm and collected. He's even carrying a bag, which I assume has Lwazi's clothes.

Dean: Ready to go?

Lwazi: Yes! I'm starving!

He looks at Lwazi and smiles.

Dean: Well, I hope your stomach is ready, because it will be filled with lots of food.

Lwazi giggles.

We then walk out. I look at Derek.

Me: Surprise?

Derek: Just go with the flow... Sometimes, you have to improvise in life.

He kisses my cheek and gets in the car. Dean opens the door for Lwazi and she gets in. Dean and I get in as well, and Derek drives off.

Dean: You need to take a bath first, eat, and then you can come with us, okay?

Lwazi looks at me and I nod.

Lwazi: Okay!

She rests her head on me and I smile.

I am so thankful right now. I can't even describe my feelings.

INSERT 65 (Short Insert)

We're now back in my house, and Lwazi is in the bathroom...

Dean, Derek, my mom and I are sitting outside. My dad is still not back.

Mom: So how did you get them to let go of Lwazi?

I look at Dean. I also want to know.

Dean: We had a civil conversation. I basically explained how this is affecting Lwazi, and how she will end up resenting them forever.

I look at him suspiciously and he smiles innocently.

Mom: I'm glad you got her out of there.

Dean: So are you going to adopt her?

Mom: I think we don't have a choice at this point.

Dean: I think it's a great idea. That place is toxic.

My mom looks at me.

Me: I don't even know where to start.

Derek: I'll help...

I look at him and smile. Lona nje has outdone himself today. I need to think of ways to thank him for being so awesome.

Mom: So Dean, wena where are your parents?

Dean: My dad passed away, and my mom is around.

Mom: And what's the age difference between you two?

Dean: I'm 34 and this one is 32.

My mom nods and looks at Derek.

Mom: How are you?

Derek smiles sweetly.

Derek: I'm well.

She smiles.

Mom: You are both so handsome... Dean, are you married?

Derek: I am about to...

Mom: Really? You're planning a proposal?

He nods and I smile.

Dean: She gave birth to our twins recently.

Mom: Really? Congratulations!

Dean: Thank you.

Mom: That's amazing. Are they your first babies?

Dean nods tightly, and I can't help but notice his jaw tighten, as if something crossed his mind.

Just then, Lwazi walks to us and squeals excitedly. She's wearing her new dress; the one Derek bought for her a while back. She specifically stated that she was reserving it for Christmas. She is so cute!

Lwazi: Mama I'm hungry!

Mama, who is my mother, stands and sighs.

Mom: Ngaze ngavelelwa!

My mom walks back in the house and Lwazi sits down.

Lwazi: Uncle D, thank you for saving me!

Me: Which Uncle D?

She groans dramatically.

Lwazi: Konje!

She looks at Dean.

Lwazi: I have to call you something else.

We all laugh.

Lwazi: How about Uncle D number 2?

Dean: I don't settle for second best, love.

Lwazi: Huh?

Me: Uncle D number 2 is perfect. Call him that, baby!

Lwazi looks at me and smiles.

Me: Are you feeling better?

Lwazi: I'm just annoyed that I had to be in the bedroom for so long.

I chuckle.

Me: Well, at least you're here now.

She stands and gives me a hug.

Lwazi: You're the best!

My heart skips a beat. My love for this child is quite deep.

She then goes to Dean and opens up her arms.

Lwazi: Thank you!

Dean pulls her for a hug and smiles. I must say that Dean has definitely wormed his way into my heart. I can't believe he has that other cold side, that he tortured me with. However, Liwa, Nolwazi and Derek were right: Dean may be a cold person, but as soon as he gets to know you and accept you, you start to see another loving and loyal side of him. I guess I'm one of the lucky ones.

Lwazi then hugs Derek.

Lwazi: Thank you daddy.

Derek's face changes. He's shocked.

Lwazi: I didn't like you at first, because I thought you were mean.

Derek's face softens up and he smiles.

Derek: You were the mean one!

Lwazi giggles and they share a hug. Just then, her tummy grumbles and she groans.

Me: Woah! Go inside and eat, please!

She laughs as she walks back inside the house.

I check the time and it's now 2pm.

I look at Dean and Derek, and they both seem chilled.

Me: Let's go to the event.

Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Yini?

Derek: We don't have to go...

Me: But I want to...

He sighs and glances at Dean, who doesn't seem to care.

Dean: I'm quite comfortable here... I was looking forward to your father's chicken. I also want to meet the funny guy.

Me: My dad is now the funny guy?

They both laugh and I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go. I dressed up for this shit.

Dean grunts.

Me: You'll meet my dad some other time.

Derek: And what about Lwazi?

Me: I'd rather she stay here.

Dean: No, she must come with us.

I sigh.

Derek: She'll interact with other kids.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Kanti thina we're not going to eat your mother's food? Haibo Dlamini.

I sigh.

Derek: Let's go inside.

Me: Wow! Go ahead and do as you please in my parents' house!

Dean: Our future in-laws...

Me: Argh.

Dean: You definitely take the cup for being the most dramatic person I know.

Me: Zip it, Uncle D number 2.

Dean: Low blow...

I stand and they follow me inside...

Also, my dad has been gone hey? Lol I'm so glad. I hope Shoprite is packed as hell.

Once we're done eating, I go to my bedroom to freshen up a bit. Once I'm done, we all walk out. The conversations have been so chilled, hey. My mom is dramatic and all, but she is definitely a people's person.

As we get to the car, I see my dad at a distance.

Me: Okay, bye bye mama. See you later.

Mom: Okay, baby.

Dean: It was lovely meeting you, ma. I'll be back for my chicken.

Mom: You're more than welcome... Just know ke that I'm charging extra.

Dean laughs.

Dean: Message received.

Me: Okay, let's go.

Mom: Bye bye Nkanyezi.

They share a hug.

Derek: Usale kahle. Please send our greetings to Bab'Dlamini.

Mom: Okay, darling.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go, people!

Mom: Heyi ke wena!

Lwazi gets in the car, Dean follows...

Me: Shap mama. We'll bring Lwazi back.

Mom: Shap, baby.

Me: Love you.

She winks and I smile.

Derek: Bye, ma.

Mom: Bye, baby.

We get in the car.

Me: Drive phela.

Dean: What's your problem wena?

Derek starts the car and we drive off. Thank God they didn't see my dad. It seems like I'm the only one who saw him.

As we're driving, my phone rings and it's my mom.

Me: Mama?

Mom: You sneaky girl!

I laugh.

Mom: Sies!

Me: I'm not in the mood for a meet and greet.

We both laugh.

Mom: Have fun ke sisi and take care of Lwazi.

Me: Of course.

Mom: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and relax...

Words cannot describe how happy I am right now.

I am loved by a sexy beast. This beast feeds me, treats me like royalty, and gives me the best orgasms.

I am happy.

INSERT 66

Here I was, thinking we're going to some intimate lunch, kanti this is an actual event. We've arrived at the orphanage...

Me: I didn't know this was a huge thing.

Dean: Go big or go home...

Me: Hmm.

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Derek: I have to check in on Xolani.

Me: Sure.

He wraps one arm around me and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He lets go of me and rushes off somewhere. There are kids all over the place, running and playing. There are different games and stations- it genuinely feels like a festival of some sorts.

Lwazi: Mommy, can I go and play?

Me: Of course.

I don't have to worry about her safety.

She runs off and I sigh.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

He looks at me suspiciously and I groan.

Me: I'm a bit nervous about taking this responsibility.

Dean: Adopting Lwazi?

I nod.

Dean: You do realise that you're already acting motherly, right?

Me: I am?

Dean: Don't over-think it. This child brings out the best in you.

I sigh.

Dean: There's no guide on being a parent. I'm also going through a lot of confusion and frustration, but I'm finding my feet.

I nod.

Dean: Just give her all the love you can...

Me: Thanks, Dr. Phil.

He chuckles and we walk around.

Dean: I miss Nolwazi. I'm ditching you.

Me: How foul!

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I answer it excitedly.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby. Ukuphi kanti? I just saw Derek.

Me: I'm with Dean.

Nomvuyo: Your new bestie?

I laugh.

Me: Where are you? I want to see you.

Nomvuyo: I'm by the water slides... My daughter is just driving me crazy.

Me: Okay. I'll see you now now.

Nomvuyo: Bye, love.

I end the call and look at Dean.

Me: I'm ditching you.

Dean: Uyahlanya. You're going to help me look for my woman.

He grabs my hand as he puts his phone to his ear.

Dean: Lwazi...I just got here now... No... Where are you?...

He ends the call and looks at me.

Dean: She is not happy.

Me: Really?

He nods tightly.

I'm sure Nolwazi hates me wherever she is. This is probably her first Christmas with Dean, and I basically took half of his day.

We walk around.

Me: Is she angry?

Dean: Just a little.

Me: Yoh manje why are you taking me with?

He ignores me.

We get to some food stall, and find Nolwazi standing there by herself.

The pregnancy really didn't do her beauty justice. She looks amazing.

She looks at us and smiles.

It's that fake smile.

That, "I'm smiling, but I really want to fuck you up" smile.

Dean: Lwazi.

Nolwazi: Hi.

Dean lets go of my hand and wraps his arm around her. She gives him a look, and he lets go of her.

Me: Hi, Nolwazi.

She looks at me.

Nolwazi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: I'm sorry for all of this. It's my entire fault, really.

She keeps quiet.

Me: They helped me get Lwazi out of that house.

Nolwazi: The girl you're planning on adopting?

Geesh news travels fast in this circle.

Me: Yes.

Nolwazi: What was the problem?

Me: The parents were being difficult. She hadn't eaten, and she was locked up in the bedroom.

Her face changes, and she now seems worried.

Nolwazi: Is she okay?

Me: We were on our way here, when I got a call from my parents. Dean and Derek helped me get her...

Nolwazi looks at Dean, and he smiles.

Dean: I'm a hero. I didn't ditch you for nothing.

Her face softens and she chuckles.

Nolwazi: Well, I would appreciate a little heads up next time. You can't just disappear like that and expect me to not react.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Nolwazi: You owe me another Christmas day, Dr. Hlongwane.

Me: Dr. who, now?

They both look at me and chuckle.

Nolwazi: So he hasn't forced you to call him by his title?

Me: Uhm, no.

Dean: I was about to... Ziyanda just talks too much, that I never get the chance to brag and shit.

Me: Wow!

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry for coming across as cold, Zi. I was just baffled.

Me: It's okay.

We share a hug.

Dean: Manje mina? Where's my hug?

Nolwazi: You're still in the doghouse.

Dean groans and I laugh.

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I answer.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Haibo sisi.

Me: Sorry, I'm on my way!

I end the call and look at Dean and Nolwazi.

Me: I'll see you around.

They're both so caught up in each other's presence that I'm no longer a factor.

I walk away from them and try to find the water slides. I spot Nomvuyo there and walk to her. Once I'm behind her, I poke her and she squeals and I laugh.

Me: I see you're still a virgin.

Nomvuyo: Of course I am.

We laugh and share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: I am exhausted. Nyami is obviously trying to remind me why I don't want more children.

Me: You are so dramatic.

Nomvuyo: Look at her...

I look over at the children, and spot Nyami there, having fun.

I remember her from all the pictures I have seen.

Me: I wish I was a kid.

Nomvuyo: Right? These little one look so carefree

She sighs and rubs her belly.

Nomvuyo: I don't know how I feel about this pregnancy.

Me: When are you going to tell Liwa?

She shrugs.

Me: Stop being so negative. This baby is a blessing.

Nomvuyo: Says the person who was freaking out when she thought she was pregnant.

I chuckle.

Me: Better you than me.

She grunts.

Nomvuyo: So is Lwazi fine?

Me: Ya, Dean spoke to the parents.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Me: I didn't know that this would be a big event.

Nomvuyo: Derek is very passionate about these children.

Derek.

Where is he? I miss him.

Nomvuyo: Nyami! Woza!

I look over at Nyami, who doesn't want to come.

Nomvuyo: Don't make me repeat myself!

Nyami walks over to us, wet and all.

Nyami: But, mommy I st-

Nomvuyo shakes her head.

Nyami is just like her mommy and daddy. Gorgeous little girl.

Me: Hello, Nyami.

She looks at me and frowns.

Nomvuyo: This is Auntie Zizi.

Nyami: Hello, Auntie Zizi.

She really isn't happy about this water slide situation. From my understanding, she is a bubbly girl, but right now, she is the opposite.

Nomvuyo: Let's go to the car, so you can change. I do not want you to catch a cold.

Nyami: But, momm-

Nomvuyo: Don't even try to talk back.

Nyami sighs and keeps quiet.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I'll be back...

Me: Okay...

They walk off, and I find myself smiling. That was a very cute interaction, but I know Nomvuyo would disagree.

I take my phone and dial Derek's number. It rings for a while, and he eventually answers.

Derek: Baby, where are you?

Me: I'm by the water slides.

Derek: Okay, I'll be there shortly.

Me: Okay.

I end the call, and I'm shocked to see Zimkitha standing next to me. When did she get here?

She looks at me and smiles. There's something about this woman's presence. It's intimidating, yet loving at the same time. I don't know, man...

Zimkitha: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: You look stunning.

Me: Thank you.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: Derek tells me you had to get Lwazi, the girl you want to adopt...

Me: Uhm, yes...

Zimkitha: And the parents? Did they cooperate?

Me: Only once Dean spoke to them.

She nods and becomes serious.

Zimkitha: If they give you problems, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Me: Thanks.

Her face then softens up again.

Zimkitha: How did the meeting with your parents go?

Me: Uhm... It went well.

She nods.

Zimkitha: Do they love Nkanyezi?

Me: They do.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: That's great.

I nod lightly, and feel someone behind me. Derek's scent fills the space, and he wraps his arms around me from the back.

Derek: Hey, snore face.

Me: Argh.

He kisses my cheek.

Derek: Zimi.

Zimkitha: Derek.

Derek: Liwa is looking for you.

Zimkitha nods and walks off.

I shiver and he chuckles.

Me: She freaks me out.

Derek: She's the best, trust me. She's just overprotective.

Me: This overprotective trait seems to be common in this circle.

Derek: Quite.

I groan.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's an unrecognized number. I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda...

Me: Yes?

Person: It's Mdu...

I immediately tense up and Derek notices this.

Me: What's up?

Mdu: I need you...

I can tell that something is wrong.

Me: Mdu?

Mdu: I just... I need you... Please come...

Me: Where are you?

Mdu: My place.

I sigh.

Mdu: Please, Ziyanda.

Me: Uhm okay.

He ends the call and I look at Derek.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Something's wrong...

He stares at me.

I don't know what to do. Is it Tholi? Are the babies fine? What's wrong?

Derek: So you're leaving?

I sigh.

Derek: Would you like me to go with you?

Me: I've already taken up most of your day... I feel bad.

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Let's go.

We then make our way out, after checking on Lwazi, and then got in the car.

Derek: Did he tell you what exactly is wrong?

I shake my head.

He drives off, and I pray that whatever it is is fixable.

When we get to Mdu's apartment, it's safe to say I was never ready.

The atmosphere is just dark and haunting.

Me: Mdu, what's going on?

Mdu: Tholi wants to kill herself.

Me: What??

Mdu: I found her-

He stops himself and tries to gather himself.

I have never seen him like this.

Just then, we hear crying.

It's the babies.

Mdu: I'm losing it.

Me: Where is she?

Mdu: In the bedroom.

Me: We have to take her to the hospital.

He nods.

He also seems like his brain is not functioning properly.

Derek has already disappeared. He went to the kids' room.

Me: What happened? I thought she was fine.

He shakes his head.

Me: Let's go...

He leads me to the bedroom and Tholi is in bed.

We walk towards the bed.

Mdu: Tholi...

Nothing.

He opens the covers and we look down at her. He pulls her out of bed.

She's literally a zombie. She has lost so much weight.

Me: Mdu, we need to go now.

He nods and is carrying her within seconds.

As we walk out, Derek is carrying one of the twins.

Derek: I called Nomvuyo. She's on her way.

I nod.

Me: We're going to the hospital.

He nods.

We walk out, and make our way to the car. He puts Tholi at the back and we get in and drive off.

Me: Why didn't you reach out sooner, Mduduzi?

He keeps quiet and drives on.

We've been at the hospital for over three hours now...

The doctor finally comes to us, and Mdu starts flooding him with questions.

Doctor: Tholi has symptoms of Postpartum Depression.

Mdu: What?

Doctor: On top of that, it seems like she has been suffering from depression symptoms long before her pregnancy.

Mdu: Postpartum depression?

Doctor: It's also known as Postnatal Depression. It's a type of clinical depression which can affect both parents after childbirth. You find yourself feeling overwhelmed, and it's not like "I'm new at this parenting thing, and I find it hard," but it's more like, "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this." You feel like you just can't handle being a parent. You feel guilty because you believe you should be handling new parenthood better. You feel like your baby deserves better.

I am honestly blown away at this point. I have always known of this type of depression, but I honestly didn't think it was this deep.

Doctor: You don't feel bonded to your baby. You just can't understand why this is happening. You feel hate and anger towards your baby, or your partner, or your friends who don't have babies. You also feel hopeless, like this situation will never get better. You can't function properly. You're disconnected: like there's an invisible wall between you and the rest of the world.

At this point, I am out of words.

Doctor: I am certain that Tholi is suffering from this, and other things... We have contacted the psychiatrist and he is on his way... He will be able to handle this issue properly.

The doctor looks at us sadly and walks away.

I find myself pulling Mdu and hugging him.

This shit is crazy.

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I'm so emotionally drained. I feel like I am carrying the whole world, literally.

Mdu and I are now in Tholi's room. She is now sleeping.

Mdu: Thank you for coming.

Me: I'm glad we finally know what is wrong. She'll get all the help she needs.

Mdu: Do you think she'll be fine?

Me: Over time... It definitely won't be easy.

He keeps quiet.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek. I answer.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Baby, we're here.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and stand.

Me: Vuvu and Derek are here.

He nods and I walk out.

I find Derek and Nomvuyo...

I immediately go straight to Derek and let him hold me... We stand there for a long time, until I feel more stable.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Mdu is in a state. I'm more worried about him at this point.

Nomvuyo: Shame...

Me: Where are the babies?

Nomvuyo: With Zimkitha.

I stare at her in shock.

Nomvuyo: Zimkitha knows about this.

Me: Really?

She nods lightly.

Nomvuyo: Mdu told her a while back.

I sigh heavily.

Nomvuyo: So Tholi has Postpartum Depression?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: I also had it.

Me: Really?

Nomvuyo: It took months to heal, but I did...

Me: The problem is that she has Depression as well...

Nomvuyo: Have they diagnosed her?

Me: The psychiatrist will make a proper diagnosis.

Nomvuyo: She'll be fine.

Derek wraps his arms around me again and we share a hug.

Derek: I'm sorry...

Me: I feel bad for them.

Nomvuyo: But I think it's time the family knows about this. This secret life is going to kill both of them. They need the family's love and support.

Derek: I agree.

Nomvuyo: And I think if the family sees them like this, they will be open to helping them.

I sigh and relax in Derek's arms.

It's now around 6pm. My body is giving up on me as well.

Derek: Let's go home, Zi.

Me: We can't leave them like this...

He looks at me intently and I sigh.

Me: I just want to help them.

Derek: And you've done all that you could.

He pulls me closer and plants a kiss on my nose.

Derek: It's been a hectic day for you. Please let me take you back home, so you can eat and sleep.

Me: What a weird Christmas day.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: Will Dean take Lwazi back to my parents' house?

He nods.

Derek: Let's go. We'll come back tomorrow.

Me: Okay, let me say goodbye to him.

He nods and lets go of me. I go to Tholi's room and find Mdu there, sleeping on the chair next to the bed.

Me: Mdu...

I walk to him and he wakes up.

Mdu: Hey...

Me: Hey...

He smiles lightly.

Mdu: Thank you.

Me: You're welcome.

He stands and we share a hug. We stand there for a long time while he sobs quietly.

Universe, I'll get back to you about this... We'll discuss it once everything is fine.

I comfort him until he feels better.

But then, a thought arises.

Me: Mdu, please get yourself checked out as well.

He gives me a weird look and I wipe his tears.

Me: I think this situation with Tholi has really affected you. I just want you to be aware of your mental health the same way you're so aware of your emotional and physical health.

He sighs.

Mdu: You think I'm not fine?

Me: You're not.

He nods lightly and I smile.

Me: Will you be fine?

Mdu: I will.

Me: Are you sure? I can stay if you want.

Mdu: I don't want Derek to freak out. You already spent half of your day here.

Me: I'm sorry.

Mdu: I'll be fine, man.

We share another hug.

Me: Maybe it's time to tell the family?

He looks at me intently.

Me: Just think about it, okay?

He nods.

Me: Shap ke.

Mdu: Good night.

Me: Same to you.

I brush Tholi's hand and walk out of the room, feeling a bit better. He seems better as well.

Nomvuyo: Is he fine?

I nod.

Me: So the babies are sleeping over at your house?

Nomvuyo: Yes, they're safe and sound.

Me: Good.

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: It's been a crazy day... I'll see you tomorrow. Get some rest, love.

Me: Bye.

We share a hug and she walks away. I then look at Derek tiredly.

Derek: Ready?

I nod.

He takes my hand and we walk out...

Derek is holding onto me for dear life...

I check the time and it's around 1am.

I try to move, but he holds me tighter.

Me: Derek, you're hurting me...

He is groaning.

What's going on?

His groaning gets louder, and he squeezes me even tighter.

Me: Derek.

He is starting to sound like he's in pain.

Me: Derek!

I break free and switch on the lamp. He is sweating furiously. I shake him and he tries fighting me, but he wakes up suddenly.

Me: Star!

He is breathing heavily.

Me: Nkanyezi, what's happening?

He closes his eyes and sighs. I watch as he breathes in and out slowly.

After a while, he pulls me closer and my face touches his.

Derek: Hey, I'm sorry...

My heart rate is on another level. I didn't even realise that I was crying.

He scared me.

He brushes my back, and I place my lips on his.

Him: I'm sorry...

Me: What were you dreaming about?

He sighs.

I keep quiet. I'm not backing off on this one. I want him to open up to me.

He kisses me. He is tender, like he's doesn't want to break me. He slides his hand under the pyjama top and I moan. I want him badly, but I also want us to talk.

He repositions us and is now on top.

Me: Derek, please talk to me...

He stares at me, and I feel his fingers slide in me...

I know I'm ready. I'm always ready for him.

He goes down and his face gets locked between my thighs. He eventually comes up, and I welcome his erection...

Him: Baby...

He is so slow. Every single sense of mine is wide awake. I'm enjoying this...

I'm now lost in my moans and groans.

I feel myself shudder, as that familiar rush approaches. Seconds later, he follows, and we both tighten our hold on each other.

Him: I love you.

He plants a kiss on my lips and repositions.

Why doesn't he want me to face him?

He's now holding me from the back. My head is resting on his arm, and his other arm is wrapped around me.

Me: Derek...

He pulls me even closer until we're pressed against each other.

Me: Derek...

Him: Hmm?

Me: Talk to me...

Him: Go to sleep, baby...

Yes, I want to talk, but the heaviness in my eyes is too overwhelming. I try to keep my eyes open, but fail.

I feel him planting soft kisses on my shoulder, until I completely doze off...

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The following morning, I woke up to find Derek in the kitchen, making breakfast. I'm still thinking about what happened in the middle of the night.

Me: Morning.

He turns and smiles warmly. My insides churn. I don't think I'll ever get used to being his girlfriend.

Derek: Hi, baby.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm surprisingly in a very good mood.

I look at him suspiciously. I know I'm going to burst his bubble, because I will force him to speak. Usile lo.

Me: That's nice...

He chuckles.

Him: And how are you?

Me: Could be better.

Him: Go back to bed. I'll wake you up once I'm done.

Me: I'll watch you cook. Why you tryna get rid of me though?

He laughs and shakes his head. He then continues with what he's doing while I watch.

Derek: Yesterday was quite hectic.

Me: Hmm.

Him: I'm going to make sure that we have a peaceful day today.

Me: How so?

Him: We're not going anywhere. I'm going to fetch Lwazi, and we'll chill indoors.

Me: Sounds nice, but I'd rather not include Lwazi right now. She's fine with my parents.

He looks at me, smiles, and then continues with what he's doing.

Him: We'll check on Mdu...

Me: I encouraged him to tell his family.

Him: It's about time. He can't keep living like this.

Just then, his phone rings and he asks me to answer it.

I reach for it and see Khwezi's name.

Me: It's your mother.

Him: And?

I grunt as I answer.

Me: Derek's phone, hello?

Khwezi hisses and I roll my eyes. I'm not in the mood to fight.

Khwezi: Give Nkanyezi his phone.

Me: He's busy.

Khwezi: Mxm.

She ends the call and I grunt.

Derek: Any message?

He looks at me and laughs.

Me: Not funny, Ngidi.

A minute later, a text messages comes through.

Khwezi: Derek, I do not like this girl. Something about her rubs me the wrong way. You have become so distant since you started being with her, and I hate that. She is obviously with you for money... Why did you leave so abruptly yesterday? It is so unlike you. Did she put you up to it? You missed the whole event, and I'm sure everyone at Twilight is disappointed.

Rolls eyes. Rolls eyes. Rolls eyes.

Somebody call the nywembulance for this grown ass woman.

I read the message to Derek and he shakes his head in defeat and disinterest.

Derek: She's childish.

Me: Has she always been like this, or is it with me?

Him: She thinks she owns me.

Me: Is it?

He nods.

Me: So she hates all your ex girlfriends?

He laughs lightly.

Him: I think she hates you the most.

Me: Wow.

Him: She can see how much I love you.

Me: Mxm.

He finishes up and I help him dish up, even after he refused. Once we're done, we go to the lounge and sit next to each other.

Me: How long have we been dating?

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I haven't been counting. Have you?

Him: A lot of shit has happened.

Me: Exactly. I think we need a moment to reflect on how far we've come. It genuinely feels like I've known you forever.

He nods.

Him: Well, I think we started getting serious in November.

I laugh.

Me: So we're approaching two months?

We both laugh.

Me: Infancy...

We continue chatting while eating. After a while, we finish up and put the plates aside.

Me: Do you like Christmas?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Do you like Christmas?

Him: Uhm... Ya...

I nod.

Him: Why?

Me: Just asking.

Him: You're random.

Me: Can't help it.

He pulls me closer and kisses me.

Me: If there's one thing you could change in your life, what would it be?

Him: What's going on?

Me: I'm just asking hawu!

He chuckles and looks at me thoughtfully.

Him: One thing I could change in my life?

Me: Yep.

Him: Hmm...

He's quiet for a few seconds...

Him: I don't think I would change anything.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: Why?

Him: I don't know...

He looks at me.

Him: And you?

Me: What?

Him: What would you change?

Me: I'd want to be born into a rich family.

He laughs.

Him: What??

Me: I'm serious. Yazi it wasn't easy growing up without money.

Him: But it made you who you are.

Me: Hai hai you grew up rich, but you're an amazing person.

Him: True...

Me: So yes, I'd want my parents to be rich.

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Me: One thing you'd want to change about your personality?

He looks at me thoughtfully. I know he's probably confused as to why I'm asking these random questions, but this is all part of my big plan. Operation Get Star to Open Up.

Him: Well... I've been told that I love too deeply.

Me: Okay...

Him: And as a result I become naive.

Me: Hmm so you love so much that you become naive?

He nods.

Me: Is that what you would like to change?

Him: I think so...

Me: I love that you love deeply and unapologetically. That's what makes you Star.

He smiles.

Me: Very few people can get over hurt and recycle love.

Him: Thank you, baby.

I kiss him.

Him: Is there anything you would change?

Me: My impulsiveness.

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Me: You know, I try my best to think before I act, but when I'm in thaaat zone... I lose it.

Him: You are quite irrational.

Me: I don't mean any harm.

Him: But I love you regardless.

I smile and decide to give him a break. I'll have to be strategic if I want him to open up. I don't want to crowd him.

At around 12pm, we're still lazing around... I didn't realize I missed spending time with him. We've been dealing with other people's drama.

His phone rings, and it's his mother again. He ignores it and we carry on watching ratchet reality shows. Minutes later, there's a loud knock on the door and we both look at each other.

Derek: Let's ignore her.

I laugh.

He increases the volume till we can't hear much.

Me: You're so bad.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: You're a bad son.

The knocking eventually stops and she send him a heated message which we didn't read.

Me: When is your birthday?

He laughs.

Him: 1st of Jan.

Me: What??

He continues laughing.

Me: You were born on the 1st?

He nods.

Me: OMG!

Him: It's funny how we know all these deep things about each other, but we're clueless about the little things.

Me: Are you big on birthdays?

Him: Definitely. My favourite day.

I smile.

Me: Really?

Him: I love celebrating life. We get so caught up in the bullshit we face daily that we forget to celebrate being alive.

Me: Hmm.

Him: I love celebrating birthdays.

Me: Well, that's good, because I'm not big on them.

Him: What? Why?

I shrug.

Him: Well, that will change. Birthdays are a big deal.

Me: Hmkay.

Suddenly, it hits me that his birthday is in 6 days! What am I going to do for him? Gosh.

Me: So when were you planning on telling me that your birthday is 6 days?

He chuckles.

Him: Angazi. I haven't gotten time to think about it, because of you.

Me: So what are your plans?

Him: None so far... I'll see.

I shake my head in defeat.

Me: My birthday is on the 20th of March.

Him: I know.

Me: How?

Him: I'm your boss.

Me: Argh.

He chuckles.

Me: I'm the best with gifts.

Him: Really?

I nod excitedly.

Him: I can't wait.

He reels me in for a kiss...

Him: You're definitely the best gift though.

Me: Swoons!

He laughs...

It's now the 30th and I am meeting up with Dean to discuss a surprise birthday dinner for Nkanyezi. I haven't seen him since the 26th when he told me his birth date. I've been at home, spending time with my parents and Lwazi.

When I get to the restaurant, I find Dean there. I join him and place my order.

Me: I spoke to Vuvu, and she insists on cooking everything.

Dean nods.

Dean: Nolwazi will help her.

Me: Okay. Are you done with your Jar?

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Dean, get that shit done.

Him: You want me to write 100 reasons why I love him? I don't have the time. Quite frankly, I hate writing.

Me: I don't give a shit. I need it by tomorrow.

Him: You are going all out, aren't you?

Me: Don't patronise me.

He laughs.

Our food eventually comes.

Me: I want this to be an intimate dinner with all the people he values.

Him: We see each other all the time.

Me: The only difference is that this dinner is for Derek, so the focus will be on him, and not the craziness that surrounds this group.

He laughs

Me: If anyone tries to jeopardize it, I will deal with them personally.

Him: Okay Rambo, calm the fuck down.

Me: Anyway, I'm meeting up with Nolwazi's friend, Slindile. Apparently she's a great event planner.

Dean: She is.

Me: Good.

He gives me a bank card and I frown.

Him: From my knowledge, teachers are underpaid.

I don't even know how to respond to that. I just laugh.

Him: Do as you please.

Me: I never thought I would find a blesser in my lifetime. I'm lucky. I would like to thank my mother, father... The Universe...

He laughs and we continue chatting. He is definitely right. Teachers are underpaid, therefore, I will use this card like there is no tomorrow. I'm not one to say no when the Universe comes through for me.

Once we're done, he offers to give me a lift.

It's so weird how close we've grown. He's like a big brother that I never had. Weird shit I tell you.

We get to some rented offices and he leads the way. We get to Slindile's office and she leads us in. She's one of those fit girls who are obsessed with the gym.

Me: Hi.

Slindile: Hi, I'm Sly.

Me: Ziyanda.

She smiles and looks at Dean.

Sly: Dean.

Dean: Slindile.

Sly: So, Nolwazi tells me you need help with your man's birthday dinner?

Me: Yes. I know it's a bit last minute.

Sly: I'll sort it out. I just need to know your vision...

We sit down and I explain to her how I want everything. Once she has been informed, we leave and Dean drops me off at Maboneng. I'm meeting up Niki.

Dean: Bye then.

Me: See you tomorrow.

We share a hug and he drives off.

I make my way to La Musa and find Niki there. Only, she's not alone. She's with a yummy guy.

I thought we were meeting up just to talk about this new man in her life, not this.

I get to the table and look at her with a grin on my face.

Me: Good afternoon.

Niki: Good afternoon, ma'am.

We laugh and share a hug. I then look at this guy and smile. He's definitely not her type. Niki loves skinny guys for some odd reason. This one is well-built and toned and shit.

Me: Hi.

Him: Hi.

He flashes a smile. He has a lovely smile... But he's eyes? I feel like they tell some deep ass story.

Niki: This is Ziyanda, the one I always tell you about.

He looks at Niki all lovingly and I can't help but want to high 5 my girl. Where in the world did she get this man? Also, I'm a bit embarrassed that I don't know much about him. I've been so focused on my Star lately.

Niki: Zi, this is Kwanele.

Me: Nice to meet you.

He stands and we share a hug.

I am about to question the shit out of him...

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I look at him and he smiles knowingly. It seems like Niki has told him a lot about me.

Me: So what do you do for a living?

Kwanele: I'm a lawyer.

I nod slowly and look at Niki, who is smiling from ear to ear.

Me: How old are you?

Kwanele: 34.

I nod.

Me: So how did you two meet?

Kwanele: Through a mutual friend.

Me: And who is that mutual friend?

Niki: Jeff.

I laugh.

Me: You hang out with that weed addict?

Kwanele: Yep.

Me: Wow, how weird.

Niki: I know, right? I was so shocked when I first met him at Jeff's place.

Me: Do you know what he does for a living?

Kwanele: Jeff?

Me: Yep.

Niki and I laugh.

Kwanele: Escort?

Me: Hmm I guess you really are friends.

Niki: But at least he has stopped.

Me: Oh please. Jeff will always be linked to prostitution.

Kwanele: No, he really has stopped.

Me: Hmm maybe I'm out of touch. I haven't seen him in a long time.

Our drinks and their food come.

Me: So, you like Niki?

Kwanele: Yes, I do.

Me: Hmkay.

I think I like him. He seems down to earth.

Me: You seem quiet. Does Niki's vibrant personality get too much?

Niki: Really??

I laugh.

Me: I'm just asking!

Kwanele: No, it doesn't get too much.

Me: Hmm...

I watch them eat while I drink a cocktail, which tastes like hell. I end up giving up and settling for a glass of water.

Me: So Star's birthday is in 2 days.

Niki: Really??

I look at Kwanele.

Me: Star is my boyfriend.

Kwanele: Star?

Me: Nkanyezi.

He chuckles.

Kwanele: Got me worried for a sec.

Me: Anyway, I'm throwing him a surprise birthday dinner.

Niki: That's nice.

Me: I want to make it a memorable day. You know mos I do the most.

We both laugh.

Me: I'm extending an invite to you... Kwanele can be your plus 1.

Niki: The 1st?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Sorry, boo. We also have plans.

Me: Heeh! What are you doing?

Kwanele: Going to Durban.

Me: Argh.

Niki giggles and they share a kiss.

Me: Wow. Lovebirds.

I take out my phone and take a few snaps of them. My phone rings and my heart leaps when I see Derek's name.

I answer it as I stand and go outside.

Me: D?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: I miss you too, Star.

Derek: Ukuphi?

Me: I'm spending time with Niki and her boyfriend.

Derek: Can I come?

Me: No.

He groans.

Derek: I haven't seen you in three days.

Me: Baby, you'll see me on your birthday. I'd really like to spend some quality time with the people I've abandoned because of you.

Derek: Mxm.

I laugh.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I love you too.

Me: Bye, I'll call you when I get home.

He groans as I end the call. I then go back inside and find them kissing.

Me: Gosh.

Niki: Was that Derek?

I nod.

Me: So, Kwanele you guys are officially dating?

Kwanele: I mean, I'd like to think so.

Niki: Uh-uh, you still have a long way to go.

Kwanele looks at her and they stare at each other amusingly. Very cute.

Kwanele: Really?

She nods and giggles.

Lord, I need to be with Derek. I can't deal with this right now.

My phone vibrates and it's a message from Dean, telling me that he just finished up writing his 100 reasons why he loved Derek. I send him a wink emoji. I'm glad that's done. Now I need to go home...

The following day, I was meeting up with Vuvu to make sure the heffer was doing her damn job. I was serious when I said that no one was going to jeopardize this shit.

When I get to their home, I am met by a very cheerful Nyami. She reminds me so much of Lwazi. There's just an "It" factor that they both have.

Me: Hey, Nyami.

Nyami: Hey, Auntie Zizi.

Me: How are you, sweetie?

She smiles and gives me a hug.

Nyami: I'm great!

Me: Where's mommy?

Nyami: In the kitchen. She said you are going to kill her if she doesn't cook.

I chuckle and she leads me to the kitchen.

Vuvu is busy there with pots and shit.

Me: Hellooo!

She looks up and rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: You've turned me into your slave.

Me: A slave for love!

She grunts and I give her a hug.

Me: Thank you for doing your job!

Nomvuyo: As if I had a choice. You're such a tyrant.

Me: Hai phela sisi. You are the one who offered to cook.

She rolls her eyes.

Me: I came to check on you.

Nomvuyo: Whatever, Hitler.

Nyami: Who's birthday is it?

Me: Uncle Derek.

Nyami nods and walks away.

Me: So how are you?

Nomvuyo: I'm fine, love. How are you? How's Operation Get Star to Open Up?

I sigh.

Me: I'll get there someday.

Nomvuyo: Just be patient.

Me: I'll try.

Nomvuyo: And don't take anything he does personally...

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo: Getting someone to open up is not easy.

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: But I'm sure he'll appreciate your assortments of birthday gifts.

Me: I hope so.

I smile.

Me: Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: So you're not even staying for lunch nyana?

Me: Nope. I'm meeting up with Nolwazi's friend, Sly, who's planning the setup.

She rolls her eyes and I laugh.

Me: Bye!!!

I hug her and make my way out, after saying goodbye to Nyami.

When I got home, I was beyond shocked to find Derek's car parked outside. So this man feels so confident that he can come as he pleases now? Wowzer!

I walk in and hear laughter.

When I get to the lounge, I find them (my mom, Derek and Lwazi) chilling there.

Me: Hehe.

Mom: Hey, baby.

I look at Derek and he has a mischievous smile.

Me: Looks like I'm not needed here...

Mom: Haike don't start!

Me: Derek?

Derek: I'm actually here to get some chicken...

Mom: Exactly. Not everything is about you.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy!

Me: Hey, love.

She hugs me and takes my things. She then walks to our bedroom.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He's with his brother.

Me: Is he coming back?

Mom: Probably not.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek stands and we walk outside.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm too exhausted to be angry.

He looks at me suspiciously and I shrug.

Me: I'm not angry.

He assesses me and then smiles. When he wraps his arms around me, I melt.

Me: My mom is in love with you.

He smiles shyly.

Derek: I'm grateful she likes me.

Me: Hmm...

He places his lips on mine and I wince. I want him so badly.

Me: This is neither the time nor place.

He laughs and kisses me.

Him: I can give you a quick one?

Me: Not here!

He laughs and I push him away from me before I do sinful things in my parents' yard.

Me: Go home, please.

Him: But my home is with you.

Me: Corrrny!

I laugh at him as he starts sulking.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow.

Him: Come home with me, please?

I shake my head.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow for breakfast.

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'll get your chicken...

We walk in and he says goodbye to my mother.

Mom: Hold on for a second... I have a gift for you...

I look at her weirdly and she ignores me and goes to the bedroom. She then comes back with a gift bag.

Mom: Happy birthday, for tomorrow. Open it tomorrow.

Derek is beaming at this point. Argh.

Derek: Wow, this mean a lot to me. Thank you, ma.

Mom: You're welcome, baby.

They share a hug and I roll my eyes.

Derek: Wow, thank you.

His smile is cute and all, but I'm not feeling this little relationship they have.

Anyway, after saying goodbye to Lwazi and my mom, I walk with him outside.

We get to his car, and I look at him. He's smiling from ear to ear.

Me: Happy?

Him: You have no idea.

I sigh.

Him: Being accepted by your mother is a big deal for me. I don't take it for granted.

I smile.

Him: I don't know... I just... I have a weird connection with her...

Me: Is it?

He nods.

Him: Her motherliness is just heart-warming.

Me: I'm happy that she makes you feel that way.

Him: She's a good mother figure.

I nod and he touches my hand.

Him: Please come with me?

I sigh.

Me: I ha-

Him: I want you to be the first person I hold when I turn 33.

Me: Oh gosh.

Him: Please, baby?

Me: Okay.

He squeals and I grunt.

Me: I'll go tell my mom.

He nods as I get out and go to the house. I get in and my mom is shocked to see me.

Me: What's wrong?

Mom: I thought you left with him.

Me: Oh... I came to tell you ukuthi ngihamba naye. It wasn't part of the plan though.

Mom: You can go.

I get everything I need and then say goodbye to Lwazi.

Lwazi: Don't forget to give him my gift!

Me: Okay, sweetie.

I make my way back to the car and he drives off excitedly.

Derek: I don't think I've ever been this happy in my life.

I glance at him and we both smile.

Him: Thank you...

He focuses on the road and I smile to myself. I want him to feel very special tomorrow... Once again, anyone that even tries to mess this man's day up, will catch these hands.

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Derek is now fast asleep with his head on my chest. I check the time and it's around 10pm. I carefully get out of bed and make my way to the lounge, with my bag. I have to finish up my 100 reasons for loving him. I've been pestering Dean, yet I'm not nearly done with mine. I quickly write them neatly, cut them individually and then put them in the small jar I bought. This is definitely the best gift, because I'm basically pouring out my heart to him. I know he'll love it, because he's cornier than me.

After a while, I finish up.

I'm so excited. I just want him to feel loved!

I clean up the space, and make my way to the bedroom.

I drop the bag, as I see Derek struggling in his sleep again. I rush to the bed and shake him lightly.

Me: D!

I shake him harder and he finally wakes up. He stares at me in shock and I'm crying again.

Derek: Oh, baby. I'm sorry.

He tries pulling me closer, but I refuse.

Me: Please talk to me.

He wipes his face, and rubs his eyes.

Me: Derek.

He sighs heavily and looks at me. I'm sitting on the edge of the bed.

Him: Come here.

He pulls me and we lie there, facing up. We're silent for a long time.

Derek: I've been having nightmares lately.

Me: You don't usually have them?

He shakes his head.

I keep quiet.

Him: I keep seeing Xolani getting beaten, and Dean is also in the mix. It's just weird...

Me: Beaten?

Him: I can't explain it...

Me: Can you see who's beating them?

He sighs.

Him: Zimkitha.

Me: What??

I feel goosebumps as I think of that creepy woman.

He chuckles as he glances at me.

Him: She's not a bad person...

I grunt.

Him: And then... I see some old woman, who keeps telling me to run...

I look at him weirdly.

I am a bit creeped out.

Him: This woman keeps pestering me about running away while I'm trying to focus on Dean and Xolani.

I sigh.

Him: It's weird explaining it out loud, but it's so raw and... scary in the dream...

I sigh and then reposition so I am on top of him. He places his hands on my butt and I stare at him.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: It's only a dream.

I nod.

Me: Do you want to pray?

He stares at me for a while and eventually nods.

Me: Okay.

We both get up and then kneel by the bed. I hold his hand and look at him.

Me: I am a strong believer in God, Derek. He has really been a pillar of mine through everything.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Whenever you feel scared, lonely, or sad- don't be afraid to talk to him. Just express yourself openly. It's not about how many bible verses you know... He will never judge you.

He smiles.

Him: He'll listen?

Me: Always.

He nods and we both close our eyes.

Me: Do you want me to start?

Him: I'd appreciate that.

Me: Okay...

I sigh heavily.

Me: Dear God...

I keep quiet for a while.

Me: As you can see, I have a special guest here... Someone I've grown to love quite deeply, and who is still a bit unsure where he stands with you.

I sigh.

Me: Anyway, I ask that you open up his heart and allow him to see your greatness. I'm quite relieved that he agreed to pray with me, because now our connection can also be linked to you. It's his birthday in a couple of hours. We thank you for always being here, even when we abandon you. Please bless him abundantly. I also ask that you continue building our bond and make it stronger...

I feel myself get emotional.

I feel like this is a deep moment for Derek and me.

Me: Anyway, I'm going to give him the opportunity to speak to you, since I speak to you every chance I get...

I keep quiet...

Derek, please just open up?

There is silence for a long time.

Eventually, he sighs and squeezes my hand.

Derek: Uhm...

Silence...

He groans and then I open my eyes.

I sigh.

Me: It's okay...

He sits on the floor, and I stand. As I am about to give him space, he grabs my hand. I sit in between his legs and he wraps his arms around me.

Me: I understand...

He doesn't say anything.

We are silent for a long time.

Eventually, I stand because my ass is in pain. He stands as well and we get in bed. He wraps his arms around me and buries his head on my neck. He's sobbing.

My heart is so torn right now. I want to be here for him, but I don't know what to do.

Me: Derek, I love you.

He doesn't say anything.

After a long time, he dozes off.

I just feel so defeated right now, but I can't begin to imagine how he is feeling. My phone beeps. I reach for it and sigh.

It's 12am.

I shift, and carefully break free from his hold. I then walk to my bag, and get my jar...

I walk back to bed with it, and shake him lightly.

Me: Star...

I'm so sleepy right now, but it is what it is.

Me: Star...

I shake him again and he opens his eyes.

Me: Hey...

He smiles at me with his swollen eyes.

Me: Sit up.

He does as he is told, and then looks at me.

Me: Happy birthday.

I smile at him warmly and he smiles back.

I get closer to him and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Him: I love you more.

I smile and then give him the small jar.

Me: There you go... Your first gift.

His smile broadens.

Him: What's this?

Me: A jar filled with love.

He chuckles.

Him: So how does it work?

Me: You read one note per day.

Him: So it's filled with notes?

Me: Yes, notes written by me. 100 notes to be exact.

He smiles wider.

Me: Open it.

He opens it and takes out one note.

Him: You wrote all of these?

I nod proudly.

He opens the note and smiles as he reads it.

Me: What does it say?

He chuckles.

Him: Despite both of us being so smart, I appreciate the fact that we can be stupid together.

We both laugh.

Him: I love this, baby.

He looks like a kid in a candy store.

Him: Can I read another one?

Me: No! This should last you for 100 days!

He sulks.

Me: Don't test me!

He sighs and reads the note again.

Him: Despite both of us being so smart, I appreciate the fact that we can be stupid together.

He smiles again.

Him: Baby, this is the most thoughtful gift I've ever received.

I smile.

Him: Thank you.

Me: Anything for you.

He puts the jar aside and pulls me.

Him: You're special.

Me: Not as much as you.

He chuckles and I kiss him.

Him: Thank you.

I nod and we kiss again.

I yawn and he laughs.

Him: Let's get some sleep.

Me: Please! I thought I would wake you up with a blowjob, but I'm tired.

He laughs as we reposition. He switches off the side lamp and we cuddle.

I feel myself doze off...

Me: Derek...

Him: Yes?

Me: I'm here for you...

Him: I know.

Me: And so is God...

He sighs.

Me: Love you.

He kisses my forehead.

Him: I know...

I immediately doze off...

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The following morning, I was awakened by Derek's kisses. I instantly wake up and he chuckles.

I was supposed to wake up and make him breakfast!

Derek: Morning, sleepyhead.

Me: Argh I was supposed to wake up earlier and make you breakfast.

Him: Guess I beat you to it.

I grunt.

Him: Breakfast will be ready in 5 minutes.

I look at him and smile. I don't know what it is, but he seems a bit lighter.

Me: Happy birthday, Nkanyi.

He smiles and plants a kiss on my lips.

Him: I can't believe I love hearing you use this Nkanyezi nonsense.

I chuckle and kiss him.

Me: Let me brush my teeth.

Him: Stinky.

Me: Futsek.

He laughs as I get out of the bed and go to the bathroom to freshen up. I still feel like I could use a couple of hours of sleep, but I know that's not possible.

Once I'm done, I walk to the kitchen and find him dishing up.

Me: I'm starving!

Him: I'll feed you soonest.

I walk to the lounge and wait for him. He follows after a while, with a tray.

Me: I feel like I'm the one who is supposed to serve you like this.

Him: I think we've established that I rule the kitchen; therefore you will be served by yours truly.

Me: Whatever.

He sits next to me and we begin to eat.

Me: Do you have any birthday memories that stand out?

Him: I do actually.

I look at him.

Him: I was 12 years old, and I ran away from home.

Me: Home? As in the Ngidi household?

He chuckles and nods.

Me: Why?

Him: That whole year nje I just felt like I didn't belong there.

Me: Really?

Him: I was starting to understand what they meant by “adoption” and I felt like I was a charity case.

Me: So where did you run away to?

I can just imagine a cute 12 year old Nkanyezi doing shit by himself.

Him: Different places... I ended up going back to Twilight, to Mam’Thuli.

Me: And?

Him: She took me back to the Ngidis.

Me: I’m sure Khwezi was going crazy.

Him: Of course.

Me: So the Ngidis changed your biological surname?

He nods.

Me: Do you know your real surname?

Him: No. I used Mam’Thuli’s before that.

Me: Really? So Mam’Thuli knows your biological parents?

He goes quiet.

Me: Have you ever asked her about them?

He shakes his head.

Him: Like I said, I have no desire to know them.

He keeps quiet.

I also keep quiet.

I'm not sure how he's feeling right now. I think he's a bit angry.

Me: Anyway, I have another gift for you.

He looks at me and his face immediately softens up.

Him: You really are the gift expert aren't you?

Me: Yep.

I put the tray aside and walk to the bedroom. I get the gift and walk back to the lounge.

Me: Let's finish eating first.

Him: No, I want to see it!

Me: Uh-uh.

He sulks, but I ignore him.

We eat and chat for a while, until we finish.

I then take the plates to the kitchen, and we wash them together. Once we're done, we go back to the lounge and I take the gift and give it to him. His smile is just something else. I love seeing him like this, more especially because I'm the one who's making him so happy.

Me: Okay, you can open it.

He takes it out of the gift bag, and stares at it.

Me: Do you want me to explain first, or you want to see it?

Him: Let me see it...

I nod and watch him.

It's an A4 envelope. He opens it and takes out its contents.

Me: Can I explain?

He nods with a childish smile on his face.

Me: There are 12 cards there, as you can see.

He nods.

Me: I'm actually glad that your birthday is in Jan, because this plan of mine will be smooth sailing.

He chuckles.

Me: Anyway, these are monthly date cards.

He nods slowly as he looks at them with more understanding.

Me: Read them...

He takes the one that's written January.

Him: January- Let's find a recipe and make dinner together. Nom, nom, nom!

He smiles and looks at me.

Me: So that's our main date this month. We're going to find a recipe, and make dinner together.

Him: Fuck, Ziyanda...

Petty LaBelle is just sitting there, fanning herself. She knows she's a champion when it comes to gifts.

Him: Can I read the others?

Me: Sure.

He looks for February, and then chuckles.

Him: February- Go to the Market Theatre and watch a play together... Preferably a historical play.

He looks at me.

Me: Are you game?

He nods as he looks for March.

Him: March- Movie Date! You get to pick the movie, because you're the star!

He laughs and I join him.

Me: Okay, don't read all of them at once.

Him: Last one?

Me: Okay.

He finds April.

Him: April- Camping. Derek, I hate this shit, but I think it will be a fun experience. If this shit doesn't work out (because I plan on bailing out anyway) we can go bowling or something.

He bursts out laughing and I roll my eyes.

Me: We'll go bowling. I hate camping!

Him: We are definitely camping. Fuck you.

Me: Argh.

He puts everything aside and then pulls me till I'm very close to him.

Him: You are... You're something else...

Me: I know...

He kisses me and I smile.

Me: Happy birthday.

Him: It's a happy day, indeed.

Me: I even forgot that it's New Year.

Him: Happy New Year.

Me: Happyyyy!

We kiss again and reposition.

Me: Now, let me get rid of this erection of yours...

Him: Do best...

It's now around 10am and Derek and I are supposed to go somewhere, but he's busy trying to get us to stay in bed.

Me: Derek, don't test me.

He grunts and finally gets out of bed.

Me: Angazi yini inkinga yakho.

Him: I just want to cuddle with you.

Me: Not now...

We go to the shower, and clean ourselves up... Even there, we have sex, as much as I hate shower sex.

Heyi this one is in heaven. Must be nice.

We eventually finish up and I request an Uber.

Him: I just don't understand why we have to use an Uber when we have a car.

Me: Zip it, Uber driver.

He laughs.

I decide to get Uber Black. Dean gave me his card mos? So why must I be basic and use Uber X? Hai man.

We walk out, and find a Merc waiting for us. Yaaas hunny!

Me: Hmyghad!

Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Hai bhuti, this is a historical moment.

Him: Mxm.

We get in, and off we go.

Derek: Where are we going?

Me: Uzobona.

We're sitting together at the back. He's phone rings and it's Dean. He answers it and puts it on loudspeaker.

Derek: Dean?

Dean: Ya wena njandini.

Derek chuckles.

Dean: You're growing up, huh?

Derek: I'm a man now.

They laugh, as if there's some deeper joke they're referring to. Cute.

Dean: Have a good day. I'll see you tomorrow.

Derek: Sure.

Dean: Are you with Dlams?

Derek: Of course.

Dean: Am I on speaker?

Derek: Yep..

Dean: Ya wena Dlamini.

Me: Ya Langelihle.

Dean: Take care of that fool.

Me: I plan to... Angithi you all decided to make other plans, knowing very well that it's his birthday.

Dean: Hai suka.

Me: Faatsek!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Mxm, I'll take Lwazi away from you, uswabe.

Me: Low blow!

He laughs.

Me: Bye, loser.

Derek: See you tomorrow.

Dean: Bye.

Derek hangs up and looks at me.

Me: I can't believe they have other plans. The nerve!

Derek: I actually don't care... I'm with you, angithi?

Me: I'm also doing you a favour nje... I could be with other important people right now. I don't understand why you had to be born on a public holiday.

He wraps his arm around me and laughs.

We continue chatting until we get to Parkview and he looks at me weirdly.

Him: Where are we going?

Me: The zoo.

He looks at me in shock and then bursts out in laughter.

Him: Are you fucken kidding me?

Me: You've mentioned once that you've never been to the zoo... Fortunately, I listen... So now we're here...

He stares at me, dumbstruck.

Him: Fuck, Ziyanda...

I smile and kiss his cheek.

Me: Let's go see the lions, monkeys, and the rest of your relatives, Mr. Ngidi!

He shakes his head in disbelief and just smiles.

Oh, Star... This is only the beginning...

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After 3 hours, I must admit that I am fed up. I have never been a fan of zoos. Growing up, I was always the girl who misbehaved when we went to school trips. Derek, on the other hand, was beyond ecstatic. It felt like I was with a 6 year old boy. The excitement was overboard, but cute.

We're now heading out.

Me: Are you good?

He nods excitedly.

Him: We're definitely coming back.

Me: I doubt the animals will be different, baby.

He looks at me disapprovingly and I chuckle.

Me: Look at you, being all protective of your relatives.

He spans my ass and I laugh. Once we're out, our car is waiting. I'm busy listening to him tell me all about the animals we saw. Well, I'm pretending to listen...

I take my phone and check my messages. I'm glad that everything is on track. I'm an excellent planner, hey. There's nothing I hate more than unnecessary chaos.

Him: Where are we going now?

Me: Thula.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and reels me in for a kiss.

Him: I don't know what I did to deserve you.

Me: I prayed for you...

He looks at me seriously.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Me: I was tired of going through fucked up relationships. My mom is the one who encouraged me to pray. I just felt uncomfortable at first, asking God for a partner...

He chuckles.

Me: But I guess he has finally answered my prayers. He sent me a star.

He smiles sincerely and I kiss him.

Me: Having a good day?

Him: You have no idea.

We continue kissing until we get to our destination.

Zoo Lake.

Derek: Picnic?

Me: Yep.

He smiles.

Him: And you hate picnics.

Me: Anything for you, Nkanyi.

We walk out, hand in hand... I lead him to where the set up is (thanks to Nomvuyo).

Him: Wow, baby.

It looks amazing, lovely and intimate.

We sit and I insist on dishing up for us.

Him: Who set this up?

Me: A friend of mine.

He nods and smiles. He looks so happy, and that makes me happier.

I give him his food, and we delve in.

Me: So I met up with Niki and her man.

Him: How is he?

Me: He seems cool and chilled.

Him: You like him?

I nod.

Me: He's different. I think he's good.

Him: That's good.

I take out my phone and show him the picture.

Me: Aren't they cute?

Him: Quite. Does Niki like him?

I nod and put my phone away.

Me: They have a good vibe.

Him: Good for them.

I look at him and smile.

Me: I enjoy seeing you so carefree.

Him: I'm like this only when I'm with you.

Me: And that makes me happy.

We share a kiss and continue chatting.

I've been getting him to open up without him even realising. I guess I've learnt a lot from my psychiatrist.

Me: I have another gift...

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Well it's not really from me.

Him: Who's it from?

Me: Lwazi.

He smiles brightly and I giggle as I take it out. I give it to him and he takes it out of the gift back.

He takes out the card first and in true child form, it's decorated with flowers and stars.

Derek: Dear Uncle D, thank you so much for being the best man for my mommy and myself. I love all the things you have bought for me. You are the best, and you treat me like your child. I hope that you enjoy your day. Have a splendid day! From: Lwazi.

He keeps quiet.

He stares at the letter intently.

What's wrong now?

He sighs and then looks at me.

Him: I love this.

I smile.

Him: I didn't know she loved me.

Me: She loves you.

He smiles and reads it again.

Him: I'll support both of you.

I smile.

He then takes out the gift and it's a slab of chocolate.

Derek: Sweet.

Me: Literally.

He chuckles and then I take his gift and put it away.

Me: Here's my gift...

Him: Another one??

Me: Yep.

He laughs in disbelief as I take it out. I hand it to him and he unwraps it.

He smiles.

Him: Cologne?

I nod excitedly.

Me: I'd like this one to be added to your already awesome collection!

He laughs and smells it.

Me: Divine!

Him: I like it.

Me: Well, it doesn't really matter if you like it or not. It's for my pleasure, quite frankly.

Him: Poor me!

I laugh and pull him closer, and he sits in between my legs. He relaxes on me.

This shit was expensive, but worth it. I didn't use Dean's card, unfortunately. All these gifts are from my pocket. Dean's card will be used for trivial things like Uber rides and maybe a major personal shopping spree, you know?

We have one last stop, before we head to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house...

After about 2 hours, we're done...

He insists on packing up... He is such a domestic man. He's definitely perfect for me.

We get in our Uber, and drive off.

I check the time, and it's around 4pm.

We get to Maboneng.

Him: Are we going to my loft?

Me: Not yet. We have one last stop.

He nods excitedly. My Sexy Soul Snatching Star.

I lead him inside Moad (Museum of African Design).

Him: And then?

Me: You'll see...

We head inside, and as soon as he processes everything, he lets go of my hand and exclaims.

Him: Zi!

I smile happily.

One of his favourite photographers is having an exhibition of some sort. This photographer focuses on education. She travels around the world, collects people's stories regarding education, and captures some raw moments.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Him: For fuck's sake!

I giggle.

Him: I love you!

Me: Okay okay, let's get in and see what she has in store for us...

He smiles widely and we walk in further, hand in hand.

As a person who's passionate about education, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed this exhibition.

Derek is on another level ke yena. He even purchased some of her work. Yes, I love this shit, but I wouldn't pay 10k for some photograph that has random school children... But, I guess it's the stories behind the photographs that capture people's hearts...

Derek is now in the bathroom. I walk around, and manage to talk to the photographer. I tell her about Derek, and how invested he is in her work. She's so humble, and lovely. When Derek comes back and sees us, he almost freezes. He is such a schoolboy right now. He gets to us, and they start having a conversation...

I'm happy for him.

At around 5pm, we finish up, and walk out.

He is holding me very tightly right now.

Me: Happy?

Him: I'm speechless.

He kisses me.

Him: Thank you, Ziyanda.

Me: You're more than welcome.

He sighs.

Him: Are we heading to my loft?

Me: Yes, we can walk.

He nods and we begin walking hand in hand.

Him: This has got to be the best day of my life.

I smile.

Eventually, we get to his loft, and we head straight to the bathroom, to freshen up. As much as I tried to avoid having sex, we did, and I am glad because it reignited my energy.

At 7pm, we're heading to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house. I managed to convince him that I needed something from Nomvuyo. He thinks we're going to a restaurant after the quick stop.

I had to stop him from trying to make out with me in the Uber...

We eventually get to Nomvuyo's house, and I am so excited.

I call her as we approach the gate.

Me: Hey Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Are you here?

Me: Yes, I'm here. Can you let us in?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: He doesn't know?

Me: No.

She chuckles.

Me: Okay, bye. See you now now. Hurry up, we have places to be!

Nomvuyo: Cute.

I end the call and look at Derek, who seems unbothered.

Derek: I'm hungry.

Me: Me too.

He strokes my thigh.

Derek: I'm craving you more than anything.

Me: Staap!

We get out of the car, and make our way inside the yard.

I am so excited!

I lead the way to the door, and walk in first.

As soon as he steps in...

Everyone shouts, "Surprise!"

His face?! His fucken face!

Liwa, Nomvuyo, Nyami, Dean, Nolwazi, Zimkitha, Xolani, Lindelwa, Malusi, Joe, Gabi and a few other randoms are there.

They're all smiling.

Derek: What the fuck?!

Zimkitha: Heyiii mind your language!

Everyone laughs as they walk to us and begin to shower him with hugs.

My heart!

He glances at me and I smile.

My Star is happy!

INSERT 73

Everyone is now making their way to the lounge. Derek pulls me aside and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: You...

Me: Me...

He chuckles and kisses my forehead.

Derek: I'm speechless.

I smile and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Derek: Not as much as I love you...

We share a tender kiss.

Someone clears their throat and we stop kissing.

Dean: Ya wena.

Derek grunts and lets go of me.

Dean: Happy birthday.

They share a hug.

Me: Aww!

Dean: I'm glad you're here. Dlamini has been annoying us for the past two days.

Me: Watch it.

Dean wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: You good?

Me: Yep.

He nods and looks at Derek.

Dean: Had a good day?

Derek: Indescribable.

Dean: Hmmmm.

Derek: Hmmmm.

They laugh as they look at me.

Me: Mxm whatever.

We then walk to the lounge and find everyone there, drinking champagne and having finger foods.

Derek: I'm starving!

Zimkitha: Relax, the table will be ready in 10 minutes or so.

He groaned.

Everyone was chatting, and I absolutely loved the vibe.

Zimkitha walks to Derek, Dean and I, and Derek wraps his arms around her shoulders.

Zimkitha: Happy birthday, Nkanyezi.

Derek: Thank you.

Zimkitha: I trust that you had a good day?

Derek: Definitely.

They smile at each other. Zimkitha is giving off very loving vibes right now, so I'll stop judging her (for now).

She then turns and looks at me.

Zimkitha: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello.

Zimkitha: I've been told that you're an excellent planner.

Me: I try...

She smiles and nods.

Zimkitha: Let me go help Vuvu...

Derek lets go of her and she walks away. Why am I suddenly feeling sorry for her?

After a few minutes, we are instructed to come to the table, by Nomvuyo. We all walk to the table and sit. It's a huge round table. I've been told that everyone in this circle believes in having circular tables rather than rectangular ones, because it allows everyone to interact equally, and you get to look at everyone, instead of just the person who is opposite, or next to you...

Derek squeezes me hand and we smile at each other.

Nomvuyo walks in and sits next to me. I also asked her to organise people who would bring our food, and be "waitresses" because I didn't want anyone running around trying to dish up for people and shit. Even though she didn't want to, she eventually agreed...

As we're sitting, the starter's served.

Liwa: Just so everyone knows, this food was prepared by my wife.

Dean: And the mother of my twins...

Malusi: You've told us a million times. We know.

Dean: Look at the wifeless man being bitter...

Everyone in the room laughed. Malusi rolled his eyes.

Malusi: I don't know why I'm friends with you people...

Gabi: How is Nandi, anyway? Have you guys been communicating?

I look at Gabi. She really is beautiful, but obviously my girl Vuvu is there at the top. I'm not one who focuses on people's looks, but it's almost impossible to not acknowledge when someone looks unreal. I'm surrounded by beautiful women and handsome men... The men are not that humble, but they love their women tremendously. It's beautiful to watch.

Malusi: I was with her today.

Gabi: So you guys are spending holidays together?

Malusi nods begrudgingly.

Gabi: Well that's nice.

Liwa: So why isn't she here?

Malusi: She says she'll meet up with Derek separately.

Liwa: Kunzima mos...

Joe: Hey, stop coming for my friend!

Everyone laughs, including Malusi. I still don't know how I feel about him. I just can't get past the fact that he cheated on his wife.

Xolani: How was your trip to the zoo?

I roll my eyes and they laugh.

Derek: It was great.

Nolwazi: So you had never been to the zoo?

Derek shakes his head.

Nolwazi: Aww that's so cute.

Dean: Finally got to meet his relatives.

Everyone laughs, including me, because that's the exact thing I said earlier. Clearly Dean and I are on the same page these days.

After a while, the first course is served.

Nomvuyo: How is that Londiwe woman who shot your cheating friend, JT?

My eyes popped.

Me: What??

Nomvuyo: Heyi Zizi these people are crazy, I tell you.

Me: What happened?

Nomvuyo: The husband was a serial cheater. On their wedding day, the wife held us hostage, tied up hubby and mistress on the bed, shot hubby's leg.

Me: Whooaa!

Zimkitha: Londi was just fed up. JT had been doing too much.

Malusi: That was a dramatic wedding...

I was so shocked, but I knew my girl, Vuvu would update me later.

It's been around three hours, and we've been talking nonstop. These people are really great company. The conversations are childish, mature, crazy and deep at the same time.

Once we're done eating the main course, Liwa stands and we all quieten down.

Liwa: Okay... So this was not part of Ms Dlamini's plan, but we all thought it would be worthwhile to each share how we feel about Derek, seeing as it's his special day...

I smile.

I had planned on having Dean and Xolani say something since they're the closest, but I'm glad that they all want to...

Liwa: So I'll start, because I've always been the leader anyway...

We all chuckle.

Liwa: We all know Derek is the calmer one, out of all of us...

They all agree, and I take a glance at Derek, who looks genuinely happy.

Liwa: But what we can all say is that he is also the smartest, and most patient...

I'm glad I copped the smartest one of the bunch. I can't with a dumb dumb.

Liwa: On this day, we're all thankful that we have you in our lives. You've been through a shitload, but you made it. You're the epitome of resilience and hard work.

Liwa then looks at Derek and smiles.

Liwa: You're like a brother to all of us... To many more years, Nkanyezi...

He raises his glass and we do the same.

Derek: Thanks buddy.

Everyone then glances at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Do I have to?

We laugh and she chuckles. She then clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: I know we've known each other for many years, but I can safely say that every interaction with you leaves me feeling more knowledgeable...

She smiles sweetly.

Nomvuyo: You carry a lot of wisdom for someone your age, and I think it's a trait that only a few have. I admire you greatly, and like Liwa said, you're like a brother to all of us... The last born... Everyone just wants to shower you with love as soon as they get to know you. That's a rare trait, because it means you're a genuine person, and people are drawn to genuineness...

She's so deep! Hmmyghad!

Nomvuyo: I wish you many more years... Happy birthday, Nkanyezi...

Malusi: Well damn...

We all chuckle, but somehow the atmosphere has changed. It's just quiet, and deep.

Nomvuyo: I'm not a woman of many words, but Derek does that to a person... Please allow...

We laugh.

Nomvuyo: Now as you were...

She takes a sip of her water, and we all turn our attention to Malusi.

Malusi: Listen, I'm not into this deep shit, but I'm grateful to have you in my life... in our lives...

Derek nods.

Malusi: I love you.

Derek: I love you too.

Liwa: Maybe that's why you got a divorce. You don't have a way with words.

Everyone laughs and Malusi grunts.

Malusi: I'll get you wena...

Liwa: I kid, I kid, buddy...

We then focus on Gabi.

Gabi: Is it my turn?

She smiles sweetly and looks at Derek.

Gabi: Gosh where do I even begin? You're my favourite person to go shopping with!

Everyone laughs. Gabi is sweet.

Gabi: You just get me. I know we don't know each other that well, but I'm just glad that you were the first person who accepted me into this circle, despite others calling me a gold digger when I first dated Joey...

Zimkitha: Who called you a gold digger?

Gabi: They know themselves...

Zimkitha: Hehe...

Gabi: Anyway, I hope we'll spend more time with each other, you know? Happy birthday!

She raises her glass and we do the same.

We then turn our attention to Joe...

Joe: Happy birthday, buddy. Like Vuvu said, you carry so much wisdom, and you're always willing to humble yourself, just to elevate others. Your humility is astounding... I look forward to many years with you in our lives...

I am feeling so emotional. Derek is really loved by these people.

Xolani: My brother, and best friend. Only you and God know what you've been through, honestly. I'm just happy that I get to be here, and call you my brother. You've provided support for me when I was confused as fuck about my sexuality, worried about what people will think. You always encourage me to live in my truth, and not stress about others. Thank you for constantly checking up on me, and making sure that I am comfortable in my truth... We've been through some crazy shit, but we're both here now...

Derek stood up and walked to Xolani. They then shared a hug. I feel like everyone knows about these dark times, because now everyone is mellow and emotional...

Derek comes back and sits.

There is silence for a while.

Dean clears his throat and we all look at him.

Dean: I think it's difficult to make sense of our challenges as we go through them... It's only when you've survived that you are able to look back and realize how strong we are...

He sighs.

Dean: I always tell you that your biggest flaw, despite people saying that it's an admirable trait, is being too strong. From my personal experience, and observations throughout my life, there's nothing admirable about being too strong, especially if you don't know when to pause, and allow yourself to go through the emotions that are brewing in you... I think as a family, and friends, we've failed you. You've become everyone's "go to" person for problems, that we haven't invested sufficient time and energy in ensuring that you are supported... As a person who is close to you, I don't want you to be strong around me; I want you to be vulnerable...

I glanced at Zimkitha and she was wiping her tears. I completely agree with Dean, and I think it's what I have been battling with when it comes to Derek. He is so used to being the tough guy who comes through for everyone else, that he doesn't take care of himself...

Dean: Anyway, I think it's time we all reflect here... Are we always seeking support from others, yet we don't give out the same support? Are we not being selfish?

There is silence.

Dean: I appreciate every single person here, and I sincerely want us to grow stronger. This can only happen if every person feels valued...

He sighs and then looks at Derek softly.

Dean: I'm not much of a talker, nor am I in touch with my emotions and shit... But I love and appreciate you... We all do...

Derek nods.

Dean: So like Joe said, may we grow and spend more time together...

We all raise our glasses.

Zimkitha: I don't think I have it in me to say something... I'm too emotional.

Nomvuyo: Should I get you more water?

Zimkitha: I'm okay, baby.

She sighs and then looks at everyone.

Zimkitha: More than anything, these birthdays just remind me how old I am!

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: But you look 30!

Zimkitha chuckles and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: Thanks, Gabi... And for your information, no one thought you were a gold digger. We just didn't understand why you two rushed to get married.

Gabi giggles.

Zimkitha: And if you ask anyone who knows me, they'll tell you that I'm the last person to judge...

Liwa: She has wrecked many hearts.

Everyone laughs except me.

Say what now?

Dean: She is definitely the last person to judge...

Gabi laughs.

Gabi: Clearly you and I have to have lunch together, Zimi.

Zimkitha: I am more than willing to share my experiences...

Liwa: And you sure have a lot of experiences...

Nomvuyo: Hey! Don't come for my Zimi!

They laugh.

I think I might need that lunch date as well. There's something about Zimkitha...

Zimkitha: Anyway, I feel blessed to have each and every one of you in my life. I didn't get to this point easily... I had to make a lot of sacrifices... But I am blessed, regardless.

She looks at Derek, with tears in her eyes.

Zimkitha: I love you so much, Nkanyezi... Don't ever forget that...

She sighs and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I'll just leave it at that...

Derek stands and they share a hug...

Cute.

He sits down again and squeezes my hand. At this point, I just want to be alone with him. I miss him. Is that weird?

When I look around the table, I am shocked to find everyone staring at me.

Haibo and then?

Liwa: Ms Dlamini...

I sigh.

Are they really expecting me to say something? Now? I'm so tired though!

I clear my throat and look at Derek. He's smiling.

Me: Uhm...

I sigh.

Me: I'm also not good with words...

Dean: Bullshit.

I grunt and take a deep breath.

There's silence for a while.

Me: I don't think I'll ever find ways to describe or explain how I feel when I'm with you...

I try my best not to break down.

Me: You love so openly and wholeheartedly, and I am so grateful that I get to be on the receiving end of such a true and raw kind of love.

I sigh.

Me: The memories we've shared so far have opened me to the point of no return. Every day, I aim to love you just as much as you love me. I aim to not just tell you I love you, but show you as well. Thank you for being patient with me, and showing me the true healing power of love.

I smile.

Me: I'm glad that you went through all the things you went through, because those experiences shaped you, and have made you my Star. I love you, and I wish you many more years... Happy birthday, Nkanyi.

He pulls me and we share a hug. I shed a couple of tears.

Derek: I love you more.

He kisses me, and I almost get lost in that kiss, but remember that we're not alone.

Liwa: Deep stuff...

Out of nowhere, everyone stands, and they shares hugs.

These people are so strange. It's like there's an unspoken language that they communicate in.

Nomvuyo: You're so sweet sometimes.

Me: You too.

We chuckle and share a hug.

After a while, we all go to the lounge, and find stacks upon stacks of gifts.

How I wish I was Derek right now. Yhu.

We're now in his apartment, cuddling in bed...

I'm exhausted.

Derek: Are you falling asleep?

Me: Mmm.

He kisses my forehead and I smile.

Me: Had a good day?

Him: I love you.

Me: Love you too.

Him: You're the best.

I giggle sleepily.

Me: I'll give you the rest of your gifts tomorrow.

Him: There's still more?

Me: Yep.

I feel him smile.

Me: One more thing...

Him: What?

I open my eyes and look at him sleepily.

Me: I spoke to my parents...

Him: About?

I keep quiet and he nudges me.

Me: I'm going to move in with you...

I swear the world may have stopped moving...

Him: WHAT?!

Me: Can I sleep now?

Him: Ziyanda!

Me: Hmm?

I was too tired to pay attention to him. I felt myself doze off into a very peaceful sleep.

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The following day, I wake up at around 10am- that's how tired I was...

Derek is nowhere to be found. I make my way to the bathroom to clean myself up and then make the bed.

Derek: So you walk around naked when I'm not around?

I squeal as I take a gown and cover myself. He shakes his head and smiles.

Derek: You do know that we have sex all the time, and I know your body, right?

Me: Whatever.

He chuckles and walks to me.

Derek: Slept well?

Me: Like a baby.

He wraps his arm around my waist and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: I couldn't sleep at all.

Me: Really?

He nods and smiles widely.

Me: I wonder why.

He squeezes me and I giggle.

Me: I don't remember what happened last night. I was that exhausted.

Him: Hey!

I continue to giggle and he sulks.

Me: What did I say?

Him: You're moving in with me.

Me: Hmm.

He looks at me intently, and I can just see the joy he's feeling.

Me: My mom didn't even hesitate to agree.

Him: Are you serious?

Me: Yep. She says it's the perfect way to get to know each other.

He nods and smiles.

Me: My dad, on the other hand, is a bit sceptical.

Him: Did he say why?

Me: He's a bit traditional, so I think the thought of living together before marriage, is a bit daunting.

Him: I understand...

Me: But he's supportive...

He nods slowly and we sit down.

Me: But you do realise that it's not going to be peaches and cream all the time, right?

Him: Definitely, but it's worth it...

I nod.

Him: I want us to work out, and I know we will.

I smile.

Me: You are so corny.

I kiss him.

Him: Breakfast is ready...

Me: Perfect, let me get dressed.

Him: Let me help you...

I roll my eyes as he stands and pulls me up...

It's Wednesday, two days since Derek's birthday. As much as he was sulking, I insisted on going home and spending time with my parents and Lwazi.

My mom has already started packing my things. All of this feels rushed, but right. I haven't had time to let it sink in, but it is what it is. I genuinely want to move in with this one.

Mom: So the plan is to move in next week?

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Mom: I think it's a great idea, to be honest. At least you'll know him before you two decide to get married.

Me: Mmm.

Mom: Don't over-analyse it, baby. I personally trust Derek.

Me: Hmkay.

Mom: And I think we should meet his parents, you know?

Me: The mom resents me.

Mom: Really??

Me: Yep.

I decide not to tell her about the slap situation, because I know she would run to wherever Khwezi is, and rearrange her.

Mom: Haike, Derek will have to intervene and sort that out.

Me: I don't even have the energy for that situation. That woman is deranged.

She laughs.

Mom: Childish woman. I'll deal with her if things get out of hand.

Me: I know you will...

We both laugh and I watch as she continues packing.

Mom: So when are you going to start learning how to cook?

Me: I can cook hawu.

Mom: Hmm okay ke sisi.

We continue chatting...

The following day, Derek, being the person that he is, pitched out of nowhere.

I was inside the house, watching TV, while my mom was busy doing the laundry outside.

Mom: Baby, Derek is here!

Me: Tell him to go back to wherever he comes from!

Mom: Hai suka. Come here.

I walk to the kitchen, and I'm completely shocked to see plastics filled with groceries.

Me: And then what?

He looks at me innocently and smiles.

Mom: Heyi we are being spoiled here.

Me: Derek?

Derek: I thought I should get you a few things...

Me: A few?

I look at all these plastics and he shrugs.

Mom: Hai suka wena Ziyanda. Stop being ungrateful!

She takes her phone and dials my dad's number.

Mom: Heyi phela you will not believe this... Derek bought groceries... Yebo...

She laughs.

Mom: Hmkay I will tell him... Bye, see you soon...

She hangs up and looks at Derek happily.

Mom: He says this must be a consistent gesture, because he doesn't appreciate inconsistency.

They both laugh and I'm just out here confused and annoyed. Why is he doing this? Argh.

I walk back to the lounge and continue watching TV. Lwazi is outside playing with her friends, and my dad is spending time with his side of the family...

Derek follows me and sits next to me. He looks so chilled, and that annoys me even more.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Hello.

He keeps quiet and I focus on the TV.

My mom walks to the lounge.

Mom: I'll be back a bit later. I'm meeting up noVuyi...

Me: Okay.

Mom: And don't be childish about this. Don't bore us.

She then looks at Derek and smiles.

Mom: Thank you very much for your kind gesture, Nkanyezi. I'll see you soon, right?

Derek: Definitely, and you're welcome.

Mom: Bye.

She walks out and closes the door.

We both focus on the TV for a while. Eventually, he turns to look at me.

Derek: How are you?

I sigh.

Me: I'm good, and you?

He sighs.

Him: I miss you.

Me: Hmm.

Him: There's nothing wrong with what I've just did.

Me: I don't even have the energy to be angry.

He smiles and pulls me closer to him so we can kiss.

Him: Missed you.

Me: Me too.

Him: You're mean.

Me: Silly old me?

He kisses me.

Me: Sorry, I'm just grumpy.

He kisses me again and I smile.

Me: Let's go out for lunch.

Him: Perfect.

Me: Let me get ready...

Him: Where's Lwazi?

Me: Playing with her friends... She'll come back later.

Him: I miss her.

Me: She's been asking me about you.

Him: We should have a play date.

Me: You do know that she is 11 years old, right?

Him: Don't rain on my parade.

I chuckle and stand.

Me: Will be back now now.

I walk to the bedroom, and get dressed properly. As I finish up, he walks in and by the looks of it; we might just have sex...

We're now at Nex Door, waiting for our order

Me: So Nikki and I always stop drinking alcohol for the first two months of the year.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What?

Him: You? No alcohol? What?

I laugh.

Me: We've been doing it for three years now. We obviously start on the 2nd, because the 1st is always spent drunk.

Him: You weren't that drunk on my birthday.

Me: Because I spent it with your old friends. Nikki and I usually spend NYE in pyjamas, drinking and stuffing our faces.

Him: So am I supposed to hold you accountable?

Me: No need to. I know how to control myself. Alcohol is not an addiction of mine...

Him: Hmm.

Me: Anyway, Nikki wants us to have a double date.

Him: With her boyfriend?

I nod.

Him: Hmkay.

Me: I think you'll like him. You two have similar personalities.

Him: You've met him once.

Me: So?

He shakes his head and chuckles.

Me: So, I'll let her know that you're up for it.

Our food finally comes and we start eating.

Him: So I've organized this whole moving process...

Me: Thank God. I don't think I want to lift a finger.

Him: Lazy bone.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's an unrecognized number.

Me: Excuse me...

He nods and I answer.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

Person: Hi, dear, you're speaking to Zimkitha.

Me: Oh.

Say what now?

Zimkitha: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Zimkitha: I'm good, love.

I keep quiet.

Universe, what does she want from me?

Zimkitha: I would like to extend an invitation for lunch, tomorrow.

Me: Uhm...

Zimkitha: Derek told me that you're planning on moving together... I'm very happy for you two.

Me: Uhm... Okay...

Zimkitha: Is that a yes?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Would you like me to send a driver for you?

Me: No, thanks. Just send me the location.

Zimkitha: Alright then... And don't come with Derek, please.

Whoa does she want to secretly chop me and bury me somewhere?

Zimkitha: Bye, dear.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek weirdly.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Zimkitha has invited me for lunch.

Derek: Oh...

He carries on eating as if he doesn't really care.

Me: You knew?

Derek: She asked for my permission.

Me: Oh... And you don't have a problem with that?

He shakes his head and smiles.

Derek: She wants to know you better...

Me: Hmkay.

I focus on my food.

I wonder what Zimkitha wants from me...

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Niki is finally back from her baecation and I'm happy for her. This guy seems good and chilled... Just what my girl needs.

I'm meeting up with her later, and we're meeting up with Jeff and Ziggy, our good ol' mates. They are a story for another day...

My mom on the other hand, is still busy packing. To me, it seems like she is excited ngathi she has always wanted to get rid of me. My dad, on the other hand, is all sad and shit. He keeps saying that the house will be too quiet without me.

At around 1pm, I made my way out of the house, to Zimkitha's house. I've been told that it's a mansion that Zimkitha refuses to let go. It's a Mzinyathi gem.

My Uber ride is expensive as hell. Maybe I should have taken Zimkitha's offer...

Anyway, as I get out of the car, the gate opens, and Nyami runs to me.

Nyami: Auntie Zizi!

Me: Hey, baby!

She wraps her arms around me and we walk in. Now, Nyami loves her parents, but she is obsessed with her Granny Zimi. They're inseparable.

Nyami: I'm so glad you're here. Zimi even cooked for you.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Well, now I just wish I had brought Lwazi with. I concluded a while back that they would get along if they met noNyami.

Anyway, I am beyond stunned by this house or "mansion" rather.

Me: This house is huge.

She giggles.

Nyami: Vuvu and Gog'Zodwa used to live in that cottage over there.

She points at a guesthouse at a distance... It's probably the size of my house...

We get to the door and Nyami leads me in.

I don't know how I feel right now. I think I'm numb. Zimkitha freaks me out a bit, because she's intimidating, yet she has a loving aura at the same time.

As we get in the kitchen, we find Zimkitha there. She smiles as soon as she sees us.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda!

Me: Hey...

She opens up her arms and we share a hug. She smells really good... Like generational wealth...

Zimkitha: How are you? You look great.

Me: Thank you. I'm well, and you?

Zimkitha: I'm well...

Nyami: I'll be in my room, Zimi.

Zimkitha: Okay, baby.

Nyami runs off, and I am left with Zimkitha all by myself. Save me, Universe!

Zimkitha: Would you like something to drink?

Me: Water is fine.

Zimkitha: No champagne?

Me: I'm not really a fan of champagne.

Her: Really?

I shake my head.

Her: I have a wine cellar, if you're a wine enthusiast.

"Wine enthusiast" hehe thatha English...

Me: No, thank you. Water will do.

She nods and gets some bottled water from the humongous fridge.

Me: Beautiful house.

Her: Oh, this little shack of mine?

She laughs and I join her.

Her: My grandparents worked tirelessly to build this...

Me: Do you live here by yourself?

Her: Yes, unfortunately.

Me: Geesh, and the cleaning?

She chuckles.

Her: Well... I have helpers...

Me: Hmm.

Her: I've noticed that you and Vuvu get along...

Me: Yes, we do.

She smiles and nods.

Her: She is not a people's person, so I'm always happy to see her gravitate towards someone.

I smile.

Her: And I'm sure she has told you our family history.

I try to keep a straight face and she laughs.

Her: Oh, sweetie, the Mzinyathi history is fucked up. No need to hide your shock and horror...

I sigh and she continues laughing.

Her: Let's go to the lounge...

I follow her and we sit opposite each other.

Her: The food will be ready soon.

I nod.

Her: So what made you agree to move in with Derek?

Me: It just feels right.

She nods slowly and looks at me softly.

Her: Derek is really loveable, isn't he?

Me: Too much.

She chuckles and takes a sip of her whiskey... Yes, whiskey...

Me: Why do you live by yourself?

She raises an eyebrow and takes another sip of her drink.

Her: Well, firstly, I'm recently divorced...

Me: Divorced?

She nods.

Her: My marriage was arranged, but I grew to love that poor man.

Me: Poor?

She giggles.

Her: Poor in every sense of the word.

Me: Ouch.

Her: Unfortunately, he was also in love with Nomvuyo's real mom...Technically, I stole him from her.

Me: She's still alive?

Her: Yep. She still hates me. She just fails to understand that the whole thing was arranged.

Me: So your ex-husband is Nomvuyo's real father?

She nods and smiles sweetly.

Wooah! I feel like my brain is going through the most right now.

Her: I have a very rich history, Ziyanda. Liwa always says I'm a walking textbook.

I keep quiet.

Her: Anyway, to answer your question fully, I live alone because I'm divorced, and my kids are all grown...

Me: How many kids do you have?

She pouts a bit and sighs.

Her: Two.

Me: Two? I only know Liwa.

Her: Liwa has a twin.

Me: Really?

I don't remember if I was told this before, but I'm a bit surprised.

Her: Her name is Princess.

I nod.

Her: She is in the UK.

Me: That's nice.

Her: Definitely. She is not the nicest person though...

Me: Really?

She chuckles.

Her: Liwa is the kindest.

Me: He is.

Her: But he has a really cold side as well...

Me: I've noticed that that's a common trait with all of them.

She raises an eyebrow.

Her: All of them?

Me: Yeah, Liwa, Dean, and Derek.

She sighs and nods.

Her: They're all very close, and they've somehow become the same. It's creepy, isn't it?

Me: Very creepy, but I understand. They hang out with each other all the time, so their habits probably rubbed off on all of them.

Her: They've always been in each other's lives.

She looks at me intently, and I can feel myself squirm uncomfortably. See what I mean with Zimkitha? One minute, she's all cute and lovey dovey, then the next minute, she's all intense and shit.

Her: I've watched all of them grow, and I am very proud of the men they've become.

Me: You were in all of their lives?

She nods.

She takes a sip of her whiskey and looks at me sweetly.

My heart rate is on another level.

Me: I admire the love they share. It's very deep.

Her: They all have one thing in common...

She stares at me.

Her: And I have a feeling you know...

I want to stand and run, but my body is failing me.

Her: They're all my sons...

Really, Universe?!

At this point in time, I'm dumbstruck.

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I look at her.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda?

She looks at me softly as she stands and sits next to me.

Me: What?

She continues to look at me softly.

Me: What do you mean they're your sons?

She keeps quiet.

I stand and look down at her.

Me: I need the bathroom.

She tells me where to go and I make my way there. I'm too calm for my liking right now. I get to the bathroom, and sit there for a while. Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek.

I answer without any hesitation.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Hi, baby. How's it going? I miss you.

I smile.

Me: I'm very overwhelmed by this gigantic house.

He chuckles and I feel myself relax. He's my happy place, this one.

Him: And how's Zimkitha? She hasn't killed you?

Me: Not yet, but I'm anticipating it.

He laughs and I join him.

Him: Okay then... I'll know where to find you once you disappear.

Me: Bye.

Him: Love you.

Me: Right back at ya.

I end the call and sigh. Once I've gathered my thoughts, I walk back to the lounge. Where is she?

Zimkitha: I'm here!

I follow her voice and it leads me to a room with a large circular table. I did mention that they only use circular tables to eat, right?

She's already sitting down... I sit next to her and a young woman serves us our food.

Zimkitha: Are you okay?

Me: I'm fine.

I stare at her and she smiles.

Me: What do you mean they're your sons?

Her: Everyone knows they're my sons...

I look at her in confusion.

Her: Liwa may be my only biological son, but I've always treated them the same.

She smiles sweetly.

Her: They've been in each other's lives forever... They're like brothers.

I sigh.

Her: And I'm sure Lindelwa would also say the same thing... They're all her sons...

Me: What about Khwezi?

She tightens her jaw, but remains smiling.

Her: What about her?

Me: Would she also say Dean and Liwa are her sons?

She sighs.

Her: Khwezi is different.

Me: How so?

Her: Well, she is not as invested in family as the rest of us.

Me: Really? Then why would she adopt Derek and Xolani?

She is quiet for a few seconds.

Her: Her husband is the one who pushed for the adoption, because she can't conceive.

Me: She can't conceive?

She shakes her head lightly.

I keep quiet. I need to process this information. What she is saying makes a bit of sense.

But then again, Zimkitha confuses the shit out of me.

Me: Has she always been this mean?

She laughs sweetly.

Her: Khwezi is a typical housewife...

I don't say anything.

Her: Is she mean to you?

Me: She slapped me.

Her jaw drops and she looks at me in shock.

Her: What??

I shrug.

Me: I couldn't be bothered, honestly. I also don't like her.

Her: She slapped you??

I nod and she hisses as she takes a sip of her whiskey.

Her: She is quite annoying.

I can't help but chuckle.

Me: So you don't like her?

She shakes her head.

Her: I don't get along with people who lack substance.

Me: Well damn...

She smiles and we begin to eat.

Her: Something tells me you have a lot of substance...

Me: Boring old me?

She laughs.

Her: Tell me about your family.

Me: There isn't much to tell, really...

Her: Tell me.

I sigh as I begin telling her about my mom and dad.

After a while, once I'm done, she smiles.

Her: You sound like you've had a love-filled life.

Me: Definitely.

Her: That's amazing. I could always tell that you come from a stable family...

Me: Uhm okay...

Her: So according to Derek, I freak you out?

Really, Derek? How you gonna expose our gossip like that?

Me: I can't seem to figure you out.

Her: Really?

I nod.

Her: Well, I'm a mystery to myself as well...

I chuckle.

Her: I've just been through a lot, that's all. Above all, I'm a protective mother...

Me: I've noticed.

Her: And because of that, I tend to come across as hardcore, when in fact, I just overly love.

Me: Hmm.

We focus on our food for a while.

Me: So do you have a favourite son?

She giggles and sighs.

Her: I love them for different reasons... Liwa is my go to person for anything. Out of everyone in my life, he genuinely gets me, and he never judges me.

Me: That's sweet.

Her: He always has my back, ever since he was young...

I nod.

Her: And he knows everything about me.

Me: Everything?

Her: Let's say 95%...

Me: Hmm.

She smiles.

Her: Dean, on the other hand, is my business confidant. I learn a lot from him... I love his toughness. He just doesn't give a shit what anyone has to say about him. He does whatever he wants, and he has taught me to do the same- shamelessly.

I nod. I have to say I also admire Dean for that. He does his own thing...

Her: Xolani is just amazing. I always knew he was gay, and he was always free around me- even before he came out.

Me: I love him.

Her: He's just stunning!

We both chuckle.

Her: And then there's Nkanyezi...

I feel myself smile. Argh I miss him.

Her: I think you understand why I love him...

I nod.

Her: I don't know where he gets all the love he gives. It's mind-blowing.

She smiles.

Her: I just want to see him happy. He has been through so much.

Me: I want him to open up to me.

She looks at me sympathetically.

Her: Give him time.

Me: Okay.

Her: He loves you, I know... He'll open up...

Me: Okay.

Her: So do you understand what I mean by them being my sons? I would die for every single one of them.

I smile. I think I'm less judgemental towards her now. She's just a loving person.

Her: And of course Nomvuyo is part of the equation.

Me: Of course.

She laughs quietly.

Her: We have a very strange dynamic, but it works for us.

I nod lightly.

Her: Anyway, enough about the deep stuff. How amazing was his birthday?

Me: Amazing and exhausting.

Her: He can't stop talking about it.

I smile.

Her: Thank you for making it memorable.

Me: You're welcome. I'm glad he enjoyed it.

After a while, we finish up eating, and we're served dessert.

Overall, that lunch was good. I think I got to know Zimkitha on a deeper level, and understand why she behaves the way she does. I still have my suspicions about her, but I think I'll just mind my own business...

I'm now meeting with Niki for a quick catch-up session...

I give her a squeeze and we make our way to Cocobel in Maboneng for milkshakes.

Me: So how does it feel to be a Love Lives Here resident?

She laughs.

Niki: Love doesn't live here as yet... I'm taking it slow.

Me: I like him though.

Her: That makes two of us.

I smile.

Her: He opened up to me yazi...

Me: Really?

She sighs heavily and nods.

Me: Yini?

Her: He was married twice...

Me: Huh??

Her: Ya... He's still waiting for confirmation of his second divorce.

Me: Geesh.

She sighs.

Her: Yep... I don't know how I feel about all of that.

Me: Yoh...

Her: But I'm not one to judge... It's just too much, you know?

I nod.

Her: He's just been through so much... I feel bad for him.

Me: I guess we all have our bullshit...

Her: Definitely. I want to be with him.

Me: Then be with him.

She sighs and nods.

Her: He's just very broken...

Me: I doubt he surpasses Sexy Beast.

We both laugh.

Her: You must give me tips phela.

Me: I've ghat you.

We continue to chat.

Me: Oh, and Nkanyi agreed to a double date... Set it up.

Her: Yay!

Just then, her phone rings and she answers it.

Niki: We're at Cocobel... Hai suka...

She laughs and ends the call.

Me: Jeff?

She nods.

Just then, a car pulls up by our table...

Jeff and Ziggy walk out and I exclaim.

Me: My people!

They get to us and I give them big hugs. Woo but I missed Ziggy. We've always had a strangely close relationship. We met them at a house party back in varsity (they weren't students though) and we've been cool ever since. Ziggy is my person though...

Niki: Gosh I forgot about Zi Squared...

Me: Don't be jealous!

Ziggy: You have really abandoned us, you fool.

Me: Dude, I have a boyfriend now. Leave me alone.

Jeff: Hehe Niki tells us you're fucking your boss.

Me: Mxm.

They join us and I force them to order milkshakes as well.

Ziggy asks them to add some alcohol...

Me: How's Luu?

Jeff grunts and I chuckle. Luyanda and Jeff are beyond inseparable. They're high-key addicted to each other, and it's a bit toxic as well.

Jeff: The baby has calmed her a bit.

Ziggy: But she's still a bitch.

Niki and I laugh.

Jeff: Hey! I'll fuck all of you up!

We continue laughing at him.

Jeff: I think you guys should reach out to her.

Niki: No way!

Jeff sulks.

Me: I'm good, fam. Your girlfriend still has a lot of growing up to do...

Jeff: Mxm.

Ziggy: So wena how's your love life?

Me: Fantastic. Being loved is nice, guys.

Jeff: Preach.

Ziggy: Mxm.

Me: Weeh you're still out and about?

Jeff: Nope, he has fallen in love with a rebel.

I shake my head disapprovingly.

Me: What do I always say to you? You need a solid woman... Not a childish person.

Ziggy: I love living in the fast lane.

Jeff: And Ivy sure as hell offers that shit.

I blink a couple of times.

Me: Say what now?

They all look at me weirdly.

Me: Ivy??

Ziggy: Yep, lovely name, huh?

Me: Ivy Dumakude?

Ziggy smiles.

Me: What the hell??

Gosh, I am actually fed up. Can the world get any smaller?

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Niki: And then wena?

I roll my eyes.

Me: Ivy is that annoying kid I told you about.

Ziggy: Annoying? Uyanya wena!

Me: Argh how did you even meet? What a disgusting combination!

Ziggy: We met at a house party... We clicked...

Me: Mxm.

Jeff: She also annoys me. Childish.

Me: I'm glad we're on the same page.

Jeff: How do you know her?

Me: Through mutual relations...

I grunt.

Me: Anyway, how's fatherhood, friend?

Jeff: I'm trying by all means to adjust to this shit. It's not easy.

I nod.

Jeff: And Luyanda seems to be going through a lot of emotional shit as well.

Me: Is she still going through a lot with her father?

He nods.

Me: Shame.

He sighs.

Jeff: We'll get through it though...

Me: Shout if you need help.

He nods.

Me: You guys can join our double date?

Jeff: Double date?

Me: Niki is organizing it.

Jeff: That would be perfect for Luu. I think she could use some air.

Ziggy: Can I also come?

Me: Euww, no. We're good.

Ziggy: Mxm rude.

We all laugh at him.

Niki: It seems like your girl is a no-go-zone.

Ziggy: She's amazing. Zi is just a judgemental bitch.

Me: More like a truthful bitch. I speak nothing but the truth.

Ziggy: Mxm.

We continue chatting for a while... Good vibes, man...

After a long time, my phone rings and it's Derek.

Me: Excuse me.

I stand and walk away from the table as I answer.

Me: Nkanyi.

Derek: Can I fetch you?

Me: But what kind of an Uber driver are you? Are you not supposed to wait for me to request first?

He groans and I laugh at him. His separation anxiety is on another level.

Me: You can come.

Derek: I'll see you soon.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and walk back to the table and sit.

Jeff: So, I'm telling Niki that I want to start a business.

Me: Really? That's great.

Niki: As long as it has nothing to do with prostitutes, then I'm behind you all the way.

We all laugh.

Me: So what do you want to do?

Jeff: Open up restaurants...

I nod slowly.

Me: Yazi that's my dream. Imagine all the eating I'd do?

Ziggy: You'll get fatter.

Me: And my man will still love me. Wena? Ivy is going to leave you as soon as she finds another idiot.

Niki: Ohhh!

Jeff: Ziyanda 2... Ziggy 0...

Me: Don't come for me!

Ziggy: I don't know what my baby did to you.

I chuckle and try to hug him but he sulks.

Me: Haike... Anyway, Jeff, I love the idea. Have you completely stopped this escorting business?

He looks at Ziggy and they both nod.

Me: Hehe... If you say so.

Niki: I still can't believe we're friends with you idiots. You're technically doing some illegal shit.

Me: If the police ever approach me, I will deny knowing anything about your shit.

Jeff: That's what you're supposed to do vele.

We continue chatting until I spot Derek walking towards us. He looks so yummy, but I can tell that he is in a sulky mood.

He finally gets to us, and he greets.

Niki: Derek!

She stands and they share a hug.

Derek: How are you, Nikiwe?

Niki: I'm good, and you? Happy belated birthday!

Derek smiles and nods.

Derek: Thank you.

He then looks at Jeff and Ziggy. I can tell that he is trying to figure out what the hell is going on.

Ziggy: What's up, mate?

Derek: Hi.

Jeff: Howzit?

Derek: I'm well.

Aww shame this snob of mine.

He looks at me.

I stand and he instantly wraps one arm around my waist.

Territorial much? If only he knew that he has nothing to worry about here.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hey...

I then look at Jeff and Ziggy.

Me: This is Derek, my boyfriend.

I then look at Derek.

Me: This is Jeff and Ziggy, very good friends of mine.

Derek nods expressionlessly.

Ziggy: Nice to finally meet you, mate.

Derek nods tightly.

Me: Okay then, bye guys.

Ziggy: See you soon?

Me: Definitely.

Ziggy stands and we share a hug.

Me: Jeff? We'll meet up, angithi?

Jeff: Definitely.

Me: Bye.

Niki: See you soon... Bye, Derek.

Derek: Goodbye.

I get my bag and we walk away. He is still holding on to me.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods tightly. I decide not to probe him further. He'll come around...

We get to his loft and I go to the lounge while he goes to the bathroom. My phone rings and it's Niki.

Me: Friend?

Niki: Is he fine? Why was he so cold?

I chuckle.

Me: Ngimazelaphi?

Niki: Haike... bye.

Me: Shap.

Niki: Ziggy doesn't like him.

Me: As if Ziggy's approval controls my intake of oxygen...

She laughs.

Me: Bye, friend.

Niki: Bye!

I end the call and Derek walks back and sits.

Me: Yini manje, Mr. Grumpy?

He looks at me blankly.

Me: You can't possibly be jealous...

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: You can't possibly think I'm that insecure.

Me: Whooa!

Him: I'd like to think that I'm experienced enough to identify a threat when I encounter one.

Me: Heee! Thatha Derek!

His face softens up and I pull him closer to me.

Me: I'm all yours.

Him: Who are those weirdos, anyway?

Me: Very good friends of mine.

He grunts.

Him: You sure know how to pick 'em.

Me: Don't come for me.

He kisses me, and I relax.

Me: My mom has sent me a message telling me that she's done packing my shit.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Him: Are you serious??

Me: Yep. She is so excited. It's obvious that she wants to get rid of me.

Him: Well, you've basically been cock-blocking your parents for 25 years.

Me: Heey!

He laughs and kisses me again.

Him: How was your lunch?

Me: It was weird...

Him: Weird?

Me: Weird, but good.

Him: She's not bad, right?

Me: Not at all.

Him: So we love Zimkitha?

Me: Hmm I still need time to think about it...

He huffs.

Me: Anyway, can we take a long shower, and cuddle? I'm tired.

He nods excitedly as he stands and pulls me up.

Two days later, I'm super excited for our double date!

I am putting a lot of energy in dressing up and looking pretty. Yes, I'm that excited!

It's around 5pm, and I'm at Derek's place. It's so weird how I'm always with Derek... Technically, we've already moved in together. I still want us to discuss how I'm going to contribute to rent and shit. I'm not about to kipita for free...

Anyway, I help Derek get dressed, and I marvel.

Me: You look stunning!

He smiles.

Derek: I feel like you're too excited for this date.

Me: Because duuh!

He chuckles.

Me: Niki and I have always fantasized about having amazing boyfriends, and linking them up. This is a big deal!

He looks at me weirdly and I giggle.

Me: You don't get it...

Him: Clearly.

We finish up and I get a call from Niki telling me that they are on the way.

We get to the car and drive off.

Derek: So you're basically going to force me to be friends with this person?

Me: Yep. I like him.

He glances at me and shakes his head lightly.

Me: He's so calm. Ufana nawe!

Him: I doubt there's another Derek in this world... I'm special, boo.

Me: Boo?

I laugh and he joins.

Me: Ewww don't ever call me that. You're far too sophisticated for such lingo.

Him: Gosh.

I continue laughing as he mocks and imitates me.

Eventually, we get to the restaurant and we are led to our table.

We find Niki and Kwani (yes, I call him that now) sitting already.

Me: Hey, people!

Niki: Heey!

She stands and we share a hug.

I look at Kwani and smile happily. He beee handsome, hunny.

Me: Heeyii!

Kwanele chuckles as he stands and hugs me.

Me: You smell stunning!

Kwanele: Uhm... Thanks?

Niki: She's obsessed with smells.

Derek: Definitely.

Me: Kwanele, this is Derek, my boyfriend.

Derek: Boyfriend? Are we kids?

Me: What am I supposed to say? I'm not used to introducing you to people.

Derek: I'm your man... Your future husband...

Me: My roommate?

We laugh.

Niki: Haiké! We don't have time for your inside jokes. Finish up this introduction phela.

Me: Oh, yes! Kwanele, this is Derek... Derek, this is Kwanele, Niki's boyfriend... Boyfriend?

Kwanele chuckles.

Kwanele: Quite a childish term...

Derek: I'm glad we're on the same page.

They shake hands as they chuckle.

I knew they'd get along. Stunning!

We sit and order.

Me: How was your baecation?

Derek: Bae what?

Me: Stop exposing your age, grandpa.

Derek chuckles.

Me: They went on a vacation.

Derek: Lovely. We should probably do the same.

Me: True... Considering the fact that schools open the week after next.

Kwanele: You also teach, Derek?

Derek shakes his head.

Derek: I'm the head master.

Me: Master...

We both laugh quietly.

Niki rolls her eyes. It's only when I'm around people that I realize that Derek and I always have these random moments when we laugh about dumb things... And Niki is the one who always points it out.

Kwanele: So you two work together?

Me: Yes.

Kwanele: What an interesting dynamic.

Derek: I'm interested to see how things will be, because we only got really close during the holidays.

Kwanele: Hmm... I'm sure you'll expose yourselves...

Derek: I'm planning on resigning anyway...

Kwanele: Future plans?

Derek: Opening my own school.

Kwanele: Great concept... If you need property assistance, hit me up.

Niki: He's a lawyer... Used to specialise in property.

Derek: What changed?

Kwanele: Got boring after a while... I'm into family issues now, so that's what I'm studying.

Derek nods slowly.

Derek: What's your surname?

Kwanele: Buthelezi...

Derek nods and glances at me. I'm smiling. This is just amazing!

After a while, our food finally arrives and we begin eating. The conversation is flowing, kumnandi, you know?

Derek: So you mentioned that you were married...

Kwanele: Twice.

Derek nods.

Kwanele: It's a very complicated story, and I'm only recovering now. It was a bad situation.

Derek: Really?

Kwanele nods lightly.

Kwanele: I messed up badly, and that resulted in my wife moving on with her boss and having two kids with him...

Derek glances at me. He seems interested in Kwanele. I'm glad they're getting along.

Kwanele: The divorce was very messy, but it's over now... I'm just waiting for this second one to be finalised. My second wife is MIA.

This second wife better bring her ass here and sign these papers. Niki can't be cock-blocked by a selfish wife who won't let go.

Anyway, we continue chatting for a while. Good vibes.

Kwanele's phone rings and he sighs.

Kwanele: Please excuse me...

We all nod and he walks away...

Niki is so happy, and I'm happy for her.

She asks to go to the bathroom and disappears as well.

Me: How amazing is he?

Derek drinks his wine and then looks at me coolly.

Me: And I like that you're two are getting along.

Derek: You are clueless, aren't you?

Me: About what?

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: Ah... Ziyanda Dlamini...

He drinks his wine and shakes his head calmly.

I don't know what his problem is. Kwanele is great.

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Derek: I'm finding you very cute right now...

Me: Kanti yini wena?

He chuckles and shakes his head lightly. Shortly after, Kwanele and Niki come back at the same time.

Just then, Derek's phone rings and he excuses himself and walks away.

Niki: So, baby, do you like Derek?

Kwanele: You two are really serious about hooking us up, huh?

Niki and I laugh.

Me: Well, I just think you two are very similar. You're both calm and collected, you know?

Niki: Match made in heaven!

Kwanele chuckles and continues shaking his head lightly. Derek eventually comes back and we finish up our food. I'm glad that the conversation is flowing. I am happy that Derek gets to interact more with my people, because we're always with his people. Lol Kwanele is officially my person now. He and Niki are good together.

It's now around 9pm, and I am exhausted.

Derek: I think we should get going...

I yawn and nod.

Derek: Great meeting you, Kwanele.

Kwanele: Likewise.

They smile at each other and nod.

Derek: Niki, I'll see you around?

Niki: Definitely.

We say our goodbyes and make our way out.

Derek: You seem tired.

Me: I am.

Him: It's all the talking you did tonight.

Me: Zip it, hater.

He laughs as we get in the car and drive off.

The following day, I get a call from Mdu, asking me to come through. I was not in the mood, but when I thought of poor Tholi, I had no choice but to agree. I honestly just want to find out how she is after she was diagnosed with Postpartum Depression.

Derek comes back from the bathroom and I look at him.

Derek: What?

Me: Am I not allowed to take a close look at the person I sleep with?

He chuckles.

I watch as he lotion his body and gets dressed.

Me: So...

He sits next to me and looks at me coolly.

Me: Uhm so... Mdu just called me...

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: No.

Me: No, what?

Him: Stop involving yourself in other people's business.

Me: I'm not!

He shakes his head sternly.

Him: Ziyanda, do you understand that this is bigger than what you think it is? Why hasn't Mdu told his family about this shit?

I keep quiet.

Him: People are going to get hurt by this revelation.

Me: But still...

He looks at me.

Me: Tholi is depressed.

He still doesn't say anything.

Me: I don't have it in me to dismiss people when they need me. I'm not like you.

Him: What you won't do is try to turn this around, just to make yourself feel better.

I sigh.

Me: They need us!

Him: Can you imagine what will happen when these people find out that we were in on this?

Me: I will face those consequences when we get there. What I will not do is shut these people out when they are going through all this bullshit.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'm a helper, I can't help it.

Him: You like taking on projects.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Solving other people's problems fuels you.

I swear the world stops moving for a second.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Part of you is obsessed with helping out other people and solving their problems.

I try to stand and he pulls me down.

Him: Don't go running off, being dramatic. I mean this in a good way. It shows how thoughtful you are.

I sigh.

Him: I just think there has to be a limit. You can't allow yourself to be too consumed with other people's lives...

Me: I can't help it.

Him: I know.

He takes my hand.

Him: And I'm not going to try to change you. I just don't want you to be so involved in other people's drama.

I sigh.

Him: But because I love you so much, I will be here for you... Even if it means I dig us a deeper hole...

Me: We'll just check up on them, and leave. I promise!

He chuckles.

He stands and I watch him finish getting dressed. Once he is done, he looks at me expectantly.

Him: Asambe.

I stand and we make our way out.

We get to the complex, and meet Mdu.

Me: How is she?

Mdu: She's getting better. She's been seeing a psychiatrist, and has the necessary meds.

Me: That's good.

He nods.

We get to their penthouse and find Tholi washing the dishes.

Me: Hey, Tholi.

She looks at me and smiles. She looks much better. Her chubby cheeks are back, and she looks normal again.

Tholi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

We share a brief hug and she looks at me awkwardly.

Tholi: I'm okay, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

She avoids Derek's eyes.

Derek: Hello, Tholi.

Tholi: Hi.

Derek and Mdu walk off to the balcony and I look at Tholi softly. I just want to hold her tight, and assure her that everything will be okay.

Me: How are the babies?

Tholi: They're okay.

Me: Are they still nameless?

She giggles and nods.

Me: Oh my goodness. When are you planning on naming them?

She shrugs.

Okay. She hasn't recovered. I won't discuss the babies. She seems uneasy as soon as I bring them up.

Me: You look good yazi.

Tholi: Don't lie.

I smile genuinely and she smiles back. She then finishes up cleaning and we walk to the lounge and sit down.

Me: Is the treatment helping?

She looks away, clearly embarrassed.

Me: Tholi, did Mdu tell you that I was diagnosed with depression?

She looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Yep.

Tholi: But... You don't seem...

She sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I look normal... I know...

She looks at me softly.

Me: But it took a lot for me to get to where I am right now.

Tholi: Really?

I nod as I begin to tell her what I also went through.

Once I'm done, I'm shocked that both of us are a sobbing mess.

Me: It's not easy...

Tholi: I thought I was crazy.

Me: But, you're not.

She keeps quiet.

Me: Depression is a silent killer. We've always been told that people who suffer mentally are attention seekers and dramatic...

Tholi: I couldn't explain what I was feeling.

Me: Because no one understood?

She nods.

Tholi: No one really paid attention to me. I always had to take care of other people's needs.

I nod. I want her to open up. I want her to trust me. I don't know why, but I genuinely feel like I have a connection with her.

Tholi: My mother died of AIDS and my aunt basically sold me off...

She sighs and wipes her tears.

Tholi: I've been through so much, Ziyanda, and I honestly don't think I have it in me to be happy. I'm scared of being happy.

Me: But Mdu makes you happy.

She smiles and nods.

Tholi: I'm scared I'm going to lose him. Once his family finds out about us, things will change drastically.

Me: Don't worry about all of that. Focus on your emotional and mental progress.

Tholi: It's not easy.

Me: Mdu is willing to fight for you. He will never abandon what you've managed to build together.

Tholi: But I won't be able to live with myself, knowing that I ruined his relationship with his family.

I sigh and nod.

Tholi: I'm very overwhelmed.

Me: Take it one step at a time.

She nods.

Me: From now onwards, you have to focus on getting healed. You won't be able to raise these babies if you're like this.

She keeps quiet.

Me: And I'll also support you. I've been through all of this.

Tholi: Will it get better?

Me: Most definitely.

She sighs heavily.

Just then, Mdu and Derek walk back to the lounge, and Derek sits next to me, while Mdu disappears.

Tholi looks at Derek worriedly.

Tholi: Is he okay?

Derek: Ya, he's going to the bathroom.

She nods and fidgets with her fingers.

Derek: Don't put yourself under too much pressure.

Tholi looks at him.

Derek: You're being too hard on yourself...

She doesn't say anything.

I look at Derek and smile. I'm glad he's not being cold...

Tholi: Would you like something to eat?

Derek: I'm famished.

She looks at me and I nod as well.

Tholi: Okay.

She smiles as she stands and walks to the kitchen.

I look at Derek.

Derek: You're lucky I love you...

I get closer to him and plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: You're the best!

He chuckles and shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Hmm...

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After a long afternoon with Tholi and Mdu, I could tell that Mdu was a bit calmer. This whole situation had obviously taken its toll on him, and he for a while, he had lost his rational self... Tholi, on the other hand, seems more comfortable around me now, and I'm glad. As messed up as this situation is, I really sympathise with her.

Anyway, after saying our goodbyes, Derek and I are heading back to his place.

Derek: Do you mind if I drop you off? Dean wants to see me.

Me: Are you having a boy's night?

Him: You could say that.

Me: Okay. I'll have an early night.

Him: Are you okay with me leaving you alone?

Me: I love you and all, but I think I can survive a few hours without you.

He chuckles and focuses on the road...

Before he left, Derek ensured that I had enough food. Clearly, this boy's night will end with him being drunk. I'm actually glad that he's going out. He and I have been glued together for a while now.

I'm now in the lounge, catching up on Little Women, when I get a call from an unrecognized number.

I answer reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes, who am I speaking to?

Person: Siya.

I legit have to stop myself from laughing. I had completely forgotten about the infamous worm!

Me: Hello, Siyabonga.

Siya: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Him: I'm good. I was just checking up on you... You sort of disappeared.

Me: How sweet.

Him: Still sarcastic, I see.

Me: Hmm... I'm good. Now can I end the call?

He groans.

Him: Apparently you're in a relationship?

Me: Keeping tabs on me, I see...

Him: Word on the street.

Me: Well, please tell the streets to stop keeping up with my irrelevant fat self. Surely there are other important people they can focus on.

He laughs.

Me: Don't call me again, yes?

He grunts.

Me: Bye...

Him: Bye.

I end the call and roll my eyes.

Yazi there's nothing I resent more than these exes. I'm not even going to entertain this shit. He's a non-factor right now, and he disturbed me while I watched one of my fav ratchet reality shows. Nxa.

Afte a while, I'm already snoring on that couch. I don't even remember dozing off.

So...

I'm finally moving out of my parents' house.

I'm legit moving in with my boyfriend.

Lol, who would have thought?

Derek organized for my things to be moved, so thankfully, I didn't have to lift a finger. My mom is too excited for my liking. She just wants to get rid of me ASAP.

We're in the lounge, and my dad is all sad.

Me: It's not like I'm leaving the country, you know?

Dad: I'm not used to any of this. I don't think it's a good idea.

Mom: Things are done differently now. She must get to know Derek properly before they get married.

Me: Wooah! Who said anything about marriage?

I'm low-key nervous about this move, but I'm also at peace with it.

Dad: It will take time to convince me.

Mom: You'll be fine...

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It has to be Derek, because my dad insisted on having a chat with him. As he walks in the lounge, he looks at me and smiles, and then greets my parents.

Mom: Hi, dear.

My dad nods.

Derek then sits down and I walk out.

I make my way out of the yard and find Lwazi playing with her friends.

Me: Lwazi.

She runs to me and I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: I feel like having some Tropika... Let's go get some.

She gets her shoes and we begin walking.

Me: Are you sure that you're okay with me moving out?

She nods.

Lwazi: It's not like I'm going back to my parents' house.

I nod.

Lwazi: Stop worrying about me, I'll be fine here.

Me: But you know that I'll still see you, angithi?

She nods and smiles.

Lwazi: I hope you have lots of fun with Uncle Derek.

I chuckle.

Me: We'll have lots of fun, sweetie.

We get to the shop and buy some Tropika. We then make our way back to the house. I'm glad she's taking this so maturely. I guess my parents' love is sufficient.

Once we get to the house, Derek is walking out.

Me: Done?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yoh.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll wait for you in the car.

I nod.

Derek: See you around, Lwazi?

Lwazi: Yes!

They share a hug and I walk in the house.

Mom: Bye bye ke sisi.

Me: So, I'll see you around?

We all chuckle and shake our heads in unison. This feels a bit weird.

Dad: Derek has somehow eased my stress.

Me: Really?

He nods and chuckles.

Me: Hmkay then. Nisale kahle.

Mom: Have you spoken to Lwazi?

Me: Yep.

I hug them and leave. I squeeze Lwazi and then make my way to the car. I'm actually quite touched now. This has been my quiet and safe space for 25 years. Now I'm leaving? Lord, it better be worth it, otherwise I'll come back running.

Derek: Ready?

Me: I guess.

Derek: We're still in South Africa. No worries.

Me: Whatever.

He takes my hand and kisses it.

Derek: I appreciate this.

Me: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

He starts the car and drives off.

Me: I'm so sad...

Derek: You'll be fine...

We drive in silence, while I take a nap.

Once we get to Randburg, we make our way to his place. As we're walking, he wraps his arms around my shoulders and makes me stop.

Derek: Still sad?

Me: Kinda.

Derek: I feel bad.

Me: I'll be fine. I just need to sleep it off.

Derek: You want to sleep?

I nod and his face changes. I can't seem to read it, nor do I have the energy to.

Derek: Uhm... Okay.

He takes his phone and begins typing.

We starting walking, and as soon as we get to the door, and I open it, I hear people yell, "Welcome to your new home!"

It takes me a minute to register what is going on.

Me: What the hell?

I look at Derek, and he looks nervous, probably waiting for my reaction.

Zimkitha, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Nyami, Dean, Nolwazi, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Xolani are there.

Malusi: Is she okay? She looks frazzled.

Dean walks to me and pats my shoulders.

Dean: Ms Dlamz.

I snap out of it.

Nomvuyo: Surprise!

She walks to me and laughs. She gives me a hug and I sigh. I'm so overwhelmed right now.

Nomvuyo: How are you? You look sad.

Me: I'm just tired.

I look at everyone and smile.

Me: Hey, everyone.

Zimkitha is smiling very warmly.

Gabi: So you guys are moving in? That's perfect!

I look at her and she walks to me with a glass of champagne.

Me: No, thank you.

Gabi: Champagne solves everything, babe.

She smiles sweetly.

Me: Sabbatical.

Nomvuyo takes my hand and leads me to the table filled with food.

Nomvuyo: You're probably hungry. I know I am...

She winks at me and I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: You're not in a people mood, huh?

Me: I mean, this is cute.

She dishes up for both of us.

Me: Let me go greet them, before they think I'm rude.

Nomvuyo: Hmkay.

I walk away and go to everyone. They're chatting up a storm, as usual.

Zimkitha: Hey, dear.

Me: Hi.

We share a hug.

Zimkitha: We're excited for both of you.

Me: Thank you.

She nods and takes a sip of her whiskey.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Liwa: How are your parents?

Me: My mom seems very excited that I'm leaving.

Liwa: 25 years is a long time.

Zimkitha: Haibo, you should be the last person to say anything. You've been attached to me since birth.

Liwa: Oh, please, woman... We can't live without each other, you and me...

They look at each other and chuckle. They're cute.

I then walk to Dean and Nolwazi. They're busy sharing their usual lovey dovey moments.

Me: Hey, lovebirds.

Nolwazi: Hey, beautiful!

She gives me a warm hug.

Nolwazi: I guess you've finally joined the vat en sit squad.

We laugh.

Me: Yeah, I guess.

Nolwazi: Don't worry about it. You'll learn how to live together.

Me: Have you guys figured it out?

Nolwazi: Dean is predictable, so I'm okay.

Dean: Wow, I won't stand here and listen to such disrespect.

Nolwazi chuckles and kisses him before he walks away.

Nolwazi and I continue chatting for a while. I really admire this one. She's so confident and chilled. I listen to her tell me all about her megabytes...

After a while, I find my way to Dean, and he's with Derek.

Dean: Derek tells me you were in a foul mood?

Me: Not necessarily foul...

Dean: Are you okay now?

I nod.

Dean: Good.

I then look at Derek.

Me: I'm fine, Nkanyezi.

Dean chuckles.

Derek then plants a kiss on my cheek and excuses himself.

Dean: He worries a lot about you. A lot.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: I was just sad about leaving my parents.

Dean: He tends to take things personally.

I sigh.

Dean: He tells me you were with Mdu and his little family.

My eyes pop out and he chuckles.

Dean: Mdu told me a while back.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Dean: Word of advice?

I sigh, because I already know what he's about to say.

Dean: Don't cross the line.

I keep quiet.

Dean: You're not stupid, you know that this is a fucked up situation that has the potential to damage this family.

Me: It's not that simple.

Dean: I'm not going to have a back and forth with you.

Me: Haike don't try to act all macho on me. Leave me alone.

He chuckles and nods.

Dean: I'm also trying to protect Derek. He's involved because he loves you a bit too much.

I don't say anything.

Dean: I don't want you putting him in compromising situations.

Me: Are you threatening me?

Dean: What? How could I possibly threaten the great Ziyanda of the Dlamini?

I try to keep a straight face, but end up laughing.

Me: Argh, I hear you. I'll back off.

Dean: Good. Mdu is a man. He put himself in this position, so he must work it out.

Me: You are all such cold people. Gosh.

He laughs and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: Let's feed you. Apparently you're a beast when you're hungry.

Me: Fuck whoever told you that.

He chuckles as he leads me to the table with food.

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It's been a few hours, and my mood has changed. Being around these people seems to have some form of positive effect on me.

I have been avoiding Malusi as much as I can. I'm still on the fence with this one and his cheating ways.

I'm now chilling with Joe and Gabi. She's busy telling me how she got Joe's assistant fired, but she's still bothering them.

Gabi: I just feel like she is trying to test me.

Me: She has some guts. Fetch the bitch.

She laughs and I join her.

Joe: I don't think you're a good influence right now, Dlamini.

Me: Well, this ex-assistance of yours is clearly a problem.

He grunts.

Gabi: He slept with her.

My eyes pop and Joe looks at me casually.

Gabi: It was when we weren't together.

I sigh in relieve.

Me: Joe, couldn't you pick someone else to sleep with?

Gabi: Ask him, Zizi. He just had to go for a thirsty bitch that works for him.

Joe chuckles.

Joe: I feel attacked right now.

Gabi then takes my hand and leads me to the champagne. She's obsessed with it.

Gabi: You think I should fetch the bitch?

I laugh.

Me: I was just joking.

She stares at me and narrows her eyes.

Gabi: You're low-key crazy, aren't you?

Me: I don't know what you're talking about! I plead the fifth!

We both laugh as we walk back to Joe, who is now joined by Malusi. Malusi is also very intimidating, but because I don't like him, he really doesn't faze me.

Gabi: Baby, let's go say hi to Zimkitha. I think she doesn't like me.

Malusi: Now who in the world wouldn't like you, Gabi?

Gabi: Treacherous, right?!

She giggles as she takes Joe's arm, and leads him to Zimkitha. I guess I'm not the only one who secretly wants Zimkitha's approval. The woman is a powerhouse, man.

Malusi: And I finally get to interact with the great Ziyanda of the Dlamini...

I find myself rolling my eyes.

What a bore.

Malusi: You really don't like me, huh?

I look at him blankly, despite feeling some type of way about his handsome self.

Malusi: You don't know me, Ziyanda.

Me: But I know what you've done.

Malusi: So you'll avoid me forever?

Me: I mean, I don't mind.

He laughs quietly and shakes his head lightly.

Malusi: Well, as long as you're fully aware that your avoidance won't really eliminate me. I'll still be here.

I stare at him serious, as he grins.

Me: I don't like people who hurt other people.

His face changes and he becomes serious.

Me: I've been a victim of that, and I don't find it funny.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Who died and gave you the right to intentionally mess up someone's life, more especially someone you claim to love?

Malusi: It wasn't intentional.

Me: Once... maybe... Twice, you're trying it... But, more than that? Bullshit.

He keeps quiet.

Me: In my eyes, you're a horrible person, and it's going to take a lot to change my mind.

Malusi: And who died and made you God?

Me: I'm definitely not God... But I am a woman who has been hurt by a person who's exactly like you: arrogant and not remorseful. Don't you feel out of place with these people in this room? Do you not see that you're the odd one out? All of these people seem to cherish the women they love. Now where in the world did you get picked up from?

He grunts.

Malusi: For fuck's sake...

We stare at each other for a while.

Just then, I feel someone's arms on my waist, and Derek's scent fills me.

I missed him.

I look at him and smile.

Me: Hey, you.

Derek: Hey, baby.

Me: Are you avoiding me?

Derek pouts and I giggle.

Malusi: Well, now you know how it feels to be avoided, oh great Ziyanda.

I roll my eyes and he walks away.

Derek: And then?

Me: Argh, he really gets to me.

Derek: You two will never get along?

Me: No, I don't want to get along with him. I'm fine without him.

Derek smiles and pulls me closer.

Derek: I miss you.

Me: You've been running away from me.

Derek: Giving you space.

Me: Hmm.

We share a kiss.

Derek: I'm ready to kick these people out.

Me: Rude, Ngidi, rude.

Derek: I want you all to myself.

Me: Really??

He nods and kisses me.

Derek: I want to welcome you properly.

Me: Yaaas!

We kiss again.

Nomvuyo: Heey!

We stop and look at her.

Nomvuyo: You have the rest of your lives to be all sexed up. Come to the lounge...

We didn't even realize that people had gone to the lounge. Xolani even left, because he has other appointments apparently. I miss him. I make a mental note to set an appointment with him so we can catch up.

Anyway, we walk to the lounge, and find everyone there.

Liwa: Finally! We had to leave you two there...

Zimkitha: Oh, please. You and Vuvu are always attached to each other.

Everyone laughs. Well know about Liwa and Nomvuyo. These two are waaay too addicted to each other, and we know that if they disappear, they're busy humping each other.

Me: Where's Nyami?

Nomvuyo: She's sleeping.

I nod.

Zimkitha: Anyway, we thought it would be a lovely idea to welcome you here...

Liwa: This group is known for doing some unconventional things, so this move is quite normal to us.

Dean: I'm more of a logical person, so my suggestion is that as of tomorrow, you sit and have a conversation about how you plan to live. Set clear rules.

Gabi: Gosh, Dean you are too much!

Dean looks at Gabi disapprovingly, but Gabi couldn't give a shit.

Gabi: Everything will work out. You'll figure out how to function properly.

Nolwazi: But it won't always be perfect. I think I agree with Langelihle.

Dean: You think? Woman, you are supposed to agree with me regardless.

Nolwazi: Ha.ha. Cute. Very cute.

Derek: Can you all stop flooding us with unsolicited advice? Are we children?

Achuu! Tell 'em Nkanyi!

Liwa: Haike. Sour much?

Malusi: Dramatic much?

Joe: Bold much?

Dean: Unnecessary much?

Nomvuyo: Aniphaphi much?

They all laugh.

Me: Thank you for your kind words, but Derek and I will figure it out.

Nomvuyo: Tell them!

Nolwazi: We apologise. We are quite opinionated.

Zimkitha: Quite.

Derek: The party is over now.

Liwa: Wow! Snaax much?

Malusi: Disrespectful much?

Joe: Rude much?

Dean: Unnecessary much?

Derek: It's time to leave, much?

Liwa: You want to have sex, much?

Malusi: You want a private party, much?

Joe: It's about to go down, much?

Dean: Tear up the roof, much?

At this point we're all just watching these men go on and on...

There's no stopping them!

Zimkitha: Okay, stop!

They stop and laugh like little boys.

Nomvuyo: Gosh, let me get Nyami.

Liwa: Okay, baby.

Nomvuyo: Because I'm annoyed, much.

Liwa: Yoh.

Nomvuyo walks away.

Nolwazi looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: Ready to go, much? Because I'm also annoyed, much.

Dean: Yoh.

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: See you soon, love.

Me: Shap.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Let's go.

Dean: Tense, much?

Derek: Not getting any sex, much?

Dean: Fuck you, much?

They chuckle and Dean walks to me.

Dean: See you soon, Dlamz.

Me: Hmkay.

We share a hug.

Dean: Bye, people.

We all say bye and they walk out.

Gabi: We should head out as well.

She hugs me and everyone else.

Gabi: I'll call you, Zi. I'm sure you want to redecorate this place.

I chuckle and nod.

They say their goodbyes and head out as well. Malusi leaves with them, cheating bastard.

Nomvuyo comes back with a sleepy Nyami.

Nyami: Bye, Aunty Zizi.

Me: Bye, baby.

We share a hug. Nomvuyo winks at me and I wink back at her.

Liwa: Bye, Ziyanda Dlamini.

Me: Bye, Liwa Mzinyathi.

We share a hug and they also leave.

Zimkitha: I can't wait to be invited for lunch... I hear you're an interesting cook, Ziyanda?

Me: Really?

She nods and looks at Derek with a grin.

She then looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: I'm happy for you two.

Me: Thank you.

She nods and looks at Derek.

Zimkitha: Bye, baby.

Derek: Bye, Zimi.

She hugs and leaves...

We are finally left alone!

Me: Geesh.

Derek: There's too many of them.

We both laugh as we begin cleaning up. I know he's having a secret anxiety attack right now.

Once we're done, we go to the lounge and throw ourselves on the couch.

Derek: Wanna take a shower together?

I giggle and nod.

I stand and pull him up.

Me: We need to discuss the rent.

He gives me a weird look.

Me: I'm not going to let you pay for everything.

His about to protest, but I stop him.

Me: I'm not compromising on this.

Derek: My shit is already paid for. What are you talking about?

I grunt.

Derek: You'll contribute towards toiletries or cleaning stuff.

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: I'm not in the mood to have deep conversations tonight. I want to take a shower, and nuzzle my head on your boobs.

He pulls me and we walk to the bedroom, hand in hand.

So far, so good...

INSERT 80 (Short insert)

It's been two days...

Derek and I have been locked up and in bed the whole time. He even switched off his phone, because we all know how needy his friends can be.

Me: So... What are some of the things you don't want to compromise on?

Derek looks at me and he can tell I'm serious. Just like Dean, I also think we should approach this move rationally. Yes, it's cute and all right now, but we all know that's not how it's going to be forever. It's going to be a long process. Getting to know each other won't be a sweet journey.

Derek: Let's see...

He sighs thoughtfully.

Derek: You know I love clean spaces.

I nod.

Derek: So I would appreciate it if you could always keep that in mind.

Me: I already know this.

Derek: Secondly, there's nothing I hate more than the toothpaste being squeezed out the wrong way.

I keep quiet. This man is crazy.

Derek: You must squeeze from the bottom, until you finish it. The toothpaste thingie mustn't be squished carelessly.

I sigh.

Me: Derek, everything of yours has to do with your OCDness.

He sighs as well and smiles.

Derek: I'm not that bad, aren't I?

Me: You are.

He groans.

Me: I'll try to respect your OCD wishes.

He nods and pulls me for a kiss.

Derek: Keep the space clean, and I'm all good.

Me: Okay.

Him: And you?

Me: Hmm...

He brushes my thigh and I stop him.

I want to have this conversation, and he needs to stop distracting me with sex.

Me: I'm not a morning person.

Him: Boy, do I know.

Me: I'm just worried that you'll be closely affected by my mood swings.

He pulls me closer and brushes my back.

Him: Don't worry about me. I'm a big boy.

I smile.

Him: Yes, I agree, we should have a serious discussion about rules and shit.

He kisses me.

Him: However, I love how spontaneous our relationship is. I love discovering new things about you, even though it means we butt heads from time to time.

He kisses me again.

Him: Don't focus too much on all of that... We'll deal with things as they happen. Okay?

Me: Okay.

He smiles and we kiss, but this time, it's more intense.

Him: I love you.

Me: Right back at ya, Ngidi.

The following day, while I'm in bed, Derek comes back to the bedroom, all smiles.

Me: And then?

Derek: I've just confirmed shit.

Me: Shit?

Him: I thought it would be an excellent idea to leave Joburg for a few days before we go back to work.

Me: Really?

He nods excitedly.

Him: Our flight to Port Elizabeth is later on at 5pm.

To be honest, I am not against this at all. I would love some alone time with him.

Derek: Let's pack up.

Me: Yaaas!

I immediately get out of bed and get ready!

It's been a hectic afternoon, and evening, but we've finally made it to PE. I may have delayed the process, and made us late, and as a result, annoyed Derek. I think he's still a bit annoyed but uzoba strong. I mean, we made it safely, right?

As we're driving to the hotel, I glance at him.

Me: Still mad?

He looks at me, and I try to pull off a very innocent and pouty look.

He stares at me for a while, and takes my hand.

Me: I'm sorry; I wasn't keeping track of the time.

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Am I forgiven?

He nods and I smile.

Me: Yaay!

He squeezes my hand and focuses on the road.

After a while, we get to the hotel and check in.

Derek: Dinner out or in?

Me: Out. I could use some fresh air.

He nods and we settle in before freshening up.

Once we're done, we head on out to some place in Somerset. I've never been one who cares about places. All I am excited about is the beach, okunye I don't really care.

We get to a restaurant and we're led to our table. We place our orders and the waiter disappears.

Me: So tell me, is Malusi's ex-wife with someone else now?

Derek: Yes, she has moved on...

Me: Good for her.

Him: Why do you ask?

Me: Nje...

Him: Don't be too hard on him.

Me: I'd rather not discuss cheating people right now, if you don't mind.

Him: Well... You did bring it up.

I hiss.

Me: Are you ready for work next week?

He shakes his head.

Him: I could use an extra week.

Me: Me too.

His bottle of wine comes and I swear my whole body craves it. He sees this and asks for another glass.

Me: Don't tempt me.

Him: It's just this once.

I grunt as the waiter gives me the glass and Derek pours some for me.

Derek: So, are you ready for work?

Me: I miss the kids.

He nods and smiles.

I take a sip of wine and sigh happily.

Derek: I need to start making this starting a school thing a real thing.

Me: I'm excited for you.

Him: You're going to be with me, right?

Me: I guess...

He smiles widely.

Him: I'll only involve you once everything has been finalised.

Me: So are we going back to pretending like we don't fuck each other?

He laughs and nods.

Me: I'm better at it than you.

Him: I seem to want you more, when I know I can't have you.

Me: Don't know how I feel about that.

He laughs and I smile. I love seeing this one happy.

As I take another sip of the wine, I literally feel like my whole body is getting rearranged.

Me: Argh I knew I shouldn't have drank this shit. I need water.

I ask for a glass of water from the waiter and he disappears once again.

Just then, Derek's face changes, and I ask him what's wrong. He's not even looking at me.

Me: Ngidi?

His jaw tightens.

Kanti?

Suddenly, someone clears their throat, and I turn and see a woman standing there. I look at her in confusion.

She takes two steps and is now looking down at us.

Woman: Derek?

I stare at this woman. She's tall, toned, and gorgeous.

I then look over at Derek and he has a straight face.

Woman: Oh my goodness...

Derek: Hi, Busi.

What's going on?

What's happening?

Busi: How are you?

Derek: I'm well.

Busi then looks at me for a few seconds.

Busi: Sorry for being rude... Hi.

Me: Hi.

She then looks at Derek again.

There's something about the way she looks at him that makes me uncomfortable. I genuinely feel like I'm invading their space, like I'm the intruder. Njani, guys?

Busi: Uhm... It was great seeing you. Goodbye.

Derek nods tightly and Busi walks away.

The tension?

Universe, what in the world is going on right now?

Suddenly, Petty LaBelle awakens from her very deep sleep...

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He tries speaking, but stops himself.

Me: I need the bathroom.

I stand, walk away, and make my way to the bathroom. I feel like calling someone right now, and venting. Like, what the hell just happened? Those two obviously have some history.

I finish up after a while and find Derek on the phone. As soon as he sees me, he ends the call and looks at me coolly. I sit down and gulp down my water.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Why wouldn't I be?

He keeps quiet and drinks his wine. He must just focus on his wine, and leave me alone.

Our food finally arrives and I delve in. My whole system is not even agreeing with this food. I'm so angry. I don't even know why... Well, I do know, but I can't explain it.

The way these two looked at each other? The vibe?

I am shooketh.

It's been 10 minutes now.

Kushubile la, because no one is saying anything. Kuthe tuu.

My phone suddenly rings, and it's Dean. I frown as I answer.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Dlamz!

Me: What?

Dean: Yoh. And then?

Me: How may I help you?

Dean: I was checking if you arrived safely. No need to eat me up.

Me: We did. Is that all?

He grunts.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and stare at him.

Derek: Are you done having your episode?

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You seem to be having a dramatic episode...

At this point, Petty's jaw on the floor.

Me: Listen here, don't you dare try to turn this shit around. Had it been my ex coming here, and looking at me like I'm the only thing in the world, you would be ready to fight. Don't come for me.

Him: You should be the last person to talk about exes popping out...

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You're not stupid. Don't start acting like you are.

Me: Are you hearing yourself?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Fuck you, Derek.

I stand and walk away. I find my way outside and stand by the entrance of the restaurant.

What the hell just happened??

I swear I feel like screaming my lungs out.

Surely I'm losing my mind?

After a while, my Uber arrives and I get in. The drive to the hotel is quick. As soon as I get there, I go straight to our room and take a quick shower to regain my rationality.

INSERT 81

It's been two hours. Where the fuck is Derek?

I get some junk food via room service, and stuff my face. I'm now certain that he's with Busi the Bitch.

I dial Niki's number and she answers.

Niki: Hey, friend.

Me: Shoot me, now!

Niki: What's wrong?

Me: I'm being tested.

Niki: Yini?

Me: Derek's ex pitched out of nowhere.

Niki: What??

I tell her what happened and she gasps.

Niki: They had a deep eye moment?

Me: Deep as fuck!

Niki: Yoh.

Me: It's been 2 hours and his shady ass is not back!

Niki: Okay... Calm down, friend.

Me: I knew this shit was too good to be true.

Niki: Woaah woah woah! Stop jumping into conclusions!

Just then, the door opens, and in walks Derek. I end the call.

He walks to me and sits opposite me.

Derek: Ready to talk?

Me: Mxm.

Him: Okay.

He stands and walks away.

Nxa he must go and leave me alone.

Once I'm done eating, I switch on the TV and browse through the channels.

My phone rings again, and it's Niki. I ignore it, because I'm really not in the mood right now.

I stand and walk to the bedroom. I find him changing into his pjs.

Me: So she's the woman who broke your fragile heart?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me.

Him: What you won't do, is come here and be disrespectful. If you need to go and cool off before you address me, then do so.

Me: Don't speak to me like that!

What the fuck is wrong with him?

He looks at me calmly.

Him: You're being unnecessary.

Me: If you want to piss me off, you've succeeded.

He stares at me for a long time, and I stare right back at him. At this point, all I see is red.

Him: What exactly is the problem here?

Me: You!

Him: What did I do?

Me: You had a moment with your ex.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: And don't you dare tell me about my ex. Mdu is my ex, but I don't go around looking at him like I have residual feelings for him.

He keeps quiet.

Me: You know very well that that situation is completely different.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: But, you see that Busi? I don't have such moments with my exes.

He sighs lightly.

Me: So don't use Mdu's situation to try to justify this shit.

Him: What am I justifying?

I keep quiet.

Him: For fuck's sake... I was just as surprised to see her.

Me: Maybe had I known about your past, I'd understand you better. Right now, all I know is that you saw your ex, and I witnessed the deep moment between you two. And don't you dare make it seem like I'm crazy or dramatic. The reason you're okay with Mdu is because you know I'm over him. You wouldn't be up and down with me if that were not the case.

He keeps quiet.

Me: So don't stand there and make it seem like I'm imagining things.

He scratches his head.

Me: Tell me I'm imagining things and I will gladly apologize.

We stare at each other.

Me: Tell me...

I am secretly wishing he does. I honestly don't think I have it in me to handle knowing that Derek loves someone else as well. I don't have it in me.

He sighs.

Him: You're imagining things.

Me: Okay.

I walk back to the lounge and continue eating my food. I want to burst out in tears, but I try not to.

If it didn't hit me before, well, it's definitely hitting me now. Derek has a history, and I know nothing about it. All I know is that he went through the most. But what exactly? I don't know.

He knows everything about me.

I don't know anything other than the fact that he was adopted.

I doze off, feeling very uncomfortable...

The following morning, I am in bed. I don't even know or remember how I got there.

I have a terrible headache, and my stomach is doing the most. I clearly had too much junk food last night. I walk to the bathroom to brush my teeth and try to gather myself. Derek is still in bed.

I walk to the lounge, and sit there.

I'm not angry anymore. Instead, I'm over everything. I just want to go back to Jozi, and forget about this shit. I hate PE.

I switch on the TV and watch it absentmindedly.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I see him walk towards me, and sit next to me.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hello.

He watches me as I watch TV. Eventually, he takes the remote and switches it off.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes, Derek.

I look at him and he scratches his head.

Him: Can we talk?

I shrug.

Him: You don't want to?

Me: What difference will it make? It's not like I know anything about you.

He looks at me intently.

Me: So what's the point? Let's just go home.

Him: You want to go home?

I nod.

Him: Okay.

He stands and walks away. I switch on the TV and continue watching it absentmindedly.

Uhm so our “baecation” is over.

Was it even a baecation?

We’re legit heading to the airport.

We’re now driving to his apartment. Thankfully, the vibe isn’t awkward. It’s weird, but not awkward.

Once we’re there, it hits me that I now live with this person.

I can’t even run away from this situation, damnit.

Me: I need some air...

He looks at me, and nods lightly. It’s quite clear that he is not fine. Heck, I’m also not fine, but I need some space from him.

I’m finding it quite annoying that he doesn’t want to open up to me. He expects me to be an open book, but he fails to do the same. Of course I’m going to freak out when I see his ex. Had I known who she was and her back story, maybe I’d be a bit better. Manje what am I supposed to do? I only have my conclusions to work with phela...

I get my bag and walk out. I find my Uber waiting for me, and it takes me straight to Mike’s Kitchen. I walk to the outside area, and find Melinda, my psychiatrist, sitting there. We share a hug and sit.

Melinda: How are you?

Me: I’m not fine.

She looks at me gently.

Me: I feel like my emotions are all over the place, and I'm being controlled by them.

Her: Please elaborate...

I begin to tell her everything that happened in the last 24 hours.

She sighs.

Her: Why do you think you're this affected?

Me: I'm jealous.

She nods slowly.

Me: I'm jealous that other people seem to know him, and I don't know much about him.

Her: And that's understandable.

Me: And I'm also angry. I feel like he has double standards: he expects me to be open, yet he's not. That's not fair.

She nods.

Me: When I saw the way they looked at each other, I genuinely felt like I was missing out on something big.

Her: And what does he have to say about this?

I keep quiet and she looks at me expectantly.

I take a deep breath.

Me: He hasn't said anything.

Her: Did you give him a chance?

I shake my head.

Her: Why?

Me: I lost it.

She nods slowly.

Me: I was too angry.

Her: Still having a difficult time controlling your emotions?

I nod shamefully and she looks at me softly.

Her: It's a process; it has its ups and downs.

Me: I don't want to lose him.

Her: Then initiate a civil conversation.

I keep quiet.

Her: Instead of wilding out, ask him to hear you out. Voice out every single thing you're feeling, and see how he takes it.

I sigh.

Her: You live together now, Ziyanda... Communication is your only tool. I also have a bunch of other tools that I know will help you out...

Me: Okay...

We continue chatting, and I am beyond thankful, that I walk out feeling 10 times better...

Melinda is my life saver.

As I walk in the apartment, I find Derek cooking. He glances at me briefly before continuing...

I decide to give him some space, because I know the kitchen is his safe space...

After about 10 minutes, I can't deal... I walk back to the kitchen and wrap my arms around him as he's busy on the stove.

His body tenses up, but eventually relaxes.

Me: Can we talk?

Derek: Give me a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

I let go of him and go to the lounge.

It's time for this one to tell me about his past. I'm tired of this ongoing puzzle.

Also, I'm going to introduce these tools that Melinda introduced to me...

INSERT 82

We're now sitting next to each other on the couch.

Me: Before we start, I would like to apologize about how I handled this situation.

He looks at me, and I honestly just want to hold him. I've never seen him like this.

Me: I apologize for snapping, and running off.

He nods.

Me: With that said, I spoke to Melinda...

His expression changes and he seems shocked and nervous.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: No, I'm not leaving you.

He looks at me pleadingly.

Me: I'm not breaking up with you, Derek.

He processes this and I see his expression go softer.

Me: I realize that I struggle with controlling my emotions, especially if they come at me too strong. I get overwhelmed and I fail to think rationally.

I keep quiet and he doesn't say anything.

Me: You obviously share a connection with that woman...

He tries to say something, but stops himself...

Me: Melinda told me about a certain toolbox, which consists of 12 human capacities that reside in all of us. It supports mostly young children, but she suggests I tell you about it, and we can start incorporating the tools in developing our relationship.

I can see that he is not on the same page as me.

Me: These tools will help us understand and manage our emotional and social success, both individually, and as a couple.

He looks at me intently.

I take my bag and dig for a paper that Melinda gave me...

Me: The toolbox consists of the: Breathing Tool; Quiet/Safe Space Tool; Listening Tool; Empathy Tool; Personal Space Tool; Using Our Words Tool; Garbage Can Tool; Taking Time Tool; Please and Thank You Tool; Apology and Forgiveness Tool; Patience Tool; and lastly Courage Tool.

He seems intrigued.

Me: Apparently it's usually used in the classroom context, but it can also be applied elsewhere. Melinda thinks it will have a good impact on our relationship.

Derek: What does each tool mean?

Me: The Breathing Tool states that I calm myself and check-in... Melinda explained that this tool should be used whenever we feel like we're losing control of our emotions. We simply stop everything, and focus on getting our breathing right.

He nods.

Me: That's basically what I try to do when I have an anxiety attack.

He nods.

Me: So you basically put one hand on your heart and the other on your tummy, and then you take deep breaths until you feel stable again.

He nods.

Me: Okay... The second one is the Quiet/Safe Space Tool. It says I remember my quiet/safe place.

I look at him.

Me: I know that your quiet/safe place is the kitchen. You seem calm whenever you're there.

He smiles lightly.

Him: What's your quiet/safe space?

Me: I don't know.

Him: You need to find one.

I nod.

Me: So this is basically a place one goes to whenever they feel overwhelmed or some type of way. This space is a safe space, and if we know each other's safe spaces, it is important to respect them.

He nods.

Me: Next, we have the Empathy Tool- I care for others and I care for myself.

Him: You're the most empathetic person I know.

I smile.

Him: Very admirable.

Me: Thank you.

I sigh.

Me: So this tool promotes the awareness of the people around you, and what they are going through. One has to constantly care for themselves as much as he/she cares for others. Relationships grow when everyone practices empathy.

He nods.

Me: The Personal Space Tool states that I have the right to my space and so do you. I think this one is self-explanatory.

He chuckles.

Me: I think we've been practicing this one.

Him: But too much personal space can create some form of gap that won't be easily bridged.

Me: I hear you.

Him: So there has to be a limit.

Me: Okay.

Him: Next tool?

Me Using Our Words Tool- I use the right words, in the right ways.

We stare at each other for a while.

Me: We're quite bad at this.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I say a lot of things when I'm emotional... I don't use my words properly...

He sighs.

Me: And you don't use your words at all... You don't open up to me.

Him: But I always tell you how I feel.

Me: You tell me how you feel about me. Me, only. I don't know how you feel about other things. You're not open.

He scratches his head.

Me: I want to know what's going through your mind, Derek.

He tries to say something, but stops himself.

Me: How are we going to grow if the communication is one-sided?

To think, when we started this relationship, I was the one with emotional and communication issues. He made me think he's all good, kanti he's not.

Him: What's the next tool?

Me: Taking Time Tool- I take time in, and time away.

He nods.

Me: It also involves using our time wisely.

Him: Okay.

Me: I know I need to work on this, because my time management sucks.

He chuckles and I smile.

I want to hold him, but I stop myself.

Me: Next, we have the Please and Thank You Tool- I treat others with kindness and appreciation.

He nods.

Me: Next, there's the Apology and Forgiveness Tool- I admit my mistakes and work to forgive yours.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Like you always say, whenever you hurt me, it's never intentional... That also applies to me. I will never hurt you on purpose.

Him: Good.

Me: Hence this tool... We recognize that we will make mistakes along the way, but it is important to apologise and forgive wholeheartedly.

He reaches for me and pulls me closer.

Him: I love you so much.

Me: I know...

We stare at each other for a while...

Me: The next tool is the Patience Tool... It states that I am strong enough to wait...

His eyes drop.

Me: I will use this tool for you, Derek. I will be strong enough to wait...

He finally looks at me.

Me: I'll be patient, just like you are patient with me.

He plants a kiss on my lips and I relax.

Him: And the last tool?

Me: Courage Tool- I have the courage to do the right thing...

He smiles.

Me: And I think you use this tool all the time by taking a chance on love, despite the hurt you've experienced.

His eyes drop once again.

Me: I don't know what has left you so bruised, but I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going to leave you.

I find myself in his arms as he holds me tight and hides his face.

Me: Nkanyezi?

He doesn't respond, instead, I he breathes heavily.

We're in that holding position for a long time... I think he's crying.

My heart is in pieces at this point.

He fell asleep holding on to me...

I'm just out here trying to figure out how to approach this situation. I really don't want to overwhelm him, because I understand that we all have different coping mechanisms.

I manage to break free from him and walk away. I go to the bedroom and sit there for a long time, not thinking about anything in particular.

I don't know what to do. I really don't.

I take my phone and find myself going to Zimkitha's number. It rings for a while, but she doesn't answer.

I sigh and go to Dean's number. He eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini?

Me: Hi.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: I don't know how to help him.

Dean: Trust me, you are.

Me: What should I do?

Dean: Don't leave him.

I keep quiet.

Dean: You're both good for each other.

Me: I feel helpless.

Dean: Don't... He'll let you in...

I sigh.

Dean: Are you back this side?

Me: Yes.

He chuckles.

Dean: That has to be the shortest vacation ever.

I grunt and he laughs lightly.

Dean: Be patient.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Bye, Dlamz.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and sigh heavily.

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After telling him about the tools, I decided not to push him too hard. I know very well how it feels to be with someone you love, and struggle to be vulnerable with them. Heck, I've always been the closed off one in my relationships, so I completely understand. My relationship with Derek is opening up so many learning opportunities for me...

We finish up eating, and I can see that he is not fine, but he is pretending to be.

Me: You do know that you don't have to pretend with me, right?

He looks at me.

Me: Even if we don't talk about what's bothering you, I'd appreciate it if you don't pretend to be fine.

He pulls me closer till half of my body is on him.

Me: I'm here.

Derek: I know.

I nod and plant a kiss on his lips and he smiles.

Me: Want to take a walk?

Him: Let's clean up first.

I nod and stand. I then pull him up and we begin cleaning up the space.

We're now taking a walk around the quiet area. Thank God, there aren't any dusty kids running around the street, as in Soweto...

Me: My dad still wants to know about Uber.

We both laugh.

I've been trying my best to make him lighten up a bit. As much as I hate seeing him so down, I think it's good for our relationship. I want to see him in his low moments as well.

Derek: I can't believe you were willing to carry on with this Uber lie.

Me: I have too much respect for my parents. I don't know man; it's just feels strange to be this open with them.

Him: There's nothing worse than having to play hide and seek, because you're scared of your parents.

I sigh.

Me: I guess...

Him: And look at how understanding they are... They trust you.

Me: Because I'm a good girl.

Him: Are you?

Me: Excuse me? You know very well that I'm good.

He wraps his arm round my shoulders, and I place mine on his waist as we walk peacefully.

Him: Of course, you're good.

Me: Good.

He chuckles and I pinch him.

Me: Have you travelled out of the country?

Him: Duuh.

Me: Geesh, excuse me!

He chuckles.

Him: I'm assuming you haven't?

Me: Duuh!

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Him: Where would you like to go?

Me: I don't know... I think everyone starts with America or London, right?

He nods.

Him: Start with the basics.

Me: But I'm not into travelling.

Him: Why am I not surprised?

I chuckle.

Him: You don't like new things.

Me: Change is a big deal for me. I'm fine in my comfort zone.

Him: That's a bad thing. You need to allow yourself to experiment.

I sigh and he chuckles.

Me: Argh leave me alone.

He kisses my cheek and we walk in silence for a while, no awkwardness though.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: Nkanyezi.

I don't look at him, instead I look ahead.

Him: I'm not a talker.

I gasp in shock.

Me: You're not a talker? What? You? I had no idea!

He laughs.

Him: Fuck you.

I squeeze him and smile.

Him: I'm worse than you.

Me: Mmm.

I look at him and he avoids my eyes. We're quiet for a while.

Him: I see you're testing me...

Me: Not necessarily testing you... More like trying to get you to see that you can trust me.

He sighs and nods.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

We continue walking and talking about random things...

The following day, we were in bed the whole day. I honestly wanted him all to myself. I can't help but feel more drawn to him when his like this.

That evening, we get a call from Nomvuyo inviting us to dinner.

Nomvuyo: I miss you, Zizi. I need to see you.

I groan.

Nomvuyo: You're with Nkanyezi 24/7. Surely you can spare a couple of hours and spend it with us?

I sigh.

Derek: Okay, we'll come.

Nomvuyo: Haike I wasn't asking your permission wena D.

Derek: Ohho.

Nomvuyo: So you're coming?

Me: I guess so. The man of the house has spoken.

Nomvuyo: Weeh!

I end the call and look at Derek.

Me: We don't have to go. I'm perfectly fine here.

Derek: No, man. We could use some fresh air. But, let's do this first...

He pulls me closer and we share a kiss. I get on top and he chuckles.

Me: Gladly!

As we're driving to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place, I get a call from Mdu. It immediately goes on speaker. I glance at Derek and he seems expressionless.

Me: Hey.

Mdu: Hey, Zi, how are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Mdu: I'm good...

Me: What's up?

Mdu: I wanted to thank you. Things have been a bit easier since you were involved in this situation.

I relax. I'm beyond glad that I could assist.

Mdu: Tholi is much better, and she can't stop raving about you.

Me: Aww how is she?

Mdu: We're taking it slowly. She's also getting used to her meds.

Me: That's great!

Mdu: Ya, and thank Derek for me. I know we've put him in an uncomfortable position.

I glance at Derek and he looks at me. He's expression is more soft.

Me: I'll let him know.

Mdu: Thanks.

Me: Alright then. Say hi to Tholi.

Mdu: Cool. Bye.

Me: Shap.

I hang up and sigh. I decide not to say anything.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Hmm?

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: For what?

Him: For making you feel like I was using the Mdu situation to justify the shit that took place in PE.

Me: Aww.

He chuckles.

Me: I don't have any feelings for Mdu, at all.

Him: I know.

Me: So there's no reason for you to even feel some type of way. Whenever I end a relationship, I always prepare myself mentally just to ensure that I don't go running back, or hold on to the person in the hopes that one day I'll be with them.

Him: That's not easy.

Me: But I value myself more. I don't see why I should waste my time and energy holding on to someone who doesn't care about me.

He keeps quiet.

Me: This mind-set didn't come easy, but it came after a lot of introspection.

He nods...

After a while, we finally get to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place. As we make our way in, we hear Nyami singing happily. I smile when I see her; I guess she's having a solo karaoke night.

She runs to me as soon as she spots me.

Me: Hey, you!

Nyami: Auntie Zizi!

We share a hug and then she hugs Derek as well.

Derek: How are you, Nyamz?

Nyami: I'm well, thank you!

She then runs off and carries on singing.

Just then, Nomvuyo appears and I smile. Gosh, will I ever get over this woman's beauty?

Nomvuyo: Hey, hey!

We share hug and then she hugs Derek as well.

Me: You've been missed!

Nomvuyo: Angithi you are too busy locking yourselves up in your dungeon.

Me: Oh, please!

Nomvuyo: The food is almost ready. You can go to the patio, where Liwa and Dean are.

Me: Dean is here?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: He needed a break from Nolwazi's parents.

Me: Kanti when are they planning on getting their own place?

Nomvuyo: You're asking the wrong person. I don't get involved in other people's business.

Derek laughs as he walks away.

Me: Okay, Gossip Girl.

Nomvuyo: Would you like something to drink?

Me: I feel like having some orange juice. Hook me up, boo.

We walk to the kitchen.

Me: So, when exactly are you planning on telling your family about this pregnancy?

Nomvuyo: Awume, man, Ziyanda. I need some time.

I nod understandingly.

Me: Well, everyone is going to be excited.

Nomvuyo: And that's what I'm not ready to handle. I don't want people running after me.

Me: Negative much?

Nomvuyo: You need to understand that when I was pregnant with Nyami, it was just Liwa, Princess and I. I didn't get attention. Now, I know that everyone is going to make it a big deal, especially Zimkitha.

Me: Hmm... I just think you're being unnecessary. This is another chance to do things differently.

She gives me my glass of juice, and rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: Leave me alone.

Me: Hmkay.

She checks her pots, and the space is suddenly smells like Dean. I turn around, and sure enough, his here.

Me: Hey.

Dean: Hello, Dlamz.

Nomvuyo: You two are really strange.

Me: How so?

Nomvuyo: You hated each other's guts, but now we're inseparable.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: I thought you were a dumb gold digger.

Me: Hey! Offensive much?

He shrugs.

Me: And I thought you were an arrogant piece of shit.

Dean: Which I am...

Me: Argh.

Dean: Let's go outside, I want to have a word with you.

Me: Hmkay.

I follow him out and Nomvuyo rolls her eyes. We walk to the other side of the yard, and he turns to look at me.

Dean: Unjani?

Me: Okay, I guess...

He nods and doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm just worried about him.

Dean: He'll open up to you.

Me: Why is he like this?

Dean: Well, there are numerous reasons, but I feel like it would be good for you, if he shares them with you himself. I don't want to be that invasive.

I nod.

Me: I hear you.

Dean: But what I will say is that Derek has always felt like he doesn't belong, and I think it stems from not knowing his real parents. The adoption affected him badly, but he managed to suppress those feelings.

Me: Don't you think finding his parents will help?

He shrugs.

Dean: He doesn't want to meet them; that's if they're even alive.

I sigh heavily.

Dean: And a lot of shit has happened in his life...

Me: Do you think seeing someone will help?

Dean: I think you're the perfect person to suggest that. He seems to value your opinion.

Me: Maybe he'll be open to discussing his issues openly with me, after he speaks to a professional who'll help him make sense of everything...

Dean nods.

Me: I'll talk to him.

Dean: Just be patient. I'm sure this experience, as fucked up as it is, will solidify your relationship.

I sigh.

Me: Okay.

He opens his arms and I look at him weirdly.

Dean: Don't leave me hanging. I hate giving hugs, but I'm making an exception here.

Me: Argh.

I step closer and we share a hug.

Dean: Let's go in... I'm starving.

We walk in and find Liwa, Derek and Nomvuyo there.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Nomvuyo: You two act like 5 year olds.

Liwa: Whatever, Negative Nancy.

We sit and Nomvuyo serves us.

Me: You are such a perfect makoti, yazi.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Liwa: I know how to pick 'em.

Nomvuyo: I can't wait to divorce you, and take all your money.

Liwa: Unganya.

We all laugh and start eating.

I glance at Derek, and it is clear that he is feeling much better. I appreciate that his friends make him feel like this.

Liwa: Uhm so are we going to discuss the many elephants in the room, or should we discuss them later?

Nomvuyo: Let's get it over and done with.

Me: What's going on?

They all stare at me.

I look at Derek, and he has a mischievous smile.

Liwa: So it has come to our attention that you are the Iyanla of South Africa.

Me: Excuse me?

I look at them in confusion.

Liwa: You are Mdu's go-to person, apparently.

Me: Uhm... What's happening?

I look at Derek and he sips his wine.

Liwa: But, not only are you involved in that situation, you're also linking up with someone who is not particularly liked by this family.

Me: Who?

Liwa: What's the name of your best friend's new man?

Me: Uhm...

I continue looking at them in confusion.

Me: What's that to you?

Liwa: You are really clueless, aren't you?

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Can I be the one who breaks it to her? Please?

Liwa chuckles and nods.

Dean: Your friend is dating Nolwazi's ex-husband, Ziyanda. She's basically dating a spineless polygamist.

Woaah.

Everything stops moving.

I blink a couple of times.

Nomvuyo: Dean, really??

I hear them going back on forth, but I zone them out.

What the hell??

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Me: What the fuck are you people talking about?!

I swear I'm about to have a heart attack.

Nomvuyo: Here's a glass of water, love.

I dismiss her and look at Dean, who is sitting next to me.

Me: Dean?!

Dean: What?

Me: What the hell are you saying to me??

He looks at coolly.

Dean: Your best friend is dating Nolwazi's ex-husband.

Oh my goodness.

I touch my chest, and try to control my breathing. Now it makes sense! It all makes sense! I remember how Kwanele told me about his ex wife and the wife who disappeared. Nolwazi? Tholi?

Yoh nkos' yami.

Liwa: Wow, you are so slow.

Nomvuyo: How unexpected.

Liwa and Nomvuyo chuckle and I look at Derek, who is smiling lightly.

Me: You knew??

He nods.

Me: Really, Derek??

Derek: What?

Me: Don't say nywhat!

He looks at me coolly.

Me: Why didn't you tell me??

Derek: Because I didn't want to burst your bubble in front of Niki, and have you act weird. It is evident that she genuinely likes him. I didn't want to ruin the date.

Dean: For fuck's sake. You're really slow.

Me: Fuck you!

Nomvuyo: Hey! Stop swearing! My daughter is in the next room!

I huff and stare at all of them.

Me: Do you understand where this puts me?

Dean: Enlighten us.

I grunt.

Me: I've grown close to Tholi!

Liwa: That in itself is another issue. Tholi is responsible for the downfall of Nolwazi's marriage.

I don't say anything. I'm overwhelmed.

I'm in shit.

I'm deep, deep in shit.

Liwa: You don't think things through, do you?

Me: How the hell was I supposed to know that this circle has so many intersections?

They keep quiet and look at me.

Me: For fuck's sake! Do you understand how peaceful my life was before I met you people??

Nomvuyo: Haike don't come for us. No one forced you to be Mother Theresa.

Me: So I'm being crucified for being kind-hearted?

Dean: This is not an episode of Days of our Lives- cut the melodrama.

Derek: Hey, now.

Dean: She's grown, and I'd like to think-

Derek: Nobody really cares about what you think, just in case you weren't aware.

Dean raises an eyebrow and Derek looks at him expressionlessly.

Derek: Like I stated, when I broke the news to you, I don't want anyone to make Ziyanda feel bad for caring about other people- a trait you obviously don't possess.

Dean chuckles quietly and shakes his head.

And then it hits me. Was Dean trying to come for me? Anganginyeli!

Derek: Baby, I felt the need to tell them, because I'm protecting you.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I don't want these people to misinterpret your actions, and think you're being shady.

I want to be mad at him right now, but he's making it very difficult. I mean, he basically put Dean in his place for me.

Nomvuyo: But, we know you're not being shady. You're just a sweet, young and naive girl.

Me: Don't patronise me.

Nomvuyo raises an eyebrow.

Me: Do you people understand that now I'm going to be torn between my best friend and this side?

Liwa: No one is asking you to choose sides.

I sigh.

Derek: I'd like to think that we're mature enough to understand that the world is not that huge, and we'll bump into people we don't necessarily desire to see from time to time.

Liwa: The only awkward thing about this is that you're involved in Tholi and Mdu's situation.

Nomvuyo: We don't want you to be caught up in the middle of this specific situation. The Kwanele thing is awkward, but manageable. Kodwa this one with Mdu has the potential to damage relationships.

I sigh.

I think Derek notices that I'm on the verge of a breakdown, because he stands and pulls me up. He then takes my hand and leads me outside. We get to the veranda, and he wraps his arms around me.

Me: Don't.

He lets go of me and apologizes. He knows that he's not supposed to hold me when I'm experiencing an intense wave of emotions, because I feel suffocated. He steps back, and I focus on my breathing. What freaks me out more than anything is the fact that I'm in the middle of this bullshit. I unintentionally put myself in the middle of this bullshit.

After a few minutes, I feel better.

Derek: Better?

I nod.

Derek: Can I?

I nod, and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: I have a lot going on in my mind right now.

Derek: Talk to me.

Me: Firstly, what the fuck??

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I get that you were trying to protect me, but geesh, couldn't you at least give me a heads up?

He shakes his head.

Him: I know you, Ziyanda. You were going to act all weird and dramatic during that date.

Me: But, still... You should have told me!

Him: I'm sorry, baby.

I sigh.

Me: Secondly, Nolwazi is obviously going to hate me because: 1, I am out here having double dates with his ex; and 2, I'm out here being Tholi and Mdu's life coach!

He tries to stifle a laugh, but fails. I end up joining him. Honestly, what am I supposed to do at this point?

Me: I'm screwed.

Him: Life coach?

He continues laughing and I sigh heavily.

Him: Whatever happens, I've got your back. I don't think Nolwazi will hate you though. She's quite understanding, and I think she'll be open to listen to everyone.

Me: Then Mdu needs to open up ASAP!

Him: Keep pestering him. I think he listens to you as his life coach.

Me: Fuck off, Derek!

He laughs and kisses me.

Me: And now I'm worried about Niki. What if Kwanele hasn't changed? There is no way I'm going to allow my friend to date a man who's done all these hurtful things!

Him: So what are you going to do?

Me: Angazi... I'll think about my next move.

He nods.

Him: At least we're not meeting up with them in secret now. I hate secrets, Ziyanda.

Me: Argh.

He smiles.

Me: And as for Dean?

Him: He was pissed at first, but I put him in his place. He needs to stop thinking everything is about him.

Me: Ouch.

Him: Tough love.

Me: Thank you.

Him: I did say I'm prepared to fight your battles, right?

Swoons!

Him: I've come to accept that you're an irrational Mother Theresa. It's about time everyone accepts it as well.

He smiles and we walk back inside the house.

I feel 100 times better now.

We sit and continue eating.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Leave me alone, loser.

Dean chuckles.

Me: So here's what's going to happen...

I look at all of them.

Me: I am going call Mdu and I will set up a meeting with his sister.

All of them look at me in shock.

Me: I'm tired of this bullshit. I'm already involved, so I'm going to end this.

Derek: Uhm, baby-

Me: No, guys, angithi you all find it easy to involve me in your business?

They stare at me in shock.

Me: Mdu will tell his sister whether he likes it or not. I'm tired of carrying all these secrets.

They don't say anything.

There is an awkward silence for at least a full minute.

Nomvuyo: So, I'm pregnant.

Liwa: WHAT?!

Oh, Lord.

Universe, is it too late to go back to PE?

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Liwa: WHAT?!

Nomvuyo looks at him and rolls his eyes.

All these men are just looking at Nomvuyo in shock.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda said she's releasing people secrets, so I don't want to be part of that.

Liwa stands, and within seconds, he is lifting Nomvuyo high up in the air.

Oh gosh. Dis tew much.

Liwa: You're pregnant?!

Nomvuyo: Liwa, put me down!

Liwa squeezes her and exclaims.

Nomvuyo: Liwa!

Liwa: I'm going to be a father again?!

Dean: Can't we just have a peaceful dinner?

After a while, Liwa finally calms down and puts Vuvu down. They sit, and he has the biggest smile on his face.

Liwa: I'm going to be a father again, motherfuckers.

Me: Woah! Ease up on the vulgarity. There's a child in this house!

Derek: You knew about this?

Me: Of course. Angithi people seem to think I'm their secret guru.

Dean: Ziyanda Theresa.

I look at him disapprovingly, and he laughs.

Me: Gosh it's been a hectic evening.

I feel Derek's hand on mine, and I look at him. I just want to be in his arms right now.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

He kisses my cheek and I smile.

Dean: Well, this is my cue to leave.

Nomvuyo: Don't you dare. I made dessert from scratch.

Dean: Then dish the fuck up. I miss my woman and kids.

Me: How are the megabytes?

Dean: Megabytes? Respect my kids.

I laugh and he grunts.

Me: I'm still mad at you for addressing me like a bitch in the streets.

Dean: Nawe you must stop being so slow. You're a teacher for fuck's sake.

Me: Dean!

He and I begin going back and forth, while the others ignore us and continue with their conversation. Eventually, Dean apologizes.

Me: Good. Don't come for me.

Liwa: You two are weird.

I glance at Derek and catch him smiling.

Me: Everything okay?

He nods and kisses me again.

It's safe to say the rest of the dinner went by smoothly, with great conversation...

It's now two days before schools open, and boy am I glad. I miss my kids, and I miss distracting myself with work!

Earlier that day, I called Nolwazi, and she had agreed to meet up with me. Mdu, on the other hand, also agreed to meet up with me.

Little do they both know that I'm setting them up.

I am tired.

I am tired of being in the middle of this. The truth needs to come out ASAP!

When I get to the restaurant, I find Mdu waiting for me. We go to our table and sit.

Mdu: And then?

Me: What?

Him: What's with the meeting?

Me: You'll see...

The waiter gets our drinks and disappears.

Me: I don't like this position that I've been put in.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: I know you might end up hating me after this, but I think it's all for the best.

Him: What the fuck are you talking about?

Just then, Nolwazi approaches our table.

My heart?

I am close to shitting my pants, I tell you.

He sees Nolwazi, and then he looks at me intensely.

I've never been one to be intimidated easily, but that look he gave me? I almost crawled under the table.

Before he can say anything, Nolwazi finally reaches our table, and exclaims.

Nolwazi: Duzi??

Mdu looks up at her, and fails to even smile. He seems angry.

What the hell have I done?? Universe, I know I'm irrational! I have learnt from this experience!

Nolwazi: I haven't seen you in such a long time, brother!

I want to stand and run, but my body is on some, "Naah fam!"

They share a hug and she sits.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zizi.

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

Oh gosh. This is a bad idea! A very bad idea! I think back to Derek telling me that I shouldn't go through with it this morning, and me dismissing him.

Nolwazi: What's up? I had no idea that you'd invite my little big brother.

I laugh awkwardly as I glance at Mdu, who is looking at me with so much anger, nkos' yami.

Me: Uhm... So...

Nolwazi looks at me weirdly.

I'm good with hiding how I feel, but right now, I'm struggling. I'm sure it's very clear that something is bothering me.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda?

I look at her nervously.

I am not going to look at Mdu, because his looks seem to have the power to make me feel like a naughty 5 years old that's in trouble.

I finally take a deep breath.

Me: Okay, I'll just start by saying-

Mdu: Ziyanda.

I stop talking and fidget with my hands.

I am really invasive aren't I?

Damnit.

Nolwazi: What's going on here?

Mdu looks at Nolwazi, and his face softens.

They stare at each other for a long time in silence. Somehow, this staring contest has calmed me down.

Nolwazi: Talk to me.

She's also very calm.

Mdu takes a deep breath and scratches his head.

Mdu: Please don't hate me.

Nolwazi looks at him in shock.

Mdu: Whatever you do, just don't hate me... I need you more than ever right now...

He rubs his eyes.

Is he crying?

Nolwazi is definitely crying.

Nolwazi: What's wrong?

Mdu: I can't afford to lose you...

Nolwazi: Mdu, you're scaring me.

My heart has stopped beating at this point. I'm also on the verge of tears.

Nolwazi reaches out to him and takes his hands.

Nolwazi: Mdu?

Mdu sighs and closes his eyes.

There's silence for a while.

Mdu takes a deep breath, and exhales loudly.

Mdu: I'm in love with someone...

Nolwazi keeps quiet.

Mdu then opens his eyes and looks at her softly.

Mdu: At first, it was for revenge, but things changed.

Nolwazi: Revenge?

Mdu: Yes.

Nolwazi: Revenge?

Mdu nods.

Mdu: I wanted to get back at Kwanele.

There's silence.

I'm scared of breathing, because it would disrupt the silence.

Nolwazi: I... I'm not following...

Mdu: I've fallen in love with Tholakele, and she has given birth to my twins.

Wooaah.

I want to stand and run, but my body is not budging.

Nolwazi removes her hands from Mdu's and looks at him intensely.

Nolwazi: What?

Mdu: I'm in love with Tholi.

She stares at him for a long time. Tears have filled her face.

Before we know it, she stands, gets her bag, and walks out of the restaurant.

I finally exhale, and look at Mdu. He's rubbing his eyes.

I don't know how I feel right now; I can't seem to describe it.

I want to leave, but I can't.

Me: Mdu.

He doesn't say anything; instead, he stands and walks away as well...

The truth is finally out.

As fucked up as this is, a huge part of me is glad.

At least we can start finding a way forward.

Yes, "we."

It's quite clear that I'm in this shit, whether I like it or not...

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Derek is now with me.

He came as soon as I called him, panicking.

Me: What if she hates me??

Derek: You're overreacting.

Me: Derek!

He sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I've messed up! This is a mess!

I think my actions are only sinking in now. What the hell have I done?!

Me: Why in the world did I involve myself in this?

He looks at me, with a smile.

Me: Don't you dare tell me that you told me so!

Him: I'm not. I'd never!

I sigh heavily

Me: What have I done?

He stands and pulls me up.

Him: Come here.

I stand and he wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Him: You need some love right now, let's go.

I groan and he kisses me again.

We're now at Milky Lane, and we're having milkshakes.

I feel a bit calmer.

Derek: How are you feeling now?

Me: I feel a bit better.

I take his milkshake and taste it.

Him: We're going back to work in 2 days.

Me: I know.

I groan.

Me: But I'm glad, I need the distraction.

Him: Definitely.

Just then, his phone rings, and he shows me that it's Dean. He answers it coolly.

Derek: Hello?... Ya, I'm with her... Okay, hold on...

He hands me the phone and I put it on my ear.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Now, why the fuck would you do this shit?

Me: Dean, I already feel like shit! Don't make me feel worse!

Dean: Do you understand that I'm the one who has to deal with an angry Nolwazi?

Me: She's angry??

Dean: I've never seen her like this.

My heart starts racing.

Dean: She's pissed.

Me: Fuck, did she mention that she hates me?

He chuckles.

Dean: You're really lucky that I have a soft spot for you.

I groan.

Dean: I'll continue putting in a good word for you.

I sigh heavily.

Me: Yoh...

Dean: I'll fill you in on the progress.

I sigh.

Dean: I don't like dealing with such shit.

Me: Bye!

I hang up and finish Derek's milkshake.

Me: I need another one ASAP.

Derek: Already ordered one for you.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki.

Me: Gosh.

I answer.

Me: Hey, friend.

Niki: Heyyy boo!

I smile sadly.

Me: Unjani?

Niki: I'm okay. How's it going there with Sexy Beast?

Me: So far so good.

Niki: That's great, friend. I need to see you though! We have so much to catch up on!

Me: Really?

Niki: Yeboo!

Me: Hehe, I wonder.

I clear my throat.

Me: How's Kwani?

Even saying his name feels weird now.

I just... Woo I don't know...

Niki: He's good. That's why I need some Zizi. He and I have been inseparable.

Me: Hmm. When do you want to meet?

Niki: Dinner tonight?

Me: Uhm sure.

Niki: Are you okay?

Me: Ya, friend. I'll call you a bit later to confirm location.

Niki: Shap shap. Then we'll talk about what's bothering you.

I groan and she laughs.

Niki: Bitch, don't nobody know you like I do!

Me: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Niki: Bye bye ke.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and sigh.

Me: She wants to meet.

Derek: How about you invite her over at our- yes, our- place?

I giggle.

Him: I'll cook a lovely meal for you two, and you can have your bonding session. I have a lot of preparing to do for work.

I sigh heavily and nod.

Me: Okay.

Him: Ziyanda, stop this.

He looks at me seriously.

Him: You're being too hard on yourself for absolutely nothing.

I don't say anything.

He seems too serious right now, and I'm going through the most.

Him: First of all, if people didn't want their secrets exposed, then they should have kept them to themselves.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not going to have you feel guilty for shit that doesn't even concern you.

He looks at me.

Him: If Mdu or Nolwazi have a problem with you, then I'll deal with them personally. No one should use you as a scapegoat. Fuck that shit.

This man? This man is mine. Nxa, damnit!

Him: Secondly, don't even entertain the guilt with the Kwanele situation. Were you supposed to play God, and stop Niki and Kwanele from meeting?

He hisses.

Him: No one should even try coming at you with crap.

I take a sip of the milkshake and look at him.

Me: Wowzer. Is it an appropriate time to tell you that I'm turned on?

His face softens up and he smiles.

Him: I thought so...

Me: Thank you, Nkanyezi.

Him: Let's take this one day at a time... At least everything is out in the open now.

I nod.

Him: Don't be too hard on yourself, okay?

I nod.

Him: Now, finish up, so we can do something about this turned on-ness of yours...

I squeal in excitement and he laughs.

That evening, Derek went all out, as usual.

Me: How about we produce a book with all the food you make? I feel like we should capitalize on this talent of yours.

He laughs.

Him: Really?

Me: Yes!

Him: We'll discuss this properly in bed... I need a proper business plan.

Me: Hmkay.

Him: It will take a lot of persuading.

Me: Our meeting will be in the bedroom? Hmm, I think I'll manage.

I spank his ass and he grunts.

Him: Okay, so you know how to dish up right?

Me: Excuse me?

Him: I'm just asking.

Me: Don't come for me!

He kisses me and then disappears.

Just then, Niki calls to tell me she's at the reception area...

Niki: I am loving this!

She looks around the place happily.

Niki: Hunnny!

Me: Gosh.

Her: This is such a cute and cozy home!

Just then, Derek emerges, and she squeals.

Niki: Heeey!

Derek smiles.

Derek: Hey, Nikiwe.

They share a hug and chat for a while. Derek then excuses himself and goes to the bedroom.

Niki: Boo, this place is amazing!

Me: I know.

I get us some juice and lead us to the balcony.

Niki: So, before we even go anywhere... What the hell is wrong with you? I'd rather deal with that first than spend the rest of the night wondering.

I sigh heavily and pout.

Me: I'm in deep shit.

Niki: Yini manje?

I tell her about the Mdu, Tholi and Nolwazi situation, and the meeting earlier.

She rolls her eyes.

Niki: Don't even try to feel guilty for that shit!

Me: I can't help it!

She reprimands me for about 5 minutes.

Thereafter, she stares at me.

Niki: What else is bothering you? Are you two fighting?

Me: What? Derek and I?

She nods.

Me: No, we're good...

Niki: So what's the problem?

I sigh again.

Niki: Ziyanda!

Me: Oh my God! Kwanele is Nolwazi's ex-husband and I am friends with Nolwazi and Tholi is also my friend because I'm helping her with her depression and I feel like I have to choose sides and I feel bad for even liking Kwanele because everyone else hates him.

I say that so fast, that I don't even remember much.

Niki: Say what now?

I shut my eyes and repeat myself.

After a while, I open one eye, and see Niki looking at me blankly.

I open both my eyes and take a deep breath.

Me: I'm so sorry!

Niki: For what?

Me: For this!

Niki: You think I give a shit that you know Kwanele's exes?

Yoh.

Haike.

Niki: I don't give a rat's ass about any of that.

Me: Oh.

Her: Ziyanda, you really need to stop taking things too personally... All this drama for nothing.
Geesh!

Me: Oh.

Her: Now, please dish up for me, a bitch is hungry.

Me: Oh.

She walks back in and leaves me there, gobsmacked.

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Niki and I had a lovely evening, I must say. She managed to make me realise that I've been stressing about nothing. She also emphasised that she really didn't care about this Kwanele situation, because it didn't affect her.

I have to admit though, that a huge part of me has decided that I'll distance myself a bit from Nolwazi ad Mdu. I'm very loyal to Niki, she comes first compared to all these other randoms I just met through Derek.

Anyway, I'm now in bed with Derek, and he is finishing up his work.

Derek: Good evening?

Me: Absolutely stunning!

He smiles and I watch as he finishes up. When he's done, he puts his laptop aside, and looks at me.

Derek: How did Niki react?

Me: She's very chilled about it.

He nods.

Him: She had no reason to be pissed. It's not like you befriended Nolwazi knowingly. You met these people through me.

Me: So I guess you're to blame?

Him: Heyi, ungalinge!

I giggle and get closer to him.

Me: Now, let's discuss the recipe book business plan thingy.

He raises an eyebrow and I look at him innocently.

Me: So I was thinking, we release a book with all your amazing recipes.

Him: Is it?

I nod.

Him: Elaborate.

Me: I just feel like we need more South African based recipe books, you know? Food that is easily relatable, you know?

Him: Hmm.

Me: So what do you say?

Him: I'm not quite sure.

Me: Hmm.

I get even closer and plant a kiss on his lips.

From that point, we're just going back and forth, playfully.

I love my Nkanyi, guys, struu.

The following morning, I wake up a bit late. I thought I'd make breakfast for Nkanyi, but I guess last night's festivities left me exhausted.

As I make the bed, I see an envelope with my name on it. I immediately stop what I'm doing, and take it. It's Derek's handwriting.

Me: Derek?!

I walk out of the bedroom, and around the place, but he's nowhere to be found.

I walk back to the bedroom, and sit on the bed. I reach for my phone and see a message from him.

Derek: At the gym, baby. It's been a while since I've been here. Clearly I've been spending too much time with you. Please don't bother making breakfast, I'd like to prepare one of my great recipes...
wink

I chuckle and put my phone away.

I'm more interested in this envelope over here. What could it be? Why didn't he mention it in his message?

I decide to put it down and continue making the bed. Once I'm done, my curiosity gets the best of me. I sit and open it.

I'm shocked to see a long piece of writing.

I began reading...

Dear Ziyanda,

We've already established that I'm probably the worst communicator in this relationship. I thought I'd be able to hide this fact about me, but clearly I was wrong, because you are quite the inquisitive little girl.

Anyway, I wanted to formally apologise for what took place in PE. I've been cracking my skull, trying to figure out how to begin to articulate my thoughts... I know you were deeply affected, but because you're Ziyanda, you've put all of that aside just to sustain peace between us. I must admit that I've never come across such a selfless person... I love you (please note that I am going to randomly write how much I love you, because I'm that crazy about you).

The woman you saw in PE was definitely an ex of mine.

Unfortunately, she wasn't just any ex...

I know you're probably freaking out, and hyperventilating, so I would like you to take a few deep breaths before you have an unnecessary attack.

I fold the letter and do as I am told.

So now that you're calmer, I assume, I would like to give you a bit of context... Busisiwe and I used to be in a relationship about 2 years ago. She and I had quite a close relationship, I loved her.

My heart is doing the most right now, but I can't seem to stop reading. I want to know about this bitch, Busi.

I loved her so much that I even asked her to marry me.

Woooh! I put the letter down... Why the fuck is he telling me this?... Anyway, after a few minutes, I start reading again...

I asked her to marry me, and she actually agreed... I was genuinely happy about our relationship. What's even greater was that she was pregnant.

Haiké. Fuck this shit. I put the letter down again, and go to the bathroom to pee. Once I'm done, I try calling his shady ass, but he doesn't answer. Damn him! Nxa I go back to reading this nonsense.

Now, you have to understand that this person was the love of my life. We had been together for just over 3 years, and I was convinced that she was the one. When she told me that she was pregnant, my whole world changed. I felt like I had a purpose. She's the one who even encouraged me to change my career... We had a good thing going, and everything felt right...

But, obviously I was wrong...

To summarise, I found out that she was in another relationship and I wasn't the father of the baby... I was basically her backup plan. I was her crutch, simply because the man she loved was married to another woman, and she was seeing him on the side. She thought she'd build a life with me, but couldn't keep it up, because she never actually loved me. She loved someone else... All of this was revealed when we were busy with Lobola negotiations. She brought this man there and they professed their love for each other in front of both my family and hers...

At this point, I'm dumfounded.

I was devastated, Ziyanda. I really thought that I would spend the rest of my life with this woman. She was "it" for me. She had promised me this amazing life, but it all came crashing down. Heck, it didn't even exist. I've never dealt with my anger and hurt towards her. She sold me a dream, and it cost me my heart. I bought that dream, only to find out later on that I was being played. I felt humiliated, hurt, and angry.

Seeing her that evening, reignited all the emotions I managed to suppress. She reminded me of how stupid I was.

So when you saw my reaction, I know you assumed I was all love struck, but it's the complete opposite. If you weren't there, I would have probably hurt her, I swear. I just fail to believe that she did that to me. She knew everything about me, and what I had been through prior to our relationship, so I couldn't understand why she would play me like that.

We fast forward to the day I met you... As cliché as it is, I was genuinely intrigued by you... When I got to know you, my heart opened itself up involuntarily. It decided independently that it would welcome you, and give you a fair chance. My mind was against it, but we know that the heart controls a lot of shit we do...

I love you so much, and I'm proud of my love for you. I'm proud of my heart. I don't know where I get the capability to love so deeply even after the shit I've been through. I don't even bother questioning this capability. All I know is that I love you, and my love for you grows every time you cross my mind, or when I see you get lost in your crazy thoughts, or when I watch you sleep and snore next to me...

I apologise for how the PE incident came across... I want nothing to do with Busisiwe. She basically used and abused me, and I think I also value myself enough to know when to eliminate myself from a toxic situation. I'm just still angered and saddened by the situation. Seeing her after such a long time just threw me off, that's all. I don't want to run off with her, as you thought.

Who in the world would leave The Great Ziyanda of the Dlamini? A stupid motherfucker.

Anyway, I'd love to discuss this with you more when I come back. I know for a fact that you have a lot of questions and "shady" comments (I do pay attention to your "ratchet" shows and I'm picking up the "trashy" lingo). I just thought it was a great idea to write this letter, so you can get my side of the story (without interrupting me).

This letter will be the basis of our next conversation, I guess.

I love you, baby.

See you soonest,

Your Star.

I put the letter down and go to the bathroom to pee some more.

I'm a bit flabbergasted right now.

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I'm done showering, and as I'm getting dressed, Derek walks in.

I swear I have to catch my breath for a second.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hi.

He looks so good!

Me: So I made you stop going to gym?

Him: That's questionable.

I roll my eyes and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: Well, now I definitely feel fat.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: Maybe I should join you.

Him: You are more than welcome to.

Me: You want me to be thin?

Him: Uh-uh, see, I won't allow you to trap me and put me in a do or die position like you women always do...

Me: I'm just asking pertinent questions here, buddy.

Him: Ya, but I'm not going to fall for it.

I laugh and he joins me.

Me: Please shower quickly... I'm starving.

He kisses me and I groan. Now I'm suddenly hungry for him.

Him: Please shower with me?

Me: Hai hai.

Him: Baby, please...

He kisses me, and I eventually give in...

We're now clean (well I'm cleaner, considering how I showered twice) and I'm waiting for him to finish preparing breakfast.

My phone rings, and I answer without checking my caller id.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, Ziyanda.

I frown as I check the caller id.

Didn't I block this person?

I put the phone back on my ear and sigh.

Me: Hello, Bongani.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm well.

He sighs.

Bongani: All this time I thought you blocked me.

Me: Ufunani?

Bongani: I wanted to hear your voice.

Me: Okay, so now that you've heard it, is it possible for you to continue thinking I've blocked you?

Bongani: Ouch.

Me: I'm in a very happy relationship, and I don't need this negativity.

Bongani: I hear you.

Me: Bye.

Bongani: Bye.

I hang up and instantly block that damn number. What the hell was that about? Yazi it seems like these exes can always sense when you're living your best life. They'll come weaselling their slimy asses back, and try to cause havoc. If you don't deal with them accordingly, you'll find yourself in messy situations. The Devil has been said to come in different forms, so you better start preaching in tongues when he tries coming at you!

Derek eventually finishes and gives me my food.

Me: Thank you, sir.

He smiles.

Me: Methinks you're the best cook in the whole wide world!

Him: You don't say...

Me: Yep.

Him: Thank you, baby.

Me: So, I thought we'd discuss your letter, while eating.

He laughs.

Me: Cause you know I prioritise food first, so I think I'll be calm and rational.

Him: Smart girl...

I sigh.

Me: And I don't want us to be all sad and shit. I'd like us to have a casual conversation.

He nods and smiles.

Me: Okay... So I have the tools here with me, and I think we can start incorporating them.

Him: Okay.

Me: So, because we're about to have a discussion, both of us are about to use the "Using Your Words" tool.

Him: Okay.

Me: And we're going to use the "Listening" tool, which states that I listen with my eyes, ears and heart.

He nods.

Me: Okay... I think I'll also use my "Breathing" tool when I start freaking out.

He laughs and nods. I eat some of my food, and then sigh.

Me: Can I start?

Him: Go ahead; I'm using my Listening Tool.

Me: Okay... I've read your letter, and I'm actually thankful that you expressed yourself in that way. I know I have a tendency to freak out and not listen attentively.

He nods as he chews slowly.

Me: Now with that said, I would like to express what I went through while reading it.

Him: Go ahead, love.

I smile. He really is loveable.

Me: So, at first I was angry, because I couldn't believe that you were telling me about your ex.

He chuckles.

Him: So you were angry that I was telling you about something you wanted to know about?

Me: Pretty much.

Him: Kodwa Ziyanda.

Me: Yeah, yeah. I know... Anyway, after a while, I was deeply saddened by what this bitch did to you.

Him: Bitch?

Me: Backhanded, Bacterioid, Basic, Bitch.

He chuckles.

Him: Lovely use of alliteration, Ms Dlamini.

Me: I can't believe she put you through all of that.

Him: You are not alone.

Me: When was the last time you saw or spoke to her?

He sighs and looks at me thoughtfully.

Him: Probably over a year ago.

I nod.

Me: And did you cut ties with her immediately after what happened?

He shakes his head.

Him: I was indenial. I thought we'd still make it work.

Yoh.

Him: Dean and Liwa had to bring me back to reality. I was really indenial.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Seeing her that night took me back to that emotional place I was in.

I nod.

Him: I was very invested in that relationship. I was never ready for that shit.

Me: I guess we live and we learn.

He nods.

Him: So, how are you feeling now?

Me: I'm okay... I just feel bad for you.

Him: You don't have to.

We finish up eating and sit back.

Him: So is this what talking feels like?

I laugh and nod.

Me: As long as we don't make it a tedious task, then we should be fine. See how constructive we've been this morning?

Him: Definitely.

I get closer to his face and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Him: I know.

Me: You do?

He nods.

Him: I don't feel insecure when I'm with you. I know you love me.

Me: And I'm not planning on leaving you for my side man.

Him: You have a side man?

Me: A lady never tells...

He laughs and groans.

Him: See, for you, I'd kill... So, please don't test me.

Me: Oh wow.

We continue making out on the couch...

Overall, I'm glad that he has taken the next step. What I will do is continue being patient, and not bombard him with deep chats. I don't want him to feel like I'm putting him under too much pressure.

So it's around 11am and I am in the mood to cook. I looked up tons of recipes, and ended up narrowing it down to pasta and mince. Simple, right? I'm not a chef, like Derek, but I'd like to meet him halfway.

Me: So, I'm cooking lunch.

He raises an eyebrow and smiles weirdly.

Derek: Ahh is it?

Me: Yes.

Him: Uhm, baby, I'm more than willing to-

Me: Derek, no. I also want to meet you halfway.

Him: But, I'm not complaining.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm inviting Dean and the Mzinyathis.

He raises an eyebrow again.

Him: Is it?

Me: Yep. I'm in a very good mood.

Him: Uhm so can I help?

Me: No.

Him: I insist.

Me: I don't give a shit.

Him: Yoh.

I look at him and smile.

Me: You can finish up your work or something. Stay away!

He sighs and nods.

I understand that he likes spoiling me, but he needs to chill. I don't understand why he is acting so weird.

I get my phone and dial Nomvuyo's number.

It rings for a while, and she eventually answers.

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby!

Me: Hey, Vuvz, unjani?

Nomvuyo: I'm great, love. Just being treated like an egg by Liwa.

Me: Aww, mommy!

Nomvuyo: It's your entire fault. Angithi you're on a mission to expose people's secrets.

Me: Gosh, I'll tell you how that meeting went... Kunzima!

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: They'll get over it eventually.

Me: Anyway, Derek and I would like to invite you two for lunch.

Nomvuyo: Thank God. I'm not in the mood to cook!

Me: Yaay! See you soon?

Nomvuyo: Shap, love.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek victoriously.

Me: At least other people are excited.

Derek: Oh, baby. I'm very excited, believe me.

He smiles reassuringly and I giggle.

Derek: Let me give you your space.

He walks away as I dial Dean's number. I'm not expecting him to come, because Nolwazi is probably gowishing, but I'll try...

He answers.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hey, Langa. Unjani?

Dean: I'm alright, and you?

Me: I'm well, thanks.

Dean: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes, actually. How are things that side?

Dean: Nolwazi is MIA.

Me: What??

Also, why is he so cool about it?

Me: Where is she?

Dean: Probably went to her best friend's place.

Me: Oh. How are you?

Dean: I can't be running after Nolwazi when we have kids to take care of. She'll come back once she has dealt with all her anger.

Me: Yoh.

Dean: Insensitive, I know. But it works for us.

Me: Hmm.

Dean: So what's up?

Me: Uhm I wanted to invite you for lunch.

Dean: Cool. See you soonest.

Me: Dean, are you sure you're okay?

Dean: Ya. Bye.

Me: Bye.

He hangs up and I sigh. He is definitely not fine. I'll interrogate him properly when I see him.

After 3 hours, I think I'm finally done...

I'm actually exhausted.

Derek emerges and is shocked when he sees the mess in the kitchen.

Derek: Baby-

Me: I'll clean!

Him: Still don't need any help?

Me: No.

He nods, gets a bottle of water, and disappears again.

I look around in defeat.

I should have told him I need help with cleaning.

Argh, anyway, I begin cleaning, and finish after a while.

Derek then emerges again, and smiles.

Derek: Our guests are here.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: Okay.

Him: Still okay?

Me: Yes.

Him: Okay.

Thankfully, everything is on track...

Within minutes, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Dean walk in.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I smile.

Me: Hey, Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug. Boy, do these men smell good.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. I'd like some hot chocolate, please.

Me: Find it.

Nomvuyo: Hawu, what happened to hospitality?

Me: You're not a guest here.

She laughs as she makes herself some hot chocolate.

Me: Hey, Dean.

Dean: Ya Dlamini.

Me: No hug?

He grunts as he opens his arms and I hug him.

Me: What's wrong?

Dean: I desperately need my own space. I'm tired of living with the Dumakudes.

Me: Yoh, manje what is Lwazi saying?

Dean: Now is not the time to bring up my shit. I have to wait for this Mdu thing to blow over.

Me: Is she that bad?

He groans.

Dean: She feels like people always expect her to react to shit maturely, and dismiss the hurt they cause her.

He pats my shoulder.

Dean: I'd rather not talk about it.

Me: Okay.

Liwa: Derek, can you dish up? We're famished.

Me: No, I'm the one who's dishing up. I cooked.

Liwa: Oh...

Nomvuyo: You cooked?

Dean: You?

Me: Yep.

I smile proudly.

Liwa: Uhm... Okay then, Dlamini...

They make their way to the lounge and I go to the kitchen.

Once I'm done dishing up for them, I give them their plates.

I sit and look at them expectantly.

Nomvuyo: Love, I'm actually craving a peanut butter and jam sandwich. My doctor says I shouldn't eat too much pasta. Had I known you were making it, I would have told you earlier.

Me: Whatever, Pregnant Petunia.

I take her plate back to the kitchen and then sit and look at them.

Derek: Baby, aren't you eating?

Me: I'll eat later...

He nods and looks at Liwa and Dean.

Liwa: Uhm, should we pray?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

We all close our eyes and Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Uhm, God... We ask you, from the depths of our hearts, to please bless this food, and the hands that prepared it. Protect and bless the people who will eat it as all. Amen.

We all murmur, "Amen."

I look at them and smile.

Me: Dig in!

Derek is the first one. Dean and Liwa look at him closely as he chews with a smile on his face.

Liwa then follows... He also has a smile on his face.

I feel good. I was very nervous about them not liking it, because they do have strong opinions.

Dean then follows. I can't read his face. I'm sure he's too stressed about his Nolwazi issues.

He chews.

Dean: This shit is-

Derek: Amazing!

Derek looks at Dean.

Derek: This shit is amazing.

Liwa: Hmm.

Dean: Hmm indeed...

I watch as they eat slowly. I'm glad they're taking their time.

Nomvuyo: Well, lookie here... We have another great cook in the family...

They all laugh quietly and I smile...

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The following day, I decide to go visit my parents. I need some TLC from them, and to catch up with Lwazi as well.

As soon as I get there, Lwazi is all over me.

Lwazi: Mommy!

Me: Hey, baby!

We walk in, hand in hand.

Me: How are you?

Lwazi: I'm amazing!

Me: Have you been treating these old people well?

Mom: Don't you dare!

We laugh and share a hug.

Me: Hey, ma.

Mom: Unjani, sisi?

Me: Ngiyaphila. How's everything this side?

Mom: Lwazi is obviously running the house.

I laugh as Lwazi runs off to play with her friends.

Me: Has she settled in kahle?

Mom nods and smiles.

Mom: And how are you? You look gorgeous.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Mom: Clearly you are well taken care of.

Me: Hmm.

She chuckles.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He went to stock chickens, so I'm sure you won't see him.

Me: I'll come back next weekend.

She nods.

Mom: How's Ngidi?

Me: I need a debrief session vele.

She laughs and we sit.

I then begin to tell her everything that has happened so far...

Once I'm done, she nods.

Mom: See, I did mention that he is not fine.

Me: You can spot them from a mile away.

We laugh.

Mom: Continue being you, sthandwa sami. I think things are going the way they're supposed to go. Be as supportive as you can.

Me: Of course.

She smiles.

Mom: I'm so proud of you. Who would have thought that my little baby would grow up to be this mature woman with so much love and patience?

Me: Aww!

Mom: I'm happy for you. I know a lot of parents would never allow this arrangement, but I trust you with my life. I also can't make decisions for a 25 year old. Umdala manje sthandwa sami.

Me: Thank you. I appreciate your support.

We share a hug.

Mom: So, would you like to eat, noma you are just popping by?

Me: Of course I'd like to eat. Derek also asked for a takeaway.

We both laugh as she stands and walks to the kitchen. I go out and call Lwazi. I need some of her craziness right now.

Argh, seeing as I popped by the good ol' township (cause you know, I now live on the other side of the world, with Caucasians) I insisted on meeting up with Niki.

We decided to meet at Bafokeng for some braai meat.

As I get there, I'm shocked to find her with Kwanele.

Universe, I thought we were getting along. You just couldn't wait a full 48 hours to let me get my shit together? Hai man. It's time I find another parallel universe that will have my back.

I get to the table, and Niki exclaims, with her usual bubbly self.

Me: Hey, Kwani.

Kwanele smiles and my heart does a little dance. He really does have a lovely smile.

Kwanele: Ziyanda.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: You smell nice.

Kwanele: I thank you.

We sit and I assess him. How could people hate this person? I don't get it, man. He's so calm and collected... But then again, these calm ones are the dangerous type...

Me: How are you?

Kwanele: I'm well... Are you well?

Me: I mean, I'm okay.

He chuckles and looks at Niki, who looks at me.

Niki: I told him about your new squad.

My heart stops beating for a few seconds.

Me: What?

Niki: I told him about your dilemma.

I look at Kwanele nervously and he chuckles again.

Kwanele: It must be an awkward position for you.

I sigh in relief. He seems chilled.

Me: You have no idea.

Niki: As long as people don't come for me, and what's mine, then I'm good.

I look at Niki, and end up laughing, because I know she means that. Niki is the type to throw hands, and make one's life a living hell if they come for her.

Me: I doubt anyone will come for you.

Kwanele: How about we stop discussing all of this from now onwards?

Niki and I look at him.

Kwanele: I think its best we all move on.

Niki: You're right, baby. There's nothing desirable about discussing exes.

They smile at each other, and I smile, because they look so happy, smiling at each other.

Kwanele then looks at me intently.

Kwanele: Is Derek well?

Me: Yes, he is. Thanks for asking.

He nods.

Overall, the vibe is chilled and our conversation is flowing. I don't feel awkward at all!

Just then, Niki's phone rings and she walks away as she answers.

I then look at Kwanele and sigh.

Me: I like you. Please don't hurt my friend.

He shakes his head and looks at me softly.

Kwanele: I won't.

I nod.

Niki: Look who's here?!

I turn and see Jeff and Luyanda.

Oh Lord... Why is the airhead here? Yazi, I can tolerate a lot of things in this thing called life, but airheads? I caiint. Luyanda is one of those pretty girls with no substance. Also, she is a cold bitch.

Already nje she's standing here looking constipated.

Me: Jeffy!

I stand and squeeze Jeff.

Jeff: Hey, Zizi Bear.

Me: I didn't know you were coming.

Jeff: Niki invited me last minute.

I look at Luyanda and try my best not to roll my eyes. I just... Gosh...

Me: Hello, Lu.

She mumbles a silent hi.

Futsek kanti! Swine!

I sit and decide that I will ignore her constipated ass.

Kwanele and Jeff greet each other and everyone sits. These are those usual wooden benches. Niki and Kwanele are sitting next to each other, and I'm on the opposite side, facing Kwanele. Jeff is next to me, so he's basically between Luyanda and me.

Jeff: Have you ordered meat?

Me: Yep.

Niki goes and checks for our meat.

Jeff: Mate, have you officially moved this side?

Kwanele: Yes.

Jeff: Finally.

They both chuckle.

Jeff: Baby, what would you like to drink?

Luyanda: Juice is fine.

Jeff then looks at me.

Jeff: You okay?

Me: Yep. I'm cleansing.

Jeff: Wena na.

Me: Don't come for me.

He chuckles as he gets up and disappears.

Kwanele: How's little Uluthando, Lu?

Luyanda smiles.

Luyanda: His good.

Kwanele nods and smiles as well.

Luyanda: He hardly ever cries.

Kwanele: He's calm like his dad.

They go on and on.

Mxm look at them bonding. How annoying. She's all kind now, because she's addressing a man, but let me talk to her, and the bitchiness goes to 100, with her dumb ass. Thanda kabi amadoda.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek. I excuse myself as I walk away from the music, to the gate.

Me: Hello?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey, Star.

Derek: What's with the loud music?

Me: I'm with Niki.

Derek: Is she good?

Me: Yep. She came with her man.

He chuckles.

Derek: You haven't freaked out?

Me: Nope, you'd be proud of me.

Derek: I'll congratulate you properly when you come back.

I squeal in excitement.

Me: Oh, and he even asked me about you. I really think you two-

Derek: Don't even try.

I groan.

Derek: Enjoy your time with your people.

Me: Nywee!

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and walk back to the table.

Jeff is back with more juice for us.

Me: Thanks.

Jeff: Cool.

Niki also comes back with our meat, and we all delve in...

Just then, Niki's phone rings, and she walks away, answering it.

Minutes later, she comes back with Ziggy.

I literally choke on my juice when I see who's following him.

Why the hell would Ziggy bring Ivy??

Ziggy: Hey, mates!

I look over at Kwanele, and I swear his expression flipped. I've never seen him this cold.

Ivy: What the fuck is going on here?

She stares at me in shock, and then stares at Kwanele in disgust.

Ivy: What the fuck are you doing here?

I stand.

I don't know why, but I stand.

At this point, I'm ready.

I've been ready for this shallow bitch.

Luyanda can jump in if she wants.

INSERT 90

Niki: Zizi Bear, let's get more drinks for me.

I'm not sure if Niki knows about Ivy, because if she did, she'd be the first one to stand and get to whipping.

She stands, takes my hand, and leads me to the bar area.

We leave everyone and get to the bar area.

Niki: And then? Why are you suddenly so combative?

Me: Ivy is the girl I told you about.

Niki: You tell me about a lot of people lately.

I sigh.

Me: The one who annoys me. Nolwazi's little sister.

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Niki: Nolwazi being Kwanele's ex?

I nod.

Niki groans.

Niki: Why is she here?

Me: I have no idea.

Niki: And was all that aggression from her directed at Kwani?

Me: I think so.

Niki: Anganya.

With that said, she walks out and leaves me there. I decide to take a deep breath and gather my thoughts before I also walk back outside.

I'm shocked to see Ivy still there. Niki is now sitting next to Kwanele.

Ivy: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hi.

I sit and pour myself some juice.

Luyanda: Why don't you guys sit?

I look at Kwanele and he is as cool as a cucumber now. Jeff on the other hand, is just watching a movie.

Ziggy: Uhm, how are you Zizi Bear?

Me: Good.

I drink some of my juice and look over at Niki.

Niki: Ziggy, as you can see, there's no space in this bench...

Ivy: I don't do places like this, so I'm okay...

Niki: As I said, Ziggy, there's no space... Do as you please.

She then looks at Kwani and smiles.

Niki: Need another drink?

Kwanele: I do, actually.

Niki: Good. Let's get you your drinks, baby.

They both stand.

Me: Get me more juice, please.

Niki: Shap.

They stand and walk away.

Hehe.

Ivy: What's with that one now? Does she know she's dating an idiot?

Jeff: Hey, now.

Me: Contrary to popular belief, Ziggy is also an idiot, so I don't think you're any different from that one, who's my best friend.

Ivy: And you would know, how?

I smile.

Me: How about you ask your idiot?

That stupid grin on her face immediately disappears and I smile ever so kindly.

Jeff clears his throat.

Ziggy: So, I'm an idiot now?

Jeff: This can't be news to you, mate.

Luyanda: Definitely.

Ziggy, Jeff and Luyanda all chuckle and I join them.

Ivy: So you know these people, Ziyanda?

Jeff: We've been in each other's lives for a while now.

Thank God Jeff has my back right now. I would disown his ass if he did the opposite. It's clear that he doesn't really like Ivy.

Ivy: So, you're busy hanging out with my sister's ex, the one who's fucked up her life, while you're building a friendship with her as well?

Me: If jumping into senseless conclusions is going to be the key to getting you to leave right now, then you're more than welcome to do so.

She takes out her phone and storms off.

Ziggy: Rea-

Jeff: Fuck off. We've told you numerous times to keep your relationship separate from this shit we have with Kwanele. Why do you have to be stupid?

Ziggy scratches his head.

Jeff: You really are an idiot.

Me: A senseless one, at that.

Ziggy sighs as he walks away and disappears as well.

Jeff: He's been acting foolishly since he met this girl.

Luyanda: Ivy is a free spirit.

I decide not to take part in this conversation, because I feel like freeing these fists across Luyanda's face.

Jeff: She's disrespectful and spoilt- a very bad combination.

Luyanda: Don't go too hard. She helped us by introducing Nomvuyo.

Jeff: That's the only good th-

Me: Nomvuyo?

They both look at me and nod.

Me: How do you know her?

Jeff began telling me about how Nomvuyo was there when Luyanda gave birth and how amazing she was.

At this point, I'm too overwhelmed to even respond. This world is way too small.

Jeff: So, Derek is related to that crew?

Me: Sorta.

Jeff nods and chuckles.

Jeff: Fucken small world.

Kwanele and Niki come back with more drinks and sit.

Niki: Did they leave?

Jeff: Yep.

Niki: Good riddance.

Luyanda: So you also dislike Ivy? You don't even know her.

Niki: I've known you for years, and I don't particularly like you, so what's your point?

Whoaa!

Jeff: Come on, Niki.

Niki: No, I'm just trying to understand what she's saying. If someone comes for Jeff, will you not be the first one to defend him?

Luyanda: There's no reason for you to be a bitch.

Niki: Then stop talking out your ass.

I sip on my juice.

Jeff: Niki, calm the fuck down.

Niki: I'm calm as hell right now, trust me.

Jeff: I think you guys need to talk this shit out right now. I'm getting tired of the unnecessary bitchiness that ensues when you're around each other.

He looks at me.

Me: Heyi, I'm not part of this. Don't even.

Jeff: I'm serious.

Luyanda tries to stand, but Jeff stops her.

Luyanda: Jeff!

Jeff: Sit down and stop being dramatic.

She looks at him angrily.

Jeff: All three of you are being childish right now.

Niki: Asingaphaphelani, Jeff.

Jeff sighs and looks at Kwanele in defeat.

Jeff: Help me out here, mate.

Kwanele chuckles.

Kwanele: Why don't you like each other?

Me: Luyanda thinks she shits rainbows.

Luyanda: Excuse me??

Niki: You walk around thinking you're better than everyone.

Luyanda: What? And what about you two mean girls?

Niki: Don't even try going that angle, because you know you started this nonsense.

Luyanda: Wow.

She looks at Jeff coldly.

Luyanda: I'm leaving.

Jeff: Baby-

She gives him one look, and he sighs.

Jeff: Okay.

He looks at us.

Jeff: We're not done here.

Niki: Hambani wethu.

Luyanda stands and walks away angrily.

Jeff: See you soon.

Kwanele: You're in big trouble.

Jeff: Tell me about it...

He stands and pats my shoulder.

Jeff: I'm mad at you.

Me: You'll be fine.

I smile at him and he eventually smiles.

Jeff: Bye, Nik.

Niki: Love you too.

He grunts and walks away.

Peace at last!

Niki: Such drama.

Me: And whose fault is it?

Niki: Heyi heyi don't you dare!

Me: Sisi, are you not the one who invited all these people.

Niki: Argh.

Me: Exactly.

Kwanele: Went from peaceful to deadly quite randomly.

Me: So Ivy doesn't get along with you?

He shakes his head.

Kwanele: It's understandable, seeing as I hurt her sister...

Niki: But, it's not like everything was your entire fault, so I don't get the melodrama.

Me: Really?

My inner Nomvuyo is now awakening.

Me: Kanti what happened?

Kwanele sighs as he begins telling me everything.

To say I am shocked would be an understatement.

Me: So your mom planned the whole thing?

He nods.

Me: But, why did you allow her to control you?

Kwanele: I was desperate. She knew how desperate and she used that. She's my mother, so she obviously knows how to press the right buttons.

Me: Yoh.

Kwanele: But, I admit that it wasn't just her... I messed up by agreeing.

I don't say anything. I need to process this side of the story.

Kwanele: The problem with Ivy is that she's overly disrespectful.

Niki: Mxm.

Kwanele: She frustrates me a lot, but I guess she has her sister's back.

Niki: And I'll gladly have your back as well.

They look at each other and start sharing one of their usual lovey dovey moments.

Me: I'm still here.

They stop and chuckle.

I miss Nkanyezi now.

My phone rings just on time, and boy am I relieved!

I answer it happily.

Me: Star!

Derek: Your Uber is a few minutes away.

Me: My what, now?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: So, Ivy got here and then Niki-

Derek: Save all of that for when you get here.

I laugh.

Me: Hmkay then, see you soon.

Derek: Bye, love.

He ends the call and I walk back to the two lovebirds.

Me: I've got to love and leave you...

Niki: Finally!

Me: Excuse me?

Niki: I didn't know how I'd get rid of you.

Me: For your information, I came all the way from my Caucasian suburbs to bless you township peasants with my presence.

Niki: Heeee!

We laugh and she stands.

Niki: See you soon, Petty LaBelle.

Me: Bye, Bitchy Bianca.

We continue laughing as we share a hug.

Me: Bye, Kwani.

He stands as well and we share a hug.

Me: Sorry for all the drama.

Kwanele: No problem.

Me: See you soon.

Kwanele: Of course.

Me: Bye, people!

I walk out and find my Uber waiting outside.

As I walk in, I'm greeted by the amazing smell of Derek's cooking.

Me: Hello!

I wrap my arms around him and he sniffs me.

Derek: Stinky.

Me: Excuse me??

Derek: Braai...

Me: Ohho.

He kisses my cheek and I let go of him.

Me: I'll take a shower, master... Anything else master would like me to do?

He laughs.

Derek: Uyabheda.

Me: I'll be back...

I walk away and take a long shower... Once I'm done, I walk to the lounge and find him there. We sit next to each other.

Derek: So what happened?

I begin to tell him everything that happened...

Once I'm done, he chuckles.

Derek: No offense, but my crew is better than yours.

Me: Whatever!

Derek: I'm glad you didn't fight.

Me: I'm a lady.

Derek: Is it?

Me: Yep.

He pulls me closer and we kiss.

Derek: A very dramatic lady.

Me: Mxm.

He kisses me and I smile.

Me: Wanna know where my quiet and safe space is?

He nods.

Me: Right here, in your arms.

Derek: Don't make me blush.

I giggle.

Derek: So how about you use the Garbage Can Tool and let go of what happened today?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Good.

He kisses me again and I relax even more in his arms.

Things are getting better with Star, and I'm beyond grateful.

Universe, I guess you aren't that selfish...

INSERT 91

The following day was our last day of freedom. I'm happy, but bitter at the same time. I could use a few more months...

Anyway, Derek and I decided we'd spend the day together, with no disturbances. We've had quite a tremendous wave of disturbances during this holiday time.

It's around 11am and we're still in bed.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Yes?

Me: Do you think Nolwazi will ever like me after this?

He looks at me blankly.

Derek: It's not like her disliking you, will make you disappear.

Me: Hehe.

Derek: And she can't direct her anger towards you, Mdu is the one who messed up.

Me: I'm the messenger...

Derek: Give it some time...

Just then, my phone rings and it's an unfamiliar number.

I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Am I speaking to Ziyanda?

Me: Uhm, yes. Who-

Person: Nolwazi.

Hmmyghaad!

My heart stops beating, I swear.

Me: Hi, Lwa-

Nolwazi: I'd like to meet with you in an hour if you don't mind.

She is so cold.

I look at Derek.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi: I'll text you the location.

Me: Sure.

She ends the call and I quickly get out of bed and look at Derek in shock.

Me: Ngidi!

Derek: What?

Me: Don't say what! That was Nolwazi!

He raises an eyebrow and looks at me seriously.

Derek: Ufunani?

Me: She wants to meet! She was so cold!

Derek: She wants to meet?

I nod.

Derek: And you said yes?

Me: Duuh!

Derek: What happened to having a drama-free day?

Me: How the hell am I going to say no to someone I've done something like this to?

He sighs and rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Derek: I'm coming with.

Me: No!

Derek: I'm not necessarily asking for permission...

I sigh and throw myself on the bed.

Me: She sounds pissed.

Derek: Mxm.

I look at him in shock and he grunts.

Derek: Let's get ready then...

He gets out of bed and pulls me.

Derek: I'm tired of this shit.

We go to the bathroom...

We're now sitting at a restaurant, waiting for Nolwazi. I know I'm a nervous wreck, but I'm not about to let any of that show. Derek is the only one who knows my panicky side, and it will stay that way.

Derek: You okay?

Me: Ya.

I see Nolwazi approaching, and I take a sip of my water.

She gets to the table and clears her throat.

Nolwazi: Good morning.

She sits.

Me: Morning.

Derek: Hi.

She stares at me, and as much as I don't want to, I stare back at her.

Nolwazi: I didn't know you'd be joining us, Derek.

Derek shrugs.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: Good to have people who fight your battles, right?

Wowzer... She really threw a jab at me?

I decide not to say anything, and Derek dismisses that as well.

Derek: Nolwazi, why exactly is Ziyanda here?

Nolwazi raises an eyebrow.

Nolwazi: Because she decided to interfere in shit that has nothing to do with her.

Derek tries to say something and I clear my throat. Although I love his supportiveness, I know I need to deal with this myself, seeing as I put myself in this position in the first place.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: Ready to speak for yourself?

Me: Please cut the unnecessary jabs, Nolwazi.

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: I have a big problem with your statement. I didn't interfere in any way... Mdu, your brother, is the one who involved me.

Nolwazi: Why are you even having such contact with your ex?

Me: I don't think that has anything to do with you.

Nolwazi: Well, clearly your conversations centred around me.

Me: They sure did... But your brother is the one who initiated all of that... I don't know you from a bar of soap.

Nolwazi: Which is precisely why I'm baffled as to why you felt the need to bring all of this to me.

Derek: You're barking up the wrong tree.

Nolwazi: Derek-

Derek: No, Ziyanda was involved without any choice, so I won't allow any of you to put this shit on her. She's not the one who led your brother into Tholi's arms. In addition, she's not the one who made them fall in love and hide it from you.

Nolwazi looks at me intently.

Me: Mdu is the one who messed up. I get that you're pissed at me for bringing it to your attention, but I honestly think your anger is misdirected.

Nolwazi: You're young. You don't understand what I went through.

Me: Nolwazi you can't expect me to sympathise with you when I don't fully know what you went through. I won't take the blame for what other people have done to you, I refuse to.

She takes a deep breath and sighs.

Me: I feel bad, I really do.

Nolwazi: Ivy tells me your friend is dating Kwanele?

I groan.

Me: I'd rather not discuss that, because my best friend is not part of this group. She has a separate life, and I don't see why it should be an issue.

Nolwazi: Ivy came back fuming, but I really couldn't be bothered by that. Kwanele has every right to move on. I've also moved on.

I keep quiet.

I thought she'd stand and slap me.

Nolwazi: I hope you're not stressed about that.

Me: I feel conflicted, because on one side, I'm getting to know you, and on the other side, I've known Niki for years, and she really likes Kwanele. It's a weird situation.

Nolwazi: Kwanele is the least of my worries. He's a good man that found himself in a corner. I've had a lot of time to go through the hurt and anger, but I've honestly just accepted the situation for what it is. Dean and I are building our life, so why should I expect Kwanele to stand still and not move on?

I sigh.

Nolwazi: The only thing that's pissing me off is the Mdu situation, and you are correct in saying that my anger is misdirected.

Derek: I'm glad you've reached that realisation.

Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: You were ready to bite my head off weren't you?

Derek nods.

Nolwazi: I don't blame you. Dean would have done the same thing.

Derek: Here's the thing, Lwazi... Mdu is the one who fucked up. Ziyanda may have been the bearer of bad news, but she's not the one to blame... Additionally, the situation with Kwanele and her best friend is honestly none of our business. Your sister may be defending you and shit, but please caution her to not come off too strong around Ziyanda. I can already see how she'll behave when we're together.

Nolwazi: Ivy is being Ivy.

Derek: But, Ivy must know her place. Now that she has established that Kwanele has moved on, she mustn't involve herself in that shit. Like you stated, the man has every right to move on. Whatever he's currently doing with his life shouldn't even affect us this side. It's unfortunate that Ziyanda is in the middle, but what will not happen is everyone assuming that she is responsible for putting herself

in this position. Niki likes the guy, and who are we to come between that? Ziyanda has decided to separate what she has with you, with what she has with her best friend. Niki has been transparent about her feelings about this whole thing, and concluded that if she wants to be informed about something, she will direct all of that to Kwanele.

Nolwazi: I hear you, Derek. I will speak to Ivy. However, she also has every right to not like Kwanele.

Derek: But, she shouldn't intentionally go to his space and be invasive. She can talk shit about him all she wants, but she has no right to invade whatever he's building for himself right now.

Nolwazi: Okay, I will have a conversation with her.

Derek: And as for Mdu and Tholi... I understand your anger, but we all know how love is...

Nolwazi sighs.

Me: Tholi is not necessarily to blame... She was forced into this.

Nolwazi looks at me intently.

Me: I've gotten to know her, and she is really going through a lot.

Nolwazi: Really?

Me: She's a wounded person, and from my understanding, she was forced into this by her aunt and Kwanele's mother.

Nolwazi hisses.

Nolwazi: I've heard it all before.

Me: But, I guarantee you that Tholi was not out to get you. She was a victim of circumstance.

She sighs.

Me: She is very remorseful, and she's even depressed severely.

Nolwazi: Really?

I quickly tell her about Tholi. I'm trying to change the way she sees Tholi. The poor girl is going through the most!

Once I'm done, Nolwazi drinks her water. She seems touched. I think I managed to convince her!

Nolwazi: Wow.

I sigh.

Me: I'm caught up in a very weird position, Nolwazi... I got to know you and I liked you, then Mdu introduced me to Tholi and then I liked her, then Niki introduced me to Kwanele and I liked him. What's worse with Kwanele is that I liked him before I knew his story. I didn't even connect the dots. He told me he made mistakes and I didn't take that seriously, because I didn't think those mistakes involved you or Tholi. I got three different perspectives on the same issue. You exposed me to the hurt you experienced because of Kwanele, Tholi and Kwanele's mother. Tholi told me she was forced and she had no choice, because of her aunt and Kwanele's mother. Kwanele told me that he was backed into a corner by his mother. I don't think any of you understand how confusing and draining this is.

Derek: In all honesty, do you all realise who the common denominator is?

Nolwazi: Of course... Thenjiwe...

Derek: That woman is obviously a great manipulator.

Ziyanda: I may be dramatic and crazy, but my intentions are never shady. I don't want you to see me in a negative light because of this. I'm in the middle of this shit, and it's a confusing mind fuck.

Nolwazi: I don't see you in a negative light, Ziyanda. I've moved on from Kwanele. I cannot emphasise this enough.

Me: I'll understand if you don't trust me.

Nolwazi: Trust you with what? You already know everything there is to know about me.

She smiles.

Nolwazi: I apologise for the way I came in here. I was pissed as fuck.

Me: Which is understandable.

Nolwazi: And I think you did well by bringing Derek. Even though he's a bias mediator, he definitely brought me to my senses.

Derek chuckles.

Me: I apologise for my part as well.

Nolwazi: You shouldn't even apologise. I know how Mdu can be, and I'm sure he involved you without even considering how conflicted you'd feel.

I take a sip of my drink.

I'm so relieved.

Me: So we're good?

Nolwazi: Yes, we good.

I sigh out loud and she laughs.

Nolwazi: And please don't feel the need to tell me about Kwanele as well. I'm good. I wish him and your best friend well.

Me: Please talk to Mdu. He genuinely loves Tholi. His love saved her... I know losing you would kill him.

Nolwazi: I don't hate him.

Me: Talk to him. Hear him out. What I've learnt from all of this is that yes, there's the truth, but there are also all these other perspectives that influence the way we see the truth. It's not easy to hold on solely to the truth.

Nolwazi: I don't know how you do it. I'd die.

Me: My life was very peaceful before I met you people.

Nolwazi: Hey!

I look at Derek.

Me: How is your crew better wena Ngidi? Firstly, you have a couple that grew up as brother and sister and ended up falling in love... Secondly, you have a couple that divorced and got married again... Thirdly, you have a man who was, and probably still is, a serial cheater... Then you have a polygamous epic fail... Oh, and an old woman who behaves like a gangster... Who can beat that?

They both laugh.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

Derek: Let's see... Your crew is running a prostitution ring; has over the top dramatic bullfighters, and of course, mentally ill people.

Me: Hey!

I punch him lightly and we laugh.

Nolwazi: Nothing beats us. We're a mess.

Me: Exactly!

Derek: A fucked up yet love-filled mess. A complicated mess.

Me: Likewise.

We continue chatting for a while, and I must say I am beyond relieved.

Universe, I officially love you! You do have my back, after-all!

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That night we ended up getting invited to Nolwazi's house for dinner.

Even though our plan was to stay in bed the whole day, we knew that was impossible with this specific crew. They love spending time together, and I don't blame them.

Derek and I are now in the shower.

Derek: Feeling better?

Me: Definitely.

He kisses me.

Me: Thank you so much for having my back.

Derek: None of them know you the way I know you. I don't want them to get shit twisted.

Me: So sweet.

I wrap my arms around him and kiss him.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Likewise.

We continue chatting as we get ourselves cleaned up.

We're now in Nolwazi's house, and Nyami runs to me.

Me: Nyami!

We share a hug and catch up.

Nyami: Granny Zimi took me to the Gold Reef City yesterday. We had so much fun!

Me: Really?

I listen as she tells me all about it.

Once she's done, she runs off.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Liwa: We heard that you met with Nolwazi. How did it go?

Me: I'm here, so...

He laughs.

Liwa: Glad to know we can move on from that situation.

Me: Yep.

Liwa: Where's Derek?

Me: Bathroom.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we walk to the veranda.

Liwa: So, you knew that my wife is pregnant?

Me: Yep.

Liwa: You seem to be the secret keeper.

Me: And I hate that. It's too much.

Liwa: I also have something to tell you.

Me: Liwa, don't you dare!

He chuckles.

Liwa: What?

Me: I don't want to know your secrets!

Liwa: I'm an open book, love. No secrets here.

Me: Good!

He smiles.

Me: I'm so relieved that Lwazi understood.

Liwa: She's a good person by nature. Some of us have to dig deeper to find the good in us.

We laugh.

Me: Do you guys ever fight?

Liwa: We used to, but we got over it. If it's a small issue, we talk about it and move on. We're definitely past the small fights.

Me: That's admirable.

Liwa: So how's Kwanele?

I look at him weirdly and he chuckles.

Me: Why would you want to know about Kwanele?

Liwa: Nje... Is he good?

I nod.

Me: He's a nice guy.

Liwa: Hmm...

Me: Do you also hate him?

Liwa: Hate? Not at all. I'm Zimkitha's son, and that automatically means I have a lot of tolerance.

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Liwa: Zimkitha has exposed me to a lot. A bit too much, to be honest. I know the world.

I look at him intently. He seems serious.

Liwa: Through that exposure, I've come to realise that everyone has a history and I can't judge.

Me: Hmm.

Liwa: Zimkitha is a special kind of woman, I tell you...

He smiles.

Liwa: But going back to your question, I definitely don't hate Kwanele. I actually sympathise with the guy...

Me: Me too.

Liwa: But you can't mention that when you're with Dean. He'll shoot you.

Me: Where is that evil man?

We both chuckle.

Liwa: He's built differently...

Me: Then Zimkitha must expose him to the shit she exposed you to.

Liwa: Uh-uh Zimkitha and I share a deep connection. I get very jealous when it comes to her.

Me: Really?

He laughs and nods.

Liwa: The only people she loves more than me are Nomvuyo and Nyami. She's obsessed with Nomvuyo.

Me: I've noticed.

Liwa: But I'm also obsessed with Vuvu, so it's okay.

Me: Cute.

Liwa: Let's go inside... I just wanted to check in and make sure you're okay.

Me: I'm okay, thank you.

Liwa: Good.

We walk back inside the house and find everyone there.

Nomvuyo: Where did you two disappear to?

Liwa: We had to sneak in a quickie.

Nomvuyo: Hehe.

I walk to her and share a hug.

Me: Hey, bestie boo.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: How are you, love?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

Nolwazi walks to us, and she's with some woman who's the same age group as her, I assume. I don't even need to go in-depth on her looks. It seems like these people eliminate you if you're challenged in the looks department. I wonder when my time is coming.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey Lwazi.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Had a good afternoon?

Me: Very relaxing.

She smiles and nods.

Nolwazi: This is Nandipha.

I look at Nandi and smile. She seems sweet.

Nolwazi: Nandz, this is Ziyanda, Derek's girlfriend.

Nandi: Nice to meet you, Ziyanda.

Me: Likewise.

Nandi: Vuvu, Nyami has really grown yazi.

Nomvuyo: Definitely. She's a big girl now.

Nandi: I haven't seen her in such a long time.

Nomvuyo: Angithi you've been MIA.

Nandi: Haibo, I was not about to be here when Malusi and I were still going through a rough patch.

Ohh so this is the Nandipha I've been hearing about?

Nomvuyo: Malusi is the one who should have been cancelled, not you.

Nandi: He depends on you guys more...

Nomvuyo: Ohho.

Nolwazi: But, I'm glad you two are good now.

I groan.

I've been too involved in these people's business. I need to go chill with my person.

I manage to slip away and find Dean.

Me: Dr. Hlongz!

Dean smiles and we share a hug.

Me: I missed you!

Dean: I don't like girls who get attached to me.

Me: Boooo!

He chuckles and hugs me again.

Dean: I hear that everything went well?

I nod.

Dean: Usindile.

Me: Argh, whatever.

Dean: I'm sure she came guns blazing?

Me: Heyii beku-tense. It's was very bad, I tell you.

He laughs.

Me: I had to keep myself from snapping. Thank God Nkanyi was there.

Dean: Safa uNkanyi wakho.

Me: Don't come for my man!

Dean: Hai suka.

Just then, I feel Derek's arms around me and I smile.

Me: Derek, I've missed you.

He kisses my cheek and looks at Dean, with a grin on his face.

Derek: What's this idiot saying to you?

Me: He's busy whispering sweet nothings.

Dean: You wish. You're not my type.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I love women who can cook.

Wooooaah!

I feel the world crashing.

Derek's body is all tense against me.

Me: What??

Dean smiles mischievously.

Dean: You heard me.

I look at Derek in shock.

Derek: I need the bathroom.

He lets go of me.

Me: Don't you dare!

He looks at me sheepishly.

Me: What's this idiot saying?

Derek: Angazi. I don't have a problem with your cooking.

Dean laughs boldly and pats my shoulder.

Dean: Stay away from the kitchen, Ms Pasta Killer.

I'm so speechless right now.

Liwa and Nomvuyo join us.

Nomvuyo: And then? Did you just see a ghost?

Dean: Just told her she can't cook.

Liwa: Oh, uhm, Vuvz, there's something I have to show you over there...

Nomvuyo: Oh, yes, love...

They quickly walk away and disappear.

Dean continues laughing senselessly.

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I'm currently going through the most. I cannot believe these people! So, all this time they thought I was a horrible cook? Njani?!

And Derek! That son of a Khwezi!

As they go to the table, I make my way to the bathroom. Why would Dean blurt it out like that? He looked like he had been waiting to burst my bubble! I am so pissed at him! At all of them!

The door opens and Derek walks in, looking nervous as hell. Damn piece of shit!

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

He looks at me in confusion. He obviously expected me to have a drama fit.

Derek: Uhm, are you okay?

Me: Ya. I'd like to pee, if you don't mind...

Derek: Oh... Uhm... Okay...

He stands by the basin and watches as I lower my leggings and pee. Once I'm done, I flush the toilet, and stand close to him.

Me: Ngidi.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: I'd like to wash my hands.

Derek: Oh. Sorry.

He moves aside and watches as I wash my hands and dry them. Once I'm done, I walk to the door and look at him.

Me: Asambe.

He nods as I open the door, and he follows me to where everyone is. I'm now seated between him and Dean.

Dean looks at me with a stupid grin on his face.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Yes?

Dean: You alright there?

Me: I'm fantastic.

He chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: Hi, Zizi! I haven't seen you!

She's next to Liwa, of course. Nomvuyo is sitting next to Nandi, Nandi is sitting next to Joe, and of course Joe is sitting next to Gabi, who is sitting next to Nolwazi. It's a full circle.

Me: Hey, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: How are you, dear?

Me: I'm well, thanks, and you?

She smiles.

Zimkitha: I'm okay, baby.

Gabi: Lwazi and Dean, how are the babies?

Nolwazi: The megabytes are getting chubbier by the day.

Zimkitha: They really are...

They all laugh and start talking about Nolwazi's megabytes. I easily zone them out and think back to when I cooked or even tried to cook for Derek. Now that I think of it, he always found excuses not to eat my food! How dare he??

Argh!

Just then, I feel someone nudging me, it's Derek, and I snap out of it.

Everyone is staring at me.

What did I miss?

I look at them expectantly.

Zimkitha: Nolwazi told us about your meeting.

I don't say anything.

Gabi: Personally, I think everyone in this family likes overreacting. Why can't we be happy for Mdu? The boy is in love, and who are you to stand in between that?

Zimkitha: I completely agree.

Dean: How about we sit this one out and let Nolwazi go through it how she wants to?

Gabi: Haike Dean. No one is coming for your woman. You can stop acting like you have a dick in your ass.

Nolwazi: Gabi!

Joe, Liwa and Derek laugh loudly and happily.

Must be so nice. I'm out here going through the most, while they're laughing and giggling. Mxm.

Zimkitha: We definitely want Nolwazi to go through it how she wants to, but I think we're entitled to having opinions and giving advice.

Dean: Your opinions and advice are unsolicited.

Joe: Do you want to go change your tampon, Diana?

They laugh once again and I refrain from rolling my eyes. Honestly, I'm just shattered.

Nomvuyo: You're all so childish.

They instantly stop laughing.

Nomvuyo: Everyone should mind their own business.

Liwa: Oh, baby. You should be the last person to say such...

Nomvuyo looks at him sharply.

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Liwa laughs.

Nomvuyo: What are you trying to say?

Dean: You're the gossip girl of the group.

Nomvuyo: What??

Now, as much as I tried suppressing it, I also ended up laughing.

Nomvuyo is out here trying to act like her ass doesn't like other people's business? Hehe.

Nomvuyo: Whatever.

Liwa: Sorry, baby.

He tries kissing her, but she pushes him away.

Nomvuyo: You'll sleep on the couch tonight.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: When are your parents coming back from their vacation, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: I have no idea. They're going to four different countries.

Gabi: So cute.

Dean grunts.

Nolwazi: Please don't start.

Dean: I want us to move out. I'm tired of this shit.

Nolwazi sighs in defeat.

Liwa: I don't understand why you're making it seem so bad, Dean. I love living with Zimkitha.

Dean: Good for you.

Liwa: You are extra sensitive today, huh?

Nolwazi: But we've discussed this before. We agreed that we'd stay with my parents until the babies are properly developed.

Dean: It's been a while now. You think we're not ready?

Nolwazi sighs.

It's very clear that she doesn't want to move out of her parents' house. I think she's enjoying the convenience, and I don't even blame her. Living with one's parents is amazing.

Nolwazi: Okay, Dean.

Dean: Everyone here knows how I feel about personal space. I don't like living with your parents. I have nothing against them.

Nolwazi: I said okay.

Things are getting a bit awkward right now.

Gabi clears her throat.

Gabi: Can we have more champagne, please?

Nolwazi: Okay.

She stands and walks away.

Everyone stares at Dean and he looks at us blankly.

Gabi: You're such a dick.

Dean glances at me.

Dean: You think I'm being unreasonable?

I don't say anything. I don't know why he's trying to involve me. Angithi mina I'm a bad cook? Nxa.

After a while, Nolwazi comes back with a bottle of champagne.

Gabi: Thanks, babe!

They all continue chatting and I add my two cents here and there...

Derek gets close to my ear.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Sure.

He clears his throat and everyone looks at him.

Nomvuyo: You two are leaving already?

Derek: We have work tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: Konje you still have that bridge to cross.

Derek: Yep.

We both stand.

Me: Night everyone.

They all say good night.

Nolwazi: Zi, can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

What did I do now?

I follow her to another room and she turns to look at me.

Me: Is everything okay?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I spoke to Mdu.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Me: And?

Nolwazi: He told me his side...

I look at her nervously.

Nolwazi: I'd like to thank you for telling me about that situation...

I sigh in relieve and she also sighs, but sadly.

Me: What's wrong?

Nolwazi: He's not the same anymore... I don't know...

Me: This secret has been eating him up.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: He's the only one supporting Tholi, so I think he was under too much emotional pressure. What makes it worse is that he had to keep everything to himself.

She nods.

Me: But at least you can be there for him now.

Nolwazi: We have to tell mom and dad.

Me: You haven't?

She shakes her head.

Me: When are you planning on telling them?

Nolwazi: When they come back...

Me: I think they'll understand if it comes from both you and him. The only reason people were or are against that situation is because they have you in mind. They're considering how hurtful it is from your perspective.

Nolwazi: Not knowing that I'm over Kwanele.

I nod.

Nolwazi: Okay... I'll talk to my parents.

Me: It's crucial for you to be there when Mdu tells them...

She smiles.

Nolwazi: I have no idea why the universe chose you to be involved in this, but I'm glad. Thank you for supporting them.

Me: It was the least I could do.

She smiles.

Me: Is he mad at me?

Nolwazi: Of course.

Me: Uzoba strong. I helped his ass!

We both chuckle and share a hug.

Nolwazi: Now, tell me, why were you so offish tonight?

Me: Argh.

Nolwazi: Everything okay?

I tell her what happened and she stifles a laugh.

Me: What?

Nolwazi: Uhm nothing... I can't believe they did that to you!

Me: The nerve!

She laughs.

Me: Wena noDean?

Nolwazi: He's too much sometimes.

Me: But don't you think he also has the right to voice out how this living arrangement makes him feel?

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Don't be hard on him. He just wants you guys to build your own home.

I can't believe I'm even putting in a good word for that idiot after what he did to me.

Nolwazi: You think I'm being too hard?

Me: Just a tad.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Okay... I'll initiate a conversation tonight.

Me: Good.

Nolwazi: One would swear you two have known each other for a long time. The way you stick up for each other?

Me: He sticks up for me?

Nolwazi: Phela I was ready to show you another side of me after the Mdu thing, but he kept telling me how sincere your actions are...

Me: Aww that evil man thinks I'm sincere?

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Dean is not as evil as he makes it seem. Only a few know his true loving self.

Me: I guess I should be honoured.

Nolwazi: We all should... The man can be cold...

She wraps her arm around my shoulders and we walk off. As we get to where everyone is, Derek immediately walks to me, and looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Baby, is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Nolwazi: Don't worry, D. I didn't bite her.

Derek: Good for you.

Nolwazi: See around, Zi?

Me: Sure.

We share another hug and she walks off.

Derek looks at me all nervously and guiltily.

Me: I'm ready.

Derek: Okay.

We say goodbye to everyone and Dean pulls me aside.

Dean: You're really mad?

I keep quiet and stare at him blankly.

I want to hear him apologise. Apparently he's not one to do such, but I want him to!

Dean: Dlamini?

Me: What?

He groans and looks at me.

Dean: Sorry.

Me: Excuse me?

He groans again.

Dean: For fuck sake, I said I'm sorry.

Me: For what?

Dean: For telling you the honest truth about your atrocious cooking.

Me: Dean!

He laughs and I end up joining.

Dean: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: You really hurt my feelings.

Dean: You are really going to drag this out, huh?

Me: Best believe.

He chuckles as he pulls and hugs me.

Dean: Dramatic.

Me: Mxm.

He lets go of me. We walk back to everyone and I give them hugs, except Liwa and her gossip girl. I'm not speaking to them till further notice. They must go dry hump each other till kingdom come, damn sex addicts.

Derek: Ready?

Me: Yes.

I say goodbye and we make our way out.

He opens the door for me and I get in. He gets in as well, and looks at me before he starts the car.

Derek: Baby-

Me: Derek, I'm extremely tired.

Derek: I know, but I still want to talk to you. You haven't said one word to me this evening.

I really want to be pissed right now, but he's making it very difficult.

Derek: Zi, say something...

Me: Okay, we'll talk later.

Derek: When we get home?

I chuckle and nod.

Me: Yes.

Derek: Good. I was about to pull out the Apology and Forgiveness Tool on you.

Me: Argh.

He starts the car and drives off, smiling...

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When we get home (blushes profusely) I go to the bathroom to pee. When I get back to the lounge, I find him sitting on the couch. He pats the space next to him and I sit.

We sit in silence for a while.

Derek: Zi.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I'm sorry.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I know you're furious.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Zi.

Me: Derek, I just fail to understand why you didn't tell me personally.

He tries to say something and I stop him.

Me: I have a huge problem with how you've handled this whole thing. You always preach about honesty, but why was Dean the one who told me my cooking is fucked up?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: At the end of the day, I'm in a relationship with you, and only you. I don't sleep with your crew, I sleep with you. Therefore, if anything happens between us, it needs to be addressed by us first before it's taken to our friends.

He sighs.

Him: I'm sorry. I never really thought about it like that.

Me: I shouldn't have to hear such from other people... You have to tell me, and then we can laugh about it with your people... I know you didn't tell me because you didn't want to hurt my feelings, but still...

Him: I hear you.

Me: Do you?

He nods.

Me: Seeing as I'm going back to teaching tomorrow, let me check for understanding... What have we discussed?

He laughs and groans.

Him: You've mentioned that you don't appreciate what I've done.

Me: And what exactly don't I appreciate?

Him: That I was not honest with you about your cooking.

Me: What would I like you to do?

Him: Talk to you first.

Me: Good. Glad we're on the same page.

He laughs and pulls me closer.

Him: I love you so much.

Me: I love you too.

Him: Do you, really?

I nod and he kisses me.

Him: How much do you love me?

Me: Right now?

Him: Remember to use your Garbage Can Tool...

Me: Let the little things go?

He nods and I giggle.

Me: Okay, I'll let it go.

He kisses me again.

Him: Tell me how much you love me...

Me: Needy much?

Him: I'm very needy right now. You've been cold to me.

I kiss him and smile.

Me: Sometimes, one has to be reminded that they can be replaced.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me.

Him: Uyanya.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles.

Me: I don't love you right now.

Him: Baby, come on...

He groans dramatically and I laugh.

Me: My love for you basically recycles itself every second.

Him: Wait... Whoa... That's deep.

I laugh.

Him: Damn, so every second it's recycled?

Me: Yep. This means it's fresh and seasoned 24/7.

Him: Well, that's good.

I laugh.

Him: So your love for me is recyclable and reusable?

Me: Yes, but definitely not reducible.

He squeezes me and we kiss yet again, but this time, we're more at ease. I'm just ready to be ate and put to sleep...

Derek must get to work...

The following morning, my alarm does the absolute most, but I switch the damn thing off, and go back to sleep!

I must have closed my eyes for 2 seconds before I felt Derek's lips on mine.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Wake up...

Me: Hmm.

I feel like crying. Why do we have to go to work? Can't I just stay home and be Derek's homemaker?

Mxm konje I can't cook.

Him: Ziyanda...

Me: What?!

Him: Vuka phela.

Me: Hai ang'funi! Go away!

He sighs and I feel him get off of me. I immediately doze off again.

After a while, I feel his face again, but this time, he's between my thighs. As much as I want to chase him away, the sudden sensation brought forth by his dancing smooth tongue is making me want more of him. All of my senses shoot up, and I forget about sleeping.

He gives me a quick yet thrilling orgasm, and I am awakened like a prostitute when a car pulls up there by Nugget Street eJozi.

I get out of bed, and make my way to the bedroom while he cleans up. Once I'm done, I get dressed and put on a bit of makeup. When I go to the lounge, I find my tray of food. He sits and pats the space next to him. I sit and we eat in silence.

After 20 minutes, we're done. I go to the bedroom and say a prayer, something I'm accustomed to. I'm going to have to make Derek realise God's importance in our lives. I can't be living with a man who thinks everything he gets in life is through his own hard work only... Anyway, I'll get through this as time goes by...

We get in the car and he glances at me with a warm smile.

Him: Good morning.

Me: Morning.

Him: All ready?

Me: We can't travel to school together.

Him: Why?

Me: We're not supposed to be seen together!

Him: Don't worry about that.

Me: Derek!

Him: Ziyanda, trust me...

I sigh.

He starts the car and drives off.

Him: I'm submitting my resignation letter today.

Me: What??

He nods and focuses on the road.

I sigh in defeat.

Me: When were you planning on telling me this?

Him: This morning.

Me: So you're really serious about leaving that place?

Him: I don't want any unnecessary drama when it comes to us. Plus, I'm serious about opening my own school.

Me: Lord...

He smiles.

Him: Don't stress, sthandwa sami.

Me: You're something else.

Him: See, as soon as I give these people my letter, I'm going to find you, and I will hold you, and kiss you big time.

Me: In front of my kids?

Him: Those little fuckers will learn.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and glances at me.

Him: This will be our school, an us thing... You should start thinking of names and shit.

Me: Uhm okay...

Him: We're building a future here... When we're 50 years old, the money has to be like a self cleaning oven- run itself without the help of anyone.

Me: So you want us to retire at 50?

Him: I'm not going to be a working old man. Do you think I'm crazy?

Me: Wowzer.

Him: Can't be old and hustling. We hustle now, so we can enjoy the fruits of our labour when we're old and tired.

Me: How inspirational.

He laughs and focuses on the road.

Him: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I switch on the music and he focuses on the road.

I guess he really does see me in his future, huh? It's both heart-warming, and scary as hell.

INSERT 95

As soon as we walk through the gates, we are overwhelmed by hugs and squeezes.

I am in heaven right now! I've missed my babies so much!

They take my bags and 10 of them walk with me to my class. We get there and I'm happy that Derek and I have been separated.

Rorisang: Ms Dlamini, my mom and I went to Durban and North West!

The others also begin to talk at the same time excitedly. I'm now listening to all these different vac stories. Just then, there's a knock on my door, and it's Zama.

How I've missed this crazy soul!

Me: Friend!

Zama: Heyi nina, hambani. Go and play outside!

The kids run off and Zama closes the door. She assesses me and smiles broadly.

Zama: You fucken liar!

Me: What did I do now?

Zama: What happened to us linking up? Are we just work buddies?

I laugh and she joins me.

Me: Friend, I had a crazy holiday.

Zama: I can tell. You're glowing like never before.

Me: I am?

She nods.

Me: Well, I guess that makes both of us. The pregnancy looks good on you!

She rubs her belly and smiles.

Zama: You must be getting some good dick.

Me: Definitely. This is what happens when one falls in love with dick.

She eyes me and we both laugh. We share a warm hug and I brush her belly.

Me: How's Zizi junior doing?

She giggles.

Zama: Zizi junior is doing just fine. She has started kicking like crazy, but she's healthy.

Me: Aww.

I continue brushing her, and feel a few kicks.

Zama: So you fell in love with a specific dick?

Me: Damn right I did.

She laughs and shakes her head.

Zama: Love is overrated.

Me: Is it, really?

She nods.

Me: Says the happily married pregnant woman...

We laugh and walk out.

Zama: I'm happy for you. This guy must be great for him to keep you hidden for a full month.

Me: He is quite special...

She chuckles.

Me: And how's hubby bae?

Zama: Things are great, I guess.

Me: That's good.

As we walk out, we bump into Derek. For a second there, I had completely forgotten about him.

Zama: Hey, Mr. Ngidi.

Derek looks at Zama and smiles.

My heart skips a beat. I just want to wrap my arms around him and kiss him.

How am I going to survive?

Derek: Hey, Zama. How are you?

He opens up his arms and they share a hug.

I also want to hug him!

Zama: I'm great, thank you.

Derek: Pregnancy looks good on you.

She chuckles as she rubs her belly.

Zama: Clearly Zizi junior has a good effect on me.

Me: That's right.

Derek raises an eyebrow.

Derek: Zizi junior?

Zama: Ziyanda has decided to name my baby girl after her.

Derek: Ah, I see...

He looks at me and smiles.

Hmyghad!

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

I think he can tell that I also want to hug him, because he opens up his arms and I eagerly go in for a hug I deserve. I inhale his cologne and feel myself melt.

I feel his lips on my ear. He kisses me lightly.

Yoh.

He must just submit this resignation letter ASAP. I caiin't!

Zama: I'll go check on my babies.

I'm not even paying attention to her. I'm holding on to Derek, and I don't care at this point.

Derek: You can let go of me now.

Me: I don't wanna.

He chuckles as he manages to escape my grip.

Me: Mxm.

He looks at me softly.

Derek: I'm irresistible...

Me: Fuck off.

I walk away and leave him there.

After a while, it's time for assembly.

All the students line up in their classes and we walk to the amphitheatre.

Derek is standing at the front with his sexy soul snatching self.

People are still chatting... He slowly raises his right hand and touches his forehead. A few scholars see this, and they do the same. Within seconds, the whole school is silent, and everyone's right hands are on their foreheads.

After that, he touches his knee, and we all do the same. He touches his right eye and we do the same once again.

He smiles and clears his throat.

Derek: Good morning, students!

Everyone greets him back excitedly.

Derek: How are we feeling on this Wednesday morning?

Everyone: Whimsical, and how are you?

Derek: I am wonderful, thank you.

He goes on to do a quick Maths warm up and then gives some students the opportunity to tell everyone how their holiday was...

Within 15 minutes, we're done and we're making our way to our classes.

Zama: See you later, friend.

Me: Shap.

I take my kids to my class. Where is Lwazi? I wonder... I can't help but laugh when I think back to how shocked I was when I found out that I was Bongani's side dish. The nerve!

We get to the class and my students immediately get to work. As I'm checking their work, my phone beeps and I go to my desk to check it.

It's a message from Derek.

Derek: Hi, Ms Dlamini. I must admit that I am fortunate to get to see you every day. I don't think I'll ever get tired of it. I love you, and I hope you have great day.

I smile senselessly as I reread the text.

Argh. Swoons!

I type a reply.

Me: Hi, Mr. Ngidi. You have me smiling like a fat kid trapped in a candy store. Thank you for your ever so lovely words. I must admit as well that seeing you daily is proving to have a good effect on me. I love you too, and I can't wait to have you all to myself later.

I press send.

Within seconds, my phone beeps again.

Derek: Now, get back to work before I fire you.

Me: How evil! Bye!

I put my phone on silent and get back to checking my kids' work.

It's now lunchtime and I am still fresh and excited. My love for teaching is quite deep, hey.

I'm eating in my classroom, when I hear a knock on my door.

Me: Come in!

The door opens and I literally drop my fork.

Me: Lwazi?!

Lwazi, my Lwazi, walks in. She's dressed in our school uniform, looking cute as hell!

Lwazi: Hey, mommy! I've beeeen looking for you!

Me: What?? What are you doing here??

She giggles as she comes to my desk.

Lwazi: This is my new school, silly.

Me: What??

She kisses my cheek and I continue staring at her in shock.

Lwazi: Mommy, don't cry!

Me: What's going on?

She smiles brightly.

Lwazi: Uncle D wanted to surprise you. He asked me if I want to be in this school and I said yes.

Me: When?

Lwazi: Last year.

Me: What??

She giggles.

I didn't even realise that I was crying.

I wrap my arms around her and squeeze her.

Me: Why didn't I see you?

Lwazi: You obviously don't pay close attention. I'm in grade 5B.

I'm teaching grade 4 this year, so this explains why I didn't really see her.

Me: Lwazi!

She continues giggling and wipes my tears.

Lwazi: You're going to ruin your makeup.

Me: You sneaky girl!

She sighs.

Lwazi: Uncle D is the best!

Me: Did mom and dad know?

Lwazi: Of course, silly!

Me: How sneaky!

She laughs and gets a chair. She then sits by my desk.

Lwazi: I like this school. At least I'm with smart kids.

Me: Oh gosh.

She laughs.

Lwazi: I like challenges.

Me: You sure do.

Just then, there's a knock and Zama walks in.

Zama: Friend.

Me: Hey, friend.

Zama looks at Lwazi.

Zama: Lwazi, go eat lunch with other kids.

Lwazi: But-

Zama: Lwazi... You don't even know Ms Dlamini.

Lwazi: I do! She used to teach me.

Zama: Really?

Lwazi smiles and nods.

Lwazi: See you later, mommy.

Me: Bye, baby.

She walks out.

Zama looks at me questioningly.

I begin telling her about Lwazi... Leaving out Derek's role...

Zama: She's a lovely girl. I fell in love with her as soon as she introduced herself in class.

Zama is the grade 3-5 isiZulu teacher.

Me: She's very loveable.

Zama then looks at me mischievously.

Me: What?

Zama: I thought I'd wait for you to spill the tea, but damnit you're taking too long!

Me: Huh?

Zama: Argh, you're in love with Ngidi, aren't you?!

Me: What?!

She pouts and crosses her arms.

I quickly stand and walk to the door.

Me: I will not dignify that with a response!

She laughs as I walk out and make my way to Derek's office. Apparently Camille is still overseas having the time of her life with her man... Must be nice!

I open Derek's door, and walk in. I find him typing.

I close the door and walk to his desk.

Me: Nkanyezi!

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: Lwazi?? Really?!

He stops typing and relaxes on his chair.

He's smiling.

Me: You sneaky bastard!

He chuckles and stands. I immediately wrap my arms around his waist and squeeze him.

Me: I love you!

I look at him and smile.

Me: You're the best!

Derek: I know...

Me: I'm pleasantly surprised.

Derek: Hmm.

He kisses my forehead.

Derek: I'm glad...

I let go of him and sigh.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Bye, baby.

I walk out and close the door.

I'm so happy right now. Derek is something else!

INSERT 96

By the end of the school day, I was a bit exhausted, but in a good way. It feels good being back at work!

Lwazi was now on her way home with her transport which my dad organised. I'm still shocked by what Derek has done. I don't know what I've done to deserve this star of mine.

I'm in my class when I hear a light knock. Seconds later, Zama walks in.

Me: Go away, demon!

She laughs and closes the door.

Zama: Unyile, I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what the fuck is going on.

She sits on my desk and looks down at me with a grin.

Me: I don't know what you're talking about.

Zama: The first time it hit me was when we were in one of our subject meetings last year, and you two kept glancing at each other like teenagers.

Me: What??

Zama: Everyone knows that you two are a thing.

Me: Zama!

She laughs.

Zama: And then there are the little jokes and giggles you share without even realising.

Me: Are you serious?

She nods.

Zama: We all know... Mina I was just waiting on you to confirm.

Me: Everyone knows?

She nods lightly.

Zama: People are wondering how you managed to lock the great Ngidi down. He seems untouchable to us low class folks.

We both laugh and I shake my head in disbelief.

Me: Argh I really don't know what you're talking about.

Zama: Hmm so you're O.J'ing this whole thing?

Me: Deny, deny, deny!

We both laugh and my phone beeps.

Zama: So I'm guessing you're not coming with me?

Me: Nope.

Zama: Heheee!

She stands and gives me a hug.

Zama: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

She walks out and I begin packing my things and preparing my board for the following day.

Once I'm done, I make my way to Derek's office, and find him packing as well.

Me: Hey, can I come in?

He looks up and smiles. I don't know why I find him cuter at work. Seeing him all serious and quiet makes him sexier...

I walk in and close the door.

Me: How was your day?

He sighs.

Derek: Hectic, but good.

Me: Hectic?

He nods.

Derek: These people don't want to let me go.

Me: Huh?

Derek: Tried submitting my resignation letter, but they refuse to let me go. I have a meeting with them tomorrow.

Me: Really?

He nods and grunts.

Me: I guess they value you.

Derek: Won't change my mind...

Me: Are you sure?

He nods.

Derek: I already got a few properties to look at.

Me: For your school?

Derek: Our school.

I sigh.

Me: You are moving too fast.

Derek: Don't see why I should waste time when I know what I want.

Me: Hmm.

He finishes up and walks to where I'm standing. He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me closer to him.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

Me: It was fantastic!

He laughs lightly.

Me: All because of you!

Him: I'm glad I could make it fantastic.

Me: Can we go home now?

Him: Home?

Me: Yep.

He smiles and nods.

Him: Sounds good.

He kisses me lightly and lets go of me.

We get our things and make our way out. It seems like everyone left early today. I guess some people didn't have a great day, like some of us. Shwem!

We get to the car and he drives off.

Me: Apparently everyone knows about us.

He looks at me in confusion and a bit of disbelief.

Me: Zama told me.

Him: Really?

I nod and he chuckles.

Him: People are quick when it comes to other people's business, but they struggle to implement shit we ask them to in their classrooms.

My jaw drops.

Me: Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi!

Him: I'm just saying.

Me: The shade?? The shade!

He chuckles.

Him: People need to stick to developing their competency and mind their business.

Me: Derek!

He focuses on the road and I laugh in disbelief. What is he trying to say? Is Zama not a good teacher kanti? Hehe yoh angizingeni!

That evening, we ordered food, because a certain somebody was not in the mood to cook. It's unfortunate that he's the only one with cooking skills in this apartment, otherwise he'd be provided with something to eat.

We're now in the lounge, and he's busy on his laptop while I'm watching TV.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Him: What do you think about this vision and mission?

He gives me his laptop and I read.

Me: Whoa you're already working on the school's vision and mission?

He nods lightly.

Me: Hmm.

Him: What do you think?

Me: I like it.

Him: Baby, I'd appreciate more substantial feedback. "Like" is very inadequate.

Me: Haike.

I read it again and then sigh.

Me: What do you want to achieve through this school?

He sighs

Him: I want the kids to be recognized.

Me: Nationally? Internationally?

Him: Internationally, of course.

Me: Then why don't you add that? So maybe the vision should be to equip students from different backgrounds with all the necessary intellectual, social and emotional skills to become worldwide citizens? And that through our education, these students will transform society?

He looks at me in silence for a good minute. Thereafter, he reels me in for a kiss.

Him: You fucken genius!

Me: Yaaas!

Him: Fuck.

He takes his laptop and begins typing.

Once he's done, he smiles brightly.

Him: What about the mission?

Me: The mission is perfect... Maybe add that the education provided is aimed mostly at students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds?

He looks at me once again.

Him: I didn't think about that... So you think the school should be for poor kids?

Me: We already have the Saint what whats... Let's create a school for kids who can't afford those schools.

He laughs in disbelief and types again.

Me: So, we have a vision and mission?

He finishes typing and nods.

Him: We sure do!

Me: And we should also start thinking about our values...

He puts the laptop aside and pulls me so half of my body is on him.

Him: You're the best.

Me: I've been told.

Him: Hey, now...

I kiss him.

Me: Thank you for surprising me with Lwazi. You're the best.

He kisses me and we reposition till he's on top of me.

Him: This is going to be a great year.

Me: Preach!

He laughs as we share another kiss...

The rest of the week went by smoothly. Derek met up with his line manager and some people from the head office, and they finally agreed to let him go. Unfortunately, they refused to let him go immediately, so he is going to stay for the first term. They're going to find his replacement and he'll be responsible for training him/her. I am honestly happy about this. I enjoy seeing him at work and indulging in a few stolen moments.

Anyway, that Friday, we were busy getting our kids lined up and ready for assembly, when Zama came to me squealing.

Zama: Girl!

Me: Yini?

She's smiling and giggling.

Zama: Why didn't you tell me that Derek has a twin?

Me: Huh?

She fans herself.

Zama: He is so hot!

Me: Uhm okay...

I push her aside and get my kids ready. I then ask them to walk to the amphitheatre.

I look at Zama questioningly.

Me: Uthi kwenzakalani, sisi?

Zama: Look at him!

She turns and I also turn.

Me: Gosh, really?

I see Derek standing with Dean.

I must say though that they do look scrumptious.

But, what is Dean doing here? He has never popped up.

Zama: Zi!

Me: Yoh Zama, awume man. Kanti are you not married?

She giggles.

Me: Geesh.

Zama: Who is he?

Me: A friend...

As we walk to the assembly area, I realise that all the female teachers are staring as they pass these two men.

If only they knew that Dean is just... Dean...

Anyway, we get to assembly and one of the teachers run it, because Derek's voice is apparently giving him problems. He woke me up in the middle of the night complaining about his throat... Such drama...

Once we're done with assembly, we all walk back inside the building.

I get to where Derek and Dean are standing.

Dean smiles.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: Hello, Langelihle.

Dean: I see you're in your element.

Me: Best believe.

He opens his arms and we share a hug.

Me: You're driving girls crazy over here.

Dean: Nothing new there...

Me: Wow!

Derek: I think I'm going to leave early, baby. I'm really sick.

Dean: Stop being a baby wena.

Derek looks at me all sulky.

Me: Is it bad?

He nods.

Me: Who's going to take care of you?

Derek: Dean.

I laugh boldly.

Dean: Uhlekani wena slima?

Me: You? Take care of a sick person? Wowzer.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: What are you even doing here?

Dean: I came to tell you that I'm planning on proposing to Nolwazi next week Saturday, and you should start planning shit. Just leave the catering to me...

My eyes pop out.

Me: Excuse me?!

He nods casually and then looks at Derek.

Dean: Get your shit, Ngidi. We'll drive past the pharmacy.

I'm so dumbstruck right now.

INSERT 97 (Couldn't edit)

That Friday, I went home by myself with an Uber, because Derek had to leave early. He's been calling me, complaining about how much pain he's in.

I've already prepared myself for the drama I'm about to experience. He is really channelling his inner boss baby right now.

As I make my way inside the apartment, I'm shocked to find Dean there.

Me: And then?

He's cooking.

Dean: I figured I should cook for my sick friend, seeing as he lives with someone who has the potential to unintentionally poison him.

I take an apple and throw it at him, and he ducks.

Dean: What the fuck?!

Me: Fuck you!

He laughs as he focuses on the stove.

Me: Go away. Your services are no longer needed.

Dean: Derek has been sulking the whole day. Just go and give him the attention he needs.

Me: How is he?

Dean: A little sore throat and he's out here making it seem like he has lung cancer. I'm gatvol.

I chuckle as I walk to the bedroom.

Me: Nkanyi?

The bedroom is dark.

I switch on the side lamp and sit on the edge of the bed. I uncover him and he winces.

Aww man.

Me: Star, how are you?

He groans as he rubs his eyes and eventually looks at me.

Me: Ah, love. Are you in pain?

He nods sadly.

Derek: I'm in pain.

Me: I'm sorry.

I try to stand, but he holds my hand.

Derek: Don't go.

Me: Let me take a quick shower first.

Derek: I want to shower with you.

Me: Okay, baby.

I help him stand. Yes, I help him stand. This flu seems to have paralysed his legs.

I take off his clothes and lead him to the bathroom. I walk out and go to the kitchen quickly.

Me: Dean, I'm taking a shower with my person. Don't even think of disturbing us.

Dean: I don't know what's more disgusting... Your pasta or seeing you and Derek naked...

Me: Fuck off!

He laughs as I rush back to the bedroom. I close the door and take off my clothes as well.

When I get to the bathroom, Derek is literally sitting on the toilet seat, looking all defeated. I did say the drama is on a 100, right?

Me: Star, you should have gotten in the shower...

He looks at me like I'm speaking a different language.

Me: Woza ke.

I help him stand and we both get in the shower.

Derek: Please make sure the water is not too hot. My skin is a bit sensitive right now.

Me: Oh, is it?

He nods sheepishly.

Me: Okay. Anything for you.

I adjust the water to his liking and then I start cleaning him up.

He groans and I stop.

Me: Everything okay?

Him: You're too rough, baby.

I roll my eyes.

Ngaze ngavelelwa.

I clean him up gently and look at him.

Me: Better?

He nods.

As I'm about to clean myself, he takes my vaslaap and I look at him weirdly.

Me: So you're strong enough to clean me up?

He nods and I chuckle.

Me: Thank you, Nkanyi.

He strokes my breasts gently and I moan. He really does have an effect on me, sick or not. I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him.

Me: I know you're sick right now, but I really need you to help me out here.

Him: I'll try...

I roll my eyes and he smacks my ass.

Me: Hey!

Him: You're very mean.

Me: Okay, I'm sorry. Love you, Star.

I kiss him as he tries to say something. I'd appreciate a quick orgasm to keep me going for a couple of hours. It's quite clear that I won't get any sleep.

After much kissing, and all that other stuff, I get my quick orgasm and we get out of the shower. I dry him up and he goes to the bedroom. I dry myself up as well and follow him back to the bedroom.

He's sitting on the bed.

Me: Ready to get lotioned up?

He nods.

I take his lotion and begin working. I'm sure this is what it's like to nurse old people in a home.

Once I'm done, I help him put on his pjs and he watches me lotion myself and put on my pjs as well.

Derek: You have a lovely body, baby. I love your curves.

I look at him weirdly, but end up blushing. He sounds so cute and sincere right now.

Me: I'm glad you find me appealing.

Him: Enticing.

Me: Alluring

Him: Tantalizing.

I giggle and he smiles.

Me: I'm sure Dean is done cooking... Ready to go to the lounge?

Him: I don't know if I can walk to the lounge, but I'll try.

Me: Please try...

He nods and I try not to roll my eyes. The drama dramz is on a hunnid right now.

We walk to the lounge.

Dean: Done having weak sex?

Me: You're so vile and gross. Go away.

He chuckles.

Dean: The food is ready.

I help Derek sit and Dean rolls his eyes as well. We then walk to the kitchen.

Dean: I need to leave. I can't take his drama.

Me: Uyanya you're not going anywhere.

Dean: I have twins waiting for me.

Me: It's not like you enjoy living with your soon to be in-laws.

He groans.

Me: Exactly. Now dish up for us and suck it up solider. You can see ukuthi Derek is doing the most...

He sighs as he begins dishing up.

Once he's done, we walk to the lounge and I give Derek his plate.

Me: There you go...

Derek: Uhm, baby I'm full.

Me: Mxm I didn't prepare it, Dean did.

Derek: Oh...

He takes the plate and Dean laughs.

Me: Mxm.

We are all seated now. I'm in the middle of Derek and Dean.

Derek: Dean, can I have some salt?

Dean was about to protest when I nudged him hard. He got up and fetched salt.

Dean: Anything else?

Derek: No, thanks.

Nkanyi takes the salt and then sighs.

Me: What's wrong now?

He sighs and looks at his plate tiredly.

Me: Would you like me to feed you?

Derek: Oh, thank you for offering. I would appreciate that.

I look at Dean and we roll our eyes. I put my plate aside and begin feeding Nkanyezi slowly.

Derek: I'd like a bit of garlic sauce.

Dean: Uyanya wena. Go fetch that shit yourself.

Derek looks at him in shock. I stand and fetch the sauce.

Derek: Just a little, baby.

Me: Hmm.

I sit and finish off feeding him. He then watches me eat.

Me: Yini? Are you still hungry?

He nods and looks down all sadly.

Me: Dean.

Dean groans as he stands and takes Derek's plate.

Me: Dean is dishing up for you.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: Hmm.

After a while, Dean comes back with more food and then sits down.

Dean: What exactly is wrong with you? Is your throat sore, do you have chest pains?

Derek: My nose is blocked. It's painful.

Me: Your nose... Your nose is blocked?

He nods.

Gosh.

All this drama over a blocked nose?

Universe, why are these men such babies when they're sick?

Dean: Haike uxakwe yini ungafuthi?

Derek: Excuse me?

Dean stands.

Dean: I'll see you-

Me: No!

I pull him down and take his plate. I put it on the table and then take the remote and switch on the TV.

Me: Let's watch the Real Housewives of ATL.

Dean: What?

Derek: You'll enjoy it... You behave exactly like these women, you'll see.

Dean: Maybe one punch will get those nostrils functioning?

Me: Dean!

Both of them sink on the couch and get comfortable.

Me: And no talking!

Dean: Just play the damn thing, Dlamini... I'm tired of hearing Derek's moaning.

I press play and relax as well...

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd be sitting here with my very very sick boyfriend and his arrogant friend, watching ratchet TV.

Life, hey?

INSERT 98 (Short insert)

It's now around 5pm, and Dean and I came up with a brilliant plan. We decided to drug Derek so that he passes out and stops annoying us. We gave him his medication, and within 5 minutes, he was moaning about wanting to go back to bed.

I help him up and take him to the bedroom. Just as I am about to leave him, he moans.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: Don't leave.

I sigh heavily as I get in bed and he rests his head on my chest.

Derek: Thank you for taking care of me.

Me: Hmm...

He is quiet for a while.

I'm honestly over him at this point. I want him to fall asleep so I can open a bottle of wine. Yes, Derek has driven me back to the bottle. I am scratching my sabbatical, that's how stressed I am.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I love you.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Hmm.

I listen to him mumble about his indescribable love for me. The way I'm so exhausted, I don't even find it cute. He must pass out now.

Within a few minutes, he is breathing loudly due to his blocked nose. I carefully break free from him and then walk out...

I am free!

I get to the lounge and find Dean there, with a bottle of wine.

Me: Right on time!

I get myself a glass and pour some.

We sit in silence for a while and then I take a sip. I swear my whole body ignites from the dead. I sigh happily and then look at him.

Me: So, you want to propose to Lwazi?

He nods lightly.

Me: That's amazing. Good for you.

He chuckles.

Me: What do you have in mind?

Dean: Simplicity.

I nod.

Me: So, the usual dinner setup?

He nods.

Me: Okay. I'll think of something, and hit you up.

Dean: Do best.

I laugh.

Me: Do best?

Dean: It's your lingo.

Me: I never thought of myself as an influencer. I obviously underestimated myself.

Dean: An influencer that can't cook.

Me: You are really going to drag this out, huh?

He laughs.

Dean: You have no idea. I want to make you cry.

Me: It will take more than stupid jabs to make me cry, evil man. I am invincible.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: So, do you have a ring?

He shakes his head.

Dean: There's someone flying in from Germany for that.

Me: What?!

He looks at me blankly.

Dean: You think I'm going to buy those idiotic rings from American Swiss?

Me: Whooaa!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Dean: I work hard and generate loads of money, so I can enjoy such luxuries, Dlamini.

Me: Derek has been saying the same thing.

He looks at me seriously.

Dean: As black people, it's unfortunate that almost 100% of the population don't grow up in households that value financial literacy. Our people live pay check to pay check. Thankfully, my family broke that cycle and stressed the importance of saving and spending wisely. I don't want my kids to grow up feeling limited just because there isn't enough money...

Me: True... We're not that educated about budgeting.

Dean: So, this is why you should also break that cycle in your family. You should start saving now, so that you won't feel the pressure when you're close to retiring. Don't you want to sit back and do nothing while still getting money?

Me: Of course I do.

Dean: Then be aware of your finances.

Me: Okay, Mr. Economics.

He chuckles.

Dean: Anyway, back to the proposal... I have someone flying in from Germany, to show me all my options.

Me: That's nice.

Dean: You'll help me choose, right?

Me: I'd love to. And maybe you can get me a young something to show your appreciation...

Dean: See, you can definitely get something from American Swiss. It's more of your level.

Me: Dean!

He laughs.

Me: You're so mean!

Dean: I'm not mean to you... Ziyanda, I can be worse.

Me: Mxm, go away. I want to cuddle with Derek.

Dean: Hmm and I also have to go now. I miss my family.

Me: Awww! Even Bab'Dumz?

He looks at me sharply and I laugh.

Me: Go and bond with your future father-in-law.

He groans.

Dean: Probably the only man who makes me question myself.

Me: Really??

He nods nonchalantly and I continue laughing.

Me: I think I'm going to love Bab'Dumz!

Dean: Mxm.

Me: So did you ask him for permission to marry Lwazi?

Dean: Obviously, dummy.

Me: And what about lobola?

He sighs heavily.

Dean: We'll cross that bridge once I've proposed.

Me: But you know she's going to say yes mos.

Dean: That's not my main concern.

Me: Then what is?

Dean: My mother is reluctant to reach out to my uncles...

Me: Hawu why?

Dean: I have no idea.

Me: Do you know your uncles?

Dean: I don't know anything about my family, Ziyanda. I couldn't give two shits about those people. The only problem now is that Dumakude insists on having my so called uncles there.

Me: That doesn't even make sense. It's not like they raised you.

Dean: My point exactly.

Me: Wowzer.

He sighs and stands.

Dean: Anyway, we'll see how that goes.

Me: I'm sure Zimkitha is excited!

Dean: You know how she is.

Me: Cute.

I stand as well and put down the wine glass.

Me: I'll call you once I have some ideas.

Dean: Okay.

We share a hug and I walk him out.

Me: Say hi to Lwazi.

Dean: Will do.

Me: And Bab'Dumz!

Dean: Fuck off.

I laugh as he walks away and I make my way back to the bedroom to check on my cancer patient.

I find him sleeping ever so peacefully. Cute soul snatching thing.

I go back to the lounge with my laptop and look up some proposal ideas on Pinterest.

I wonder if Derek would ever propose to me. Would I even say yes? Hehe I don't even want to think about all of that. I'm still wrapping my head around the fact that we live together...

The following morning, I decide to make breakfast. Yes, I will make breakfast, and I will shut this nigga up once and for all. I am not a sore loser. I will look up a simple recipe, and I will slay the shit out of it. I'm not going to be the laughing stock, nxa! I refuse!

I research how to make fruity french toast and an omelette. Once I have taken out my requirements, I start following the recipes very very carefully. I even taste along the way.

As I'm busy, I keep thinking of Dean's evil laugh, and that motivates me even more. It's the eye of the tiger!

After a while, I'm finally done. I clean up the space and dish up for my cancer patient.

Once I'm satisfied, I walk back to the bedroom with a tray. I wake him up and he yawns.

I ignore how sexy he looks...

Me: Derek, wake up.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Hello. Vuka, I made you breakfast.

Derek: Baby, I'm not-

Me: Don't fuck with me. Thatha lokudla udle.

He looks at me in shock.

He then sits up and I place the tray on his lap. He assesses it, and I can tell that he is shocked. The presentation is on point! I did the damn thing, I know it!

Derek: Uhm, thank you.

Me: Eat up.

He digs in the omelette and looks at me.

Derek: It looks good, baby.

Me: Hmm.

Eat up nigga!

He slowly opens his mouth, and in goes the omelette.

He chews slowly... I'm watching closely... I want to see how he reacts...

He looks at me.

Then he digs in again.

He chews faster this time around and then smiles.

Derek: Baby, this is-

Me: Amazing, I know.

I stand.

Derek: Manje uyaphi?

Me: I'm taking a shower.

Derek: Oh, but-

Me: If you don't tell your people that I've redeemed myself, consider yourself girlfriend and roommate-less.

His eyes pop out and I walk to the bathroom.

Drops the damn mic, bitches!

INSERT 99

That afternoon, Derek miraculously got healed. Maybe the medication Dean got for him really worked. I was just grateful that I was no longer expected to run up and down. This experience made me realise that I'm not a very patient caregiver. I lose patience after a while...

It's now around 12pm and Derek has showered and up from the dead.

Me: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay.

Lord. Clearly he's touched by how I addressed him earlier.

Me: Want to take a walk?

Him: Okay.

I wait for him to finish up and then we make our way out and walk around the block.

Me: I'm glad you're feeling better. I hated seeing you like that.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: I can't stand seeing my Star all sick and fragile. It really was a traumatizing experience.

He smiles and we hold hands. As annoyed as I was, I have to admit that he was very cute throughout his sick period.

Him: You're not quite a sympathetic caregiver.

Me: Excuse me??

Him: Baby, you were snappy, and you constantly rolled your eyes. I've concluded that I'm going to take myself to a home when I'm old.

Me: Hehe. We'll see about that.

We continue chatting... After a while, my phone rings and when I check the caller ID, I see Nomvuyo's name. I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Nomvuyo: Hey, bestie boo.

Me: Who am I speaking to?

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, really??

Me: Excuse me?

Nomvuyo: Gosh, you are really going to drag this one, huh?

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Love, I'm sorry about not being honest with you. It was a very awkward situation, and Liwa and I didn't want to burst your bubble.

Me: Mxm.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: What will it take for you to forgive me?

Me: You can't bribe me.

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry!

Me: Whatever.

Nomvuyo: I miss you. When am I seeing you? What about today?

Me: I'm spending the day with Derek, so it will have to be tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: Gosh... Alright then. I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Love you!

Me: Whatever!

She laughs as I hang up.

I look at Derek and he laughs.

Me: I can't believe you didn't tell me that my cooking sucks.

He sighs in defeat.

Derek: Baby, I don't want to be the one who bursts your bubble when it comes to such.

Me: So much for honesty.

He groans.

Derek: So you're going to breakup with me if I don't tell "my people" as you call them, that you've redeemed yourself?

I nod and he places his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Anything for you, baby.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Any plans for today?

Me: I'm in the mood for cuddles and lots of sex.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

I smile innocently.

Derek: But, your wish is my command.

Me: Damn right it is.

We continue chatting and walking...

That evening, Derek and I were watching a movie, when he got a call...

Derek: It's my dad.

I lower the volume and he answers.

Derek: Hello?... Hi, dad... What's wrong?...

His body tenses up and I look at him.

Derek: What happened?... When?...

He sighs again.

Derek: Okay... Alright... I'll be there shortly... Bye...

He hangs up and growls.

Me: What's wrong?

Derek: My mom's in hospital.

Me: Really? What happened?

Derek: It seems like she had a stroke... It's been two days...

Me: Oh my goodness. How is she?

Derek: My dad says she's not well.

Me: Let's go to the hospital.

He nods and we both stand. I don't know how I feel right now. I don't necessarily like Khwezi, but I don't want anything bad to happen to her. At the end of the day she's Derek's mother, and I know she means the world to him.

Once we've gotten ready, we make our way to the hospital.

He's very quiet, and I don't know what to say. I want to give him space and just let him be, but I know that's not what he wants. I can tell he's worried...

As we're driving, I glance at him.

Me: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay.

I nod lightly and decide to not enquire further, because he's clearly not in the right space.

After a while, we finally get to the hospital.

We are led to Khwezi's room.

Me: I'll wait here...

Derek: No.

He takes my hand and opens the door.

Senior is sitting by the bed, where Khwezi is. At first I don't see anything wrong with her, but as I walk closer to her and see her face and actual body language, I can't help but be shocked. Her whole left side is badly affected. We all know how stroke messes one up, but I never really thought this happens. I was so shocked!

Derek: Why am I only told now that this happened?

Senior looks like his whole world is tumbling down.

Derek: I don't understand why you would keep this from me.

Senior sighs heavily and looks at Derek in defeat.

Senior: She didn't want you to know...

Derek tries to say something, but stops himself. He then focuses on Khwezi.

At this point, I'd rather focus my attention on Senior, because looking at Khwezi is making me very uneasy. She looks completely different. My heart is genuinely pounding hard.

Derek: Mama.

Khwezi looks at him.

Derek: What's going on? What happened?

Khwezi: I don't want that girl here.

Nazoke. Even in her sick state, she's still being her mean old self. Till this day I have no idea what I did to this woman.

Derek: Mama?

Khwezi: I said... I do not want that girl here...

Mind you, she's not speaking properly, because of the after effects of the stroke.

Derek: You're in your deathbed, and the first thing you can say to me is that you don't want Ziyanda here?

Senior: Nkanyezi...

I clear my throat.

Me: I'll be outside.

Derek tries to say something, but I shake my head. Listen, I'm all for support, but what I will not do is force myself into situations where I am clearly unwanted...

I get out of the room and see Zimkitha walking towards me.

Zimkitha: Zizi? What are you doing here?

Me: Uhm, I came with Derek.

Zimkitha: Is he here??

She looks shocked.

Me: Yes, his dad called and told him.

Zimkitha: Hmm.

I don't say anything.

She smiles kindly.

Zimkitha: Let me check in...

She walks in and I decide to take a walk and find the nearest vending machine. I'd like a packet of chips to distract me from all of this.

I was having such a peaceful day with Nkanyi...

The Universe sure knows how to switch things up. Phela now I'm being insulted by a woman who is suffering from a stroke. Kunzima.

My thoughts are interrupted by my phone ringing.

It's Derek.

I answer it.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Where are you?

Me: Reception area.

He hangs up and I groan. Things are definitely about to be intense... I can feel it...

Within a few minutes, I see him approach me. He seems angry.

Derek: Why did you leave?

Me: Haibo, Derek. Your mother didn't want me there.

He grunts and begins walking.

Me: Where are you going?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Manje why ungasho?

I get that he's going through the most, but he must also consider my presence. He can't be walking off and leaving me confused.

He turns and walks back to me. I open my packet of Fritos and grab a few.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

He sighs and looks at me more softly as I chew.

Derek: I apologize for how I'm behaving; however, I'm pissed as fuck right now. My mother almost died, and I was only informed today...

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry about that...

He keeps quiet.

Me: How is she now?

Derek: The doctor says she's badly affected.

Me: I'm sorry.

Derek: Let's go home.

Me: You don't want to stay?

He shakes his head tightly.

Me: Okay.

He walks and I follow him.

Now I have to deal with an angry and grumpy Derek... Kunzima ukukupita mos...

INSERT 100

We're now in the apartment, and Derek has been in the bedroom. I ended up giving him space. I can't seem to deal with his current mood for some odd reason. More than anything, I also need the space, so I decided to watch TV till I fall asleep.

My phone rings and it's Dean.

Me: Dean?

Dean: Are you two at home?

Me: Yes.

Dean: How's Ngidi?

Me: He's pissed.

Dean: Hmm.

Me: Do you have a close relationship with Khwezi?

Dean: More or less...

Me: She hates me.

Dean: I've been told.

Me: The first thing she said when we got to her room, was that I should get out.

He chuckles.

Dean: Monster-in-law.

Me: Is it bad that I don't really care that she hates me?

Dean: Not at all. Don't let her get to you.

Me: Hmkay.

Dean: I'm on my way to the hospital now with Liwa.

Me: Alright then. Bye.

Dean: Bye.

I hang up and sink on the couch. This group of friends is very strange. There's something about their dynamics that confuses and intrigues me... I don't know, man...

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek sitting next to me.

Derek: Love.

Me: Hey.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: I'm sorry for being a dick.

Me: It's okay... I love your dick...

He laughs and I look at him and smile.

Me: How are you?

He sighs heavily and rubs his eyes.

Derek: Still pissed.

Me: Kanti what exactly happened?

Derek: Apparently there was a lack of blood flow in her brain, so there was a poor supply of oxygen.

Me: Yoh, but is she going to be fine?

He shrugs.

Derek: I don't know all the details...

Me: When are you going back?

Derek: Angazi...

I sigh and sit up, so I can look at him properly.

Me: Ngidi, I know you're pissed as hell right now, I know... However, this is the one time you need to be by your mother's side.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Yes, they didn't tell you earlier, but it doesn't change much. She needs you.

Derek: You think I should go back?

I nod.

Me: As mean as she is, she's still your mother and she loves you. Go and support her.

Derek: Okay.

I get closer to his face and kiss him.

Me: You can go without me.

Derek: You don't get it, do you?

Me: Get what?

Derek: I've become dependent on you. Being around you has a positive effect on me. I need you.

Me: Whoa.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: Just knowing that you're by my side is enough to make me conquer the world.

Me: Hmyghaad!

I kiss him again.

Me: Aren't you a little a poet.

Derek: I'd turn into a construction worker for you.

Me: And I'd turn into a prostitute for you.

Derek: What??

I laugh.

Me: For real...

He looks at me mischievously and quickly stands.

Derek: I'll be back.

He runs off like a little kid and leaves me wondering what the hell he's up to now.

Within minutes, he's back next to me.

Me: And then?

He smiles and takes out 200 bucks.

Derek: Zip it, prosti...

I look at him in shock and laugh boldly.

Me: Are you kidding??

He chuckles.

Derek: 200 bucks for a blowjob.

Me: Uyahlanya. You think I'm going to suck your dick for 200 bucks?

He takes out another 200.

Me: Hmm...

He throws it at me and I laugh.

Derek: Get to work, woman.

Me: Hehe...

He pulls me closer till my lips are touching his. He tries kissing me, but I close my mouth.

Derek: Sisi?

Me: Bhuti, you only paid for a blowjob, no kisses... These lips are exclusive.

Derek: You're too fucken expensive.

Me: Yep. I'll show you why I'm costly.

He takes out another 100 and I smile brightly.

Me: Perfect! Now, let me get to work.

We begin kissing and I channel my inner hoe. Petty LaBelle is having the time of her life right now. She has always thrived in such situations...

The following Sunday morning, I am awakened by Derek's usual awesome-smelling food. I get out of bed and make my way to the lounge.

Me: Morning!

I think I'm in a good mood. Yes, I'm definitely in a good mood.

I walk to him and wrap my arms around him.

Me: Hey, sugar foot!

Derek: Someone's in a good mood.

Me: Of course.

He chuckles and then kisses my forehead.

Derek: Slept well?

Me: Like a prostitute after getting paid!

He laughs and kisses me again.

Me: And you?

Derek: I didn't know you were into role-playing... You were really spectacular.

Me: I also didn't know... You have ignited something in me, buddy... My inner hoe has unleashed!

He laughs and continues dishing up.

Derek: Uyabheda wena.

Me: Need any help?

Derek: You can wash the dishes.

Me: Mxm.

I clean up and wash the dishes while he finishes dishing up. When we're done, we go to the lounge and sit.

Derek: My property developer called me this morning.

Me: Really?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: We have 10 spaces that we can choose from.

Me: Really?

Derek: Yep. We'll start checking them out from next week.

Me: You are such a doer... It's admirable.

Derek: Don't make me blush.

Just then, his phone rings, and he answers it.

Derek: Dad... Yes, I'll come today... Yes...

He sighs.

Derek: Okay, bye...

He hangs up and groans.

Me: Shame, he really needs you right now.

Derek: I feel sorry for the guy, he loves the woman.

Me: You have to be there for him.

He grunts and focuses on his food.

Me: I wonder why your mom hates me so much.

Derek: Mxm.

I realise that discussing his parents frustrates him, so I shall stop. I don't want to deal with grumpy Derek. We had such a fun-filled, erotic night, that my body is still on recovery mode, so I will not ruin the good vibe.

Me: Anyway, I'd like to go to my parents' house for dinner.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: That's a good idea actually.

Me: Will you join me?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: I miss your mom.

Me: Cute.

He chuckles.

Derek: Stop hating on my relationship with your mom. We love each other.

Me: You do realise that you sound creepy, huh?

He laughs and we continue chatting while eating...

That afternoon, I found myself accompanying Nkanyezi to the hospital again. The things we do for love...

I'm pleasantly surprised to find everyone there. As much as I hated to admit it, I missed seeing Derek's crew.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I chuckle as he walks to me and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Liwa: I've been informed that we are currently not on your good books.

Me: Hmm, you don't say...

He smiles.

Liwa: As a matter of fact, unlike the others, I genuinely liked your food.

Me: Don't patronise me, Mzinyathi.

He laughs and sighs.

Liwa: Okay, okay... I'm sorry.

Me: I forgive you.

He hugs me tightly.

Liwa; Now, please go talk to my wife. She's been whining about missing you.

Me: Has she, now?

He nods and I look over at Nomvuyo, who's sitting on a couch, looking like an unbothered goddess.

She looks at me and smiles.

Nomvuyo: So you forgive my husband, but make me sweat?

Me: Ngithanda amadoda.

Nomvuyo: Ngizokulimaza ngoLiwa.

Me: Let's take it outside...

She laughs as she stands and we share a hug.

Nomvuyo: I've missed you so much.

I look at her in shock.

How and when did her belly grow so much? Isn't she like 2 days pregnant?

Nomvuyo: I'm getting fat.

Me: Hmm... Not as fat as me though.

She laughs and spanks my butt.

Me: Not in front of people, lover...

Nomvuyo: I've been suffering without you...

We laugh and find everyone looking at us oddly.

Dean: You two are strange.

Nomvuyo: Whatever.

Nolwazi emerges from out of nowhere and smiles when she sees me.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

I push Nomvuyo aside and share a hug with Nolwazi.

Me: Hey, Lwazi. How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm great, and you?

Me: Great, thanks.

Nomvuyo goes back to where she was sitting.

I look at Joe, Gabi and Malusi.

Me: Hello.

Joe and Malusi greet me back.

Gabi: So we don't get hugs? What kind of bullshit is that?

I decide to laugh that comment off.

I'm not that comfortable around these three. I haven't really gotten to know them properly. Malusi ke yena, I genuinely have no interest in being close to him. Gabi seems so different to me. I don't know what we'd talk about if we were left alone, and I don't mean that in a bad way. She's too perfect for a messy person like me, so I'd rather keep the distance.

Liwa, Dean and Derek seem to have disappeared. They must have gone to see Khwezi.

Gabi: How is Khwezi?

Nomvuyo: She's still not well.

Gabi: Poor thing. Strokes really are the worst... Imagine having only one side of your body function.

I go and sit next to Nomvuyo on the couch.

Nolwazi: I have to make a call... Please excuse me.

She walks away.

Just then, I see the same woman from one of our dinners, approach us. I think she's the one linked to Malusi.

Gabi: Nandi!

Yes, Nandi, that's her.

Nandi looks at all of us and smiles. She seems like those quiet and sweet women who mind their own business. I wonder why Malusi would even cheat on her. I'm glad she divorced his shady ass.

Nandi: Hello, everyone.

We all greet her back.

Nandi: Is everything okay?

Gabi: It seems like Khwezi is not getting any better.

Nandi sighs and then walks to Malusi, who wraps his arm around her. They stare at each other.

Wowzer... Ezama-couple azingenwa straight.

Nandi: How are you?

Malusi: I'm okay.

She nods and then looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: I thought you'd bring Lele.

Malusi: Why would we bring our daughter to a hospital?

Oops! Someone's in a crappy mood.

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Nandi looks at Malusi questioningly and he groans.

Nandi: Want to get some fresh air?

He nods tightly and they walk out.

Gabi: These two confuse me.

Nomvuyo: Malusi is just a bitter man. He must get over himself.

I decide not to say anything. I'm just confused as to why they're all lovey dovey.

Nomvuyo seems genuinely annoyed now.

Gabi: Joey, let's get some fresh air as well.

They walk out, hand in hand.

Nomvuyo: Fucken idiot.

Me: Relax...

She grunts.

Me: How's the pregnancy treating you?

Nomvuyo: I have a feeling it's going to be a very very long ride.

I laugh and she sighs.

Me: Liwa must be treating you like an egg.

Nomvuyo: Uyamazi.

Derek, Dean and Liwa come back.

Liwa: Where did they go?

Me: Fresh air.

Liwa looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: You okay?

Me: Malusi snapped at her, now she's sulking.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

This person is behind Derek, Dean and Liwa.

They all turn around...

As soon as I get a peak of the person, my whole stomach churns.

Liwa: Busi?

Busi stands there, staring at Derek.

Busi: Hey.

I feel like I just got punched in the stomach.

INSERT 101

You know, I try my best to be a kind and loving person. I pay my taxes, I don't litter, and I don't do drugs...

Why do I constantly have to be put through the most by the universe? My relationship with the universe is officially over. I don't want anything to do with such an abusive entity.

Liwa: How are you, Busi?

Busi: I'm well, thanks.

I can't seem to stop staring at her. I don't think I've ever hated anyone more.

Derek seems to be on the same page, because his face says it all.

Liwa: What are you doing here?

Nomvuyo: Liwa, if you could just get me some tea, the world would be a better place.

I look at Nomvuyo, and I can't help but chuckle. I guess this is her way of saying Liwa must back off. Unfortunately, I don't want him to back off, because he seems to be the one asking pertinent questions at this moment.

Liwa: Uhm...

Nomvuyo: Tea... You were about to get me tea...

Liwa: Okay.

He walks off like a little puppy.

Nomvuyo then sits back and stares at Busi. The Resting Bitch Face is so intense, that even I feel the pressure! This one knows what loyalty is! Yaas!

Busi: Uhm... Please show me where Khwezi's room is.

She's looking at Derek.

Derek: Zi, let's get some fresh air.

Me: Okay.

I stand and he puts out his hand for me to hold. We then walk out holding hands. Is it bad that I don't want to leave this bitch here? She's the one who should be leaving!

Anyway, we get outside and he looks at me softly.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: I'm okay, Nkanyi. A bit confused, but okay.

He smiles lightly.

Me: I'm not going to have a bitch fit, I promise.

Derek: Hmm.

He wraps his arms around me and I smile.

Me: I'm okay, Derek.

Derek: I didn't know she'd come.

Me: I know you didn't know.

He exhales.

Derek: I'm sure Khwezi asked her to come.

Me: Were they close?

He nods.

Me: Hmm, interesting.

Derek: They were definitely close...

He lets go of me and scratches his chin thoughtfully,

Derek: Khwezi is probably trying to get to you.

Me: It will take more than a lousy ex to get rid of me. Your mother seems to underestimate me.

He laughs lightly and I take his hand.

Me: As long as you and I are on the same page, I really couldn't give a rat's ass what happens.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Right back at ya, mate.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we walk back inside, and find Nomvuyo, Liwa and Dean still there.

Dean: Why the fuck would you leave me with her?

Liwa laughs.

Liwa: I personally had no choice but to leave.

Nomvuyo: I don't want you talking to that woman. She is bad news.

Liwa: You are the master here, Vuvu. What you say goes.

Nomvuyo looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: I hope you're not worked up, because she is definitely not worth it.

Me: No, I'm okay.

Nomvuyo: Good. We don't do well with damaged goods.

Me: Well damn.

Dean: I just fail to understand why I was left here with her.

Dean looks at me.

Dean: I've never liked her.

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Nandi come back. They have three boxes of pizza.

Gabi: We thought we'd get some food.

Me: Where's Nolwazi?

Dean: She had to go. One of her friends needs her.

Me: Okay.

As soon as the pizza is on the table, everyone digs in.

Nandi comes to me and smiles.

Nandi: I haven't had the chance to interact with you properly, Ziyanda. How are you?

I smile. She's sweet.

Me: I'm well, thanks.

She nods.

Nandi: How are things with Derek? I hear you two get on like a house on fire.

Me: Really?

She nods and takes a bite of her pizza.

Me: We're close.

Nandi: That's nice.

Me: Hmm.

Nandi: I also hear that you don't particularly like my ex-husband?

I feel a tad embarrassed. I hope she won't go off on me, telling me to mind my own business and all that jazz.

Nandi: I also don't like him.

I raise an eyebrow and she laughs.

Me: Really?

Nandi: He is quite an obnoxious man...

Me: Aren't they all?

She laughs again and I join her. I'm glad she's cool.

As we're chatting, Malusi walks to us and they share a moment. I refuse to even think it's cute, because Malusi is a cheating man. There's a very special place in hell for men who cheat, more especially husbands with kids. I have no sympathy for them whatsoever. I don't care if this makes me a Judgemental Judy... People who carelessly ruin the families they've built bug me. I can't with them.

Malusi then looks at me.

Nandi: I was just telling Ziyanda that I don't like you.

Malusi: I guess you both have something in common.

Nandi laughs sweetly. She obviously likes this man, while mina on the other hand I genuinely don't.

Malusi: Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Malusi.

He stares at me with a grin on his face. Argh.

Nomvuyo: Zizi, I need some water!

She's yelling from wherever she is. I'm sure she can tell that I don't want to be where I currently am.

I walk to her and she laughs quietly.

Nomvuyo: Go get me the water phela.

Me: Heyi sisi, you're not disabled. Don't try me.

Nomvuyo: Is this the price of loyalty?? Disrespect??

Me: Gosh.

I walk away and try to find her bottled water. My phone rings and I answer without checking the caller id.

Me: Hello?

Mom: Baby!

Me: Hello, sthandwa!

Mom: Kanti when are you coming? I'm ready for you and Nkanyezi. I cooked up a storm!

I laugh.

Me: I don't think we'll make it. Things seem a bit tense and strange this side.

Mom: Eish is that woman still bad?

Me: Angazi, but it seems like it.

Mom: Unjani uDerek?

Me: He's okay.

Mom: Okay ke sisi. I guess we'll see you some other time.

Me: I'm sorry.

Mom: No, it's okay, love. You have to be there for him.

Me: Alright then. Bye.

Mom: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and walk back to everyone. I give Nomvuyo her water and she thanks me.

Joe: We're going to head out now... D, you'll let us know how things go?

Lol both Derek and Dean nod.

Gabi: I hope she gets better. I'll keep her in my thoughts.

Nandi: We'll pray for her...

Derek: Thank you.

They say goodbye, and walk out.

Now, it's just Derek, Dean, Liwa and Nomvuyo here...

I wonder where Busi is.

Washo wavela uSathane.

She walks to where we are and looks at Derek.

Busi: Derek, Mam'Khwezi would like to see you.

Mam'Khwezi? Lolzer!

Derek: What does she want?

Busi raises an eyebrow and looks at Derek disapprovingly.

Busi: Your mother has asked to see you.

She then looks at me.

Busi: Goodbye.

She walks off and disappears.

Gosh. I can't deal, hey.

I look at Derek.

Me: I cancelled dinner with my parents.

Derek: Why?

Me: I thought-

Dean: You cancelled dinner with your parents? Are you crazy?

Me: Excuse me?

Liwa: Why would you do that? You don't cancel on your parents.

Nomvuyo: Honestly.

Me: Excuse me, what's happening?

Liwa: Derek, go check on Khwezi, and tell Zimkitha we're heading to Soweto.

Me: What?!

I look at all of them in shock.

Nomvuyo: God knows I've been craving a wholesome meal all day...

She stands and Liwa gets her bag.

Dean: Let's go.

Me: Whoa whoa whoa! What the hell is going on??

Nomvuyo: We're going to have dinner at your parents' house.

Me: Huh??

I look at Derek, and he frowns.

Liwa: Hurry up, Ngidi...

Listen, I'm dumbfounded right now.

Dean: I've been thinking about your dad's chicken futhi... Perfect timing...

What the hell just happened?

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, call your mom and tell her you have a few extra guests.

With that said, they all walk away. Derek also leaves me there and goes to Khwezi's room.

Really??

INSERT 102

We're now driving to Soweto...

Universe, why? Gosh, I definitely miss my peaceful single days. Derek's presence has shifted everything!

Derek: I'm sure you want to kill me.

Me: Hmm.

He chuckles.

Derek: Relax, baby. Your parents will love my people.

Me: Mxm.

He brushes my hand and focuses on the road. Dean is riding with Liwa and Nomvuyo, and they're following us. I am beyond annoyed.

After a while, we get to the house and I know my mom is going to do the most, because she seemed excited when I told her that I have three extra guests.

I open the gate for them and they park their cars. They get out...

Liwa: I'm not a snob.

Dean: You're most definitely a snob.

Me: Have you ever been to Soweto?

Liwa: I mean, I've been here a few times.

Nomvuyo: Lies.

Liwa: I won't allow you people to paint me in such a negative light.

Me: Wena Vuvu have you ever been here?

Nomvuyo laughs sweetly.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I've been around...

Liwa: Only because you chose to run away.

Nomvuyo: Hai suka.

I chuckle and lead them in... Suddenly, our house seems tiny with all these people here.

My mom is in the kitchen. She squeals as soon as she sees us.

Mom: Yoh!

I groan. Lord, can't I just go chill by the spaza around the corner? Dis tew murch.

Dean: Sawubona, ma.

I roll my eyes. He's out here acting like he's my mom's bestie.

Mom: Langelihle, how are you? It's been long.

Dean: I'm well, and you? We've been busy...

Mom: Hmm, ngi-right.

Dean shares a hug with her and then she looks at Derek with the biggest smile.

Mom: There he is!

Derek also smiles broadly.

Derek: Hello, ma.

Mom: I was so disappointed when Zizi cancelled on me. I was looking forward to seeing you.

Derek: We insisted on coming. You know how she is.

They share a very long hug. *rolls eyes*

Mom: How's your mother?

Derek goes on to give my mother a brief summary.

Mom: Shame, we'll keep her in our prayers.

Derek: Thank you.

My mom then looks at Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Mom: Haibo... Are you the third brother?

They all laugh happily. Yazi it's a party...

Derek: This is Liwa.

Liwa pushes Derek aside and goes on to hug my mom like he's known her for years.

Liwa: I'm Liwa. I'm so glad we're finally meeting.

Mom: Liwa... You all have such lovely names. Your mothers did well.

Liwa: Indeed...

He looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: And this is my wife, Nomvuyo... She is your daughter's best friend.

My mom looks at Nomvuyo. I already know that she's going to go on about her beauty. Nomvuyo is a showstopper kaloku.

Mom: Waze wamuhle, Nomvuyo. You're beautiful!

Nomvuyo smiles sweetly and they share a hug.

Nomvuyo: Hey, ma. I'm so happy to meet you. I've heard a lot about you!

Mom: All of you are so good-looking!

Me: Wow... Coz I'm ugly, right?

My mom looks at me in shock ngathi she even forgot I was here.

Me: Yep, I'm here.

They all laugh and she pulls me for a hug and kiss.

Mom: Hello, sthandwa sami. My star child!

Dean: Your star child needs to learn that we don't cancel on parents.

Mom: Oh, man... I'm sure she just wanted to be there for Nkanyezi.

Me: I'm still here!

They laugh again. Once again, this kitchen seems so congested with everyone here. I want to them to leave!

Mom: Anyway, you can go to the lounge while I dish up... Derek can stay with me here; I want us to catch up.

Safa thina.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He's delivering chickens with his personal assistant, Lwazi... They'll be back a bit later.

Dean: Is there some chicken left? I'd like a few takeaways.

Liwa: Me too. I've heard some great reviews.

Mom: Heeh! I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that.

I lead Dean, Liwa and Nomvuyo to the lounge.

Nomvuyo: This is a cute house.

Me: By cute you mean tiny?

They laugh.

Nomvuyo: I'm serious. I'd love to live in a small and intimate house.

Liwa: But, it's not practical, considering the size of our family.

Nomvuyo: That's the only downside.

Dean: Good to know you consider us a downside.

I chuckle and we sit on the couches.

Liwa: So, you grew up here?

I nod.

Liwa: Then how is it that you can't cook? Didn't your mom teach you?

Nomvuyo: Liwa!

Me: Wow!

I stand and they laugh.

Me: I would cuss you out, but this is a Christian house.

They continue laughing as I walk to the kitchen. Derek is now helping my mother dish up. As bothered I am, I must admit that I find them quite cute. My mom really has a soft spot for Derek. The guy has clearly won both of our hearts.

Me: I'm hungry.

Mom: Give me 10 minutes.

I nod and walk out. I need some fresh air. Again, my house is too tiny for these people and their enormous personalities.

As I get to the gate, I see Lwazi and my dad approaching. Lwazi sees me and sprints to me.

Me: Hey, baby!

Lwazi: Mommy!

We share a hug and she starts telling me about her day with my dad. She seems to enjoy this assistant role of hers, and she's taking it very seriously. My dad eventually gets to the gate, and he chuckles.

Me: Hey, you.

Dad: Hello, Zizi, unjani?

Me: Ngiyaphila, wena?

Dad: Ngiyaphila. Are your people here?

Me: My people?

He chuckles and I groan.

Me: I'm quite overwhelmed.

Dad: They seem like a good bunch.

Me: Go and check them out, mina I'm tired of them.

He laughs and walks in. I'll chill by the gate till I'm less overwhelmed.

Lwazi: Mommy, are you sleeping over?

Me: You want me to?

She nods excitedly and I chuckle.

Me: I'll talk to Uncle D first.

Lwazi: We have to ask him for permission?

I nod.

Lwazi: Why? He's not your father.

I laugh. Trust Lwazi to channel her inner feminist.

Me: I live with him, baby.

She sighs dramatically.

Lwazi: I don't get it.

Me: You will once you're my age.

Lwazi: Is he here?

Me: He's inside.

She smiles excitedly and runs off. I guess Derek is loved by these people...

My phone vibrates and I check the caller id. It's Zama...

I answer it.

Me: Lover.

Zama: Hey hey!

Me: What's up?

Zama: I don't think I'll come to work k'sasa. Can you pass on the message to Derek?

I laugh and she joins me.

Me: Futsek wena, I'm not your post woman!

She laughs and sighs.

Zama: I was just checking in.

Me: Unjani?

Zama: I'm okay, friend.

Me: Hmkay then.

Zama: See you tomorrow, Mrs. Ngidi!

Me: Faastsek!

She laughs as I hang up. Just then, I feel Derek's arms around my waist.

Me: I thought you forgot about me.

Derek: And I thought you ran away.

Me: Hmm.

I turn around and face him.

Derek: Food is ready.

Me: And are the introductions done?

He chuckles.

Derek: Yes, your dad is well-acquainted with my people.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Don't be a party pooper.

He takes my hand and leads me in. Yazi you'd swear he's the one who grew up here.

When I get in, I find everyone eating.

Mom: Sisi, where did you disappear to?

Me: I was at the gate.

Mom: I thought you went to Niki.

Me: Nope.

I get my plate and sit next to Derek.

Mom: So, we're discussing the proposal you're planning.

I look at Dean and he smiles. I'm still shocked by how close I am with this one. I hated his guts at first phela... Now he's sitting here comfortably in my parents' house, clearly having a good time.

Me: I'm still juggling a few ideas.

Liwa: Do you mind sharing?

I shake my head.

Derek: She's adamant about not telling anyone until she has a constructive plan.

Liwa: Is one week realistic though, Dean?

Dean: I trust Dlamini.

Dad: As long as the parents have been informed, then I think all is all.

Dean nods.

Liwa: So, tell me about this chicken business of yours...

My dad gladly tells him why and how he developed that idea. The passion? Lol it's unmatched! Once he's done, they all look at each other in awe.

Me: What's wrong?

Dean chuckles.

Dean: He just sold his business to us...

Me: Oh.

These people are so dramatic.

Liwa: Would you be interested in opening up an actual store?

Dad: That's the goal.

Liwa: Hmm, I'm sure my boss mom would agree to investing in you...

My dad looks at him excitedly.

Dad: Really?

Liwa: Of course... We'll meet again to discuss things properly. I'm thoroughly impressed... I'll also need some free meat to serve as testers.

Dad: I will dish up some takeaway... Not free though.

Everyone laughs.

Hehe. Good for my dad. I trust that he will handle things.

They continue chatting while I zone them out and focus on my food.

Before I know it, there's a knock on the door.

Next thing I know, Zimkitha is also here.

Ya, Universe, when you come, you come all the way through. Ndidikiwe.

INSERT 103

I'm sitting here wondering what the hell is going on.

I even feel sick. Ngathi ngiqalwa yi-flu.

I'm even having a difficult time breathing, that's how overwhelmed I am. No, I'm not being dramatic. I genuinely feel overwhelmed by all these people here.

I think Derek notices, because he asks me to accompany him outside. I gladly stand and follow him. Everyone is having a good time, and I'm happy for them...

We get outside and he looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: I'm going to take a walk down the street. I'll be back.

He tries to say something, but I shake my head.

Me: You don't get it. My anxiety is shooting up and I can't control it. I'm not angry, I'm anxious.

He looks at me intently and I can tell he feels bad.

Me: Derek, I'm not angry.

Derek: Okay. Then let's take the walk.

I sigh. I'd rather walk by myself, but I know he'll take it personally.

Me: Okay.

He takes my hand and we walk out of the yard. It's getting dark now...

Me: So, Zimkitha's here...

Derek: Yep...

He looks at me.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay. They were going to have to meet sooner or later.

Derek: They are quite overwhelming.

Me: Definitely...

As we continue walking and chatting, I'm actually glad that he tagged along. I feel much better now. After a while, we get back to the house and get in.

Hehe people are laughing and having a good time. Kumnandi mos.

It seems like Zimkitha is recalling the time she found out that Nomvuyo and Liwa were secretly in love with each other.

My mom is shocked, to say the least.

Mom: Why in the world would you two do that??

Liwa chuckles while Nomvuyo looks down ashamedly.

Liwa: We just fell in love... I don't know...

Mom: I hope you gave them a good beating, Zimi!

Zimi? Hehe must be so nice!

Lwazi is now in the bedroom, preparing for her week...

They continue chatting about the Liwa and Nomvuyo situation for a while...

Thereafter, they discuss marriage and children.

It's safe to say that they covered every topic in the book. I'm not even shocked that Zimkitha and my mom are getting along. They have similar personalities.

At around 8pm, we finish up and conclude that it's time for everyone to go their separate ways.

Mom: It was so lovely meeting all of you. Now I know who my baby is with when she's vanished.

They laugh.

Zimkitha: She's a great person and she fits right in.

Mom: She hasn't shown you her overly dramatic side?

Dean: Trust me, that's the first thing we learnt about her.

Me: Wow.

They laugh once again.

Derek: All the women in this group are dramatic. It's nothing new.

Mom: Hmm then we should meet the other women as well.

Zimkitha: I'll invite you over to my house.

Mom: We'd love that.

I stand and go to Lwazi's bedroom and find her sleeping. Everyone else goes outside... I walk to the bed and plant a kiss on her forehead. As much as I want to wake her and give her a squeeze, I stop myself... I'm so happy that now I get to see her at school. I think this has to be the best thing Derek has ever done for me.

As I walk out of the bedroom, I feel a sharp pain in my back, and I have to stand still for a second and re-evaluate.

What the fuck?

Derek walks in and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Ya.

We walk out and I rub my back. Clearly I've been up and down today. I even feel like I'm coming down with the flu...

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: I need to sleep. My throat hurts, my nose is also starting to do things, and my whole body is tired.

Derek: Ohhh look who's sick now.

Me: Don't come for me. Unlike you, I'm not moaning and groaning;

Derek: Hmmm.

Me: Whatever.

We get to where everyone is.

Zimktiha: Nisale kahle

Dad: Nihambe kahle.

Mom: It was such a pleasure getting to know you all.

Liwa: We will definitely be seeing each other again soon.

They all say goodbye to my parents and then get in their cars.

Dean: I'll see you tomorrow, Dlamini.

Me: Tomorrow?

He nods.

Dean: Some of us are not tied up from 8-5 at work.

Me: Argh whatever, evil man.

Liwa: Bye, Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Shap.

I wink at Nomvuyo and she winks back.

Zimkitha: Bye, sisi.

Me: Bye.

Zimkitha: Liwa, I'll follow you ngoba I don't remember the route.

Liwa: Sure...

They say goodbye once again, and then drive off.

Once it's quiet, I let out a loud sigh and my mom laughs.

Mom: Hawu shame mntanami.

Me: I'm exhausted now.

Derek wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: We should also get going. Siyasebenza k'sasa

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Nina na.

Mom: Cute.

Me: I think I'll come by during the week... I just want to make sure that Lwazi is settling in kahle at school.

Mom: She would love that.

Me: And you have to make sure that she does her homework.

Dad: You can't tell us how to raise a child phela... We have been doing this for 25 years.

Me: Well, excuse me then, lovely people.

They laugh.

Me: Nisale kahle ke.

Mom: Bye bye, baby.

Me: I think I'm coming down with the flu now...

Dad: It's all the fresh air you've been getting this evening.

Me: Wow! Low blow!

He chuckles and I hug them.

Me: See you soon.

Mom: Shap baby.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Mom: Bye bye, Nkanyi.

They share a hug.

Yep, she loves the guy, probably more than me.

Derek and I get in the car and he drives off.

Haibo, did Derek really spread his flu to me? Why am I suddenly feeling so fluey?

Me: This is your entire fault.

Derek: I'm sorry.

I groan.

We then drive back home where I pass out as soon as I'm medicated with Derek's medication... I guess it's my turn to be the baby...

The following morning, waking up was such a mission. It seems like I developed swine flu of some sort.

Derek: You should stay at home.

Me: I can't miss school.

Derek: I'm not asking you, Ziyanda.

I groan.

Derek: I have an important meeting now at 9am. I'll come back as soon as I'm done.

I groan again.

I'm not even being dramatic right now. I'm in pain and it's all because of this man!

Derek: Baby, wake up so you can eat.

Me: I'm not hungry.

Derek: You have to eat, so you can take these meds.

He pulls me up and looks at me concernedly.

Me: I'll have cereal.

Derek: I made breakfast.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't have an appetite.

He sighs and nods.

Derek: Okay.

He walks out and I take out my phone and dial Zama's number. It rings for a while, but she eventually answers.

Zama: Girl? I'm in an Uber, what's up?

Me: I'm not coming in today.

Zama: Yini? Are you okay?

Me: I'm sick.

Zama: What's wrong?

I groan.

Me: I suddenly have full-blown flu.

Zama: Oh, man... Sorry, love. Why don't you go to the doctor?

Me: Ngizoya. I can't afford to miss work when we've just started the year.

Zama: True... Do you need me to give your kids work?

Me: Yes, please. Just get the green file on my shelf and you'll find work for them.

Zama: Okay, love. Get well.

Me: Thank you.

Zama: So, is Mr. Principal also missing school?

Me: Bye!

She laughs as I hang up.

Derek walks back with a bowl of cereal.

Me: Thanks.

He sits on the edge and watches me eat.

Me: You can go...

He sighs.

Derek: I'll be back soon, okay?

Me: Okay.

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: I'm sorry for making you sick.

Me: You make me sick, Ngidi!

He laughs and kisses me again as he stands.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I just want him to hold me. As he walks out, I want to stop him, but I stop myself.

I am suddenly awakened by my phone ringing.

It's Derek.

I answer sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm a bit better. My short breath is better.

Derek: Okay... I thought I'd be done by now, but I have another meeting.

Me: It's okay.

Derek: I asked Dean to bring you some meds...

Me: Okay.

Derek: But, I'll be there in 2 hours tops, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and go back to sleep.

I'm suddenly awakened by another phone call and I hiss. Why can't I sleep in peace?!

I grunt as I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Open the door.

Me: Huh?

Dean: Open the door.

I hang up and get out of bed angrily. I make my way to the door and open it.

Me: Ufunani?

Dean: Futsek wena.

He pushes me aside and walks in.

Dean: You look horrible.

Me: Don't you have a home and job? Leave me the fuck alone!

He puts a plastic on the kitchen counter and pours himself a glass of water.

Dean: Take these meds...

I take the plastic and put out everything that's there.

Me: I hate pills.

Dean: You'll be strong...

As I take a bottle of medicine. Something catches my eye, and I swear to God my whole body tenses up.

Me: Dean??

He looks at me coolly.

Dean: Yes?

Me: What the hell??

He doesn't say anything.

Me: What the hell is this??

Dean: Pregnancy test.

I look at him in shock.

INSERT 104 (Couldn't edit)

Me: Ungazongiphaphela wena. Who died and made you a medical doctor?

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: You get a lousy PhD and a random Dr. Title, and you think you can come here and give me unsolicited advice?

His eyes pop out and his jaw drops.

Dean: Take that back, Dlamini!

Me: No!

Dean: How dare you devalue my doctorate?

Me: Go and shove your lousy doctorate up your nosy ass!

Before I know it, I am wet. This idiot threw his water at me.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Apologise.

Me: No!

He throws some more water and I take a glass and throw it at him, but he manages to duck. It hits the fridge and breaks.

Me: Get out!

Dean: Zi-

Me: I'll call the police!

Dean: Ziyanda!

Before I know it, Dean is leading me to the lounge, and all I see is red.

Why is he giving me a pregnancy test? Does he think I'm pregnant? Why? How?

I'm on panic mode at this point, and there's no turning back.

I keep hearing him say my name, but it's not helping. I feel like I'm drowning forcefully.

I can't be pregnant. Did the doctor confirm this? Yes, she did... I'm not pregnant. But why is Dean doing this? Do I look pregnant? Do I behave like a pregnant person?

My heart is pounding so fast, and my vision is blurry. I'm now at the centre of my anxiety attack.

I try to focus on something, something to narrow my attention span...

The huge clock on the wall... Yes... That's what I'll focus on...

Time... One second at a time... I count the seconds... Okay, my vision is becoming less blurry by the second... 60 seconds... 1 minute... It's 11:27... 3 minutes till 11:30...

I take a deep breath...

Okay, my vision is clear now...

My heart though... It's still pounding hard... I need to take breaths in 5 second intervals... Let me time myself... I take a deep breath and watch closely as the clock ticks... 5 seconds done... Next... 1 minute has passed...

I'm okay...

I blink a couple of times.

I'm fine.

I take one last deep breath, and exhale loudly.

I blink again.

Dean.

Yes, Dean... He's here...

I clear my throat.

He looks like he has just seen a ghost.

Me: Dean.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Dean.

He snaps out of it.

Me: Please get me some water.

He quickly stands and comes back within seconds with a glass of water. I drink half of it.

Okay, now I'm back.

I'm okay.

Me: Dean.

Dean: What the fuck just happened?

I sigh.

Me: Hasn't Derek told you about my attacks?

He shakes his head lightly.

Dean: I didn't know the extent.

He looks at me more softly.

Me: I'm okay.

Dean: I thought you were dying.

I chuckle.

Me: I get like that.

Dean: But, what triggers it?

Me: It can be anything from a pen not working, to being told that I might be pregnant.

He frowns.

Dean: Does the thought of pregnancy really drive you that crazy?

Me: Yes!

Dean: But, why?

Me: Dean, I'm not ready!

Dean: But, can one ever be ready for parenthood?

Me: Are you hearing yourself? Parenthood?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Parenthood... Ziyanda... Parenthood... Fucken Ziyanda Dlamini!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Dean: You are a little coo coo, but I don't think you're irreparable.

Me: Argh!

I stand and make my way to the balcony.

Yazi, iphelile kwaleyo-flu.

I stand there and take in the fresh air.

Dean: I apologise for triggering all of this.

Me: I don't like what you did...

Dean: Can you hear me out for a sec? I'm about to go off-script.

I roll my eyes and he laughs quietly. He then rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Dean: I'm not going to lie, the first time I met you, I wanted nothing to do with you. I thought you were a random girl that came to fuck up my friend's life... I wasn't even willing to get to know you.

Me: Wow.

Dean: But, would you like to know when I realised that you might not be that bad?

I don't respond.

Dean: When Liwa and I came here and found you with your swollen eyes... I think you had your first deep moment with Derek the night before...

I try to recall that night. I think that's when Derek asked me what I want...

Dean: When Liwa told you about his daughter, you engaged passionately with him, and you two discussed the pros and cons of teachers letting students skip grades... Your passion for children amazed me. I don't know, but it was at that moment that I realised that you might just be the one...

I don't know if he's trying to butter me up right now, but I'm feeling very buttered up.

Dean: We've grown quite close, and I'm being very honest when I tell you that I trust you. I've known a lot of people for many years, but I can confidently say that I don't trust or even value them as much as I do you... More than anything, my relationship with you is teaching me that loyalty, love and trust are not solidified by the number of years people have been in each other's lives, but they're solidified by the emotional connection that transpires between people, and emotional connections can form within a matter of seconds or minutes. There's no solid timeline that illustrates when loyalty, love and trust is developed.

Whoa.

Dean: You have no idea how much I value you... Seeing how happy you make Derek, makes me value you more every single time I interact with you, or I see the way you look at each other, or even when he calls me and tells me how much you drive him crazy...

I smile.

Dean: I gained respect for you, and that's something I couldn't control, even if I wanted to...

He chuckles and sighs.

Dean: What I'm trying to say is this; I understand that the development of your relationship with Derek can overwhelm you from time to time, because we're so used to building such love-filled relationships for years and years... It's unconventional to fall in love in days or months... However, the stress is not worth it...

I sigh.

I don't know why Dean is trying to get me all emotional.

Dean: You can't live your life stressing about such things. If it feels right, then allow it to feel right. The Universe works in mysterious ways.

He scratches his chin thoughtfully and then stares at me. We are silent for a while.

Dean: Calm down, okay?

I nod lightly.

Dean: I'm hungry... Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

Dean: Would you like me to prepare something for you?

I nod and he opens up his arms.

Dean: You're like the little sister I never had. This shit is a fun and new experience for me.

Me: You must stop teasing me.

Dean: Oh no, that will never happen. That's how I express my love. If I don't tease you, then you should be worried.

Me: Wow.

We share a hug and walk back in.

Dean: I'll get rid of the pregnancy test. I was honestly just pulling your leg, and I didn't think you'd have a panic attack.

Me: I'm not pregnant. The doctor even confirmed it.

Dean: You really are a crazy bitch. You should have seen how psycho you looked.

Me: Dean!

He laughs.

Dean: I kid, I kid...

Me: Let me take a shower while you clean up this mess and cook for me like my bitch.

Dean: Fuck off, lunatic.

Me: Argh!

I walk to the bedroom and leave him there...

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Dean gave me medication that made me pass out almost immediately after eating.

I must have dozed off for a while, because when I wake up, I see Nkanyezi. He seems to be rearranging the closet.

I clear my throat and he instantly drops some clothes and walks to the bed.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey.

I missed him. I'm so used to spending my days with him, and today felt really strange without him.

He bends and plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: I missed you.

He smiles and sits on the edge.

Derek: You have no idea how weird today day was.

I smile.

Me: Did you check on my kids?

He nods.

Derek: Zama gave them work and I got someone to supervise them throughout the day.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Lwazi was worried sick.

I laugh.

Derek: She even came to my office to question me.

Me: Are you serious?

He nods.

Derek: She'll call you when she's done with her homework.

Me: Okay.

I sit up and give him a hug.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: A bit better.

Derek: But you don't look better.

Me: Really??

He chuckles and nods.

Derek: I'm not convinced. I think you're lying because you want to go to work tomorrow.

Me: I am going.

Derek: No, you're not.

Me: Derek!

He shakes his head.

Derek: As a teacher, you know how important it is to always be 100% healthy. I'm taking you to the doctor tomorrow. There's only so much these pharmacy pills can do for us. We're both going to get vaccinated.

Me: Wow!

He leans closer to me and plants another kiss.

Me: I want to shower. I feel icky.

Derek: Let me finish packing up this closet.

Me: Hmkay...

He stands and I get back in the blanket and watch as he finishes his task.

Me: Dean professed his love for me.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: He went all poetic on me.

Derek: Really? Did you record him? That's rare.

I laugh and shake my head.

Derek: You seem to bring out the softer side of him.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: You did that with Nomvuyo as well...

He turns and looks at me with a smile.

Derek: Clearly you bring out the best in people.

Me: Aww!

He chuckles and continues.

Me: You also bring out the best in me.

Derek: I bring out the best in everyone. I'm the shit.

Me: Hey, now!

We laugh. Derek's calm vibe always has a good effect on me. I guess with my craziness, I need someone like Derek, who'll bring me back down to earth. Not every moment in one's life has to be hyper, you know?

We continue chatting until he finishes packing the closet. Once he's satisfied, he asks me to come. I get out of bed and walk to the closet. It's now divided, with his things on one side, and my things on the other side.

Derek: Our things shouldn't get mixed up.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: I've also divided these drawers...

Me: Hmkay.

I really don't think it's that deep, but if it makes him feel better, then good for him.

Derek: Now, let's take that well-deserved shower.

Me: Finally!

He chuckles and we walk to the bathroom.

Me: No shower sex, please!

Derek: What? I love that shit.

Me: Derek I'm not skinny. Those positions make me uncomfortable. You do not have the privilege to flip me around like a pancake. I'm a very fat pancake.

He laughs.

Me: That shit is uncomfortable and the cramps are torturous.

Derek: You get cramps?

Me: Yes!

He continues laughing.

Derek: Why didn't you say this before?

Me: Because you seem to enjoy it. I've been sucking it up all in the name of love.

Derek: Shame, baby. So you've been suffering while I'm busy thinking you're having fun.

Me: Those moans are mostly because of the pain I'm in when you're busy twisting me like a damn pretzel.

He continues laughing.

Me: Look at you laughing at my pain.

Derek: I'm sorry, love.

Me: We can give each other head, but it should end there. I caiin't!

We get in the shower and he starts cleaning me up.

Derek: I can't be this close to you and not have the desire to get in you.

Me: Hai Derek you'll get in me once we're done showering. It's only 15-20 minutes yoh.

He laughs and shakes his head lightly.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

We eventually finish showering and I am so thankful that no sex was had.

Me: I feel like going out...

He frowns.

Me: Let's go watch a movie.

Derek: Uhm...

Me: Yes, let's have a movie date.

Derek: You're sick.

Me: I'm not disabled!

Derek: No, we'll catch a movie once you've healed. Your flu will worsen if we go outside.

Me: Yoh, Derek, I left my dad in Soweto!

Derek: And I promised your dad that I'd take care of you.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: No, put on your pjs. I'm going to make us some soup.

Me: Soup? I don't even like soup!

Derek: Well, too bad...

He wears his gown and walks out.

Me: I don't like you right now!

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Argh.

He disappears and I throw myself on the bed...

As much as I don't want to admit it, I'm blushing deep down. This man is so invested in my well-being. I am blessed bazalwane.

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek.

As soon as I try to get out of bed, I am overwhelmed by aches.

I don't know what's going on. My whole body feels like it went through a dungeon filled with fire.

I squeal and Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Derek, I don't know what the fuck is going on!

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: My body is achy.

Derek: Is it too painful?

Me: I can't describe the pain. It's subtle, but intense.

He sighs.

Derek: Wake up and get dressed.

Me: Why?

Derek: We're going to the doctor.

I groan in frustration.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Okay!

I get out of bed and go to the bathroom to freshen up. He doesn't even want me to take a shower.

It's now around 10am and we're heading to the doctor.

I don't know why I suddenly feel uneasy.

I dismiss this...

We get there and we are led to some doctor. This one is different from the one we had the last time we were here.

Derek: I've put you under my medical aid.

Me: Huh?

He smiles.

Derek: You're my dependent.

Me: Wow. How insulting.

He chuckles.

Me: I'm an independent woman. I don't depend on nobody.

He chuckles.

I don't even have the energy to fight him.

She greets us and we greet back.

Doctor: So, what brings you here today?

Derek: Ziyanda?

They both look at me and I sigh heavily.

Me: I don't know what's going on. I think I have flu.

Doctor: You think?

Me: I have the symptoms, but now my body is also confusing me. I have aches all over. It's unexplainable.

She nods slowly and starts questioning me more.

Doctor: Alright then, I'll have to take samples of your blood and urine.

Me: Blood and urine? It can't be that deep.

She chuckles.

Doctor: You'll never know... I'd also like a sample of your mucus, and we'll also conduct chest x-ray.

Me: What??

Derek is also as shocked as I am.

Derek: Isn't that too much?

The doctor shakes her head.

Doctor: All the symptoms you've described for me indicate a possibility of pneumonia.

Derek stands and gets me a glass of water. He knows me too well.

I take it and drink it all.

Doctor: Don't stress. Pneumonia is curable.

Me: But it's pneumonia!

She sighs.

Derek holds my hand and I groan. There's nothing I hate more than being sick. I hate being in pain.

Doctor: The chest X-ray will allow me to check for changes in the lungs and to look for other causes of your symptoms. However, the X-ray does not always show whether you have pneumonia, especially if it's done when you first get sick. The X-ray results will suggest the type of organism causing pneumonia...

I sigh.

Doctor: The reason I'm testing your mucus is because you mentioned that you have shortness of breath.

Derek: And the urine test?

Doctor: This test can identify some bacteria that cause pneumonia. This can help guide treatment if you have been officially diagnosed with it.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Do you need some fresh air?

I shake my head.

Me: Just do what you have to... I'd like to leave.

Doctor: Alright then... Give me a few minutes...

I spent the rest of the day in bed.

I had called my mom and told her about this pneumonia thing and she insisted on coming over and taking care of me...

At around 4pm, we got a call from the doctor. She said she would push for the tests to be conducted immediately after we left...

My mom tagged along as we made our way there.

We got in and sat down.

Mom: Is my daughter okay?

Doctor: The results came back...

She looks at me.

Doctor: You definitely have pneumonia.

I swear my heart sinks.

How??

Doctor: However, it doesn't seem severe. I'm glad you came here so soon.

I look at Derek.

I guess I have him to thank.

Doctor: It's nothing antibiotics and over-the-counter pain relievers can't fix.

Me: Okay.

She sighs.

Doctor: And it is crucial for you to take the medication religiously...

Me: Okay.

Doctor: Pregnancy puts you at risk for developing pneumonia. It's most commonly bacterial in origin.

She smiles.

I don't know what's happening.

What's happening?

What's going on?

What is she talking about?

Mom: Pregnancy?!

The doctor looks at me coolly.

Doctor: Yes, you're pregnant. Were you not aware?

Mom: Pregnant?!

They lost me at that point.

INSERT 106 (Unedited)

Mom: Ziyanda...

No, this can't be. I can't be pregnant.

Mom: Ziyanda... Baby, you have to wake up.

Wake up?

I feel my mom's hands on me and she brushes my cheeks. Her hands are warm.

Mom: Yanda... Ngicela uvuke... It's just you and me in this room...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Mom: Baby...

I feel the tears welling up.

Mom: Ziyanda, I need you to focus on your breathing. Take a deep breath now...

I listen to her and do as I'm told.

Mom: I want your breaths to be deeper.

She takes a very deep breath and I also take one. I feel like I'm suffocating.

I groan. I'm in pain. Why am I on the floor? Did I pass out?

Mom: Let's try to stand. You've been on the floor for too long now.

She helps me stand and once I'm up, she makes me sit on a chair.

Mom: Drink some water...

I shake my head. I feel like I just got hit by the bus. I need to bury myself in my bed.

We stare at each other for a long time, and I end up bursting out in tears.

Mom: Oh, baby...

She pulls me and wraps her arms around me.

Mom: Shh...

She comforts me for the longest time, till I'm calm.

She then wipes my tears and makes me look at her.

Mom: Are you calm?

I nod lightly.

Mom: Let's go home. You need to rest.

Just then, the door opens and I see Derek. He looks worried.

Mom: Nkanyezi, do you mind driving us to Soweto? I'd rather she sleep at home tonight.

Derek: Oh...Uhm, sure...

He's avoiding my eyes.

The doctor walks in as well.

Doctor: Can I have a word with you, Ziyanda?

Mom: I don't think this is the right time to have constructive conversations. Ziyanda will come back once she has stabilized.

The doctor sighs and nods.

Doctor: I apologize for the inconvenience caused.

Mom: Thanks... We'll see you soon.

The doctor nods and walks out. My mom then looks at me.

Mom: Baby, let's go...

I stand and Derek gets my bag.

Derek: I've got her medication.

Mom: Alright.

We all walk out and make our way to Derek's car. I get in at the back and fall asleep instantly.

After a while, I'm awakened by my mom's voice.

Mom: We're here, sisi.

I sit up and blink a couple of times. My chest is so closed off that I am struggling to breath.

Me: My chest is painful.

Mom: The doctor gave us something for that. Let's get in...

She looks at Derek and sighs.

Mom: See you soon.

Derek: Okay.

She gets out of the car.

It's silent for a long time. I can't seem to move.

Suddenly, he gets out of the car and within seconds, he's sitting next to me at the back.

Derek: Please don't hate me.

I look at him.

Me: Hate you?

Derek: I know you're not happy about this.

Me: I'm not.

He sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I hate myself for being irresponsible.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm on contraceptives. How am I pregnant?

Derek: It seems like you were actually pregnant that time we did the test.

Me: But, how?

He shrugs.

Derek: I don't know...

I sigh and try not to cry all over again. The thought of the future is now enough to lead me to my grave.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: I should get in... I'm not feeling well.

Derek: How long are you going to stay here?

I shrug.

He scratches his head lightly and sighs.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Bye.

We both get out and he watches as I walk in...

It's been two days since I was told that I'm pregnant.

Yes, you are pregnant, Ziyanda.

I kept having nightmares, and my mom ended up sleeping with me. She definitely understands why I'm behaving like this, so I don't even have to explain myself. This is why I'm glad she was there when the news broke out and that she suggested that I come back home with her.

My dad hasn't said one word to me. My mom mentioned that she told him. I don't know where his head is at, but I think he's just giving me space to process it.

It's now Thursday...

I wanted to go to work, but my mom insisted that I stay.

She's right. Seeing my kids would be very triggering.

I'm so pissed at myself. How could I be so irresponsible? I don't want a baby. I don't want it.

That morning, Lwazi comes to my room.

Lwazi: Mommy.

I sigh.

Me: Yes, Lwazi?

She sits on the edge of my bed and looks at me as I'm lying there.

Lwazi: I don't like seeing you like this.

Me: I'm just sick, baby.

She gets closer to my face and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Lwazi: Did Uncle D make you sad?

Me: Not at all. I'm just sick.

Lwazi: Okay.

Me: Are you ready for school?

She nods excitedly.

Me: Do you enjoy it there?

Lwazi: I love it!

Me: That's great.

She goes on to tell me about her week, and I end up smiling and laughing.

Oh, my Lwazi...Always ready to put a smile on my face.

Just then, my mom walks in.

Mom: Lwazi, your transport is here. Woza.

Lwazi: Okay, ma!

She gives me another kiss.

Lwazi: Bye, mommy!

Me: Bye, baby.

She runs out of the room and my mom chuckles.

Mom: She's been going through a tough time this week. Your bleakness rubbed off on her.

Me: Hmm.

Mom: Let me walk her out... Go back to sleep.

Me: Okay.

She closes the door and I go back to sleep...

That Friday, I decided to get out of bed.

Well, it's not like I had a choice... That doctor insisted on seeing me for a thorough check up.

I guess from now on I'm going to be forced to do certain things all because I'm carrying a human...

Once I'm done getting ready, I walk to the lounge, and I see Derek.

My heart drops.

I haven't seen or spoken to him since Tuesday.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Hello, how are you?

Derek: Okay, and you?

Me: Okay.

Derek: How's the pneumonia?

Me: I think it's almost healed.

He nods lightly and stands.

My mom emerges and smiles.

Mom: We can go...

We all walk out and make our way to Derek's car. My mom gets in at the back and I honestly want to cuss. Anyway, I get in at the front and Derek drives off.

They both chat throughout the drive while I fall asleep. Sleeping has been my coping mechanism this entire week...

Eventually, we get there and we're led to the doctor's office.

She smiles brightly as soon as she sees us.

Dr: How are you feeling, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm much better.

She goes on to ask me more questions about the treatment...

Once she's done, she looks at me intently.

Dr: Now, I'd like us to discuss your pregnancy...

I nod lightly.

Dr: I would like to do a thorough check up because you've gone so many weeks not aware of the pregnancy... I want to make sure that the baby is okay so that we start following necessary procedures to ensure that all is well.

I nod.

Dr: Please give me a few minutes...

Mom: Okay, dear.

Dr. Modisa walks out.

Derek: Excuse me...

He stands and walks out as well.

My mom looks at me intently.

Mom: This is overwhelming for all of us, baby...

I don't say anything.

Mom: There's nothing we can do at this point. Don't allow the anxiety to rule you.

Me: Easier said than done.

She sighs.

I need bubblegum to distract me. I get my bag and as I look for my gum, I come across a piece of paper. I take it out and open it.

It read:

Dear Mommy,

I know you are sick but I think you are sad. I hate seeing you sad because it makes me sad too. I wrote this letter to tell you that I love you very much. You are the best mommy in the whole world. You loved me when no one else did. You always take care of me and you are very beautiful. Thank you for everything you have done for me. I love you.

From your daughter, Lwazi.

I don't know when or how this letter was slipped in my bag.

I'm now sobbing. I don't know why, but I'm sobbing.

Mom: Ziyanda?

I give her the letter and she reads it.

She sighs heavily and also wipes her tears.

Mom: I don't know what is going on... I don't know what God is trying to do, but I'm not about to question Him...

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: I'm going to be a grandmother.

She sighs loudly and takes my hand.

Mom: Believe it or not, Lwazi has prepared you for this role... You'll make an amazing mother.

Me: I'm not ready.

Mom: We all have to suck it up now.

I sigh.

Mom: Now, please find Nkanyezi...

I stand and walk out...

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I find Derek standing at the parking lot, leaning against his car.

Me: Derek.

He looks at me.

Me: The doctor is ready...

He nods lightly and follows me as we walk back inside. The doctor leads us into the scanning room and I sit on the reclining seat while my mom and Derek sit on the chairs close to me.

Doctor: According to the test results, you are 8 weeks pregnant.

I keep quiet.

Mom: One would swear that you two have been in each other's lives forever...

Derek looks at me and I look at the doctor.

Doctor: I'd like us to have a look at the progress of the fetus.

She looks at me intently. Why is staring at me?

Mom: Zizi, vula phela...

Oh...

I recline my seat and expose my belly. It seems the same to me. I'm chubby, so I can't see anything different.

Anyway, she begins applying the gel thing and I wince at how cold it is.

We wait for a few minutes as the monitor loads. We eventually see the classic black and white background. She moves the probe carefully.

She smiles.

Doctor: Well, lookie here...

We all stare at the monitor.

There it is...

Doctor: You are on the 8th week of your pregnancy... This week is vital for the brain development of the fetus. The nerve cells begin to branch out and connect with each other. The spinal cord also continues to develop.

Mom: I can see him growing...

Him?

Doctor: Are you hoping for a boy, ma?

Mom: Definitely. I've been surrounded by too many girls.

They both laugh.

I glance at Derek and he is solely concentrating on the screen.

Doctor: The facial features are also beginning to grow... As you can see here, there's a hint of the upper lip, the tip of the nose, and the eyelids.

She moves the probe and everyone stares at the monitor.

Mom: What about the limbs? I can see that he is forming.

The doctor chuckles.

Doctor: "His" arms and legs are getting longer, with the hands folding at the wrists and elbows.

I zone them out. That's the only way I'm able to not pass out from the anxiety.

I go to my mental quiet and safe space and get lost there.

It must have been a while, because I'm brought back to reality by Derek clearing his throat.

I blink a couple of times and look at him.

Derek: How big is the baby?

Doctor: Around 1.6cm, about the size of a medium raspberry.

Derek: And how is Ziyanda's body adjusting?

She stares at me.

Doctor: At this point, you may have started noticing certain changes in your body. Your body has already started to prepare for breastfeeding, which causes your breasts to appear larger than normal. Your belly may be expanding a little; however, you will not start showing just yet.

Derek nods lightly.

Mom: Her breasts have definitely grown bigger. That's one thing I've observed this past week.

Wow.

Derek: And what are the pregnancy symptoms we should expect at this stage?

The doctor looks at me and smiles.

Doctor: Morning sickness with nausea, headache, vomiting and dizziness are the most common. Having the symptoms of morning sickness generally indicate a healthy pregnancy. However, it is also normal not to experience these symptoms.

Derek nods.

Mom: I never got morning sickness.

Doctor: Lucky you!

They laugh happily. Derek seems serious. I can't read him.

Derek: Any other symptoms to look out for?

Doctor: There's the following: fatigue or tiredness, bloating, constipation, frequent urination, heartburn, breast tenderness, shortness of breath, increased appetite, nasal congestion, abdominal pains, insomnia, itchy legs, hands and belly, backache.

She sighs.

Doctor: There are emotional changes as well...

She looks at me softly and then focuses on Derek again.

Doctor: Anxiety... Hormonal changes...

She then smiles.

Doctor: Would you like a copy of the ultrasound?

Mom: Of course! I'll create an album for us...

Derek looks at her and smiles lightly.

Doctor: Alright then...

She wipes the gel and I fix my top.

Doctor: In the coming weeks, I'm going to conduct a few tests. These will help determine whether your child has any worrying conditions. Some are relatively simple blood tests, while others involve more invasive procedures.

Derek: Are these tests diagnostic?

Doctor: Many of these prenatal tests are for screening, rather than diagnostic purposes. Screening tests give us a sense of your risk for certain conditions. But only a diagnostic test can tell you accurately whether your baby has a problem.

Derek nods.

Doctor: I'd like to draw some blood... I need to know your blood type. Additionally, I need to assess your hormone levels and red and white blood cell levels; to be sure you're normal. Your blood will be screened for STDs, HIV, and certain immunities.

I zone out again.

I can't listen to this woman...

I feel my mom's warm hand on mine.

I snap out of it.

Doctor: I'd like to do a pap smear to check for infections and abnormalities. I'll also need your pee sample. Just so you know, I'll need your pee every time we meet, so your glucose and protein levels can be monitored.

I nod absentmindedly.

Doctor: Alright then, let's get to it.

She smiles warmly as Derek and my mom walk out...

It's now 12pm, and I feel very lightheaded as we walk out and make our way to the car.

Mom: I have to rush off to work... They need me for something.

Derek: I'll give you a lift.

Mom: No, no, baby. I'll take a taxi.

With that said, she gives me a hug and Derek as well.

Mom: Bye bye.

She winks at Derek.

Derek: Bye.

She walks off.

Well, that was random.

Derek: Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

We get in the car and he drives off.

Now that I've been told about these symptoms, it seems like I'm more aware of them. I feel sick. Maybe it's all in the mind...

We get to Mike's Kitchen and get a table.

I look through the menu and feel conflicted. I want to have a burger, yet I also want 10 other things. I'm just a walking, confused, sick zombie.

I settle for a burger and chips.

We sit in silence for a long time, both of us on our phones. I'm too drained to engage in conversation.

Derek excuses himself to go to the bathroom.

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I ignore the call and switch off my phone.

He comes back and sits.

Me: Did you tell your friends?

Derek: No.

I nod lightly and we're silent once again.

Eventually, our food is brought and I focus on my burger.

After a few bites, I feel disgusted.

I'm confused. Before going to the doctor, I was perfectly fine. What's going on?

Me: I'm not feeling well.

He looks at me sharply.

Derek: What's wrong?

I groan and stand.

Me: Need the bathroom.

I walk away and go to the bathroom. I stand by the window and get some fresh air. Seconds later, the door opens and Derek steps in.

Derek: Ziyanda, what's wrong?

Me: I don't know. I've never felt like this.

He sighs and looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Do you want to go back to the doctor?

I shake my head.

Me: Just feeling nauseous.

We stand in silence, him staring at me, while I'm just looking out the window.

After a few minutes, I feel better. We walk back to our table and I ask for more water.

He pushes his plate aside and I look at him questioningly.

Derek: Lost my appetite.

I look at both of our plates.

My burger looks disgusting... His chicken looks appealing.

Me: Can I have some?

Before he nods, I'm already pulling his plate and delving in. This seems edible... Yes, it's most definitely better than the burger, which Derek has taken and seems to be enjoying.

We look at each other, and end up smiling lightly.

Derek: Better?

I nod.

We eat in silence...

Once we're done, he pays the bill and we make our way out.

We get in the car.

Derek: Am I taking you to Soweto?

I shake my head and lower my seat.

He smiles and starts driving, while I take a nap.

INSERT 108

The following day, I wake up at 10am and go straight to the bathroom to take a shower.

Once I'm done, I find Derek sitting on the bed with his laptop.

He looks at me strangely and questioningly.

Me: I'm seeing Melinda.

Derek: Oh.

I finish getting dressed and walk to the kitchen to get some water.

Derek: Would you like me to drive you there?

Me: My Uber is 3 minutes away.

He doesn't say anything. Instead, he walks away and disappears.

I get my bag and make my way out...

Melinda: You're pregnant?

She looks at me in disbelief and I sigh heavily.

Melinda: Oh, Ziyanda...

I burst out in tears and she gives me my box of tissues. She knows that when I get like this, she needs to be quiet and let me get the tears out of my system.

After a while, I'm done crying. I wipe my tears and sigh loudly.

Me: I can feel myself sinking... I feel it, this is going to be the worst 7 months of my life, and once this baby is born, things will never be the same again.

She nods lightly.

Me: I'm not ready! I don't want to have this baby, Melinda!

Melinda: Why are you so adamant?

Me: I'm not ready. I won't make a good mom. I already struggle with dealing with myself, how am I going to take care of someone else for the rest of my life?

She nods.

Me: I won't make a good mother.

Melinda: Why do you say that?

Me: I suffer from depression. Every day, I have to try to convince myself to even get out of bed. People see me smiling and laughing, but they don't understand what I go through in my mind on a daily. There are days when I want to curl up and die. 70% of my life consists of such days, Melinda.

She sighs.

Me: How am I supposed to take care of a baby when I don't fully believe that life is worth living?

I wipe my tears.

Me: I'm not 100% stable. I don't have control of myself. What kind of a life is that?

Melinda: You're being too hard on yourself. You've made a lot of progress, Zi.

Me: But the progress is not enough, Melinda. At this moment, I genuinely don't want to be alive.

She looks at me softly.

Me: And as much as the people in my life say they understand, in all honesty, they don't. They don't know how it's like to constantly feel like shit... To constantly convince myself that life is worth living. They don't get it. It's easy for them to label me as dramatic or cold-hearted, but they don't understand that that's my coping mechanism. They understand, but only to a certain extent.

She nods.

Me: This pregnancy has thrown me off. It has taken me 100 steps back. I'm miserable.

Melinda: How is Derek?

Me: He's happy. He wants this baby.

Melinda: Has he expressed his happiness?

Me: He's hiding it.

Melinda: Because he doesn't want to seem insensitive?

I nod.

Me: I'm just angry that I put myself in this position. I should have been more responsible.

She nods.

Me: Derek's mother hates me. So, this child won't be welcomed by her.

Melinda: And does that affect you?

Me: I don't know why she hates me. I haven't done anything to her. She makes me feel like I'm some disgusting piece of shit.

Melinda: And Derek knows about this?

I nod.

Me: He's been supportive about that situation.

Melinda: And what about your mental illness?

Me: You know how it goes, Melinda... People say they understand, but they don't... And it seems like you're crazy and unfair when you're battling with this shit.

Melinda: It takes time for loved ones to fully get it, but they do after a while.

Me: Derek is doing well so far...

She nods.

Me: Now, this pregnancy is also going to disrupt my moods.

She smiles.

Melinda: It's just going to add on to what is already a chaotic pool of moods...

Me: Exactly...

We sit in silence for a while...

Melinda: You're going through a lot, Ziyanda...

I keep quiet.

Melinda: Our main focus at this point in time should be your mental health. Thereafter, we'll deal with Derek... You will not be able to work on your relationship with him if you're not stable. I want us to go back to the drawing board, to ensure that you live a happy life.

Me: "Happy"

She chuckles.

Melinda: Yes, "Happy."

I sigh.

Melinda: So, now we go back to basics... We celebrate getting out of bed; we celebrate taking a shower... Every small action is a milestone...

I nod.

Melinda: We need to go back to basics...

Me: Okay.

Melinda: How's mommy?

Me: She's beyond excited.

She smiles.

Me: Thank God she was there when I found out.

I begin telling her how I found out...

Melinda: That's crazy.

Me: Yep.

Melinda: We'll see each other weekly now.

Me: Definitely.

She nods and we continue chatting...

When I get to the apartment, I'm shocked to find the furniture in the lounge rearranged.

Derek is busy doing something electronic-related...

Me: I'm back.

He looks at me and nods lightly.

I then walk to the bedroom and throw myself on the bed...

Just then, my phone rings and it's Dean.

Shit.

The proposal.

I answer it hurriedly.

Me: Hello.

Dean: Wow, how is Nolwazi not my fiance right now?

I try to say something, but I feel defeated.

Dean: I've extended your deadline to next week. Don't fuck with me, Dlamini.

I sigh as he hangs up.

I then go to the bathroom and take a very long shower. I'd appreciate a bath though...

Once I'm done, I get dressed in my pjs, despite it being 2pm.

When I walk to the lounge, Derek seems to be done with whatever he was doing. He's sitting on the couch, watching tennis. I get myself some water and then sit. It seems like he was installing a different router...

Me: Dean called.

He looks at me.

Me: Did you tell him to back off?

Derek: I just asked him to postpone.

I nod and we focus on the TV.

We've been sitting here for close to an hour. I'm restless... I stand and go to the kitchen to get more water. Derek walks to me.

I look at him.

Derek: Come here for a sec.

I take a few steps and get to him, and he wraps his arms around me.

We stand there for a while.

Derek: I don't want to lose you.

I don't say anything.

Derek: Ziyanda, I don't want to lose you.

I try to say something, but words fail me.

He pulls me closer and my body tenses up against his.

Derek: Please let me in...

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: Don't shut me out, please...

He trails kisses down to my lips.

Derek: I love you and I need you. Don't push me away. I want to be here for you.

I look at him.

We are silent for a while. He's looking at me pleadingly.

Derek: I'd like to use one of the tools... The Empathy Tool...

He lowers his head and I feel his lips on my ear. At this point, I'm practically holding on to him for balance.

Derek: If you were in my shoes, what would you do?

He plants a kiss on ear and then looks at me. I get lost in his eyes for a while.

Derek: Baby.

I sigh.

Me: I'd use my Patience Tool.

He smiles and chuckles.

Derek: Touché...

He tightens his hold on me and I feel his lips by my ear again.

Derek: I love you.

He plants a kiss.

I didn't even realise that I was crying at this point.

Me: I love you too, Derek.

He tightens his hold on me even more and buries his head in my neck.

We stand there for the longest time.

Eventually, he looks at me and smiles.

Derek: Movie date?

Me: Gosh, finally.

He laughs quietly and plants a kiss on my lips.

INSERT 109

We're now at a restaurant, having dinner, after watching the movie.

Derek: You've just made me watch a corny movie.

Me: Stop complaining. It was a good movie.

Derek: About a surrogate who ends up being obsessed with the man she's carrying the child for?

Me: Whatever.

We get our food and begin eating.

Derek: So, Dean called you?

I nod.

Me: I completely forgot about the proposal.

Derek: It's been a rough week.

He smiles lightly and I sigh.

Derek: Are you going back to work on Monday?

Me: Why wouldn't I?

Derek: I'm just asking...

I sigh.

Me: I want to go back.

Derek: Are you sure?

Me: Derek.

Derek: Okay.

We focus on our food and eat in silence. I prefer sitting in silence lately.

My dessert arrives and I delve in.

Derek: Can I have some?

Me: No, get your own.

Derek: Wow!

Me: What?

Derek: So, it's okay for you to practically eat all of my food, but I can't do the same?

Me: What's yours is ours, and what's mine is mine.

He chuckles and shakes his head. He calls the waiter and order malva pudding with custard.

Derek: Don't even think of touching my dessert.

Me: Surely you wouldn't want your child to starve...

He tries to say something, but I think I made him speechless.

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't know how to respond to that.

I smile innocently.

Just then, his phone rings and he answers.

Derek: Zimkitha?... Uh-huh... No, we won't be able to make it... Okay...Bye...

He hangs up and looks at me.

Derek: She's hosting brunch tomorrow and she wants us to come.

I sigh.

Derek: We won't go.

Me: Thanks.

The last thing I want is to be around those people. I'd like to stay in bed and get my mind and body ready for work for the day after tomorrow.

Derek: Zi?

I snap out of it.

Derek: I was asking if you would like some malva.

I didn't even realise that it had arrived. I look at it and it actually looks delicious.

Me: Yes, please.

He pushes the plate towards me and I eat some.

Me: Are you a baker?

Derek: I haven't really mastered baking.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: I'll learn...

Me: Hmm.

My phone rings and I check the caller id. It's Niki. As much as I miss her, I genuinely don't want to talk to her.

Derek: Aren't you going to answer it?

Me: I'll call her when we get back home.

He smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: I love hearing you refer to our place as home.

Me: Corny man.

He chuckles and we finish up his dessert. Once we're done, we make our way out of the restaurant.

Once I'm in bed, I call Niki back and she answers after a while.

Niki: Wow, 3 hours later?

Me: Sorry, I was out with Derek.

Niki: Oh okay.

Me: What's up?

Niki: Dude, I think I'm in the same position as you!

Me: In terms of what?

Niki: Dealing with an evil monster-in-law.

Me: What??

Niki: Heyiii! Kwani and I were at his place, when his mother pitched out of nowhere!

Me: And??

Niki: Zi, that woman is beyond hectic!

I gasp.

Niki: She's huge, first of all!

Me: What did she say?

Niki: She came in there and asked why Kwanele hasn't been checking on her, because yena she is sick.

Me: And then?

Niki: Then I walked in and she saw me. Heyiii! The woman went crazy.

Me: Lies.

Niki: She went on to accuse me of creating the distance between yena and her son.

Me: Wow.

Niki laughs.

Niki: I'm in disbelief, I tell you.

Me: So, uKwanele yena? What did he say or do?

Niki: Thank God he defended me. He kicked her out.

Me: Good for you.

Niki: Hai phela we would have a problem if he didn't feel the need to check her.

Me: Yoh, that's exactly what happened with me. How crazy!

Niki: You have to give me tips. How am I supposed to deal with a psycho future mother-in-law?

Me: Future mother-in-law? Whatchu talkin' 'bout? You're going to marry Kwani?

We both laugh.

Niki: I'm not about to fight a crazy mother for fun. I don't have time to waste.

Me: Hehe! Wena na!

Niki: Anyway, how are you? You sound offish.

Me: Eish it's been a rough week.

Niki: What's wrong?

Me: We'll discuss everything when we meet.

Niki: Yoh, alright then.

Derek walks in and gets in bed.

Me: Shap ke.

Niki: Bye, friend. Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and put my phone aside.

I take my book and read for a while...

Derek: How is Niki?

Me: She's okay, just stressed about Kwanele's mother.

Derek: Really? How is she?

Me: Apparently she's just like Khwezi.

He is quiet for a couple of seconds, and then burst out in laughter.

Derek: Mxm.

Me: I'm serious.

I summarise what Niki told me and he continues laughing.

Derek: So my mother is not the only crazy one?

Me: Clearly.

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: Fucked up...

I put my book aside and switch off my side lamp. Derek then pulls me closer to him till our faces touch.

Derek: I've missed you.

I sigh.

Derek: It's okay, you don't have to say anything. I'll speak to myself until you get better.

I stifle a laugh.

Derek: You were also patient with me after that whole Busi thing... I guess it's my shift.

I chuckle and get comfortable in his arms.

Derek: Good night.

Me: Night.

He kisses my forehead and I eventually drift off into a weird, but peaceful sleep.

The following morning, Derek is not in bed. I'm sure he's working on breakfast as usual...

I doze off again.

When I wake up again and check the time, it's around 11am. Whoa.

I sit on the bed for a while, trying to gather my thoughts. I had such weird dreams and they made absolutely no sense. Thankfully, I don't feel sick anymore. I feel like myself again. Yes, I'm not 100% emotionally, but I'm much better... I wonder what changed...

Derek walks in and smiles.

Maybe it's this one's presence.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hey.

He walks to me and plants a kiss on my lips and I groan. I always tell him not to kiss me when I haven't brushed my teeth. I feel like that's what white people do. It's nasty.

Derek: Want to shower first or have breakfast first?

Me: Brush my teeth.

He laughs and nods.

Derek: Hmkay then.

I stand and walk to the bathroom. Once I'm done, I get his gown and go to the lounge.

Me: And then??

I'm stunned to say the least.

He rearranged the whole space. There's a blanket and cushions in the middle of the space, with two of those square wooden crates used for picnics as "tables."

Derek: So, remember the gift you made for my birthday with the different dates we should have monthly?

I nod.

Derek: I loved August... The card said we should have an indoor picnic.

He takes my hand and leads me to the set up.

Me: Did you set this up?

Derek: Duuh.

I smile.

Me: This is cute.

Derek: Cute?

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: Divine? Enchanting?

Derek: Much better.

He makes me sit.

Derek: At first I took out a bottle of wine, and then I remembered that... Uhm...

He coughs uncomfortably and I roll my eyes.

Me: Water is fine.

Derek: We also have juice. I know you don't really drink much of it...

Me: It's okay.

He nods and walks off.

I look around in amazement. When did he set this up?

After a while, he comes back with two trays filled with finger foods. He puts them on the table and walks off again to fetch two more trays that had fruit. He walks off again and comes back with a jar of water and juice.

He sits opposite me and smiles.

Derek: Dig in.

Me: Derek, this is beautiful.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Anything for you.

Me: Can I get a hug?

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Argh.

I stand and then pull him up and wrap my arms around him.

I bury my face in his chest and take in his scent.

We stand there for a long time.

I'm sobbing.

Why am I sobbing?

Derek holds me tighter and I feel his face on mine.

We stand there for a while. I take a deep breath.

Me: Sorry.

Derek: It's okay.

Me: No, I'm sorry...

I look at him and sigh.

Me: I'm overwhelmed.

Derek: I understand.

Me: Do you, really?

He sighs and stares at me.

Derek: I wouldn't be here if I don't. I understand, and somehow, I love you even more.

I groan and he chuckles.

Derek: I'm here to stay... I know you think no one understands you, but I do. Like I've said before, getting to know you is complicated. You have a lot of layers... just like me...

He tightens his hold on me and kisses me.

Derek: I guess the reason I'm so patient is because, in a way, you're a reflection of me... I also have my dark layers and I trust that you will be as patient, when you peel them off bit by bit.

Me: I love you.

Derek: And I love you as well. I'm not going anywhere.

Me: Okay.

He wipes my tears and plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: More.

He chuckles as we kiss again, more intensely. Once we're done, we sit down again and begin to eat.

Me: So... We're having a baby, huh?

He looks at me carefully.

Me: Go ahead...

He smiles broadly and I groan.

Me: I'm surprised you managed to hide your joy for so long...

He laughs.

Me: You're going to be a dad, Star.

Derek: The best fucken dad!

I chuckle as I listen to him continue telling me how excited he is. I try not to give in to the anxiety...

INSERT 110 (Short insert)

It's now Wednesday, and I'm in my class, when I get a call from Derek. I answer it.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Are your kids out for lunch?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Please come to my office, baby.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and walk out of my class. I bump into Zama.

Zama: Girrl!

Me: What, now?

She smiles brightly.

That's how she smiles when she comes across a good-looking man.

Zama: That hot guy is back!

Me: Dean?

She nods excitedly.

Zama: Don't you want to introduce me to him?

Me: Sisi, ushadile!

She rolls her eyes.

Me: And he is also getting ready to get hitched, so back off.

She laughs and I walk away and make my way to Derek's office. I knock and hear him saying I should come in. I walk in and sure enough, Dean is there.

I haven't seen him in over 2 weeks.

I close the door.

Me: Hello.

They're both sitting. I sit next to Dean and look at him.

Dean: You disappoint me.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I asked you to plan shit for me, and you haven't done shit.

Me: Who says I haven't?

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: I want it to be a surprise for you too.

Dean: Are you serious?

He looks at Derek.

Derek: She's been working on it.

Dean: But, who's financing your plans? I'm yet to give you my card.

Me: Derek is... However, you'll repay him.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Derek owes me a lot of money, so I guess my proposal shindig is on him.

Derek: Fuck that, you also owe me a lot of money.

Dean: Wh-

Me: Okay, you owe each other money, you're like brothers, we get it... Now, why am I here?

They both look at me in shock.

Me: Niyabhora when you start acting like kids. I don't have the energy today.

Dean: Yini, wena? Why are you unnecessarily bitchy?

I look at Derek.

Me: Star, why am I?

Derek: I haven't seen you since 8am. I miss you.

Dean: Mxm.

I smile.

Just then, there's a knock on the door.

Derek: Come in.

The door opens.

Why am I not surprised?

Zama walks in.

This friend of mine is a crazy hoe. A crazy, pregnant hoe!

Zama: Good afternoon.

Derek: Hey, Zama.

Zama glances at Dean.

Zama: Hi.

Dean: Hi.

Dean is such a rude man! He's a cold, rude and evil man! His face is just blank and I'm sure Zama is shitting her pants.

Zama: Uhm, I was... uhm looking for you, Zi.

Me: Okay, friend. I'll be with you just now.

She nods and quickly walks out with her tail between her legs.

As soon as the door closes, I punch Dean's hard arm.

Me: Dean!

He looks at me coolly.

Dean: Yini?

Me: You're so mean! She has an innocent crush on you!

Dean: Do I look like I want any more kids? Step kids at that?

Me: Wow!

Dean: Anyway, I came to tell you that I'm coming over tonight to show you the rings.

Me: Oh, that's great.

He nods and smiles.

Me: Aww, Lwazi is going to be so happy.

Dean: Of course she is... This is me we're talking about.

Me: Whatever.

I stand and look at Derek.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Okay, baby.

I walk out of the office and find Zama at the reception area.

Zama: Why didn't you tell me he's a fucken cold man??

Me: I've been telling you, but you chose to ignore me!

We walk back to my class.

Zama: But, he's so hot! Gosh!

Me: Zama!

Zama: Hai man wena, I'm not going to fuck him. I'm just admiring the view!

Me: I'm sure your husband will be glad to know that you're busy admiring views.

Zama: Oh, please. Richie is not that innocent.

Me: I need to meet this man that you love and hate.

She laughs.

Zama: He's my chocolate latte.

Me: And Dean is someone else's chocolate latte.

Zama: And Derek is your chocolate latte.

Me: Heyi, I don't know what the hell you're talking about!

She laughs.

Zama: When are you going to stop denying this relationship?

Me: Sisi, bye!

She laughs and walks out.

Zama: See ya later!

We're now driving, making our way home.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

Me: It's getting better.

He smiles.

Derek: We have an appointment this Friday with Doctor Modisa.

I nod.

Me: And I'm sleeping over at my parents' house tomorrow.

He nods.

Me: I need to speak to them, especially my dad.

He nods and focuses on the road.

Derek: He'll come around.

Me: Hmm.

We get to the apartment and I get my laptop and finalise a few things for Dean's proposal.

As I'm busy, I get a call from Nomvuyo. I haven't spoken to her in such a long time.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Wow!

Me: I've been busy.

Nomvuyo: Mxm.

Me: Sorry.

Nomvuyo: What's wrong with you? Why are you ignoring this pregnant friend of yours?

I chuckle.

Me: I'm sorry.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: I miss you.

Me: I'll see you soon. Things have been hectic at work.

Nomvuyo: Whatever!

Me: Love you too!

Nomvuyo: Bye.

I hang up and get back to work.

At around 5pm, Dean comes through.

A white woman is accompanying him.

Hehe look at him flying in foreign women for rings. Nolwazi is one lucky lady.

Dean: Ziyanda, this is Catherine, a good friend of mine, who happens to be one of the best jewellers.

I smile and shake her hand.

Dean: Catherine, this is Ziyanda... What are you to me, Ziyanda?

I roll my eyes.

Me: Nice to meet you, Catherine.

Catherine: Likewise.

She puts her briefcase on the table and opens it.

Lorrrd!

Catherine: We have quite a few options...

Derek walks in and joins us as well.

Catherine begins showing me the rings, but now she's busy explaining the type of diamond or gold or emerald each ring has and all these other random details.

I zone her out. Don't nobody care about where the black diamond originates. If it looks good, then it's the one. The history lesson is really unnecessary for a basic bitch like me.

As she's going on and on, one of the rings catches my eye.

Me: This... This is the one...

Dean: Which one?

I point to it.

Dean smiles.

Catherine: Wow... That's Dean's top 3.

Derek: It's beautiful.

Catherine: It's a Lorraine Schwartz ring. This is a flawless 18 carat emerald-cut diamond on a split shank band with micro pave diamonds.

Wowzer.

I have no idea what the hell she just explained. All I know is that the ring is fab!

Derek: And the price?

Catherine laughs quietly.

Dean: You'll find out when you engage your girlfriend.

Me: Argh, you're so rude.

Dean: Me? Rude? Never!

Derek: I wonder what Nolwazi sees in you. You really are the epitome of evil.

Catherine laughs sweetly.

Catherine: Women do tend to be attracted to the bad boys.

Me: Eww no. Why would I want to be with a rude and obnoxious man?

I look at Derek and smile.

Me: I like them sweet.

Catherine looks at Derek and I and she smiles.

Catherine: Hmm, I look forward to your call, Derek.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Not yet...

Me: I'm pregnant, so that alone should keep us going for a few years.

There's an awkward silence.

Dean has frozen.

Catherine: Congratulations!

Dean: You're what?!

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Well, I wasn't expecting you to break the news in this manner, but, yes, we're pregnant.

Dean immediately bursts out in laughter.

I don't think I've ever seen him laugh like this.

I regret mentioning it instantaneously.

INSERT 111 (Short insert)

It's been a good five minutes.

Dean has been laughing since then...

You know when someone laughs at you till you want to burst out in tears? For a split second, that's how I felt, but then I remembered that this is Dean, and Dean is a dick.

Derek: What the fuck is wrong with you?

Dean rubs his belly and sighs happily.

Dean: You made my night.

He stands and goes to the kitchen and comes back with a glass of water. He sits and looks at Ngidi and me.

Dean: So, you're going to be parents, huh?

Derek: And what's so funny about that?

Dean: Nothing... It's just...

He looks at me with a smirk.

Dean: Unexpected.

He chuckles and drinks his water.

Derek: Are you done here? I think it's time you leave.

Dean: Alright Sensitive Susie. Do you need a tampon as well?

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Bye, Catherine.

Catherine smiles and nods.

Catherine: Thank you for having me.

She packs her shit up and walks out.

Dean stands and looks at me.

Dean: Congratulations.

I cross my arms and look at him angrily.

Derek: This stays here.

Dean: You don't want the others to know?

Me: No!

Dean: Relax, tiger.

Derek: We'd like to keep this between us for now.

Dean nods.

Dean: Alright then, I'll see you idiots soon.

He opens up his arms for me and I growl.

Me: Go away.

He chuckles as he walks away.

Dean: Congrats!

He walks out and Derek looks at me amusingly.

Derek: And then?

Me: I didn't mean to blurt it out.

Derek: I'm not complaining. Hearing you say you're pregnant made me feel some type of way.

Me: Really?

He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: Yep.

His face touches mine and he plants a soft kiss. I moan and feel him smile.

Derek: Are you craving me as much I'm craving you?

I nod.

At this point, I want him to help me let out all these crazy emotions in me.

I tighten my hold on him and we find ourselves on that couch.

I guess we don't have to stress about condoms anymore, seeing as that bridge has been burned...

All Derek kept asking me as he pounded in me was for me to let him in... He felt a slight disconnect, and wanted me to let him in.

I did let him in, and that resulted in lots and lots of squirting...

I'm sure he feels included now... and this damn couch as well...

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek's arms around me.

I feel suffocated.

I break free from his hold and go to the bathroom, where I vomit.

I'm not a vomiter. Why am I suddenly vomiting?

Then it hits me... I'm pregnant.

I sit on the toilet and gather my thoughts. After a while, I brush my teeth and get in the shower. Minutes later, Derek walks in the shower and yawns.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Hey.

He pulls me for a hug and then kisses my cheek. We clean ourselves up in silence and then he looks at me.

Me: What?

He smiles innocently and shakes his head.

Me: Ohho.

Derek: Can I touch your belly?

Me: It's still the same. Nothing has changed.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Go ahead...

He steps closer and makes me turn around so that my back is on him. He then wraps his arms around me and his hands cover my belly. I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: You're going to make an amazing mother.

Me: Really?

He kisses my ear and we stand there for a while without saying anything.

Derek: You're selfless...

Me: I am?

He nods.

Derek: You're selfless in your own special way.

I giggle.

Me: I feel like you're throwing shade at me.

Derek: I'm not, baby.

Me: So what do you mean?

Derek: Your love is endless in a way...You help people whole-heartedly.

Me: But I'm selfless with certain people.

Derek: And that is why I love you... You know when to draw the line.

He brushes my belly.

Derek: You don't allow anyone to take advantage of you. You know how precious your love is, therefore, you protect yourself.

I try to turn around and face him, but he stops me.

Me: I wanna look at you!

Derek: I'm still telling my baby about his mother.

Me: His?

He chuckles.

Me: Wow.

Derek: Now, as I was saying, you're going to make an amazing mother...

Me: Hmm.

Derek: This child will be treated very well.

Me: And you're going to spoil it.

Derek: Don't refer to my child as "it."

Me: Derek, we don't know the gender. Stop being dramatic.

Derek: I don't give a shit. My baby is not an object.

Me: Gosh.

He kisses my ear.

Derek: But, I'm sure he'll be stubborn... Like you...

I chuckle.

Derek: But he'll definitely be a cutie... I mean, look at us.

I laugh.

Me: Derek, we're wasting water.

Derek: Mxm.

He begins planting soft kisses on my shoulders and neck. His hands begin exploring my body... He massages my breasts and groans.

Derek: I did notice a change here.

Me: Really?

He nods.

I growl as he continues massaging me and making his way down...

Me: Yoh, Derek...

He chuckles.

Derek: Ready for some thrilling shower sex?

Me: Hmm...

As we make our way to work, I receive a message.

I read it.

Dean: Pregnant woman, when are you sending out the invite to my people?

I roll my eyes.

Me: I have a name.

Dean: Pregnant woman?

Me: Dean!

He sends laughing emojis.

Dean: I've been laughing since yesterday... I need a good 5 minutes with you so I can laugh to your face properly.

Me: I don't have time for this...

Dean: Have a good day, preggie girl.

Argh, I switch off my phone and grunt.

Derek glances at me.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Ya...

He focuses on the road...

Eventually, we get to school and go our separate ways as usual.

At around 12pm, there's a knock on my door, while I'm teaching.

Some man comes in, carrying a large bouquet of flowers.

My kids all squeal excitedly.

Me: And then?

Man: Hi, Ms Dlamini, I have a delivery for you.

Gosh, this has Derek written all over it, but he knows I'm not into flowers because of my sinuses.

Me: Thanks.

I take the bouquet and sign. He walks out and my kids continue squealing.

Me: Quieten down and finish this activity.

They do as they are told and I walk to my desk. I take the card and read it.

Dear Pregnant Woman,

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I fucken told you so!

Oh, Ms Dlamini... Let this be a lesson... Never EVER doubt my word...

I fucken told you so!

drops mic

Kindest regards,

DR. Hlongwane.

PS: I guess this doctorate is not that lousy, huh?

Really??

Argh. I tear the card and shove the flowers in the bin. My kids try to ask me what's wrong, and I tell them to shut up and finish their work.

Dean is proving to be a problem in my life, honestly!

INSERT 112 (Short + Unedited)

Derek is now driving me home.

I want to talk to my dad and hear what he thinks about this whole situation.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I think my dad is disappointed in me.

He sighs.

Derek: Ziyanda, you're old enough to start having such developments in your life.

Me: But, these developments have to take place in a proper manner.

Derek: Proper manner?

Me: Moving in with you was already shady, now a baby?

He laughs quietly.

Derek: I'd like to think that your dad prioritises your happiness.

Me: Having a baby doesn't make me happy.

He keeps quiet and I also stay silent.

We eventually get to my parents' house and Derek insists on coming with me. As we walk in, we find Lwazi making herself a sandwich.

Me: Hey, baby.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy.

Derek: Hi, love.

Lwazi: Hey, Uncle D.

We walk to the lounge and find my dad there.

Me: Hey, there.

He smiles and stands.

Okay, I'm glad he's in a good mood.

We share a hug.

Dad: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Dad: A bit exhausted from work, but okay.

He looks at Derek.

Derek: Sibalukhulu.

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Hlomuka.

Uhm, okay... They're having a clan name moment, so does this mean this conversation won't be bad?

Dad: Sit.

He's serious now.

We sit and he clears his throat. Lwazi walks in with a plate and glass of juice.

Lwazi: Here's your sandwich, baba.

Dad: Thank you.

Lwazi then runs off and disappears. My dad takes a bite of his sandwich and then looks at us.

Dad: So nithi you're expecting a baby?

Derek: Yes.

My dad bites more of his sandwich and doesn't say anything. We're silent for a while.

Dad: I don't know what's more dreadful: my one and only daughter having sex, or me being a grandfather.

Really? Why would he say that? That's just weird.

Derek: I'd like to think that Lwazi has given you a taste of grandparenthood.

Dad: And you would know, how?

Yoh.

Derek keeps quiet.

Dad: Ungaphaphi...

Hai! What's going on? How did this conversation turn sour?

Dad: I am very angered by your lack of responsibility.

He stares at me and I look down ashamedly, fidgeting with my fingers.

Dad: You left my house all excited about moving in together kanti you're rushing to go have endless unprotected sex?

Universe, please come to my rescue!

I'd like to be swallowed by the Earth.

Dad: Why in the world would you be so stupid?

He looks at Derek.

Dad: You're careless and you're stupid.

My dad has never spoken to me like this. In my 25 years of living, I've never heard him address anyone like this.

Dad: I'm highly angered, and highly disappointed.

I feel Derek tensing up next to me.

Dad: Ziyanda, first of all, are you even ready to have a child?

I don't respond. I'm holding in my tears.

Dad: Ngiyabuza.

Me: No.

Dad: So, what's this nonsense?

I don't say anything.

Dad: Get out. I want to talk to Derek.

At this point, I'm sobbing quietly. I get that he's angry, but why is he addressing me like this? It's like he's disgusted by the mere sight of me.

As I stand, my mom walks in.

Mom: Hawu kanti nifikile? Hello!

She assesses the scene and realises that we're not having a party.

She stares at me.

Mom: Zizi?

I begin to walk to my room.

Mom: What's going on? What did you say to her?

I hear my dad telling my mom to stay out of it.

Mom: Hai phela, you can't say that to me...

She follows me to my bedroom and as soon as she holds me, I burst out in tears.

Mom: Ziyanda, calm down...

Me: He hates me...

Mom: He doesn't, baby. He's just expressing his anger.

I continue crying for a while until I doze off...

I am awakened by Derek's hand, brushing my cheek.

Derek: Zi...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Derek: I'm leaving.

Me: Leaving?

I sit up and gather my thoughts. I then remember what happened.

He sees that I'm about to panic. He holds my hands and sits on the edge of my bed.

Derek: Relax...

Me: My dad...

He sighs.

Derek: After an hour of shouting at me, he eventually calmed down.

Me: He did?

Derek: Thanks to your mom.

He brushes my hand and smiles.

Derek: All is well now.

Me: What did he say?

Derek: He's going to come to terms with it... He needs some time...

I sigh.

Derek: I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: No.

Derek: Zi, I'm not about to take you from this house and have your dad thinking we're having endless unprotected sex.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles and I wrap my arms around him. I inhale his scent and relax in his arms.

Me: I've never seen him like that.

Derek: Ya, that was a bit intense.

He kisses my cheek and sighs.

Derek: I should get going... It's getting late.

I hiss and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: See you tomorrow.

Me: Hmkay.

He lets go of me and we stand. We then make our way out and get to the lounge.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

My dad nods lightly.

Mom: Bye, baby.

Lwazi: Mommy, are you leaving?

Me: No, I'm sleeping over.

Lwazi: Yaay!

We walk out of the house and get to Derek's car. Instead of saying goodbye, I find myself getting in the car with him.

We end up chatting for over an hour.

Me: Khwezi is probably going to search for me and kill me.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Or the presence of a grandbaby could change her.

Me: You're funny...

Derek: I'm serious.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Anyway, I should get going.

I groan loudly.

Me: Okay.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss.

Me: Bye.

Derek: I'll request an Uber for you.

Me: You know I can do that myself, right?

Derek: Listen, your dad and I had a very hectic conversation. I'm not about to go against my word.

Me: You still don't want to tell me about this conversation?

Derek: I gave you a brief summary.

Me: Argh.

He brushes my hand.

Derek: Baby, go inside. I don't want to anger your father further.

Me: Whatever. Bye.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too. Facetime me when you get home.

He smiles.

Derek: Okay, love.

I get out of the car and he drives off once I'm in the yard. Once I'm inside, I walk to my bedroom.

Dad: Ziyanda.

I ignore him.

I really don't want to address him. Petty is suddenly up and ready, and I would hate for my dad to be a victim of her wrath.

As I get ready for bed, my door opens and my dad walks in.

Dad: So, you're ignoring me now?

Me: I'm tired.

Dad: Hmm.

He stares at me softly and then nods.

Dad: Alright then...

He walks out and a minute later, Lwazi walks in.

Lwazi: Mommy, can I sleep with you?

Me: Duuh!

She giggles.

Lwazi: I'm still watching Generations. I'll join you after Uzalo.

I laugh.

Me: Okay, sweetie.

She walks out and I get in my pjs and snuggle in bed.

My phone rings and I'm shocked at who it is. I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Mduduzi?

Mdu: Ya wena.

Me: Watch it now.

He groans.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Mdu: I'm good.

Me: How's Tholi? I miss her.

Mdu: She's been asking me about you.

Me: Really?

Mdu: Mmm.

Me: How is she?

Mdu: She's much better.

Me: That's great.

Mdu: When are you going to visit her?

Me: When I get an invite.

Mdu: Consider yourself invited.

Me: Hmkay. I'll come through this weekend.

Mdu: Okay.

Me: Uhm-

Mdu: We'll talk when I see you.

Me: Okay.

Mdu: Night.

Me: Night.

I hang up and sigh.

Wowzer.

Totes unexpected.

After a while, Derek calls me to tell me he arrived safely.

Me: Nkanyi.

Derek: I'm home.

Me: I can see.

He smiles.

Me: Mdu just called me.

He frowns.

Me: I know!

Derek: What did he say?

I tell him about it and he sighs.

Derek: I guess there's no harm in seeing them at this point, because everything is out in the open.

Me: Will you come with me?

Derek: Absolutely not.

Me: You suck!

He chuckles.

Derek: Want me to watch you sleep?

Me: Duuh!

Derek: Alright then...

I get comfortable and we continue chatting till I fall asleep. I didn't even hear Lwazi come in, but I felt her snuggle next to me...

INSERT 113

It's now Friday, and I'm in Derek's office, having lunch. I've become quite clingy after my dad was mean to him, and he is loving it.

Derek: So, is everything sorted for tomorrow?

Me: Yes.

He glances at me and smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: You're an excellent planner.

Me: Aww, silly old me?

We chuckle.

Me: Hopefully, Nolwazi says yes.

He laughs.

Derek: Why wouldn't she?

Me: Dean is a dick.

Derek: They love each other.

I sigh.

Me: He has been teasing me about this pregnancy.

Derek: Me too. I've even blocked his number.

Me: I'll block him too.

Someone knocks on the door and Derek tells them to come in. The door opens and in walks Lebo, the receptionist who doesn't get along with me.

Lebo: Mr. N, there's a lady who would like to meet with you.

Derek: Who is she?

Lebo: Ms. Mlambo.

Derek's face tightens.

Derek: Tell her I'm busy.

Lebo: She says it's an emergency.

Derek: I'm busy.

Lebo then looks at me.

Lebo: Alright.

She walks out and closes the door.

Me: And then?

Derek: It's Busi.

Me: What??

He nods tightly and drinks some of his water.

Me: What the hell is wrong with her? Why is she suddenly so present?

Derek shrugs.

Me: Mxm.

There's a knock again and Lebo walks in.

Lebo: She says it's an emergency.

Derek: Let her in.

Lebo nods and walks out.

Me: Uhm, I'll go t-

Derek: You're not going anywhere.

Me: But-

Derek: I'm not asking you, Ziyanda.

Whoa.

I sigh and focus on my food.

Me: Shit is about to get real awks.

He's so pissed; I don't even think he heard me.

The door opens and Lebo leads Busi in.

Lebo: There you go...

With that said, Lebo walks out, and closes the door.

Derek: Busisiwe.

Busi looks at Derek very seriously.

Derek: How may I help you?

Busi: I'd like some privacy.

Derek: People who make appointments with me are privileged to demand privacy...

Busi: Damnit, Derek!

Derek doesn't say anything.

Busi: Please excuse us, Ziyanda.

How does she even know my name?

Derek: Ziyanda is not going anywhere.

The tension is a bit too thick right now.

Busi looks at him angrily.

Derek: Let's get one thing clear: you and I are not on speaking terms, and I am absolutely fine with that.

Busi tries to say something, but Derek stops her.

Derek: I will not have you come into my personal space and try to disrupt my peace. You had your chance and you blew it, so what the fuck do you want from me now?

Busi: Your mother-

Me: You and my mother have your own relationship. Don't involve me.

She keeps quiet.

Derek: I have nothing to say to you. I've said everything I wanted to say the last time I saw you. Now, please leave and make sure you stay out of my life.

Busi: Why would you address me like this?

Derek: I've been very patient with you. Why would you come to my workplace? What's next? You're going to come banging on my door at home?

Busi: Wow.

Derek: Just leave.

She stares at me and I swear I would have died if eyes could kill.

I take a bite of my sandwich and chew.

Busi: Mxm.

She storms out and shuts the door loudly.

I take a bite of my sandwich again and chuckle.

Me: Wowzer.

Derek: Nxx.

Me: This is the perfect time to use the Garbage Can Tool. Let the little things go, Star.

He sighs.

Derek: Okay.

He stands and walks towards me. He then bends down till his face is close to mine.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and goes back to his seat and sits.

Derek: People are so annoying.

I laugh.

Me: I've gone through so many emotions the past two weeks; I'm too tired to even entertain this Busi thing.

Derek: Nxx...

Me: Anyway, I feel like going out tonight.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Derek: Out as in?

Me: Out as in great vibes, people, drinks-

Derek: Drinks?

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: Where do you want to go?

I shrug.

Me: I miss Maboneng. Let's sleep over at your loft tonight.

He smiles.

Derek: Where it all started?

I roll my eyes.

Derek: What? Don't you remember how nervous you were when I asked you to sleepover?

Me: See ya later, mate.

I stand and pack my things.

Derek: Leaving already?

Me: My kids will be back in 5 minutes.

He groans.

Derek: Come give me a kiss.

I throw away my takeaway and walk to the door.

Me: You're my boss, filthy man!

He laughs boldly as I walk out of the office and close the door.

It's now around 2pm and we're heading to Dr. Modisa for our appointment. She insisted on seeing us weekly until she is sure that the pneumonia didn't affect the baby.

We get to a different room and she asks me to lie on the bed.

Dr: We'll do the ultrasound transvaginally.

Me: Huh?

She smiles.

Dr: I'm going to insert a probe into your vagina, because your uterus is still behind your pelvic bone.

I look at her nervously.

Dr: No, don't stress. This won't hurt. I'd like us to have a clearer view of the fetus.

Derek sighs and nods.

Me: Okay.

Dr: We've reached a great milestone this week. The baby is no longer an embryo; he or she is a fetus.

Derek: What's the difference between an embryo and a fetus?

Dr: The embryonic phase is about forming major organs, including the brain, heart, and lungs, plus the arms and legs. Once you've got a fetus, those organs and parts are formed and are now growing and developing. At this point, the baby is developing more distinct facial features.

Derek: What about the heartbeat?

She smiles.

Dr: We'll be able to pick it up today.

He smiles and nods.

Dr: Alright then, let's get to it.

After a few minutes, we're now staring at the screen.

Dr: Look at that... He's as big as a cherry!

Me: He?

Dr: That's what everyone is hoping for, so we'll refer to it as a boy.

Derek is smiling like a lunatic.

Dr: How's the morning sickness?

Derek: It's not that bad, but there are moments where it hits her intensely.

Dr: Hmm.

Derek: Especially when she sleeps late. She wakes up feeling quite sick.

I look at him in shock and he shrugs.

Derek: I've been observing.

Dr: Cute.

We focus on the screen again and she smiles.

Dr: Everything is okay... Your blood tests also came back and you're healthy.

The heartbeat is also good apparently. Derek listened to it through some Doppler device... I opted out...

Dr: You should expect extreme pregnancy fatigue at this point. Making a baby is hard work. Your body is working overtime preparing for motherhood as it develops the placenta. Additionally, your body's metabolism and hormone levels have increased significantly, which triggers a decrease in blood sugar and blood pressure- a recipe for fatigue.

I sigh heavily and nod.

Me: Okay.

Dr: On the flipside, at this point in your pregnancy, you two should start looking for ways you can budget, so you have extra cash when the baby arrives.

Derek chuckles.

Dr: I think this is the perfect time to start planning your finances.

He continues chuckling. Knowing him, he's probably laughing because he knows that money is not a concern.

Derek: Thanks.

Dr: And, you should consider checking out your company's policy to see how maternity leave is typically handled. That way, when you break the news to your boss, you'll be prepared to discuss your expectations, and begin a potential maternity leave plan.

I look at Derek and he laughs quietly.

Derek: Thank you. We will make sure that she informs her boss.

Dr. Modisa smiles.

Dr: That's it for today...

Me: What about the risk of a miscarriage?

The room is silent for a couple of seconds.

Dr: Vaginal bleeding can occur in the first trimester and it isn't necessarily a cause for alarm, but it could be a sign of ectopic pregnancy or a miscarriage, so please call me right away if you experience bleeding. Please...

Derek's jaw is tightens.

Dr: Please don't stress yourself. I cannot emphasise enough how badly stress can affect your pregnancy.

I nod lightly.

Dr: So, moving forward, I'd like us to have a weekly to-do list. I understand that we won't see each other every single week, so I'll send an email as well with all the information you need and frequently asked questions and answers.

She sighs.

Dr: This week's checklist... Week 9...

Derek takes out his phone and begins typing as she speaks.

Dr: 1. Create a baby budget. 2. Make a pre-baby to-do list of all the things you want to accomplish or enjoy before the baby arrives. 3. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. 4. Go for a walk, or do 30 minutes of another moderate exercise, and make it a part of your daily routine.

Me: I'm not thin, so does this mean my weight will affect my baby?

Dr: I don't want you to gain too much weight, which will put the baby in danger.

Me: Okay.

I look at Derek.

Me: I guess I have to join you at the gym.

He smiles.

Dr: You don't have to be a gym junkie. I just want you to remain healthy.

He grins and looks at me mischievously.

Derek: We'll find other ways to exercise...

Me: Wow.

Dr. Modisa laughs.

Dr: Trust me, her sex drive is yet to increase, and you'll have to work very hard, Derek.

Derek: Can't wait.

Me: Eww.

They laugh.

Once we're done, she prints the scan and we make our way out.

Believe it or not, I genuinely zoned out Dr. Modisa for 90% of the time. As soon as I felt like I was getting too much information, I zoned her out and went to another place... Derek is the one who paid all the attention...

Anyway, I miss the vibe in Jozi, not this quietness from the suburbs. We're heading to his place in Maboneng and I'm excited.

We get to his loft and I go to the bathroom to pee, something I've been doing a lot for the past week.

When I walk back to the bedroom, I find him on the bed.

Me: And then?

Derek: I need a power nap. I have a headache.

Me: Oh okay.

Derek: Come join me.

I lie next to him and he kisses me.

Derek: So, this weekend we have to get you maternity bras.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Baby, I love you. However, your breasts are starting to pop out.

Me: Wow!

He chuckles and kisses my nose.

We continue chatting.

Within 5 minutes, I'm seriously dozing off.

Derek: Zi?

Me: Hmm?

Derek: You do realise that I'm the one who needed the nap, right?

Me: Mmm.

I feel his lips on mine and he kisses me.

Derek: We're still going out?

Me: Ya. We're meeting up with Mdu and Tholi.

Derek: What??

Me: Shh...

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Shh... I'm trying to sleep.

He groans.

Derek: Maybe I should also set up a meeting with Busi...

Me: I'm more than willing to raise this child by myself.

Derek: Wow.

Me: Now, hush, I'm trying to sleep...

I turn around and doze off immediately.

INSERT 114

When I wake up, I am in such a good mood- like, extremely good mood. Derek and I take a shower and get dressed. As I'm putting on my jeans, my buttons just refuse to do the things.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Hmm?

Me: My jeans!

Derek: What about them?

Me: They don't fit!

He looks at me and frowns.

Me: Bheka!

I walk to him as he is seated on the edge of the bed, and stand between his legs.

Me: Look!

Derek: Whoa.

Me: Uthi nyoa!

He touches my stomach and rubs it.

Derek: Whoa.

Me: What??

Derek: It's hard.

Me: Argh!

Derek: But, Dr. Modisa mentioned that it will start feeling hard, it's your uterus.

Me: I don't give a flying fuck! My jeans don't fit!

Derek: They do... The buttons are the problem.

Me: Just shut up. Honestly uyabhora.

Derek: Ngenzeni manje mina?

Me: Mxm!

I walk to the closet and take out leggings.

Me: I'm already fat. Now I have to gain more weight and look like a whale?!

Derek doesn't say anything.

Me: So you think I'm a whale?

Derek: Huh? I didn't even say anything.

Me: Which means you agree!

Derek: Zi, you're not a whale, and you'll never look like one.

I groan as he stands and walks to me. He wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Derek: Stop stressing. You still look the same.

Me: Hmm.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: You'll be my whale.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and I push him away and finish getting dressed.

Me: You're so annoying!

Once we're done, we head out and I insist on walking to the restaurant, considering the fact that I'm not allowed to gain more weight than I already carry. I may as well use this opportunity to walk this fat out.

We walk to Pata Pata and make our way inside.

Me: I thought we'd find them here.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Did you just roll you eyes at me??

Derek: I don't know why I'm here. Who says I want to have dinner with your ex?

I roll my eyes and he pinches me.

Derek: I need a strong drink.

He orders his whiskey.

Me: If I can't drink, then you can't.

Derek: See, now you're taking it too far.

Me: You made me pregnant. Why are you allowed to drink, but I'm not?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: So you're going to use this pregnancy to your advantage?

Me: I'm just asking...

Just then, I see Mdu and Tholi walk in.

Mdu has become such a sexy thing.

Then I see Tholi... She is beyond cute. I'm so excited to spend some time with her and hear about her progress.

They're perfect for each other: Mdu with his tall, muscular chocolate self, and Tholi with her cute, chubby yellow self.

They get to our table and I exclaim.

Me: Tholi!

Her cheeks turn red as she smiles.

Tholi: Hey, Zi.

I stand and we share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Tholi: I'm good, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

She looks at Derek nervously and Derek flashes a sweet smile. I'm glad he's pretending to be happy. I always pretend I'm stable when I'm around his people, so naye he must suck it up when it comes to Tholi. I really like the girl.

Tholi: Hi, Derek.

Derek: Hey.

He stands and gives her a hug.

Mdu: Why are you sitting inside? It's quite hot in here.

Me: Derek is recovering from the flu.

Mdu takes off his jacket and I glance at his toned body. He sees this and chuckles.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: I'm good.

He knows he's not allowed to touch me when Derek is around, not even a handshake. Can't be disrespecting Derek like that... Although it doesn't hurt that he's great to look at.

Mdu: Derek.

Derek: Mduduzi.

They shake hands and we all sit.

Mdu: I'm starving.

He looks at Tholi.

Mdu: I didn't get to eat lunch at work.

Tholi: Really?

Mdu: Busy day.

Tholi: I'm sure you'll indulge in a feast shortly...

He leans closer to her and plants a kiss on her cheek, and she turns red again.

Cute.

The waiter takes our orders and brings Derek's drink.

Mdu: So how are you two? My sister tells me you live together...

Really, Nolwazi? She's outchea making it seem like she's above the drama kanti naye she's a gossip girl.

Derek: We're good...

Tholi: I think it's nice that you moved in together. It's a great way to get to know each other.

Me: Definitely.

Mdu: Any annoying habits?

I look at Derek and he raises an eyebrow.

Me: He has major OCD vibes.

Mdu: Hmm... I know...

He looks at Tholi and she exclaims.

Tholi: Hey!

Derek: I see nothing wrong with wanting to live in a clean space that is conducive to safety and health.

Tholi: Yes. There's nothing more frustrating than not knowing where things are.

Derek: Organisation and order are crucial.

Tholi: Definitely.

Me: Wowzers.

Mdu: Bowzers.

Derek: I don't even know why you're judging, because you always leave the lights on...

Me: Excuse me??

Derek: You never switch off the lights. I don't get it.

Tholi: Mdu always fails to close the fridge. It's always slightly open when he is done using it.

Mdu: Really??

Me: I'm sensing a lot of judgement, and I'm not pleased!

Mdu: Unbelievable!

Derek: Tholi, I'm glad I've met someone who understands the importance of tidy spaces.

Tholi giggles.

Mdu: So there are other Tholis in the world? I'm glad I'm not the only victim of constant nagging.

We all laugh and continue chatting. It's safe to say that now I am fully aware of my annoying habits, according to Derek. Naye he knows what annoys me about him...

It's been about 2 hours and the conversation is still flowing. I've never seen Tholi so open and happy. She seems so much better. I decided that I won't bring up the Nolwazi situation or Tholi's progress. I feel like she's having a good time and these topics would just take us 10 steps back.

Me: So, I was reading through some self-help and lifestyle books to buy, and I came across one by Gary Chapman, titled The Five Love Languages.

Mdu and Derek both say, "Here we go" at the same time.

They look at each other and chuckle.

Me: What??

Derek: You sure love these self-help books.

Me: They are life!

Derek smiles.

Derek: Carry on...

Me: So, I ordered the book online, but I'm still waiting for it... But, I went on to research these five love languages.

Tholi: Why are they called love languages?

Me: It basically means that there are five ways that people speak and understand emotional love.

Tholi: Oh... That's interesting. What are these languages?

Me: Okay, so the first one is "Words of Affirmation." This language expresses love through words. So, verbal compliments, or words of appreciation are the communicators of love. You make your partner feel appreciated through words.

They're all listening to me attentively at this point. Lol, I do have a way with words, after-all ;)

Me: The second one is "Quality Time." Giving someone your undivided attention, not just sitting and watching TV together, but sitting there, talking and looking at each other... Undivided attention means there are no distractions like phones and other people... It's just you two...Here, time is important. Spending time together and just drowning in each other's presence fills the love tank.

They're all nodding.

Me: The third one is "Receiving Gifts." Here, gifts are seen as visible symbols of love. A gift is something tangible that shows you that the person was thinking of you. These gifts don't have to cost money...

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Me: The fourth one is "Acts of Service." This means doing things you know the person would like you to do. You please the person by serving them. These services can include cooking, washing the dishes and many more. They require thought, time and effort, that's why they're a form of expression.

I sigh.

Me: And then there's the last love language, which is "Physical Touch." I think this one explains itself.

We all laugh.

Mdu: Now, that one is powerful...

He looks at Tholi mischievously and she blushes.

Me: It's not just sex, dummy.

He chuckles.

Me: This can be kissing, hugging, holding hands, cuddling, sitting close to each other when watching a movie, and having sex... just being physically connected...

I look at all of them.

Me: How interesting?

Derek nods slowly and I feel his hand slide between my thighs underneath the table.

Derek: Very interesting...

I giggle.

Mdu: Indeed...

Tholi also giggles.

Me: Okay, you both can stop groping us now.

Mdu and Derek chuckle.

Me: So... I found some cool website with a survey. The results of the survey basically tell you what your love language is... Not what you do, but what you want your partner to do... This basically helps you fill up your partner's love tank.

Mdu: Hmm...

Me: All of us are going to take the survey and see what's up!

Derek: Okay...

Tholi: Sure.

Mdu: Let's do it.

Me: But, first, I think we should guess what we'll get. So, Tholi you'll guess what your love language is, then Mdu will state if he agrees or disagrees. Subsequently, Mdu will the same as well. After we take the survey, we'll discuss the results and see how we can meet each other's needs as partners.

I look at them.

Me: Understood?

They all nod.

Me: Let me check for understanding...

I look at Tholi.

Me: What are the five love languages?

Tholi giggles.

Tholi: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, and Physical Touch.

Me: Excellent.

I look at Derek.

Me: What are we about to do now?

Derek: Take a sur-

Me: Heyi, full sentence, Ngidi.

He chuckles.

Derek: We're about to take a survey.

Me: Mdu what's the purpose of this survey?

Mdu: To identify your partner's love language.

Me: Derek, how will this process work?

Derek: So, in our case, my survey will reveal what I would like you to do, in order for me to feel loved.

Me: Well done.

I look at Tholi.

Me: So, what are we going to do before taking the survey?

Tholi: Uhm, we're going to predict what our love languages are. For example, you will state what you think your love language is, and state why. Thereafter, Derek will state if he agrees with you or not.

Me: Yes! And then what happens after we take the survey, Duzi?

Mdu: We discuss how we can meet our partner's love language.

Me: Excellent! Well done, everyone. You are such great listeners!

Mdu: For fuck sake.

Tholi laughs.

Tholi: You are such a teacher.

Me: Can't help it.

Derek: This is what I deal with...She calls this process "Checks for Understanding."

Mdu: We're not your kids.

Me: Hai suka! Anyway, let's discuss this shit...

We go on to have our love language discussion...

Good varbz...

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We're now going through our survey results.

Mdu: So, Tholi, what do you think I got?

Tholi: You probably got Physical Touch.

Mdu chuckles.

Mdu: That's what I got vele.

They both laugh.

Mdu: I need to be touched 24/7.

Tholi: Ewww!

They continue laughing. They're beyond cute. I'm glad that Mdu stopped his whoring ways for Tholi. Phela mina bengifebelwa to come nice.

Mdu wraps his arm around her shoulders and they kiss.

Me: We're still here, hey.

Tholi giggles shyly as she pushes Mdu away.

Me: So, does Tholi meet your love language?

Mdu: Definitely.

Me: Good.

Mdu: She's definitely more of a Words of Affirmation type. She didn't hear enough encouraging words when she grew up.

Tholi: That's what I got.

Mdu: See? I know you, Chubby Cheeks.

He plants a kiss on her flushed cheeks and she giggles.

Derek: You two seem to be in tune.

Mdu: Definitely. She's my world, this one.

Tholi continues blushing, heck, even I am blushing on her behalf.

Tholi: What about you guys?

I sigh and look at Derek.

Derek: Want to start?

I chuckle.

Me: I think it's either Quality Time or Physical Touch.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

He smiles.

Derek: It's actually a tie.

Me: Really??

He nods.

Derek: I got Quality Time and Physical Touch.

Me: Really?

He shows me his results.

Me: How accurate.

Derek: See, when we spend quality time, I want you close to me.

Me: Of course.

We laugh.

Tholi: You guys are so cute.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss.

For a second there, I had forgotten about Mdu and Tholi.

Me: Isn't it weird how we know each other so well, but we haven't been in each other's lives for a long time?

Mdu: It goes to show that time is a complex concept...

Me: Definitely.

I then look at Derek.

Me: So, what do you think I got?

Derek: Definitely Acts of Service.

Me: Correct!

He chuckles.

Mdu: So, you like having servants, huh?

Me: Hey!

Derek looks at me lovingly.

Derek: You appreciate it when people help you out...

Me: And it took me a long time to accept help from people.

Derek: Hmm.

I look at all of them and smile.

Me: How amazing was this little exercise, guys?

Tholi: I loved it.

Mdu: Even though it told us shit we already knew. I also liked it.

Derek: I think the point, at the end of the day, is to find a balance. It takes all of these love languages to make a relationship solid.

Mdu: Definitely...

Me: I totes agree about finding a balance. We all need the physical contact, the quality time, the words of encouragement and the service.

We continue chatting...

The following Saturday morning, I wake up at around 6am, feeling so sick. I feel like vomiting, but there's nothing coming out. I sit on the toilet seat and groan.

Derek walks in and yawns.

Derek: Morning, love.

Me: Hey.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I feel sick.

He sighs.

Derek: We slept quite late last night.

Me: Argh, whatever, Mr. Observant.

Derek: Can I pee?

I stand and go back to the bedroom as he pees. I make my way to the kitchen and pour myself some water, and then I go to the balcony to get some fresh air. After 30 minutes or so, I feel much better. I walk back inside, to find Derek making breakfast.

I walk to the bedroom to finish off my sleep...

So, everything is set...

I'm suddenly so nervous! If there's one slip-up, I swear I'm going to kill somebody!

Derek: Baby, relax.

I'm even sweating, that's how nervous I am.

We're now driving to Soweto.

Derek: So, you're not even willing to tell me what's happening today?

Me: You'll find out soon. Just zip it!

He laughs in disbelief and leaves me alone.

We then get to a park.

We find Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Malusi, Nandi, Joe and Gabi there.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

Where the hell is Dean and Nolwazi? I explicitly told his ass to be here on time!

Nomvuyo looks pregnant. How? Isn't she like 2 days pregnant? Well, she's not showing too much, but seeing her tiny bump is making me uncomfortable.

Anyway, we finish greeting everyone.

Liwa: So, what's going on?

Just then, I see Dean's car, and sigh in relief...He walks out with Nolwazi and they walk to where we are.

Nolwazi: Lookie here!

She's in such high spirits. My heart is genuinely happy for her. This is going to be a great day!

Dean: Why the fuck are we in a dry park? Is it even safe here?

Derek: Hmm. Diana is afraid of the township?

Everyone laughs and Dean hisses.

Dean: Mxm.

Zimkitha: Why are we here kodwa, Zi? Yazi we could easily go to Vilakazi for brunch.

Nomvuyo: I doubt we're dressed appropriately.

They all start adding their two cents, and talk back and forth. Gosh, these people are too much.

I take a deep breath and look at them calmly.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your left ear...

They continue chatting.

Derek is the only one who heard me. He's touching his ear. See why this one is the right one for me?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose.

They continue talking. Derek touches his nose.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your forehead.

Nomvuyo glances at Derek.

Nomvuyo: And then?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose...

Nomvuyo frowns and nudges Liwa. Liwa stops talking and looks at Derek.

The others continue talking.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your bottom lip.

Derek does that, and I'm shocked to see Liwa and Nomvuyo do the same. Nomvuyo winks at me and I wink back.

Yazi loGabi ngathi uzobayinkinga. She's the one who's making these people talk too much.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your ears.

Zimkitha looks at Liwa, Nomvuyo and Derek. They're all touching their ears. Lol they look ridiculous.

Zimkitha: And then?

Finally!

It is silent!

Me: If you can hear me, touch your knees.

Liwa, Nomvuyo and Derek touch their knees.

Dean: Are you serious?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your chin.

Dean: Really?

He starts laughing, and within seconds, Zimkitha is laughing as well. Soon, Gabi, Joe, Malusi, Nandi, Lindelwa and Nolwazi are laughing their lungs out.

I continue... I'm beyond calm right now... I'm in my teacher zone...

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose.

My diligent students, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Nkanyi, follow my instructions.

After these hooligans are done laughing, they stare at me in shock.

Me: If you can hear, touch your ear.

Malusi: Oh, wow... She's actually serious.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your chin...

They look at each other, as they slowly touch their chins. You'd swear there's someone pointing a gun at them.

Silence.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose...

I watch as they all do as they are told...

Once I'm satisfied, I sigh and smile.

They're staring at me in disbelief. I think they can't believe what just happened.

Me: A great teacher doesn't move on until she's given 100%...

I smile.

Me: Now that I have your undivided attention, I'd like to thank Nkanyezi, Liwa and Nomvuyo for listening attentively. I appreciate it.

They continue looking at me in shock.

Joe: I think I'm dreaming.

Gabi: I think I'm having an out of body experience...

Dean: She gets like this...

Nolwazi: Wow, Zi. For a second there, I thought I was a child.

I smile.

Me: Thank you.

Dean: That wasn't a compli-

I look at Dean sharply.

Me: We speak only when spoken to...

Liwa: Whooooa!

They all laugh and I look at Dean, sticking my tongue out.

After a while, I clap twice.

Me: Okay, guys, on a serious note, please listen!

They keep quiet.

Me: So, I asked you guys to reserve your Saturday, because I would like us to spend it together.

Lindelwa: How sweet.

She smiles at me and I smile back.

Me: We are going to have a Kasi Scavenger Hunt!

They all look at me weirdly.

Gabi: Yay! I've always wanted to get to know Soweto.

I give them a minute to process what I've just said.

Me: It will be awesome!

Nomvuyo: Hmm... Sounds cool.

Me: So, the starting point is my parents' house... We're all going to drive, and you'll leave your cars there.

Malusi: So, how are we going to get around?

I chuckle.

Me: Look around... There are taxis everywhere!

Gabi: Yay!

Nolwazi: Okay, now I'm definitely excited.

Me: We're going to have an amazing day! Let's go!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

He hugs me as everyone starts making their way to their cars.

Liwa: I'll lead everyone, since I know where you live.

Me: Hey, now... Don't brag!

He laughs as he walks off.

Now, it's just Derek, Dean and I standing there.

Me: Everything is set... You're also set angithi?

Dean smiles and nods.

Me: Great, let's go!

Dean: Oh, by the way, Mdu and Ivy are joining us.

Me: The Devil is a lie. I will not acknowledge any negativity today!

He laughs.

Dean: Behave yourself, okay?

Me: Whatever!

We go our separate ways...

Derek and I are now driving to my house.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

I laugh.

Me: Hmm!

He chuckles and focuses on the road.

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We're now at my parents' house. Lol, my neighbours are just shocked. All these scrumptious cars at my house? Njani? What is happening? Lol.

Liwa: Is it possible for me to get something to eat before we start?

Me: No! We don't have time!

Liwa: With all due respect Dlamini, I'm not leaving this house till I'm fed.

He walks to my dad and asks for chicken. My dad gladly dishes up for him. He then goes and sits on the stoep. Malusi and Joe walk to him and he lets them taste.

Before I know it, everyone is now seated on the stoep, eating chicken.

Derek takes me inside the house. He knows I'm about to freak out.

Derek: They'll be done in no time.

Me: They're wasting my time!

Just then, my mom walks in and chuckles.

Mom: At least your dad got new customers!

Me: Ah!

My dad walks in smiling.

Derek: Sawubona.

Dad: Ngidi... I charged your friends 20 rands extra each, because they look and smell like money.

They both laugh. So, they get along now? Kanti zikhiphani kahle kahle kulendlu?

Derek: You should have charged them 50 rands extra.

Dad: My scamming is not that bad...

They chuckle...

Me: Uphi uLwazi?

Mom: I sent her to the shops.

Me: I guess we won't see her.

Mom: You saw her yesterday, awume tuu.

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It's Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Baba, this chicken is amazing! My dad would love it. It's so fresh. Is there a way you can give me a few pieces? I want to take them back home.

Dad: Of course!

Mom: You must be Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness, how rude of me... I got so excited about the chicken.

She introduces herself and hugs my mom.

Mom: How are the babies?

Nolwazi: All grown up!

Mom: Aww, man. Congratulations!

Just then, Dean walks in, and I know he wants us to get moving. Time is of the essence, people!

Me: Give me a minute.

I walk to my bedroom and sit down for a couple of minutes. Once I'm done gathering my thoughts, I walk out and bump into Derek. He pushes me back in the bedroom and shuts the door.

Me: And then??

He chuckles and kisses me. Like, reallllly kisses me. Haibo! I quickly stop the Devil.

Derek: I don't know why I'm suddenly turned on.

Me: Bhuti, go to the toilet and let it all out. I'm not about to spread it low and dirty in my parents' house.

He laughs as we walk out and make our way outside. Thankfully, everyone is done eating. My mom emerges with an envelope.

Mom: Can I have everyone's attention, please?

They all continue chatting. Yazi this crowd talks too damn much!

Mom: Ye nina!

There's silence within a split second.

Zimkitha laughs.

Zimkitha: Saze savelelwa! UMam' Teacher naye is commanding our attention?

Everyone laughs.

Mom: Anyway, I've been instructed to give you this envelope... You have to decide who will read what's in it.

Zimkitha: Okay, because we are getting old, I don't think it's a good idea to participate. Lindelwa and I will stay here.

My mom smiles and nods.

Gabi: I'll read it.

Why am I not surprised? Lol, she's such a bossy lady.

She walks to my mom and takes the envelope. She opens it and clears her throat.

Gabi: Okay... Let's see...

She clears her throat again.

Gabi: Welcome to the Kasi Scavenger Hunt... This adventure will be fun-filled and worthwhile. You will all cooperate and work as a team to ensure that you reach the finish line... Buckle up and have lots of fun!

I smile to myself. Yazi I really am great sometimes.

Gabi: First things first... You need to establish ground rules. Thereafter, you should select two people to be your leaders. We all know that no team is successful without a person who plays the role of a guide. Once you have established your rules and chosen your two leaders, you will receive your second set of instructions. You have 10 minutes to finish this task.

She looks at us.

Everyone is quiet for a few seconds.

Mom: The timer has started.

Gabi: I'd like to nominate Ziyanda.

Nomvuyo: You can't nominate Ziyanda, she's the one who planned this.

Gabi: Oh...

Nomvuyo rolls her eyes. I'm sure she thinks Gabi is some dummy. Lol this one hates everyone.

Nolwazi: I'd like to nominate Nandi.

Nandi: Oh, no!

Dean: I second that. I think we need Nandi's calm vibe.

Malusi: Calm vibe, huh?

Nandi punches Malusi lightly and he chuckles.

Derek: What about Nomvuyo?

Dean: Uhm...

Nomvuyo: Uthi nyum. Nyum what?

Dean: You've just proven why you can't lead us. You're too temperamental.

Liwa: But, no one here knows Soweto better than Nomvuyo.

Gabi: Really? How?

Liwa chuckles.

Nomvuyo: We're not all trapped in the suburbs. There's life out there.

Ooops!

Watching all them go back and forth is proving to be quite entertaining.

Joe: Okay, here's a suggestion. How about we go around and discuss the pros and cons for everyone?

They stay silent, thinking about what Joe's just said.

Gabi: There's no time! We're left with 7 minutes!

Liwa: Shit, all in favour of Nandi raise your hand.

Everyone raises a hand.

Liwa: Good. Now who'll be the second leader?

Gabi: Joey?

Dean: Uh-uh we can't have two calm people. We need balance.

Gabi: Gosh.

Malusi: I think Nolwazi should lead with Nandi.

Everyone is quiet.

Liwa: All in fav-

Dean: Why don't you lead, Liwa? You seem to have taken the role already?

Liwa: Silly old me? I mean, it comes naturally.

Dean: All in favour of Liwa?

Everyone raises their hand.

Liwa: Great.

Liwa looks at my mom.

Mom: 5 minutes.

Liwa: Ground rules?

Nandi: When it comes to figuring out our tasks, you cannot speak unless you've been given permission by either me, or Liwa.

Dean: I t-

Nandi looks at Dean and he sighs.

Nandi: Good. Now, what else?

Joe raises a hand.

Nandi: Joe.

Joe: How about we have one basic rule... Everything has to be approved by the leaders?

Liwa: Perfect. So, you can't talk without our approval, you can't make decisions without our approval...

Nandi: If you agree, say aye.

Everyone says aye.

I can tell that Dean is a nervous wreck. I just want to hug him.

Liwa: Okay, so we're sorted...

He looks at my mom.

Liwa: Can we get the next set of instructions?

Mom: Right on time.

She gives it to him and he gives it to Nandi. Nandi opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: Well done! You've now established your rules, and you've chosen your leaders... Below is a riddle... The answer to this riddle will let you know where your next stop is. Good luck!

She looks at us.

Malusi: This is some serious Amazing Race shit.

They all chuckle.

Nandi: Okay, let me read the riddle.

She sighs as she focuses on the paper.

Nandi: People across the world travel just to come experience my amazing vibe and rich history. I am home to some phenomenal South African past politicians, but there's one in particular, that managed to shake the entire world. Where am I?

Nandi looks at us.

Derek: Easy... Orlando...

Everyone agrees. Nandi continues reading.

Nandi: Go to this phenomenal politician's home... Once closely there, you will find something truly funny, entertaining and shocking... There, you will find your next clue. You have 20 minutes max.

Liwa: Let's go, people!

I've never seen a bunch of grown ass people this excited in my life!

Zimkitha: Good luck!

Lindelwa: See you later!

We say goodbye as we walk out of the yard.

Liwa: Zi, we can't use our cars?

I shake my head.

Liwa: Okay. Where do we get taxis?

Nomvuyo: Over there, snobby.

Liwa: I'll punish you later wena...

Nomvuyo chuckles as she leads us to where we can get taxis. Derek is holding my hand...

Gabi: So, how do we point? I've seen people point up on TV.

Nomvuyo points down.

Gabi: Make sure it's one of those minibuses.

Malusi: We don't have time to be picky, Gabi.

Gabi sighs. She definitely looks out of place.

Within minutes, an empty Siyaya stops and we climb in.

Did I mention how funny these people look right now? I keep laughing to myself.

Nomvuyo sits at the front with the driver.

Gabi and Nandi are on the first row.

Joe and Malusi are behind them.

Nolwazi and Dean are on the third row.

Liwa, Derek and I are on the back seat.

Nomvuyo: Hello, bhuti.

Taxi driver looks at Nomvuyo and smiles.

Driver: Waze wamuhle ntokazi. U-right kodwa?

Nomvuyo: Ngi-right... Please take us to Vilakazi.

Driver: Niyaphi?

Nomvuyo: Mandela's house.

Driver: Anything for wena dali.

Liwa: Ngizonyisa inja...

Me: Liwa, shh...

Liwa: Hai man.

Me: You can't be starting shit with taxi drivers.

He groans as he watching from a distance... Nomvuyo is laughing and giggling away. Akumnandi pha phambili. Zilekese, ziRice Krispies, snap crackle and pop, I tell you. Taxi driver is in heaven with his new woman.

Liwa is just fuming... Poor man... He shall be strong, because it is what it is, it does what it do.

Lol, I look forward to this Scavenger Hunt... Ngathi kuzoba mnandi.

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Gabi: I love the vibe here!

Nolwazi: It's definitely a great vibe.

Liwa: Okay, so the note says we have to be on the lookout for something funny and entertaining.

We all look around. I already know what they're supposed to look for, but I'm not going to participate. I watch as they look around trying to figure out the answer.

Nandi: Does it say we should go inside the museum?

Nolwazi: No it said once we're around the area, we'll see it...

Malusi: What the fuck could it be?

Gabi: Maybe it's those girls dancing over there.

Everyone looks at a group of young girls dressed in traditional attire, singing and dancing.

Dean: The note said funny and entertaining...

Joe: Ya, they may be entertaining, but I doubt they're funny.

Derek wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Me: Why aren't you helping your friends?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: They don't deserve me.

He gets closer to my ear.

Derek: I figured it out. I know what they're supposed to spot.

Me: Do you, now?

He smiles and nods.

Derek: I've been here a couple of times... I've seen this shocking, funny and entertaining thing.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: Derek, we would appreciate your help! Stop holding on to Ziyanda and work with us!

Derek: Dramatic much?

Nomvuyo pulls him away from me.

Nomvuyo: What are you thinking?

Derek: I don't think it is here.

Nomvuyo: What is it?

Nomvuyo: Come on, Vuvu... You know this...

Nomvuyo looks around... She's getting frustrated.

Suddenly, she exclaims.

Nomvuyo: Guys!

Everyone stops talking and looks at her.

Nomvuyo: Let's go down the street.

Gabi: But-

Nomvuyo: Let's go!

Liwa: Do you have an idea?

Nomvuyo nods and leads the way. We all follow her down.

Malusi: Oh shit.

We all stand there.

Gabi: How is this even possible?

We all stare at the guy busy doing stunts with a 1.25 coke bottle.

It's amazing, and I can never get over him. He throws that bottle around and catches it with his foot, and then he throws it again and it lands on his back, and he balances it with his bum.

We continue staring in shock and amazement.

Nandi: This is it! Or rather, here he is!

They all chuckle. Once he's done, we walk towards him and clap. Liwa take out his wallet, and puts 100 bucks on the guy's money bag.

Gabi: Hi, bhuti, how are you?

Him: Ngi-grand, my sister...

Gabi takes out her purse from her Gucci backpack and takes out 100 bucks and gives it to him.

Gabi: I've never seen such! Well done!

The guy smiles.

Him: I've been doing this for many years now. Thank you, my sister.

Gabi: That was phenomenal!

Liwa: I'm guessing you've been informed about us?

The guy chuckles and nods.

Him: Yes... Here's your envelope.

He takes it out of his pocket and gives it to Liwa.

Liwa: Thanks, buddy.

Nolwazi: Bye!

We all walk away.

Nandi: Ziyanda, you are something!

Joe: How in the world did you even get this guy?

I laugh and shrug.

Nandi: Okay, let's read the next clue.

They all quieten and focus on Nandi as she opens the folded envelope and starts reading.

Nandi: Well done! You have reached your second stop... Now that you're all warmed up, get ready for the next part of your amazing journey!

Nolwazi: Can we just take a moment to applaud Zizi? This is so creative!

Joe: Impressive.

I smile.

Nandi: Here's your second riddle...

Nandi glances at everyone.

Nandi: Ready?

They all nod.

Nandi: I was opened by the Minister of Bantu Development, MC de Wet Nel, and Ian Maltz, who was then Mayor of Johannesburg.

They all look at each other in confusion.

Dean: Ziyanda, you do know that we're all finance people, right? And we have a bunch of housewives.

Nomvuyo: I don't even have a degree!

Gabi: Gosh, and I hated History!

I giggle and shake my head.

Me: It's very easy! Carry on reading, Nandi.

Nandi nods and they all focus again.

Nandi: On June 16, 1976, thousands of black students marched regarding the education system and learning in Afrikaans...

They all look at each other awkwardly. My goodness, these people don't even know their history! I look at Derek in disappointment. He smiles slyly and I sigh in relief. Clearly he knows the answer, but he's pretending not to. Boy, am I relieved! I was going to get turned off instantly!

Nandi: Guys, does anyone of an idea?

Nomvuyo: Let's retrace our history...

Nomvuyo: When the students protested, where were they supposed to meet?

Malusi: I know there's something about Morris Isaacson.

Gabi: And Hector Pieteron.

Liwa: This is embarrassing...

They all chuckle.

Me: This is very embarrassing. How do you people not know your history??

They look at each other ashamedly.

Me: Sies! I'm going to prepare a lesson and I'll teach you...

Nolwazi: We do know our history, it's just those specific details...

Nomvuyo: Is there another clue, Nandi?

Nandi sighs as she reads.

Nandi: I was originally built for the Johannesburg Bantu Football Association and I have a seating capacity of-

Dean: Fucken Orlando Stadium!

Liwa: Fuck, yes!

Gabi: Wow, I still wouldn't have figured it out.

Me: So, you only get the answer once soccer is mentioned? Sies!

Nandi: Okay, focus!

They keep quiet.

Nandi: More than anything, this race is showing me that we're a bunch of uncultured snobs. I'm so ashamed!

Malusi: Oh, please. It's nothing a few lessons from Dlamini won't fix...

He looks at me with a grin and I look at him blankly. Still don't like him, doubt I ever will.

Nandi: Alright, let's get going, people!

Nomvuyo: We have to go up the road in order to get taxis.

We all make our way to the main road and sure enough, there are taxis.

Gabi: So, where's the Hector Pieterse thingie?

Hector Pieterse thingie? Haibo, guys!

Nomvuyo: Up there...

Gabi: We should come back some time.

Me: Clearly you do. Angithi you don't know your history.

Derek places his arm around my shoulders and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Can't wait for the private history lessons, baby.

I smile.

Me: It's on.

Gabi: There is no time for all of this! Nomvuyo do the pointing thing so we can go!

Dean: You people are such snobs.

Nolwazi: You people?

Dean: I'm very street smart.

Nolwazi: Okay, bhuti, keep telling yourself that.

Soon, a Quantum stops, and we all get in.

Nolwazi: I hate to admit it, but this is much better than that taxi we got first.

She sits next to Dean and he wraps his arm around her shoulders.

Derek and I are sitting behind them, at the back seat.

Derek: That was entertaining...Turns out my people are dumb.

Me: Your words, not mine.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my lips.

Liwa, who insisted that Nomvuyo sit next to him this time around, looks back at us from the first row.

Liwa: Derek, it's your turn to pay!

Derek: I don't carry cash. Ask the driver if he has a speed point.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Derek: I'm kidding.

He takes out some money from his wallet and gives it to Nolwazi, who gives it to Nandi, who gives it to Liwa, who gives it to the driver.

Me: For a second there, I thought I lost you to the Snob Club.

Derek: Never, baby...

He chuckles.

Derek: Unlike them, I know the struggle.

Me: Hai suka, you struggled for five nyana years.

He laughs.

Derek: OK'salayo, I struggled.

Eventually, we get to Orlando Stadium.

Gabi: Where exactly are we going?

Malusi: Nandi, read the clue again.

Nandi: Okay.

She takes out the paper and continues reading from where she left off.

Nandi: Once you reach your destination, you should figure out where to get your next clue. Solve the following easy riddle...

Joe: Hopefully, it's nothing historical!

They all look at me and I shrug.

Nandi: It says... I am a homophone... Before moving on, discuss what a homophone is. Thereafter, each of you should give an example. You cannot move on until everyone has given an example!
Good luck!

Nolwazi: Easy. It's two or more words that are pronounced the same, but have different meanings or spellings.

Derek: Correct.

Dean: Here we go again with the teacher shit. You two need to stop treating us like we're your students!

Nandi: Hey! Focus!

Everyone keeps quiet.

Liwa: I'll start... Hear and here.

Joe: Buy and by.

Gabi: More like, Joey should BUY Gabi an engagement ring BY the end of the month.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: I'm serious-

Nomvuyo: Back to examples. We don't have time to waste.

I chuckle. Gabi sighs and rolls her eyes.

Gabi: Heal and heel.

Dean: Flower and flour.

Malusi: Hour and our.

Nolwazi: Not and knot.

Wowzer, what a coincidence. She's going to tie the knot soon phela.

Nandi: Whole and hole.

Malusi: Hmm...

Nandi: Don't be naughty wena.

They chuckle.

Liwa: Is that everyone?

Nolwazi: Derek?

Derek: Weigh and way.

Liwa: Perfect!

Me: I also want to give an example!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, not now.

I laugh.

Liwa is such a competitive man! It's funny to watch!

Liwa: Alright, so everyone has given their examples... Nandi, carry on...

Nandi focuses on the paper.

Nandi: Alright, now that you have an understanding of homophones, here's your clue...

She clears her throat.

Nandi: I am somewhere around this area... Kids love me, because I have everything they like... If you can't figure me out, think of Muvhango.

They all look at each other.

Liwa: What the fuck?

They all begin to look around.

Nolwazi: What are we even looking for?

Dean: Something kids like...

Gabi: There's a school there with a playground.

Dean: But how does that relate to Muvhango?

Joe: Hmm...

We walk around for a bit. I just want to slap some sense into all of them. The answer is literally around the corner!

5 minutes have gone past.

Derek: Wait a minute...

They all stop walking.

Derek: Remember, what we're looking for has to be a homophone...

They all look at him.

Derek: Meaning, there's a correlation between Muvhango, and whatever this other thing is...

Malusi: What could kids possibly like here?

Just then, two kids run past us. We all stare at them and our eyes follow them.

Nandi: They're going to that woman over there...

There's an old woman selling sweets and chips by the corner.

Malusi: Okay, so the woman is the clue...

Nolwazi: But, how does Muvhango fit into this?

All of a sudden, Derek bursts out laughing, and they all look at him. Seconds later, Gabi laughs as well.

Gabi: Oh my goodness!

Liwa: We'd appreciate it if you would share the joke.

Gabi and Derek look at each other.

Derek: Go ahead and tell them, Gabi.

How gentlemanly of him.

Gabi: Guys! What's the main language used in Muvhango??

Nomvuyo: Venda.

There's silence for a few seconds.

Suddenly, they all burst out in laughter.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I join in the laughter.

Malusi: Shit... Venda vs... Vendor... That lady is a street vendor!

They continue laughing.

Nandi: Alright, guys. Let's go get our clue from the street vendor!

We all make our way to the old woman.

Derek places his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Sneaky girl.

Me: I was worried there for a second...

Lol, let the journey continue!

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They now have their next letter...

Nandi: Congratulations, everyone! Before reading your next clue, please reflect on your journey thus far... What have you done well? What do you need to work on in order for you to work effectively as a team?

She then looks at everyone.

Malusi: Should we start with what we have done well?

Everyone nods.

Malusi: I think, in an unexplainable way, our personalities just blend well.

Nolwazi: I agree, we all have very strong personalities, but somehow, we're a good unit.

Derek: The only problem is that we all speak at the same time when we're passionate.

Joe: But, we have Ziyanda now, so she can always do one of her attention grabbing signals.

We all laugh.

These people, man... I think I love them. More than anything, I admire them. I am surrounded by black, powerful men and women. The men prioritise their families, work extra hard to ensure that their families are taken care of, and they are genuinely caring! The women are not just "decorations." They are strong, confident women and they also prioritise their families. All of these people are not just intellectually impressive, but their emotional intelligence is astounding. Their love is powerful. They're all vibrating on the same frequency. This shit is rare to find. We're so used to backstabbing friendships and unnecessary drama, but these people defy all of that. To me, they are the epitome of black excellence and I'm beyond grateful that I get to interact with them. I learn and laugh at the same time whenever I'm around them...

Anyway, after a quick reflection session, Nandi continues reading the letter.

Nandi: Now that you have reflected on your journey thus far, you can move on to your clue...

She turns over the paper.

Nandi: I am a 65 000 square-metre development and cost R650 000 000 to build.

They all look at each other thoughtfully.

Nandi: I officially opened in September 2007. I am owned by a South African entrepreneur and property developer, in partnership with Investec and ZenProp property holdings. I am symbolised by an elephant.

Dean: Easy, Maponya Mall.

Nolwazi: Hmm, impressive, Hlongz.

Dean chuckles.

Nomvuyo: I'm not sure if we can get taxis to Maponya from this side, so I suggest we go to Bara.

Nandi: Isn't Bara a hospital?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: You guys are shameful. Bara is not only hospital, there's a mall and taxi rank.

Gabi: You've clearly been around Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Mmm. Let's get going.

We all cross the road and make our way to the other side. They ask some locals how they're supposed to point, and minutes later, we're in a taxi, making our way to Bara...

We're now in a taxi to Maponya Mall.

I'm not feeling well.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Just a headache.

He looks at me suspiciously.

I think I've been in the sun for too long. I feel heavy and congested.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I need water.

He nods lightly.

After a while, we arrive at Maponya Mall and make our way to the big elephant.

Derek: Ziyanda and I are going to get water for you guys.

Nandi: Thank you, I'm starting to feel dehydrated.

He takes my hand and we walk in.

Derek: Are you still in pain?

Me: It's nothing deep.

Derek: I don't believe you.

Me: Derek, I'm fine.

We walk to PicknPay and get bottles of water.

Derek: Let's get you something to snack on as well. You haven't eaten since earlier on.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Roll your eyes all you want.

He gets me some biltong and we go to the till and pay. Once we're done, we head back to the elephant statue outside and find everyone there. We give them the plastic and they each take a bottle of water.

Derek: So, what does the next clue say?

Nandi takes the envelope, which I assume they got from the person I organized to be there. She opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: So, you're approaching the end of your journey... Now, it's time for you let loose and have lots of fun! What you're about to do is going to allow you to step out of your comfort zone!

They all look at me and I laugh.

Me: What?

Nandi continues reading.

Nandi: Below is a list of tasks you are supposed to do. Please note that it is absolutely compulsory for you to complete these tasks!

They look at me again.

Me: What??

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, you better not make us do weird shit.

Me: Whatever!

Nandi: Before you start, please make sure that everything that is done from this point is recorded. You should decide who will be the one who takes the video.

They all look at each other.

Derek: I volunteer.

Liwa: Perfect.

Nandi focuses on the paper and everyone keeps quiet.

Nandi: The first task is for Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Why me??

Everyone laughs. Derek takes out his phone and begins recording.

Nandi: Nomvuyo, go to 5 strangers and make them tell you you're beautiful, without telling them you're playing a game. You should find creative ways to make them tell you you're beautiful, thereafter, you should get all their numbers.

Nomvuyo: What?!

Everyone laughs loudly.

Gabi: Oh my goodness, this will be interesting!

Malusi: I don't think she can do it...

Dean: She won't.

Liwa: And she doesn't have to. Baby, I-

Nomvuyo: Gosh.

She walks off and Derek follows her, while still recording.

Dean: She's starting to sound just like Dlamini. Childish lingo.

Me: Whatever, idiot!

Nolwazi: You two need to be locked up in one room, so you can beat each other up properly.

Me: I'd love that!

Dean: Oh, ple-

Liwa: I think we should go check on Vuvu.

Malusi: Relax, she won't run off with these strangers.

Liwa groans. We watch, from a distance, as Nomvuyo talks to some guys. After a while, she comes back with Derek, following her. When she gets to us, she shows us the five new contacts on her phone.

Nomvuyo: Done and dusted.

We all cheer for her, and Liwa wraps his arm around her and kisses her forehead.

Nomvuyo: Territorial.

Liwa: You know this.

She chuckles and gives him a hug.

Nandi: Alright, let's move on to the next task...

She focuses on the paper.

Nandi: The next task is for Joe.

Gabi: He better not do anything shady! I will not allow that!

Nandi: Joe, you have to walk around and ask for money. You need to collect a total of R50.

Joe: Come on!

We all start laughing boldly.

Gabi: Oh, baby. I think you can be quite persuasive...You can do it.

We continue laughing as we walk inside the mall. Joe approaches a few people, and they ignore him.

After around 20 minutes, he finally manages to convince a few girls to give him money. Thankfully for him, the money added up to 60 bucks.

Joe: Fuck this shit.

He gives me the money and I laugh.

Dean: I never thought I'd see the day you beg for money.

Joe: Mxm.

Gabi: Baby, at least you know how it feels like to be helpless...

Joe grunts and we continue laughing at him.

Nandi: Okay, let's focus.

We all quieten down.

Nandi: The third task is for Dean and Malusi.

Dean: Hell no.

Malusi: Not happening.

Nandi: You will do whatever is required. No negotiating!

She focuses on the paper and continues reading.

Nandi: Dean and Malusi, find a clothing store, and try on women's clothing- it should be whole attire.

Dean: WHAT?!

Malusi: Fuck, NO!

Everyone laughs.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness!

Dean: Uyanya wena, Ziyanda. Uyanya.

Malusi: Amasimba!

We continue laughing.

Nandi: Once you have tried on the clothes, you must go to any salesperson in the store and ask them to take a picture of you both.

Malusi: WHAT?!

We continue laughing. Dean looks at me begrudgingly and I smile mischievously. This is my way of getting back to him for making fun of me regarding the pregnancy.

Liwa: Diana and Miranda, stop wasting our time!

Nomvuyo: Let's go to Mr. Price.

Nolwazi: How about Edgars? The sizes there are a bit accommodating.

Liwa: Edgars it is!

We continue laughing at them.

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We're now at Edgars and kushubile to say the least.

Dean is so pissed. I don't think I've ever seen him like this.

Malusi naye is beyond angry, but I don't really care about him.

Nomvuyo: Okay, we've been standing here for 15 minutes!

Joe: Didi and Mimi, let's find your sizes!

We all laugh.

Dean: I'm not doing this shit.

Nolwazi: Langa, phela if you don't do it, you're not coming home with me.

Dean looks at Nolwazi sharply and she smiles sweetly.

Nolwazi: You have to do it.

We continue laughing.

Just then, a sales lady approaches us. She scans the crowd and I can tell that she is smitten by all these men. Once again, they manage to make a space seem very small, just by their presence.

Lady: Hi, everyone. My name is Lebo. How may I help you?

Nandi: Hi, dear. We're looking for nice elegant dresses.

Nomvuyo: Dresses? Uh-uh we want leggings and nice girlie tops.

Everyone bursts out in laughter.

Dean tries to walk away, but Liwa stops him.

Lebo: Alright, uhm, we have a range of leggings.

Gabi: Dear, I think we'll manage to find what we need. Thank you for your assistance.

Lebo: Oh.

Lebo walks off with her tail between her legs.

Nomvuyo: Thanks for dealing with that...

Gabi: I can spot them from a mile away.

Liwa: Wow.

I look at Derek. I almost forgot about him, because he's the designated video man. He gets closer to me and kisses me.

Derek: Miss you.

Me: Right back at ya.

Derek: Thanks for not giving me that task.

Me: I'd never!

He chuckles and continues taking the video. I want them to look back at such moments and appreciate each other even more.

We all walk to the leggings section and Nolwazi begins going through the sizes.

Nandi: Malusi has always been a grey type of man...

Nolwazi: And Dean is a navy guy.

This is so funny. I'm worried that Dean will never forgive me, but I'll deal with that later.

Gabi: Let me get the tops.

Nomvuyo: I'll help...

Gabi and Nomvuyo walk off.

I look at Dean. He gives me the coldest look and I shiver. I refuse to feel bad! He tortured me regarding this pregnancy, so he must pay!

Nolwazi and Nandi pick the sizes and show us.

Nolwazi: There you go, daddy.

She laughs as Dean snatches the navy leggings.

Nandi: Thatha baba ka Lele.

Malusi snatches the grey leggings.

We continue laughing.

Gabi walks back with two tops.

Gabi: Now, because Malusi has such a sexy body, I think this white sleeveless shirtdress is perfect. It will show off his amazing arms, you know?

Everyone is just laughing like lunatics.

Nomvuyo: And then, for Dean, I selected a lovely crop top. Seeing as he has a great torso, I would like him to show it off, you know? Also, it's summer, kuyashisha.

We continue laughing.

Nandi: Alright then, please go to the dressing room and do your thing.

Nolwazi literally had to push Dean in there...

We're now standing by the dressing room.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, I will never forget this shit.

Nomvuyo: Very special.

Liwa: You literally managed to strip off these idiots' masculinity!

We laugh.

Liwa: I'll always remind them of this day.

I check the time and it's now around 1pm. We're behind... Thankfully, we're almost done.

Out of nowhere, Nandi lets out a scream. We all look towards the dressing room entrance and scream as well.

Malusi stands there with leggings and a very tight shirtdress, the buttons are holding on for dear life!
Oh my goodness!

Nandi: Lusi!

She has her phone and is busy taking pictures.

Nandi: You better worrrk, baby daddy!

Liwa is literally on the floor, dying from laughter. If I was Malusi, I'd be in tears. I'd be dying from humiliation. Liwa's laugh is just like Dean's. It's that laugh that makes you feel so small, that you end up doubting your existence.

Malusi looks at everyone blankly. I think the only way he's dealing with this is by drifting off into another world and zoning us out. Lol, I kinda feel bad for him, because the way these people are laughing at him? Kuyanyiwa.

After a while, Nolwazi walks in the dressing room. Dean seems to be refusing to come out, because we waited a long time.

Eventually Nolwazi walks out. She was clearly holding in her laughter.

Nolwazi: Take it easy on him, okay?

We all look at Liwa, who has finally recovered from Malusi's grand entrance.

Liwa: I can't make any promises.

We all keep quiet and look at the entrance.

I am so nervous and excited.

Within a minute, Dianna is standing there. Dianna has navy leggings and a white crop top written "I'm sexy and I know it!"

Yhu, I tried to keep it together, but this time around, I was on the floor with Liwa. I didn't even realise that Derek was also laughing as hard as as Liwa and I.

I was lost in a world of true raw laughter for such a long time, that when I finally recovered, I was beyond dizzy.

Dean is so angry, he could kill me, and I know it.

Nandi: Alright then, you two need to go to any salesperson and ask for a picture.

Malusi: Can we get this shit over and done with?

Malusi walks off and comes back with Lebo, who is confused and amused.

Malusi: Take a picture of us.

Nandi: Haibo Lusi, not even a “please?”

Malusi: Nandipha, just shut the fuck up.

We all laugh.

The salesperson takes Liwa’s phone and takes lots of pictures of Diana and Miranda.

Nolwazi: Langa, you have to smile.

Dean doesn’t say anything.

Gabi: I think we should add bags-

Malusi: Don’t fuck with me.

Gabi: But, it w-

Diana is already walking back to the dressing room. Miranda follows him and we continue laughing.

Liwa: Shit, man. Fucken shit!

We finally finish up, after many laughs. I don't think I have ever laughed this much in my entire life. Lebo walks to us with an envelope. She gives it to Nandi, who reads it.

Nandi: Hopefully, this was a fun activity that you all enjoyed, except for Dean and Malusi.

Liwa: Damn right we enjoyed that shit.

Nandi: Seeing as you're at the mall, it is time to go shopping! The aim is for each of you to shop for a semi-casual outfit. Yes, this is not Saxton or Rosebank, so you will work with what you have here. Seeing as you're all couples, it is important for your outfits to complement each other. Ladies, please get your necessary makeup as well. Go wild, and have fun! You have 30 minutes to shop. Once you've found the perfect outfits, you should gather by the elephant statue outside, where your next clue will be.

Nandi looks at us.

Nandi: Comprende?

We all nod.

Nandi: It's 13:30 right now. Let's meet by the statue at 13:55?

We all nod.

Nandi: Alright then, people. See ya later...

She looks at Malusi.

Nandi: Are we a couple right now?

Malusi: Mxm.

Konje these two have their issues. I need to find out from Nomvuyo whether Nandi is seeing someone else.

I finally have Derek all to myself! I'm not one to be all touchy feely in public, but right now, I'm doing the most. And as usual, Derek is enjoying it. He seems to like it when I'm clingy.

Derek: What are we going to wear?

Me: How about we start at McD's and get me a McFlurry?

Derek: You want ice-cream?

I nod.

Derek: Okay.

We walk to McD's and get me some ice-cream. Once we're done, we walk around.

Derek: I can't believe you planned this entire day by yourself.

Me: Well, I did get help.

Derek: From whom?

I chuckle.

Me: Jeff.

Derek: Ah... I see... The escort guy?

I laugh.

Me: He's the one who sorted out the people and gave them the clues.

Derek: Hmm... Is this our last task?

Me: Not really, but it's the last crazy activity.

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean neh...

Me: He will never forgive me.

Derek: Hai suka...

It's now 13:55 and we're all here except for Joe and Gabi.

Me: Can someone call them?

Nandi calls her and tells her we're ready to leave. After 10 minutes, they walk to where we are.

Gabi: We couldn't find the perfect outfit for Joey.

Nandi: Did you end up finding something?

Gabi: I guess.

Just then, one of the car guards comes to us and Nandi takes the envelope from him.

Nandi begins reading.

Nandi: Well done on making it this far! You should all be proud!

Dean hasn't even looked at me. He hates me!

Nandi: A taxi should be pulling up close to where you are right now. Here is the number plate...

Nandi reads the number plate and we all see a Quantum close to where we are.

Nandi: This taxi will take you to a house, where you will all freshen up. Thereafter, you will get your next clue.

Gabi: Whose house is this?

I roll my eyes.

I don't need her snobbish negativity right now. I'm hungry and exhausted.

We all walk to the taxi and get in...

Jeff was kind enough to let me use his Soweto double storey. I'm sure a lot of hoeish activities take place in it, but it is what it is.

At around 3pm, we're all fresh and ready.

Nandi: You look amazing guys!

Liwa: We clean up nicely.

Nandi: Okay, so we're ready now.

Nomvuyo: And hungry.

Liwa rubs her belly.

Liwa: Ziyanda, I hope we're going to eat now.

I shrug.

I'm also starving.

Nandi: Everyone ready?

Nolwazi: Dean is still upstairs.

Me: I'll get him.

Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: And apologize to him, please.

Me: Okay.

I walk up to the bedroom and knock on the door. I walk in and find Dean sitting on the bed.

Me: Is it safe to come in?

He looks at me blankly and I walk in anyway, and close the door. I sit next to him and sigh.

Me: I'm not sorry.

He looks at me and I smile innocently.

Me: You made fun of me as well! I didn't mope around!

Dean: You had a hissy fit.

Me: Argh, fuck off.

He chuckles lightly and I smile.

Me: Are you ready?

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'm nervous.

Dean: I'm shitting my pants.

Me: She doesn't even have a clue!

He groans.

Dean: We had a great day. Thank you.

Me: Anything for you, meanie.

I stand and pull him up.

Me: Let's do this!

I wrap my arms around him and we share a hug.

Me: Asambe.

We walk out and make our way downstairs to everyone.

Nandi finds an envelope in the kitchen and reads it.

Nandi: You're almost there! The finish line is near! Now that you're all fresh, go outside and get in your taxi. It will take you to your next destination.

Gabi: This is a nice house, Zi. Who owns it?

Me: A friend.

Gabi: Hmm, okay.

We all walk out and get in the taxi.

Within 15 minutes, we're driving in eUbuntu Kraal.

Nomvuyo: When last was I here...

Nolwazi: Is this a park?

Nomvuyo: Events take place here.

Nolwazi: Ohh...

Gabi: Is that set up for us?

Nolwazi: Wait, is that my family??

We all walk towards the large round table that is set up. It's absolutely exquisite! I am happy!

Thandeka, Dumakude, Mdu, Zimkitha, Lindelwa, and Xolani are all here!

Nolwazi: Mama, what are you doing here??

Thandeka: Ziyanda invited us for a late lunch.

I look at Nolwazi's dad. Lol, he reminds me so much of my father. However, my father doesn't look mean. He's kind until you come at him sideways. Nolwazi's father, on the other hand, seems to be mean 24/7.

Everyone shares hugs and we all sit.

Zimkitha: How was your day?

Nomvuyo: Tiring!

Nolwazi: It was amazing. I've never spent such a long time in Soweto.

Thandeka: It's our fault. We should have gotten a house this side.

Nolwazi: I doubt that Ivy would even agree to live this side.

Me: Hey! What are you trying to say?

They laugh.

We continue chatting for a while.

I'm a nervous mess, but I can't imagine how Dean feels!

INSERT 120 (Unedited)

Gosh, as soon as I see Ivy walking towards us, I feel my whole mood reach a zero.

Ivy: Heyyy!

Everyone greets her back excitedly. I feel Derek's hand brushing my thigh and I look at him. He gives me an encouraging smile and I sigh. I'll just have to suck it up and ignore her.

Ivy: Dad is even here??

Thandeka: It took a lot of convincing.

Ivy: He likes acting fresh vele.

They all laugh. She then looks at me and doesn't say anything.

Nolwazi: Uhm, Zamo, come sit next to me.

She then sits on the empty seat between Joe and Nolwazi.

I'm sitting in between Dean and Derek. I keep glancing at Dean, and I can tell that he is dying from nerves.

After a few minutes, I see Mdu approaching the table. I avoid how good he looks by focusing on Derek.

Me: I need the bathroom. I'll be back.

Derek: Can I go with you?

Me: No. Stay here.

He groans as I stand and walk off...

When I come back, everyone is still chatting and laughing. I look over at Xolani and I can tell that he's not 100% fine. He's not his usual carefree self. I make a mental reminder to check on him as soon as all of this is done.

Just then, one of our waiters gives Nandi an envelope.

Nandi: Thank you, dear.

She opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: Welcome to the last part of your race. Here, you get to relax and have fun with your loved ones. Your last task is very simple: Use this time to tell your partner how much you love them and why you value them so much. Take the time to appreciate each other as a group as well.

Nandi puts down the paper and looks at everyone with a smile.

Zimkitha: Clearly this race was great. We should have joined you.

Liwa: It was quite insightful. Dianna and Miranda came out to play.

Everyone laughs for a good 5 minutes.

Dumakude: You'll have to send me these pictures. When Hlongwane troubles me, I'll pull out the big guns.

They continue laughing. I'm out here stressed for Dean.

Zimkitha: Anyway, seeing as I don't have a partner-

Liwa: Don't lie. I'm sure you have a line of old men waiting on you.

Zimkitha laughs sweetly.

Zimkitha: Hai suka wena. I'm too old to date.

Liwa chuckles sarcastically.

Zimkitha: Anyway, I'll start this circle of love.

Everyone focuses on her as she smiles. She really is the foundation of this circle; she brings all of them together.

Zimkitha: So, I am very grateful for having all of you in my life. The love in this circle is absolutely mind-blowing! We fuss and fight all the time, but we always learn from our mistakes. It takes a great deal of maturity to put aside your interests just to ensure that the next person is good. We all vibrate on the same frequency.

Nolwazi: Vibrate on the same frequency... I love that!

Zimkitha nods and smiles.

Zimkitha: My hope is that once I'm dead, you'll continue loving each other so deeply.

Thandeka: That's my hope as well. I love how tight you are. Your bond is special. You push each other, in a positive way, to reach your goals. Keep it up!

Ivy: Mama, wena why do you love the evil man over there?

Everyone laughs (the guys are laughing a bit nervously).

As much as I don't like this girl, I'm glad she asked this question. I'm very curious about the Dumakudes. I don't spend much time with them, so I want to know more.

Thandeka: The first thing that attracted me to him was the fact that he had a bright future. Yes, he wasn't wealthy, but I could tell that he was going to build an empire for himself.

Ivy: Wow, so you were a gold digger?

Thandeka: I was... The gold wasn't there, so I had to dig very deeply.

We all laugh.

Thandeka: I was getting my degrees phela, so there was no way I was going to date an uneducated man with no vision. With Vusi, I would tell that he was going to be successful. He had the drive and ambition.

Ivy: Manje wena baba why did you ask mom out?

Dumakude: Because of her beauty.

Nolwazi: Wow, shallow much?

Dumakude: I wanted a pretty woman with no substance.

Nolwazi: Wow!

Sies! This man has no shame!

Dumakude: When I asked her out, she told me she'd never go out with the likes of me.

Ivy: Likes of you?

Thandeka: He was very rural and uncivilised. He was a legitimate farm boy.

Everyone laughs.

Dumakude: I have no idea why I was attracted to her feistiness. I had never been with an outspoken girl. I can't explain what made me want her more.

Thandeka: Don't lie. You know very well that I introduced you to some great sexual experiences.

Mdu: REALLY?!

Nolwazi: DISGUSTING!

Ivy: Yaaas mama, yaaas!

Everyone laughs.

Nolwazi: We can stop having this discussion now!

Dumakude chuckles.

Dumakude: Your mother and I are very compatible. What she brings to the table is completely different to what I bring. We've built a great life for ourselves and I don't think I'd do it with anyone else. Because we're so different, we find ourselves making a lot of compromises. It's been said that the greatest trip one can make is to meet other people halfway... That's basically how we've made it this far. Relationships aren't daisies and roses. It takes a lot of work. Just because you're in love with each other, it doesn't mean you won't have days where you want nothing to do with each other. It takes maturity to work through the lows and leave them behind once you've sorted things out.

Ivy: Preeach!

Thandeka: That was beautiful, baby.

She gets closer to Dumakude and kisses his cheek.

Mdu grunts and I look at him. He is definitely a mini version of his father.

Zimkitha: I think the authenticity of the love in this circle can also be seen through Nandi and Malusi. You two are divorced, but you've maintained a good relationship.

I look at Malusi.

He doesn't seem to agree, but he's sucking it up. That's what you get for breaking up your family. Uzoqina.

I listen to everyone go on and on about why they love each other. I'm genuinely happy in this moment. Love is special! It's great to see people loving each other so openly and sincerely.

After a while, everyone focuses on Nolwazi and Dean.

Nolwazi: Is it our turn?

Zimkitha chuckles.

Zimkitha: You two are so mysterious. Tell us why you love each other!

Nolwazi: We're not mysterious!

Ivy: The only person who's mysterious here is Mdu! I will make it a point to find out who's been keeping his shady ass busy!

Nolwazi clears her throat as Mdu tightens his jaw.

Nolwazi looks at Dean and smiles.

Nolwazi: Langa is my person, guys. I love this man.

Ivy: I must admit that you're my goals. I'm beyond glad you're done with that fool, Kwanele!

I take a sip of my water.

Nolwazi clears her throat once again. I feel Derek's hand on my thigh again. He knows this girl is intentionally trying to get to me.

Nolwazi: Anyway, Dean reminds me of my dad. Protective and full of love. I got a good one here.

Aww! Surely, this is a good time for Dean to slide in??

I pinch Dean's thigh and he clears his throat.

Nolwazi: You don't have to say anything. I know you're not much of a talker when it comes to such.

Everyone laughs.

Dean: I want to.

Everyone quietens down and listens.

My heart is pounding!

Dean: We've known each other for many years... We started off as interns many years back, and then we went our separate ways for a few more years... We then got together again, but this time around I was your boss, and I had a Dr. Title.

Nolwazi: Hey!

He chuckles.

Nolwazi: I'm going to start with my PhD because I am tired of your bragging!

He sighs.

Dean: I won't lie and say your relationship with Kwanele made me happy. Looking back, I've always wanted to be with you, but it was never the right time. You obviously wouldn't know because you were so in love with Kwanele.

Nolwazi shrugs.

Dean: I've never been one to want serious relationships, but as soon as I heard about that divorce, I knew I had to make my move.

Nolwazi: But, you were very shy and nervous.

Dean: Who? Don't come for me.

I chuckle.

Ivy: Don't come for me?

Nolwazi: He's been hanging around Ziyanda for too long.

Everyone laughs.

Liwa: Even Nomvuyo speaks like that now.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: I wasn't nervous... I was just careful.

Nolwazi: Hmm.

Dean: Anyway, I've never felt like this about anyone in my life. I've never been filled with so much love for a person.

Everyone says, "Awww!"

Dean: You are such a phenomenal woman. Your heart generates love so effortlessly, that I feel the need to protect you even more, because I don't want you to be hurt. You've exposed me to a part of myself I had no idea existed. I had no idea that I was capable of loving like this. When I'm with you, the rest of the world is not a factor. You're genuinely the apple of my eye.

Guys, Dean! Dean Hlongwane!

Nolwazi is now teary-eyed.

Dean: When I look at our babies, my love multiplies even more. I can't explain it, Nolwazi. I'm thankful that I get to call you the mother of my children; you and I get to raise children together...

Dean then stands and raises his glass.

Dean: I don't usually do this, but I'd like everyone to stand while I dedicate a toast to the love of my life and the mother of my children.

Everyone stands. I don't know how, but the mood has changed. Everyone is dead quiet and all emotional. I guess it's because we're not used to this side of Dean.

Dean: Nolwazi, I love you. Thank you for teaching me how to love. I don't see myself being with anyone else.

Nolwazi wipes her tears and smiles.

Thandeka is also sobbing.

Dean: I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I'll never allow you to slip away from me.

He sighs.

Is he crying? He sounds like he's holding back the tears!

Dean: Thank you for loving me regardless of my flaws. I know I'm a flawed man, everyone knows this...

He looks around and we all chuckle.

Dean: But I feel protected in your love. Your heart is my safe place...

Nolwazi: Langa...

He puts down his glass and rubs his eyes.

Dean: Hopefully, this is first and last time I have to do this...

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Express your love for me?

Dean shakes his head lightly and digs in his pocket.

As soon as everyone realises what's happening, they're all screaming.

Dean is now kneeling and looking up at Nolwazi.

Dean: I hope this is the first and last time I ask you to marry me.

I swear I almost fainted!

Nolwazi dropped her glass and is now looking down at Dean with pure shock!

Dean: Nolwazi, I love you with all my heart... My family adores you, and I cannot imagine my life without you in it. I hope you will say yes and make me the happiest man on Earth...

Everyone is staring in utter shock! The only thing audible is the sobbing.

He reaches for her hand and sighs.

Dean: Will you marry me?

Nolwazi is a sobbing mess and I don't blame her! I'm also crying!

Nolwazi: Yes, Dean. Of course, I'll marry you!

As he slides the ring on her finger, everyone cheers!

I sit down and sigh in relief.

My job is done.

I feel so lightheaded.

INSERT 121

It's been 30 minutes since Nolwazi said yes to Dean. Music is playing and people are dancing and having fun.

I'm exhausted. I've been sitting here, drinking water, because I'm not allowed to have alcohol.

I see Xolani standing a bit far from our setup; he's on the phone. I stand and make my way to him and find him yelling at whoever he's speaking to.

He ends the call when he sees me.

Me: Xolani.

He smiles lightly and opens up his arms. We share a hug and he squeezes me.

Xolani: You seem to have forgotten about me.

Me: Don't say that!

He sighs.

Me: Are you okay?

Xolani: I'm going through a midlife crisis.

He chuckles.

Me: Want to talk about it?

Xolani: Brunch tomorrow?

Me: Okay.

He smiles.

Xolani: I've been told that you organised this whole thing.

Me: I tried.

Xolani: Maybe you should start an events business.

Me: Not now. I'd like to go sleep.

He chuckles.

Just then, I feel Derek's arms around me.

Derek: I've been looking for you.

Xolani: I should get going now.

Derek: See you around.

Xolani nods and then looks at me.

Xolani: See you tomorrow.

Me: Yes.

Xolani: Stunning!

He walks off and I turn to look at Derek.

Derek: You look like you're ready to pass out.

Me: I am.

He chuckles.

Derek: Then let's go home.

I nod and yawn. He then takes my hand and we walk back to the table.

Nolwazi hugs me tightly as soon as I get there.

Nolwazi: Thank you!

Me: You're welcome.

She kisses my cheek and smiles.

Nolwazi: I guess I'm indebted to you?

Me: I'll think about that.

She laughs.

She's happy. She's so happy, and I'm happy for her!

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Me: It's a pleasure.

Nolwazi: I love the ring!

Me: Right??

She sighs happily and I smile.

Dean: Can I have a word with Zi?

Nolwazi: Of course. Take your person.

Dean chuckles as he takes my hand and we walk away from the scene.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Hlongz.

He sighs.

Dean: I guess your job is done.

Me: I guess so.

Dean: Thank you.

Me: You're welcome.

Dean: Go and rest. You look like you're ready to drop dead.

Me: Argh, whatever!

He gives me a hug and we walk back to where everyone is.

Derek: Ready to go?

I nod.

Ivy: The planner is leaving us?

I walk to Zimkitha and give her a hug. Ivy is a non-mother-fucken-factor in my life. I'll continue to ignore her till she gets the message. I don't need this negativity in my life.

Me: Goodbye everyone.

Thandeka: Bye, baby. Get some rest.

Liwa: So, how are we getting our cars?

Me: The Quantum that brought us here is outside.

Liwa: Perfect. See you around, Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Alright.

Derek and I finish saying our goodbyes and make our way out. We get an Uber that takes us back to my parents' house. When we get there, Lwazi is excited to see me, as usual.

Lwazi: Mommy, I want to see where you live!

We all look at each in shock. She's so random!

Derek: How about you sleepover sometime during the week?

Lwazi: Perfect!

My mom laughs.

Mom: Uyaphapha kodwa Lwazi!

Lwazi giggles as she walks off to her bedroom.

Mom: Are you heading home now?

Me: Yep.

My dad and I are fine now. I'm no longer mad at him for being mad at me.

Mom: How was the proposal?

Derek: It was amazing. I'm very impressed by Ziyanda's planning.

Mom: My baby always shows up.

Dad: It must have been a great moment for Dean.

Derek: He was very nervous.

Mom: How sweet.

Me: Alright then, I think we should get going.

Mom: You look exhausted.

Me: Am I that bad na? Everyone keeps saying this.

Mom: Hambani.

Me: Bye then.

I call Lwazi and we say goodbye to her. Thereafter, we make our way to the car and drive off.

When we get home, I throw myself on the bed and doze off. I feel Derek taking off my shoes. Minutes later, he makes me reposition, so I can sleep comfortably. He then begins removing my makeup and I chuckle sleepily. I've trained him well.

I doze off immediately.

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek's body on me. I feel his face close to mine and I groan. He plants a kiss on my lips and I feel him smile.

Me: Hmm.

He continues kissing me till I respond and kiss him back. He begins trailing kisses down my neck to my breasts.

How am I naked? When did I take off my clothes?

He kisses my nipples tenderly and I wiggle. He nibbles on them and continues making his way down south. When he gets between my thighs, I'm already ready.

Derek: Want to go back to sleep?

Me: Don't come for me.

He laughs as he continues awakening my body and senses...

When we finally finish that lovely morning round, we make our way to the lounge.

Derek: There was a delivery for you earlier this morning.

Me: Really?

He nods and points to a box on the table. I walk to it and open it.

Me: Who's it from?

Derek: Dean.

Me: Hmm.

I squeal as soon as I see what's inside.

Me: Did he get me this??

Derek: Well, I told him to get that, I guess he went wild...

I exclaim as I take out all the bundles of weaves in there! There are four bundles of straight long hair, four curly bundles and four wavy bundles.

Me: Oh my goodness!

He chuckles.

Me: Stunning! Stunning! Stunning!

I take my phone and video-call Dean. He answers begrudgingly. He's still in bed.

Me: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Dean: Hmm.

Me: Thank youuuu!

Dean: Bye.

He ends the call and I sigh happily.

Me: Hmyghad!

Derek: I didn't know this shit is so expensive.

Me: Yaaas!

My mood went from 100 to 200!

Me: Thank you for suggesting these heavenly bundles.

Derek shakes his head and laughs lightly.

Derek: Come help me make breakfast.

Me: Huh?

He chuckles.

Derek: Woza.

Me: Are you patronising me?

Derek: What? Silly old me?

I stand and follow him to the kitchen.

Derek: What do you feel like eating?

Me: I don't know. I think I want Cornflakes.

Derek: I'm in the mood to cook up a storm.

Me: Uhm, okay then, Chef Ngidi.

He laughs as he takes out his ingredients.

Derek: Switch on the stove, baby.

Me: Okay.

I do as I am told.

He then continues throwing orders and I oblige.

My phone rings, and I walk to the lounge to answer it without checking the caller id.

Me: Hello?

Niki: Babe!

Me: Hey!

Niki: What happened to us meeting?

Me: Yoh.

Niki: I'm coming over for lunch. Tell Derek to cook.

Me: Bu-

She ends the call.

Just then, I remember that I'm supposed to meet up with Xolani. I quickly dial his number and he answers.

Xolani: Zizi.

Me: Hey!

Xolani: No, you're not cancelling on me.

Me: Uhm.

Xolani: Meet me at Mike's Kitchen at 10.

I sigh.

He ends the call.

Yoh.

All I want is to chill with Derek. Why are people doing this to me?

I go to the kitchen and groan.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: I'm supposed to meet Xolani in an hour.

Derek: Don't involve me, please. I'd like a peaceful day.

Me: Well, too bad, because Niki says she's coming here for lunch.

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: You're lucky I love you.

Me: Let me get ready for my date with your brother.

Derek: So, you're not having breakfast with me?

Me: I obviously can't, dummy.

I walk away and get ready for this brunch session with Xolani.

When I get to Mike's Kitchen, I find Xolani there, looking like a snack!

Me: Hey!

He stands and we share a hug.

Xolani: Hey, baby.

We sit and he places an order for drinks.

Me: I'll have water.

He looks at me weirdly.

Xolani: Uyabheda lo. Please get her a Long Island cocktail.

Me: No!

Xolani: I'm not drinking by myself.

I look at the waiter and tell her to get me water. She walks off and I stare at Xolani.

Me: I'm cleansing!

He laughs and shakes his head.

Xolani: Women are strange. You like doing these weird things.

Me: Whatever!

Xolani: Anyway, how are you?

Me: I'm good. Just focusing on work, you know?

He nods.

Me: As I told you yesterday, I moved in with your brother...

Xolani: You two are perfect.

Me: Hmm, not quite.

Xolani: Really?

Me: We're still getting to know each other... We have our moments.

He nods.

Me: How are you? I know you're not fine.

He chuckles.

Xolani: I'm going through relationship drama.

Me: Really??

Xolani: Let me build context for you...

I nod.

Xolani: I'm basically in love with a soon-to-be married man.

Me: Xolani!

He sighs.

Xolani: And he's marrying a woman.

Me: What?!

He rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Xolani: He's gay, unquestionably gay.

Me: But about to get married!

He shrugs.

Me: Xolani, no!

Xolani: Is it wrong that I don't feel bad?

Me: Yes!

He sighs and finishes his drink.

Xolani: He told me about his proposal plan... He's proposing soon.

Me: How did you meet? Were you with him before he was with the girl?

He nods.

Xolani: We dated for a year and then he ended it.

I nod.

Xolani: And then, when we were broken up, he dated this random girl for about 6 months. Now he's planning on proposing.

I look at him in shock.

Me: Manje when did you and him start dating again?

Xolani: Two months ago.

Me: Yoh.

Xolani: I'm going to stop that wedding.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be involved in this type of drama.

Me: So, what's the problem? Do the parents hate the fact that he's gay?

He chuckles.

Xolani: He's white.

Me: Ye??

Xolani: They don't want him to be with me, because I'm black. His undercover sexual preferences aren't even the issue. Race is the issue here.

Me: Wowzer!

Xolani: So, yes. I'm in love with a white man, who's getting married to a white girl, and whose parents are racist pricks.

I drink my water and sigh heavily.

Xolani: Kunzima.

Me: Damn...

Xolani: Yep...

Our food comes and we begin eating.

Just then, Xolani looks up and smiles.

I turn my head to see what got him grinning. I see a white guy walking towards our table.

Me: Xolani, really??

Xolani smiles innocently.

Xolani: What? I'd like you to meet him.

For fuck's sake. When the Universe shows up, it shows off, huh?

INSERT 122

This white man gets to our table.

Xolani: Hi, baby.

The guy greets back and they share a hug.

Xolani: Zi, this is Leon... Leon, this is Zi, my brother's future wife.

Leon, who looks 30 something, smiles at me and opens up his arms.

Am I supposed to hug him?

I stand and we share a hug.

Leon: Hi, Zi.

Me: Hello.

We sit and I drink my water.

Xolani: Zi, isn't he cute?

Uhm, no. He looks like some racist office administrator.

I chuckle awkwardly.

Xolani: So, I wanted you t-

Just then, my phone rings, and boy am I relieved when I see Derek's name.

Me: Sorry, I have to answer this.

I stand and walk away.

Me: Derek!

Derek: I'm meeting up with the guys.

Me: No!

I know he's frowning wherever he is.

Derek: And then?

Me: Derek, I need to leave this place! I want to come back home!

He chuckles.

Derek: What happened?

Me: Dude, Xolani invited his boyfriend here-

Derek: Boyfriend?

Me: Yes!

Derek: I didn't know he had one.

Me: The white guy!

Derek: Excuse me?

Me: The white guy!

Derek: Leon?

Me: Yes!

There's silence for a few seconds.

Derek: What the fuck?

Me: What's wr-

Derek: Xolani is back with Leon? He's with him as we speak?

Me: Uhm... It seems like it... What's happening? I feel like you know something.

Derek: Where are you?

I tell him nervously.

Derek: I'm coming.

Me: Wha-

He ends the call and I'm left standing there, confused as hell.

What the hell is going on?

I eventually walk back to the table and find them chatting. There's something unusual about them. I've never seen Xolani like this. He looks at Leon like he's his everything, like he's obsessed with him. It's strange.

I sit and Leon looks at me intently.

Leon: You don't drink?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm cleansing.

He chuckles.

Xolani: Boring, right?

Leon smiles.

Leon: Cleansing is good for one's system... Xolani would know.

What's that supposed to mean?

Gosh, they are so awkward, and now I can't leave, because Derek told me to stay.

Leon: Where are you from, Zi?

Me: Soweto.

Leon: Nice...

He goes on to interrogate me and I give him one-word answers. Clearly there's something wrong with this guy, for Derek to have such a reaction after I tell him he's here.

I'm still trying to figure out why I am here. Why is Xolani trying to involve me in his mess? I'm confused.

After a while, I see Derek's car. He gets out and walks towards the entrance, but I stand and walk to him, because we're sitting outside.

Me: Ngidi.

He sees me and walks to me.

Me: What the hell is going on?

He has his usual "Don't fuck with me" look. In this moment, he looks exactly like Dean. It's odd and scary at the same time. Now, I'm not sure if the coldness is directed at me or the situation at hand.

Anyway, he-yes-he, leads me to the table where Leon and Xolani are sitting, they are looking all lovey dovey. Leon's cool face changes as soon as Derek towers over him.

Derek: Really, Xolani?

Xolani looks at Derek.

I'm struggling to read Xolani expression. Is he scared?

Why is Derek like this? Is it because he knows that Leon has a wife-to-be elsewhere? Maybe he doesn't want Xolani to get hurt.

Derek: Xolani.

Xolani keeps quiet.

I'm now staring at Derek. Yes, I've seen him pissed here and there, but this is different. I've never seen him like this. If it were possible, he'd be exhaling fire.

There's a moment of silence.

Leon then smiles.

Leon: Derek-

Before I know it, before everyone knows it, Derek throws a quick and intense punch at Leon.

I think I'm dreaming. I'm frozen.

He doesn't stop.

Leon falls off his chair and Derek continues pounding him.

When I see all the blood, that's when it all sinks in.

There's commotion. These tiny waiters are trying to hold Derek back, but he's too strong. Xolani is also trying to fight him, but he's unsuccessful.

Me: Derek!

I've lost him. This man is in another zone and I'm sure all he sees is red. It's difficult for one to come back when they're in such a zone.

Other customers get involved and some big random guy manages to stop Derek. He holds Derek from behind, and removes him from the chaos.

Leon's blood is everywhere.

Now, the manager is there, and he is on the phone.

That's when I start to panic. Is he calling the police?

I quickly snap out of it and rush to the manager.

Me: Sir, please don't call the cops!

He looks at me coldly.

Me: Please! This whole thing was a misunderstanding!

I'm panicking now, because I'm worried that these cops will get here, and something bad will happen. We all know how serious they take such incidents (especially if they affect the privileged minority).

I want to go check on Derek, but I need to make sure that this manager doesn't do anything extreme.

I go on to makeup a lie that makes it seem like Derek is the innocent one, and that this whole thing was simply a misunderstanding.

He's aggressive at first, but he eventually gives in and says he won't call the police. All I need to do right now is remove all of these people from the property.

I talk to Xolani first, who's catering to Leon.

Me: Xolani, please take him to a pharmacy or someplace where they can do something about all this blood.

Xolani: Where the fuck is Derek?! Fuck h-

Me: Don't you dare cause another scene! Take your things and leave, now!

Xolani: Fu-

Me: Xolani!

He keeps quiet.

Me: This manager has threatened to call the police. Go, now!

He tries to speak, but I give him a deadly look.

Me: Take Leon, and leave!

I watch as he does as he is told and they stagger away.

Derek.

Now, I have to find him.

I walk inside the restaurant and make my way to the bathrooms. I find him there, washing his hands. The big guy, who removed him from the scene, is standing there, watching him.

The guy looks at me from head to toe.

Guy: You with him?

I nod.

He also nods and then walks out. Derek finishes washing his hands and then pushes past me and walks out.

The fuck?

I sigh heavily and follow him out. We walk to his car and get in. He drives out and focuses on the road.

I feel like I'm going to die from speed. He's driving too fast for my liking.

Me: Please be mindful of your speed.

He ignores me and continues speeding.

I say silent prayer and accept that I'm dying soon.

I soon realise that he's driving to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house.

He parks outside.

Derek: Go in.

Me: Excuse me?

He glances at me, as if I'm annoying him, I'm some nuisance.

Haibo, what did I do? All I want to know is why I'm being told to go in this house. Why am I not taken home, and people can go wherever they want to if they need space?

Derek: Ziyanda, I said get the fuck-

Me: Ungalinge wena. Don't even think for a second that you can address to me like that.

He keeps quiet.

Rha!

Me: Nxa.

I take my bag and get out.

I shut that door like there's no tomorrow.

This idiot. Instead of getting out of the car and try to explain himself, he drives off within seconds. Now I am pissed! Why is he taking out his frustrations on me? I literally had to save his ass from going to jail! I should have let that manager call the police, so his ungrateful ass can go be someone wife there in Block E.

I dial Nomvuyo's number and tell her I'm outside. Within seconds, the gate is open and I make my way in. As I'm walking, I type a very heated message to Derek. Ungijwayela kabi lo!

I get to the door and find it open. I walk in and go to the kitchen, Nomvuyo's favourite place.

As soon as she sees me, she squeals. Unfortunately, I'm not as excited to see her.

Nomvuyo: And then?

Me: I'm so angry!

Nomvuyo: Yini?

Me: I'd like a glass of wine.

Nomvuyo: Hawu, what happened to cleansing?

Me: I'm done.

Nomvuyo: Yoh, okay.

We walk to the cellar and she takes out a random bottle and pours me some red wine.

We walk to the lounge and sit.

Nomvuyo: And then?

As soon as I take a sip of that wine, my whole body switches up on. I vomit right then and there, instantly.

Nomvuyo looks at me in shock.

Nomvuyo: What the fuck is wrong with you?!

I start getting emotional.

Nomvuyo: What's going on?

Me: Derek is busy punching white men and now he's taking out his frustrations on me! My emotions are all over the place, I'm vomiting like crazy. Now, I can't drink my wine in peace, because of this fucken pregnancy!

Her jaw drops.

I stand and leave her there to go find stuff to clean this vomit with.

When I walk back to the lounge, she's still sitting there with her open mouth.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I proceed to clean up my mess. Once I'm done, I go wash my hands and come back with a glass of water. I sit down and sigh heavily.

Nomvuyo: You're pregnant?!

I roll my eyes and grunt.

Nomvuyo: Oh my goodness!

She smiles and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: Cong-

Me: No, stop.

She stops.

Me: I want you to tell me everything you know about Derek and Xolani.

She looks at me weirdly.

I begin telling her about the situation.

Once I'm done, she sighs.

Nomvuyo: All I know is that Xolani became a drug addict because of Leon...

Me: Huh??

She shrugs.

Nomvuyo: The guy introduced Xolani to cocaine.

Me: What?? How??

She shrugs again.

Nomvuyo: I thought he stopped communicating with Leon after he came back from rehab... Clearly not...

I'm speechless!

Nomvuyo: So, I'm sure that's why Derek is pissed.

I finish my water and sink on the couch.

I can't right now.

INSERT 123 (Short Insert)

I don't know when I fell asleep, but I found myself waking up and feeling like I was out of touch with reality.

I stretch and sit up.

Derek is sitting on the opposite couch, staring at me. All the anger I had towards him seems to have evaporated via the nap I took. Instead, I just want to hold him and sleep some more.

Also, I can tell that he's a bit nervous. He's waiting for me to explode on his ass.

I take a deep breath.

Me: You're too far.

He raises his eyebrow. I stare at him, and he eventually stands and sits next to him.

Me: Do you mind telling me what happened?

He scratches his chin thoughtfully and then sighs.

Derek: Nomvuyo says she told you.

Me: I want to hear it from you.

He is quiet for a while.

Derek: Leon introduced Xolani to cocaine.

Me: When was this?

Derek: About two years ago.

Me: Did he go to rehab?

He nods.

Derek: Leon is a bad influence, Ziyanda. He introduced my brother to a very toxic world.

Me: How did you get involved?

He shrugs.

Derek: I knew I had to save him. He was close to losing it.

Me: And where was Leon?

Derek: Leon is a piece of shit. He's been trying to tempt him back.

Me: They haven't been in each other's others lives since?

Derek: Clearly not. I knew that something was up with him... I just knew it...

He rubs his eyes and I keep quiet. For once, I don't know what to say.

We sit in silence for a long time.

I eventually get closer to him till I'm in his arms.

Me: I don't know what to say.

He chuckles quietly.

He's not here. He's here physically, but he's not here emotionally or mentally.

Me: I'm sorry.

He keeps quiet.

Me: How can we help him?

His body tenses up and I can tell that he's angry.

Me: Derek, there's no use responding to this situation with anger. You need to be more composed, otherwise you'll push Xolani away.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Are you listening to me?

He nods.

I decide to keep quiet before I ramble and give unsolicited advice.

Me: I'll give you space.

I try to move, but he tightens his hold on me.

Derek: I'm listening.

Me: I'm hungry.

I push and he eventually lets go of me. I don't know why I'm suddenly annoyed at him. I stand and go to the kitchen. Surely Nomvuyo prepared something here... I dish up for myself and make my way to the backyard. I sit in the gazebo and have my food.

After a few minutes, my phone beeps.

It's a text message.

Derek: I apologise for snapping at you. It was an impulsive reaction.

I read it again and sigh.

At this point, I don't know why I'm pissed... Actually, I do know.

I'm pissed at the universe. Every time things go well in my life, something emerges and messes the whole thing up. When will I get a break?

I type a message and send it. I've asked him to come join me outside.

Within minutes, he is sitting next to me, watching me eat.

Me: I don't like how you took out your frustration on me. You made me feel like I was part of the problem.

He nods.

Me: That's why I'm angry. You dismissed me and I took it very personally.

He nods and continues to watch me eat.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: The rational side of me understands why you're angry and acknowledges that your actions were justified. However, the other side is very hurt. I don't like being dismissed by you, especially in that manner.

Derek: Baby, I hear you. I'm sorry.

Me: I forgive you.

Derek: You don't mean that.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: I don't believe you.

I laugh and look at him.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Ohho.

He smiles.

Derek: I'll never do that again. I just hate that you saw me in that zone.

Me: I was and still am very shocked.

He chuckles.

Me: I didn't think your anger reached such heights.

He shakes his head and sighs.

Derek: If he falls, then I have failed him as a brother. Xolani is my everything... I am all he has...

Me: And what about you?

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: What do you have?

He sighs.

Derek: I may not have biological parents, but I'm surrounded by unquestionable love.

I nod.

Me: As long as you know you're loved...

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't doubt your love, baby.

Me: Hmkay.

I finish eating and stand.

Me: I'm ready to go home and catch up on my work.

He groans as he stands as well.

Derek: It's been a stressful weekend.

I nod.

Me: I'll help you with Xolani... Just don't push me away.

Derek: Thank you.

He pulls me in for a hug and kisses my cheek.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: Ready to go?

I nod.

We then walk back inside the house and find Nomvuyo making herself a cup of tea.

Nomvuyo: You two have been doing as you please in my house.

Me: We're leaving now.

Nomvuyo: Stay for dinner.

Me: Nope. I already cancelled on my best friend... I need to do some work.

Nomvuyo: Boring!

We say goodbye to her and make our way out.

It's now Wednesday, and I have been in my class the whole day...

I get a call from Derek, asking me to come to his office. When my kids go to lunch, I make my way to the office.

Me: Look what the wind blew in!

Dean rolls his eyes.

I go to him and hug him while he's sitting.

Me: How's your new life?

Dean: Nothing much has changed.

Me: Hmm.

Dean: Nolwazi and I are having date night tonight, and her parents are in Durban... You're babysitting.

Me: Excuse me??

He stands.

Dean: You two must be at the house at exactly 17:00.

Derek shakes his head in disbelief.

Dean: See you there... This will prepare you for your new upcoming roles.

With that said, he walks out and closes the door.

Me: What the hell??

Derek: Uyahlanya lo.

Me: Nxa.

I've been avoiding the megabytes at all costs. They're very triggering.

I sit and watch as Derek goes through his emails, something we've identified as one of our "bonding" moments.

Derek: What the fuck?

Me: Yini?

He stares at his laptop. I can't read his expression. Is he angry?

Me: Derek?

I can sense that this is serious. However, I'm trying to figure out if it's work, or personal.

I stand and walk to his side of the desk. I bend and look at his screen.

It's an email...

Dear Nkanyezi,

I hope this email finds you well.

Please note that you do not know who I am, however, I know you. In fact, I happen to have valuable information regarding your real parents. I am currently married to your real father, and he would like to meet you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Vicky Mbhele

I stare at the email.

I'm too shocked to even say anything...

INSERT 124 (Unedited)

I look at Derek in shock.

Me: What the hell is this??

He sighs and closes his laptop.

Derek: I don't know...

Me: Are you going to contact this woman?

He keeps quiet.

Me: This is crazy!

I go back to my seat and sit. I look at him as he shakes his head lightly and groans.

Derek: Anyway, how is your day, baby?

I look at him weirdly. Is he really going to pretend like he didn't just get this email?

Me: Uhm, my day is okay. How's yours?

Derek: Busy.

Just then, there's a knock on the door and he tells the person to come in.

Lebo, the receptionist, walks in, looking bitchy as usual.

Lebo: Mr. N, your 1pm appointment is here.

Derek nods tightly and Lebo walks out.

Derek: Come give me a kiss.

I stand and walk to him.

Me: See you later.

I plant a kiss on his lips and walk out...

I don't know how I feel about this email, but knowing Derek, I think he's going to avoid it and go on with life.

It's now 16:30 and Derek and I are making our way to Dean and Nolwazi's place- Nolwazi's parents' house...

Derek: I don't know why we're even going there.

Me: We weren't given much of a choice.

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean really thinks he's the shit.

Me: Definitely.

We continue chatting till we get to the house. We make our way in and find Dean cuddling his baby girl, Simo.

Me: Hello, Daddy Dean.

Dean: You're on time, for once.

Me: Don't come for me.

Derek: Where's megabyte 2?

We decided that Simosihle, the ultimate diva, will be megabyte 1, and the humble Khulekani will be megabyte 2.

Dean: He's sleeping upstairs.

Derek is beyond excited, he's just hiding it. Mina I'm not looking forward to this at all. I'm an only child. I've never taken care of kids, so this is a new experience that I'm not excited about. Derek will have to do all the work.

Dean: Sit down.

Me: I'm getting very tired of you throwing comman-

Dean: Shut up and sit.

I roll me eyes and sit next to Derek, who is chuckling.

Dean: My babies are still very young, so I don't want you playing around with them.

Derek: Mxm.

Just then, we hear Nolwazi coming down the stairs and we all stare at her. She is gorgeous!

Nolwazi: I thought I heard voices!

She smiles warmly as she walks to us.

Nolwazi: Are you ready to babysit?

Me: No.

She laughs and looks at Derek amusingly.

Derek: You look ravishing.

Nolwazi: Date Night is taken very seriously in this household.

Dean: Too seriously, if you ask me.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Anyway, I just want to give you a brief heads up on what to expect...

I sigh heavily as I listen to her tell us the dos and don'ts. I zone out 80% of the time.

Derek: We'll cope, stop stressing.

Nolwazi: I'm still not comfortable with leaving them like this...

Dean: For all we know, you two could be some sick kidnappers.

Me: Dean!

He chuckles and looks at Derek.

Dean: Take care of my kids, idiot.

Derek: Just leave already. You're getting on my nerves.

Dean stands and I'm shocked when he tries to give me Simo.

I freeze and look at him in confusion.

Dean: Yini wena? Take my baby.

Me: Uhm-

Dean: Ziyanda.

I look at Derek nervously and he gives me an assuring smile.

Nolwazi: Sit comfortably Zi.

I do as I'm told and Dean bends and hands over megabyte 1. As soon as Simo senses the change of arms, she smiles and giggles. She then stares at me and tries to figure out who I am.

Me: Is she still blind?

Dean: For a smart nerd, you can be quite dumb at times.

Me: Go away, evil man!

Dean then looks at Nolwazi and smiles.

Dean: Umuhle.

Nolwazi: You clean up nicely yourself.

They smile at each other and get lost in each other's eyes, all lovey dovey. I roll my eyes.

What am I supposed to do with this baby? Do I shush her? She's busy giggling and angazi why.

I think Derek sees my uncomfortability, because he stands and offers to take Simo. I quickly give her to him and sink on the couch.

I need wine. I need vodka. I need sumfin!

It's Wednesday night, I could be at home, watching some ratchet TV, not this nonsense.

Dean and Nolwazi go upstairs and I sit and watch Derek as he kisses Simo.

I don't know why he seems sexy right now, but I'm choosing to ignore that. He seems comfortable and relaxed. Does he have some veza ndlebe that I don't know about? Has he done this shit before?

I stand and make my way to the kitchen to get myself something to drink. I get some non-alcoholic bubbly and drink lots of it. My alcohol craving subsides and I walk back to the lounge to find the second megabyte there. He's sleeping peacefully on the couch.

Dean: We'll be back at around 22:00.

Me: Why so late??

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: We'll be reachable.

Derek: Bye.

Nolwazi plants a kiss on Simo's forehead and then Derek and I watch as they walk out of the house. You know when Beyonce says, "Come back... Come back..." at the end of "Sorry"? That's exactly how I felt... I just wanted to hold on to Nolwazi and cry, "Come back... Come back... Come back!"

It's been 2 hours and I am gatvol!

Simosihle has been crying her lungs out for the past 30 minutes.

She doesn't even take breaks. She cries consistently! I don't think I've ever disliked someone like I do that little diva! Sies man!

I take megabyte 2 and walk upstairs. Derek must stay with his favourite megabyte. Angithi he loves dramatic women? He must deal!

I get to the nursery and sit. Khulekani yawns and smiles.

I don't know why I'm so drawn to him. I think his calmness is beyond adorable. Unlike his crazy sister, he just smiles and sleeps.

I sit there for about 30 minutes, till he falls asleep. I place him in his cot and watch him sleep ever so peacefully. Just then, Derek walks in, carrying a very quiet Simo. I watch as he puts her in her cot and smiles down at her.

Me: You'll find me downstairs.

I walk out and make my way to the kitchen. I begin googling if it's okay to have at least one glass of wine during pregnancy.

I hear Derek's footsteps and I put my phone down and open the fridge.

Derek: I feel like I've just finished a marathon.

Me: Tell me about it!

I take a bottle of water and drink.

Derek: That little girl is a problem.

Me: I don't want to see her again.

He laughs and begins looking around.

Me: Yini?

Derek: I can't find my phone.

He'll call it.

He unlocks it and frowns.

He then stares at me in shock.

Me: What?

Derek: Are you fucking kidding me?

Me: What?

Derek: You're searching whether it's okay to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

I try to say something but stop. I think I'm in trouble.

I stare at him.

Derek: Don't fuck with me, Ziyanda.

Me: Listen, I'm stressed as fuck right now.

He groans.

Me: I'm not irresponsible-

Derek: Then what the hell am I reading right now?

I sigh.

Me: I won't drink!

Derek: You better not!

I drink my water dramatically and walk away.

Me: If I'm not drinking, then your ass is not as well!

When Dean and Nolwazi arrive, I'm sleeping very deeply. Ngiyab' dontsa.

I genuinely don't want to wake up. I don't know if it's because these babies took all of my energy, or Dean and Nolwazi's bed is just extra comfy.

I feel Nolwazi next to me. She's mumbling and giggling.

Dean: She drank too much champagne.

Derek: And Ziyanda is exhausted. She seems to be deep within her sleep.

Dean: She can sleepover.

Derek: Alright then, I'll bring her cl-

Just then, loud cries fill the room through the baby monitor.

It's that piece of work, Simo!

I instantly wake up and get out of bed.

Dean: And then?

Me: Derek, let's go.

Derek laughs.

Dean: Was it that bad?

They both laugh.

Derek: See you later, buddy.

I walk out and Derek eventually follows me.

There's no way I'm sleeping over here... I love myself too damn much.

INSERT 125 (Unedited)

It's been one very quick month...

I've been drowning myself in my work that I've managed to avoid any stress related to the other aspects of my life.

I'm in bed sleeping, when I'm awakened by Derek kissing me.

I push him away and groan. I don't want to have sex; it's the middle of the night for crying out loud!

He continues planting kisses on my face till I open my eyes and look at him angrily. Why is his lamp even on at this time? Argh.

He smiles warmly.

Derek: Someone's getting old.

Me: Huh?

He chuckles.

I'm sleepy and confused. He stops bothering me and I go back to sleep instantly...

When I wake up that morning, he's not in bed with me. I go to the bathroom and get ready for work. It's a Friday, thank goodness. I'd like to spend this weekend in bed, doing absolutely nothing.

Once I'm done showering and lotioning, I go back to the bedroom to get dressed. I walk to the lounge and my eyes pop when I see lots of black and white balloons on the ceiling.

Just as I'm about to say something, Derek approaches the lounge area.

Derek: Happy birthday!

I groan.

It's the 20th of March...

Did I really forget about my birthday? I know I'm not a "birthday person" but have I been that preoccupied?

I sigh loudly as he walks to me and kisses my cheek.

Derek: Happy 26th Birthday, my love.

Me: I forgot.

He smiles.

Derek: I realised yesterday.

I look at the balloons.

Me: 26 balloons?

He nods, with the biggest smile.

Me: Corny man.

Derek: Brighten up!

He wraps his arms around me and pulls me till our bodies touch.

Derek: The gift of life is not afforded to everyone... I don't tolerate sadness on birthdays.

Me: I'm not sad.

Derek: Ya, but you're not excited either.

Me: It's 6am! Why the hell would I be excited?

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: Sit down; I prepared a lovely bacon-filled breakfast.

He makes me sit on the couch and walks off.

I obviously need to re-evaluate my mood...

We're now driving to work.

Me: Ngidi, whatever happens, do not surprise me!

He laughs.

Derek: I'd never!

Me: What are the plans?

Derek: Dinner.

I groan.

I love his people and I love my people, but I really just want to be with him only, hey. I haven't seen his crew that much... I've been focusing on my work, naye he's been focusing on his plans for the new school, seeing as he's last day at our school is fast approaching. I don't know how things will be without him. I already miss our office shenanigans.

Derek: Relax, baby. I'm not throwing you a Great Gatsby event.

I grunt.

We eventually get to school and as expected, my kids go all out!

Lwazi made it a point to outshine everyone. She held on to me till we got to assembly!

My mood is now at 40%. At this point, the baby growing in me is in total control of how I behave. I try to take charge, but in the end, he/she is running things.

It's now around 10am and I'm busy teaching my kids.

Lebo walks in and tells me there's a delivery for me. I walk with her to the reception area and I'm given a huge basket. I sign and make my way to class. I've always emphasised that I don't like doing crazy things on my birthday and I don't want people to do crazy things as well. Derek is generally a very romantic guy, so I think he's going to hide behind this fact as he spoils me today.

I walk back to my class and my kids get ready to transition to their next class. As they leave, I open the huge basket and find all of my favourite snacks. I take this opportunity to open the biltong and indulge. My appetite has been doing the most, but the doctor keeps emphasising that I need to watch what I eat, so I've been eating in moderation.

As I'm stuffing my face, I hear a knock on my door and Derek walks in. He smiles.

Derek: I see you got your gift basket.

Me: Hmm...

He chuckles.

Derek: I was planning on sending this vele... It's a coincidence...

Me: You don't say...

He sits on my desk and watches me eat.

Derek: How's your day so far?

Me: It's good.

He chuckles.

Derek: You are such a Debbie Downer.

Me: Whatevs. Go away!

He does as he is told and I focus on my biltong...

It's now lunchtime and my mood is at a solid 60%.

My phone rings and it's Derek. I answer.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: I think we should have lunch somewhere...

Me: Hmm wena na.

He laughs lightly.

Me: Okay.

Derek: Woza ke. I want to give you a kiss.

Me: Gross. You're my boss!

He laughs.

Derek: In ten days you won't be able to say that shit again!

Me: Whatevs!

I end the call and get my phone, and then I walk out...

Derek: I have something for you.

I look at him suspiciously.

Derek: Relax.

He digs through his bag and takes out an envelope.

Derek: This is for you.

I take it and open it.

I chuckle as I read.

Me: To the love of my life,

Birthdays are very special, and it is strange how you don't celebrate yours as much as you celebrate others' ... I guess this shows your selflessness: always willing to go the extra mile for others.

Anyway, before I ramble, I'd like to give you this set of coupons. Because you're such a simpleton, this is the perfect gift for you...

These coupons can be redeemed anywhere, anytime...

Happy Birthday, my love.

Regards,

Your Star

I look at him and laugh.

Me: Coupons?

He nods excitedly.

Me: Funny man!

I look through the coupons...

Me: Full-body massage; date of your choice; private dinner date; recital of a poem written for you; printing (in colour) and preparation of classroom resources; mysterious gift; Dischem/Clicks date; shopping voucher; new sex position; mini-vacation; lap dance.

I am laughing as I read all of these options.

Me: What are the terms and conditions?

Derek: All of your coupons need to be used at some point.

Me: So, I can just pull them out anytime?

He nods.

Me: Hmm... Anywhere, anytime?

Derek: Yep.

Me: A lap dan-

Derek: Ziyanda!

We both laugh.

Me: You said anywhere, anytime!

Derek: Not in front of people!

I giggle and read the coupons again.

Me: This is amazing!

Derek: I'm glad you like it.

I giggle.

Me: I already know what I want for tonight.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: Full-body massage.

He smiles mischievously and I grin.

Me: Maybe it can lead to the new sex position?

He laughs and nods excitedly.

Derek: Shit will be ready by then, ma'am!

Me: By fire, by force!

My mood has gone up. It's on a solid 80% now, all because of this person of mine.

As we're eating, the waiter brings a slice of caramel cake.

Waiter: Happy birthday, ma'am.

Me: Thank you!

The waiter walks off and I sigh.

Me: You're sneaky.

Derek: I'll take that as a compliment...

We continue chatting...

INSERT 125

So my mood is now at a solid 80%. I've just finished eating and I'm full.

Derek: Are you ready to go back to school?

Me: No.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: You don't want to go back?

I shake my head.

I'm so full; I legit just want to go back home and sleep.

Derek: What do you want to do?

Me: Take a nap.

He looks at me with a frown.

Me: What? A girl is tired from all this eating.

He shakes his head and sighs.

We get up and make our way to the car.

Derek: Have your parents called?

Me: Ohho those two always forget my birthday.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: We're not birthday people at home, Nkanyezi.

Derek: How strange.

We get in the car and he drives off.

Me: Where are we going?

Derek: Home.

Me: Wait, are you serious??

He nods and I laugh.

Me: I can take my nap?

Derek: Anything for you, love.

Me: Yaas! I guess dating the boss does have advantages after-all!

He laughs as I continue teasing him. It's now around 1pm. We eventually get home, and I make my way straight to the bedroom. As soon as my head hits the pillow, I am gone with the wind!

When I wake up, it's 3pm.

I go to the lounge.

Dean looks up from his phone and smiles slyly.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: What are you even doing here?

He chuckles and opens up his arms.

Dean: Happy birthday.

I grunt as I step closer to him and we share a hug.

Dean: How old are you?

Me: 26.

Dean: Hmm, you're still a baby.

Me: Mxm.

We let go of each other and I walk to the kitchen to get some water

Dean: So, you really ditched work to take a nap?

Me: Where is Derek?

Dean: He went back to work.

I grunt.

Thankfully, it's Friday, so I'm not worried about waking up tomorrow.

Dean: I'm not much of a gift person, so what do you want?

Me: Money.

He looks at me blankly. I know he's not being serious.

Dean: How much do you want?

Me: Anything around 5 grand. I'm an expensive whore.

He laughs as I walk off.

As I approach the bedroom, my phone rings and I go get it.

Me: Hello?

Niki: Happpppy!

Me: Ohho!

Niki: Happy birthday, friend!

I listen to her sing for me.

Me: Are you done?

She laughs.

Me: When am I seeing you?

Niki: Well, as you know, mina I'm going to the bundus with my person. I'll see you next week.

Me: Hmm, must be nice.

She laughs.

Niki: What are you doing?

Me: I just woke up from a nap, I ditched work.

Niki: Must be nice!

Me: Bye bye then. Have fun there.

Niki: Shap, love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and go back to the lounge to find Derek there.

Me: Ngidi!

He smiles as I walk to him and give him a hug.

Me: Why would you leave me all alone?

Derek: I had an important meeting... You were fast asleep.

I groan and he kisses me.

Dean: I'm hungry. Let's go.

Me: Siyaphi?

Dean: I don't know.

Me: Derek and I are not going anywhere. Wena you can do you.

Dean: Ungazonginyela wena.

Derek and I laugh at him.

Derek: Let's go to Rodizio. I want meat.

Me: I'd like to take a shower.

Derek: And I'd like to join you.

He winks at me and I laugh.

Dean: Mxm, you're already pregnant. What more do you want?

Me: Rude!

I walk to the bathroom and leave them. I've been doing so well, zoning out this pregnancy, and Dean always tries to mess all of that up.

As I'm busy cleaning myself in the shower, Derek steps in.

Derek: I think you should be used to Dean by now.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Uyabhora.

Derek: Don't take anything he says seriously.

Me: Argh.

We're now heading to the restaurant.

Dean: Are you still refusing to acknowledge that you're pregnant?

I ignore him.

Dean: You need to wake up and smell the coffee soon. It was nice when you two were pounding each other with no protection, manje you don't want to face the consequence?

Derek: Dean, come on.

Now my mood is at a solid 0%. Why is Dean being so invasive? It's none of his business!

Dean: I'm just saying.

Me: I'd appreciate it if you would stop thinking you have that much value in life. You seem to overestimate your importance.

He immediately keeps quiet.

Me: Asingaphaphelani. I don't even know why you're here, because I certainly am not enjoying your company.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: He must go home to his wife and kids angangibhori.

Derek also keeps quiet.

Me: Angazi why abantu bacabanga ukuthi bangakhuluma noma yini when it comes to my life. Just because they're okay with any Tom, Dick, and Harry being in their business, they think sonke siyafana. Stay the fuck out of my business.

There is complete silence.

We drive in silence and I am happy with that.

We get to Rodizio and I'm completely shocked when I see all of my friends there.

They all yell "Surprise!" and I stand there, looking at them in confusion.

I should be happy in this moment, but I'm so down from our ride here, that I can't even pretend to be excited.

Thato, who's my varsity bestie, stands and comes to me.

Thato: Happy birthday!

When did she even get here? She lives in Cape Town. Actually, all of my friends are all over the country, except Niki. We went our separate ways after varsity.

Anyway, Thato squeezes me and I feel her lips on my ear.

Thato: Can you try to pretend you're happy to see me?

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm... I'm...

I sigh and force a smile.

Thato: Happy birthday.

Me: Thank you.

Thato: Long time, huh?

Me: Definitely.

I look at Derek.

I'm pissed as hell right now. Did we not agree that there'd be no surprises? Also, how the hell did he contact all these people?

Thato: Come sit down!

Dean clears his throat.

As soon as Thato's eyes land on Dean, I know I've lost her. She's immediately captivated.

Dean: A word, Dlamini?

I try not to roll my eyes. He takes my hand and we walk away until we're a bit far from the scene.

Dean: You're pissed?

Me: I think even a blind person would be able to tell.

He chuckles.

Dean: I'm not used to you being so sensitive. Usually, you're able to take my shit.

Me: Maybe I'm getting tired of you.

Dean: Ungazonya wena.

I groan.

Me: Dean, I'm still trying to wrap my head around this pregnancy.

He sighs.

Me: So, until further notice, my pregnancy will be a NJZ.

Derek: NJZ?

Me: No Joke Zone!

He stares at me for a few seconds, before bursting out in laughter.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Okay!

I punch him.

He eventually stops laughing and then wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: Stop being Sensitive Susie.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: But, I hear you... This child is currently a NJZ.

Me: Yes.

Dean: Okay...

Me: Good.

Dean: I think I'm going to leave-

Me: Don't you dare!

He sighs.

Dean: I don't like hanging around people who worship me.

Me: Gosh!

Dean: And you need to stop saying vicious things when you're pissed! Your tongue is lethal!

Me: Hey, it's your fault!

Dean: I always find myself tongue-tied when you're in that zone.

I laugh as we walk back to the table... Derek looks nervous, as he should.

Anyway, I try to pretend I'm excited about this.

So, my entire varsity crew is here: Thato, Kea, Mandi and Ash.

I give them hugs.

Kea: I see you haven't changed. Still uptight and shit!

Me: Argh.

Thato and Kea are the rebels. They are worse than Niki. I met them at a club, in the bathroom, to be exact. We were drunk as hell and I randomly walked in while Thato was crying because she had just had an argument with her boyfriend. Kea also walked in and somehow, we found ourselves

comforting a very frenzied Thato. I guess the rest is history... Mandi, on the other hand, was my tutor in 2nd year. We hit it off immediately. I look up to her. She's doing her PhD and is busy working with NGOs. Ash, my one and only white friend, was my lecture bestie. We were in the same lectures throughout my time in varsity, and that blossomed into a solid friendship.

The problem is that they're all over the country, doing different things. I'm not a long distance lover/friend ke mina. I don't communicate much with you when you're far, but that doesn't mean I love you any less. Thankfully, we all understand each other, so whenever we do meet up, it's great times.

Me: How and why are you guys here?

Thato: Your boyfriend seems to be a doer, a man, an achiever.

I chuckle and look at Derek.

Me: This is a great surprise, thank you, Nkanyezi.

Derek's face softens up and we all sit.

I can tell that everyone is trying not to focus on Dean, but they want to, but they know they shouldn't... It's just... awkward?

Kea: You've gained more weight, what's happening?

I chuckle.

Derek looks at Kea sharply and I brush his knee under the table.

Me: I guess life is good...

Kea: Hmm, is it Derek?

She looks at Star.

Kea: Derek, what are you doing to my friend?

Dean: You keep track of Ziyanda's weight?

Gosh.

Kea: I'm known as the weight watcher of the group.

Dean: You sure have time to waste-

Me: Mandi, how's your PhD journey going?

Mandi smiles and sighs. She really is the humble one out of everyone.

Mandi: Listen, my brain can't take it anymore. I want to submit this thesis and move on with my life!

Dean: You're doing your PhD?

Mandi nods.

Dean: On what?

They go on to have a discussion, while I catch up with everyone else. I'm glad the awkwardness is slowly evaporating.

Just then, I hear Niki's voice.

Niki: I am starving!

She gets to our table and looks around.

I chuckle. I'm officially defeated.

Derek's intentions were very good, kodwa he doesn't know the dynamics of this circle. There's a lot of history here, and eish... kunzima...

Niki: Hey, Mandy! Heeey Ash-Ash!

She smiles as she hugs them.

She then looks at Thato and Kea.

Niki: Hello.

They mumble back.

Gosh.

Niki: Birthday gaaal!

Me: Hey!

She bends and gives me a kiss.

She then hugs Derek, and she whispers that she's going to kill him later.

I take a deep breath...

Ngathi kuzoba tough nyana over here.

INSERT 126

Niki sits next to Dean and looks at him in confusion.

Lol, they've never met konje.

Niki: Who are you?

Me: This is Dean.

Niki: Oh... I see...

She looks at Dean, unfazed.

Niki: You dating my man's ex?

Dean: You dating my woman's ex?

Niki chuckles and Dean joins her.

Thank God they get along! Phela I always tell Dean about Niki, and whenever he tries being shady, I stop him. I always tell him to be nice whenever he meets her. I'm glad he is following my rules otherwise I was going to kill him! No one comes for Niki as long as I'm still breathing.

Kea: Your name is Dean?

Dean looks at Kea blankly and nods. I'm hoping that he doesn't unleash his cold side, because that would just make things a bit too tense. Derek, on the other hand, is absolutely quiet- typical. He's just being observant...

Ash: How's the new school, Zi? I'm obsessed with your Instagram posts about your kids.

Me: I'm lovin' it!

She laughs.

Thato: Is it public knowledge that you're dating your boss?

Niki: Is it the public's business?

Yhu!

Can Niki try to cool it down? We haven't even started eating!

Niki: That's the problem with people thinking they are entitled to other people's business...

Kea laughs sarcastically.

Me: Thato, how's your man?

Thato: We broke up about a month ago.

Me: Oh...

She sips her wine and smiles.

Thato: You've been unreachable...

Me: I'm still using the same number mos.

Thato: Well, it's unreachable.

I focus on my water.

Mandi then starts asking Dean about his PhD and that conversation eases the tension. I look at Derek and he says, "I'm sorry, baby," with his eyes, and I say, "Fuck you," with my eyes. We have a back on forth with our eyes, till I look away.

Ash: Nik Nak, who are you dating?

Niki blushes dramatically.

Niki: Some tall, handsome black man.

Ash giggles.

Ash: I sure love them like that too!

Niki: You sure do!

They laugh.

I look over at Thato and Kea, and they're just over everything. They're busy sipping on their wine.

Me: Any update on your love life?

Ash: Well, you know I'm not much of a relationship girl.

Niki: So, you're just dick hopping?

Me: Niki!

Dean: You're into black dick, Ash?

Ash: Yep!

Dean chuckles.

Ash: Mind hooking me up?

Dean: All my people are married.

Kea: So?

Gosh, Kea. The conversation was flowing so nicely. She just had to come in with her shady ways?

Ash: So all your people are married?

Dean nods.

Mandi: Well, that's unfortunate. We're out here scouting!

Dean chuckles.

Thato: Derek, why are you so quiet?

Derek: I only speak when spoken to.

Kea: You people are too tense for my liking, damn!

Dean: Then leave.

Kea grunts as she finishes her wine and storms off.

Thato looks at Dean sharply.

Thato: Really??

Niki: How about you leave as well?

I try to say something, but stop myself. I'm speechless and confused. Everything is transpiring so quickly.

Before I know it, Thato is storming off as well.

I need wine! I need vodka! I need something, now!

Niki: Good riddance!

Mandi sighs.

Mandi: When will you guys get over the past?

Niki: Mxm.

Dean: Those two are bad news. I don't have to know them extensively to infer that they're fucked up.

Ash: A lot has happened...

Mandi sighs again.

I know she wants to go check up on them. She's always been the mediator here.

Me: How about we schedule a lunch date this weekend?

Ash: That sounds perfect.

Mandi: I'm sorry your birthday night is ruined.

Me: It's okay. I'm very happy to see you guys!

I stand and share hugs with them.

Me: I'll call you.

Mandi: Shap.

They say goodbye and we watch as they walk away.

Dean: Ziyanda, I don't want you hanging out with those people.

Me: My father is in Soweto.

Niki: Tell her, Dean.

Dean: They're negative and insincere.

Me: Can we leave this place? Is that too much to ask?

I get my bag.

Me: This is exactly why I don't celebrate birthdays. People do the most and end up fucking everything up!

They all keep quiet and stare at me.

Me: I just want to go home and sleep. Please take me home.

Derek tries to say something, but stops. He nods lightly and they all stand. Niki is also quiet, thank God.

At this point, I'm drained as hell.

We walk out.

Niki: So, like, I need a lift...

Dean: Get an Uber.

Niki: Excuse me? Do you know how expensive it is to come to Sandton?

Dean: Then call your tall and handsome boyfriend.

Niki: Yazini neh? Don't let me punch you in front of all these white people!

Dean laughs.

I leave them there and get in the car. I'm over all of them. I actually just want to go to my parents' house and sleep in my bed.

5 minutes later, Dean and Derek get in.

Niki: Babe, I'm going to Soweto... Your man got me an Uber.

Me: Okay. Bye.

Niki: Love you.

Me: Hmm.

She closes the door and Derek starts the car.

My mood is somewhere in the negatives.

I think this was the worst birthday of my life.

All this unnecessary drama has ruined my day.

We're now driving to Derek's place. It's around 6pm.

Me: I'd like some McDonalds. Please go via the drive through.

Derek: Okay, baby.

Mxm baby wok'nuka.

Dean asks for ice-cream and Derek gets ice tea, while I get a Big Mac.

Once we get our order, we drive to Derek's place.

Derek tries holding my hand and I refuse.

Me: I told you not to plan any surprises.

He sighs in defeat. Dean is also annoying me, because he's busy sucking that ice-cream like nobody's business. Also, why the hell is he still here? He must go home now.

As soon as I open the door, I'm shocked to find Derek's crew there.

“Surprise!”

For fuck’s sake!

I stand there, frozen. I have nothing left in me. I just want to sleep nkos’ yami!

Want to know what happened as soon as Nomvuyo wraps her arms around me and I smell her familiar scent?

I lose it.

I lose it, and I cry my lungs out.

Now it’s completely silent and I’m sure they’re all staring at me, but I don’t care.

I cry.

I cry like those women Shaka Zulu forced to cry when his mother, Nandi, passed away. Ngisikhihle straight.

Now, Nomvuyo is busy comforting me, but Derek is also insisting on holding me.

I don’t know why I’m crying, but at this moment, it’s what my body wants to do, so...

I’m now in the bedroom.

As soon as I’m all covered up, I fall into a very deep sleep...

When I wake up, I am completely shocked to see everyone sitting around the bed.

Derek is next to me on the bed.

Nomvuyo: Baby...

I look at all of them. They're staring at me.

I'm humiliated.

I'm so embarrassed.

Nomvuyo gives me a glass of water and I find myself gobbling it all up.

It's silent for a while.

Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Nolwazi, Dean and Derek are here.

Before I can even gather up the courage to say something, Zimkitha starts singing...

Seconds later, they're all singing "Happy Birthday."

Now, I'm teary-eyed again, but this time, it's tears of positivity, I don't know what to say.

Dean: Stop crying!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Zimkitha: Happy birthday, sweetheart.

She gives me a warm hug and I relax in her embrace. For a second there, I miss my mom...

Dean: So, I have a story for you all...

I relax in Derek's arms as we all listen to Dean tell everyone about my shady group of friends.

Lol, if only he knew the half of it.

When he's done, everyone is now on my case about my choice of friends. I zone them out.

They obviously don't know me. I'm not naive when it comes to the people I love... They just don't understand the dynamic of our friendship...

Liwa: We have a few gifts for you.

He gives me a box.

Liwa: That's from Vuvu and I.

Me: Thank you.

Liwa: You must open it later.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi then gives me an envelope.

Nolwazi: And this is from Langa and I.

I open it and gasp.

Nolwazi: We're the worst when it comes to gifts, so please forgive our lack of creativity.

All I see is 100 and 200 rand notes.

I look at her in shock and she laughs.

Me: I was joking about the money!

Nolwazi: It's the least we could do.

I look at them and sigh.

Me: Wow.

Dean: Expensive whore.

Liwa: Dean!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Mind your own business wena.

I laugh.

Me: Yep, Liwa, mind your own business.

Liwa: Ohho kanti. I'm trying to defend you.

Dean and I chuckle.

Zimkitha: My gift will arrive soon...

Me: It's okay.

Derek sighs.

Derek: I apologise for how the day turned out.

Me: It's okay. You had good intentions.

Dean: You're the planner in this crew, Dlamini. Today is proof that if you're not organizing something, it will fail.

We all laugh.

Me: This is why I asked for an ordinary day.

Liwa: And this fool didn't listen.

Dean: Fucken idiot.

Derek: Fuck off.

Liwa: Fuck you too.

Zimkitha: Heyiii language!

Liwa, Dean and Derek go back and forth until they're satisfied.

Nomvuyo: Are you done?

They keep quiet.

Nolwazi: Niyabhora.

Nomvuyo: Dinner should be ready now... Let's go.

Everyone gets up and goes to the lounge.

Derek pulls me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Love you too.

He smiles and lets go of me.

At this point, I'm not keeping track of my moods... I'll just let go and see what happens...

INSERT 127 (Very Short Insert)

I am awakened by my phone ringing. I reach out for it and answer sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Mom: Happy!

I chuckle quietly.

Mom: Aww, my baby is growing up!

I listen to her sing for me.

Me: Hmm, once again, you forgot my birthday.

Mom: I didn't forget!

Me: Hmm. I am yet to receive a call from dad!

She laughs.

Mom: We're too old to remember dates!

Me: I am your only child, woman!

She giggles.

Mom: I'm so proud of the young woman you've become.

Me: It's not over yet.

Mom: Heyi and it's just the beginning. Phela you're getting ready to be a mother now, and we all know that you'll be amazing.

I sigh.

Mom: How was your day?

Me: It started off great, and then it just went downhill. Derek invited abo Thato and Kea.

Mom: Heeh! Was Niki there?

Me: Of course.

She laughs.

Mom: Did it end well?

Me: Not really, we ended up leaving.

Mom: Good!

I laugh.

Mom: How's Derek?

Me: He's okay.

Mom: I'm sure he has learnt his lesson. You hate surprises.

Me: I hope he did.

We laugh.

Mom: Alright then, I'll call you again tomorrow. Sleep tight.

Me: Love you.

Mom: Love you too, baby.

I end the call and check the time. It's now 23:00.

As I turn, Derek pulls me and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too, Star.

He plants a kiss on my nose and dozes off.

I use that last hour of my birthday to reflect and thank God for remaining loyal to me throughout the years... I know I'm currently an emotional mess, because I'm afraid of what the future holds for me, but I know He'll still be around, guiding and protecting me. I'll hold on to my faith and see where everything goes...

The following day, Derek wakes up early and tells me that he organised a family meeting and they're going to discuss Xolani's issue.

Me: I think that's a bad idea.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: He will instantly feel attacked and he'll be defensive.

He keeps quiet and looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: You and Xolani are very close. Don't involve all these other people in this issue. I suggest you handle it privately and personally. Involving your parents will ruin the whole thing, I guarantee you.

He sighs.

Me: Think about it.

He nods.

Derek: I think you're right. Knowing Xolani, he'll probably run off if we gang up on him.

Me: Yep.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: Anytime.

He continues getting dressed and I go back to sleep. Once he's done, he wakes me up and I see him off. I really hope that everything goes well for him...

It's now around 11am and Derek has been gone since 9am.

Just as I am about to give him a call, my phone rings and it's him. I answer it quickly.

Me: Is everything okay?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: I met up with him, and he has agreed to go to rehab.

I sigh in relief.

Me: How is he?

Derek: He seems fine. Thankfully, the addiction is not full-blown as yet. I just want him to leave this shit permanently.

Me: He needs to cut ties with Leon.

He sighs.

Derek: Hopefully, they'll help him with that as well. He's obsessed with the guy.

Me: Shame.

Derek: What are you doing?

Me: Just finished showering. I really miss taking a bubble bath; this shower business is too much.

Derek: Hmm...

Me: Ubuya nini kanti?

Derek: Come join me for brunch.

Me: Okay. No surprises?

He laughs.

Derek: No surprises, baby.

Me: Okay.

Derek: I'll request an Uber now, get ready.

Me: Shap.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and do as I am told. After about 10 minutes, the Uber arrives and I make my way outside.

I'm now with Derek at some restaurant.

Derek: So, I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Derek: We should move.

Me: Move?

Derek: Move out.

I look at him in disbelief.

Derek: We're living in a bachelor apartment. It's not conducive to pregnancy.

I sigh heavily. He's definitely right.

Derek: We need more space.

Me: So what were you thinking?

He smiles.

Derek: I've invested in a lot of property. The move will be a breeze.

Me: And do I have a say in any of this?

Derek: You can decide which property is best.

I shake my head lightly.

Me: You don't get it.

Derek: What?

Me: I'd like to contribute and actually feel like I own the space.

He looks at me disinterestedly.

Me: Derek, I'm serious!

Derek: I told you that you're welcome to buy consumables.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Derek: I'm a much organised guy, Ziyanda. My life is planned and shit.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: I don't want you living in a bachelor apartment, when I have a pool of property that is appropriate for the phase we're in.

Me: Wowzer.

Our food finally arrives and we begin eating.

Derek: I got a call from my dad asking me to come home, ngoba he needs to tell me something. Do you mind coming with me?

Me: Ah, and what about Khwezi?

He chuckles.

Derek: She's probably out with her housewife friends.

Me: Okay.

We continue eating...

We're now making our way to Derek's home. I'm dreading it!

We get there and make our way to the lounge.

Senior exclaims as soon as he sees me. I completely forgot how kind he is, compared to his dragon wife.

Senior: Ziyanda!

Me: Hello, sir.

We share a hug and he looks at me amusingly.

Senior: You two look very good together.

Me: Thanks.

Derek: I know how to pick 'em.

Senior: You sure do.

I look at them disapprovingly and they laugh.

We spend the next 10 minutes catching up.

We then go outside and he looks at us seriously.

Senior: I have some bizarre news.

Derek: Regarding?

Senior scratches his head and sighs heavily.

Senior: I'm actually glad you came with Ziyanda, because this affects her as well.

Now my heart is immediately racing. Derek senses this, and holds my hand.

Derek: What's wrong?

Senior: I'm not supposed to tell you this now, but I can't keep it to myself. Your mother wanted to break the news...

Derek: Baba, khuluma.

Senior sighs heavily and then looks at me. Thereafter, he focuses on Derek.

Senior: It turns out, Busisiwe's child is actually yours, not the man she ran off with...

I don't think I heard him properly.

I must have misheard him, right?

Surely the Universe wouldn't throw such a bomb on me. Not now... it can't be.

INSERT 128

It has been silent for quite some time now. I can't really read Senior's expression, but Derek looks like he is ready to blow up.

Derek: What the fuck are you saying?

Me: Derek-

He looks at me sharply and I keep quiet.

Derek: What the fuck are you saying to me?

Senior: Derek-

Derek lets go of my hand and steps closer to his father. He's making me feel very intimidated. I'm not used to this side of him. I've only seen him like this the other time when he attacked Xolani's lover...

I'm not sure what's going through his mind right now, and I think that's what's making my anxiety shoot up.

Senior: Son-

Derek: Are you telling me that Busisiwe has my child?

Senior looks at Derek nervously and nods. It's very clear that he is also intimidated by him.

Derek: When did this come to light?

Senior: I found out a couple of days ago.

Derek: What about Khwezi?

Senior sighs heavily.

Senior: It's been a while, before she had the stroke.

Derek tightens his jaw and glances at me. The fury in his eyes is a bit too much, so I look away and focus on Senior.

Derek: I'm assuming Busisiwe knew from the beginning?

Senior sighs again and scratches his head.

Senior: From my understanding, she has been aware from the beginning.

Derek looks at me again and this time, I stare right back at him.

I eventually break the staring contest, and ask Senior for the bathroom. I then proceed to make my way there. I sit on the toilet seat and try to figure out how I'm feeling.

I think I'm numb, because I'm not panicking. However, I'm also angry. I'm angry at the fact that I seem to attract a lot of drama. I'd like to go back to my peaceful life, where the only thing that stressed me out was my choice of reading books.

Ever since Derek came into my life, everything has been chaotic. His friends have brought so much drama in life, and that can't be denied.

Now, I'm constantly triggered.

My thoughts are interrupted by the door opening.

Derek stands there and stares at me.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

He walks in and closes the door.

Derek: I don't know what to say to you.

Me: There's nothing to say to me. You have a child with Busi.

He scratches his head.

Me: If there's one person you should be talking to, it has to be Busi, not me. What am I going to do?

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: I'm not angry, Derek.

He keeps quiet.

Me: But, what I would like right now is to go to my mother's house and spend time with her.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Because I'm telling you right now, being here and witnessing what's going to take place next will be enough to send me back to a psychiatric clinic.

He tries to say something, but ends up keeping quiet.

Me: So for my sanity, and this child's health, please let me go home and separate me from this chaos. I don't want to be put through this shit.

I stand and look at him.

Derek: I want to talk to my mother, she's here.

My heart rate immediately increases. The thought of Khwezi drives me crazy. There's a special place in hell for people like her.

Me: I'll leave now.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: Derek, once again, I'm not angry. I understand that this is not your fault. I just don't want to get involved, please.

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'll go home now.

Derek: I'll ask Liwa to pick you up.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't want that. I want to be alone.

He stares at me intently and eventually nods.

Me: Thanks.

He steps closer to me till our bodies are touching. Our foreheads touch, and he pushes my head up till we're facing each other.

Derek: No matter what happens, don't ever, for even one second, doubt my love for you. Nothing will come in-between us.

I don't say anything.

I think part of me needs all of this assurance.

Derek: I'm not going to let anyone ruin what we have. Please tell me you believe in us?

I sigh.

Derek: Please assure me that you're not going to run off.

He stares at me pleadingly.

Derek: Ziyanda, please?

Me: I'm not going to run off.

He sighs in relief, as if he expected me to tell him to fuck off.

Me: All I ask is that you sort it out without involving me. I'm already dealing with this pregnancy; I'm not in the right space to go back and forth with your mother and baby's mother.

I ignore the piercing pain that stems from the realisation that I'm not carrying Derek's first child.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I want to go home.

He kisses my forehead and nods.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I know.

Derek: I'll never forgive myself for not ensuring that your birthday weekend is filled with positivity.

Me: Your intent is what matters. I'll be fine.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Derek: I'm sorry for all of this.

Me: It's okay.

He plants a kiss on my lips and then sighs.

Me: Let's get going. I'm sure Khwezi is ready for you.

He chuckles. It's a different chuckle. He's clearly angry about this situation, and he has every right to be.

We walk out of the bathroom and make our way downstairs.

Khwezi: What the HELL is she doing in MY HOUSE?!

Derek squeezes my hand.

I zone everything out and continue walking. The door seems so far right now.

Khwezi: I'm asking you a question, Derek! What the hell is that skank doing here?!

Derek stops walking and I try to continue walking, but he stops me.

Khwezi: DEREK! WHAT IS THAT SKANK DOING IN MY HOUSE?!

Derek immediately turns and walks to her.

Now my heart rate is on another level.

He walks to her and gets so close, that he's body is practically pressed against hers.

Senior: Son!

Derek: Call her a skank one more time...

He's voice is so low, but authoritative at the same time.

Khwezi breathes heavily.

Me: Derek.

I walk to him and grab his arm.

Khwezi: How dare you disrespect me?!

Derek: Me? Disrespect you?

Me: Derek, let's go, please!

He pushes me lightly so I'm out of the way.

Senior: Son, let's talk-

Derek: Shut up.

Senior: No! You need to calm down!

My anxiety is sky high at this point. I decide that the only logical thing to do is walk out, because I can feel an attack approaching.

As I begin walking to the door, Senior says my name. I ignore him. I don't want to be part of this!

Senior: Ziyanda!

I continue to walk, and as I get to the door, I hear Derek say my name as well.

I get to the car and, Derek is behind me.

Derek: Baby.

Senior is also here, looking at me in confusion and disbelief.

Why are they looking at me like this? I know my anxiety is triggered, but I haven't had an attack yet. I'm still "sane."

I decide that I'll walk out of the yard all together.

Derek: Zi, wait.

He stops me and looks at me. He looks like he's panicking. His anger seems to have evaporated.

Me: What? I'm fine.

Derek: His eyes trail down my body.

Me: What?

Senior: Are you okay?

I look at them in confusion.

Me: What's going on?

I also look down and gasp as soon as I realise that I'm bleeding.

I push Derek away and look at all the blood that seems to be covering my grey leggings.

I'm confused.

INSERT 129 (Short Insert)

Derek is now panicking, dialling someone's number.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He grabs my arm and leads me to the car.

Senior: What's going on??

He's now on the phone.

Derek: I need you to go fetch Ziyanda's mom... No, Dean, go now.

He ends the call and then tries to let me get in the car.

Me: The bleeding is not that bad, relax.

Dean: Get in the fucken car!

I get in and sit, while he goes to his father and speaks to him for a minute. He then gets in the car and immediately drives off.

Derek: Are you in pain??

I shake my head.

Derek: Are you in fucken pain, Ziyanda?!

Me: No, Derek! No, I'm not in fucken pain! Now, would you stop shouting at me?!

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He then takes a deep breath and focuses on the road.

Derek: Are you still bleeding?

Me: I don't know...

I open the window and focus on the buildings we're driving past.

I hear him making calls and I instantly zone him out.

I didn't even realise that we had arrived at our doctor's practice.

I feel him shaking me, and I snap out of it. We get out of the car and he leads me inside.

Dr M looks at me, and I can tell that she's shocked and confused.

Dr: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

She glances at Derek.

Derek: There's no time to do all of this. Why the fuck is she bleeding?

Dr: Let's check you out...

Soon, I'm being taken to a private room and asked to take off my clothes...

Dr: First trimester miscarriages are caused by problems with the chromosomes of the fetus.

Derek: What the fuck do you mean? Did we not come here every fucken week to check on this baby? How did you not identify problems?

Dr: Our last check up was three weeks ago.

Dr sighs heavily and looks at me.

Dr: Chromosomes are blocks of DNA. They contain a detailed set of instructions that control a wide range of factors, from how the cells of the body develop, to what colour eyes the baby will have. Sometimes, something can go wrong at the point of conception and the fetus receives too many or not enough chromosomes. The reasons for this are often unclear, but it means the fetus won't be able to develop normally, resulting in a miscarriage.

As Derek continues questioning Dr M's credibility, I zone out their back and forth...

Now I'm just uncomfortable. I feel dirty.

As I snap out of it, I find Dr M staring at me softly.

Dr: I have to emphasise that it's not your fault... Additionally, this doesn't mean you won't be able to get another baby.

Where is Derek?

I look around.

Dr: He needed some fresh air.

I nod lightly.

Dr: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

Dr: Are you with me?

I nod.

She sighs and nods.

Dr: We've determined that you have a missed miscarriage. Here, the fetus dies, but the body doesn't recognize the pregnancy loss. As a result, the placenta may still continue to release hormones; hence you're still experiencing signs of pregnancy.

I keep quiet.

Dr: Through the ultrasound, we've just determined that there's no heartbeat...

Just then, Derek walks back in.

My mother and Dean walk in after him. They all sit and look at the doctor. Derek is avoiding my eyes. My mom looks blank, I can't read her. Dean looks concerned; he's also avoiding my eyes.

Dr: We have 3 options: 1. Expectant Management- wait for the tissue to pass naturally out of your womb. 2 Medical Management- take medication that causes the tissue to pass out of your womb. 3 Surgical Management- have the tissue surgically removed.

Mom: Please explain each option properly.

Dr nods lightly.

Dr: With Expectant Management, you have to wait 7-14 for the pregnancy tissue to pass naturally. If the pain and bleeding have lessened or stopped completely during this time, this means the miscarriage has finished.

There's complete silence.

Dr: With Medical Management, you have medication to remove the tissue. This involves taking tablets that cause the cervix to open, allowing the tissue to pass out. You'll then be sent home for the miscarriage to complete.

She looks at me.

Dr: In some cases, surgery is used to remove the remaining pregnancy tissue. We'll have immediate surgery if: 1 you experience continuous heavy bleeding. 2 There's evidence the pregnancy tissue has become infected. 3 Medication or waiting for the tissue to pass out naturally has been unsuccessful.

Mom: She'll take the expectant option, no medication and surgery.

I close my eyes and zone them out again as they continue having a Q&A session.

After a while, I feel my mom's hand on mine, and I open my eyes...

Dr: You'll experience symptoms similar to a heavy period, such as heavy cramping and heavy vaginal bleeding for up to three weeks. Take a pregnancy test after three weeks. If the test shows that you're still pregnant, call me immediately, so I can conduct further tests to ensure you don't have a molar pregnancy or ectopic pregnancy.

There's silence.

Dr: Please contact me immediately should your bleeding and pain become particularly heavy, or you develop high temperature. Additionally, if the bleeding and pain gets worse within the 7-14 days, this could mean that the miscarriage hasn't finished. In this case, we'll do another scan. After the scan, you may decide to either continue waiting for the miscarriage to occur naturally, or have drug treatment or surgery. If you want to continue to wait it out, I'll check your condition again up to 14 days later.

My mom nods.

Mom: We will do so.

Dr: I have given you all the information you need, however, please contact me should you have any concerns. I am always available.

Mom: Thank you.

My mom then looks at me.

Mom: I brought clean clothes.

I stand as the doctor and Dean walk out.

My mom takes out fresh underwear...

She and Derek watch as I place the long sanitary towel on my underwear.

Me: I can't use tampons?

Mom: Hai, Ziyanda.

I sigh as I finish getting dressed...

INSERT 130

We're now driving back to my parents' house.

The ride is completely silent. Dean is not with us now, he went back home after we finished at the clinic.

We eventually get to the house and make our way in. I go straight to the bathroom to take a hot bath. As I lay there, I close my eyes and feel myself doze off. I am eventually awakened by my mother, shaking me lightly.

Mom: Ziyanda.

I blink a couple of times and shiver, because the water is cold now. As soon as I stand, I groan.

The water is now bloody and my back is achy.

Mom: Phuma, so I can drain the water.

I nod lightly as I get up and dry myself.

I leave the bathroom and make my way to my bedroom, where I sit on the bed.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Zama. I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Zama: Hey, friend!

Me: Hey, unjani?

Zama: I'm great! So, I was thinking...

Me: Yes?

Zama: I want you to plan my baby shower!

Me: Isn't a baby shower supposed to be a surprise?

She laughs.

Zama: No! I want you to plan, Zi! Please!

Me: Uhm-

Zama: I'm not taking no for an answer! You can't show me the pictures of the proposal you planned for Dean and then not agree when I ask you to do the same shit for me! How could I resist??

I sigh.

Me: Okay then.

Zama: Yaas!

Me: Bye then.

Zama: We'll continue this conversation on Monday.

Me: Okay.

Zama: Are you okay?

Me: Yep, just tired.

Zama: Alright then, bye!

Me: Shap.

I hang up and stand as soon as I feel the bleeding. I wipe myself, lotion, and get dressed in my pyjamas. I walk out of the bedroom and find Derek sitting in the lounge with my mom. She seems to be comforting him.

I walk to the kitchen and find something to eat. She follows me and stares at me.

Mom: Baby, are you hungry?

Me: I'm sorted.

I walk back to my bedroom and get in bed. My back is suddenly achy and I feel uncomfortable.

It's now Monday, and before I could even get ready for work, my mom walked in and stopped me.

Me: I'm going to work.

Mom: No, you're not, Ziyanda.

Me: I'm not sick, I can function.

She looks at me softly.

Mom: Baby, you've been quiet since Saturday. I know you always need time to think things through, but this is too much...

Me: What's too much?

She keeps quiet.

Me: Stop trying to treat me like I'm disabled.

She tries to say something, but stops herself. She then walks out of the bedroom and I continue where I left off.

Lwazi insisted on traveling to school with me in an Uber, so I obliged.

Lwazi: Mommy, I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Lwazi: When are you getting married to Uncle D?

I frown and she giggles.

Lwazi: You guys are always together.

Me: What happened to wanting me all to yourself?

She laughs.

Lwazi: I'm just asking!

Me: So, you want me to get married?

She shakes her head dramatically.

Lwazi: I want you all to myself!

Me: Hmkay then...

Lwazi: Are you sick?

Me: I just have a really bad headache.

Lwazi: You must drink lots of water!

Me: Yes, ma'am...

We eventually get to school and I go straight to my class to prepare for my day. When it's time for assembly, Zama fetches me.

Zama: Dean is here, friend!

She goes on to tell me how she can't seem to get over his hotness.

Me: Focus on your pregnancy.

She laughs and we walk out. I see Derek and Dean standing a bit far from everyone. They seem to be engaging in a deep conversation, and Dean seems to be reprimanding Derek.

I stand next to my kids and Zama leads assembly.

After 20 minutes, we're done.

As I walk in with my kids, Dean says my name and I turn to look at him.

Dean: Can I have a word?

Me: I have a class.

Dean: I won't be long.

I tell my kids what to do and they walk in quietly. Thereafter, I follow Dean to Derek's office and close the door. Derek is sitting down.

I can't even describe how he is, because I've never seen him like this.

Dean: Why the fuck are both of you at work?

Me: Am I supposed to stay at home?

He looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: Are you kidding me?

Me: Dean, I have a class to teach.

He sighs loudly and I look at Derek. He hasn't looked at me.

Dean: Zi, come on...

He sounds defeated.

Just as I'm about to say something, Derek bursts out in loud sobs. Dean immediately rushes to where he's sitting and holds him.

As I'm about to walk to them, Derek stops sobbing and looks at me.

Derek: You must be thrilled.

I don't respond. I'm still processing what he said.

Dean: Dere-

Derek: You never wanted this baby to begin with...

Dean: Derek, stop.

Derek: Am I lying?

Dean groans in defeat.

Derek: You can't even pretend you cared, for my sake... I'm the one who always has to consider how you're feeling. You don't bother meeting me halfway.

Dean looks at me nervously.

I walk out and close the door lightly. I then walk to Camille's office and knock lightly.

I walk in and find her working.

Camille: Hey, Zi!

Me: Hey, how are you?

Camille: I'm well, thanks, and you?

Me: I'm well.

Camille: Have a seat.

I sit opposite her and she looks at me.

Me: I wanted to let you know that I'm resigning.

She blinks a couple of times, before staring at me in shock.

Camille: Excuse me?

Me: I'm resigning, with immediate effect.

Camille: Ziyanda!

I don't say anything.

Camille: What's going on? Are you unhappy? What triggered this sudden decision?

Me: It's not sudden.

She looks at me expectantly.

I don't say anything.

Camille: Have you been offered another job?

I shake my head.

Me: I need time off.

Camille: We're approaching the end of the term. You'll have time to regroup and rest.

I don't say anything.

Camille: I'm not going to let you do this. If you need time off, then I'll give you time off. These students cannot afford to lose you!

She sighs.

Camille: Think about it... If you still want to resign after vac, then we'll discuss it.

I don't say anything.

Camille: Please?

Me: Okay.

She smiles lightly.

Camille: Thank you.

Me: Okay.

I make my way to my classroom and find Dean there, my kids are working quietly.

He walks to me desk and clears his throat.

Dean: It's not about you...

His voice is low.

Me: Derek is grieving.

Dean: What about you?

Me: What about me?

He sighs.

Me: I'd like to teach, if you don't mind.

He scratches his head and looks at me.

Just then, I feel a sharp pain on my back and I gasp quietly.

Dean: Are you okay?

Me: Ya... Need the bathroom.

I get my bag, walk out and make my way to the bathroom.

I sit there and look at all these bloody clots on the pad... I quickly change it and throw away the used one.

Dean is still in my class, chatting to my kids.

Dean: Your kids are quite smart, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Yep.

He walks to me. He stares at me intently.

Dean: I have to go.

Me: Alright, bye.

He hesitates, but eventually walks out.

I continue teaching...

INSERT 131 (Unedited)

It's now Wednesday and I am making my way to work with Lwazi, when I get a call from Nomvuyo.

Me: So early in the morning?

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Aren't you tired of these cravings?

Me: Huh?

Nomvuyo: I just woke up now and guess what I'm craving?

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: Pickled fish.

Me: Pickled fish?

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I know!

Me: How random.

Nomvuyo: This pregnancy is getting on my nerves. I need it to end ASAP!

Me: Sorry...

Nomvuyo: Anyway, how are you? I haven't seen you in a while.

Me: I'm alright...

Nomvuyo: How's the pregnancy? Have the cravings started?

Me: I'm alright, hey...

Nomvuyo: Let me get going, Nyami's transport driver is busy giving me problems.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye, love.

She ends the call and I glance at Lwazi, who is sleeping at the back.

Eventually, we get to school and make our way in...

It's now lunchtime and I feel drained and lethargic. I haven't bled at all and I'm glad, because all that running up and down to the bathroom is quite tiring.

As I'm making my way back to the classroom, I find Dean there.

Dean: Hey.

He looks at me awkwardly.

Me: Hello.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Dean: I'm...

He sighs.

Dean: Ziyanda, I need you to-

I sigh.

Me: Is Derek in his office?

He nods.

I then begin walking towards the door.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I walk out and he follows me. I get to Derek's door and knock. I hear him say come in and I walk in, with Dean following me.

Derek looks up from his work and stops what he's doing. He seems shocked.

Dean closes the door.

There's a long silence... Many thoughts are racing through my mind, so I take a deep breath and try to gather these thoughts.

I take another deep breath and look at Derek.

Me: When I met you, I never, for one second, thought we'd develop a close relationship...

He stares at me.

Me: From the get go, it was very clear, and I mean beyond explicit, that I have mental problems... And just like everyone who comes into my life, you promised me that you would always have a deep sense of understanding towards the way I behave. There were many moments where I felt that we shouldn't continue developing this relationship, because I knew that it's not easy.

I stare at both of them.

Me: Unfortunately for me, I am not privileged like any of you to control my emotions. Believe me when I say I have tried to rationalise a lot of them, and do this and that, but unlike you, I am very very far from perfect.

Dean sits down.

Me: When I fell pregnant, I made it clear that I was not ready for a baby, and you, Derek, knew my reasons. We both knew that I was not mentally and emotionally ready to have a child. Heck, I'm still trying to control my own shit, and now I have to take care of another human? You tried to convince me that we'd be able to do it... I fought it for a very long time, but I eventually started opening up to it... With each passing day, I was able to accept that I was going to have a baby... I wasn't 100% there, but I was slowly making progress. Someone else looking from the outside may think I was being selfish or dramatic, but we both knew what I go through every single day. You're the only person, besides my parents and Niki, who get to see me when I am at my lowest: when I wake up and feel like life is not worth living; when I fuss over tiny mistakes that I make and blame myself; when I have horrible nightmares and hallucinations; or when I just want to shut out everyone and be in my own bubble.

I keep quiet and try to gather my thoughts.

Me: So why would you even bring up the fact that I initially didn't want this baby? Is this a way of you finding someone to blame for what happened? What exactly is your purpose of saying that?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: So, you're just going to dismiss all the progress that I made?

I sigh.

Me: You say I'm thrilled that this baby died...

I feel a mild pain hitting my back.

Me: You think I'm thrilled that every time I go to the bathroom to pee, I see bloody clots? Do you really think that it's thrilling to know that as I change a pad and throw away the used one, I'm actually throwing away a fetus? Every pain and every blood clot represents what was supposed to my child; do you honestly think I'm that cold-hearted that I'd find all of this enjoyable?

Dean looks down and I continue staring at Derek.

Me: Just because I'm not curled up in a bed, crying my lungs out, I'm heartless? Now, I'm forced to grieve a certain way, because that will make you feel better?

I swallow the lump forming in my throat.

Me: More than anything, this shows me just how misunderstood I am. As much as you try, you will never understand how it's like to be mentally oppressed by an illness you have no control over. Unfortunately, depression is not a switch I can play with, just because I have to accommodate people. Instead, I am the one who's suffering, because I have to accommodate it in my life forever. I don't get to choose when I want to deal with it...

He looks down.

Me: So, I apologise for being selfish, I really do. I apologise for not meeting your standards. I had no idea that you feel like I never meet you halfway... You've always been so vocal about understanding me and being patient with me, so I apologise for overusing all of your patience... Clearly you've run out of patience and I am here to tell you that you can walk away from me... I don't want to be with you when all I do is use up all your energy and push you to the edge. I don't have the right to expect that from you... I'd rather live knowing that my selfishness doesn't affect other people. I'll continue figuring out how to live with this disease, because it's obviously not going anywhere... Thankfully, my parents don't really have a choice to leave me, so I think they'll be around for a while... They won't minimise my actions to being dramatic or selfish... Had I known that today you'd be using my episodes as leverage to make a strong point, I'd have toned everything down... Unfortunately, because I don't know much about you and your life, I can't really turn around and use your troubles to make my points. I am obviously going to lose here, because I have been emotionally naked with

you, so you have some great points to make. Silly me didn't know this nakedness would come back to hit me like this.

I sigh.

Me: I have to constantly strengthen myself, because a child is literally removing him/herself out of my system for the next few weeks, so I apologise that I haven't shed a few tears... If there's a universal way of dealing with grieve, then I obviously missed it. I apologise for not processing this whole traumatic experience the same way as everyone else in the world. My body is not used to bleeding out children, so please forgive me for not making space for a few tears...

I clear my throat.

Me: But look on the bright side... When God closes the door, He opens a window... You have lost something this side, but gained something elsewhere... You're fortunate...

He stands.

Me: I am going to be deliberately selfish, and exclude myself from this situation now... Being numb at this moment, is what's keeping me alive. I can't afford to be an emotional mess, when I'm already suffering physically, so if you'll excuse me...

I turn and walk out of the door.

I go straight to my classroom, get my bag, and walk out, ignoring the crippling pains that seem to be approaching.

INSERT 132

It's been a full week since the doctor told us about the miscarriage. The bleeding isn't as crazy as I thought it would be- which makes me think I still have a long way to go.

As I'm getting ready in my room, my mom walks in and smiles.

Mom: Are you ready?

Me: Almost done.

She nods and walks out, closing the door.

After 15 minutes, I finish up and go to the lounge, where I find Derek sitting. I haven't seen him since that day in the office. I decided I'd stop going to work... Schools close in couple of days, so all should be well.

Me: Hi.

Derek: Hi.

I walk out and they follow shortly after. My dad has been avoiding me at all costs and I'm glad.

We get in the car and drive off to see Dr M.

When we get there, she does the usual tests and tells me that the miscarriage is not done. I still need to wait it out...

Mom: Is the weight loss normal? I'm worried that she's losing too much weight.

Dr M looks at me softly.

Dr M: It's normal... As long as you're still keeping healthy, you should be fine.

My mom looks at me worriedly.

Mom: Alright then.

Dr M: I'll see you again next week.

Mom: Thank you.

We make our way out.

Mom: I have to meet someone close by... Derek, I'll catch a taxi.

Derek: I don't mind dropping you off.

My mom shakes her head and smiles.

Mom: You can take Zi back home, I'll be back later.

Derek nods lightly and gets in the car.

Mom: See you later, baby.

Me: Okay.

She walks off as I get in the car.

Me: I'd like to get something to eat, if you don't mind.

Derek: Sure.

He drives to Mike's Kitchen and we get a table. We place our order and the waiter walks off.

Derek: How are you?

Me: Could be better.

He nods and keeps quiet.

The waiter brings our drinks and we focus on them for some time.

Derek: I looked for you on Wednesday.

Me: I went home.

Derek: I figured.

Me: How are you?

He scratches his chin thoughtfully.

Derek: Emotional.

I nod and we're silent once again.

Derek: So, where do we stand?

Me: I stand by what I said on Wednesday.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I'd rather we go our separate ways to avoid more misunderstandings and hurt.

He nods and keeps quiet.

Our food eventually comes and we begin eating. His phone rings and I see that it's Khwezi calling. He ends the call and focuses on his food. Seconds later, it rings again, and this time it's Busi.

He switches the phone off.

Me: You can answer it.

He shakes his head and focuses on his food.

After a while, we finish eating.

Derek: Would you like some dessert?

Me: No thanks.

He orders malva pudding for himself.

After a while, the waiter brings it and he focuses on it.

He finishes eating and pays the bill. We then make our way out.

Derek: I need to get something from my loft in Maboneng. Do you mind?

Me: No.

He drives off.

Just then, my phone rings, and I see Niki's name. I answer it.

Niki: Finally!

Me: Sorry.

Niki: What's going on? Why are you ignoring me?

Me: I had a miscarriage.

Derek looks at me sharply and Niki gasps.

Niki: What??

Me: I lost the baby. I started bleeding last Saturday and went to the doctor.

Niki: Zi, no...

She sighs heavily.

Me: Yep.

Niki: So, what's happening now?

Me: I have to wait it out.

Niki: The bleeding?

Me: Yes.

Niki: Why didn't you opt for the surgery?

Me: My mom doesn't want me to do it.

She sighs.

Niki: Where are you? I need to give you a big hug.

Me: I could use one...

Niki: I'm so sorry friend.

I keep quiet.

I don't know what it is that triggers it, but I start sobbing.

Niki: I know it doesn't make sense right now, but God knows what He's doing. This is not your fault, Zi. I hope you know that.

I bite my lower lip. I need her to continue, because her voice is really comforting.

Niki: I'm here for you. I don't like speaking to you over the phone, so please let me know when you're at home.

Me: Okay.

Niki: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Niki: Bye, then.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and wipe my tears. Derek speeds off and soon, we arrive at his loft and he insists on me coming in with him. We get there and I sit on the couch, while he goes to the bedroom.

He comes back.

He walks to the couch and sits next to me.

Derek: Do you mind giving me a few minutes of your attention?

Me: Sure.

Derek: I mean your undivided attention, Ziyanda.

I switch off the TV and look at him. I hadn't realised just how bad he looks. Do I also look like this? He looks like he's carrying the world on his shoulders.

Derek: Let's get one thing clear...

He looks at me sternly.

Derek: I'll never let you walk away from me without fighting.

I try to say something, but he stops me.

Derek: As emotional as I am right now, I'm still rational enough to know that it would be foolish to not fight for us. We've come a long way, and I'm too invested to give up on you.

He sighs and scratches his head.

Derek: I don't know where I'm at emotionally. I'm a mess. I don't think I've ever been this hurt or angry.

Me: Angry at whom?

Derek: God, the Universe, my family, Busi, myself, and you...

I keep quiet.

Derek: I'm angry that God would even do such a thing to the people He claims to love and protect. I don't get the logic of this one bit. One minute, we're blessed with something so precious, the next that thing is snatched from us... I don't get it...

He rubs his eyes.

Derek: I had so many plans... I had so many hopes and dreams for our next chapter, and I'm fucken pissed that this shit had to happen. I don't get it, Ziyanda. I don't fucken get it.

He sighs.

Derek: And then there's my family and Busi... I will never forgive them for this shit. It turns out Khwezi knew about this shit for a long time now. I want to cut all of them out of my life, but I obviously can't because of this new development.

He looks down.

Derek: And then there's you...

He looks at me.

Derek: Yes, I'm angry at you... I know it doesn't make sense, but I am... I'm angry that you're pulling away from me when I need you the most. I'm not sure whether you need me or not, but I need you. I feel like I'm drowning, and I know for a fact that you're all I need right now.

He sighs heavily and chuckles lightly.

Derek: It's scary how much I love you... I think you underestimate the impact you have, and how much you mean to me. I'm pissed that we're not able to go through this together. I know we deal with shit differently, but surely I'm not selfish in wanting you by my side right now?

We're silent for a while.

Derek: I apologise for being harsh and inconsiderate. Yes, I don't fully understand what you go through, but I'm more than willing to unlearn and relearn. I would never use your troubles as leverage to make strong points in an argument, Ziyanda. I'm sorry if that's the impression I gave you. You also need to understand that I'm grieving, so my rationality is a bit shaky.

He gets closer to me and takes my hands.

Derek: I need you, Ziyanda. Right now, I'm hurt, lonely, confused and pissed as fuck. I'm fucken emotional and I need you by my side. So, when you start mentioning separating, you're actually making it worse. I don't like this distance between us. There's no way I'm going to let go of you. If I have to spend the rest of my life fighting and proving how much I love you, then so be it.

I sigh heavily and eventually start sobbing.

He pulls me and wraps his arms around me...

INSERT 133 (Short Insert)

When I wake up, Derek's arms are wrapped around me a bit too tight. I try to remove myself, but he groans sleepily and continues holding on to me.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: I need to pee.

He groans.

Me: Ngidi.

He opens his eyes and yawns.

Me: I need to pee.

He loosens his grip on me.

Derek: Don't run away.

I get out of the bed and make my way to the bathroom. I pee, and as I wash my hands, I realise just how drained I look. I'm losing weight, and not in a nice way. My face is pale and I look dry.

I finish up and go back to the bedroom. As soon as I get back in bed, Derek wraps his arms around me again and I sigh in defeat.

I am awakened by mild pains in my abdomen area. I groan heavily and Derek instantly wakes up.

Derek: Baby.

I curl up and squeeze my tummy.

Derek: Zi.

I begin sobbing quietly as I listen and process this excruciating pain. As it intensifies, I feel myself bleeding.

Derek: Should we go see Dr M?

I shake my head and shut my eyes.

Me: I need a hot water bottle.

He looks around, panicking.

Derek: I don't have one. I'll buy one quic-

Me: Just pour boiling water in an empty bottle.

Derek: Okay.

He rushes out as I continue curling up and groaning.

After a while, he comes back with a bottle and hands it to me.

Me: I need a small towel.

He gets one and I cover the bottle with the towel. He watches as I place the bottle on my abdomen area.

After a few minutes, the pain subsides and I sigh.

Me: I'm okay.

He sits on the edge of the bed and stares down at me.

Me: I'm okay, Derek.

I stand and walk to the lounge to get my bag. I then take out a pad and walk to the bathroom. He follows me and watches as I change the pad.

As soon as he sees the bloody pad, he takes it.

Me: Derek-

He shakes his head and I leave him alone. I wipe myself, before putting on the clean one. I wash my hands and take the pad from him. I roll it and use some tissue to cover it. Thereafter, I flush it and turn to look at him.

Me: I'm sorry.

I step closer to him and he wraps his arms around me and instantly starts crying. It's not his usual quiet sobs; he's letting it all out this time around.

I wrap my arms around him and we stand there for what seems like forever. I don't think I have it in me to cry more.

I don't know when or how, but we find ourselves sitting on the ground. The tiles are making my pains worse, but I ignore them.

Derek: This is fucked up.

I sigh.

Derek: I don't know how I'm going to get through this. I've never felt this defeated.

I want to speak, but I don't know what to say. I don't have it in me to comfort him, because I'm also confused and defeated.

He then looks at me.

Derek: Thank you for staying.

Me: Well, it's not like you gave me a choice.

He chuckles and looks at me.

Derek: Do you see yourself dating someone else besides me?

I frown.

Derek: I'm just asking.

Me: I don't know...

Derek: Hmm.

We're silent for a while.

Derek: How are your pains?

Me: The tiles are killing me.

He immediately stands and pulls me up.

Derek: Why didn't you say anything?

Me: You were crying your lungs out.

Derek: Mxm.

We walk to the bedroom and I get back in bed.

Derek: You've lost a lot of weight.

Me: I look horrible.

Derek: You do.

Me: Hey!

Derek: You know I love your curves...

Me: Mxm.

I take the hot water bottle and give it to him.

Me: Please massage my back, it hurts.

He nods as I reposition and lie on my tummy. He pulls up my top and begins massaging my back gently. He then places the bottle.

Derek: Does this help?

I nod.

He continues massaging me until I doze off into quite a deep sleep.

When I wake up, I can smell Derek's food. I get out of bed and go to the bathroom and chuckle when I see packets of pads neatly placed next to the toilet rolls. I take one and change the pad I have. I then walk out and make my way to the kitchen, and sure enough, I find him cooking.

Derek: Dinner will be ready in a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

I go to the lounge and sit. I take my phone and see that I have missed calls from Niki and my mother. I text both of them, and let them know that I am okay.

Minutes later, Derek comes with a tray of food.

My stomach instantly grumbles and he chuckles.

Derek: Right on time, huh?

Me: Whatever.

He fetches his plate and we begin eating.

Me: Can I switch on the TV?

He frowns.

Me: Angithi you said you want my undivided attention.

Derek: Very funny.

I switch on the TV and play an episode of Basketball Wives.

It's now around 7pm, and I am full.

Derek: Are you ready to go home?

Me: I'd like to go out for a drink.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I'm not pregnant anymore, Derek. I'm sure I can drink now.

He sighs.

Me: You can stay.

He shakes his head and stands.

Derek: Asambe.

I stand as well.

Derek: So, we're going to go out looking like this?

Me: We can't be that bad...

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Are you trying to charm girls?

Derek: Angithi I'm single.

I leave him there and go to the bathroom, while he laughs.

It's now around 8pm and we're heading to Shakers.

As soon as we get there, we look at each other and shake our heads. It's so packed, that one can't even take 2 steps without bumping into someone. We then walk to Lenins, which is more peaceful. We get a table outside and I order a mojito, while he gets whiskey.

As we're chatting, we're interrupted by someone.

The Worm, Siya, stands there.

Siya: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hello, Siya.

He looks at Derek.

Siya: Long time, buddy.

Derek doesn't respond.

Siya: How are you? I thought you didn't like Mabo?

I don't respond.

He then realises that he's unwanted, and eventually walks away.

I look at Derek and roll my eyes.

Derek: You used to fuck that?

Me: Wow.

He shakes his head disapprovingly and I grunt.

Me: Mxm.

After three mojitos, I'm beyond tipsy and Derek is acting strong, but he's also a bit woozy.

As we stagger back to his loft, we almost get mugged, but a security guard intervenes and we literally jog off.

As soon as we get to the loft, we pass out on the couch...

INSERT 134

We're now with Dr M, and Derek is holding my hand.

Dr M: The miscarriage is done.

I sigh and close my eyes.

I don't know how I feel. I'm relieved, but sad at the same time. I'm relieved that I won't go through the intense bleeding and pains, but I'm sad that I've lost a child. I'm sad, because this was a traumatic experience. It's going to take a very long time for me to accept that this happened to me. 90% of me is still in denial. I haven't fully registered what happened.

I begin sobbing and my mom stands and wraps her arms around me. I cry for a very long time till I doze off.

When I wake up, I'm still in a private room. I blink a couple of times and find Derek sitting close by.

Derek: Baby.

I yawn and sit up.

Derek: Dr M said you must take these tablets for your headache.

Me: Okay.

He hands them to me, and gives me a glass of water.

Me: Thank you.

I get up from the bed, and as I'm about to put on my shoes, he pulls me till our bodies are pressed against each other. He wraps his arms around me and our faces touch.

Derek: I'm sorry.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I'm not going anywhere, okay?

I nod and wrap my arms around him. We stand there for a long time, till the door opens and my mom walks in. He kisses my forehead and lets go of me.

Mom: Sit down; I need to talk to you.

Me: Is everything okay?

She nods as Derek and I sit.

She looks at us sternly.

Mom: I am very proud of how you two have handled yourselves. It may not make sense to other people, but you seem to know each other very well.

I glance at Derek.

Mom: This is not going to be easy. You still have a very long way to go, but I have faith that you'll be fine.

Why is my mom saying all of this? Has she been observing Derek and me for the last two months?

Mom: The last two months have been challenging, and I'm grateful that Derek is stubborn, and never backs down when you push him away, Ziyanda.

Derek chuckles and I roll my eyes.

Mom: That makes me feel good as a mother. I'm glad that my one and only daughter is in safe hands.

Derek: Thank you.

She nods lightly.

Mom: Let's go.

We stand and I put on my shoes. We walk out and say goodbye to Dr. M. We make our way to the car and my mom asks Derek to drop her off somewhere. Once we drop her off, Derek drives to his place.

I've been staying with my parents for the past two months. Even though Derek and I are working on things, I still want space. I also resigned from the school. Camille tried to convince me otherwise, but I had already made up my mind. I just want to take a couple of months off and find myself again- and that means meeting up with Melinda regularly. Once I'm emotionally stable, I'll get a job somewhere different. Surprisingly, Lwazi didn't take it badly. She has settled in quite nicely and made good friends, so I'm the least of her worries. Derek, on the other hand, also left the school. He's been busy with his school, and now that the property has been bought, he's busy with renovations and all that other shit. I've been helping him...

With regard to Busi and that situation, Derek said he would deal with it once we were fine... He put everything on pause...

So yes, I'm unemployed; I've been living with my parents, and meeting up with Derek on the weekends. I've also been meeting up with Melinda.

Derek: Do you mind if I drive to Dean's place first?

Me: No.

I haven't seen Dean in a long time. He's been calling and checking up on me, and I'm glad that he respects my space. I decided that I don't want Derek's crew to know about the pregnancy and miscarriage. I'd rather they find out when I've healed properly, that way their sympathy won't really be triggering.

We get to Dean and Nolwazi's new house, and make our way to the lounge.

Thankfully, the megabytes are with their grandparents, so I won't be listening to Simo's loud and traumatising cries.

Nolwazi: Zizi!

She walks to me and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: It's been so long!

Me: I know...

Nolwazi: You've lost so much weight.

Me: Hate it.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay...

Derek seems to have disappeared.

Nolwazi: Are you sure?

I sigh.

Me: Well...

She looks at me intently.

Me: I was pregnant and I had a miscarriage.

She looks at me in shock.

I thought Dean may have told her during their pillow talk... So, Dean is also trustworthy?

Nolwazi: What??

I tell her everything and she gasps.

Nolwazi: Oh, Ziyanda. I'm so sorry.

I sigh.

Me: Thanks.

Nolwazi: Shit. That's really fucked up.

I nod and we sit.

Me: I need advice.

Nolwazi: Okay.

She looks at me intently.

Me: How do you suggest I deal with Derek's ex?

She sighs.

Me: You've been in a similar position, where Kwanele's mother hated you, and did all these crazy things to get rid of you... How did you cope?

She sighs and bites her lower lip.

Nolwazi: I think your situation is different, because your man is willing to fight for you. Kwanele didn't even attempt to stop what happened.

I nod.

Nolwazi: So, you're at an advantage, because Derek is on your side, and he has made that absolutely clear.

Me: But still...

She smiles.

Nolwazi: Busi has no power here. She thinks she has power, but she doesn't. You also need to show her how strong your unit is with noNkanyezi. Don't allow them to come in-between you two.

I sigh.

Nolwazi: Busi is a random ex that is very dizzy. Don't even allow such a non-factor to ruin your life. I know the likes of her.

I chuckle.

Nolwazi: Fight for your relationship. Don't blame Derek for any of this, because just like you, he also had no idea that he has a child with Busi. Khwezi and the minion are using this to get you to run. Mother-in-laws are pathetic yazi...

She hisses.

Nolwazi: If I could go back in time, I would gladly slap Thenjiwe a few times.

Me: Kwanele's mother?

She nods.

Me: But, you handled yourself well.

She nods.

Nolwazi: My dignity is important, at the end of the day. Don't go around screaming and trying to prove your importance. You are important, in fact, you're very important in Derek's eyes, so why try to prove your importance to anyone else? Don't allow them to control your reactions. Stay calm at all times, that will terrify them.

I nod thoughtfully.

She opens up her arms and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: I know you can do this. I've seen the feisty side of you.

Me: My feisty side is too extreme.

She laughs.

Me: It's either I'm an emotionless robot, or a crazy person.

We laugh.

Nolwazi: Call me anytime. I've been through my fair share of relationship drama.

Me: Thank you.

Just then, Derek and Dean walk to the lounge.

Before I can even control myself, I'm already rushing to Dean. I didn't realise I missed him this much.

He opens his arms and I squeeze him.

Dean: Look what the wind blew in...

Me: Mxm.

Dean: You've been acting very fresh lately.

Me: Whatever.

Dean: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I'll gain my weight back!

Dean: Please do. Skinny is not for you.

Me: Argh.

He chuckles and hugs me again.

Dean: I missed you.

Me: Of course. Who wouldn't?

Dean: Haiké.

I smile.

Dean: Apparently you're unemployed?

Me: Yes.

Dean: So, you've officially become a gold digger?

Me: I guess.

I glance at Derek and he chuckles.

Nolwazi: I was about to dish up lunch. Want to join us?

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Dean: Of course, they're joining us. Look at Ziyanda... Poor girl looks hungry.

Nolwazi: Langa!

He laughs as he wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: How I've missed The Great Ziyanda of the Dlamini.

Me: Mxm.

We all walk to the kitchen...

INSERT 135

Derek: So, you're not sleeping over?

Me: No.

He sulks.

Me: Derek, you and I are still roaming around with an undefined relationship.

Derek: The fuck??

I chuckle.

Derek: You must be crazy.

Me: Just take me home, please.

He groans as he changes direction. Nolwazi's food was so delicious, that Dean even packed a skhaftin for me.

Me: I need to gain weight.

Derek: Don't worry about that...

I look at him questioningly.

Derek: The happiness I will bring to your life will bring back your curves.

Me: Wow! Egotistical much?

He laughs.

Derek: Give me 2 weeks. You'll be back to your usual self.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: Dean likes exaggerating. You don't look horrible.

Me: Can you imagine what my neighbours are saying? I'm sure they've concluded that iqhoks has finished me.

Derek: Qhoks?

Me: The three sisters!

Derek: What??

Me: Chive!

Derek: HIV?

Me: Yes!

He bursts out in laughter and looks at me in shock.

Derek: What the fuck?

I sigh in defeat.

Me: I'm sure they've spread so many rumours about me. Futhi they've seen your crew's cars driving in and out of our yard. I'm sure bayasho nje ukuthi I'm a hoe and now my hoe tendencies have caught up with me.

He continues laughing.

Derek: That's why I'd never survive in the township. Too much shit going on.

Me: Mxm.

We eventually get to my parents' house and I say goodbye to him...

It's now Wednesday and Derek insists on meeting up with me. I'm waiting for him to come fetch me.

My dad and I ended up having a proper conversation about the miscarriage, and it's safe to say he's deeply affected. He's assured me that he'll be fine though, so I've been giving him space.

I get in Derek's car and he drives off.

Derek: I think it's time I teach you how to drive.

Me: I'm really not interested. I got my Learner's and I think that's enough.

He shakes his head disapprovingly.

Me: Where are you taking me?

Derek: You'll see.

We get to Botanical Garden and I chuckle when I see the set up.

Me: Are picnics our thing now?

Derek: I think so.

Me: This is cute.

Derek: I know.

We sit and he pours us champagne.

Me: Thanks.

I take a sip and pull a face. I'm really not a champagne person yazi. I drink it once in a while...

Derek: So, it's clear that I have to beg you again to be my girlfriend.

Me: Beg?

Derek: Let's just call a spade a spade: you love being begged.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Uthanda ukuncengwa.

Me: Wow!

He looks at me blankly and I roll my eyes.

Derek: So, I'll put in the work...

Me: It will take more than a lousy picnic.

Derek: Lousy? Ouch.

I giggle.

Me: I'm an expensive whore... I keep saying this.

He chuckles.

Derek: I still feel bad for how messed up your birthday weekend was. You did the most for me when it was my birthday, but I failed to do the same when it was yours.

Me: I even forgot about that.

He sighs.

Derek: I've put you through a lot.

Me: I've also put you through the most.

He pulls me closer to him. I'm now kneeling in-between his legs.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

We chuckle.

Derek: Please be my person again?

I look at him thoughtfully.

Derek: Pretty please?

Me: I'll get back to you. Let me think about it.

Derek: Ah yabona ke.

I laugh and he smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: It's been a while since I've seen you smile sincerely.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: I'm serious.

He plants a kiss on my nose and I back off.

Derek: Wow.

Me: I'm a single virgin. Stay away from me, Devil!

I sit down again and take a samoosa.

Me: Melinda wants to meet you.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: What?

Derek: She wants to meet me?

I nod.

Me: She wants to do a few sessions with us.

He sighs.

Me: You don't have t-

Derek: Tell me when...

I smile and nod.

Me: Okay.

Derek: As long as she doesn't feed you nonsense.

Me: Nonsense?

Derek: That you and I don't belong together.

I chuckle.

Me: She never tells me what to do. She helps me makes sense of my life.

Derek: Hmm.

I throw an olive at him and he ducks.

Derek: You can't be wasting food!

Me: Gosh, I'll stuff my face, then.

We continue chatting...

About 3 hours later, we're done and making our way to his apartment. He managed to convince me to sleepover at his place.

As we approach his door, we see Khwezi and Busi there.

He immediately takes my hand and holds it.

I want to turn and run away, but the notorious Petty seems to have risen. Where has she been all this time?

We get to the door.

Khwezi: Wow!

Busi is staring at me. I open the door and walk in. Just as Khwezi is about to follow, Derek blocks her way.

Derek: Uyaphi?

Khwezi: Ye wena, Nkanyezi!

He looks at her blankly.

Me: Just let them in.

He turns and looks at me in disbelief. I shrug and walk off.

As I'm in the bathroom, I hear Khwezi scolding Derek.

I sit on the toilet seat for a while, gathering my thoughts.

Eventually, I get up and make my way to the lounge, where everyone is.

I find Busi sitting on my usual spot.

Khwezi: When are you going to see your son, Derek?

Me: When it has been confirmed that the child is his.

They all stare at me in shock.

Me: What will not happen is you thinking it's okay to waltz in here as you please. I live here now, so I have every right to ask you to leave.

Khwezi tries to say something.

Me: No, Khwezi, I'm tired of hearing your voice. You seem to be so involved in other people's business, that you forget that not all of us are like Busi over here: weak and spineless. I've taken a lot

of nonsense from you, Khwezi, and it ends today. The next time you pitch here, it's either you have the DNA results, or I call the police and they'll escort you out of here.

Khwezi: What?! Derek are yo-

Derek: Shut up.

She looks at him in shock.

Me: I'm tired of this back and forth. Get the DNA done, so we can find a way forward.

I look at Busi.

Me: I just fail to understand how you can raise a child for over 2 years, while lying about he's true identity. It doesn't even make sense to me, but that's a story for another day.

Busi grunts.

Me: Now, if you don't mind, please leave my space and never come back.

I look at Derek and I see his hidden smile. I then look at Khwezi, who is breathing heavily.

Me: I've been very quiet... I've been disrespected by you, and I'm tired. I still respect you as an adult, so I won't stoop as low as you, when it comes to getting my point across.

I then look at Busi.

Me: Get the tests done.

Busi: Derek, why would you allow her to address me like this?

Derek: Busi, in the grand scheme of things, who exactly are you?

There's an awkward silence. Damn, Derek.

Derek: You seem to overestimate your value in my life.

Wait, did he just use my line? I should copyright this shit.

Derek: I don't give a shit about you. I've set up an appointment with my doctor. We're doing this DNA, and if the child is mine, I'll do what I have to...

He then stares at both of them.

Derek: And for both your sakes, that child better be mine...

Khwezi: Are you threatening me?!

Derek: Get out.

Busi takes her bag and storms out. Khwezi looks at me angrily and hisses.

Khwezi: You'll get what's coming to you.

Me: Hmkay.

Khwezi: You couldn't even carry a child for him; do you really think that you'll manage to keep Derek to yourself forever?

Me: Well, if you could keep your husband for this long, without giving him biological children, then surely there's hope for me?

Yoh, I almost got killed.

Derek literally had to drag her out of the place.

I sit down and sigh heavily.

Derek comes back after a while and sits next to me.

Derek: Are you okay?

I nod.

Me: I need some wine.

He nods as he walks off and I sink on the couch...

INSERT 136

Two weeks have passed and Derek and I just came back from visiting Xolani. He eventually agreed to go to rehab, and he seems to be doing fine.

Derek and I are now on our way to meet with Melinda for our fourth session. Derek seems to like her very much.

Derek: I am looking forward to this session. Melinda said-

Me: Melinda this, Melinda that. Yoh, ngaze ngafa.

He chuckles.

Derek: Melinda said we're going to focus on transparency.

Me: Hmm.

He smiles as he focuses on the road.

Me: You're not transparent though.

He sighs.

Derek: That might change.

Me: Hmm.

We eventually get there, and make our way to Melinda's "office."

Melinda: Hello!

Derek: Hi, Melinda.

Derek smiles warmly and they shake hands.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug.

Derek and I then sit and she also sits opposite us.

Melinda: Today, I'd like you to tell each other how you are, instead of telling me.

Derek chuckles and I try not to roll my eyes.

He seems to admire Melinda. Everything she says is pure gold to Derek.

Melinda: I'll give you two minutes. So, Ziyanda, you'll tell Derek what it's like to be in your body today. Derek, you will do the same.

We both nod and look at each other.

Derek: Would you like to start?

Me: Why don't you start?

He chuckles and sighs.

Derek: What is it like being in my body today?

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I think it's calming... I'm in a neutral mood.

I nod lightly.

Derek: And you?

Me: I'm also in a neutral mood today.

Derek: What a coincidence.

He chuckles.

Melinda: So, you're both in a similar state of mind today?

Derek and I nod.

Melinda: Today, I want us to focus on a number of things, transparency being one of them...

I look at Derek.

Melinda: Ziyanda?

She looks at me knowingly. She already knows that I have something to say.

Me: I think Derek has double standards.

Melinda: How so?

Me: He expects me to be open and honest, yet he isn't.

Melinda: He's not open and honest?

Me: He's honest. However, he doesn't let me in.

Melinda: Let you in, how?

Me: He knows everything about me. I got into this relationship thinking I'm the one who is closed off, but that is not the case. I don't know Derek to the core. I don't know his inner dialogue: what scares him, what ticks him off. He hasn't exposed himself fully to me.

Melinda then looks at Derek.

Melinda: Is this true, Derek?

Derek glances at me before saying yes.

Melinda: Are you closed off?

Derek: Yes.

Melinda: Are you closed off with everyone, or Ziyanda specifically?

Derek: It's mostly everyone.

Melinda: Do you have someone in your life that you've exposed yourself to?

Derek: Yes.

I look at him.

Me: Is it Dean?

Derek: Yes.

I hiss.

Melinda: Is there a problem?

Me: This is what I have told Derek... I will not get back with him unless he's willing to open up. I don't think it's fair that the transparency is not expected on both sides.

Melinda: Derek?

Derek: It's not that easy.

Melinda: Why do you find it difficult?

Derek: I'm not trusting.

Me: So, you don't trust me?

Derek: It's not that I don't trust you...

Me: Then what's the problem?

He sighs.

He seems defeated.

I always let it slide, but not this time. I want Melinda to come for him. This is unacceptable.

Melinda: I am going to tell you about the Johari Window Model.

She draws a four-square grid.

Melinda: The Johari Window model is a simple and useful tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness, communication, and mutual understanding between individuals within a group. It's usually used in businesses, but I'd like to tell you about it, because we can also apply it here.

She points at the grid.

Melinda: As you can see, there are four blocks here. They all represent different things. The top left block represents the arena. Here, we have all the things a person knows about themselves, and what is known by others as well. This block is called the arena, because it is open for all. This is the information about the person - behaviour, attitude, feelings, emotion, knowledge, experience, skills, views, etc - known by the person ('the self') and known by the group ('others').

She writes all of this on the top left block.

Melinda: Next, we have the blind spot, on the top right block. What do you think it is?

Derek: What's known to others, but not known to self?

Melinda: Yes. This includes things we don't know about ourselves, but are known to other people.

She looks at me.

Melinda: How do you think we can find out what others know about us?

Me: Ask them.

She nods.

Melinda: This is where open and honest communication is vital. The only way we can find out what others know about us is through feedback, constructive feedback. Asking others will help you find out some things about yourself. You might be doing things you don't know, so communicating with others will enlighten you on people's perceptions of you.

Derek and I nod.

Melinda: Then we have the bottom left block... Ziyanda, what do you think happens here?

Me: Maybe, what I know about myself, that others don't know?

She nods.

Melinda: Spot on. This block is called the facade. This is what is known to ourselves but kept hidden from, and therefore unknown, to others. This hidden or avoided self represents information, feelings, etc, anything that a person knows about him/herself, but which is not revealed or is kept hidden from others. The hidden area could also include sensitivities, fears, hidden agendas, manipulative intentions, secrets - anything that a person knows but does not reveal, for whatever reason.

We nod.

Melinda: Then lastly, we have the unknown in the bottom right block. This block contains information, feelings, abilities, aptitudes, experiences etc, that are unknown to the person him/herself and unknown to others in the group. These unknown issues take a variety of forms: they can be feelings, behaviours, attitudes, capabilities, aptitudes, which can be quite close to the surface, and which can be positive and useful, or they can be deeper aspects of a person's personality, influencing his/her behaviour to various degrees.

She writes down all of this.

Melinda: Now, it is very important to note that we should all aim to have more information on the arena block. The "arena" block represents openness. It means what we know about ourselves is also known to others. This leaves little room for misunderstandings about our intentions.

She then stares at us and allows us to process the information.

Melinda: Any questions?

I shake my head and we stare at Derek.

Derek: Does this mean I have a lot of shit under the Facade block?

Melinda nods.

Me: You do. A lot of things are only known by you, and I'm in the dark. I don't know if you're intentionally keeping me in the dark or what.

Derek: It's not intentional.

I sigh in defeat.

Melinda: Why are you so frustrated, Ziyanda?

Me: Our relationship has the potential to be great, but because there's a lot of shit I don't know about him, we're at a standstill.

Melinda nods.

Melinda: It's going to be a long process.

Me: And, until Derek is willing to put in the work, him and I will remain stagnant.

Derek chuckles quietly.

Melinda: Are you giving him an ultimatum?

I nod.

Melinda: So you two haven't been together since the miscarriage?

I nod.

Melinda: How do you feel about what Ziyanda is saying?

Derek: I hear her...

Melinda nods expectantly.

Derek: I'll try.

Melinda nods knowingly.

Melinda: It's important for you to work at your own pace, and not rush things. This is a long process.

She looks at me.

Melinda: The Patience Tool will come in handy.

Me: I've been very patient.

Derek: But, you're making it seem like the patience is running out.

Me: Well...

Melinda: Your patience is running out?

I sigh.

Me: It's also not easy being in a relationship with a person who's closed-off. I don't know him as much I should.

Derek stands and excuses himself. He walks out and I stare at Melinda.

Me: He's angry.

Melinda: How do you know?

Me: I know.

She nods lightly.

Me: But, I think this is the push he needs. I need him to feel uncomfortable. He must be in touch with his feelings. I don't want to end up feeling like I'm sleeping with a robot. I'm a very emotional person, and Derek is the complete opposite. However, because we're in a relationship, he needs to find a way to broaden his "arena" in order for us to build a deeper connection.

Melinda nods.

Derek eventually comes back and Melinda concludes the session.

I bet he doesn't like Melinda now, huh? Uzoba strength.

We're now driving.

Derek: Are you hungry?

Me: Not really.

Derek: Well, I am..

He changes direction and drives to one of his favourite restaurants.

We get there and get a table.

Me: So, are you going to be grumpy for the rest of the day?

He groans.

Me: Melinda is just trying to help.

I imitate him.

Me: Melinda is great. Melinda is so different and she-

Derek: Okay, I get it!

I stop and chuckle.

Me: It's all part of the process. There comes a time in your life when you have to face the demons you've spent most of your time avoiding...

He scratches his chin and sighs.

Me: Part of the process...

Derek: And until I've faced these demons, you and I will remain like this?

Me: Yep.

He hisses and I smile.

Me: If you want me, all of me, then you must put in the work. I'm an expensive whore...

He chuckles.

Just then, I hear murmurs.

Out of nowhere, people start singing Happy Birthday.

I turn around.

Me: The fuck?

Dean, Nolwazi, Nomvuyo, Liwa, Zimkitha, Niki and my parents are all here.

They walk to the table and finish up singing.

Dean: Happy Belated Birthday, Dlamini.

I look at them in disbelief.

Nomvuyo: Let's go to our table...

She pulls me and leads me to a huge circular table that has been set up...

INSERT 137

Me: What's happening?

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Nomvuyo: We know you don't like surprises, but we don't really care.

Me: Wow.

We all sit.

Mom: I told them you'd go crazy.

I take a deep breath.

Derek touches me hand and brushes it. I glance at him. He knows what's going through my mind.

Me: You're annoying.

Derek: Write Melinda a letter, I'm sure you'll feel better afterwards.

My jaw drops and he chuckles.

He leans closer to me and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Ngeke ngizwe ngawe.

I push him away and he continues chuckling.

I look at my dad.

Me: Did mom drag you here?

Dad: Believe it or not, I was looking forward to this.

I frown.

Dad: It's good to interact with this side of the world once in a while.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Thanks for bringing the chicken.

Me: Chicken?

Mom: Vuvu seems to be obsessed with your dad's chicken. She asked for a delivery.

Me: Gosh.

I listen to them make fun of me for a while.

We're served our first course and we begin eating.

Zimkitha: You've been so MIA, Zi.

Liwa: And you look slimmer.

I try not to roll my eyes.

Derek: She's been busy with work.

Niki, who's sitting next to me, clears her throat.

Niki: Do you mind reintroducing yourselves? I forgot your names.

I chuckle.

I'm glad she's changing this subject, because what am I supposed to say to these people? They don't know what I've been going through...

Dean: You're the one who should be reintroducing yourself.

Niki: I'm certain you know who I am.

Dean chuckles.

Nolwazi: Yes, we do.

Mom: Ungazophaphela uNikiwe, wena Langelihle.

Dean winks at Niki playfully.

Liwa: Well, this is my wife, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo smiles.

Nomvuyo: I'm glad we're finally meeting you. We've heard a lot about you.

Niki: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: And I think it's interesting that you're dating Kwanele.

I just want to go over to her and shut her mouth.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Uhm, this is my mother, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha smiles sweetly.

Liwa: And, I'm Liwa.

Niki: Nice to finally meet you. I've also heard a lot about you all.

Nomvuyo: So, how's-

Liwa: How's the food?

Dad: The food could use more spice...

Gossip Girl is doing the most right now, and I don't want her to be disliked by Niki, but right now, I think Niki wants to rearrange her pretty face.

My dad goes on to innocently get rid of the awkwardness.

The conversation is now flowing, and I'm also feeling more at ease.

I'm quite shocked at how well Nolwazi and Niki are getting along. They seem to be enjoying each other's company.

Zimkitha: It's now time for gifts!

She seems so excited.

Zimkitha: I didn't get to give you my gift the last time...

She stands and disappears.

A minute later, she comes back, and is followed by one of the waiters, carrying lots of boxes.

Zimkitha: We show up and show out!

She pulls me off my seat and I stand next to her.

Zimkitha: This is from Gabi and Joe, who couldn't join us today.

I take the box and open it.

Me: How lovely...

Of course, Gabi would get me makeup. Just what a girl needs. She even included a set of brushes.

Zimkitha then gives me another box.

Nomvuyo: That's from me.

She winks at me and I smile.

Me: Perfumes?

Nomvuyo: A girl has to have at least 5 bottles of perfume. You can't smell the same every day.

Me: Wowzer.

She smiles.

Me: Thank you, lover.

Nomvuyo: You're most certainly welcome, baby.

I then take another box. I open it and smile.

I glance at Derek, because I know it's from him.

Derek: 365 reasons why I love you.

Nolwazi: You wrote 365 notes by hand?

He nods.

Niki: That is so cute!

I chuckle.

Dean: These two do some really weird shit.

Nolwazi: That is so romantic!

Zimkitha: And original!

Derek: I got the idea from The Great Dlamini.

Me: Thanks, Ngidi.

Derek: You're welcome. You still have a lot of unused coupons, remember?

I laugh.

Me: We'll get to that some other time...

Derek: I'll be waiting...

I put his gift aside, as Zimkitha gives me an envelope.

Mom: That's from me and your dad.

Me: Hehe, it's money, neh?

They laugh.

Me: You give me money every year.

Mom: Hai sisi we know how much you love money.

Dad: And we never know what to get you.

Me: Well, I'm not complaining.

Dean: Expensive girl...

Me: Yep.

I continue opening the gifts.

I give all of them hugs.

Me: Thank you, people.

Zimkitha: I know you'll enjoy using that bag I got you.

Me: Certainly. I don't doubt the quality.

Zimkitha: No knock-offs here.

We continue chatting and eating for a couple of more hours.

By 5pm, we're done.

My parents leave with Zimkitha, who invited them to some fundraising event... My poor parents.

Liwa: We've really missed you, Dlamini.

He wraps his arms around my shoulders and looks down at me.

Liwa: Are you sure everything is okay?

Me: Yes, I promise.

He looks at me suspiciously before nodding.

Nomvuyo: Your pregnancy isn't showing, instead you're just losing weight.

Derek: Uhm we shoul-

Liwa: Wait, what? You're pregnant?

I sigh in defeat, as Liwa exclaims excitedly.

Derek walks away.

Niki: I need the bathroom, where is it?

Nolwazi: I also need it. I'll show you where it is...

Niki and Nolwazi disappear.

Liwa: You're pregnant? Is that why you've been MIA?

Dean looks at Nomvuyo angrily.

Dean: You can't keep your mouth shut, can you?

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Dean: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: Heyi, wena. Don't even tr-

Me: I lost the baby.

Liwa and Nomvuyo both look at me as if I'm speaking a foreign language.

Liwa lets go of me.

Me: I had a miscarriage, that's why I've been MIA.

Nomvuyo's eyes water up.

Me: Please don't. I'm really trying to move on.

Liwa: I apologise for...

He sighs in defeat and scratches his head.

Me: It's okay. I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: I'm so sorry.

She steps closer to me and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry.

She lets go of me and wipes her tears. I'm also a bit teary now.

Nomvuyo: Why didn't you tell me? All this time I've been referring to your pregnancy kanti you lost the baby? Ziyanda...

Me: I wasn't ready.

She sighs heavily and nods.

I look at Liwa, who seems traumatised.

Me: I'm fine, guys, really.

Liwa: Did you at least get the support you need?

Me: I guess...

Nomvuyo: Now, I feel like an idiot.

Dean: You shou-

Nomvuyo: Shut the fuck up, Dean. You're really starting to piss me off.

Dean: You're the one who's supposed to shut the fuck up, with your big mouth.

Nomvuyo: D-

Me: Guys, come on.

They stop.

Nomvuyo: Mxm.

Liwa: Dean, how the fuck was Nomvuyo supposed to know? Stop being an unreasonable piece of shit.

Dean tries to say something, but Liwa gives him a look.

Liwa: Don't get me started.

Dean walks off.

Now, I'm confused. Why are they being so dramatic? Surely, it's not that deep?

Me: I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: Did you see Melinda?

Me: I've been seeing her.

Liwa: That's good.

He gives me a hug.

Liwa: I know there's nothing much we can say or do, but I hope you know we're here for you.

I nod and smile.

Me: Thank you.

Nomvuyo: Dean knew?

Me: He was there...

She hisses.

Liwa's phone rings, and it's Zimkitha.

Liwa: Mama... Yes, we're still here... Oh, I didn't see it... You're coming back to get it?... Alright, then...Bye...

He hangs up.

Liwa: She forgot her coat.

Nomvuyo: There it is... She really is getting old...

They both chuckle.

Just then, Nolwazi and Niki come back.

Where's Derek?

Nolwazi: Where's Langa?

Nomvuyo: Probably changing his tampon.

Nolwazi is left speechless.

Dean walks in with Derek.

Dean: Ready to leave, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: Yes.

She looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: See you soon?

Me: Yes.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Bye, everyone.

She hugs Liwa and decides to leave Nomvuyo alone.

Looking at Nomvuyo, I think I'm also going to be just like her when I grow up: a petty and sensitive bitch. Gosh, I need to change my ways. I can't be this person.

Suddenly, someone clears their throat.

We all turn around, and lo and behold, Kwanele is standing here, looking at us.

I think there is silence for a good 30 seconds.

Kwanele: Hi.

Another 30 seconds of silence.

I clear my throat.

Me: Hey.

Nolwazi: Hello, Kwanele.

Awks.

I look at Niki, and the hoe looks as cool as a cucumber.

Niki: I should get going. Goodbye, everyone. It was lovely meeting you.

She walks to me, gives me a squeeze, and then walks to her man.

Dean, Lord, Dean... I don't even want to look at him, because I know he has beef with this man.

Liwa: Nice to meet you too, Niki... Good seeing you Kwanele.

Kwanele frowns.

Something weird is going on and angazi yini... Something don't feel right.

Nolwazi: Uhm, we should also get going...

Just then, Zimkitha walks in.

Zimkitha: I forgot my coat...

We all stare at her.

Zimkitha assesses the scene.

She glances at Kwanele and Niki.

Liwa: Mama, here's your coat.

She takes it from him.

Zimkitha: See you around.

Me: Where are my parents?

Zimkitha: In the car.

I nod and she walks out.

Niki: Bye, everyone.

Ku-tense nje.

Nolwazi: Bye, Niki.

Liwa: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye, dear.

Niki: Bye bye Dean.

She looks at him sweetly.

Dean: Bye.

Niki then looks at Kwanele and smiles.

Niki: Asambe.

Kwanele nods and they walk off...

The tension is as thick as my thighs from a couple of months ago.

Liwa chuckles quietly and looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: Ready to go?

Nomvuyo: Yes.

She gets her things and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: I'll call you.

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo: Bye.

She walks off with Liwa, hand in hand.

Nolwazi: The things we tolerate...

I look at her in disbelief.

Dean: I'm getting tired of blabbermouth.

Nolwazi: The day I snap...

Hai hai, this can't be happening. Why are these people being so dramatic and unnecessary?

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: I hope you enjoyed your day.

Me: I did, thank you.

We share a hug.

I look at Dean, and as much as I try, I end up laughing.

Me: I didn't know you could be this shook in life... Kwanele makes you sweat?

Dean: Don't fuck with me.

Nolwazi and I chuckle.

Me: Wowzer.

Dean: Mxm, asambe, Nolwazi.

He walks off and Nolwazi follows him.

Now, it's just Derek and I...

I look at him softly.

Me: Don't be grumpy.

I step closer to him and give him a hug.

Derek: I'm horny and frustrated.

Me: Shame.

I try to let go of him, but he holds me tighter.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Derek-

Derek: Stop giving me terms and conditions. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.

Me: I know you do.

Derek: Then stop pushing me away.

Me: Let's just leave...

Derek: Are you spending the night at our place?

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Good. You obviously need to be reminded...

Me: Reminded of what?

Derek: You'll see...

I push him away, as I feel my insides churn.

We get my gifts and make our way to the car.

INSERT 138 (Short Insert)

I'm trying my best to keep myself intact, but Derek fucken Ngidi is pounding me so intensely, that I feel like I'm being introduced to another galaxy. With every pound, the stubbornness trickles away, and he gains more control of my soul, my whole entire soul.

As soon as I reach my climax, I'm a shaking mess.

I lose touch with reality and see stars all around. I'm convinced I'm insane.

After some time, he turns me around and grins.

Derek: You okay?

I grunt and he chuckles.

I eventually doze off, but I'm awakened by his erection...

Heyi, out of nowhere, I'm being flipped like a pancake, and my ass is floating high.

A girl can't even get any sleep. I feel like I'm being rearranged, and I don't even have the chance to catch my breath.

I wake up and my joints pulse.

I check the time and it's around 8am.

As I'm about to get out of bed, Derek pulls me.

Me: Yoh, Derek, I get it, you're great...

He laughs and lets go of me. I go to the bathroom and pee.

I just feel like I'm having an out of body experience. It's very clear that I haven't had sex in a very long time. I sit there for a while, re-evaluating my life.

I eventually walk out and stare at him as he's lying there, naked.

He pats the empty space next to him and I walk to the bed. I get in and he pulls me.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Morning.

He plants a kiss on my nose and I groan.

Derek: Missed you.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Stop being stubborn... Didn't I fuck you enough?

I squeal and try to move away from him, but he holds me tighter, and laughs.

Derek: Stop trying to convince yourself that you don't want to be with me.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Me: Thank you for yesterday.

He nods.

Derek: Anything for you.

Me: Hmm. What was up with Dean and Nomvuyo?

He shrugs.

Derek: Nomvuyo was shocked, and Dean was trying to protect you.

Me: Protect me from what though?

Derek: He didn't want the focus to be on what happened.

Me: Nomvuyo didn't know about the miscarriage. Dean was being dramatic.

Derek: I've never seen Dean like this. You've unleashed the drama queen in him.

I giggle.

Me: As for Nolwazi and Vuvu.

Derek: I can't wait for that to unfold. There's always been a vibe between them.

Me: Who do you think will win the fight?

Derek: Hmm...

Me: I think Nolwazi is a silent killer.

Derek: Ya, I think she could win.

Me: But, I know Vuvu will not be played. The bitch is crazy.

We laugh.

Derek: Vuvu is unmatched.

Me: I can't wait. It will be very entertaining.

Derek: I'm sure once the fight is over, the tension will vanish.

Me: I'm going to have to jump in when the fight takes place.

Derek: Whose side are you on?

Me: Vuvu's my girl.

He laughs.

Derek: Hmm...

He pulls me and locks me in his embrace.

Derek: Now let's discuss this fight between you and me.

Me: Nigga, I am not fighting you. Awungiyeye.

Derek: Then make love to me.

I groan and he repositions...

It's now around 12pm, and Nomvuyo insisted on seeing me.

Derek really rearranged my entire existence. I'm having an existential crisis right now, all because of sex.

Nomvuyo eventually arrives, and I'm very happy to see her pretty face.

She walks in and I glance at her round belly.

Me: This baby is making you more beautiful.

Nomvuyo: You don't say...

She looks at me sadly, before she sits comfortably.

Me: Go on, I'm listening.

Nomvuyo: I can't believe you went through all of that shit by yourself! Why? Why would you do that to yourself, Ziyanda?

I listen to her give it to me... Once she's done, she starts sobbing.

I get closer to her and hold her.

Nomvuyo: I'm so sorry you had to go through such a traumatising experience.

I continue comforting her until she calms down.

Nomvuyo: I feel guilty for being pregnant.

Me: Don't. I'm really fine, Vuvu... The physical aspect of the miscarriage was what traumatised me more than anything.

She nods.

Me: But, I dealt with it. I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: You're not lying to me?

I shake my head and smile.

Me: I'm fine, I promise.

She nods and we share a hug.

Nomvuyo: I apologise for yesterday.

Me: It's okay, you didn't know.

Just then, Derek clears his throat.

We turn, and he is standing there, with Dean next to him.

Lord, I don't need more drama.

Dean: What are you doing here, blabbermouth?

Nomvuyo stands, and before we all know it, a vase is thrown at Dean. He quickly ducks and we all stare at Nomvuyo in shock.

Nomvuyo: Don't fuck with me.

She takes a glass and throws it at Dean, who ducks once again.

Me: Vuvu!

I take her hands and she pushes me off. She walks to Dean and points at him.

Nomvuyo: Don't ever fuck with me.

Dean: Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Don't fuck with me, Dean!

Dean: You're fucken crazy.

Nomvuyo: You don't know the half of it.

I watch as she stands very close to Dean.

I can't help but chuckle, because her round belly is the only thing blocking her from being in Dean's face.

They stand there for a long time, and eventually start laughing.

Derek and I look at them weirdly.

They hug each other.

What's happening?

The Universe is just doing the most...

Dean: You talk too much.

Nomvuyo: And you have too much estrogen in your system.

I walk to them.

Me: You people are really strange.

Nomvuyo smiles at Dean.

Nomvuyo: He has a problem with my mouth, and I have a problem with him thinking he shits cupcakes.

Dean: Whatever.

Nomvuyo: But, since I can't convince my husband to cut him off permanently, I just have to learn to tolerate him.

Dean: The same way Nolwazi tolerates you?

Nomvuyo: If only I gave an actual shit...

Me: Yoh.

Nomvuyo: I'll call Kwanele, and your arrogant ass will be humbled immediately. Don't come for me.

Nomvuyo then looks at me.

Nomvuyo: I'll see you later, baby.

Me: Shap.

Nomvuyo: Bye, Ngidi.

Derek: Bye, Vuvz.

She hugs us and leaves.

Me: Don't ever come for Vuvu!

Dean: Mxm.

We go to the couch and sit while I laugh at him.

Derek: So, I'm supposed to clean this shit?

Me: My joints are achy...

Dean: No wonder you're so calm... You got fucked?

Me: Ewww...

They both laugh.

Me: So, when is the fight taking place?

Dean: What fight?

Me: Between Lwazi and Vuvu.

Dean: What??

He laughs.

Me: When's the Royal Rumble?

He continues laughing.

Me: Who are you betting on?

Dean: You don't know Nolwazi...

Me: Hmm...

He chuckles.

Dean: But, Vuvu's craziness is on another level, so it's a tough one.

Me: We shall see...

We continue chatting...

INSERT 139

I've been unemployed for exactly 3 months now, and I must say, I'm still happy about my decision. I'm not yet ready to be around people. I've also been helping Derek with his school, which he wants to open the following year.

It's been a week since my "surprise" birthday lunch, and Derek managed to convince me not to go back home...

He's busy working on the school's operations plan, when we hear a knock on the door.

We look at each other and frown.

Me: How odd.

I stand and open the door.

I stare at Busi.

Busi: Hello.

Me: Hi.

Busi: The security guard let me in.

I decide not to question her.

Busi: I have the DNA results.

Derek: Baby, who is it?

I step aside, and Busi walks in. I close the door and lead her to the lounge.

Derek looks up from his laptop. His face immediately tightens when he sees her.

Derek: Busisiwe, how did you get in here?

Busi looks at him nervously.

Busi: The security guard recognised me, and let me in.

Wow, I'll have a chat with that unprofessional security guard. So yena he just lets people in because he recognises them? Nxa.

Derek: Ufunani?

Busi: I have the results.

Derek: And how do I know they're legit?

She sighs.

Busi: Derek, you know me...

He stares at her for a very long time.

Derek: Sit.

She walks to the couch, and decides to sit next to him.

As I'm about to make my way to the bedroom, he says my name.

Derek: Please sit.

He looks at me softly and pleadingly. I nod and sit.

Derek: Firstly, I would like you to explain this whole situation. Why did you lie about your pregnancy? Did you know from the get go that you were carrying my child?

Busi sighs.

Busi: Yes, I knew.

Derek: You were having an affair with Thami.

She sighs again.

Busi: I regret doing that, Derek. That was the biggest mistake of my life. I'm sorry for breaking us up.

I roll my eyes as she wipes her crocodile tears.

Busi: I was so selfish and childish. I was fascinated by a man who abused me.

Derek: Abused you?

Busi: Thami was an abusive person. He abused me physically and emotionally. He managed to convince me that I wouldn't be able to live without him, even when he got married. I was brainwashed.

Somebody call the nywembulance.

Derek seems to be taken aback. His sweet self seems to be taken by this story.

Busi stands.

Busi: Can I use the bathroom?

Derek: Su-

Me: It's blocked.

They both look at me in confusion.

Me: I'll get you tissue.

I stand and walk to the bedroom. I get a box of tissues and give it to her.

Derek is beyond confused.

There is no way Busi is going to go to that bathroom by herself. Next thing, she takes my underwear, and in three days, I'm paralysed and seeing short men surrounding the bed in the middle of the night. Not happening. I'm not that stupid.

I watch as she wipes her tears.

I get her a bottle of water and give it to her.

Busi: Thanks.

We give her a few minutes to sort herself out.

Derek: Give me the results.

She takes out the envelope from her bag and gives it to him. Derek's rudeness seems to be deeper when he's around Busi...

It's still sealed.

He opens it and reads the paper.

I don't even have to read it to know what it says.

That child is Derek's.

I ignore the piercing pain that's trying to take over my heart.

I think Derek sees this, because he stands and sits next to me.

Derek: Baby.

I take a deep breath and look at Busi.

Me: How old is he?

Busi: He's turning 3 in two months, ngoAugust.

Me: Derek, have you seen him?

Derek shakes his head.

She takes out her phone and scrolls through it.

She then gives the phone to Derek and he looks at it.

When I take a glance, I'm beyond shocked. This child looks exactly like Derek.

I want to stand and just go, but my body is failing me.

Derek gives back her phone and she looks at me.

Busi: Can I have a word with him privately?

Derek: No, she-

Me: Okay.

I take my phone and walk towards the door.

Derek quickly stands and follows me.

Derek: Zi.

Me: I just need some fresh air.

He tries to say something, but I shake my head.

Me: Go talk to her, I'm fine.

I walk out the door and immediately request an Uber.

I get in and it drives off...

Me: I'd like to see Dean, please...

Dean's PA looks at me weirdly.

Her: Who are you?

Me: A friend.

Her: You have to have an appointment.

She ignores me and continues typing.

I take my phone and dial Dean's number. It rings for a while, but he eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hey.

Dean: What's up?

Me: Uhm, I'm here, and I don't have an appointment to see you.

Dean: Excuse me?

Me: Please come get me.

Dean: Uhm, okay...

I hang up.

Within a few minutes, Dean is here.

He looks at me in confusion.

Dean: Dlamini?

His assistant tries to explain that I don't have an appointment, but he dismisses her. He leads me to his office, and as soon as he closes the door, I burst out in tears.

Dean: Ziyanda? What the fuck is going on?

He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: Derek has a son...

I feel his body harden, but he continues holding me.

After a long time, I finally calm down.

He leads me to the long couch and makes me sit. He grabs a bottle of water and gives it to me.

Dean: What happened?

I tell him and he sighs.

Dean: Let's call him and let him know you're fine, because I know he's freaking out.

He takes his phone and dials Derek's number.

Dean: Ngidi... I'm with her, she came to my office... Yes... Okay... Bye...

He hangs up and then looks at me.

Dean: So, that child is Derek's?

I nod.

He groans and scratches his chin thoughtfully.

Dean: I don't know what to say.

Me: There's nothing to say. He has a son.

Dean: And are you guys sure about this?

Me: He's literally Derek's replica.

Dean: She came with him?

Me: We saw a picture.

He nods slowly and sighs.

Dean: So, what are you going to do?

Me: What do you mean?

Dean: He thinks you're not coming back.

Me: It's triggering.

He nods.

Dean: You can't separate again.

I keep quiet.

Dean: Work it out.

Me: If you had another child somewhere, you'd expect Nolwazi to stay?

He tightens his jaw.

Dean: If it's not my fault, then yes, I would expect her to stay.

I sigh.

Dean: Derek is also being thrown in the deep end. He didn't put himself in this situation. You should constantly remind yourself of this fact, before you go running.

Me: It doesn't make it any easier.

Dean: Just work it out. You two are meant to be together.

Me: This relationship is too challenging.

Dean: No one ever said this shit is easy. Loving someone and accepting their flaws unconditionally is a challenging task. These experiences will either bring you two closer, or separate you. I certainly don't want you to go your separate ways, because we've seen how bad it is for you two. Therefore, you both need to find a way to move on while still preserving your relationship.

I drink some water and we sit in silence.

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It opens and Derek walks in, looking stressed.

He sits between Dean and me.

Me: I'm not walking away, I just needed fresh air.

He sighs heavily and glances at Dean, who smiles lightly.

Dean: I hear you're a father...

Derek grunts.

Dean: Fucked up, this life thing...

He stands and goes to his desk.

Dean: I'm giving you 10 minutes to talk about this, and then I'm going to kick you out... I have an important meeting soon...

He sits and focuses on his work...

INSERT 140

It's been a month since the DNA results.

I'm still very much affected, but I keep reminding myself that this is it, and there's nothing I can do to change it. More than anything, I feel like God and the Universe are really testing me this year. I've faced a lot of shit, and I'm honestly just trying to survive at the point.

I've been locked up in my parents' house, reading The Four Agreements over and over again. I keep reminding myself to not take any of this personally, because it really isn't about me. None of this is my fault.

As I'm busy reading in the lounge, I hear a knock on the door. I tell the person to come in.

I'm beyond shocked when I see Zimkitha walking in.

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

She gives me a kiss and sits.

Zimkitha: Where are your parents?

Me: My mom is at work, and my dad went to stock more chickens.

She nods and smiles sweetly.

Zimkitha: How are you?

She looks at me intensely, as if she knows everything I'm going through.

Me: I'm surviving.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: You're a very strong young woman. I don't think another person would be able to walk in your shoes.

Me: I'm tired of being strong.

She nods understandingly.

Zimkitha: I was in an arranged marriage...

I look at her in disbelief.

Zimkitha: According to my mother, I was a commodity, and I was used to get what the family wanted... I was never allowed to make choices that made me happy.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: But, that didn't stop me from doing things that made me happy.

She chuckles.

Zimkitha: I won't lie; I broke many hearts in my time...

I gasp and she laughs.

Zimkitha: I didn't have a loving home, so I sought love elsewhere, and my heart got its fair share of pain.

Me: You had an affair?

Zimkitha: I had multiple affairs... I was quite rebellious. I resented my parents for treating me like a product.

Me: Konje Liwa has a twin?

She nods and chuckles.

Zimkitha: My Princess. She is a firecracker.

I've heard a lot about how this Princess mistreated Nomvuyo, so I don't like her already.

Zimkitha: She and Nomvuyo don't get along. She was always threatened by how close Vuvu was with Liwa.

Me: Where is she now?

Zimkitha: She lives in London.

Me: Is your ex-husband their father?

She laughs and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I have a complicated life.

Me: Do they know?

Zimkitha: Liwa knows everything about me. He's the only person I truly trust in this world. My son has never judged me.

Me: And Princess?

Zimkitha: She chooses to separate herself, and I understand.

Me: So, who's Liwa and Princess's father?

Zimkitha: He's definitely out there...

Me: Out there?

Zimkitha: My kids have no interest in him, and so I respect their wish.

Me: What about you?

Zimkitha: What about me?

Me: Do you also have no interest in him?

She sighs.

Zimkitha: No.

Me: Have you ever been in love?

Zimkitha: I don't think so. I don't know what love is because I've never witnessed it. My parents weren't in love, they tolerated each other. I definitely didn't love Luvuyo, because I was forced to marry him... Bheki, on the other hand-

She stops herself and I look at her in confusion. I get the feeling that she wasn't supposed to say his name. Well, it's not like I'm going to do anything about it, so she must continue spilling the tea. I'm just genuinely interested in Zimkitha's life. I feel like she has a lot under the "facade" block, and the day that shit comes to light in the "arena" kuzoba yi-lituation.

Me: Do you think you were in love with him?

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Zimkitha: He loved me. He still worships the ground I walk on... In fact, all the men I come across worship me.

She laughs to herself.

Me: What about you?

She shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I don't have the capability to love a man. I've had some horrible and traumatic experiences because of them. The only reason I was attracted to them was to satisfy my physical needs, that's all.

Wowzer.

I look at her in shock and she smiles sweetly, her signature smile. This woman amazes me.

Zimkitha: I've kept my heart safe from these men.

Me: That's smart of you.

Zimkitha: Please pour me a glass of water? I'm dying of thirst.

Me: Okay.

I walk to the kitchen.

I come back and give her the glass of water.

Me: So, you don't want to be in a relationship?

Zimkitha: I'm 58 years, baby.

Me: And that's young!

She giggles.

Zimkitha: I'm playing the field, but nothing serious. People like me aren't meant to settle down.

Me: Don't say that. We all deserve being loved wholeheartedly.

Zimkitha: And that's why you and Derek need to hold on to each other.

She's sleek, changing the subject quickly.

Me: I'm just drained. This year has been draining.

Zimkitha: I've had multiple miscarriages in my life... I can confidently say that there's nothing as emotionally and physically traumatising as that experience, and I've been sexually assaulted quite a few times...

She looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: It's unexplainable.

I nod.

Zimkitha: My heart broke when Derek told me.

Me: He told you?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I was worried when he stopped talking about you.

I sigh.

Me: And then there's this Busi situation.

Zimkitha: Can I tell you the honest truth?

I look at her.

Zimkitha: Busi will never be a threat to your relationship. Derek doesn't love that girl. Yes, she has his child, but that will never make Derek want her over you.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: I assure you, she will never bother you... Not when I'm still around.

Me: You know her?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I know her, and I know her type: pathetic women who think they can use children to trap men.

I don't say anything.

Zimkitha: Focus on yourself and Derek. Focus on healing fully from your miscarriage. Don't even allow yourself to waste your emotions on Busi. I assure you, she is not a threat. Derek is yours. His heart is yours, I assure you.

Me: I just feel bad, because I lost his child.

Zimkitha: Well, life happens... Are you going to dwell on this forever? Free yourself. You deserve to bask in his love and adoration.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: You are the apple of his eye. That man loves you. I have no doubt that he will never stop fighting for you. Busi is a mere distraction.

I sigh.

Zimkitha: And now that this child is going to be a part of our lives, we all need to open up our hearts and accept him. The poor child was a pawn in Busi's game, and he is innocent. He can't suffer for his mother's sins.

She finishes her water.

Zimkitha: If you refuse to open up your heart, Derek will never be a great father to this boy. I'm convinced he prioritises you over anything. That little boy doesn't deserve to be rejected, he's faultless.

We're silent for a while.

Zimkitha: Relationships aren't perfect. However, we should also distinguish between genuinely horrible and unsolvable problems, and problems that can be solved. The solving process may not be easy, but it's possible.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: You're a strong girl, sthandwa sami. You may feel defeated now, but I have no doubt in my mind that you love Derek enough to work on this.

Me: I do love him.

She nods.

Me: Thank you.

Zimkitha: You're my daughter now.

I smile.

Me: I'm surprised Khwezi hasn't pitched to do the most.

Zimkitha: Like I said, they are mere distractions, weak distractions. Brush them off.

I chuckle.

Zimkitha: Khwezi won't be a problem anymore.

Me: Did you talk to her?

She nods.

Zimkitha: She's a bored housewife. I told her to find a stable hobby.

I gasp.

Me: Didn't she want to beat you up?

She laughs.

Zimkitha: She wouldn't dare...

Me: Did Derek tell you about the email he got from some woman claiming to know his real parents?

Zimkitha: Excuse me?

Me: There was some woman claiming to know who his parents are.

Zimkitha: Hmm, he didn't tell me.

Me: I would have liked him to enquire about the issue.

Zimkitha: Interesting...

She sighs.

Zimkitha: I'll ask him about it.

I nod.

Zimkitha: Alright then, let me get going. I came to check up on you.

Me: Thank you, I appreciate it.

We both stand and share a hug.

Zimkitha: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Zimkitha: Walk me out.

Me: Alrighty.

We walk out.

Me: So, what's up with Nomvuyo and Nolwazi?

She chuckles.

Zimkitha: Nomvuyo doesn't like Nolwazi.

Me: We've already established that.

Zimkitha: And you know what, I've accepted that we won't love everyone we meet...

I chuckle.

Me: I think they should fight.

Zimkitha: Oh, no... Nolwazi is too much of a suburban snob, and Nomvuyo is too street smart... That fight won't end well.

We both laugh.

Me: Nolwazi is a silent killer.

Zimkitha: With words, I know she'd demolish Vuvu. She also has a lethal tongue like you, but if we're talking a physical fight, then that's a different story... Nomvuyo has too much aggression in her body. I'd hate to be on the receiving end of her blows.

We continue laughing till we get to her car and say goodbye.

I watch her drive off and walk back inside the house.

I feel lighter now.

INSERT 141 (Short Insert)

The following day, I tell Derek that I would like to meet up with him.

Derek: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Should I fetch you?

Me: No, I'll be fine.

Derek: I'm already in my loft.

Me: Alright.

Derek: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and get ready immediately.

When I'm done, I tell my parents that I'm heading out. I get a taxi and make my way to Maboneng. I'm there within 45 minutes...

When I walk in the loft, I find him busy on his laptop.

Me: Hello.

He looks up and smiles.

Derek: Hey.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

We sit and he closes his laptop.

Me: Zimkitha came to my house yesterday.

Derek: She told me.

Me: Of course she did.

He chuckles.

Me: I mentioned the email from Vicky.

Derek: I told her not to entertain it.

Me: You don't want to find out?

He shakes his head.

Derek: I'm dealing with a lot right now. That's the least of my worries.

I nod.

He stares at me and I shift uncomfortably.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Why did you want to meet?

Me: I miss you.

He raises an eyebrow and I sigh.

Me: I haven't seen you in two weeks.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How's the school's operations plan coming along?

Derek: I'm almost done. Do you mind editing it once I'm done?

Me: I don't mind.

He smiles.

Derek: You're looking good.

Me: Really? I'm gaining back the weight.

He chuckles.

Derek: Yes, you are.

Me: Thank God.

Derek: How's Lwazi?

Me: She's great, as usual.

He nods.

Me: She sends her greetings, and says you must call her, so she can update you on their new principal.

He laughs.

Derek: I'll call her later today when she returns from school.

Me: Apparently the new principal is very unapproachable, and they all dislike her.

Derek: Camille told me the same thing...

Me: I'm sure they miss you.

Derek: Who wouldn't miss me? This is me we're talking about...

I roll my eyes.

Me: You and your random egotistical moments.

He chuckles and then looks at me seriously.

He's silent for a few seconds.

Me: What?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: Me too.

We sit in silence for a while.

Me: I'd like some wine.

Derek: Sure.

We both stand and make our way to the kitchen, where he pours me a glass.

Me: Thank you.

He nods.

Me: I haven't had alcohol in a while.

I take a sip and sigh.

Me: So...

He stares at me.

Me: I had a whole speech planned, but now I've forgotten everything.

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: Don't look at me like that...

Derek: Sorry.

I gulp down my wine and look at him.

Me: This time away from you has made me realise a few things...

I look at him seriously.

Me: I keep trying to convince myself that we're not meant to be together.

His face changes, he looks at me nervously.

Me: But, my heart constantly yearns for you. I don't want to be with anyone else, but you.

His face softens and I see a hidden smile.

Me: I've never felt like this about any man. I love you.

He smiles.

Me: And I'm willing to stay and work through the craziness. I think you're worth all the pain and heartache. I love you enough to have the strength and patience to endure the bullshit.

I sigh.

Me: As Beyonce says: I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. Nothing real can be threatened. True love brought salvation back into me. With every tear, came redemption and my torturers became my remedy...

I smile.

Me: So we're gonna heal. We're gonna start again. You've brought the orchestra, synchronised swimmers. You're the magician. Pull me back together the way you cut me in half. Make the woman in doubt disappear. Pull the sorrow from between my legs like silk...

At this point, he's smiling like a lunatic.

Me: Now I'm in the mood to watch Lemonade. We should watch it tonight.

He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I don't know what to say.

Me: You can kiss me?

He chuckles as his face touches mine and we share a long tender kiss. That, "Welcome back home, you've been missed," kiss.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: I can't continue denying that what we have is special. God knows I've tried, but I can't let go of you. You're my Star.

He kisses me again and squeezes me.

Derek: You've left me speechless.

I giggle.

Me: Good. Now, I'd like something to eat. I'm starving.

Derek: In the mood to go out?

Me: No. I want your food.

He nods as he kisses me once again...

The following day, Derek tells me that he has to go back to his apartment in Randburg, because his son is coming for a visit.

Me: How is he?

He smiles.

Derek: He's cute.

Me: Really? What's his name?

Derek: Mpumelelo.

Me: So, what's going to happen now?

Derek: I'm just getting to know him... I've been seeing him almost every day.

I nod.

We drive to his place.

I don't know how I feel about this, but I'd like to meet him. I may as well face our new reality, as daunting as it is.

When I come back from the bathroom, I hear Zimkitha's voice and a little one's voice as well.

When I get to the lounge, I find Zimkitha picking the boy up and placing him on her lap.

Busi is sitting there, watching with a smile on her face.

I clear my throat and they all turn to look at me.

Zimkitha: Zi!

She smiles widely and I smile lightly.

Me: Hello, Zimi.

I glance at Busi.

Me: Hi.

Busi: Hey.

My eyes finally land on the boy.

He looks like a mini Derek, with his dimpled face.

He stares at me and then at Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Come sit next to me, Zizi.

I do as I'm told. I can't seem to stop staring at the boy, and he is also staring at me, obviously trying to figure out who I am.

I clear my throat.

Me: Hello.

Mpumelelo: Hello.

He has the sweetest voice and a bit of a lisp.

Me: How are you?

Mpumelelo: How are you?

Zimkitha laughs sweetly and Derek smiles.

Me: How are you?

Mpumelelo: How are you?

He looks at me with a smile.

Me: What's your name?

Mpumelelo: Lelo!

I don't know what it is about his voice, but it's making me feel warm. I smile.

Me: Lelo, how old are you?

Lelo: Lelo is 3!

He shows me 2 fingers and I laugh quietly.

Zimkitha: Lelo, when is your birthday?

Lelo: Happy birthday, Lelo!

Oh my goodness.

We all laugh as he starts singing the birthday song.

Derek walks to Zimkitha and takes Lelo.

He kisses Lelo on the cheek and smiles.

Lelo: Hello!

Derek: Hello, Lelo.

He starts wiggling his legs and Derek puts him down. He then runs off and disappears. He is so cute, short and skinny.

Derek: He's going to the bathroom.

Me: The bathroom?

He nods.

Busi: He seems to have a fascination with bathrooms.

Zimkitha: Oh, Lord.

I look at Derek, and realise how happy he is.

Derek: Let me make him a sandwich.

Busi: He doesn't like tomatoes.

Derek nods.

Derek: Just like Zi...

He looks at me amusingly before he walks to the kitchen.

Busi: Let me go check up on him.

She stands and walks off.

Zimkitha looks at me and smiles.

Zimkitha: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

Zimkitha: Put your positive pants on.

I nod and stand.

Zimkitha: Uyaphi?

I narrow my eyes and she laughs.

Zimkitha: Heyii ngoba anything is possible!

I chuckle as I make my way to the bathroom...

INSERT 142 (Short Insert)

It's been another month of more growth and healing for me. My sessions with Melinda have been focused on getting me to let go of the past, and live in the present. I have some horrible days, where I feel like I'm wasting my time and energy, but I also have days where I'm filled with gratitude and more joy.

My mantra has been, "Put on your positive pants," ever since Zimkitha mentioned it to me. Every time I feel like I'm overwhelmed, I constantly remind myself to stay positive.

Anyway, I'm officially living with Derek again, and it's been a calm month of growth for him and us as a unit as well. Seeing him find his feet in his new role as a father is bittersweet, considering that the child he's raising isn't mine.

We're now in the apartment, waiting for Lelo.

Me: I think he's opening up to the idea of you being his father.

He smiles.

Derek: It's going to take a while.

Me: I don't think so. He's still very young and impressionable.

He stares at me.

Me: Yini?

Derek: Thank you for sticking around.

Me: You're welcome.

Derek: Lelo seems to like you a lot.

Me: He's quite cute.

He smiles.

Derek: Well, he does have my genes.

Me: Haike uqalile.

He chuckles.

Just then, there's a knock on the door and Derek walks to the door.

A minute there, Lelo comes running in.

Lelo: Hello!

Me: Hello, Lelo.

Lelo: Hello Lelo!

He comes to me and I give him a hug. He has such an innocent and bubbly personality, very lovable boy.

Me: How are you, Lelo?

He smiles and wiggles. I let go of him.

Me: How are you?

Lelo: Good!

He bounces away happily.

Busi sits close to me and looks around. I can tell she wants to say something.

Me: Is everything okay?

Busi: Do you stay here?

Me: Yes.

She nods lightly and I focus on the TV. Derek joins us...

Derek: Do you mind switching off the TV for a few minutes, baby?

Me: Sure.

I lower the volume and look at him. He clears his throat and looks at Busi seriously.

Derek: Thank you for bringing Lelo.

Busi smiles and nods.

Busi: He loves you.

Derek: He should, I'm his father after-all and I've been MIA.

The smile disappears and is replaced with a smug look.

Derek: Listen, I would really like to spend more time with him.

Busi: That's why I bring him daily.

Derek: I don't think it's necessary for you to be present at all times. I believe I'll manage without you.

She looks at him in disbelief.

Derek: Is there a problem?

Busi: Derek, I'm his mother.

Derek: And?

She looks at me and shifts uncomfortably. It's clear that she wants me to disappear, but Derek has made it explicitly clear that I'm not a guest in his life...

Busi: I want to be here...

Derek: There's no need for you to be here. I'd like to spend time with my son.

She tries to say something, but seems to be dumbstruck.

Derek: We need to work out a schedule. I want him to start sleeping over, especially now that I'm currently not working.

Busi: Hai!

Derek: Hai yani? Kanti why did you reveal him after all this time if you're going to be stubborn for no reason?

She keeps quiet.

Derek: I want him to start sleeping over. We need a schedule that will work for us.

Busi grunts and looks at us grudgingly.

Derek: I want him to get to know Ziyanda as well, seeing as she's my partner.

Busi: I don't want my child to be exposed to different women, Derek.

Derek: Different women?

Busi: How am I supposed to know how often you change your women?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: One would think you know me... Ziyanda is not going anywhere. Mpumelelo has to have a relationship with her. We live together permanently.

Busi: And what happens when you separate? My child must get to know another stranger?

Derek: Don't worry about irrelevant things... Are you exposing him to different men?

She gasps.

Derek: Because I also don't want my child to be bombarded by strange men...

Busi: No, I'm not exposing him to different men.

Derek: So, all this time, he didn't have a father? Where is Thami?

Busi: I left him.

He nods lightly.

Derek: Anyway, I'd like you to give me more time and space with my son...

Busi: I'll think about it...

Derek: Unfortunately, you don't have much of a choice, seeing as he is mine. You don't get to make decisions that don't benefit me.

She keeps quiet.

Derek: Let's start off with weekends.

Busi: Excuse me?

Derek: I'll take him every weekend from now on... We'll see how it goes.

Just then, Lelo comes to the lounge.

Lelo: Zizi, come!

He comes to me and takes my hand.

Lelo: Zizi come!

Me: Okay.

I stand.

Busi: Lelo, yini?

Lelo looks at her innocently, before pulling me. I follow him to the bedroom and he leads me to the closet, where he seems to have unleashed the artist in him. He scribbled all over the door.

Me: Now, why in the world would you do this?

He giggles and I sigh. Where did he even get this pen?

He sits down and continues working on his artwork.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Come see...

He walks in, followed by Busi.

As soon as Busi sees what he's doing, she drags Lelo and spansks him a couple of times on the arm. At this point, I'm beyond shocked. He is such a tiny child, and she's out here beating him like he's a grown man.

Lelo immediately bursts out in tears and Derek snatches him from her.

Derek: What the hell is wrong with you??

Busi: Hey! He knows he's not supp-

Derek gives her one threatening look and she instantly shuts up.

He then walks out, comforting Lelo.

Busi stares at me and I stare back at her.

Busi: What? What are you looking at?

Me: Nothing.

She storms out and I sit on the edge of the bed, and try to gather my thoughts.

This is obviously going to be a long and complicated journey...

The following day, Dean and Nolwazi invite us to their new house for dinner, everyone is going to be there.

We haven't spent much together since my birthday lunch, so I am really looking forward to it.

As I'm getting dressed, I get a call from Nomvuyo, confirming that they are going to pick us up in 30 minutes...

Once I'm done getting dressed, Derek walks past and goes to the bathroom. Minutes later, he walks out and disappears.

He keeps pacing around.

Me: And then? Everything okay?

He nods dismissively.

He disappears and comes back again, as I'm applying makeup.

Me: Nkanyezi, yini ngawe?

He comes to me, stops, and then walks away.

I finish up and he walks back in.

Me: Derek?

He steps closer to me and holds my hands.

Derek: Will you marry me?

Me: Huh??

The fuck?

What's going on?

INSERT 143 (Unedited- Excuse Any Errors)

I look at him in confusion, more than anything.

Me: Excuse me?

He keeps quiet and looks at me in confusion as well. Why is he confused? What's going on here?

He lets go of my hands and scratches his head. He looks at me doubtfully.

Me: Did you just ask me to marry you?

He frowns.

I stare at him, waiting for an answer.

I am so confused right now. Where did this come from? What's going on?

Derek: Uhm...

I keep quiet.

Derek: Uhm...

He sighs heavily.

Derek: Forget I said anything.

Before I can even say anything, he walks out.

I sit on the bed, and process everything. I get my phone and dial Niki's number. It rings, and she answers after a while.

Niki: Baby boo.

Me: Dude, something strange and random just happened.

Niki: What?

Me: Derek randomly asked me to marry him.

Niki: WHAT?!

Me: Dude!

She gasps.

Niki: What did he do? How did it happen? Spill the tea!

I tell her exactly what happened and she keeps quiet for a few seconds.

Niki: Uhhh I think the fuck not!

Me: Dude!

Niki: Like, what the hell? How are you supposed to respond to such randomness? Couldn't he at least sit you down and ask you properly? Haibo!

Me: Why is he asking me to marry him to begin with?

Niki: Well, you two are perfect for each other. I just have a problem with HOW he did it!

Me: Niki, I'm not ready for marriage! What the hell??

She laughs.

Niki: You're already living like a married couple, so what's the problem?

Me: Wow!

Niki: Don't be awkward about it, I'm sure he's a nervous wreck.

I sigh.

Niki: Yhu, but naye he's so random!

Me: Dude.

I say goodbye to her just as Derek walks back in the bedroom.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yes.

He nods and walks to the bathroom.

I get my things and wait for him in the lounge. I'll try not to be awkward about this. I don't know what to say. He's obviously feeling embarrassed, because he seems to be avoiding my eyes right now.

We walk out and make our way to the car.

We get to Nolwazi and Dean's house and find everyone in the lounge, sitting and chatting.

Me: Hello.

They all greet back and we share hugs.

Nomvuyo: Zi, can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

We make our way to the backyard.

Me: Is everything okay?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, why?

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: Just checking on you. I know you like your space, hence my lack of communication lately.

I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: I don't want to bombard your space, at the same time, I want to provide sufficient support.

Me: I'm okay, I promise... It's just the Busi thing...

She rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: The best way to deal with baby mama drama is to ignore the bullshit. Don't take anything personally.

Me: Konje you also have to deal with that.

Nomvuyo: I have to deal with a bitter ex-wife. Kunzima

We laugh.

Nomvuyo: Don't be bothered by Busi.

Me: I'm starting not to... Somehow, she doesn't affect me that much anymore.

She nods.

Nomvuyo: Good.

Me: Do you want a baby shower?

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: I don't have any friends...

I laugh and she smiles.

Me: That sounds sad.

Nomvuyo: Not even, I don't like people ve... Liwa and Zimkitha are my best friends.

Me: Wow! Go on and slice my heart in pieces!

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: And then there's you and Ivy. I'm quite content with my besties.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Don't even come for Ivy.

Me: You don't even like Ivy's sister.

Nomvuyo: So?

I grunt and we walk back inside the house.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

We share a hug and she looks at me.

Nolwazi: You're looking good.

Me: Thank you.

Nolwazi: You're glowing... Are you back with Derek?

Me: He's not the source of my glo-up.

She laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: Hmkay then... Let me go check on the food. Everything should be ready in a few minutes.

Me: Cool.

She walks off and I glance at Nomvuyo, who's busy with her phone.

Nomvuyo: Nyami is going through puberty, yazi.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: The last thing I need is a moody little girl... I'm already dealing with this pregnancy.

Me: Mina Lwazi is still her usual dramatic self. She hasn't bloomed yet.

Nomvuyo: Give it some time... Puberty will hit her hard... Cherish these last moments you have with her innocence.

I laugh.

Me: You're making it sound so horrible.

Nomvuyo: Uzobona.

Me: I think my teaching experience has prepared me for such...

Nomvuyo: Lucky you!

We get to the lounge and Ivy seems to have joined the party.

Ivy: Vuvz, I've been looking for you.

Nomvuyo: Sorry, love, I was with Zi outside.

Ivy glances at me.

I refuse to acknowledge negativity.

I go to Derek and hold his hand. He looks at me and smiles.

Me: Everything okay?

He nods.

So, I guess he's going to pretend nothing happened? Haike I'll also go with the flow.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Why don't you say hi to your friend?

Me: Don't come for me.

He chuckles.

Me: Where's Dean?

Derek: He has an important work conference call in his study.

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Nolwazi comes back and tells us the table is ready.

Suddenly, we hear Mdu's voice, and I am beyond shocked when I see Tholi right beside him.

Me: Tholi!

I am genuinely excited to see her!

Her cheeks are beyond red at this point. It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that she is horrified by being here.

I walk to her and hug her. I feel her lips close to my ear.

Tholi: **whispering** I'm scared.

Me: **whispering** They're not bad.

Ivy: What the fuck is going on?!

Before we know it, Mdu drags Ivy out of the room and they disappear.

At this point, Tholi looks like she's ready to burst out in tears. I hold her hand and look at everyone, who's staring at us.

Me: Guys, as you know, this is Tholi.

Nolwazi walks to her and smiles.

Nolwazi: Hey, Tholi. I'm glad you're joining us.

Tholi clears her throat.

Tholi: Thank you.

Her voice is a mere whisper.

Liwa: Hi, Tholi.

Derek: Hey, Tholi.

Nomvuyo: Hi, dear.

Tholi looks at everyone and they smile warmly.

Liwa walks to her and I step away a bit. He places his around her shoulders.

Liwa: Tholi Tholz, relax... No one's going to bite you!

Tholi looks at him nervously and he squeezes her.

Liwa: We're not that bad... I know we look horrible, but I promise we're not that bad...

She looks up nervously.

Liwa: Would you like something to drink?

Tholi: I'm okay, thanks.

Liwa looks at me.

Liwa: Get her some champagne.

Me: Okay.

I pour her some champagne and give it to her.

Soon, Mdu comes back, with no Ivy. I wonder how that conversation went. Phela I was ready to defend Tholi, against that animal, Ivy.

Tholi takes a sip and looks at me. She seems less intimidated.

Nolwazi: Dinner is ready!

Everyone follows her, and I stay with Tholi.

Me: Can you just take a deep breath?

She exhales and I smile.

Me: They're not that bad.

Tholi: They're intimidating.

I nod understandingly.

Just then, Dean emerges.

Me: Dean!

He smiles and we share a hug. He then looks at Tholi.

Dean: Hi, Tholi.

Tholi: Hey.

She can't even look at him in the eye.

Dean then looks at me.

Dean: Apparently that idiot proposed to you?

I groan and he chuckles.

Dean: I can't wait to humiliate his dumb ass... I hope you rejected that shit.

Me: He didn't give me the chance to.

He chuckles and walks off.

Tholi looks at me in shock.

Tholi: Derek proposed?

I sigh.

Me: Yes...

She smiles and I shake my head.

Me: If only you knew how he did it...

Just then, Mdu emerges. He looks at Tholi and smiles.

Mdu: Woza phela... No one will bite you.

Tholi: I need the bathroom!

Mdu: You can run, but you can't hide.

Her face goes red.

Mdu: Woza, I'll show you where it is...

They walk away hand in hand, and I make my way to where everyone is.

It's obviously going to be an interesting dinner...

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We're all seated and eating. Malusi and Joe have joined us, but Gabi and Nandi couldn't make it. It must be strange for Nandi to always be identified as Malusi's +1 even after they've divorced...

Anyway, Derek has been chatting up a storm with Nolwazi, who's sitting next to him, and now I know for sure that he's avoiding me.

I keep talking to Nomvuyo, but I really just want to talk to Derek. He's been avoiding me a bit too much.

I nudge him and he looks at me.

Me: Hi.

He smirks.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Are you avoiding me?

He shakes his head.

Derek: Could never avoid the The Great Ziyanda...

With that said, he focuses on Nolwazi again and I'm ignored.

Nomvuyo: Apparently you rejected his proposal?

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: News travel fast in this group, I'm not the only gossip monger, babes.

I roll my eyes and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: I'm glad you rejected him. How dare he ask you like that? Hai phela he must not disrespect us.

Me: Disrespect us?

Nomvuyo: Sishade sonke la.

Me: Oh gosh.

Just then, Zimkitha walks in...

Everyone stops talking and stares at her.

She looks like she got beaten really badly.

Before we can even say anything, Liwa and Nomvuyo are standing and walking to her.

Liwa: What the fuck happened?

Zimkitha laughs.

Zimkitha: Nothing. I just got mugged on my way here.

Everyone gasps.

Zimkitha: Please don't be dramatic.

Liwa: Got mugged?

Nomvuyo: What happened?

Nolwazi: Would you like anything?

Zimkitha pushes off Nomvuyo and Liwa and then she smiles, but you can see she's in pain.

Zimkitha: Calm down, I'd like wine, please.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Liwa leads her to her seat and she sits carefully.

I don't think I've seen Liwa like this. It's evident that he is pissed.

Liwa: Mama-

Zimkitha gives him a look, and they stare at each other. He backs away and disappears.

Nomvuyo: What did they take?

Zimkitha sighs and smiles.

Zimkitha: My purse...

Nomvuyo groans.

Zimkitha: Go check on your husband, please. You know he can be over the top...

Nomvuyo nods and walks off after Liwa.

Nolwazi gives her the glass of wine and she takes a sip.

Zimkitha: I think I want something stronger...

Nolwazi: I'll get you whiskey.

Zimkitha: Perfect.

I stare at Zimkitha, analysing her black eye, and she catches me.

Zimkitha: I probably look very bad, but I assure you I'm fine...

She stares at Dean, who also looks pissed as hell.

Zimkitha: You're all taking this too seriously.

Mdu: Well, you do look beaten up...

Zimkitha sighs and smiles.

Zimkitha: I've been through worse, I'm okay.

She then looks at Tholi in slight disbelief.

Zimkitha: Hello, Tholi.

Konje she also knew about Mdu's situation before it blew up.

Tholi: Hi, ma.

Zimkitha: I keep telling you to stop reminding me that I'm old.

Tholi smiles shyly.

Zimkitha: U-right? Are they treating you well so far?

Tholi looks down shyly and doesn't respond.

Mdu: Who would treat her otherwise? Kunganyiwa phela.

Gosh, the amount of arrogance in this group is quite appalling. These men are too much, even Derek, with his quiet arrogance, counts. They really think they shit rainbows. But then again, when I look at all the men I've dated, it's clear that I attract the arrogant ones. Nagine-type.

Liwa and Nomvuyo come back and sit. Liwa still looks pissed, but he's much better now.

Zimkitha: I'd rather not talk about what happened to me.

Nolwazi: Okay, as long as you're okay.

Zimkitha chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: I'm fine, love.

She looks at Dean intently.

Zimkitha: I'm fine, Langa.

There's an awkward silence for a while.

Liwa: So, Derek, what the fuck?

Derek doesn't respond.

Before we know it, everyone is laughing out loud.

My heart sinks as I look at Derek, who is clearly touched.

Dean: What an idiot!

Nomvuyo: You're so disrespectful. How in the world are you going to propose like that?

They continue laughing. I actually just want to walk away and leave them. This is painful to watch. I'm not even trying to look at Derek at this point.

Malusi: You're the most romantic of this group. What the fuck happened?

Dean: He chickened out.

Joe: Shame, man...

Nolwazi: You're all so evil. I'm sure Derek had his reasons for blurting it out like that...

She chuckles as she looks at Derek.

Derek: Are you all done?

Liwa: Nope. You're going to leave this house crying.

He grunts as they continue laughing.

Zimkitha: Oh, baby... I guess today is your day.

I guess it's true. Everyone has a "day" with this crew. I just don't like it when it's Star. These people are ruthless when they laugh at you.

After a long time, they finally let go of the topic.

Derek goes to the bathroom.

Nolwazi: I think we went overboard.

All the guys shake their heads.

Liwa: He'll be fine. Derek is more emotional compared to all of us.

Dean: Uzoba-strong.

I sigh.

Mdu: So, you really rejected his proposal?

Me: How about you mind your business?

They all keep quiet.

Me: Niya-bhora...

Mdu: Yoh konje we're dealing with Ziyanda...

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Nomvuyo: Baby, we-

Me: If you continue dragging this out, then we'll have a problem... Stay out of my business. You're all behaving like suffixes, busy adding your unsolicited opinions.

There's an awkward silence as they stare at me in shock. I don't like how they're drilling this.

I stand and walk off.

I find Derek outside, busy on his phone. I wait for him to finish...

Me: Derek, I don't know what the fuck is going on...

Derek: With what?

Me: You proposed to me...

He doesn't say anything.

Me: You really want to marry me?

Derek: Don't ask me obvious questions.

I keep quiet.

We're silent for a while.

Me: I'll marry you, then...

He looks at me.

Me: If it will make you happy, then I'll do it.

Derek: I said forget it.

Me: Manje how am I supposed to deal with you walking around like you've shat your pants?

Derek: Excuse me?

Me: That was a random moment, and you can't play victim right now, just because I'm not reacting the way you want me to.

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He looks at me for a few seconds and ends up chuckling.

Me: If you want me to marry you, then I'll marry you.

Derek: Forget it.

I cross my arms and look at him sternly.

Derek: I don't want to marry you if it's something you don't want.

Me: Derek, you know how I am...

Derek: I do.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Can we sit? I'm feeling lightheaded?

Me: Am I making you feel lightheaded?

Derek: That and many other things...

He smiles and I smile back.

We go to the gazebo and sit next to each other.

Derek: Truth?

Me: Truth.

He sighs.

Derek: I was supposed to propose to you after my birthday.

Me: Huh??

He chuckles.

Derek: You know how I feel about you... It's been love from the beginning.

He sighs.

Derek: I've been postponing it, because there was never "the right" time.

I keep quiet.

Derek: I have no idea what came over me today. Being around Busi makes me realise how grateful I am that you're in my life.

Me: Are you sure you asked me for the right reasons?

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: The timing is strange... Are you doing this because you want to seem legitimate when you fight for Lelo?

He keeps quiet.

Me: I won't have a problem with that reasoning... I think it's a logical reason- and valid.

He chuckles.

Derek: Trust you to be logical...

I sigh.

Me: Do you acknowledge that your proposal was random, and lacked substance?

He chuckles and nods.

Me: Can I give you an idea for next time?

Derek: Please.

Me: Sit me down and have a discussion with me.

Derek: No fireworks?

Me: I think you know I'm not tickled by that, especially when it comes to serious aspects of my life.

He looks at me thoughtfully and nods.

Me: Are we good?

Derek: Good.

Me: Will you stop ignoring and avoiding me?

Derek: Have I been doing that?

Me: Yes!

He laughs as he stands and pulls me up. He wraps his arms around me and kisses my nose.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you more.

We share a kiss.

Me: How hectic is Zimkitha's situation?

He tightens his jaw and shakes his head.

Derek: We'll get to that later...

He takes my hand and we walk back inside the house.

INSERT 145 (Unedited)

We're now in the house, and the conversation is flowing as usual. This group has mastered the ability to let go of the little things (even though I'm still pissed at them for coming at Star like that).

Dean: Have you decided what you're going to do with your life Dlamini?

Me: In terms of what?

Dean: You're unemployed.

Me: Can I be unemployed in peace though?

He chuckles and glances at Derek.

Me: I have enough money saved up... I'm not depending on Derek as yet.

Derek grunts and I ignore him. He's been trying his best to be a blesser, but I'm not ready to be blessed. I don't want to feel like I'm sucking him dry. The time will definitely come soon, because the way my savings are currently set up... I've been unemployed for too long.

Zimkitha: A man should take care of his family.

She looks at Derek sternly.

Derek: She won't allow me to take care of her.

Nomvuyo: I was also like that at first...

Liwa: Too stubborn.

Nolwazi: I think independent women struggle with letting go.

Me: Definitely, and men think we're being dramatic. Some of us were raised to not depend on anyone... It's not easy to suddenly stop taking care of yourself and expect a man to do so.

Dean: You know very well that men should take care of their families. It's what we told from when we're young.

Nolwazi: But we find it difficult to let go.

Mdu: Clearly feminism has flooded some radical thoughts in your minds...

Nolwazi: Listen, I completely understand that men and women have different roles; however, I don't want my dependency on you to mean you have power over me. I refuse to give away my power to anyone, more especially the man I'm sleeping with.

Me: Amen!

Nolwazi: I depend on you because I trust and love you, not because I'm trying to be oppressed.

Liwa: So, you believe that men and women are equal?

Dean: She sure does...

Nomvuyo: Liwa, you think men and women are not equal?

Liwa: Oh, baby... My relationship with you has proven that we're on the same frequency.

He rubs her belly and winks at her.

Now I'm interested in what Derek has to say... I look at him.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: Hmm?

Me: What's your take?

We all look at him and he sighs.

Derek: I strongly believe that men are the heads of the family.

Me: What exactly do you mean by heads? They control everything?

Derek: They guide and protect. It's their responsibility to ensure that the family is well taken care of.

Me: And where do I fit in this picture? I cook and clean?

Dean: Well, Dlamini... We've already established that you can't cook.

There's an awkward silence, and before I know it, they're laughing out loud.

I roll my eyes as I wait for them to finish. Derek knows better than to laugh at me.

Derek: I think it's shallow to have those old school role expectations. I'm a man, and I absolutely love cooking... Do I sit back and expect you to do all that shit?

Dean: Certainly not. Shit, we don't want you to die.

They laugh once again and I look at Dean. He winks playfully and I grunt.

Derek: Every man needs to take care of his family. There's no sugar-coating it, to be honest.

Dean: So, in other words, Derek wants you to stop acting like you've got your shit together.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I'm sure your savings are dry at this point...

I sigh in defeat.

Derek: Maybe you can knock some sense into her... I've been telling her the same thing.

Me: Can we stop discussing my finances now?

They laugh and we move on to another topic...

They start asking me questions about Busi.

Zimkitha, thankfully, takes over this conversation, and answers all their questions.

Nomvuyo: I wonder what we'll do once you're not around Zimi. Every one of us depends on you.

Zimkitha smiles through the pain.

Zimkitha: You'll be fine... I'd like to think I've raised strong and smart people.

They continue expressing themselves about the Busi thing.

Nolwazi: I don't know how I'd react if Langa had another child elsewhere.

Zimkitha: Even if it's not his fault?

Nolwazi: What does that even mean? We're about to get married. Why would he have children elsewhere?

Nomvuyo: Things happen...

Nolwazi chuckles sarcastically.

Nolwazi: That's bullshit.

Mdu: So, we all agree that an illegitimate child is a deal breaker?

Nolwazi: Definitely.

Hawu, wasn't Nolwazi the one advising me to stay with Derek and not feel threatened by Busi? Now she's the one who's outchea saying illegitimate children are deal breakers? Mihlolo!

Nomvuyo: If the child was conceived before you were in the picture, you have no right to be talking about deal breakers.

Nolwazi: Well, obviously.

Nomvuyo: Manje uthini kahle kahle?

Nolwazi sighs. She seems to be losing her patience just a tad.

Nolwazi: You wouldn't understand...

Nomvuyo: Is it? What's so difficult to understand? I'd like to think I have a fairly good understanding of the English language.

Boom!

This is it!

At this point, it is dead silent in the room. We're all staring at these two women.

I've been waiting for this. These bitches better not disappoint.

Nolwazi chuckles quietly and puts down her fork.

She stares at Nomvuyo very oddly.

Nolwazi: You want me to repeat myself?

Nomvuyo: Repeating yourself won't make your point any clearer. I'd rather you explain what you mean differently.

Nolwazi's expression changes.

Nolwazi: Is this the perfect time to discuss how much of a bitch you are?

All our jaws are on the floor.

Heyi, we're all speechless.

Nomvuyo: I'm a bitch? Wow, that's news to me.

The sarcasm in Nomvuyo's voice is also just touching me.

Nolwazi: And while we're at it, let's also discuss how petty and unnecessary you are... Clearly everyone in the table is afraid to tell you this... I don't know why, really, because you're not much of a threat.

Yhuu!

I look at Nomvuyo. How is she going to even respond to such? They're basically telling her that she ain't shit!

Nomvuyo: Let it all out, Nolwazi. Clearly you've been keeping a lot in...

Nolwazi: I will, actually, because unlike you, I discuss my issues with people, instead of acting out like a child. Now, however, I'm starting to doubt that this will be a productive conversation, considering how childish you can get.

I want to get in and help my girl, Vuvz, but she seems too calm, and it's strange. I'd be spitting fire at Nolwazi, rha!

Nolwazi: You've had a problem with me since I met you...

Nomvuyo doesn't respond, instead she looks at Nolwazi coolly.

I look over at Tholi, and the poor girl is just so confused and traumatised. Heyi naye she'll have to book extra appointments with Melinda. She can't walk around looking constipated 24/7. She really needs to breathe a bit, and enjoy this back and forth that's happening between Nolwazi and Nomvuyo. She should be glad that these people have their own drama, and aren't really focused on her.

Nolwazi: What's wrong? Why are you so bitter? Are you threatened by me? You do know that universities are open for all, right?

Oh, no... Nolwazi took it way too deep. She took it deep down, there!

Nolwazi: Stop being mad at women who are living the life you secretly desire.

Zimkitha tries to say something, but Derek stops her. I'm glad he knows that this shit needs to be said... We need to move on from this unspoken tension.

Nomvuyo suddenly laughs.

We all look at her in confusion. She should be fuming, yet she's outchea laughing.

She finishes laughing and sighs.

Nomvuyo: Stop being mad at women who are living the life I secretly desire?

She continues laughing and we all look at each other in confusion.

She quietens down and then looks at Liwa and Zimkitha.

Nomvuyo: Am I the only one hearing this?

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: So I wish to give birth to my babies and leave them with nannies?

She looks at Nolwazi, who seems pissed at this point.

Now, Vuvu's also taking it deep yonder... Clearly the gloves are off.

Nomvuyo: In your self-proclaimed higher grade brain, you genuinely think I desire to be like you? A woman whose babies are more familiar to a bunch of nannies, than the person who gave birth to them?

Damn.

Nomvuyo's smile has now disappeared.

Nomvuyo: Don't ever get it twisted, dear. I love being a housewife, and if you didn't know, then now you do. I choose to be in this position every single day, and thankfully, it doesn't require a certificate. So while you're prancing around, trying to convince yourself and those around you, that you're doing the right thing by handing over your kids to strangers, don't for one second, think that's what I also desire.

Dean tries to say something, and I look at him sharply.

Nolwazi: Then what's your problem with me?

Nomvuyo: Do I not treat you with respect every time I see you? Am I not cordial?

Dean: You don't like her, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: I don't have to explain myself to anyone. You, out of all people, should know that we're not all going to get along with everyone we meet.

I'm not taking sides or anything, but there are certain people I meet that I just don't like- from the get go. It's just unfortunate that all of this is taking place in this circle.

Nolwazi shakes her head and stands.

Nolwazi: Let me go check on my babies- or rather, my nannies' babies.

Nomvuyo: Good, go do that, and maybe they'll eventually get used to you.

Nolwazi walks away and then there's silence.

Nomvuyo drinks some water.

Mdu: Uhm, does anyone mind filling me in? Why the fuck were you speaking to my sistr like that? In her house futhi?

Zimkitha: Liste-

Mdu: How fucked up are y-

Liwa: Mduduzi, I suggest you keep quiet.

Mdu looks at Liwa, who's looking at him coolly.

You know, I'm still trying to figure out Liwa. Something ain't right about him nomamakhe. They scare me a bit.

Anyway, I'm outchea sipping my wine, waiting for round 2.

Nobody said the Royal Rumble would be easy. Makunyiwe, then we'll try to clean up people's wounds later.

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The tension is quite deep right now.

Nomvuyo stands and walks away. She seems nonchalant about this whole thing, which I didn't expect. I want her to go crazy.

Zimkitha: I don't like what's happening right now.

Liwa: Let them be.

Dean: Of course, you'll say that... Your wife is the one being unnecessary.

Liwa ignores Dean and looks at me. I nod and stand.

I make my way outside to the gazebo and find Nomvuyo there.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Yes?

Me: What the hell?

She grunts as she sits and rubs her belly.

Me: What just happened?

Nomvuyo: Don't act like you're not enjoying this.

I smile guiltily and she chuckles.

Nomvuyo: My feet are so swollen...

She wiggles her toes and I look at her intently.

Me: Are you really going to act like you didn't just have that moment with Nolwazi?

Nomvuyo: Awume man...

She sighs as she drinks her water.

Nomvuyo: My ass needs to go back to school... That's what I learnt today...

I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: My uneducated self goes around craving other people's lives...

Me: Gosh, Vuvu.

She laughs quietly and shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: Ya neh...

She rubs her belly and looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: Don't worry about me. I'm really unaffected.

Me: You sure?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: What she said didn't faze me... I've come across a lot of women like her, who think we all want to be like them. Had it been true, I'd be fazed.

Me: You came for her parenting, Vuvu.

She shrugs.

Nomvuyo: If you come for me, I'll also go all out...

I sigh heavily and shake my head.

Me: So, what's going to happen now?

Nomvuyo: You people found me here. I was perfectly fine without all of you. I'll survive without Nolwazi's presence, trust me.

Me: So, you're not going to apologise?

Nomvuyo: For what? I've never badmouthed Nolwazi, nor have I tried to tarnish her name. Aningiyeke, please.

I groan as I walk away.

Nomvuyo: Please tell Liwa to bring my bag.

Me: Are you leaving?

She shakes her head and I nod. I walk back inside the house and find everyone at the table except Nolwazi and Dean.

Zimkitha: Is she okay?

Me: Yes, she's fine... Liwa, she's asked you to bring her bag.

Liwa stands and walks away. Tholi also walks away and makes her way to the bathroom.

Mdu: Clearly we came at the wrong time... I don't have time for this drama.

Me: Just keep quiet, wena... Not so long ago, you were also putting us through the most with your hidden life. You shouldn't even try to act like you're above the drama.

He looks at me in shock.

I look at Zimkitha, who's chuckling.

Me: Where's Lwazi?

Zimkitha: She's upstairs.

Mdu: I thought you changed...

I roll my eyes as I walk away and make my way up the stairs. I go to the main bedroom and knock. I open the door and find Nolwazi and Dean sitting on the bed.

Me: Hey.

Nolwazi looks pissed.

I have to admit that I've never seen her like this. Her face says it all.

Nolwazi: Who the fuck does she think she is? How dare she come for my parenting?

I listen to her go on and on. In all honesty, I want her to say all these things to Nomvuyo's face. Sometimes, all we need is the opportunity to let all our anger out, and let the source of the anger see how pissed they made us. Otherwise, you'll just feel like you're not heard or acknowledged and the anger will just remain in the system.

Dean also looks pissed.

Lol, I find it cute that he wants to defend Nolwazi, but he really needs to sit this one out. It's between Nolwazi and Nomvuyo, and as much as we all want to put our 2 cents, I think it's best to stay out of it.

Me: I think we should go downstairs.

Nolwazi: For what? Why the fuck should I go downstairs to talk to a childish 30 something year old?

Yhu. Now, I'm being attacked.

I take a deep breath, and channel my teacher mode.

Me: Nolwazi, the only way issues are solved is through communication. The process may be hurtful, angering and hectic, but it's necessary.

She looks at me intently.

Nolwazi: You really care for her, don't you?

Me: I do, and I also care about you. Both of you need to talk in order to move on.

Nolwazi: But, I'm not the one with the problem.

Me: I understand.

Nolwazi: She came for my parenting.

I sigh.

Me: And you basically said she's uneducated.

She tries saying something, but stops herself.

Me: You snapped.

Nolwazi: Give me a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi: Langa.

Dean nods and stands. We both walk out and close the door.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Dean, I need you to calm down.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: Let Nolwazi fight her own battles.

We get downstairs and find everyone there, including Nomvuyo and Liwa.

Liwa seems to be back to his usual happy self.

Liwa: Where's Nolwazi? She needs to come here, so we can sort this shit out.

Dean hisses and Liwa ignores him.

I look over at Nolmvuyo, who seems fine.

Soon, Nolwazi comes back and sits. We're all very quiet at this point. We've never had such an awkward moment. Usually, we move on, but this time, the tension is a bit too much.

Nolwazi sits and drinks some water.

Nolwazi: Now, let's get one think straight...

She looks around the table.

Nolwazi: No one in this room will ever discuss how I choose to raise my kids.

I want to raise my hand and say something, but I pull myself towards myself.

Nolwazi: Do not, even for one second, think you have the right to tell me how to raise my babies.

Nomvuyo: But, it's fine for you to point out how people choose not to further their studies like you?

There's an awkward silence.

Nomvuyo: Isn't that hypocritical?

Nolwazi sighs and looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: The last time I checked, we were having a decent conversation and you chose to change the direction. I didn't throw a stone at you. I was reacting to how you came at me.

Nolwazi: And I was reacting to how you always treat me. Nomvuyo, if you weren't pregnant, I don't know what I would have done to you...

Nomvuyo: Well, let's thank my pregnancy then... I'd like to think we've known each other long before my pregnancy, but if we're running with it as an excuse for you not putting your hands on me, then so be it... I'm also grateful for my pregnancy right now.

Yhu...

Nolwazi takes a deep breath.

Nomvuyo: I don't know how you managed to conclude that I'm threatened by you... If that doesn't show how egotistic and delusional you are, then I don't know what will... One simply doesn't go around thinking other people desire to be like them, but clearly you do.

Nolwazi: Then what is your problem?

Nomvuyo: Kanti yini inkinga? I've never bad-mouthed you or tried to tarnish your name? Why are you so bothered?

Nolwazi hisses.

Nolwazi: I don't walk around concluding that I don't like people I've never met... That's childish.

Nomvuyo: Then leave me and my childishness. You mature people love announcing how mature and dignified you... If you're so mature, then you'll stop trying to seek validation and keep it moving.

Nolwazi: Wow...

I clear my throat and everyone looks at me.

Okay, I know I said I want these two to fight, but I feel like this is getting out of hand, and it shouldn't. It's painful to watch.

Me: Uhm, I think this is escalating at a very high speed.

Nomvuyo: Ziya-

Me: No, Vuvu.

She drinks her water and looks at me calmly.

Me: We all know that Nolwazi is not your favourite person.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Had it been a random person, I don't think she'd be so bothered.

I continue channeling my inner teacher.

Me: It makes sense for her to be bothered, because this is a close-knit circle. This is an extended family. I'd also be touched if one of you didn't like me, and made me feel unwanted.

Nomvuyo: I've never made her feel unwanted.

Me: You don't know how you've made Nolwazi feel. Just because you think you've been cordial, it doesn't mean that she interpreted your actions that way. Don't disregard her feelings like that.

Gosh, I know she's going to kill me, but I have to reprimand her.

Me: You're all family.

Liwa: Why do you keep saying "you're" and excluding yourself?

I frown.

Liwa: You're also part of the family.

I ignore him and focus on Nomvuyo.

Me: Your silence towards Nolwazi has been very loud... We've all felt it, and in all honesty, it's unjustified. I'd understand if Nolwazi was a psycho bitch, but the woman is amazing. What's there not to love? I know I'm probably the pettiest one in this room, but I have to admit that your dislike towards her is wrong, considering how close you all are in this circle.

There's silence.

I then look at Nolwazi.

Me: No offense, but you also have no right to say someone is threatened by you, and then insult them for not having qualifications. You don't know why Nomvuyo chose to not continue pursuing her studies.

I feel strange speaking to Nolwazi like this, but I'm going with the flow right now.

Me: I get that you were reacting to her behaviour, but that was an inappropriate comment. Had you really wanted to know why Nomvuyo was acting like this, you could have easily approached her a very long time ago, and not in this setting. You've never directed your thoughts to her directly.

Dean tries to say something, and I look at him sharply.

Me: This has nothing to do with you...

He hisses.

Me: Nawe Nomvuyo, you have no right commenting on other people's parenting methods. Just because you're raising Nyami a certain way, it doesn't mean it's the universal way. Don't judge someone for being a working mom.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: With that being said, I'd like to say there's nothing wrong with your parenting. I look up to you. You've done very well for yourself, and I'm sure your megabytes will admire you.

Her face seems to have softened up.

Me: I think the perfect thing to do at this point is give Nomvuyo and Nolwazi some space to talk... What they do with this time is entirely up to them.

Liwa: I agree.

We all stand and leave them in there...

As soon as I hear Ivy announcing her presence in the lounge, I go straight outside and Derek follows me.

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Derek: That was very noble of you.

He stares at me and we laugh.

Me: As much as I wanted that fight to take place, I realised how damaging it could be.

He nods.

Me: Do you think they'll sort it out?

Derek: They will... I think it was a case of misunderstanding.

Me: Nomvuyo will continue being civil, but I don't think she'll form a close relationship with Nolwazi.

Derek: At least their feelings are out in the open now, so there won't be any weird vibes.

Me: True.

Derek: And we can now make fun of them openly.

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: I was just defending your ass, and you're already thinking about making fun of someone else?

He wraps his arms around me and kisses my cheek.

Derek: Thank you for defending me.

Me: Your battles are my battles. I've got you.

We laugh and share a kiss.

Me: I think I'm ready to go now.

Derek: Definitely. The last person I want to see is Ivy.

I look at him in shock and he shrugs.

Derek: I guess your beef rubbed off on me.

I laugh at him.

Me: Good.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

What does Malusi want?

Derek and I look at him expectantly.

Malusi smiles.

These men always have this same weird smile when they're about to engage with someone.

Malusi: A word, Dlamini?

I look at him blankly. I don't know what's going on.

I look at Derek, and it seems like he's not going anywhere, because his arm is now on my waist.

Me: Sure.

Malusi: That was a cute speech...

Me: Cute?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Malusi: A bit hypocritical if you ask me.

I keep quiet. I was waiting for such.

Malusi: You judged me without even getting to know me.

Me: I did.

Malusi: You don't even know me, or the reasons behind my actions.

Me: And, I apologise.

Him and Derek look at me in shock.

Malusi: Sorry, what?

Derek: Baby?

I smile.

Malusi: Well, okay then... I was expecting us to have a back and forth, fuck I even had my arguments ready.

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not there...

Malusi: Hmm...

I look at Derek.

Me: Ready to leave?

Derek: Yes.

Malusi: Leaving already?

Me: Yes.

Malusi: Hmm, alright then.

He walks away and Derek looks at me expectantly.

Derek: And then?

Me: I still don't like him...

He chuckles.

Derek: I was shocked for a second.

We walk back inside and find everyone in the lounge. Nolwazi and Nomvuyo are not here.

Me: Where are they?

Liwa: They're still in there...

I nod.

Ivy seems to have disappeared, and so has Mdu and Tholi. Just then, my phone beeps and it's a message from Tholi, telling me she's not ready to be in this space, and that Ivy was going to make things worse, so she asked Mdu to leave.

I completely understand where she's coming from. However, I'm glad that the group has shown her that they don't have a problem with her. I think she needs to interact with these people bit by bit, and not all at once. Ivy, on the other hand, is obviously going to give her a difficult time, so she's a story for another day.

Just then, Nolwazi emerges.

Okay, she seems fine.

Nolwazi: You can come back in...

We all look at her nervously. We follow her and make our way back to our seats. Nomvuyo is still sitting, drinking water. She also seems fine, but one can never be too sure with this one.

We all sit and it's silent for a few minutes.

Nolwazi: Dessert should be here now...

There's an awkward vibe. We want to know how the talk went. Sifun' kwazi!

Nolwazi looks at us and chuckles.

Nolwazi: You can all breathe... Nomvuyo and I are fine.

We continue staring at them. Why aren't they giving us the details?

Nolwazi: We spoke... We apologised, and we're moving on. You can all stop staring at us.

Liwa: Are you sure you're fine?

Nolwazi smiles sweetly and nods.

Everyone looks at Nomvuyo, who hasn't said anything.

Nomvuyo: We're fine.

She looks at me and I stare right back at her.

Me: That's nice.

Soon, dessert is served.

I want to go home and suffocate in Derek's arms.

Nomvuyo: I won't be joining you for dessert. My bed is calling me.

She yawns as she stands with Liwa. They say their goodbyes and walk out.

Zimkitha: How did the talk really go, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: It was fine. We both apologised.

Zimkitha nods.

Zimkitha: Good.

We continue chatting.

Just then, Ivy comes in the room and looks around.

Ivy: Hey, people...

Everyone greets her back.

Ivy: So, you don't invite me?

Nolwazi: I was planning on inviting you, but I decided not to.

Ivy: Why? Is it because Mdu brought that fat skank who caused you emotional turmoil?

Zimkitha: Nomzamo!

Ivy hisses as she walks to the empty seat next to me (Nomvuyo's) and sits.

She looks at me.

Ivy: I hear you played a role in bringing that girl here?

I don't know who she's talking to.

Nolwazi: Ivy, I don't need your energy right now. I'm exhausted.

Ivy: Ziyanda, you come here and try to change these people's lives, huh? First, you befriended Kwanele, and had the audacity to bring him into this space... Now, you're meddling in my brother's business as well? Orchestrating a relationship with that bitch that played a role in Nolwazi's heartbreak?

Nolwazi: Ivy!

Ivy: What? Am I wrong?

She looks at me with obvious disgust.

Ivy: Bitch, am I wr-

Before she can even finish her sentence, I stand, and give her one piercing smack on the face.

At this point, I go completely blank.

This time, I throw a quick and sharp punch, and I don't even know where it lands, because I'm already being snatched away and dragged out.

All I see is red.

I hear Derek saying my name.

I think I've lost it. I haven't been in such a state in a very very long time.

I can also hear Ivy in the other room, screaming and shouting, yelling every insult in the book.

I make my way outside, and allow the fresh breeze to fill me.

Derek: Baby.

I gather my thoughts.

Derek: Baby...

I feel his hands on my arms and I look at him. He looks nervous and concerned.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Are you sure?

Me: I snapped. That girl tests me, Derek.

He smiles and nods.

Derek: Those hits were well-deserved. She was antagonizing you.

I sigh.

Me: Hug me.

He wraps his arms around me and I hold on to him. I inhale his scent and relax.

Derek: Are you okay now?

Me: Not yet...

We stand there for a long time until I feel much better.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: We should leave now... I'm tired.

Me: Makes the two of us.

He lets go of me and we walk back inside the house.

As soon as I walk in the door, I'm met by a punch on my face.

My adrenaline instantly switches, and I swing. I'm swinging and making sure that Ivy will think twice the next time she tries to come at me.

Once again, I'm being dragged out.

Dean: Dlamini!

Me: No, leave me alone, Dean!

Dean: Calm the fuck down!

Me: Let go of me!

Dean lets go of me and I walk all the way to the driveway.

Derek follows me and unlocks the door. We get in the car and he drives off...

Derek: Use your Breathing Tool...

He looks at me with a smile and I end up chuckling.

Me: Mxm... I think she hit my eye.

Derek: Is it painful?

I nod and pat my eye.

Me: Nxx.

Derek: Breathing Tool, baby.

Me: Star, stop!

He laughs and focuses on the road...

Me: I need a break from these people. I'm tired! Ngapha I have to deal with your psycho mom and her best friend, Busi? I'm tired!

He keeps quiet as I grunt and sink on my seat.

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A month has passed and Derek and I have been doing our own thing. We've been going on dates and lazing around.

We've decided that we won't be around his people for a while. I genuinely feel like being around them brings me stress to a certain extent. They always involve me in their issues, and then I get sucked in deeper, until I can't exclude myself. I need some peace right now. I'm still battling with the aftermath of the miscarriage, and I can't be bumping into the likes of Ivy, whom I've sworn to beat up every time I see...

Anyway, Derek and I are at the mall, busy shopping for things for Lelo. He's finally going to sleepover, and Derek has been beyond excited.

Derek: So, when are we moving out?

Me: Next month.

He laughs.

Derek: Don't worry, I'll sort out everything.

Me: I'll help with packing.

We've decided to move out, seeing as we can't really host a child where we're currently staying.

We eventually finish shopping, and make our way back to our place.

We find Busi already there.

As soon as Lelo sees me, he jumps for me and I pick him up.

Me: Lelo!

Lelo: Hello!

I give him a kiss and he giggles.

I've grown to really love the little boy. He's cuteness is infectious.

Busi: Baby, come give mommy a kiss.

I try to put him down, but Lelo doesn't let go of me.

Lelo: Zizi, let's go play!

Me: Say goodbye to mommy first.

Busi: Mpumelelo!

I let go of him and Busi takes him. She plants a kiss on his lips.

Busi: Bye, baby.

Lelo: Bye bye.

She kisses him again and puts him down. He then walks to me and takes my hand.

Derek and Busi exchange hellos. Thereafter, we watch her drive off.

Derek: Lelo, you're not going to say hi to daddy?

Lelo laughs as he lets go of my hand and hold Derek's.

We make our way inside and Lelo goes straight to the lounge, where we've set up a play area for him. Derek and I begin unpacking all the groceries.

Derek: So, we have a guest this weekend?

I chuckle.

Me: I wonder how we'll sleep.

Derek: Should be interesting...

Me: And Lwazi will be here soon.

Derek: I've missed her.

Just then, my phone rings and it's my mom.

Me: Mama?

Mom: We're outside, baby.

Me: Okay, I'll be there now now.

Mom: Shap.

I hang up and sigh.

Me: They're here.

He smiles excitedly.

Lwazi: Hello, cutie!

Lelo looks up from his lego game. He looks at Lwazi, a bit confused.

Lwazi: I'm your sister!

Lelo: Hello, Lelo.

I chuckle.

The child is really confused. I just find it cute when he has these moments where he greets himself.

Lwazi walks to him and picks him up.

Seeing her hold Lelo makes me realise just how grown she is... She's grown into such a beautiful, strong young girl.

Lwazi: My name is Auntie Lwazi.

Lelo: Hello, Lelo!

I chuckle.

Me: Lelo, this is my baby... Her name is Lwazi.

Lwazi: Hai, you can't let him call me by my first name.

Me: Heeh, why?

Lwazi: Mommy, I'm 13 years old now. I'm his aunt.

Me: And what does that make me?

Lwazi: Well, duuh, you're his mom.

Me: Hai wena.

She rolls her eyes and looks at Lelo.

Lwazi: Hello, Lelo.

Lelo: Hello!

He wiggles and she lets go of him. He then focuses on his lego game.

Lwazi: He's so cute!

Me: Too much.

Lwazi: You must bring him home.

Me: Ah ah.

She groans.

My mom walks to us and looks down at Lelo.

Mom: Is this the young man?

Lelo looks up with his big eyes. He's beyond confused.

Mom: Hello, boy.

Lelo: Hello.

Mom: Unjani?

He looks at her in confusion.

Mom: Haike, you'll have to learn isiZulu.

Me: He only speaks English.

Mom: Unacceptable...

She looks down at Lelo.

Mom: Uzofunda ukukhuluma...

Lelo blinks three times and focuses on his lego game again.

Lwazi: I'm famished!

Me: Hehe, look at you...

Mom: She's been flooding us with these big words... Sifile!

I laugh as I listen to Lwazi explain the importance of using powerful English words.

Mom: You look really good... You're back to your usual self.

Me: Aww, thank you.

Lwazi: You look astounding!

Me: Yaas!

Derek walks to us and tells us the food is ready.

We walk to the other side of the lounge and sit.

This place is really starting to feel small. Now, I definitely think moving is a good idea.

Lwazi helps him serve, and we begin eating.

Mom: So, how's fatherhood?

Derek smiles shyly and looks at me.

Derek: I'm still wrapping my head around it.

Mom: You seem to be doing great.

Derek: Your daughter's been by my side.

My mom looks at me and smiles.

Mom: I'm glad.

Derek then looks at Lwazi.

Derek: How's school?

Lwazi: It's great. I just miss you guys.

I sigh heavily. I think I miss being around children, it's been too long.

Anyway, we continue chatting and catching up...

A couple of days have passed, and Lelo has left. I must admit that I miss his adorable self...

In the afternoon, I make my way to Nomvuyo's house. The woman made it explicitly clear that I shouldn't plan a baby shower for her, and I obliged. She's now waiting for the baby to pop out.

I get to their house and find her by the pooling, dipping her feet in there.

Me: Lover.

I bend and give her a kiss.

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby.

She rubs her belly and groans.

Me: Everything okay?

Nomvuyo: Cramps.

Me: Yoh...

Nomvuyo: I'm ready to take him out.

Me: It's a boy??

She nods.

Me: Why didn't you tell me?

Nomvuyo: We found out recently.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sure you've heard about the Ivy thing.

She chuckles and nods.

Nomvuyo: She told me...

Me: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: The girl had a blue eye, what did you do to her?

Me: I don't want to talk about her.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

She rubs her belly and groans lightly.

Me: How are you and Nolwazi?

Nomvuyo: What do you mean?

Me: Have you guys spoken?

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I'm pregnant. All my attention has been on this baby...

Me: Hmm...

Just then, Liwa comes to us and gives us drinks.

Me: Thank you.

Liwa: You're welcome, Ziyanda Dlamini!

He walks off.

Me: By the way, how's Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: She's okay.

Me: What happened that day?

Nomvuyo: You wouldn't understand... Zimkitha lives a wild life.

Me: Wow.

She rubs her belly again and groans.

Nomvuyo: Please help me stand...

Me: Okay.

I help her stand and we make our way inside.

Nomvuyo: I need some rest... Come massage my feet.

Me: So, you called me here just to make me your slave?

She laughs as she throws herself on the couch...

When I get to our place, I find it locked.

I knock and hear Derek saying he's coming.

Seconds later, the door opens.

Me: Really?

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't feel safe when you're not around. You're the fighter, love.

Me: Gosh.

I walk in and he follows me.

Derek: Did Nomvuyo feed you?

Me: Nope.

Derek: Good. Do you want to shower first, or?

Me: Excuse me? Do I stink?

He laughs.

Derek: Angithi you love freshening up before you eat...

Me: I'll be done in 30 minutes.

Derek: Okay, baby.

I walk to the bedroom...

When I come back, he rearranged the entire space.

Me: Yay! Picnic time?

Derek: Yep.

Me: Perfect.

I sit as he dishes up for us.

We begin eating.

Me: I'm convinced food is better than sex.

He laughs.

Derek: Oh, please...

Me: You're an amazing cook, Ngidi.

Derek: I know, baby, but I'm also great in bed.

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles.

Derek: So, I'd like to discuss a few things with you...

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: And, I'd like to redeem myself a bit.

Me: Hmm, I'm listening.

Derek: I've known you for close to ten months now...

Me: Has it only been 10 months?

We laugh as I make fun of how obsessed he was with me at first.

Me: I genuinely thought you were a creep!

Derek: You were so rude to me!

Me: Ngidi, you stalked me!

He laughs and shakes his head.

Derek: See how far we've come?

I nod.

Derek: Do you see yourself with anyone else?

Me: Ewww.

He chuckles.

Derek: You and I have a strange level of understanding towards each other.

Me: It's very strange...

Derek: I could spend my days like this forever... You know, the last time I was unemployed, I was ready to blow up banks. I hated it.

Me: Dramatic much?

Derek: So, you're not enjoying yourself?

Me: I mean, it's okay... I'm starting to miss being busy though.

He chuckles.

Me: But, I must admit that I enjoy spending my days lazing around with you. You feed me well, Star.

He smiles.

Derek: Now, with that being said, Ziyanda, don't you think we're soul mates?

Me: Without a doubt.

He smiles.

Derek: How do you feel about taking the next step?

Me: Marriage?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Will you marry me?

Me: Hmm, I think I need a kiss, just to gather my thoughts.

He chuckles as he gets closer to me and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Of course I'll marry you...

He smiles and kisses me again.

INSERT 149

It's been a week since Derek and I had a discussion about our future. Lol, as strange and unconventional as it sounds, it works for me. He's first impromptu proposal ignited my anxiety, so this discussion had to happen.

Anyway, it's 11am and I get a call from Nomvuyo.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: I'm about to have this baby.

Me: What??

Nomvuyo: Come to the hospital.

Me: Vuvu, are you serious??

Nomvuyo: Yes, Zi. I just got to my room and the doctor is getting ready.

Me: Wait! We'll be there shortly.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: So, we must wait for you?

Me: Yes!

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Wozani ke.

Me: Shap.

I hang up and rush to the lounge, where Derek is watching soccer.

Me: Ngidi! Come!

He looks at me blankly.

Me: Vuvu is in hospital! She's about to pop!

Derek: Really?

Me: There's no time, come!

He stands and switches off the TV.

Me: Let's go!

We get our things and rush out... I have no idea why I'm so nervous, you'd swear I'm the one having the baby.

When we get there, we find Liwa, Zimkitha and Nyami.

Nyami holds on to my hand as I greet.

Zimkitha: You arrived just in time.

Me: Kanti nifike nini?

Zimkitha: About an hour ago. Nomvuyo's baby is ready.

Liwa: My seeds don't waste time.

I laugh.

Liwa: How are you?

Me: I'm well, thanks.

Zimkitha: Nomvuyo says she wants you to be there, Zi.

Me: Really?

She smiles and nods.

We walk to Nomvuyo's room and find her on her bed. She is so chilled, you'd swear she's not about to give birth.

Liwa walks to her and plants a kiss on her forehead.

Liwa: How different is it this time around?

They both laugh.

Me: Hey, Vuvz.

She smiles and rubs her belly.

Nomvuyo: I told the doctor we can't start without the Great Ziyanda.

Me: Whatever, don't patronise me.

She laughs.

Derek: Vuvz.

Nomvuyo: Hey, Star.

They smile at each other and then Nomvuyo looks at Nyami, who is still holding on to my hand.

Nomvuyo: Come give mommy a kiss.

Nyami walks to the bed and leans closer to her mom. They share a kiss and she walks back to me and holds my hand.

Zimkitha: I'm so happy that I'll be here this time around... You two chose to exclude everyone the first time.

Liwa: Those were some crazy days...

Nomvuyo: Liwa was crying like there was no tomorrow.

Liwa: Hai suka.

Zimkitha: Nisuka kude...

Just then, the doctor walks in and smiles.

Doctor: Hello, everyone.

We greet back. He looks at Nomvuyo.

Doctor: We can start...

I'm just amazed by the calmness here. Isn't she supposed to be screaming? What happened to the pains? Where's the drama?

As I stand here, staring at Nomvuyo with her legs wide open, I'm numb... I can't explain what's going through my mind...

Doctor: Ready?

Nomvuyo: Yes...

Liwa is standing close to her, holding her hand... He looks emotional.

Doctor: We'll push in 10s then we'll build up, okay?

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Doctor: Alright.

Nomvuyo takes a deep breath.

Doctor: And push... 1...2...3...4...5...6...7...8...9...10...

Nomvuyo huffs heavily.

I want to hold on to Derek, but he's not in the room. He's outside with Nyami. It's just me, Liwa and Zimkitha. Zimkitha is busy taking a video.

Dr: Ready?

Nomvuyo nods.

Dr: And push...

He continues counting and Nomvuyo groans loudly.

Dr: I want you to push very hard, Nomvuyo, okay?

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Dr: Take a very deep breath.

Nomvuyo does as she's told.

Dr: Go...

He continues counting.

Nurse: The head is approaching, push harder.

Nomvuyo visibly pushes harder, and Liwa keeps encouraging her softly.

The vibe is still calm and relaxed. I've never imagined a delivery to be this relaxed.

Dr: Well done, Nomvuyo... Another hard push and the head will be out.

Out of nowhere, Nomvuyo starts sobbing.

I walk to the other side of her bed and brush the sweat off her face.

Liwa: Baby, you can do this...

She closes her eyes and continues sobbing.

I've never seen this soft side of Nomvuyo, so now I'm also feeling teary.

Liwa comforts her and she regains her calmness.

Doctor: Ready?

She nods.

Doctor: Very deep breath in...

She takes in as much air as she can and commences.

As soon as I hear that baby cry, I cry my lungs out.

In fact, all three of us are bawling.

The nurse places the baby on Nomvuyo's chest and the bawling continues. I've never seen this birth process before, so I'm overwhelmed and stunned. I can't believe women are capable of doing such. It's mind blowing when you witness it so intimately.

Seeing Liwa like this is also making my emotions crazier. These people never wear the hearts on their sleeves, so seeing them this emotional is doing things to me.

Dr: Do you know what you're naming your boy?

Liwa: Yes.

He looks at me.

Liwa: Nkanyezi.

Me: Excuse me?!

They all look at me.

Nomvuyo: What?

Me: Nkanyezi??

Zimkitha: Yes, we want to pass on the name.

Me: Pass it on where? I think the fuck not!

Okay, I didn't mean to say that, but it just came out.

Liwa: What's the problem?

Me: Nkanyezi will be my child, not yours. Why are you stealing Star's name?

They all look at me in shock.

Liwa: You want children?

Zimkitha: So, you're going to have children with Nkanyezi?

Me: What kind of a question is that? Of course we're going to have kids!

They all stare at me for a good minute, before bursting out in laughter.

I look at them in confusion.

Zimkitha sighs in relief.

Zimkitha: We just wanted to make sure you're not a robot...

I continue looking at them in confusion.

Liwa: It's a joke, Ziyanda Dlamini... We're not naming our baby Nkanyezi...

I sigh and they laugh.

Liwa: Our baby's name is Nkosinhle.

Me: Damn right it is... You must stay very far from other people's names.

They continue laughing...

Derek looks at me softly.

Me: I need fresh air.

He nods as he takes my hand and leads me outside.

Derek: How was it?

Me: Mind blowing.

Derek: And you're not traumatised?

Me: I don't think so... It was fascinating.

He chuckles. I wrap my arms around him and rest my head on his chest.

Me: I feel weird.

Derek: How so?

I look up at him.

Me: I want a baby.

His eyes pop out, and just as he's about to say anything, Dean yells my name.

I let go of him and leave him there.

Me: Langa!

We share a hug.

Dean: How are you?

Me: Okay, and you?

Dean: Liwa tells me you were in the delivery room. How are you not in the emergency room?

Me: Not funny!

He laughs.

Dean: I guess you're growing up.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: And then? Yini ngomuntu wakho?

We watch as a dumbstruck Derek walks to us.

Gosh.

Dean: Yini wena?

Derek looks at me.

Derek: You want a baby?

Dean: Who?

Now they're both staring at me.

Dean: Wait, what? She says she wants a baby?

Derek nods.

Dean: God really does exist...

I roll my eyes.

Me: Can you stop being dramatic? I'm just broody, that's all. It will wear off.

They continue staring at me and I walk away and leave them there.

When I get to Nomvuyo's room, I find Nolwazi there.

Okay, I didn't expect that.

Me: Uhm...

Nolwazi: Yes, I'm here, Zi.

Me: And, you know what? I'm not complaining.

I look at Nomvuyo who seems relaxed.

Me: Everything okay, bestie boo?

She nods lightly.

Nomvuyo: I'd like to sleep...

Me: You deserve some sleep, after all that pushing.

Nomvuyo: Mxm.

Me: Girl, I saw your vagina... No wonder Liwa's obsessed with you.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

We laugh.

Me: I'm just saying...

Nolwazi: We'll give you space, Vuvu.

Nomvuyo nods as she repositions and covers herself. Zimkitha and Liwa are nowhere to be found. Also, where's the baby? I'm too uninformed about this shit...

We walk out and close the door...

I decided that we should throw a surprise "Welcome Home" shindig for Vuvu and little Nkosi. I didn't invite every single person in the circle, phela it's not a party. It's just Nolwazi, Dean, Zimkitha, Derek and I.

And seeing as we didn't have a baby shower for her, I demanded everyone to bring gifts...

I've decorated the lounge, and I must say I did a great job.

Nolwazi prepared the food, and Zimkitha organised the drinks, of course.

As they drive in, we turn off the music and keep quiet. As soon as they walk in, we all shout, "Surprise!"

Nomvuyo looks at us in shock and Liwa smiles proudly.

Nomvuyo: Really?

Me: Ungazothi nyweally.

She looks around and eventually smiles.

Nomvuyo: Is this for me?

Dean: No, it's for the neighbour...

Nomvuyo: Very funny, arrogant man.

Dean chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Thank you...

Zimkitha: We thought we'd get-together and welcome baby Nkosi in style.

Nomvuyo: I'm sure he'll never forget this.

We all laugh.

Nomvuyo: I'd like to take a bath and change clothes, if you don't mind.

Zimkitha: Go ahead, we'll be here, drinking.

Nomvuyo: Oh, wow...

She goes upstairs and Liwa takes the baby upstairs. Nyami has been glued to me... Angazi what's her problem. I think she's a bit jealous of Nkosi, since the attention is not solely on her anymore. Uzoqina shame. That's what happens when parents shag endlessly.

Anyway, I was very satisfied with how the shindig turned out- intimate and filled with love. After we finish giving her our gifts, we all go our separate ways, and give them space...

INSERT 150 (Short and Unedited Insert)

A week has passed. I am ready to go back to work. I'm tired of waking up and not having something constructive to do.

At least Derek has been focused on the school, mina I've been walking around like a zombie. If I ever wished to be a housewife, this experience has definitely shown me that I'm not about that life.

Anyway, we're getting ready to move to a new place, a proper house. Derek's rich ass seems to have a pool of property while I'm out here struggling with my savings, which are running out.

We're busy packing up, when I get a call from Derek, who left to get more boxes.

Me: Derek?

Derek: Baby, I'm getting pizza, which one do you want?

Me: Huh?

Derek: I'm getting pizza.

Me: I'm confused...

I tell him what I want.

Derek: I'll be there soon.

Me: And the boxes?

Derek: Got them.

Me: Hmkay.

I hang up and continue packing.

My phone rings again and I answer it without checking the caller id.

Me: Derek?

Dean: Derek wok'nuka.

I roll my eyes.

Me: What do you want?

Dean: Come open the door.

Me: No, stay there. I don't want to see you.

Dean: Mxm.

He hangs up and I grunt as I walk to the door and open it.

I stare at Dean.

Me: You look good, uphumaphi?

Dean: Some of us work...

Me: Mxm.

He pushes me aside and walks in. I close the door and follow him to the lounge.

Dean: So, you're really moving?

I nod.

Dean: Good. You two have been living like roommates in a high school dormitory.

Me: I don't need your negativity in my life.

He chuckles.

Me: Want a drink?

Dean: Water.

I go to the fridge and get him a bottle of water. I pass it to him and continue packing.

Me: How are the megabytes?

Dean: They're growing too fast.

Me: Khulekani is so chubby.

He smiles.

Dean: He eats like a man.

Me: And how's the little ho-

I clear my throat.

Me: How's the other megabyte?

He looks at me suspiciously.

Dean: Did you just call my daughter a hoe?

Me: What? Me? No, I'd never!

He grunts and I laugh.

Me: I'd never!

Just then, the door opens and Derek walks in.

Derek: Dean, get the boxes in the car.

Dean stands and goes without complaining.

Me: Pizza? Really?

He smiles.

Derek: You don't want it?

Me: Don't be foolish.

I take the box and open it.

Me: Yaas!

Derek: How's the packing?

Me: I'm done with the lounge. Tomorrow we can start and finish the kitchen, then move on to the bedroom.

He nods.

Me: I'm tired.

He grins.

Me: No, Derek, I'm done with you. I know I said I want to have a baby, but there's no need for you to have sex with me every chance you get.

He laughs and shakes his head.

Derek: I'm taking advantage of the situation.

I shake my head.

Me: I need to start my contraceptives again.

Dean walks back in with the boxes and puts them down.

Me: I'm surprised you didn't complain...

Dean: Mxm.

He sits and takes the box of pizza.

Dean: So, when is the wedding?

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: Are you deaf now?

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Mind your business, Hlongz.

Dean: You are my business. You know you're my only friends.

Me: How sad... No one likes you.

Dean: As if I care.

Me: I think you do... Secretly.

Dean: Okay, Oprah.

Me: Mxm.

We continue chatting and eating...

That night Derek and I finished packing the lounge and half of the kitchen.

Derek: I think we should be ready in two days.

Me: Once we're done with the kitchen, then I'll see the light.

We throw ourselves on the couch and I rest my head on his chest.

Me: I need a massage.

Derek: Me too.

I groan.

Derek: Let's take a shower and massage each other.

Me: Derek, I'm done having sex with you. Leave me alone!

He laughs and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: Do you still feel like you want a child?

I sigh.

Me: Not anymore.

He groans.

Me: I was just broody, Derek. Also, you have Lelo, so leave me alone.

Derek: In all honesty, my relationship with Lelo will take a while to be solidified. I can't seem to wrap my head around the fact that I wasn't there for him from the beginning.

Me: You need to get over it. He's in your life now, and you can't withhold yourself from loving him unconditionally. You're responsible for that little boy, don't let him down.

Derek: What about you?

Me: Huh?

Derek: You heard me.

I sigh.

Me: I'm also getting there...

Derek: He loves you...

Me: Hmm.

Derek: I'm proud of how you've healed from the miscarriage.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Melinda has been amazing.

Me: She's the best.

Derek: Our communication continues to improve.

He plants a kiss on forehead.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Love you too, Star.

Derek: Now... I got something, and I hope you won't freak out.

Me: What?

I watch as he gets up and walks to the bedroom.

Is he fetching the ring?

My heart starts beating fast as I realise that I actually agreed to marry him. I take a deep breath and try not to freak out. He eventually walks back and sits. He gives me a plastic and I take it hesitantly.

I take a peek and then look at him sharply.

He looks at me, clearly nervous.

Me: Pregnancy tests, Derek?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Really??

Derek: Uhm, you haven't been on contraceptives since...

He clears his throat and shifts uncomfortably.

I stare at him in shock.

Derek: Baby, I'm just trying to make sure.

Me: Make sure what?

He sighs and scratches his head.

I sit back and put the plastic aside.

Me: You want to kill me?

Derek: Never.

I stare at him and he hides a smile.

Me: Unbelievable...

Derek: I just want to know...

Me: And what happens if I'm pregnant?

He smiles widely and I roll my eyes.

We sit in silence for a long time. I eventually stand and take the plastic. He follows me to the bathroom and watches as I take out the three boxes of pregnancy tests.

Me: Why did you buy three?

He shrugs and scratches his head shyly.

Me: Hai kodwa, Derek...

I splash water on my face and take a deep breath. Thereafter, I take out the tests and manage to distribute my pee on all three of them.

I read the instructions.

Me: The pink shows that the urine has been absorbed... We should wait for 3 minutes.

Derek: How will we know once, uhm...

Me: A blue line will be present in the control window to show that the test has worked. There'll be a positive sign if I'm pregnant...

I give him the paper and he takes it and reads the instructions. I sit on the toilet seat.

This is probably the longest three minutes of my entire life.

Derek is now sitting on the floor, between my legs.

I don't know how I feel right now. I'm indifferent.

After a long time, Derek reaches for one of the tests and glances at it. He then gives it to me and I stare at it.

I exhale and look at him.

Me: Again?

He nods and a smile appears on his face.

I put down the test and groan...

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It's been over 24 hours since those three tests confirmed that I am pregnant.

Derek has been up and down getting shit packed and I've been cracking my skull about all of this... Derek is evidently happy. The man has been smiling and humming since we found out. This time around, he's not even trying to hide his joy.

As I'm labelling the boxes, he walks to me and I glance at him.

Derek: You haven't eaten. What would you like to eat?

He smiles sweetly.

Me: I'm okay.

He sighs and stares at me.

Derek: You haven't said one word since we found out.

Me: I don't want to rain on your parade.

He stifles a smile and takes my hands.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I'm still processing it.

He looks at me softly and wraps his arms around me. I sigh and relax.

Derek: Stop over-thinking.

I keep quiet.

Derek: What will help?

I look at him.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: Hmm?

Derek: What will make you feel at ease?

Me: Ice-cream.

He smiles and hugs me.

Derek: Alright then.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and I walk to the bedroom while gets the ice-cream. I don't know how I feel... I need to call Melinda, even though she's not in the province.

Derek walks in and sits on the bed, next to me.

I open the tub and dig in.

After a few minutes, he clears his throat and I look at him.

Derek: Our appointment with Dr Modisa is in 2 hours.

I nod and he smiles.

Me: I need a nap.

Derek: Okay, I'll finish off packing the kitchen.

I sigh and close the tub.

Me: I need to shut down for a bit.

He takes the ice-cream and walks out of the bedroom. I lie back and try to gather my thoughts. I don't really know how I'm feeling right now. I think I'm freaking out, but I'm also not going crazy. I just don't know.

So, I'm really pregnant. The doctor has confirmed it. Apparently I'm approaching five months. How? I don't know. I've been living like a non-pregnant person, so I have no idea how this is possible. I zoned out when the doctor gave us a lecture.

Derek and I get in the car and sit in silence.

Me: I think we should tell my parents.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What? They already think I'm a disappointment, we may as well tell them.

Derek: Come on, Zi.

Me: Let's go to Soweto, please.

He stares at me for a while and eventually nods lightly. He starts the car and drives off.

My phone rings and I check the caller id.

It's my mom. Clearly she can sense all this shit.

I clear my throat and answer.

Me: Mama.

Mom: Hello, baby!

Me: What's up?

Mom: I was just checking in.

Me: Hmm, we're on our way there.

Mom: Really? I miss you!

Me: See you soon.

Mom: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Alright then, I'll see you when you arrive.

Me: Shap.

I end the call and look at Derek.

Derek: Uthini?

Me: Nothing, she's just excited to see us.

He stifles a smile.

I ignore him and lower my seat.

Honestly, sleeping is the only way I can cope right now. I'm very confused.

When we get to my house, we find my mom cooking. I can't help but feel relaxed for some odd reason.

She smiles brightly when she sees us.

Mom: My babies!

She gives me a hug and then moves on to Derek, who is more than happy to see her.

Me: Where's your husband?

Mom: He's out...

Me: Hmkay.

I'm relieved. In all honesty, I'm not ready to face my dad. He has an eccentric way of handling things. I'm not in the mood for his verbal punches. I'd rather deal with my overly excited mother for now.

Me: Is Lwazi back from her school trip?

Mom: They're only coming back later.

I groan and go to the lounge.

I listen to her and Derek catch up. They are really into each other.

Mom: Is everything okay?

Derek looks at me. I think he wants to tell my mom, but I know he's going to make it sound all deep and philosophical, and I'm not in the mood for that.

I sigh and stare at my mom.

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: We're e-

Me: Mama, I'm pregnant.

There's silence as they both stare at me.

Mom: What?!

Here we go.

For the next few minutes, we watch and listen as she ululates and thank God for healing me.

Njani?

I don't know how I've been healed, but I just keep quiet and let her be.

She eventually quietens down and sits. She looks at Derek, who is smiling from ear to ear.

Derek: Mama? Do you need water?

Mom: Haibo Nkanyezi, your soldiers do not play around!

My jaw drops.

What the hell??

Derek's jaw is also on the floor.

Me: Mama!

She laughs and sighs happily.

Mom: I was so stressed. I was worried that you'd never recover from what happened!

Me: And how exactly is this pregnancy a form of recovery?

Mom: It's a blessing.

I keep quiet.

She continues preaching for a while.

Mom: Alright, so we need to discuss logistics.

My heart immediately pounds as my dad crosses my mind.

Mom: Derek, you cannot be popping pregnancies like this.

He stares at my mom softly.

Derek: We've already discussed that other issue.

My mom is quiet for a few seconds.

Mom: Really? And?

Derek: We're good.

Mom: Really??

She looks at me in shock.

Me: What are you talking about?

They both look at me.

Mom: You agreed to marry him??

Me: Huh?

She doesn't say anything.

Me: How do you know?

Mom: Derek asked for our permission a very long time ago. We've been waiting for you.

Me: Waiting for you? A very long time ago? What are you saying?

My mom sighs and looks at me gently.

Mom: Baby, Derek has known a long time ago that he wants to be with you long term.

Me: Long time ago? When was this?

Mom: Before your pregnancy.

Me: What??

I look at Derek in shock and he doesn't say anything.

Mom: Why do you think your father was not too intense about your pregnancy? He knew that Derek had plans. The problem is that you are a tough nut to crack. At the end of the day, we had to wait for you to realise what you really want.

I look at them in confusion.

Like, bathini labantu? Kahle kahle, kwenzakalani?

Derek stands and sits next to me.

Derek: I asked your parents for permission just after we moved in together. I was with Dean.

What?

Derek: Your father told me not to ask you because that would overwhelm you.

Mom: We knew you weren't ready for marriage.

We sit in silence for a while.

Mom: Are you okay?

Me: Dad didn't have a problem with Derek wanting to marry me?

Mom: Ziyanda, you are 26 years old. Why in the world would we stand in your way?

I keep quiet.

Mom: You're an adult. We don't have the right to tell you how to live your life. At this point, all we can do is guide you, not dictate.

I can't help but smile at her. I must admit that my mother is the best.

Mom: Okay?

I nod.

She looks at Derek.

Mom: I know for a fact that he won't be too mad if you tell him Ziyanda has agreed to marry you. At least he'll feel like this relationship is stable, and you're not just being irresponsible.

She smiles.

Mom: All we want is for you to have a solid future, Zi.

Me: I'd rather we wait a bit. I don't want to tell him now.

Mom: We can't wait too long.

I nod and sigh.

Me: I miss Lwazi.

Mom: She'll be back soon... Let me dish up for you...

She stands and walks to the kitchen...

We're now driving to a restaurant to meet up with Dean and Nolwazi for dinner.

I'm still hungry, even after stuffing my face earlier at home.

We get there and find them at our table.

Nolwazi smiles brightly and we share a hug.

We sit and I look at Dean.

Me: So, you knew?

Dean: Knew about what wena?

Me: That Derek asked my father for permission to marry me.

Nolwazi: What??

She looks at us in shock.

I sigh and look at Dean.

Dean: What's your point?

Me: Mxm.

Dean: It's about time you agreed. Angazi uthembeni nge vat en sit.

Me: Excuse me, pot?

Nolwazi: You agreed?!

She smiles widely.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness!

Me: Nolwazi, this stays between us, please.

Nolwazi: We need champagne ASAP!

Derek chuckles.

Me: You know I don't like champagne.

Nolwazi: I don't care! We need to celebrate!

She calls the waiter.

Nolwazi: We need champagne!

I groan.

Me: I'm pregnant.

Nolwazi and Dean: What??

They look at us in shock.

I sigh.

Gosh...

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Dean: What the fuck?!

He stares at Derek.

Dean: How the fuck do I not know about this?

Me: Excuse me? Asijoli sonke.

He ignores me and continues staring at Derek.

Derek: We only found out today.

Nolwazi: That's amazing!

Dean stares at me.

Dean: Ukhulelwe?

I don't respond.

He looks at Derek and smiles.

Dean: Congratulations.

Derek: Thank you.

Nolwazi: We'll drink on your behalf, Zi.

I roll my eyes and they laugh.

Dean looks at me intently.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I don't know.

Dean: Well, you're not running around crazy, so that's a good thing.

Me: Mxm.

Nolwazi: What a blessing. I'm really happy for you two!

The waiter brings the bottle of champagne and Nolwazi stands and insists on pouring. I glance at Derek.

Me: What are you doing?

Derek: Drinking.

Me: I think the fuck not. You'll drink once I've given birth.

Dean: Uyanya wena.

Derek: Are you serious, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm as serious as this pregnancy.

He sighs and Nolwazi laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: It's the right thing to do, D.

Derek: But I also want champagne.

Me: Uzoqina.

Nolwazi: My man and I will drink on your behalf.

Nolwazi and Dean laugh as they gobble down the champopo.

Just then, Nolwazi's phone rings and she groans.

Nolwazi: I have to take this, it's work.

Dean: Niqala kanje ukuba nabomakhwapheni.

Nolwazi laughs as she stands and walks away. Derek follows and goes to the bathroom.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hmm?

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: I don't know.

He chuckles.

Dean: How many months?

Me: Almost five.

Dean: So, you've been fucking without protection for five months?

I keep quiet.

Dean: Mxm, uyabheda kanti. What did you expect?

Me: Leave me alone.

He tries to say something and I look at him sharply.

Dean: Lighten up.

I sigh.

Me: How can I? What if I lose the baby again?

He exhales.

Dean: The chances are slimmer at 5 months.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I'm actually glad that you found out now. At least my nephew has been surviving by himself, without your stress.

Me: Excuse me??

He smiles.

Dean: Relax.

I sigh.

Me: I'm shitting my pants here, Dean.

Dean: Focus on taking care of yourself.

Derek comes back and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Dean: I'm telling your person to stop stressing.

Derek looks at me intently.

Dean: I need my nephew to survive.

Derek: Nephew?

I roll my eyes.

Dean: You want a girl?

Derek: I do, actually.

Dean: Why am I not surprised?

I finish up my water and sink in my seat.

Me: Can we change the subject?

Dean: No, you must get used to this. We're not going to hide our excitement this time around.
Kuzoqina wena.

Me: Wow!

Derek: Hai man, Dean.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Angeke sizwe ngawe.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: So, are you going to get married first?

Me: Yes.

They both look at me in shock. I'm also shocked at my response.

Derek: Huh?

Me: I'm not trying to have a bastard.

Dean immediately bursts out in laughter and Derek continues to look at me in shock.

Dean: What??

I groan.

Derek: Ziyanda, you want to get married first?

I look at him blankly.

Me: Yes, kanti?

Derek: Before the baby is born?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Are you aware of the time we have left?

I don't say anything.

Me: I'm not thinking about all of that. All I know is that my father will not allow me to get married after the baby.

Derek: Why the fuck not?

Me: Because!

He looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: You never cease to amaze me.

Nolwazi comes back and sits.

Nolwazi: What's up?

Dean fills her in.

Nolwazi: You want to get married first??

Me: Yes.

I look at them blankly. I don't understand what the problem is.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness. How many months?

Me: Almost 5.

Nolwazi: So, you have plus/minus three months to plan a wedding?

Me: What wedding?

All of them look at me in shock once again.

Dean: What the fuck is wrong with you? Who gave birth to you?

I shrug.

Dean: You don't want a wedding?

I shrug once again.

I look at Derek. It seems like he is going through the most.

Me: Kanti you don't want us to get married?

Derek: I do.

Me: Manje?

Derek: I want to marry you, but what do you mean you don't want a wedding?

Me: I don't know.

Dean: What exactly do you know?

Me: Angazi.

Nolwazi: I think Ziyanda is overwhelmed and you two aren't helping. You need time to figure things out.

We're silent for a while.

I stand.

Me: Excuse me.

I walk away and make my way outside. I need fresh air. My thoughts are all over the place.

I go to a table outside and sit there.

I'm starting to freak out. I can feel the anxiety building up. I'm starting to feel like I have a lot to figure out about my future, and it's not as simple as I thought.

Just as I'm about to lose my breath, Derek comes from out of nowhere with a glass of water. He takes a chair and sits opposite me.

Derek: Ziyanda, drink some water.

I shake my head. I don't want water. I want to stabilise my breathing.

He gets closer to me and stops himself from touching me. He knows I don't want to feel suffocated when I'm anxious.

Derek: I need you to focus on your breathing, Zi.

All these questions are racing through my mind. Dean has made me think about all these things. I wasn't thinking about a wedding. How am I going to have a wedding when I'm 9 months pregnant? On the flipside, how am I going to deal with my father emphasising that I have to get married before I give birth?

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek's warm hands on mine.

I snap out of it.

Derek: Let's do the grounding exercise, okay?

I nod.

Derek: Rate your anxiety on a scale of 1-10.

Me: 7.

Derek: Relax your shoulders and sit up straight.

I sigh and do as I'm told.

Derek: Close your eyes...

I do as I'm told.

Derek: Breathe slowly and deeply...

I focus on my breathing, making sure it's not quick and sharp.

After a while, I feel calmer.

Derek: What colour is my t-shirt?

Me: Grey.

Derek: What does the chair you're on feel like?

Me: It's metal... It's cold and a bit uncomfortable.

He chuckles quietly and stays silent. I continue to focus on my breathing for a while.

Derek: What do you hear?

Me: The harsh breeze...

Derek: Can you feel the harsh breeze on your face?

I nod.

Derek: What can you smell?

I inhale.

Me: You mostly...

He chuckles again.

Derek: Two things you can feel.

Me: The breeze hitting my face, and your warm hand on my left hand.

He's quiet again and I focus on my breathing.

I exhale loudly and open my eyes.

We stare at each other.

Derek: Hello, there.

He smiles and I smile back.

Derek: Better?

Me: Yes, thank you.

Derek: We'll figure it out...

I sigh and nod.

Derek: I don't want you to stress about anything, Ziyanda, do you hear me?

I keep quiet.

Derek: We'll do what's best for us, baby.

He stands and pulls me up.

Derek: And try your best to zone out that idiot, Dean, whenever he opens his mouth.

Me: It's his fault!

Derek: I know, baby.

He pulls me and wraps his arms around me and I relax in his embrace.

Me: Screw him!

He chuckles and kisses my forehead.

Derek: Are you ready to go back?

Me: Yes. I'm hungry.

He laughs as he takes my hand and leads me back inside. When we get to our table, Nolwazi and Dean seem to be having a good time, drinking champagne. Mxm.

We sit and I immediately focus on my food.

Dean: Dlamz?

Me: Awungiyeye Dean.

He chuckles and shrugs.

Dean: One can never win with you.

Me: Leave me alone!

Nolwazi: Dean uyahlupha yazi...

Me: Idiot...

It's now Saturday, and I am meeting up with Niki and Kwanele. I haven't seen these two in a while, and I could use their company. I've been hanging around Derek's crew for too long.

Derek was very hesitant to let me go by myself, but I told him to get over it. I'm not going to sit in the house like some zombie.

I get to Kwanele's penthouse and I am immediately relaxed. I'm so glad I'm going to do my own thing a bit. I'd like to forget about my life this afternoon.

Me: Ko ko!

Niki: Ngenaa!

We share a long hug and exclaim.

Me: Missed you!

Niki: Missed you too, heffer!

Me: Hey, Kwanele!

Kwanele smiles.

Kwanele: How are you, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm well, thank you. Unjani?

Kwanele: Great, thanks.

We share a hug and then Niki and I go to the balcony.

Me: Nidla ubusha benu, huh?

Niki: Yoh, friend... Dating rich is great.

I laugh.

Niki: I'm addicted to this opulent life.

Me: You're funny, sisi.

Niki: How are things?

Me: Things are okay.

Niki: Just okay?

Me: We're busy moving.

Niki: Yaas!

I told her about the proposal, but she has no idea that I'm pregnant. I'm going to tell her later today... Right now, I want to eat and gossip!

Me: Are we eating here? I love the view!

Niki: Of course!

We laugh and make our way inside.

Me: I'd like some orange juice, please.

Niki: Pregnancy driving you crazy?

Me: Huh?

Niki: Uthi nya, slima!

Me: Niki!

Niki: You really thought you'd get away with hiding a pregnancy? Am I stupid?

I look at her in shock and she rolls her eyes.

Niki: You are one fertile bitch.

I groan.

Kwanele: Congratulations, Ziyanda.

Me: Can we not?

Niki: Are you hiding it?

Me: Not really.

Niki: Do the parentals know?

Me: Dad doesn't know.

Niki: Yoh...

I sigh.

Me: Can we not?

Niki: Okay.

Me: Now pour me that orange juice, bitch.

Just then, there is a loud knock on the door.

Niki: Gosh...

Kwanele tightens his jaw.

Out of nowhere, a large woman budes in and looks around.

Woman: Kwanele? Why aren't you answering my calls??

Her eyes land on me. She stares at me so intensely that I feel uncomfortable.

Woman: Haibo, who is this beautiful girl?

She continues staring at me.

I look around.

Is she referring to me?

From Niki's descriptions, I have gathered that this is Kwanele's mother...

I finally get to meet the notorious Thenjiwe Buthelezi.

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Thenjiwe walks to me and I feel myself stepping back. She has an intimidating presence. I don't know if it's because I've heard so much about her or because she is physically intimidating.

Thenjiwe: Who are you?

Me: Uhm, me?

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Ziyanda.

She looks at Kwanele and smiles.

Thenjiwe: Are you telling me you've dumped this one?

She points at Niki dismissively.

Haibo, guys! What's happening??

Me: Excuse me?

Kwanele: Mama, get out.

I look at Niki, and my friend is ready to kill this woman. She is fuming!

How could this woman disrespect Niki like this? What is it with these mothers? Nami I have Khwezi thinking she can talk to me like I'm some piece of shit. Kunzima!

Thenjiwe: I came to-

Kwanele: Get out.

He stares at her calmly, yet intensely.

Thenjiwe looks at me and smiles.

Thenjiwe: Beautiful girl...

I keep quiet.

She then looks at Kwanele and smiles sweetly.

Thenjiwe: Your father has asked for a family meeting...

Kwanele looks at her in confusion.

Thenjiwe: I have no idea what it's about. That man is full of surprises these days.

She hisses as if she's thinking of something that's angering her.

Kwanele: You could have called me.

Thenjiwe: I've missed you... You've been MIA lately.

She stares at Niki disgustingly.

Thenjiwe: Is Ziyanda your second girlfriend?

She laughs boldly and takes her bag.

Thenjiwe: You must come over tomorrow noon. We all can't wait to hear what your father has to say!

With that said, she walks out and it's silent.

I feel awkward.

I feel very awkward.

Me: Uhm-

Niki: Kwanele, I've mentioned how uncomfortable your mother makes me. Don't let her in when I'm around... How many times have we had this chat?

Kwanele: Are you kidding me? Am I the only one who was present when she pitched unexpectedly? Did you not see that?

Niki: Why does she have access to your place? Why is it so easy for to just budge in?!

Kwanele: Are you fucken serious right now, Nikiwe?

I listen to them go back and forth.

Heyi, if people think I have drama, then they must meet Niki. The heffer can go from 0-100 in a flash, and her 100 is like 200 to a normal person.

Now, voices are going higher and the tension is getting thicker and thicker. Kunzima.

Niki: You're an enabler! You enable her to have this much power over you! Grow the fuck up and stop allowing your bully of a mother to control you!

Kwanele: Have you seen her control me? What the fuck are you on about?!

Niki tries to say something, but Kwanele shuts her up.

Kwanele: Don't come here with bullshit. I've defended you since she laid eyes on you. Uyabheda manje.

Niki storms off and disappears.

Kwanele also storms off and disappears.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, so... Y'all are just gonna leave a pregnant person unattended?

Silence.

Me: Hmkay then...

I pour more orange juice and dial Derek's phone. He answers immediately.

Derek: Baby, is everything okay?

Me: What do you think?

He chuckles.

Derek: What happened?

Me: Everything was cool until Kwanele's mom pitched out of-

Derek: What?? Are you okay?? Ziy-

Me: Whoa, calm down. Why wouldn't I be okay? Geesh, relax, the woman is not a killer.

Derek: You'd be surprised.

Me: So, Niki and Kwanele had a back and forth as soon as she left.

Derek: About what?

Me: Niki feels disrespected and thinks Kwanele is being controlled by Thenjiwe.

Derek: Really?

I chuckle.

Me: You're such a gossipmonger.

Derek: I mean, I like hearing how other men mess up their relationships while mine is thriving.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Me: So, Kwanele was throwing all kinds of swear words, and Niki was also doing the most. Bekunyiwa I tell you! After, they bo-

Just then, Kwanele walks back.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, I'll call you later, ma.

Derek: Ma?

Me: Love you.

Derek laughs.

Derek: Did one of them walk in?

Me: Yes, I'll call you.

Derek: Manje why are you calling me ma? Hai, Ziyanda...

He laughs.

Me: Bye, ma! Love you!

I quickly hang up and take a sip of my juice.

Kwanele: Ziyanda.

I look at him.

Kwanele: I apologise for how I conducted myself.

Me: You don't have to apologise...

He sighs.

Me: I'll check on Niki now...

He nods as I walk away.

I eventually find her in the main bedroom.

Me: Boo.

She's lying on the bed.

Me: Have you calmed down?

Niki: That woman, Ziyanda! That humongous piece of shit! I swear I'm going to go head to head with her!

Me: It's not worth it... She'll never change... They never change...

She groans and looks at me.

We stare at each other for a few seconds before bursting out in laughter.

We laugh for a good minute.

Me: So, not even one of us is blessed with a sweet mother-in-law?

Niki: Fucken bitches.

We continue laughing.

Me: Stop being hard on Kwanele. I'd also avoid fighting with that woman. She's too much.

She sighs.

Me: And he told her to leave... Take your over-the-top-ass back in that kitchen and apologise for being unnecessary. I want to eat, and this fight was pointless.

She rolls her eyes and stands.

Me: I'll wait for you here. Call me once you're done.

She stands and walks away...

After a few hours, I'm full and ready to pass out.

Me: Guys, thanks for the food, but I need to sleep.

Niki: Wow.

Me: I could pop right now, that's how full I am.

As soon as my head hits the pillow, I pass out.

I am suddenly awakened by someone shaking me lightly.

I ignore them.

They shake me again and I groan.

Person: Zi, vuka...

I open my eyes in confusion.

Me: Derek?

He looks at me blankly.

Me: What's happening?

I blink a few times, trying to figure out where I am.

I remember. I'm at Kwanele's.

Me: What are you doing here?

Derek: I'm not about to have you sleep at another man's house. Vuka.

He pulls me up and I sit up. I yawn and stretch.

He looks around and shakes his head.

Me: What?

Derek: Nothing... Let's go.

I put on my shoes and we walk out.

Is it weird that I suddenly feel so pregnant?

All this time I've been living happily, but now I'm bloated and aware of the life growing in me. It's crazy.

I just... I don't know, man...

We get to the lounge and find Niki and Kwanele chilling, all cuddled up.

Niki: Your man couldn't even stomach the thought of you sleeping here. I don't know what his problem is.

I look at Derek disapprovingly and he remains silent.

Me: See you two another time.

Kwanele: Bye, Ziyanda.

Niki: Bye, boo.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Niki chuckles.

Niki: Bye, Star.

Kwanele: Nihambe kahle.

I give them hugs and follow Derek, who's already out. Clearly he has a lot to say...

We get in the car and I look at him.

Me: Go ahead...

Derek: Last time I checked, you had a bed, a very comfortable one at that.

I chuckle.

Me: Your jealousy knows no bounds...

Derek: Can't have you sleeping in another man's bed...

Me: Okay, Star.

Derek: Understood?

Me: Hmkay.

Just then, his phone rings and it's Dean. He answers it.

It's on loudspeaker.

Derek: Dean? I'm driving.

Dean: Zimkitha's in hospital.

Derek: What??

Me: What happened??

Dean: Get here now.

Derek: Uhm, sure...

Dean: I can't contact Liwa, Derek.

Derek: Does he know?

Dean: Ya.

Derek: Shit.

Dean: Exactly.

Exactly what?

Derek: I'll try calling him. Is Zimkitha bad?

Dean: Just get here.

Derek: Okay.

He ends the call.

Me: Oh my goodness!

He dials Liwa's number and it rings for a very long time.

Just as we're about give up, he answers.

But he doesn't say anything.

Derek: Liwa.

He doesn't say anything.

Derek: I'm on my way to the hospital now, Liwa. I need you to meet me there.

Before Derek can continue, the call is ended.

Derek: Shit.

Me: What's wrong??

Out of nowhere, he changes direction, and goes back to where we come from.

Me: And then?

Derek: I don't want you in that environment. I'm taking you back to Niki.

Me: Are you kidding me? Am I a child?

He glances at me.

Me: Turn this car around and drive to the hospital, Nkanyezi.

He contemplates for a few seconds...

He sighs and changes direction once again...

I have no idea what the hell is going on, but I sense that it's huge...

I find myself touching my belly as poor Zimkitha crosses my mind.

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We get to the hospital and Derek stops and looks at me.

Derek: I don't want you to come with me.

Me: Why? Sitting here, by myself, will stress me out even more.

He sighs.

Me: Let's go.

He takes out his phone and calls Dean.

Derek: I'm here... Where's her room?... Okay...

He hangs up and then looks at me.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm nervous.

He nods tightly and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay.

Me: You're not.

He groans.

Just then, Dean emerges and it's safe to say he is not in a good mood.

Dean: What is she doing here?

Me: Excuse me?

He looks at Derek coldly. He eventually looks at me with the same coldness.

Me: You don't have to be a dick.

He ignores me and walks away. We follow him and Derek holds my hand.

I get that everyone is stressed, but can we show some kindness? It's so tense.

We eventually get to the room. As we walk in, we find everyone there: Nomvuyo, Nolwazi, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Nandi- except Liwa.

Zimkitha is in the bed. She's unrecognisable due to bruises.

Me: What happened?

They all turn and stare at me. I immediately regret breaking the silence.

Nolwazi: Car accident.

I want more information, but decide to keep my mouth shut. Dean is already looking at me like I'm an invader.

I look over at Nomvuyo, and my heart immediately goes out to her.

She stands and I find myself moving out of her way as she walks out of the door.

As I'm about to follow her, we hear Zimkitha moaning.

All of us immediately go to her bed. She moans louder.

Dean: You all need to get out.

Gabi: Why? Sh-

Zimkitha tries to say something.

Dean: Get the fuck out!

He looks at us and I instantly turn. I'm not about to be eaten and swallowed by Dean. Derek can stay here with him while I check on Nomvuyo.

Zimkitha: Dean... Liwa...Derek... Vu-

We all walk out and shut the door.

Gabi: I just don't understand why Dean has to be so cold and unnecessary. We're all here because we love Zimkitha. He must stop treating us like some random outsiders.

I decide not to respond to that. I walk around, looking for Nomvuyo, and eventually find her at the parking lot. She's leaning on her car.

Me: Vuvu.

I get to her.

It doesn't take rocket science to see that she's acting strong. Knowing Nomvuyo, she hates being seen as weak.

Me: I'm sorry.

I give her a long hug. I want her to cry, but she remains stone-faced.

Me: Have you spoken to Liwa?

She doesn't respond. I guess that's a no.

We stand in silence for the longest time. My phone rings and it's Derek.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Zi, ukuphi?

Me: Parking lot.

Derek: With Vuvu?

Me: Yes

Derek: Come back. Zimkitha wants to see her.

Me: Is she up?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Okay.

I hang up and look at Nomvuyo.

Me: Zimkitha wants to see you.

She begins walking and I follow her. I'm really awkward when it comes to comforting people... I feel very uncomfortable right now.

Anyway, we eventually get back inside and find Dean and Derek there.

My stomach growls.

Gosh, this is such an awkward time to be hungry. I imagine myself eating pasta with bits of bacon...

I quickly check myself. Derek looks at me weirdly.

Nomvuyo walks to the bed and touches Zimkitha's hand. Zimkitha is still "sleeping" so now I'm confused. How did she ask for Nomvuyo? Did she moan her name?

Also, this accident was clearly horrific. She looks really bad.

Dean stands and scratches his head lightly. He looks calmer now, for some odd reason. He walks to me, takes my hand, and we walk out. I don't know why he is so adamant about me not being here. He can't even hide it.

Once we're out of the room, he sighs.

Dean: Where's Nolwazi?

Me: They're all downstairs.

He nods lightly and looks at me more softly.

Dean: You shouldn't be here.

Me: But, why?

Dean: You can't be in stressful situations, Ziyanda, you're pregnant.

I keep quiet.

Dean: We need to play our part in ensuring that you have a smooth pregnancy. Being here, where everyone is tense and stressed, is not good for you, especially because you're such an absorber of emotions.

Me: I didn't think about that.

He rolls his eyes.

Dean: Of course you didn't, dummy.

Me: So, you want me to go home?

He nods.

Me: I'll go back to Niki.

Dean: Ungazonya wena. Stop acting like a homeless person.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: How dare you sleep in another man's bed?

Me: Gosh, not you again.

He looks at me sternly.

Dean: I think you should go to Soweto. Spend some time with your parents, while we deal with Zimkitha's accident.

Me: Deal? What's there to deal with?

He sighs.

Dean: Logistics.

Me: What happened vele?

Dean: We're still waiting for a report.

Me: From the police?

He nods lightly.

I don't really know these things, so I'm absolutely confused.

Dean: Nolwazi will drive you home.

As I'm about to say something, he shakes his head disapprovingly.

Dean: Stop being stubborn. Ngidi has to stay here.

I look at him angrily and eventually nod.

Me: Okay.

Just then, his face tenses up. I turn to see what the cause is.

It's Liwa.

Liwa is walking towards us.

I find myself stepping back, and getting closer to Dean. I've never seen Liwa like this. I'm genuinely scared.

Dean: Liwa.

Liwa ignores Dean and opens the door to Zimkitha's room. We rush in behind him.

Nomvuyo looks up from Zimkitha, and stares at Liwa.

He stands there for a few seconds.

The vibe is intense.

He steps closer to the bed and then walks to the other side, where Nomvuyo is. He pulls her up and as soon as she is nuzzled in his arms, she bursts out in tears.

I stand there, not able to move. I thought I had seen it all, but Nomvuyo being this emotional? Nope.

I find myself feeling extremely sad as her cries fill the room.

Liwa continues comforting her until she eventually calms down. He sits her down and turns to look at us.

He's also emotional.

Derek, Dean and I nod and walk out of the room. Derek closes the door and we stand there in silence.

Dean: I need Nolwazi...

He walks away and leaves Derek and me there...

My stomach growls again and I rub it.

Derek steps closer to me and looks at me worriedly.

Me: I'm fine, just hungry.

Derek: Let's grab something to eat.

Me: Dean wants me to go to Soweto.

Derek: No.

I look at him weirdly.

Me: You don't want me to go?

Derek: Ngizosala nobani?

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: You don't know what you want wena...

Derek: Right now, I want food.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Woza ke...

It's been a while since we arrived at the hospital. I'm fed and feeling much better. I'm also relieved that Liwa is here, so Nomvuyo has a shoulder to cry on.

We're all just rooting for Zimkitha right now.

The doctor has asked us to leave...

Liwa and Nomvuyo refused, so we had to leave them there.

We're now in the parking lot.

Gabi: Can we please go out for dinner? We need to recoup.

Dean: Sure.

Dean looks at Derek and me.

I don't think I want to go with them. I want to sleep.

Derek: We'll join you tomorrow. We need some rest. We're also moving, so it's been taxing.

Gabi: Oh, alright then.

Me: Bye, guys.

We share hugs and they watch as Derek and I drive off...

Me: I've never seen Liwa like that...

He glances at me.

Derek: There's more to this than meets the eye.

He sighs and focuses on the road.

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The following day, I decide that I am not going to the hospital. I woke up feeling exhausted and Derek encouraged me to stay. He was more than happy to leave me.

We're supposed to move today, but Derek postponed it to tomorrow. Because our place is officially empty, Dean and Nolwazi offered us refuge.

It's around 12pm and Derek is getting ready to leave. He's going to drop me off at Dean and Nolwazi's place.

Derek: You need a car...

Me: No, I don't.

He hisses.

Me: Derek, I hate driving and I have no desire to drive.

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Let's go.

I get my things and we make our way out. Just then, his phone rings and he answers it.

Derek: Busi?

I roll my eyes.

This Busi girl is beyond annoying. I need her to disappear.

Derek: I can't talk right now, I'll call you later.

He ends the call and glances at me.

Derek: She says she needs to talk to me.

Me: About?

He shrugs.

Derek: Angazi.

Me: What if it's about Lelo?

Derek: It's not.

I sigh and focus on my phone as he drives off.

We eventually get to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

Nolwazi: I've just finished cooking. You can dish up anytime.

Me: Thanks.

Dean: Don't burn my house down.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: Call me if you need anything.

Me: I think I can take care of myself for a few hours.

Dean and Nolwazi walk out. Derek looks at me worriedly.

Me: I don't understand you sometimes. You want to exclude me from Zimkitha's situation, and now that I'm backing off, you act like a lost puppy. Ufunani kahle kahle?

He smiles shyly and I chuckle.

Me: I'll be fine.

Derek: Love you.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Call me if you need anything.

Me: Even if it's a kiss?

Derek: Especially if it's a kiss.

Me: Yaas!

He chuckles and we share a kiss.

Me: Bye, lover.

Derek: Bye.

I walk him out. Dean has already made himself comfortable in Derek's car.

Derek: So, where am I supposed to sit?

Dean: At the back, where you belong.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry, Ngidi, but I don't sit at the back when Dean's driving.

Me: Haibo, then you two must drive your own car.

Dean: Hai suka wena, blabbermouth.

Derek: The shit I tolerate...

He glances at me.

Derek: See you later.

Me: You must tell me if Dean comes for you.

He chuckles and I watch as he gets in the car and they drive off.

Finally.

I've been craving some quiet time all by myself.

I make my way back inside the house. I decide that I'll chill by the pool and make some virgin cocktails *rolls eyes*. Bongani, my ex-friend (clears throat) taught me how to make cocktails, so I should be fine.

Anyway, I change into a dress, mix a virgin cocktail, and go to the pool.

I'm trying to imagine myself as a mother... I can't seem to visualise myself.

At this point, I just hope that I'll miraculously start loving the baby when he/she pops out, because right now, the connection is quite low.

My thoughts are interrupted by my phone ringing- it's Derek.

Me: Lover.

Derek: We just got here.

Me: How's Zimi?

He sighs.

Derek: She's up now.

Me: That's good.

Derek: Ya.

Me: How's Liwa and Vuvu?

Derek: They're much better.

Me: Is that Zimi speaking?

Derek: Yes. She wants to speak to you.

Me: Oh. Okay.

I hear some shuffling.

Zimkitha: Zi?

Me: Hello, Zimi.

Even though her voice is low and strained, she still sounds like her usual positive self.

Zimkitha: How are you, my love?

Me: I should be asking you that.

She chuckles and then groans.

Zimkitha: I'm okay, just a few bruises here and there.

Me: A few?

She sighs.

Me: I'm glad you're up.

Zimkitha: I'll be fine. These kids need to stop stressing.

I sigh.

Zimkitha: How's our baby?

I groan and rub my belly.

Me: Okay, I guess.

Zimkitha: I've never met a person as stubborn as you- you're even worse than Vuvu.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I really need to speak to you.

She sounds serious.

Me: About?

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Please come and visit... by yourself.

Me: Without Derek?

Zimkitha: Yes.

I suddenly feel nervous. Why does she want to speak to me alone?

Zimkitha: Please come as soon as possible.

Me: Uhm, okay.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Alright then, bye.

Me: Is Derek in there?

Zimkitha: He just walked back in.

Me: Can I speak to him?

Zimkitha: Okay, dear. Bye.

Me: Bye, Zimi.

Zimkitha: Don't forget...

I hear some shuffling.

Derek: Baby?

Me: Hey.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Ubuya nini?

Derek: You miss me?

Me: I mean, not really...

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll be back soon. Maybe in 30 minutes.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too. Bye.

Derek: Bye.

I end the call and continue chilling...

After a while, I decide to go back inside for a nap.

As I walk in, a phone rings...

It's definitely not mine.

I walk to the lounge, and realise that Dean left his phone. It stops ringing.

After a few seconds, it rings again.

I take the phone and answer it.

Me: Dean's phone, hello.

Person: Dean?

Me: No, this is not Dean. He is currently not here... Can you call again after a while?

Person: Who's this?

This is a woman.

Me: Uhm, a friend...

Person: A friend? He leaves his phone at a friend's now?

Me: Uhm, can I take a message?

Person: Tell him I'm coming for him. Tell him I'm coming for everything he has built. He will pay for what he did to me.

Heyiiii! My heart??

What the hell is going on here??

Just as I'm about to ask more questions, the call is ended.

Who was that?? What does she mean, she's coming for him??

My heart is beating so fast!

I try to dial Derek's number, but quickly stop myself.

What am I going to say to him?

I sit down and take a few breaths. I'm still holding Dean's phone...

I unlock it and find myself browsing through it. I know I'm not supposed to be doing this, but damnit, Petty is busy encouraging this behaviour.

What am I looking for? Why am I doing this?

I am shook.

As I'm about to go to his messages, my phone rings and I quickly put down Dean's phone and clutch my non-existent pearls.

Lord.

It's Derek.

I take a deep breath before answering.

Me: Star?

Derek: Baby, we're on our way back now.

Me: Okay.

Derek: You okay?

Me: I'm about to fall asleep.

Derek: See you soonest.

I cringe.

Dean likes saying that.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and lie comfortably on the couch.

Gosh.

I must have dozed off, because I am awakened by Derek's lips on mine.

I moan as he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You need to eat, vuka.

I blink a few times and look at him in confusion.

Me: Did you just come back?

Derek: We've been back for over 3 hours now.

Me: Oh.

I sit up and stretch. He bends and plants a kiss on my lips again.

Derek: I missed you.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm hungry.

He pulls me up and we walk to the dining room. The table is set and the food is ready. Nolwazi and Dean are there.

We sit and immediately start eating.

I look over at Dean and he seems fine.

Has he checked his phone?

Nolwazi: I need the bathroom. Please excuse me.

We all nod and she stands and walks off.

I look at Dean sternly.

Dean: And then, wena?

Me: Dean, are you hiding something?

Dean: Huh?

They both look at me weirdly.

Me: I'm not even going to beat around the bush, because I sense that this shit is big, and I'm scared.

Dean: Excuse me?

Me: Are you keeping a big secret?

He glances at Derek and they continue to look at me in confusion.

Me: Some woman called, and she said I must tell you that she's coming for you.

Dean: What?

Me: She said you're going to pay for what you did to her...

There's silence.

An intense moment of silence.

Me: Dean, what the hell is going on??

I look at him pleadingly. I need him to tell me that I'm overreacting.

He drinks his whiskey and looks at me coolly.

Just then, Nolwazi comes back and sits.

Nolwazi: We need to fetch the twins tomorrow. I miss them.

She looks at Dean, with a warm smile on her face.

I clear my throat.

Me: Your mom is really obsessed with them.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: She's taking her grandma role too seriously.

I smile and avoid Dean's eyes.

I don't know what is happening, but I need Dean to tell me, so we can make sure that whoever this woman is doesn't come and ruin things for him and Nolwazi...

Gosh, here I am, involved in something else, once again...

INSERT 156

We're now done eating, and Derek insisted on helping Nolwazi with the dishes. He knows that I want to talk to Dean privately, and nothing will stop me.

Dean walks to his study and I follow him.

Me: Dean!

I shut the door and watch as he goes to his table, and sit on the edge. He crosses his arms and looks at me coolly.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Yini, Ziyanda?

Me: Are you kidding me right now? Answer my question!

Dean: What question?

Me: Who's the woman?!

He continues looking at me expressionlessly.

Me: Dean, I'm not dumb. Please don't dismiss me.

Dean: What's the problem? What exactly did this woman say to you?

I sigh and walk closer to him.

Me: She wanted to talk to you, and I told her that you're unavailable.

He nods.

Me: Thereafter, she asked if you go around leaving your phone at your friends' houses... Then, she mentioned, very coldly, that she is coming for you and what you've built. She ended off by saying that you'll pay for what you did to her.

He keeps quiet.

We're silent for a long minute.

He looks at me intently, as if he's lost in thought.

Me: Dean?

Dean: Focus on your pregnancy, Dlamini.

Me: But-

He shakes his head and looks at me threateningly.

I keep quiet. I know not to question him when he gives me that look.

Dean: I know you want to solve everyone's problems, but trust me, I'm a big guy, and I can handle my shit.

Me: What's happening?

He shakes his head.

Dean: Nothing hectic... That woman is my ex, and she's always been crazy and delusional.

Me: Does Nolwazi know her?

Dean: Yes.

I sigh in relief. I don't know why, but I'm relieved that Nolwazi knows this crazy woman. There's nothing worse than being in the dark when your partner's ex is busy trying to make a comeback.

Dean: I'll sort it out, okay?

Me: Okay.

He smiles.

Dean: Now, forget about it and focus on my nephew...

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Dean: I find it funny that you focus on other people's problems as an escape. You don't want to face your shit.

Me: Whatever.

Dean: How are you though? Are you coming to terms with the pregnancy?

Me: Yes, I am... Very slowly...

He smiles.

Dean: Slowly is better than nothing.

I shrug.

Dean: I need to sleep...

Me: I need something sweet.

He sighs.

Dean: I've suffered enough from Nolwazi's pregnancy. It's Derek's turn now.

We walk out of the study and make our way to the lounge, where we find Derek.

He looks at us questioningly.

Dean: No worries.

Derek: Hmkay.

I look at Derek, and smile. I really aspire to be like him one day. He legit has mastered the art of minding his own business. He only speaks when spoken to, unlike some of us...

Anyway, I want to have sex with him now, because I'm highly turned on by his calm aura.

I take his hand and lead him to our room. I'll deal with this here craving first, then deal with my sweet tooth later...

The following day, I'm up by 5am.

I'm sick, so sick.

Derek finds me in the bathroom, vomiting my insides out.

Derek: What do you need?

I ignore him and continue vomiting. After a while, I stand and brush my teeth. I go back to the bedroom and throw myself on the bed.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: What do you need?

Me: Just leave me alone, please.

He sighs as he stands.

Me: Uyaphi?

Derek: Leaving you alone.

Me: Mxm.

He walks out and I start sobbing. I hear the door open and he walks back to the bed.

Derek: Zi? What's wrong?

I look at him angrily.

Me: Really? You walked out on me!

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: Just go, Derek.

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He takes a deep breath and gets back in bed. He pulls me closer and I place my head on his chest. I'm glad he did the right thing...

I immediately doze off.

It's around 12pm and I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to go to the hospital without Derek. They all decided that they'd have a gathering, and they'd visit Zimi the following day.

Now, how in the world do I miss the gathering without seeming shady?

I go to Derek, who's getting ready in the bedroom.

Me: Star.

Derek: Yes, baby?

Me: Niki wants to meet up with me.

Derek: Today?

I nod.

Me: She says it's an emergency.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: Is she okay?

Me: I'm not sure.

Derek: Uhm, okay. I'll take you there.

Me: No, it's okay. I'll get an Uber.

Derek: Ziya-

Me: Star, spend time with your friends. Nami I miss my friend.

He's quiet for a few seconds.

Me: I'll be fine, man.

Derek: Okay.

Me: And, I won't be long.

Derek: Alright then.

Me: Cool.

I walk out quickly, before he notices that I'm lying.

I go to the kitchen and get myself a bottle of water. I find Nolwazi there.

Me: When are you fetching the twins?

Nolwazi: I'm about to leave now.

I smile.

Nolwazi: I know for a fact that your life will change as soon as you meet your baby.

Me: Negatively or positively?

Nolwazi: Positively, of course.

She smiles.

Nolwazi: Nothing beats the love of a child.

Me: Hmkay.

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: You'll see...

I sigh.

Me: See you later. I'm meeting up with Niki.

Nolwazi: Is she still with Kwanele?

Me: Yes.

She nods.

Nolwazi: Good for them.

Me: Do you miss him?

She laughs.

Nolwazi: I have Dean... Why would I even think of another man?

Me: Wena na.

She smiles.

Me: See you later.

Nolwazi: Do you want a lift?

Me: No, thanks.

She nods and I walk away. I go to our bedroom and find Derek finishing up.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Okay.

I walk closer to him and we share a kiss.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

He stares at me and I swear it's like he can see right through me. I let go of him and grab my bag.

Me: Shap, the Uber's here.

I walk out...

As soon as I get to the hospital, reality sinks in.

I'm nervous.

Why does Zimi want to speak to me alone?

The nurse walks me to her room and I'm relieved when I find Zimkitha by herself.

She looks a bit better than the last time I saw her.

Me: Hey, Zimi.

She groans as she smiles.

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

I close the door.

Zimkitha: Come, sit close to me.

I walk to the chair close to the bed and sit. She tries to sit up, and I stand and help her. She hisses.

Zimkitha: My left side is killing me.

Me: Is it the most painful?

She nods and moans.

Me: Sorry.

She smiles and looks at me.

Zimkitha: Sit.

I do as I'm told.

We're silent for a while.

Zimkitha: Between you and me, I thought I was going to die.

Me: Was the accident that bad?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I'd never been so scared in my life.

She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes.

Zimkitha: I really thought I was going to die.

I look at her nervously.

She opens her eyes.

She's crying.

I don't know what to do.

I take some tissue from my bag and wipe her tears gently.

Zimkitha: I just kept thinking of all of you... My children...

She smiles.

Zimkitha: That's what kept me alive...

We're quiet.

I'm scared.

I don't want this conversation to go where I think it's going.

Zimkitha: There are so many things I need to bring to light... Dying right now is not an option for me- it would be the easy way out.

Me: Bring to light?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I trust you, Ziyanda... As young as you are, I trust you. For some odd reason, you remind me of Liwa.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I need your help.

I look at her intently.

We're silent for a while.

Eventually, she begins talking...

I just... I don't know how to feel...

I feel sick.

INSERT 157 (Short and Unedited)

I walk to the backyard and find everyone there. It's evident that they're having a good time, because the laughs are loud and the conversations are flowing. The large round table is filled with food and drinks.

As soon as they see me, they exclaim.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Uhm, okay...

Why is he so cheerful?

Me: Hello, everyone.

Liwa stands and gives me a hug.

I just... Am I the only one who is confused? The last time I saw him, he was in another state.

They greet me back.

I feel Derek's eyes on me.

He pats the seat next to him and I sit. He leans closer to me and I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: Missed you.

Me: Missed you too.

I shift and take a glass.

Derek: Water?

I nod and he pours me some.

Derek: How's Niki?

Me: Huh?

What is he talking about?

Derek: Niki... How is she?

Shit, konje I said I'm going to meet with Niki.

Me: Oh, she's fine yazi. She had a little argument with Kwanele.

Derek: Really? What's wrong?

Me: Hai, why are you so nosy?

Derek: Hawu, I'm just asking, baby.

I take a sip of my water.

Gabi: Ziyanda, dear, you have a lovely glow.

Me: Excuse me?

Gabi: You're glowing. Derek must be treating you extra nice.

I give her the usual Caucasian smile and drink some of my water.

Gabi: Anyway, Joey and I have an announcement to make.

We all quieten down and look at her.

She smiles sweetly and looks at Joe.

Gabi: Joey and I are expecting our first child!

Nandi: What? Really? Congratulations!

Nolwazi: Yaay!

Liwa: Congrats!

Gabi smiles brightly and blushes.

We all congratulate them.

Gabi: I wish Zimi was here. She'd be thrilled.

Everyone keeps quiet.

Suddenly, the mood is sombre.

Joe: Zimkitha would hate to see us this down... She'd want us to continue being positive.

Malusi: And, as we've already seen, she's in a better condition.

We're all quiet.

I want to sleep. I want to allow my mind and body to rest.

Gabi: This is why Joey and I decided to tell you about our pregnancy. We all need some positive vibes right now.

I look over at Nomvuyo and she stares right back at me.

It's clear that she wants to leave this table. We both stand at the same time and walk inside the house.

Once we get to the lounge, she sits on the couch and I sit next to her.

Me: Vuvz.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Hey.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: Drained.

I nod and stare at her. We sit in silence for a while.

Me: Uhm, how's Zimi?

Nomvuyo: She's much better.

Me: That's good.

She looks at me.

Nomvuyo: And, what about you?

Me: Huh? What about me?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

I groan.

Me: I'm okay, I guess.

She looks at my belly and smiles lightly.

Me: I'm still trying to wrap my head around it.

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: You look good.

Me: Thank you. I can't say the same about you.

She rolls her eyes and we chuckle.

Nomvuyo: It's been a stressful week.

Me: We'll get through it.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Just then, Liwa walks in.

Nomvuyo immediately stands.

Liwa: Baby.

Nomvuyo walks out and disappears.

What the hell just happened? Are they fighting?

Liwa sighs as he walks closer to me.

Me: Uhm... Is everything okay?

Liwa: Not really. We're not seeing eye to eye right now.

Me: Oh.

Liwa: We'll be fine.

He scratches his head and sits. Thereafter, he pats the space next to him. I sit hesitantly.

We're silent. It's not awkward, but I don't particularly enjoy the silence.

Liwa: So, you went to see my mother?

I look at him in shock and he smiles lightly.

Liwa: I know...

His face changes, he's more serious.

Liwa: Everything...

I stare at him, frozen.

The warm smile re-emerges and he stares at me softly.

Liwa: Are you good?

I try to speak, but words fail me.

Liwa: Ziyanda?

I clear my throat.

Liwa: Are you good?

I nod.

Liwa: If you need to get anything off your chest, I'm here.

I don't respond.

Liwa: Okay?

I nod.

Liwa: Good.

He gives me another warm smile and then stands. He walks out and I continue sitting there...

I clearly dozed off, because when I wake up, I am wrapped in a fleece blanket.

I finally get up and as I make my way to the kitchen, to get myself some water, I bump into Dean.

He looks at me blankly.

Dean: Nihamba nini? I don't like this roommate situation.

Me: Fuck off, idiot.

I push him away and get a bottle of water.

Dean: You okay?

Me: Ya.

He looks at me suspiciously.

Dean: You're not still bothered by my ex, right?

Me: I'm bothered by a lot of things right now. Leave me alone.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: Pregnancy.

He chuckles as I walk away and leave him there. I walk up the stairs and make my way to our room. Derek is busy on his laptop.

Me: Hey.

He looks up and smiles.

Derek: Hello, beautiful.

I take my phone from my bag. I have so many missed calls, mostly from Niki.

I see a message from my mom saying she misses me and that she spoke to my dad about the pregnancy. I don't even want to engage right now, I'll deal with that another time.

Just as I'm about to put down my phone, it rings.

Me: Shit.

Derek: Yini?

Me: It's my dad.

Derek: What's the problem?

Me: My mom says she told him about the pregnancy.

He looks up from his laptop and stares at me.

The phone continues to ring and I answer it.

Me: Hello...

There's silence for a few seconds.

Dad: You finally decide to answer my phone.

I keep quiet.

Dad: I'll be expecting you Derek here, tomorrow morning.

Kodwa... Why?

I groan.

Dad: Bye.

Me: Bye.

He ends the call and I put down my phone.

Derek is staring at me, very seriously.

Derek: What did he say?

Me: He wants to see us tomorrow morning.

Derek: Shit.

I groan loudly.

Derek: Shit.

He stands and walks out.

Me: Uyaphi??

I stand and follow him.

He's already speaking to Dean.

Dean is listening to him very attentively.

After a while, they both look at me.

Dean: Any tips on dealing with your father?

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I'd like to know how we can butter him up.

Me: Dean! You are not going anywhere!

Dean: Of course I am... I need to make sure that your father doesn't blow things out of proportion. You're pregnant, not dying.

Me: Gosh.

I walk away and go to the bedroom. I throw myself on the bed and bury my head on the pillow.

Soon, I feel Derek's arms around me. I reposition and put my head on his chest.

Me: I couldn't read him. I think he's angry.

Derek: Everything will be fine.

I put my head up and look at him.

Derek: The only problem is that we waited a while to tell him. That will definitely piss him off.

Me: I needed time.

He sighs.

We're silent for a while.

Derek: We'll see.

He caresses me till I fall asleep...

My mind is flooded right now.

I don't even know how I managed to fall asleep.

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The following morning, when I wake up, I see Derek getting dressed. I blink a few times and look at him in confusion.

Derek: Morning, love.

He bends and plants a kiss on my lips. I push him away and he laughs.

Derek: I suggest you wake up.

Me: Ang'funi.

Derek: I'm not about to get killed by your father. Vuka.

He pulls me up and his eyes land on my belly, which seems to have grown.

Derek: You're starting to show.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Your father is definitely going to kill me.

Me: Mxm, he must get over it.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: I'm not in the best of moods.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Derek: Lighten up.

Me: Hmm.

He knows I hate talking before I brush my teeth, yet he continues doing such.

I push him lightly and make my way to the bathroom...

We're now driving to Soweto.

I have no idea why Dean decided to involve himself in this. I just want my dad to put him in his place ngoba uphapha too much.

Dean: Dlamini, did you tell your father to prepare some chicken for me?

I ignore him and continue browsing through my phone.

Dean: Ye wena Dlamini.

Me: Dean, for your own sake, shut the fuck up.

Derek chuckles quietly.

Me: Were you this forward when Nolwazi's father cut you to size?

Dean: Wow, low blow.

Me: Tsek.

I continue focusing on my phone and he stops bothering me.

Eventually, we get to my house and my mom is outside, sweeping the yard.

Mom: Heeh, long time, no see!

She walks to us and gives us hugs.

Dean: It's been a very long time.

Mom: Angithi you're all stuck in the suburbs and stole my daughter.

I leave them as they continue doing the most.

I get in the house and go straight to my room. I can hear my dad speaking on his phone. I think he's in their bedroom.

I sit on my bed and say a quick prayer. I'm really not ready to have this conversation.

I just want to go away from everyone. I want to be alone for a very long time. I want to gather my thoughts in peace. Is that too much to ask?

Someone knocks on my door.

Me: Come in.

It's my mom.

Mom: Baby, woza phela. Your father is ready.

I roll my eyes and grunt.

Mom: Haibo, and then?

Me: Nothing.

I stand and follow her to the lounge, where I find my dad, Derek and Dean.

Me: Hello.

My dad stares at me and his eyes obviously land on my belly.

Dad: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

Dad: I'm good.

I sit next to Derek. I still can't read my dad's mood.

My dad looks at Dean.

Dean: Sibalukhulu.

Dad: Ya Hlongwane.

Dean: Are you well?

Dad: Yes. Why are you here?

Dean: Uhm...

I look at Dean.

Is the arrogant idiot shaking in his boots? Now this is worth watching!

Dean: We're here to discuss Ziyanda's pregnancy.

Dad: Did you make her pregnant?

Whoaa!

Dean looks at my dad as if he's speaking Spanglish.

Dean: I most definitely didn't impregnate your daughter.

Dad: Then, you can go and wait in the car while we finish up here.

Whoaaaa!

There's an awkward silence.

Dad: I don't see why you thought your presence would be needed today.

Dean looks like he's just been slapped a few times on the face. In fact, we all look like we've been slapped, including my mother.

Dad: You're a friend. This is not the time and place for your voice to be heard.

Heyiii! My father did not come to play with us! Kuzonyiwa!

We're all staring at my dad, waiting for him to smile and tell us he's joking...

He continues staring at Dean coolly.

Dean stands like a lost puppy and we watch as he walks away. My mom stands and follows him. She must go and comfort him vele. I'm sure uswabe to come nice.

So, it's just Derek, my dad and I now...

My dad looks at me.

Dad: Ready to speak?

Me: I'd like some water.

He nods.

I stand and go to the kitchen. I pour myself a glass of water and sigh heavily.

I'm not about to let my dad stress me out.

I walk back, feeling more courageous.

I sit next to Derek and look at my dad.

Hai, all the courage I had built up, fades away.

He's my dad. I respect him, and I'll always be a child to him. This is awkward for me.

Dad: Have you quenched your thirst?

Me: Spicy much?

He keeps quiet and stares at me.

Me: I'm pregnant.

Dad: I can see.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you sooner. I really didn't need the stress.

Dad: Am I the cause of the stress?

I don't respond.

Dad: Don't attach me to your stress. You're stressed because you know that this is not particularly right.

He looks at Derek.

Dad: And, why did you not tell me?

Derek: I was respecting Ziyanda's request for time.

Dad: You're going to have to start standing your ground.

Haibo! What is he trying to say??

Derek: With all due respect, it's my role as a partner, to respect Ziyanda's wishes. I cannot overlook her needs.

There's silence.

Derek: Yes, we should have told you sooner. However, Ziyanda wasn't ready to tell you.

Dad: Get me some water, Ziyanda.

I do as I'm told.

Dad: So, what's the plan here?

Me: We're going to get married.

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Hawu, nini?

Me: Before I give birth.

Dad: Really?

I nod.

Derek scratches his head.

Dad: I'm assuming you're not happy with that?

Derek: I'd rather we worry about that after the baby is born.

Dad: Why is that?

Derek: Firstly, we're too busy stressing about moving. Secondly, there's no time- we have approximately four months left till the baby is born. Lastly, I don't think all of this stress is good for any of us.

My dad looks at him thoughtfully.

Dad: I agree.

I look at my dad in shock.

He sighs.

Dad: We're already doing things the unconventional way, so we may as well do what's best for you.

Me: But-

Dad: And, what's best for you is to have a quiet pregnancy. I'd like to think you don't want to go through that whole traumatic experience again?

I keep quiet.

Dad: I'd like to speak to Derek privately, please.

Me: I'm really sorry for keeping you in the dark.

Dad: I know. You don't have to explain your intention, because I know it's never malicious.

I smile lightly.

Dad: Now, go and comfort Dean. I'm certain he's fuming.

I chuckle.

Me: I wish I recorded that. He's too forward.

My dad laughs.

Dad: Go and dress his wound.

I laugh as I walk out. I find my mom and Dean outside, chilling by Derek's car. They're laughing.

Argh, why are they laughing? I want Dean to be sad, so I can make of him!

I get to them and my mom looks at me expectantly.

Me: My father is a very strange man.

Mom: Angkeke um-confirm-e.

Me: He wants to speak to Star privately.

Dean hisses and I look at him amusingly.

Dean: Not now. I'm not in the mood.

I begin laughing at him.

Me: Bakuphoxe kancane.

Dean grunts.

Mom: Why are you two behaving like I gave birth to you?

Dean: You have an annoying child.

My mom laughs.

Mom: How cute. You're like brother and sister.

Me: Euww, I am not related to this arrogant man.

My mom looks at us amusingly as Dean and I go back and forth.

I exclaim as soon as I see Lwazi approaching. She's with her group of friends. As soon as she sees Derek's car, she sprints to us and is met by my arms.

Me: Hey, baby!

Lwazi: I missed you so much!

Me: Me too!

She squeezes me, but quickly lets go of me a few seconds later.

Me: Yini?

Lwazi: Why is your tummy so hard, mommy?

Me: Err...

Okay, I didn't think about this. Lwazi is too inquisitive and I can't hide anything from her.

All the while, my mom is laughing.

Mom: Ask, baby!

Lwazi looks at me worriedly.

Lwazi: Are you sick, mommy?

Me: In a way.

My mom laughs even more.

Lwazi: What's wrong?

Me: We'll talk later.

She nods and then focuses on Dean, whom she loves. I'm certain she has a crush on him...

So, my dad is chilled.

Why in the world did I think he'd kill me? The man is amazing!

Derek also seems lighter. I'm not even going to bother to find out what they spoke about.

Right now, I need a drink.

But since I can't drink alcohol, I'll have food.

Dean and my mom have been having their own DMC, while Lwazi and I caught up. I'm not going to tell her about the pregnancy yet...

As we're driving back to Dean's, his phone rings.

Dean: Please answer it for me, Dlamini.

I take his phone.

Me: It's Lwazi.

I answer it.

Me: Hey, Lwazi... Dean's driving.

Nolwazi: Hey... Listen, please tell him to come home.

Me: We're on our way back. Is everything okay?

Nolwazi: I think there was an attempted break-in.

Me: What??

Nolwazi: I came back from my errands, and found my other car's windows damaged. I haven't gotten inside the house, I'm a bit nervous, because I don't know what is going on.

Dean: Everything okay?

Me: Nolwazi says someone broke into the house.

Dean: What? Give me the phone.

He snatches it from me and speaks to Nolwazi.

Once he ends the call, he speeds up.

Derek: Where is she?

Dean: Told her to go to her parents' house.

Derek: Who the fuck would such in broad daylight?

I check the time and it's 1pm.

Vele who goes around breaking into people's homes in the afternoon? Honestly!

Dean: Ntsiki.

Derek: For fuck's sake.

Dean tightens his jaw and focuses on the road.

I know that now is not the right time to be curious, so I'll ask Derek later about Ntsiki.

Is she the infamous ex? Also, why would she do such? Is this her way of getting back at Dean?

So many questions, man...

INSERT 159 (Short Insert)

We get to Dean's house.

Derek: You can't just walk in-

Me: Derek, I love you, but now is not the time to be logical. This psycho needs a good beat-down. Hopefully, she's still in here.

Derek: I doubt she's that dumb.

Dean walks in and I follow him.

Derek: Why can't you be like normal people, who don't like putting themselves in danger?

Me: Zip it.

We get in the house and Dean starts searching.

Derek: She's not in here. She would be really stupid.

Dean: She left.

Me: How do you know for sure it's her?

Dean: I know.

Me: Don't you think it's time you give me more information? You can't have this crazy woman doing such!

Dean looks at Derek and there's silence for a while.

Dean: Ziyanda-

Me: No, I want to help you. I know you'd also want to help if I was in a similar position.

Derek: Let's hope you will never be...

Me: Is it that bad? What's going on? Are you in the wrong? How did you-

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I want to know!

Dean sighs heavily and stares at me.

Dean: I trust you.

Me: As you should.

Dean: But, I don't want to put you in an uncomfortable position.

Me: Just tell me what's going on, and spare me the theatrics.

Dean: Ntsiki is my ex.

Me: We've already established that.

Derek: Ziyanda-

He looks at me seriously.

Me: Derek, I wan-

Derek: No.

As I try to say something, he looks at me tensely and I keep quiet.

Derek: This has nothing to do with you. You said you want to take a nap- go upstairs.

Whoaa!

Somehow, my stubborn self knows not to question him right now. I want to, but I know I can't. I feel like a school kid.

I look at Dean softly.

Me: Good luck.

He chuckles lightly.

I walk away and leave them there. As soon as I throw myself on the bed, part of me wants to creep out and eavesdrop on the conversation, but I stop myself. I don't Derek to give me that strange look of his.

When I wake up, Derek's head is on my boobs. I wiggle my way out of his embrace and go to the bathroom. Once I'm done, I make my way downstairs to the lounge and I find Nolwazi, watching a cooking show. She seems to love doing this in the middle of the night. I sit next to her and we share a blanket.

Me: How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm good.

Me: How do you feel about the break-in situation?

Nolwazi: I'm very uncomfortable. My dad is going to tighten our security.

Me: How did he react?

Nolwazi: He's pissed, and of course he blames Dean for not securing the house.

I sigh.

Me: Our fathers are bit dramatic at times.

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: I'm just glad I wasn't here with the twins.

Me: Thank God.

We focus on the TV for a long time.

Me: Has Dean calmed down?

Nolwazi: He's still in his angry zone.

Me: Eish.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: At least no one got hurt.

Me: Hmm... I just wonder who would do such in broad daylight.

I'm channelling my inner Nomvuyo right now. I love me a good goss.

Nolwazi: Probably some randome criminal...

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Dean emerges. Nolwazi looks up at him and smiles.

Nolwazi: Oh, hey. I couldn't sleep.

Dean: Woza.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Dean walks off.

Nolwazi: Love, I'll see you in the morning.

Me: Alright.

She stands and disappears as well.

I get why she likes Dean. I just wouldn't cope with him in a romantic relationship. We're too similar.

Anyway, I continue watching this food channel, and my taste buds immediately blossom. I go to the kitchen and make myself muesli and yogurt.

It's now around 2am.

As I'm stuffing my face, Derek walks in the kitchen, yawning.

Derek: Your absence woke me up... Everything okay?

Me: Uh-huh.

He watches as I finish up my muesli. We walk to the lounge and I switch off the TV.

When we get to the bedroom, he pulls me closer and places his head on my boobs once again.

The following Monday, Derek has to attend a meeting with some white guy who wants to be part of the school.

Me: Don't take anything he has to offer. We don't want white people in this project.

He laughs.

Me: You laugh, but I'm serious. This is a black-owned school. We don't need them people.

Derek: I'll keep that in mind.

Me: Good.

Derek: What are your plans for today?

Me: I'm going to take myself out.

Derek: Alright. You must text me.

Me: Yes, sir.

We share a kiss.

Me: Bye, Nkanyi.

Derek: Bye, baby.

He leaves the house...

Gosh, I can finally go see Zimkitha.

When I get to Zimkitha's room, I find her sitting up.

Me: Hello.

She smiles warmly and opens up her arms.

She has made lots of progress. She should be discharged soon.

Zimkitha: Come give me a hug.

I walk closer to her and hug her carefully.

Zimkitha: My left side is still killing me.

I don't say anything.

She looks at me intently as I sit on the chair close to the bed.

Zimkitha: What's wrong?

Me: I want you tell me about Dean's ex.

Zimkitha: Dean's ex?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Why? Is there a problem?

Me: I know you know everything. Who is Ntsiki?

I stare at her, trying to figure out her mood, but as usual, she's calm and collected.

Zimkitha: Ntsiki?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Hmm.

Me: Zimkitha.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: Relax, love. Why don't you have some of my food?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

I continue staring at her.

Zimkitha: How do you know Ntsiki?

Me: She seems to be causing problems for Dean lately.

Zimkitha: Problems?

She looks at me more seriously.

I tell her about the call and yesterday's car situation.

She looks at me in slight disbelief.

Zimkitha: Did Dean confirm that she's the one who broke into the house?

I shrug.

She sighs heavily.

Me: What's going on??

Zimkitha: Nothin-

Me: Zimkitha!

She looks at me in shock.

Me: Stop this! These secrets are not good! They could ruin this entire unit you've managed to build!

She stares at me for a very long time.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Ntsiki was pregnant with Dean's child.

Me: WHAT?!

She sighs once again.

Zimkitha: I'm not going to give you all the details.

I give her a threatening look.

Zimkitha: She had an abortion.

I look at her in shock.

Me: Why??

She keeps quiet.

Me: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: She drugged Dean and basically raped him.

My jaw drops.

Zimkitha: Listen here, Ziyanda. This has nothing to do with you. Nolwazi is still in the dark, therefore, you cannot get involved.

I nod slowly.

Zimkitha: Do you understand me?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Now, if you don't mind, I'd like you to excuse me. I need to sleep and gather my thoughts.

Me: Oh.

I stand.

Zimkitha: I'll see you once I've been discharged.

Me: Okay.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: I trust you.

We stare at each other for a while and I eventually nod.

Me: Bye.

Zimkitha: Bye, love. Take care.

I walk out and request an Uber.

I definitely need this spa day.

INSERT 160 (Unedited)

The past 4 hours have been relaxing. I got pampered, and managed to calm my overwhelming thoughts.

I decide to go to Paul's ice-cream for some homemade ice-cream.

My phone rings and it's Derek, who has been calling me every 30 minutes.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: I've just arrived home.

Me: Oh, alright.

Derek: However, I have to go meet a few more investors in Cape Town.

Me: What??

Derek: For a week.

Me: Huh?!

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How the hell am I going to survive 7 days without you??

Derek: You can come with...

Me: Ah, you won't have time for me, so I may as well stay here.

Derek: Come home, so we can talk.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and request an Uber.

When I get home, Nolwazi and Dean are at work. Derek is packing in the bedroom.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hey, baby.

We share a hug and kiss.

Me: So zikhiphani?

Derek: The white guy-

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: He has connected me with a few more people who want to invest.

Me: Invest? Derek you have enough money to run this school by yourself.

Derek: I know, I just want to hear them out.

I groan.

Me: Manje you're leaving for 7 days?

He nods.

Me: Must be nice.

Derek: Come with me.

I shake my head.

Me: I want to stay here... I could use some personal space.

Derek: You sure?

Me: Yep.

Derek: And, you're not going to cause any trouble?

Me: I won't!

He looks at me suspiciously.

Me: For real.

Derek: Hmkay. You and I will have a big problem if you don't stick to your word.

Me: Wowzer.

Derek: Help me pack.

Me: Alrighty.

I've been asked to babysit the megabytes.

Thankfully, they're well-behaved. As they're sleeping in their room, I'm in the lounge, jamming to Lauryn Hill.

Derek left, and as much as I love him, I'm more than happy that he won't be around for a few days. I need some Ziyanda time.

As for this issue with Dean and his ex, I'm not going to say anything. It's definitely a bit awkward, because I know the truth, but Dean will have to handle that by himself.

Just then, my jam session is interrupted by my phone ringing.

It's Dean.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Nolwazi and I have a late meeting. I'm not sure when we'll be back.

Me: Alright. Is it a dinner meeting?

Dean: Yes.

Me: Manje what am I going to eat?

Dean: Make a plan.

I groan.

Me: I'll have last night's leftovers.

Dean: I don't give a shit.

Me: Wow.

Dean: See you later.

Me: Shap.

I hang up.

He's been moody since yesterday. I've been giving him space. He'll come around when he feels better.

It's now around 7pm and I've fed the megabytes. They're chilling with me in the lounge, and we're watching Little Women.

Derek texts me and lets me know that he arrived safely.

I think I've been trying to ignore this Dean thing, but it's really been flooding my mind.

How the hell did this Ntsiki woman rape him? Is that why Dean behaves so aggressively? Shit, and this pregnancy... So, she raped Dean and then fell pregnant? Is that what she wanted? But then, if she wanted to be pregnant and get back with Dean, why the hell would she have an abortion?

I have so many questions.

Beyond all of these questions, is my natural instinct to solve. I can't help but want to solve all of this.

I really hope this woman is going through some phase, and won't drag this out. I don't want anyone to get hurt here.

Simo has been well-behaved tonight. She realised that I pay more attention to Khulekani, because he is quiet. So, all in all, we've had a very peaceful night.

Khulekani is asleep on the couch, but Simo still wants me to entertain her.

Me: I need to pee.

She pouts and speaks this language of hers.

Me: I'll be back.

I put her down and she squirms.

I then rush to the bathroom and pee...

Before I leave the bathroom, I get a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I stare at my belly and sigh.

I don't know when I'm going to feel genuinely happy about this pregnancy.

I walk out.

As soon as I get to the lounge, my eyes pop out.

Me: Who the fuck are you?!

This woman is standing over the megabytes.

Woman: Don't you dare come closer!

Fight or flight?

Definitely fight. Till the very end.

I rush to her and before she can move, I push her away from the babies.

This has to be Ntsiki.

Who else would it be??

We're now on the floor, tangled in each other's arms. I try to wrap my arm around her neck, but she is too strong for my liking.

Ntsiki: Leave me the fuck alone!

I try my best to gather all my strength and I manage to wrap my arm around her neck. She tries kicking and moving, but I manage to reposition so that I am on my knees, while she's half-lying on the floor.

I don't know how I'm going to get her out of here.

Out of nowhere, I feel the most piercing pain I've ever felt, on my thigh.

I tighten my hold against her neck and she groans. She can't speak now, because she's gasping for air. I continue tightening my hold. I'll strangle her to death if I have to.

Here's that pain again.

As soon as I see blood, my vision gets blurry.

Is it what I think it is?

Am I having another miscarriage?

The pain hits me again, and I try to keep strong, but I'm confused and scared.

For a second, I forget that I'm trying to deal with this psycho.

She senses this, and within a few seconds, she manages to go free. I look down and see the blood on my lap.

As soon as I see her bending over Simo, I quickly stand. I grab the plate on the table and hit her with it- straight on the head.

She lets out a loud scream.

At this point, the twins are screaming and crying for dear life.

Ntsiki: You fucken bitch!

She turns around and I punch her as hard as I can- on the stomach. She loses her balance, and almost falls on Khulekani, but I grab her.

Instead of tumbling to the floor, she holds on to me and I lose my balance- we both fall.

Before I can stand, she's already up.

I feel another piecing pain, but this time, on my stomach. I let out a scream.

I try to stand, but I blackout as she throws something and it hits my head.

I blink a few times.

I try to move, but the pain is torturous.

I touch my belly.

The right side seems fine...

The left side is where the pain is.

I take a deep breath and try to sit up. My left thigh is pounding.

I let out a cry, and continue trying to sit up.

My eyes shoot out as I see all the blood.

I begin crying.

I don't think I've ever cried like this in my entire life.

I can't lose another baby, I can't. Why would God allow this to happen to me again?

I drag myself to the couch. I extend my hand and search for my phone.

Khulekani's cries begin to match mine.

I can't stop wailing.

I finally find my phone, and I dial Dean's number.

It rings for a while, and he eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini, we're on our way-

Me: Dean!

I cry even more.

Dean: Ziyanda? What the fuck is going on?

Me: Come back! Come back, please!

Dean: Ziyanda??

Me: Ntsiki... She was here-

Dean: WHAT?!

I look at the blood.

Me: Blood... There's blood everywhere! I lost my baby!

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: I lost my baby, Dean! I lost my baby!

I begin to hyperventilate. I can't breathe.

The smell of the blood is making me nauseous.

Why isn't Simo crying?

Where is she?

Me: Simo!

I put down the phone and try to stand, but I can't.

I feel a piercing buzz throughout my body.

I take more deep breaths...

I try to stand, but end up blacking out once again.

INSERT 161 (Unedited)

I feel someone's hand brushing mine.

I try to open my eyes, but they're heavy.

I blink a couple of times and the bright light hurts me eyes. I groan and immediately hear people speaking.

My throat is dry. I need water.

Person: Zi...

She repeats my name.

Nomvuyo.

I open my eyes and blink a few more times.

Nomvuyo is staring at me worriedly.

Nomvuyo: Baby.

I groan.

Nomvuyo: What's wrong?

I clear my throat.

Nomvuyo quickly gets water and she helps me drink it with a straw.

I feel much better.

I clear my throat once again.

Me: What's going on?

I try to sit up, but struggle. My body feels heavy.

Nomvuyo: Baby, relax.

Me: What's wrong?

I look around the room.

Liwa is here.

Nomvuyo: You're in hospital.

Me: Hospital?

There's silence.

I close my eyes and allow my mind to trace back what happened. I immediately shiver as I recall my fight with Ntsiki.

Nomvuyo: Zi, calm down.

Me: She was in the house! She was in the house!

I start crying as I remember all the blood- the revolting smell.

Nomvuyo: Zi!

I hyperventilate.

Me: My baby! I lost my baby! There was blood!

Before I know it, the doctor is next to me, telling me to calm down.

Me: My baby! I lost my baby!

Doctor: Ziyanda...

I continue crying.

Doctor: Hey, Ziyanda...

She takes my hands.

Me: I can't afford to go through another miscarriage. I haven't recovered, that miscarriage still haunts me.

I continue crying.

Me: I know I didn't want the baby, but losing it? I didn't want to lose it. I don't know how I'm going to get through this.

I look at Nomvuyo.

Me: I need Derek! Please get Derek!

At this point, I feel like dying.

I don't even want to touch my belly.

Doctor: Ziyanda.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I need you to focus on my voice.

I shake my head.

Me: I need Derek, please!

Nomvuyo: Zi...

I look at her.

She's teary-eyed.

Me: I can't go through this again, Vuvu. I can't.

Nomvuyo: Zi, you didn't lose the baby.

My heart stops beating as I stare at her.

Nomvuyo: You didn't lose the baby. She didn't stab you deeply on your stomach. However, she did do more damage on your left thigh- she stabbed you twice there.

What is she saying?

She wipes her tears and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Your baby is fine. You are fine.

Me: I didn't lose the baby?

She nods.

Me: The baby is still alive?

She nods and smiles.

Me: My baby didn't die?

Nomvuyo: Your baby is perfectly fine.

I stare at her and there's silence in the room.

As soon as I exhale, I start crying all over again.

I'm overwhelmed.

Nomvuyo: Ah, my love...

She wraps her arms around me and I continue crying.

Me: So, I didn't lose my baby?

Nomvuyo: No, you didn't.

Me: My baby is fine?

Nomvuyo: Perfectly fine.

I continue crying, but this time around, I feel like a huge load has been lifted off my shoulders.

She comforts me till I manage to calm down.

Me: I need Derek.

She lets go of me.

Nomvuyo: He's only arriving in the afternoon.

Me: What time is it?

Nomvuyo: It's 6am.

Me: Oh.

I look around.

Liwa looks stone-faced.

He walks to me and smiles lightly.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini.

Me: Hello, Liwa.

Liwa: How are you feeling?

Me: I don't know.

He chuckles.

Me: I'd like to speak to Derek.

Liwa: He's been waiting for you to wake up.

He takes out his phone.

Liwa: I need you to reassure him that you're fine. He is freaking the fuck out.

Me: Okay.

He dials his number and then gives it to me.

It rings twice, before he answers.

Derek: Liwa.

I sigh.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

He is silent.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Video call me. I want to see you.

Me: Okay.

He sighs before ending the call.

Liwa: How is he?

Me: I can't read him.

Liwa: Just don't let him think you're in a really bad state. Can you imagine how stressed he is that he's not physically here?

I nod lightly as I call him again.

He answers instantly.

He's in his hotel room.

Me: When are you getting here?

Derek: I should be there around 1pm.

Me: Okay.

He stares at me.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Are you in pain?

I shake my head.

Me: Not really. I just woke up now.

Derek: Are you going to do an ultrasound?

Me: Yes.

Derek: And your thigh? How is it?

Me: I can't really feel anything right now.

He doesn't say anything.

I'm really struggling to read him.

However, because I've come to know him, I know he's trying to be cool. He knows very well that I feed off his energy, and if he freaks out, I'll absorb that and freak out 10 times more.

Me: I'm okay, Star.

I smile, and he remains unfazed.

He is angry.

He is angry, and there's nothing I can do.

The doctor clears her throat.

Doctor: I'd like to check you now, please.

Me: Oh.

I look at Derek.

Me: I'll call you back.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I love you.

He sighs.

Derek: I love you too.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Bye.

He hangs up and I look at Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Me: He's pissed.

Liwa: Dean is the last person he needs to see when he arrives.

Dean.

Shit!

Me: Simo!

My heart begins pounding and I stare at them in shock.

Me: Ntsiki took Simo!

Liwa scratches his head and Nomvuyo sits.

Liwa: Yes, she took Simo.

Me: Where's Dean?? Nolwazi??

Liwa: They left an hour ago.

I groan.

Me: We have to find Simo!

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I need you to calm down and focus on yourself right now. Focus on yourself, and your baby.

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: You need to check yourself right now. Don't allow yourself to stress too much.

She looks at the doctor.

Nomvuyo: Please do the ultrasound.

Doctor: Alright.

Me: I want to stand and take a walk first. My legs are too numb.

Doctor: 5 minutes.

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo removes the cover and Liwa gets closer to me. He helps me stand and I wince as my legs tingle.

Me: I think the meds or whatever, are wearing off. I feel achy.

Doctor: Take it easy.

Me: Okay.

I begin taking small steps.

Doctor: How's the thigh?

Me: It's okay.

Doctor: 5 minutes.

She walks out.

I rub my belly and exhale as soon as I feel it. I don't think I've ever been this relieved in my life.

Just then, the door opens, and my mom and dad walk in.

Oh my goodness.

Where do I start with them?

Mom: Zizi!

She walks to me and hugs me carefully.

Me: Hello, ma.

I look at my dad and he smiles.

Dad: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

I share a hug with him.

Me: I'm starting to feel the pain in my thigh.

Mom: Eish kodwa Ziyanda... You need to stop being so careless.

Me: Careless?

Mom: I just don't understand why you would try cooking, when you know you can't function in a kitchen.

Whoa, what's happening?

Nomvuyo: You know how she gets when she's in her zone. I don't know why she started cooking without supervision.

What the hell is going on?

Dad: Well, now that we're sure you're okay, we can leave now...

Me: Oh. Okay.

They give me hugs.

Mom: You are banned from the kitchen, young lady!

I chuckle nervously.

Me: Uhm, goodbye.

They say goodbye and I watch them walk out.

As soon as the door is closed, I stare at Nomvuyo and Liwa.

Me: What the fuck??

Liwa: Your parents do not need to know the truth.

I try to say something, but I'm speechless.

Liwa: You were cooking, you tripped, you fell, and you broke your leg.

Me: What?? That doesn't even make sense!

Liwa: Well, that's what happened. Roll with it.

With that said, he gives me a smile and walks out.

I stare at Nomvuyo in shock and she shrugs.

Seconds later, the doctor walks in and smiles.

Doctor: Ready for the ultrasound?

Me: Uhm, yes.

Doctor: Alright then...

I go back to my bed and Nomvuyo helps me sit.

I need Derek.

My anxiety is brewing...

I'm trying my best not to lose it right now.

INSERT 162 (Unedited)

I spent the rest of the morning sleeping- that was the only way I could deal with the anxiety.

I tried contacting Dean, but he didn't answer my calls, which is understandable. I just feel useless right now. I want to be there for him and Lwazi.

I wake up around 12pm and find Nomvuyo there.

Me: You can go home now, I'm fine.

She rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: Derek would kill me if I left you alone.

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: He says there was a delay with his flight.

Me: Are you serious?

She nods.

Me: I'm not even surprised. The Universe does the most when it comes to me.

Nomvuyo: Are you feeling better though?

Me: I'm okay. I'm just worried about Dean and Nolwazi. I can't begin to imagine how they feel right now.

Nomvuyo: We'll find Simo...

There way she says it, makes me believe that we will find her. She seems sure.

Nomvuyo: Stupid woman... Does she think she's going to hide forever?

Me: You knew about her?

Nomvuyo: I decided to exclude myself from the situation. I don't know the full details.

Me: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: There are so many unanswered questions right now. Nolwazi is going crazy.

Me: And Dean?

She shrugs.

Me: That bad?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: We'll find Simo...

Me: I hope so.

Nomvuyo: Go clean yourself up.

I walk to the bathroom...

When I walk back in my room, I find Liwa and Zimkitha.

I don't know why I'm shocked to see Zimkitha, but I am...

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

Me: Hi.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I smile and he smiles back. He is back to his usual bubbly self, and I must admit that I'm finding it weird. Why is he so chirpy, when we're dealing with such a horrible thing?

Zimkitha: How are you, physically?

Me: I'm okay.

Zimkitha: Pains?

I shake my head.

Me: Just aches, nothing hectic.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: Good. How is my grandchild?

Me: The baby is fine.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: Vuvu tells me you were emotional at the thought of losing the baby.

I keep quiet. How am I supposed to respond to that? Of course I was emotional. That shit was traumatising and triggering.

Zimkitha: I'm glad you're fine...

She smiles sweetly and I sit on my bed.

Zimkitha: So, Ntsiki was there?

Me: I assume it was her... from what I knew.

Liwa: I'm quite appalled that Zimkitha would even let you in on all of this.

Zimkitha: Liwa, she left me no choice! Have you ever been cornered by this girl?

Liwa looks at me amusingly.

Liwa: You know how to get people to do what you want?

Me: You don't have to phrase it like that.

Liwa: She shouldn't have told you anything.

Me: Well, we can't waste time reminiscing about what could have been, can we?

Liwa: Feisty much?

Me: We need to find that psycho!

Liwa: Don't worry about that. She won't hide forever.

Me: How do you know?! That woman is crazy! No one knows what she's capable of!

Liwa: Ziyanda.

He looks at me seriously.

Liwa: Focus on yourself, and your baby.

Me: Oh, please. Spare me the scare tactics. Dean and Lwazi's child is missing, and I was there when it happened. I will not sit here and pretend as if none of that happened!

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: We'll find Ntsiki.

Me: How? What are you doing to find her? Have you contacted the police?

Zimkitha: Trust-

Me: No, Zimkitha, I do not trust any of you. Dean should have dealt with that woman a long time ago. Why would he even hide that fact that she drugged and assaulted him? None of this is his fault, but his dishonesty is what will make him lose Nolwazi! That woman kidnapped their child! Why are you both sitting here as if we're getting a visit from the president??

They stare at me.

Me: Do you understand how crazy it will be once you tell Nolwazi the reasoning behind the kidnap? What the hell is wrong with you people? You keep saying you're a close unit, but what about all these insane secrets?? Who the fuck does that??

They keep quiet.

Me: I don't understand any of you, honestly. This is not healthy. Nolwazi deserves to know the truth.

I stare at Zimkitha.

Me: Everyone deserves to know the truth, Zimkitha.

Just then, the door opens.

Dean.

I immediately walk to him.

I know he hates hugs, but I go in for one.

He doesn't hug me back.

I look at him.

I've never seen him like this.

I let go of him.

He stares at Liwa and Zimkitha and they immediately stand. Dean and I move out of the way and I watch as they walk out and close the door.

Dean then stares at me.

I can't read him properly. He's cold.

Me: Dean?

I don't know why I'm getting emotional, but I can't seem to help it. My heart goes out to him.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: My leg is the problem, but it's not that bad.

He looks at my belly.

Me: We're fine.

He lets out a low chuckle.

Me: Yes, you heard me right.

Dean: Sit.

I walk back to my bed and sit, and he follows and sits next to me.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

Dean: Derek is going to kill me.

Me: Definitely.

He looks at me.

Dean: I won't fight back... I'll let him beat me.

I laugh.

Me: Your ego will never let anyone beat you.

We're silent for a while.

Me: Nolwazi?

Dean: With Mdu.

Me: Where are her parents?

Dean: Vacation...

Me: Did you tell them?

He shakes his head.

Me: Dean-

Dean: I'll find Ntsiki.

Me: So, we're supposed to hide this as if we're the ones in the wrong?

He looks at me.

Me: When are you planning on telling Lwazi? She needs to know.

He doesn't say anything.

I shake my head and we're silent once again.

Dean: I fucked up.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I'm going to kill Ntsiki.

I look at him sharply. I feel like he means that... But then again, he's an emotional mess.

Dean: She took my child...

He is deep in thought at this point.

Dean: She took my fucken child...

He stands and I also stand. I don't want him to leave. I want all of this to sink in and for him to deal with his emotions accordingly.

Also, I'd rather be with him than those two weirdos, Zimkitha and Liwa.

Dean: She took my fucken child, and almost killed you...

Me: I'm fine, Dean, I promise.

I step closer to him and open my arms.

Me: I know you hate hugs...

He nods and I step even closer till our bodies are touching. I wrap my arms around him and he does the same.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm not angry. I'm worried.

Dean: I'll find Ntsiki.

Out of nowhere, the door bursts open, and before I can even process anything, Dean is no longer in my arms.

I watch in horror as Derek pushes him against the wall and punches him countless times.

I'm frozen.

Zimkitha staggers in and yells for Derek to stop.

Where is Liwa?

I spot him standing coolly by the door.

Zimkitha: Liwa, stop them!

Liwa: No. Dean deserves this shit.

More than anything, I am traumatised by Derek.

I thought I had seen it all.

Zimkitha: Derek, stop!

Dean is now pressed on the ground, and his face is smashed with punches. He's not doing anything.

Somehow, my senses come back.

I ask Derek to stop, but he continues.

Me: Derek!

Out of nowhere, Dean manages to push Derek away, and stands.

Instead of asking Derek to stop, he throws a punch and it lands on Derek's face.

What the fuck?

This infuriates Derek even more. He throws a punch on Dean's stomach.

Dean staggers and loses his balance.

Before we all know it, Dean's pressed on the floor again and he's being punched like never before.

Me: Liwa, stop this!

Liwa shakes his head.

Me: What the fuck is wrong with you??

I walk closer to Derek, and attempt to touch his shoulder, but he pushes me away, quite intensely, and I stumble.

Me: Derek, what the hell?!

Derek: Ziyanda?

He immediately stops punching Dean.

I thought my leg was fine, but now the pain seems to have risen suddenly.

Just as he is about to come to me, two white security guards rush in.

They go straight to Derek and grab him.

They instantly drag him out and disappear...

There's silence in the room.

I stare at Dean as he gets up. His face is bloody.

He wipes his mouth and nose and looks at Liwa, who is now sitting on my bed.

Liwa shrugs as Dean storms out.

I honestly have no idea how we're going to get through this.

INSERT 163 (Unedited)

Me: Are you fucking kidding me right now, Liwa?!

Liwa looks at me coolly.

Me: What is wrong with you??

I look at Zimkitha, who is sobbing.

Me: You need to sort this out, Zimkitha.

She looks at me.

Me: Sort this out!

Liwa: Hey, take it easy.

Me: Mxm. Please get out.

Liwa stands.

Zimkitha: Ziya-

Liwa: Mama.

Zimkitha looks at Liwa.

Liwa: Let's give her space.

He takes her hand and they walk out.

As soon as the door is closed, I sit on my bed and focus on my breathing.

I am ready to leave this place. I want to help find Simo. I want to be there for Nolwazi.

After a few minutes, the door opens and Derek walks in.

Derek: Get your shit. We're leaving.

Did I miss something? What's going on?

Derek: Ziyanda. Get your-

Me: Excuse me? Are you fucking kidding me right now?

He is silent for a while.

I watch him go from being pissed, to being calmer- not fully calm, but better than how he was.

He looks at me softly.

Derek: I don't want to think about what could have happened to you, Ziyanda. My heart can't take that shit.

I sigh.

Me: Please hold me for a sec?

He sighs and steps closer to me. I get off the bed and dive into his arms. As soon as I'm embraced, the tears flow like never before. I cry so intensely, that I forget where I am for a while.

Eventually, I calm down and he continues holding me.

Me: I thought I lost the baby.

I feel his body tense up.

I put my face up and look at him.

Me: It took this incident for me to realise the value of our baby. I'm sorry for taking this long to accept our situation.

I see a smile somewhere in there, despite his obvious fury.

Me: The thought of losing the baby almost killed me. I couldn't handle it, Derek.

Derek: The thought of losing you almost killed me.

Me: I wasn't about to go out like that.

He chuckles.

Me: So, you were more worried about me than the baby?

Derek: What kind of a question is that? You're my world, Ziyanda.

I stare at him.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I love you too. I'm sorry for not being there.

Me: Don't blame yourself, please. No one could have stopped this.

He tightens his jaw and I look at him carefully.

Me: Derek... Come on...

Derek: Dean was supposed to deal with this shit a long time ago. You cannot expect me to hug him right now.

Me: His daughter is missing, Derek... Can't you practise a little empathy?

Derek: I almost lost you and my child, because of someone else's carelessness.

I sigh.

Derek: Your parents?

Me: Liwa made up some floozy story about me tripping while attempting to cook.

Derek: And they bought it?

I nod and he shakes his head.

Derek: Do you see how fucked up this is? Now we have to lie, just to cover up more lies?

I keep quiet.

Derek: I don't lie, Ziyanda. I hate dishonesty. I try my best to live a truthful life, and this right here is fucking everything up. What will your parents say when they find out the truth? How the hell am I supposed to explain all of this to them?

Me: I understand.

Derek: You don't.

I sigh.

Me: We need to focus on what is happening right now: I am well, the baby is well, but Simo has been kidnapped. Dean needs us right now, he may not express it, but he needs us.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I need you to calm down, please.

He doesn't say anything.

I get closer to his face, and place my lips on his.

Me: Please?

We share a gentle kiss and I feel his body loosen up. We continue kissing till we're both panting.

Sex is the perfect way for him to get rid of all this anger and drama, but now is not the time, and this hospital room is definitely not the place...

The door opens and Zimkitha walks in.

Derek: Zim-

Zimkitha: Shut up, and sit down.

Yoh.

Derek lets go of me and we both stare at Zimkitha. The tears are gone with the wind, she seems angry.

Soon, Liwa and Dean are in the room, and they're all sitting down.

Zimkitha: Sit down, Derek.

Derek and I sit on the bed.

She sits as well and looks at the guys.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Who'll go first?

Silence.

Liwa: Alright then...

Just like that, they start playing Rock-Paper-Scissors.

What the hell?

I didn't even know that the game could be played by three people, but they do it.

Dean and Derek both play rocks, while Liwa plays the scissors.

Liwa: Hmkay... So, I go first.

I have no idea what the hell just happened.

Liwa: This is beyond fucked up.

He looks at Dean.

Liwa: What the fuck happened to tightening security?

Dean looks down.

Liwa: You're an idiot. Why the hell would you leave Ziyanda all alone with the kids, knowing very well that you still needed to work on security?

Dean tries to say something.

Liwa: And you...

He looks at Derek.

Liwa: You didn't beat him hard enough. One of his limbs should be broken.

Derek doesn't say anything.

Liwa: Dean, you were careless. Ziyanda could have lost her life and her baby.

I want to speak, but I'm speechless.

I've never seen anything like this.

Liwa: I've said my peace...

Derek and Dean then play their version of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

Dean plays the scissors, and Derek plays the paper.

Derek: Fuck you, Dean.

Dean looks at him.

Derek: Fuck you, for putting my family in danger. And fuck you for putting your family in danger.

I feel like they're being too hard on Dean, but I can't say anything ngoba they'll cut me to size.

Derek: This situation could have ended differently. How many times did I tell you to deal with this woman?

Dean doesn't say anything.

Derek: We've never sugar-coated anything, and we won't start now. Your dumb ass could have prevented all of this.

Liwa: Very dumb ass.

Yhu I feel bad for Dean.

Derek: I don't know what I would have done if Ziyanda was dead.

Liwa: Ya, well, she's okay, so your dramatic ass needs to let this shit go now.

I'm so confused. I've never seen such.

Dean: My daughter is missing...

There's an intense silence.

Dean: My fucken daughter is missing...

Liwa: We'll find her.

Dean: I'll kill that bitch.

Liwa: Of course.

Zimkitha: I gave that rapist a second chance, and she double-crossed me. The only person who has the right to kill her here is me.

Heyi!!

Me: We're all speaking hypothetically, right?

Liwa: Definitely, Ziyanda. None of this is literal.

I look at Derek worriedly.

Dean: I'm sorry for putting your life in danger, Dlamini.

I look at him and smile.

Me: I'm fine. Can we stop focusing on me?

Zimkitha: I have organised a lovely dinner for us... Let's get going.

Me: Dinner?

She looks at me sweetly.

Zimkitha: Would you rather stay here, Zi?

Me: Am I discharged??

She nods.

Me: Oh... Let's go.

She laughs and then looks at Dean.

Zimkitha: I always keep my promises. We will find Simo, and this will never happen again.

With that said, she walks out.

Liwa: Ready to hug it out?

Derek: No, I'm still pissed. Give me a minute.

Dean walks out.

Liwa: Don't drag this out, Ngidi.

Derek: This better be a wake-up call for him. I've warned him too many times about this woman...

Me: Derek, come on...

Derek: I'd like some time with Ziyanda for a sec... We'll meet you for dinner, Liwa.

Liwa nods and walks out.

I'm confused and relieved at the same time.

INSERT 164

We're now making our way to Liwa, Nomvuyo and Zimkitha's house.

To be honest, I'd rather not be around these people (Liwa and Zimkitha), but at the same time, I want to be there for Dean.

Derek: We don't have to go to this dinner.

Me: It's okay. Dean needs us.

He glances at me.

Derek: You're strange.

Me: Why?

Derek: You were attacked. How are you this calm?

Me: I don't have time to freak out right now. It's no longer about me, because I'm safe. We need to find Simo.

Derek: I'm beyond pissed.

Me: You have to get over it, Star.

He shakes his head.

Derek: You don't understand how I felt. I thought I lost you.

Me: Who told you, anyway?

Derek: Liwa.

Me: I'm sure he was blunt.

He chuckles.

Derek: I've told you this before... Liwa is sweet and bubbly, but he has a very cold side.

Me: I've seen a glimpse.

He chuckles.

Me: Him and his mother freak me out.

Derek: They're just overprotective.

Me: But, they have this weird obsession with each other. I mean, I love my parents, but Liwa and Zimkitha's relationship is on another level.

He glances at me.

Me: It better not be incestuous.

Derek: What?? Ziyanda!

Me: What? I'm just saying.

He pulls a face.

Me: Derek, you have to admit that they have a creepy thing going there.

Derek: No, man... They've been through too much together. Zimkitha has never been lucky when it comes to relationships, so Liwa is always there...

Me: Exactly! That's what's creepy about them! Why is Liwa acting like her husband??

Derek laughs quietly.

Derek: It's not like that.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: They've always been close. They confide in each other.

Me: Hai, but they need to let go now. Can you imagine asking my mother to move in with us? Then she stays with us for the rest of our lives? Really?

He smiles.

Derek: I wouldn't mind that. I love your mother.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

We eventually get to the house.

I am actually glad that Nolwazi is not here. I don't think I'm ready to see her. What am I going to say? I am the worst liar ever, and knowing me, I'd definitely start spilling the beans.

Zimkitha, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Dean are there.

Thank God the others are not here as well. I'm really not in the mood to listen to Gabi's drama.

A table has been set up.

We sit and we're served our drinks.

The mood is definitely sombre.

Me: So, what is the plan?

They all look at me.

Me: How are you planning on finding Simo, seeing as you're not involving the police?

Liwa: You're not going to let us handle this, are you?

Me: No. It would be foolish of me to sit at home and twiddle my thumbs.

Nomvuyo: They've even excluded me from this whole thing...

Liwa looks at Zimkitha.

I don't know if these people have a plan, but I think I have one.

Just then, Dean's phone rings and he stands and walks away.

Derek takes my hand and kisses it. I look at him and smile.

Zimkitha: So, how was the meeting with Zizi's parents?

Derek: It went well.

Zimkitha: Why couldn't you wait till I was discharged?

Derek: The meeting wasn't meant for anyone else but me.

Zimkitha: Oh.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Everyone is so tense.

Me: Is Nolwazi still at Mdu's?

Zimkitha: Yes.

Nomvuyo: Let me go check on my baby...

She stands and walks away.

Me: You're not planning on telling her parents?

Zimkitha looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: Can we stop discussing this for just 30 minutes?

She looks at me pleadingly and I nod.

I guess we're supposed to pretend nothing is going on around us. I don't understand why they're so calm.

Me: Let me check on Dean.

Derek nods as I stand and go to the kitchen, where I find Dean.

Me: Everything okay?

Dean: Was speaking to Nolwazi.

He sighs heavily.

Dean: She's pissed at me.

Me: Why?

He shrugs.

Dean: She's just stressed.

Me: I have an idea.

He looks at me.

Me: You have to reach out to Ntsiki.

Dean: You think I haven't tried to?

Me: You have to reach out differently.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: She's doing all of this because deep down, as crazy as it is, she loves you.

Dean: Bullshit.

Me: Believe me, she's crazy about you.

Dean: So, taking my baby will benefit her in what way?

Me: She finally has your attention.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Think about it... She may seem crazy, but I think the obsession stems from her love for you. So, if you reach out to her, less aggressively, she might cool down.

Derek walks in and I look at him.

Me: Ntsiki loves Dean, right?

Derek: Love?

He shakes his head disgustingly.

Me: In a weird and toxic way.

Derek: So?

Me: I think Dean needs to reach out to her, the way she has always wanted him to.

Derek: And how is that?

Me: In a kinder way.

Derek: What are you saying, Ziyanda?

Me: Dean needs to make Ntsiki think he is willing to work things with her.

They both stare at me.

Me: Listen, I watch a lot of crime documentaries. I know that Ntsiki needs attention from Dean specifically.

Dean looks at Derek, who is looking at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I hear what you're saying.

I continue staring at Dean.

Me: Once you're with her, you can convince her to bring back Simo, and then we catch her and send her to prison, where she belongs.

Derek: I don't think it will be that easy.

I sigh.

Me: You guys don't get it. Dean has a lot of power over this psycho. Why else would she do such? She wants his attention. Let's give the woman what she wants.

Derek looks at Dean.

Derek: Have you tried contacting her?

Dean nods tightly.

Me: Obviously she won't respond, because she can see that your attitude hasn't changed.

Dean: Ziyanda, you want me to be kind to that whore?

Me: Yes.

Dean: Are you fucking kidding me?

Me: No, this is the only way we can get Simo. I don't want any of you to do things that are out of character. I strongly believe that this can be solved without any bloodshed.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Bloodshed? Baby, no one is killing anyone here. Stop being paranoid.

I look at them and narrow my eyes.

Me: Those two gangsters outside are dangerous. I know it.

Liwa: Two gangsters? Really, Ziyanda Dlamini?

I squeal and look at Liwa and Zimkitha in shock. When the hell did they even get here?

Zimkitha: You think my son and I are gangsters?

They start laughing and I groan ashamedly. Now that they know how I feel, I kinda feel stupid for even thinking such.

Zimkitha: Oh, wow.

Nomvuyo also walks in with her baby boy, nuzzled in her arms.

Derek: Ziyanda has an idea that could work.

Zimkitha: Really? I'm all ears.

I listen to Derek speak, and I must say I'm glad. His English is better than mine anyway, so he phrased my idea perfectly. It sounds convincing.

Liwa looks at me amusingly.

Liwa: You want Ntsiki to go to prison?

Me: Liwa, where else would she go?

Liwa: I'm just asking.

I shudder.

Liwa: I like your plan. Psychologically, it will work. This woman is definitely obsessed with Dean, and the mere possibility of them getting back with him is enough to bring Simo back home.

We all look at Dean.

Dean: You want me to reach out to this woman and give her the impression that I love her?

Me: Yes.

He shakes his head tightly.

Dean: There has to be another way.

Zimkitha: Yes, there is another way. However, let's exhaust this way, before moving on to other ways.

She winks at me and I shudder once again. I think they're just going to do the most after overhearing what I said about them.

Dean sighs heavily and scratches his head.

Nomvuyo: This will definitely work.

Dean looks at me.

Me: You have to do this. I know it sucks, but you have to do it. Simo needs to come back home.

Dean: Okay.

I sigh in relief.

Dean: I'll call her now.

He looks at all of us sternly.

Dean: Go eat.

Liwa: You don't want us to judge your weak flirting skills?

Really? Yazi, this man has a very strange sense of humour, and it pops out of nowhere.

Everyone goes back to the table, except Derek and I.

Dean drinks some water and looks at Derek.

Derek: Let's talk for a sec.

I'm glad Star has come back to his senses. Dean cannot be stressing about finding his daughter on one hand, and mending his bromance with Derek on the other hand.

Me: I'm hungry...

I look at Dean.

Me: Ntsiki cannot sense pretense. Make her believe every word you say.

Dean nods.

Me: Good luck.

I walk back to the table and immediately start eating...

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It's been 10 minutes, and we're all outchea wondering how it's going with Dean.

Derek is now back, and I'm watching him eat.

Me: I want to check on him.

Zimkitha smiles.

Zimkitha: You are such a caretaker.

Derek: Go, check on him. You know how to get him to open up, anyway.

Me: Hmkay.

I stand and walk to the kitchen.

It's evident that he has been standing there for a while.

Me: Fresh air?

He nods and we walk out and make our way to the backyard.

Dean: I don't like this idea.

Me: Do you have another one?

He sighs.

Dean: Nolwazi is going to kill me.

Me: As long as she kills you after we've found Simo.

He chuckles in defeat.

Me: Let's try it.

Dean: You watch too much TV.

Me: Leave me alone.

He scratches his head.

Dean: What do you want me to say to her?

Me: Uhm, how about we role play?

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: What? I'm tryna get you ready!

Dean: I'm not role playing bullshit.

Me: Then call her. It's 7pm now, I'm sure she's having dinner.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Dean, you need to do whatever it takes to get your daughter back. We will deal with the consequences after.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: What?

Dean: Thank you.

Me: I've got your back.

He nods tightly.

Me: Call this bitch.

Dean: So, you seriously fought her

Me: Pregnant or not, I'm not going to let anyone try me. If she didn't have any weapons, I would have whooped her ass.

He chuckles.

Me: Now, channel your inner Idris Alba and call this bitch.

He exhales.

Me: Actually, jog around the pool, just to get the nerves out of the way.

Dean: Uyahlanya wena.

I begin pushing him.

Me: Go!

Dean: You can't expect me to do stupid shit by myself. Come.

He pulls me and we end up jogging.

Me: Dean, I'm dying...

He laughs.

I'm glad he's laughing at my expense...

Dean: Let's do another round.

Me: Dude, I'm pregnant.

Dean: And you're gaining weight... Woza.

He pulls me and we continue jogging.

I regret suggesting this nonsense. He continues laughing at me until we finish the lap.

Once we're done, we sit by the pool and he continues laughing as I huff and puff.

Me: Ready?

Dean: No.

Me: Ya, well, you have to do this...

He takes out his phone and stares at his wallpaper- Simo and Khulekani.

Me: Should I give you privacy?

He shakes his head as he dials Ntsiki's number.

Dean: You're the only one I trust with my weak flirting skills.

I laugh.

Me: At least you have your charm.

Dean: And money.

I continue laughing.

He glances at me.

Me: Ringing?

He nods.

My heart rate is on another level right now.

Just as I'm about to say something, he clears his throat.

Dean: Ntsiki...

The bitch actually answered!

Dean sighs.

He's silent for a while... I'm not sure if it's because Ntsiki is speaking...

Dean: Please say something.

I stand.

I don't want to hear this conversation. I don't like seeing Dean like this.

I walk away and make my way back inside the house. I get to the dining room and find Derek and Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Everything okay?

Me: He's on the phone with her.

Zimkitha: Hopefully, she falls for it.

She stands and walks away.

I look at Derek.

Me: Do you think she'll fall for it?

Derek: I'm hopeful.

I groan.

Me: I need a strong drink.

He smiles.

Derek: Four more months.

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: Where are we going to sleep? We're homeless.

He sighs heavily.

Derek: We'll stay at Dean's for now.

Me: Why didn't Nolwazi's dad tighten security, as he promised?

Derek: I'm pissed at that old man. He should have sorted this shit before he went to his vacation.

Me: Please don't go off on him. He seems scary.

Derek: Mxm.

He pulls my chair closer and leans closer to me.

Derek: I'll fight anyone who puts you in danger.

Me: You've proven yourself... I get it.

He chuckles and kisses my cheek.

Me: I feel sick, hey.

Derek: Didn't you disagree with me when I said you're an absorber of emotions?

I look at him disapprovingly.

Derek: You're addicted to solving other people's problems.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: It's a blessing and curse. The problem is that you overlook your own problems.

Me: Awungiyeye, Nkanyezi.

He plants another kiss on my cheek.

Me: I haven't forgotten how you pushed me when you were attacking Dean.

Derek: Ahh, baby, come on.

Me: Uh-uh.

He's now all pouty.

Me: Hai suka.

Just then, Dean walks in.

Derek and I look at him expectantly.

Dean: She wants us to meet.

Me: When?

Dean: Now.

Zimkitha and Liwa walk back.

Zimkitha: What's up?

Derek: She wants to meet.

Zimkitha: Perfect-

Dean: She wants me to come with Ziyanda.

Me: What?!

Derek: What the fuck do you mean??

Dean: She asked me about Ziyanda.

Me: Why?

Dean: We have to go.

Derek: Are you crazy? Ziyanda is not going anywhere. Tell that fucken lunatic that we'll find her.

Liwa: She's crazy. She can't possibly think we'll do everything she says. What does she think this is? A movie?

Me: Let's go.

Derek: Ziyanda, don't fucken test me.

Me: What? We need to get Simo!

He looks at me threateningly and I keep quiet. I'm so defeated. I want this to be over.

Liwa: How did the conversation go?

Dean: She says I led her to this point, and that I need to fix this.

Zimkitha: Led her to what point?! To kidnap your child?!

I don't think I have seen Zimkitha switch up like this.

She snatches Dean's phone and dials a number.

Dean: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: We will not bend over for her!

Dean snatches the phone from her.

Dean: What the fuck is wrong with you?! Do you realise that she could hurt my daughter if any of you get involved?!

We all keep quiet.

Dean: I will deal with her. I don't want any of you to handle this. I will go there and I will get my daughter.

He looks at all of us.

Dean: Ntsiki kidnapped my child. She's doing all of this because she's pissed. She was pregnant with my child. We made her have an abortion, and she's going crazy. The common factor is me. She has gone crazy because of--

WHAT?!

Wait, who said that??

We all turn around.

Shit.

Nolwazi stands there, eyes wide open.

Nolwazi: WHAT?!

All of us stare at her in complete shock.

Why is she here? When did she-

Nolwazi: NTSIKI DID WHAT?!

Dean: Nolw-

Nolwazi: Ntsiki is the one who kidnapped my child?!

She looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: Uthi you made Ntsiki pregnant?

I feel like I'm about to faint. My heart is beating too fast!

Out of nowhere, we're all ducking and diving.

Shit is being thrown at us- vases, glasses, plates-everything.

Nolwazi: YOU MADE NTSIKI PREGNANT?!

Zimkitha: Nolwazi-

Nolwazi: Shut the fuck up! Shut the fuck up!

She throws a plate at Dean and he ducks.

Nolwazi: Ntsiki has my child?! You knew about this all along?!

Dean: No-

Another plate is thrown at him and he ducks again.

Nolwazi: WHAT, DEAN?! What do you have to say to me?!

Silence.

Nolwazi: What do you have to say to me, Dean?! What?!

She looks at all of us one by one.

Her eyes land on me and I instantly look away.

Nolwazi: You all knew about my baby, and you didn't say anything??

Liwa: Nolw-

Nolwazi: Shut the fuck up!

There's silence once again...

Nomvuyo comes down the stairs.

Nomvuyo: And then? What's with the noi-

She sees Nolwazi and then clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, I'll be right back.

She walks up the stairs and disappears.

Nolwazi: I want my baby! I want my baby now! NOW!

Dean: I'm going to get her now.

Nolwazi looks at him in disgust.

There's silence for a long time.

Nolwazi: Get my baby... Please get my baby... Please...

She collapses on the floor and starts crying. Zimkitha walks to her and just as she's about to comfort her, Nolwazi pushes her away and Zimkitha stumbles and winces.

Just as Liwa is about to defend his mom (as expected) I pull him back and tell him to zip it.

We all look at Nolwazi as she cries painfully. We know not to go to her.

I look over at Dean.

I have to blink a couple of times, just to make sure I'm seeing right.

He's crying as well.

I clear my throat.

Me: Let's go, Dean.

Derek tries to say something and I look at him disapprovingly.

Liwa: We'll follow behind you.

I look at Derek. I know he wants to kill me right now, but I want all of this to be over.

Me: Just make sure you're not too close.

Liwa: Of course.

Nomvuyo comes downstairs and goes straight to Nolwazi. Nolwazi doesn't fight her.

Nomvuyo: They'll get Simo...

Nolwazi sinks in Nomvuyo's arms and cries even more.

Me: Let's go.

Dean is conflicted. It's clear that he wants to comfort Nolwazi, but he can't.

I grab his arm and we start walking...

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We're now in Dean's car.

We've been sitting here for a few minutes.

Me: Are you ready?

He glances at me.

Dean: Nolwazi will never forgive me.

Me: She will.

I'm lying. From what I've seen, Nolwazi will not let go of this, and to be honest, she has every right to be pissed.

Me: Dean, can you imagine how she's feeling right now? She just found out everything in the worst possible way.

He sighs deeply.

Me: Let's find Simo. We'll deal with Nolwazi when we come back.

Just then, Liwa knocks on my window.

Liwa: Let's go!

Me: Okay.

Dean starts the car and drives off.

Me: Where are we going?

Dean: Her house.

Me: Did you ever live together?

Dean: Not really.

I sigh.

Me: Has she always been crazy?

Dean: Ntsiki knew from the get go that I didn't want a serious relationship. For fuck's sake, I never saw a future with her, and I always made myself clear.

Me: Really? It wasn't a serious relationship?

Dean: No. Nolwazi always thought I was too cold towards Ntsiki. I didn't have deep feelings for her. She was aware from the beginning. I didn't sell her dreams.

Me: Yoh.

I look at him.

Dean: You can ask me anything.

I sigh.

Me: I'm just thinking about the pregnancy situation.

He looks at me sadly.

Dean: She drugged me.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I went to my doctor for my check up, and he noticed that I had an unfamiliar drug in my system. Ntsiki had already started contacting me, talking about how good our reunion was. She got into my place, drugged me and proceeded to fuck me. I had no idea, until I went to my doctor.

I process all of this. I feel sick.

Dean: I was furious, Ziyanda. I have never been violated like that.

Me: Is that why you couldn't tell Lwazi? You were humiliated?

He nods tightly.

Dean: It's not easy to accept that you've been taken advantage of...

I nod.

I completely understand what he's saying.

Dean: And then, she told me that she's pregnant.

I hiss.

Dean: Zimkitha convinced her to have an abortion. It was either that, or we'd take her to the cops.

Me: Do you think that was a good decision?

Dean: Ziyanda, why the fuck would I want Ntsiki to have my child without my consent?

Me: I hear you.

Dean: That bitch will get what's coming to her.

Me: Don-

He looks at me and I shudder.

Dean: Don't try to talk me out of killing her.

Me: Dean!

Dean: What?

Me: You will not kill anyone! We will get Simo, and you will rebuild your trust with Nolwazi. You won't be able to do all of that if you're behind bars for murder!

Dean: Mxm.

He speeds up and focuses on the road.

Me: Is this it?

He nods.

Me: Are you going to call to ask her to let us in?

Dean: I have the remote.

Yazi, I'm still wondering why I was asked to come. All I know is that as soon as I get a chance, I'm going to

stab her ass as well. Damn bitch.

Derek and Liwa manage to drive in behind us.

We're now in the parking lot.

Derek: Ziyanda, get in my car.

Me: Huh?

Derek: I won't repeat myself.

Me: Derek-

Derek: Don't fuck with me. Get in this car.

I look at Liwa and he shakes his head.

Liwa: You are not going in there.

I look at Dean and he shrugs.

Me: Mxm.

I get in the car and bang the door. I watch as they have a conversation.

After a while, Derek gets in the car.

I watch as Dean and Liwa disappear. I don't even know how they're going to get in the house. Is Ntsiki around? Can she see us?

I have so many questions, and I hate not knowing what's going on.

We've been sitting in silence for about 5 minutes now.

Derek: You're crazy if you really thought I'd let you go.

Me: What's going on? What if Ntsiki hurts them?

Derek: She won't.

Me: How do you know? That psycho is dangerous!

He sighs

At this point, everything is sinking in. I feel like this whole plan is stupid. Ntsiki would have to be really dumb to believe this nonsense.

Me: What if she saw our two cars? She is probably hurting them right now. We should go in!

Derek: You are so strange, Ziyanda.

Me: Huh?

Derek: For someone who suffers from anxiety, you react very boldly to dangerous situations.

Me: I can't help it.

Derek: That's why I need to keep you in check.

Me: Derek, awume kancane. Dean and Liwa are not safe!

I just want to make my way in there.

Out of nowhere, Dean emerges from the house.

He rushes to his car and just as I'm about to open my door, Derek locks it.

Me: Derek!

His phone rings and he answers it.

Derek: Yes?... Alright...

He ends the call and starts the car.

Me: What's going on?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Where are we going?

I honestly want to slap the piss out of Derek. Why is he being so unnecessary? Yeses, man.

A minute later, Liwa walks out of the house and I am beyond glad when he comes to our car. At least he'll spill the tea for me.

Me: Liwa.

Liwa: Ziyanda.

Me: What's happening? Where's Simo?

Liwa: The baby is not here.

Derek starts driving and follows Dean's car.

Me: Was Ntsiki there?

Liwa shakes his head.

I groan heavily.

I decide to keep quiet, because it is very clear that my questions will not be answered fully. If I was with Dean, I know for a fact that he'd tell me everything. I don't know why these two are acting like they're some private investigators.

I must have taken a nap, because when I wake up, we're in an area I'm not familiar with.

Derek: Go back to sleep.

Me: Uyanya.

Liwa chuckles.

Liwa: You really don't want to be left out, hey?

Me: Mxm.

We drive into some yard.

Me: Where are we?

Liwa: Ntsiki's sister lives here.

Me: Is this where Simo is?

Liwa: Hopefully.

I sigh.

Once we're parked, Derek unlocks the doors and I glance at him.

Me: Am I allowed to go out, master?

Derek: Mxm.

We all get out of the car and walk to Dean. He looks at me.

For some reason, he looks calmer.

Me: Is Simo here?

He nods.

Me: What about-

Derek: Dean, go and get her. I'd rather we wait-

Me: Uzosala noLiwa. I'm going with Dean.

He tries to say something, and I turn away from him.

Me: Let's go, Dean.

Dean looks at Derek. They do that thing of theirs of communicating nonverbally. At this point, I don't even care. Derek is being a cock-blocker right now.

Dean: Okay, let's go.

I know Derek is fuming, but I just want to turn and stick my tongue out at him- childish, I know.

Anyway, Dean and I make our way to the door, and he rings the bell.

Me: Are you sure she's here?

He nods tightly.

As he's about to ring the bell again, the door opens.

A woman stands there.

She looks like she's in her mid-20s. Is she Ntsiki's sister?

Dean: Yoli?

The woman nods.

Yoli: Dean?

Dean nods.

Yoli sighs heavily and looks at me.

Yoli: Nolwazi?

Me: Oh, uhm, no.

Yoli: Oh...

She looks at Dean softly and pitifully.

Yoli: You can come in.

She steps aside and we walk in.

When we get to the lounge, and we see Simo on a stroller, we immediately rush to her and Dean takes her.

As soon as she is nuzzled in Dean's arms, I sink on the floor and sigh. The load is finally off.

I watch as Dean sobs quietly.

I'm sobbing as well.

Why the hell would a person kidnap a child? How is that normal?

After a while, Yoli clears her throat and I look at her.

Yoli: Would you like some water?

I don't say anything. This bitch has some nerve, asking us if we're thirsty!

Yoli: I am so sorry that you had to go through this.

I don't say anything.

I stare at her. She looks like she is also going through her own shit.

Yoli: When she brought the baby here, she didn't even give me any information. She just said I must take care of her. Had I known that...

She swallows her tears.

Yoli: I'm sorry.

I stand.

Me: So, you go around taking in babies you don't know?

She looks at me in shock.

Me: You are just as fucked up as your sister. You either get more information, or you go to the police- that's the normal thing to do.

As I walk to her, she steps back.

I want to slap some sense into her.

Me: What the hell is wrong with you??

Yoli: I didn't know!

Me: Your sister stabbed me!

Yoli: Wha-

Me: Tonight, you'll lear-

Dean: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it and look at Dean.

Dean: Let's go.

He walks towards me and grabs my arm.

We walk out and make our way to the car.

Derek: Thank God.

Liwa: Let's go before Nolwazi dies.

I quickly take Simo from Dean and get in Dean's car, before Derek can protest.

I need to know how they knew about this Yoli person, and Dean is the only one who'll fill me in...

As I kiss Simo, I find myself smiling. As annoying as she is, I missed her and her absence made me value my pregnancy...

Now that this part is over, Dean needs to get his shit together and fix his relationship with Nolwazi.

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When I wake up and check the time, it's 10am.

I sit up and yawn loudly. Derek is still passed out next to me.

I reach for my phone and dial Dean's number. It rings for a long time, but he eventually answers.

Derek decided that we should sleep at his place (which is furniture-less). He insisted on being away from everything.

Dean: Ziyanda?

Me: Hey.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How is she?

Dean: She slept at Mdu's.

Me: She took the babies?

Dean: Ya.

My heart breaks for him. He's so miserable.

Me: What's your plan?

He sighs.

Me: Are you planning on giving her space?

Dean: No.

Me: Hmkay. I guess space will increase the gap between you guys.

Dean: Can I come over for breakfast?

Me: Uhm, Chef Ngidi is passed out... unless you want me to-

Dean: No, I'll bring breakfast.

Me: Whatever. It's not like cooking is an option. We're literally left with our bed and toiletries here.

Dean: I'll be there soon.

Me: Shap.

I hang up and just as I'm about to get out of bed, Derek pulls me back in.

Me: Dean is bringing breakfast.

Derek: Hmm.

He tries to hold on to me but I escape quickly and make my way to the bathroom.

Dean walks in with a large paper bag.

Me: Morning to you too.

Dean: It's 12pm.

We get to the kitchen and I unpack the food.

Dean: Is he still sleeping?

Me: Yep.

I glance at him.

Me: You look horrible.

Dean: Not as much as you.

Me: Oh please, my melanin is popping, cheeks bright and right. Don't come for me.

He chuckles.

Me: Now, you on the other hand... Hunny...

Dean: Mxm.

He walks to the bedroom and I dish up for all of us.

After a few minutes, he walks back and looks around.

Dean: Manje we're going to eat standing?

Me: Yep. Everything has been moved.

He shakes his head.

Dean: I don't know why you didn't sleepover last night.

Me: We wanted to give you guys space.

Dean: As if that helped.

I sigh.

Me: You better fix this.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: What happened last night?

He takes a croissant and takes a bite roughly.

Dean: Ukhuluma ngani?

He chews and stares at me.

Me: When you got in that psycho's house!

Just then, Derek walks in and stretches. I try not to roll my eyes. His timing is the worst- damn cock-blocker.

He walks to me and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hey, lover.

He takes his food and eats on the spot.

I groan as I watch them munch away like pigs.

Dean: When exactly are you moving into your new place?

Derek: We're good to go now.

Dean: I need your shit out of my house.

Me: I don't know why you're so ready to get rid of us, because it's not like Nolwazi will be back there anytime soon.

Dean: Fuck off.

Derek: Vele, don't be so quick. Don't come for us.

Dean: Mxm.

Just then, Dean's phone rings and he checks the caller id.

He walks away as he answers it.

Derek: Are you okay with moving today?

Me: Oh, I thought-

Derek: No, you're not going to try play peacemaker.

I sigh.

Derek: We're going to spend some quality time.

Me: Bu-

Derek: Ziyanda, I want some quality time with you.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: Okay.

Derek: I know you thrive in helping others, but right now, I need you to check your priorities. We're having a baby in 4 months, and we haven't had downtime.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Let's focus on us, please?

I sigh and nod.

Me: Okay.

Derek: You're not angry?

Me: I understand and acknowledge how you feel.

Derek: Thank you.

He gives me a kiss on the cheek.

Dean walks back and takes another croissant.

Dean: I have to go... Turns out I have a meeting in an hour.

He takes a bite of his croissant and looks at Derek seriously.

Dean: I need you now more than ever. Don't try that shit with me.

Did he overhear our conversation?

Derek grunts.

Dean: Suck it up.

He then looks at me and smiles.

Dean: You're a gem.

Me: So I've been told...

He chuckles and walks out.

I look at Derek expectantly.

Derek: Who am I kidding? There's no possible way of excluding ourselves from this shit.

We both sigh heavily.

Derek: Can we at least spend today together, just you and I?

Me: Of course, Star.

I pull him and give him a smooshy kiss.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

I must admit that my downtime with Star was exactly what I needed. We spent the rest of the day at a spa.

It's now around 5pm, and we're going to check out our new place now that all our things are there.

When we get there, I immediately start critiquing the space.

Me: We need new furniture. It doesn't take rocket science to see that our old furniture looks strange here.

Derek: That's something we can work on progressively.

I sigh.

Me: Alright then. So, you want us to move out of Dean's?

He scratches his head.

Derek: He won't let us.

Me: You still think your group of friends is chilled and drama-free?

He laughs lightly.

Derek: Whatever.

Me: I need to meet up with my people. I miss them.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Heyi, ungalinge.

Derek: Let's get going.

We make our way to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

When we get to the house, we find Zimkitha, Nomvuyo and Liwa there.

Zimkitha: Zizi, hello, my angel.

Me: Hey.

She gives me a hug.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hello, Liwa.

I look around.

Me: Nolwazi is not back?

Zimkitha: She won't come back unless she's fetched.

Liwa chuckles.

Me: Vuvz, I miss you.

Nomvuyo: I miss you too, love. I need this chapter to be closed. I'm tired.

Me: Tell me about it...

Dean walks down the stairs and walks to us.

Nomvuyo: How are you planning on fixing this?

Dean doesn't respond, instead, he takes his phone and walks away again.

Nomvuyo: Haike.

She walks to the kitchen.

I really don't like this tension. There has to be a solution here, honestly.

As everyone is chatting and eating in the lounge, I make my way to our bedroom, and sit on the bed.

I'm trying to come up with ideas to solve this. Once this is solved, we can all move on properly. There's absolutely no way everyone can go their separate ways right now and live their lives in isolation. This group is close, and they're involved in each other's lives, so it's impossible for them to turn a blind eye when one of them is going through shit. I, on the other hand, hate seeing my loved ones going through shit. If my help is needed, I will genuinely offer my assistance. I've never been able to step back when I'm needed. If a problem can be solved, then we will work together to solve it- we'll deal with the rest later.

I dial Mdu's number and anxiously wait for him to answer.

Mdu: Ziyanda, ufunani?

Me: Uhm, hey.

Mdu: I don't want to talk to any of you fucken idiots.

Me: Mdu, really?

Mdu: What you did was unforgivable.

Me: You? Who exactly are you talking about?

Mdu: You and your fucken friends.

Me: Listen here wena, you have no right to act righteous right now. You involved me in your bullshit and I supported your ungrateful ass.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Don't even try the honourable act right now.

Mdu: What do you want from me?

Me: I need you to do everything you can to get Nolwazi to be open to having a conversation with Dean.

Mdu: Her child was kidnapped, and Dean knew about it, in fact all of you knew! You cannot compare my situation with this bullshit!

I keep quiet.

Mdu: This is fucked up. Nolwazi thought she had lost her child. Dean knew all along.

Me: The situation is complicated.

Mdu: How? Please, enlighten me!

Me: It's not my place.

Mdu: Well, all of you can fuck off.

He ends the call and I groan.

I lie on the bed and face the ceiling.

Gosh.

How am I going to get him to calm down?

His anger is definitely justified. I get why he's not willing to hear me out.

Tholi.

I think she can get through to him.

Yes, I'll call Tholi.

Surely, he won't allow himself to throw all those "fucks" at his Chubby Cheeks...

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The following day, Derek woke up early for a business meeting. He was supposed to leave the province, but he managed to get the people to come to Jo'burg- for obvious reasons.

I'm glad he's leaving, because I have my own plans.

Derek: So, what are your plans for today?

Me: Plans? I have no plans, none whatsoever.

He looks at me coolly and nods.

Derek: Hmm.

I quickly get out of bed.

Me: Wanna save water today?

He chuckles and smiles.

Derek: Of course.

I walk to the bathroom and get in the shower, and he follows shortly after.

Derek: Our appointment with Doctor Modisa is tomorrow.

Me: I saw the reminder.

Derek: And, we see Melinda right after.

Me: Yep.

Derek: It's been a minute.

Me: Sure has.

Derek: So, what are your plans for today?

Me: Huh?

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: I don't have any.

He continues looking at me with a raised eyebrow.

Me: Gosh.

I huff.

Me: I'm planning on going to Nolwazi.

He shakes his head in defeat.

Me: What?

Derek: You're scaring me.

Me: Huh?

Derek: You're too invested. It's borderline obsessive.

Me: Yes, I am. Once this is solved, we can all move on.

Derek: Let Dean fix this.

Me: I'm helping them.

Derek: There's a big difference between helping and what you're doing.

Me: Really? Care to enlighten me?

Derek: You're in too deep.

Me: Maybe if I didn't get stabbed by this woman, I'd feel out of touch with this situation, but I was involved from the beginning. I don't turn my back against loved ones when they need support.

He sighs.

Derek: You're making it seem like I don't care.

Me: You obviously care less. I don't even understand, because Dean is your brother.

Derek: Wow.

He turns his back on me.

Derek: I'd like you to leave.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Just get the fuck out of the shower.

Me: Excuse me??

He turns and looks at me angrily.

Derek: You don't get it, do you? You were fucken stabbed. You were in danger. Now, I'm the bad guy for wanting to keep you safe?

I keep quiet.

Derek: Yazi Ziyanda, your stubbornness will be the death of you. You always want to be right, and you refuse to listen. Go and do as you please. If this shit backfires, don't expect me to clean up your mess.

Me: So dramatic.

I walk out of the shower and dry myself...

We get dressed in silence.

Once he's done, he packs his bag and his phone rings.

Derek: I'll be there in 30 minutes... Sure... Bye...

He takes his bag and walks out.

I hope he leaves the drama wherever he's going.

I finish getting dressed, and my tummy growls. I make my way downstairs and I'm glad to find no sign of Derek. I make myself an egg and cheese sandwich.

Dean: Why are you burning my pots?

Me: Whatever.

I clean up the mess and then sit on one of the high stools.

Dean: Are you okay?

Me: Yep.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: Just tired.

Dean: Then go back to sleep.

I shake my head and continue eating.

Dean: Hmkay then, grumpy...

He walks away.

I get to Mdu's house and call Tholi to let me in.

She meets me at the door.

Tholi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey, Tholi.

We share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Tholi: A bit tired.

Me: You guys have four babies in here?

She looks down and her cheeks turn red.

Me: And then?

Tholi: Nothing.

Me: Are you tired of your new roommates?

She looks at me in shock.

Tholi: Zi!

I chuckle.

Me: Are you scared of kicking Nolwa-

Tholi: Shh!

I continue chuckling as I follow her in.

I am immediately greeted by Simo's giggles. The girl really is an attention seeker. She can sense when a new set of eyes is in the room.

Nolwazi is busy playing with her.

I clear my throat.

She looks up and is legit shocked to see me.

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

She puts down Simo and then stands.

Nolwazi: Hi.

I can't read her. However, I'll take advantage of the joy she feels when she's with her babies.

I walk to Simo and pick her up. At least Lwazi won't attack me if I'm carrying her baby.

Me: I miss you guys.

My sessions with Melinda have taught me a lot when it comes to dealing with people. You have to ease your way into difficult conversations- works like a charm.

Nolwazi: Khulekani has been grumpy.

Me: Aww, really? He misses our play dates!

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: I guess.

She looks at my belly.

Nolwazi: When are you finding out the gender?

Me: Tomorrow.

Nolwazi: What are you hoping for?

I shrug.

Me: I don't know.

She sighs.

Me: How is this living situation?

She looks around.

Nolwazi: Okay, I guess.

Me: Who would have thought... You, living with your ex-husband's ex-wife?

Nolwazi: Messed up, huh?

Me: I guess it speaks volumes about your forgiving nature.

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: Before you attack me, please lend an ear?

Nolwazi: Ziyand-

Me: Please?

Simo slaps my cheek and I groan. Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: You two have a love-hate relationship.

Me: Your child is a lot.

Nolwazi: Tell me something I don't know.

She sits and I sit next to her.

Tholi walks in with some juice and two glasses.

Me: Thank you, Tholz.

She smiles as she puts them on the table. She walks away.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: You are one of the most understanding people I know.

Nolwazi: Stop trying to butter me up and get to the point.

I sigh.

Me: You need to hear him out.

Nolwazi: I'm not ready.

Me: And, I respect that. Dean knows you better so that's why he's giving you space. However, I just wanted to let you know this is more complicated than you think.

Nolwazi: Why didn't you tell me when you found out?

Me: It wasn't my place.

Nolwazi: So, you coming here right now is your place?

I keep quiet.

Nolwazi: I don't know how I'll forgive Dean. This is too much.

Me: As much as I want to tell you what happened, I think Dean should. I'm afraid that too much space will ruin your relationship, especially because you are not fully informed. I think it's only fair for you to be aware.

Nolwazi: What's so deep, that it can change my whole perspective on all of this?

Just as I'm about to talk, my eyes pop out.

Me: Dean!

Dean looks at me in confusion and shock.

Dean: What the hell are you doing here?

Me: Oh, uhm, I came to see the twins.

Dean: Hmm.

As soon as his eyes land on Nolwazi, his whole face changes. He looks at her softly and pleadingly.

I clear my throat.

Dean: Lwazi.

I look at Nolwazi and she's already sobbing. I want to comfort her, but Simo is also slapping the shit out of me. This little brat wants her dad now.

Dean walks to us. He wants to comfort Nolwazi, but he can't.

The tension is too thick for my liking. I want it to end.

Nolwazi: Why would you lie to me?

She continues sobbing.

Simo is now crying her lungs.

Dean looks at me and I nod.

I quickly stand, and as I walk to the kitchen, I bump into Mdu.

Mdu: Who the hell let you in my house?

Me: Liste-

Mdu: Is that Dean's car outside?

Me: Mdu-

Mdu: Get the fuck-

Tholi: Mdu!

Mdu keeps quiet and looks at Tholi.

Tholi: Will you just shut up and allow people to solve their problems?

Mdu: Tholi-

Tholi: No. Stop being unnecessary.

Ewu.

Kwathi cwaka.

Tholi: Now, if you don't mind, please check what's wrong with the washing machine.

Hehe.

Yes, girl. You better tame your man!

Anyway, I have a good feeling about Dean and Nolwazi. I think a constructive conversation can be had now. I feel lighter and hopeful.

I check my phone and I haven't received any calls or messages from Derek.

Konje.

I sigh heavily and focus on Simo, who is suddenly drooling over Mdu.

Such thot-y behaviour.

INSERT 169

Me: Mdu, you really need to check yourself.

He looks at me coldly.

Me: You don't scare me, so cut the nonsense.

Mdu: At the end of the day, I don't give a shit about others. Family comes first.

I don't say anything.

Mdu: Give me one good reason why I shouldn't go to my lounge and punch that idiot.

Me: He'll beat your dark ass.

Tholi: Ziyanda!

Me: Not literal, Tholz. That would totes be inappropr.

Mdu chuckles.

Me: Those two need to talk and sort it out.

Mdu: Aren't you tired of being involved?

Me: I love how everyone asks me that bullshit as if I wake up and randomly ask to be involved in everyone's nonsense.

Tholi: Shame, everyone trusts you.

Me: It's a blessing and a curse.

Mdu: Manje uthi what exactly happened with Dean?

Me: Not my place to tell you.

Out of nowhere, Nolwazi walks into the kitchen.

She's been crying. Her face is puffy as hell.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda.

I look at her nervously.

She walks away. I guess I'm supposed to follow her?

I walk to the lounge and sit opposite her and Dean.

I stare at Dean.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda.

I look at her.

She takes a deep breath and wipes her tears.

Nolwazi: Ntsiki stabbed you?

Me: Uhm, ya.

Funny enough, I thought she knew. Kanti didn't she come back with Dean after I called that night?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay. She didn't really hurt me.

Nolwazi: I'm so sorry.

Me: It's okay, Lwazi, honestly. It's not even your fault.

Nolwazi: It is our fault. All of this could have been prevented.

I shrug.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry.

Me: Please stop apologizing. I'm fine.

She takes a sip of water and looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'm struggling to process this.

Dean: I'll give you space.

She shakes her head.

Nowazi: You'll sleep in another room.

Dean stifles a smile.

Nolwazi: I just...

She exhales and shakes her head.

Nolwazi: I just didn't think Ntsiki was this crazy.

Me: I think everyone underestimated her.

She shakes her head.

Nolwazi: That fucken bitch.

Throughout this conversation, my whole body keeps relaxing even more. Nolwazi is slowly coming around!

Mdu walks in with a crying Simo. There she goes crying when no one is paying attention to her. Sivelelwe la.

Dean stands and takes her from Mdu.

She continues crying, but as soon as Dean showers her with kisses, the crying stops instantly.

Mdu: I'm tired of this child. Please go back to your house now, Lwazi.

Nolwazi: Wow, brother.

Mdu: We cannot live with four kids in one roof. It's too much.

Dean: Watch it...

Mdu then looks at Nolwazi intently.

Mdu: You wanna talk?

Nolwazi shrugs.

Mdu: Come.

She walks to him and they walk out.

I look at Dean, who has managed to calm Simo down.

Me: Dean.

He looks at me.

Me: You okay?

Dean: I've been better.

Me: At least she listened.

He nods.

Me: And she's willing to come back to the house.

Dean: Mmm.

Me: I should get going. I'm sleepy and hungry.

Dean: We'll leave together.

I nod as I sink on the couch.

Tholi: Ziyanda...

Me: Hmm?

Tholi: Wakeup.

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Mdu: Vuka wena, and never come back here.

Me: Argh.

I sit up and stretch.

Me: What time is it?

Tholi: 3pm.

Me: Gosh.

Tholi: Nolwazi and Dean have been waiting for you.

Me: I'm glad they didn't wake me up.

Tholi: Apparently you're aggressive when someone interrupts your sleep?

I chuckle.

Me: Don't believe the lies.

I get up and stretch.

Me: Where are they?

Mdu: Upstairs.

Me: Hmkay.

I make my way there and knock on a closed door. When I open it, Dean is on the bed, while Lwazi is packing her clothes.

Nolwazi: Zi, you're awake.

Me: Yep. We can leave now.

Nolwazi: Give me five minutes.

Me: Shap.

It seems like things are much better between Nolwazi and Dean. The tension has been replaced with calmness.

I'm happy for them.

Even my nap felt lighter.

As we make our way inside the house, I'm shocked that there's no sign of Derek. His meeting wasn't supposed to be long.

It feels weird not being able to call or text him.

Dean: You fought with Derek?

Me: Not really.

Dean: I th-

Me: I'm hungry, Dean. I don't have the energy to discuss Derek's drama.

He laughs lightly.

Me: Please make something to eat.

Dean: Uyanya.

Me: Please, man.

Nolwazi: My dad wants to come and make sure you've upgraded our security.

Dean grunts.

Nolwazi: That's what you get for having a crazy ex.

Me: I wonder where Ntsiki is...

Nolwazi looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'd rather not think about her right now.

Just then, Derek walks in.

We all stare at him.

He stares at Nolwazi.

Derek: Hi, Lwazi.

He is definitely not his usual warm self.

Nolwazi: Hey, Ngidi.

They share a hug.

Derek: Good to have you back.

Nolwazi: I can't honestly say it's good to be back.

Derek then looks at me briefly and then focuses on Dean.

Derek: We're moving out today.

We all look at him in shock.

Nolwazi: What? Why?

Derek: I'd like my own space. We've overstayed our welcome.

Dean: Dramatic much?

Nolwazi: I hope you know that you're always welcome.

Derek: I do. I'm happy that you're back. I strongly think you two need space now that you're more informed.

Nolwazi: I'm still pissed at all of you, by the way.

Derek then looks at me.

Derek: Go pack your shit.

My jaw drops.

Surely I'm dreaming?

Who in the world is he addressing like this?

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Go upstairs and pack your shit. Mine is already packed.

I have to take a few breaths. I am speechless.

I try to say something, but I'm dumbfounded.

I walk away, not knowing how exactly I feel.

I get to our bedroom and look around.

I am literally shaking.

This motherfucker really packed his things.

He even put my suitcase on the bed. It's wide open.

I take out my clothes and throw them in the suitcase.

The door opens and Derek stares at me from the door.

Me: Leave me alone. I don't want to hear your lousy apology.

Derek: Apology?

I stop and look at him.

Derek: I'm not here to apologise. I came to tell you to hurry up, I'd like to beat traffic.

My jaw drops to the floor as he closes the door.

What the hell?

Did Petty escape from my body and get into his?

I am shook.

INSERT 170 (Unedited)

As I'm washing my face, Derek walks in the bathroom.

I rinse my face and dry it. I walk out and get dressed.

Once I'm done, I go downstairs and then it hits me. We have no food or snacks in this house. I look around and roll my eyes. Nxa.

I walk around and check out the rooms.

I just feel like Derek sucked out all the joy from this moving process. His petty ass better be able to keep this shit up, because I'm not budging.

I make my way back to the kitchen to pour myself some water. I'm starving, it's not even funny. I'm craving a dagwood: bacon, cheese, pickles and an egg.

I decide to open the fridge and lo and behold, the damn thing is filled to capacity.

When did this happen?

I walk to the pantry, it is also filled.

When did Derek do all of this?

Just as I walk out of the pantry, he walks into the kitchen. I pour myself a glass of water and leave him there. When I check my phone, I see a message from Melinda, confirming our appointment for today. I want to respond and cancel, but I know that will not be well-received.

After 20 minutes or so, I walk downstairs with my bag.

Derek is washing his plate.

He made breakfast.

I watch as he walks upstairs and I rush to the kitchen to see if there are some leftovers. The whole space smells like bacon. My belly growls even more and I rub it. When I check, I realize that he finished the food. There's nothing in the pots.

I let out a low moan. I want to cry. Did he really feed himself and leave me to die? I know he doesn't love me right now, but what about his child? Mxm.

Derek: Let's go.

I snap out of it and before I can confront him, he's already walking out.

We're now in the reception area, waiting for Dr. Modisa.

Receptionist: She's running a bit late.

Derek: How late?

Receptionist: She'll be here soon.

I sigh and go straight to the bathroom to cry my lungs out. I'm starving. I feel like the baby is probably eating its toes right now.

After a few minutes, I walk back to the reception area to get my bag. Derek is now sitting down, busy on his phone.

I'm going to request an Uber and go to the nearest food spot. I can't even see straight anymore.

As I reach for my bag, which is on the empty seat next to Derek, I see a skhaftin.

Me: What's this?

Derek: Your food.

Yoh, I almost collapse. I put my bag aside, sit my big ass down and chow like there's no tomorrow.

Once I'm done, I drink some water and close the skhaftin.

Me: Thanks.

He nods tightly and continues focusing on his phone.

I sit back and listen to my body as it digests the food. In a few minutes, the heartburn kicks in and I rush to the bathroom. I try to keep it in, but I can't. I vomit everything I ate... Mxm, so much for food digestion.

When I walk back to reception, I find Dr. Modisa there, speaking to Derek. She smiles when she sees me, and we share a hug.

Dr: How are you?

Me: Just vomited my breakfast.

Dr: Oh, no. That's not good.

Me: Tell me about it...

Dr: Please give me a few minutes to settle in.

Me: Okay.

I get my bag and take a quick glance at Derek. I know for a fact that he wants to ask if I'm okay, but his petty-streak won't allow him to.

Dr: Almost six months...

She looks at us and smiles.

Dr: You're approaching the last month of your second trimester.

I sigh

Dr: What's wrong?

Me: I'm tired most of the time, and my feet look like fish.

She laughs.

Dr: These are some of the common concerns when you're at this stage of the pregnancy. Hormonal changes and heartburn make it difficult for you to catch a good night's sleep.

Me: I'm just uncomfortable.

Dr: And the kicks?

Me: I haven't felt any kicks, just little movements.

I look at Derek and he avoids my eyes.

Dr: Eat your dinner at least two hours before bedtime, and don't forget to eat slowly- that will make you sleep better, and prevent heartburn.

I nod.

Dr: As your uterus continues to expand, the aches will leave you fatigued. Ideally, there's nothing to worry about, but if you're too uncomfortable, call me.

Me: Okay.

She continues explaining the symptoms I will experience.

Dr: Now, let's move on to our baby.

She looks at Derek.

Dr: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay...

I roll my eyes.

Dr: Now, as you can see, the baby is growing bigger now.

She goes on to tell us the specific details about the baby's growth.

As overwhelming as it is, I think I'm a bit numb at this point. I don't know, hey.

She then smiles brightly and looks at me.

Dr: Gender time! What are you hoping for?

Me: I don't know. I don't think I want a girl.

Dr: Really? Why?

Me: Girls are too much admin.

Dr: Aww, Derek, what are you hoping for?

Derek: I'm okay with anything.

Dr: That's good.

I look at Derek. He's trying to act tough, but I can tell he's lowkey excited.

Dr: Alright then, let's see...

As she rubs my belly, trying to find the perfect angle, I feel Derek's hand on mine. I glance at him angrily and he looks at me softly.

As much as I want to smack the pettiness out of him, I can't help but smile at him.

Dr: Well, lookie here...

We all stare at the screen. I always struggle to see the baby, hey. Thankfully, this time around, the outline is clear, because it's growing.

Dr: I'll let you figure it yourself...

I turn my head and so does Derek.

Dr: Do you see it?

Me: What?

Derek chuckles.

Derek: It's a boy.

I frown.

Me: Huh? Where's the penis?

They both laugh as I continue staring at the baby.

Derek stands and touches the screen, pointing at something.

Me: Is that it?

He chuckles and nods.

Me: Oh, wow.

Dr: You're having a boy!

I sigh in relief.

I really didn't want a girl. The Universe listened to me.

Melinda: It's good to see you two.

She smiles at us.

Melinda: I believe there's a problem? Your body language says a lot.

Derek: We do have a problem.

Melinda: Alright, let's get into it.

Derek: Ziyanda has a serious problem.

Melinda looks at him intently.

Derek then goes on to tell her how I haven't been taking care of myself, and how invested I am in other people's shit... The usual...

Once he's done, she sighs.

Melinda: Ziyanda, do you want to say something?

I shrug

Me: I don't think what I have to say will make him happy. I personally do not see anything wrong with what I did. I was being supportive.

Derek hisses.

Me: I don't know why he makes it seem like we have problems. You're telling me you just couldn't put your shit aside for a while just to cater to your friend? Nolwazi and Dean are fine now. Why did you make it seem like the phase would last forever?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I think he's being dramatic, and because I'm not in the mood to fight, I'll leave it at that.

Derek: I'd like a few minutes, please.

Melinda: Sure.

He stands and walks out.

Melinda then looks at me softly.

Melinda: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

Melinda: Are you going back to avoidance as a coping mechanism?

I look at her blankly.

Melinda: You know that never ends well for you.

Derek walks back in and sits.

I glance at him and realize that he really is angry.

Now, I'm concerned.

Derek looks at Melinda.

Derek: I'd rather we meet another time. I'm not in the right frame of mind.

Melinda: Why?

Derek: Her stubbornness is fucken driving me insane.

Me: Then go. No one is forcing you to be here.

Just as he is about to stand, Melinda intervenes.

Melinda: No one is leaving. We will resolve this.

Me: I don't have time for this.

Derek: But, you have the time for other people's problems?

Me: What the hell is going on here? When did you and I have problems? What are these problems that I don't know about? I am so confused. Last time I checked, we were good.

Derek: Mxm.

Me: You can't just go from 0 to 100 and expect me to take it.

He shakes his head and looks at Melinda.

Me: You can look at Melinda all you want. You're being dramatic. Tone it down a notch if you want us to have a constructive conversation.

He stands.

Derek: I'll be back...

He storms out.

I look at Melinda.

Me: He legit went from 0-100.

Melinda: He's clearly passionate about this.

Me: He's doing the most right now. We'll talk once he's cooled down.

Melinda: Are you open to hearing him out properly?

Me: Sure. I'm just failing to respond properly because he's too angry.

She nods and stands.

Melinda: Let me check on him.

Me: Alright.

She walks out and I look around the office and spot the Empathy Tool... I guess it's time to use it right now, because Derek is def's passionate about this.

INSERT 171 (Unedited)

He walks back in the room and sits.

Melinda: Alright, are we ready to listen to each other?

I look at Derek. He seems calmer.

Melinda: Derek, you mentioned that you think Ziyanda is too invested in other people's problems?

Derek nods.

Melinda: What happened?

Derek: I'm sure if she has told you about the kidnapping situation.

Melinda raises an eyebrow and looks at us questioningly.

Melinda: Kidnapping?

Derek looks at me and I look back at him blankly. He must tell the story, since he's in a talking mood.

He then begins telling her what happened.

Derek: When I got the phone call...

He swallows hard.

Derek: I thought I lost her...

I don't know what's happening right now. Is he holding in tears?

Melinda and I stare at him.

Derek: I couldn't even get to her immediately because my flight got delayed... I was going crazy.

Melinda: I'm so sorry to hear that.

Derek shrugs.

Melinda: How did you make sense of the situation?

Derek: I still think it could have been avoided. I blame myself and Dean.

Melinda: Why do you blame yourself?

Derek: I couldn't protect her.

There's silence for a few seconds.

Derek: Just like I couldn't protect her from her miscarriage.

Whoa.

Me: Wait, you blame yourself for the miscarriage?

He continues looking at Melinda. Is he ignoring me?

Melinda: Answer Ziyanda's question.

Derek: The miscarriage happened during the time we discovered that I have a son.

My heart rate slowly increases.

Derek: I think Ziyanda was really triggered by the situation. It stressed her out.

Melinda looks at me.

Melinda: Do you blame Derek for the miscarriage?

Me: I don't see why we should go back to it.

Derek finally looks at me.

Melinda: Are you avoiding it?

Me: I've gone through my stages of grieve, but am I ready to sit here and delve deeper into it? No. I don't want to talk about that experience.

Melinda nods.

Me: So, if you feel like you still need to go back and unpack the situation, please do it in my absence. I don't want to talk about it.

Melinda: I respect that.

Me: What I will say though, is that I don't blame anyone for that miscarriage. I've been through a lot of shit in my life, and I've learnt that blaming others is counterproductive. I may not have accepted the miscarriage, but I don't blame Derek.

Melinda: You don't have to speak in third person, he's right here.

I look at Derek.

Me: I don't blame you.

I look at Melinda.

Me: That's all I'm willing to say regarding that.

Derek: I'm sorry for bringing it up.

Me: Cool.

We sit in silence.

I try not to give in to the sullenness that is threatening to take over. I don't want to deal with that shit right now, because I will die, seriously.

Melinda: Now, why do you think Ziyanda is too invested in other people's lives?

Derek: She was adamant about helping Dean fix his relationship with Nolwazi to the point that she didn't realize that she crossed the line.

Melinda: What line?

Me: Please explain this line to me.

Derek: I get that you were trying to help, but at some point, Dean has to take charge and sort his shit out.

Melinda: So, you think she was facilitating intensively.

Derek: Yes.

Me: Bullshit.

He looks at me.

Me: First of all, don't sit here and make it seem like your circle doesn't have an invasive culture.

Melinda: Invasive?

Me: When I first met them, I had a big problem with how they were in each other's business. They all know what happens in each other's relationships.

Melinda: Oh...

Me: That's their culture. When I raised this issue, Derek said I'll get used to them. That's just how they do things.

I look at him.

Me: I adapted to that culture, to your circle's culture, Derek.

Melinda: What do you have to say about that, Derek?

Derek: Nothing.

Melinda: Is Ziyanda correct?

He tightens his jaw.

Me: He's making it seem like I woke up one day and said, "Hey, I'm about to involve myself in your friends' lives and I don't give a shit about you. Bye."

Melinda: You disagree that you overstepped your boundaries with Dean and his fiancée?

Me: Dean literally looked us in the eye and told us he needs us. What kind of asshole do you think I am?

He looks at me.

Me: When we are fighting, your friends get involved. When Liwa and Vuvu fight, we get involved. When Dean and Nolwazi fight, we all get involved. How is this foreign to you?

Derek: You are fucken pregnant, and you were almost killed! Why don't you get that?

Me: If your concern is that then you say it like that. You don't come at me and make it seem like I'm some nosy bitch who likes other people's business. That's what pisses me off. You're painting me as a nosy person!

Melinda: Alright, so this is the root of the tension.

We both look at her.

Melinda: Both your intentions are misunderstood.

She looks at Derek.

Melinda: You are trying to protect Ziyanda. Because of the danger she's been exposed to, you want to keep her safe. That's your main concern.

She then looks at me.

Melinda: Ziyanda, you on the other hand, are not getting this message. You keep hearing him say you're too involved, and it comes across as negative feedback.

Me: Derek has this habit of bottling things up, and when he does finally speak up, he goes in hard. He'll paint me as a bad person. What I've been getting is that I'm nosy, and I love meddling in other people's business. I haven't been getting this protective perspective.

Melinda: You feel like you're sticking to the group's norm: to be there for someone else when they're at their lowest.

Me: Yes, emphasis on the word "lowest." Yes, we've gone through our own shit, but at that moment, our friends were at their lowest. They needed us. You and I are not at our lowest point right now, because our baby is healthy and all I got from that incident was stab wounds, nothing else. I'm okay.

Derek: But, I'm not okay, Ziyanda. I almost lost you.

I sigh and look at Melinda in defeat.

Me: I don't know, I feel like we're not hearing each other.

Melinda: You're not.

We both look at her.

Melinda: You're both fixated on your point of views.

Me: I need to pee.

She chuckles and nods as I stand and walk out.

I need some fresh air.

I come back and drink some water.

I sit again.

I feel better now that I got fresh air.

Melinda looks at us.

Melinda: Can I tell you something?

We look at her.

Melinda: Your stubbornness is unmatched...both of you.

She chuckles.

Melinda: In every relationship, you need common ground. Yes, you'll have different opinions, but there has to be a point where both of you can meet and accept your differences. That's the only

way you can have a healthy relationship. You cannot be fixated on your views- compromise has to be your best friend.

She is quiet for a few seconds.

Melinda: I'm going to give you some privacy.

With that said, she stands and walks out.

I don't pay her to leave me with my problems. This white woman better come back here and sort this shit out.

We sit in silence for a very long time.

Derek: I can't bring myself to apologise for wanting to keep you safe.

Me: I can't bring myself to apologise for being a supportive friend.

We sit in silence for a while.

Derek: What can you bring yourself to apologise for?

I sigh.

Me: Not finding a proper balance.

Derek: Elaborate.

Me: My area of growth is finding a balance between helping others, and not exhausting myself.

Derek: That's what I want for you.

Me: Then you should have said that.

Derek: Didn't I?

Me: It's not about what you say, it's about how you say it. You know I don't respond well to being told what to do.

He nods.

Me: Your intention was misconstrued.

Derek: Because I didn't communicate in a way that accommodated you, everything I said didn't really reach you.

I keep quiet.

Derek: I'm sorry for that.

Me: I'm sorry for making you feel dismissed.

Derek: It's okay.

Me: Dean needed us.

Derek: Right now, my priority is you and my son.

I sigh.

Derek: But, I hear you. I was too hard on you.

Me: Too much.

He stands.

Derek: Come here for a sec.

I stand and he pulls me closer to him, till our bodies touch.

Derek: I hate fighting with you.

Me: Really? It sure has hell didn't look like it when you told me to pack my shit, and then leave me hungry.

Derek: I almost gave in when I saw you crying because of hunger.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Me: Can we not fight for the remainder of this pregnancy?

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Okay, baby.

Just as he kisses me again, the opens and Melinda walks in.

Melinda: Well, what do we have here?

She chuckles.

Melinda: Common ground and compromise...

She smiles brightly.

Melinda: You are exceptional learners...

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It's been two months since "the incident." Ever since that session with Melinda, I have stopped asking too many questions. Till this day, I don't know what happened to Ntsiki, and as much as I still want to know, I've managed to avoid asking questions.

Dean and Nolwazi have been working on their relationship. Because Nolwazi is so forgiving, she hasn't been giving Dean a hard time. Also, I think as soon as she found out what happened to Dean, she approached the whole thing differently. Dean, on the other hand, has turned into another version of Derek: super-duper protective and dramatic. He's been working on gaining Nolwazi's trust back. He even agreed to see a therapist with Nolwazi. I definitely support this, because it's always good to have a third neutral person listening to your problems.

Nomvuyo, Liwa and Zimkitha are still obsessed with each other. They're inseparable- nothing new here.

I must say that I'm glad that I'm not working. Dean refers to me as a suburban house-girlfriend. Derek continues to ensure that I'm relaxed and stress-free.

Today we're hosting a housewarming brunch. Yes, we've been here for two months, but we're officially settled, and Derek wants his friends to come see his new home. I'm still coming to terms with it.

The past two months have been a rollercoaster, mostly because of my pregnancy. I'm 7 months pregnant, and I'm over it. I don't know who lied and said carrying a child is a great experience. I'm constantly uncomfortable, I can't sleep peacefully because of the kicks and movements, my feet are swollen, I'm fatter, my boobs are heavy, and did I mention that I can't sleep properly? I feel like people sold me dreams. There's nothing cute about pregnancy. This is a fulltime job.

Anyway, before I digress any further...

Today, brunch, private chef, going all out, house-girlfriend vibes, sexy beast who stays doing the most...

Derek walks in the bedroom as I get dressed.

He closes door.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: Everyone's here.

Me: Okay.

He walks to me and helps with my bra.

Me: Can't I just go around braless?

Derek: Baby, you do that every day. We have guests today.

Me: Are you ashamed of my watermelons?

Derek: You know I'm obsessed with them.

I put on my dress and he smiles coyly.

Derek: You're beautiful.

Me: Ohho.

He chuckles and pulls me closer, but the belly stands in the way.

Derek: We've come a long way.

Me: Indeed.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: Let me sort out my hair.

Derek: Be quick.

Me: Hmkay.

He walks out.

I must admit that although this pregnancy drives me crazy, I'm in a good space, and Derek contributes greatly to this space. Sexy Beast stays doing the damn thing.

When I walk outside, everyone is there: Dean, Nolwazi, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Malusi, Nandi, Gabi and Joe.

The large circular table is there, as usual.

They all exclaim when they see me.

Me: Hello, everyone.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Look at you, all preggies.

Me: Not funny.

I sit between Dean and Nomvuyo.

Nandi: I didn't know you were pregnant, Ziyanda. Congratulations!

Gabi: None of us knew!

I glance at Derek.

Derek: Thought I mentioned it...

Gabi: So secretive.

I can't help but stare at Gabi in awe. Why does she look so graceful, while my pregnancy is killing me? She makes it look so easy.

Derek pours me water.

I stare at Nandi and Malusi. Are they back together? What's going on with them?

My thoughts are interrupted by Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: How's the new house treating you?

Me: It's a bit big, but I like it.

Gabi: The bigger, the better. No one's trying to live in a small house. We're too rich for that.

This one is goals. You'd swear she's the one who makes all this money she brags about.

Nomvuyo: Nandi, will you have another child?

Nandi coughs and giggles.

Nandi: Not anytime soon.

I look at Malusi and he's staring at her all gooey.

Nandi: I'm still enjoying being single.

Gabi: Weren't you dating that property guy?

Nandi: I was.

Gabi: What happened?

Nandi sips her water. She's clearly uncomfortable.

Malusi: Would you like us to question you on your exes as well, Gabisile?

Gabi: Heyy, I'm just asking!

Malusi grunts.

Nolwazi: I miss being single.

Dean: Uyanya.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: Lwazi, you moved straight into a serious relationship after your divorce, right?

Nolwazi: Dean didn't give me much of a choice.

Dean: Fuck that... You were swooning over me.

Nolwazi: Excuse me? You were the one shaking when you had to shoot your shot. Don't you dare come for me.

Me: He was shaking??

I begin laughing, as I imagine Dean all nervous while shellaring Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: He took me to a restaurant and started speaking in riddles. It was quite entertaining.

Dean: Mxm.

We all laugh as Nolwazi tells us how Dean approached her.

Liwa: But, he didn't hesitate to fuck.

Nolwazi: Liwa!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: She was going through a rather dry season- quivering and shit.

We continue laughing.

Nolwazi looks at him and smiles.

Nolwazi: Remember how you drove four hours to Dundee, just to bring me food, because I refused to eat my in-laws' food?

Dean nods and they smile mischievously. I assume there's some dirty thoughts involved.

It's so good to see them like this. I honestly had my doubts at first, but they are really trying to make it work.

Zimkitha: You have come so far... I'm proud of you.

Nolwazi plants a kiss on Dean's cheek.

We all say, "Awww!"

We begin eating and the conversation flows, as usual.

It's now around 2pm, and this brunch has turned into a mini-party. I don't know when or how we got to this point.

Liwa is the DJ and I'm shocked that he's playing such good music.

Gabi is obvs my dancing spirit animal. Nolwazi is also doing the things. Lol, of course the guys and Nomvuyo) are uptight. Come to think of it, I've never been "clubbing" with Derek. Ever since I met him, I gained weight nje because all we do is go to these fancy restaurants.

Lol, these men are actually so boring and liveless. I think they're judging us as we dance.

DJ Liwa decides to play Beyonce's Party, one of my all-time favs.

I walk to Derek and put out my hand.

Derek: What?

Me: Let's dance.

He looks at me like I'm crazy.

I glance at Dean and he takes out his phone and shakes his head.

Dean: Angijoli nawe.

Me: Wow!

I look at Derek.

Me: I'm carrying a baby, and I'm still able to dance. What's stopping you?

Derek: Baby, I don't dance. Have you ever seen me dance? Why would I dance?

Dean: I don't even get the logic behind dancing, honestly.

Me: Are you serious??

Dean: You sway from left to right, and then what?

I look at both of them in shock.

Nolwazi grabs my arm and laughs.

Nolwazi: Don't bother. They're too stiff!

Me: I'm so shocked!

She laughs and we go back to dancing. See, Beyonce's Party is the perfect song for me right now- chilled and groovy- not too heavy.

Also, I didn't realise how many things I've stopped doing since I met Derek. Even though I'm not a fan of clubs and crowded parties, I used to love those once in a while, random nights out- my friends and I would dance our butts off... Now, it's all a myth.

After a few songs, I'm tired.

In fact, we're all tired.

The DJ stops the party and we make our way back to the table.

Nomvuyo gets close to me ear.

Nomvuyo: When I went to the bathroom, I saw Malusi and Nandi kissing in one of the rooms.

Me: What? Really?

She nods.

Me: Clearly the divorce didn't mean anything.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

I look over at Malusi and Nandi, and indeed, they do look lovey dovey.

When Liwa gets to the table, we give him a round of applause and he smiles brightly.

Me: You were amazing!

Liwa: Jack of all trades, people!

Nomvuyo smiles at me.

Nomvuyo: You're so forward... Sit down.

Derek clears his throat and we all look at him.

He stands

Derek: I'd like to thank you all for coming. We'll take you on a tour of our home shortly.

They all clap playfully and Derek laughs lightly.

Derek: I'd also like to thank my baby, Ziyanda, for turning it into a warm space.

He smiles at me.

Derek: I love you, baby.

Me: Love you too, Star.

Derek: Now that we're home owners, and things have settled, I'd like to give you a well-deserved gift.

I look at him in confusion.

Derek: It's a little token of my love and appreciate.

He takes it out.

I smile and immediately tear up.

I can hear everyone exclaiming excitedly.

Derek: We've already discussed this, but there was no follow-up on my part.

He smiles warmly as he opens the small-squared velvet box.

He kneels and stares at me lovingly.

I was not ready for any of this. My heart is beating fast. My smile is from ear to ear.

Derek: I can't imagine not having you in my life. We've built something solid here, and I'm grateful as fuck...

He smiles.

Derek: Baby, will you please spend the rest of your life with me, and teach me how to dance?

I squeal as I look at the diamond ring.

Me: Of course!

I can't even keep track of what happens next, because there's a lot of screaming and clapping.

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Derek: Baby.

I open my eyes and blink a few times.

Derek: Come to bed.

I groan as I sit up.

Me: What's the time?

Derek: 10pm.

Me: I'm hungry.

Derek: It's late.

Me: Star, I'm really hungry.

Derek: I'll get you grapes.

Me: Hai, I want a sandwich.

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: Don't come for me.

Derek: You can't let your cravings control you, baby.

Me: Awume, let's go make this sandwich.

I stand and then pull him.

Me: Stop being a cock-blocker.

We get to the kitchen and I take out the bread.

Me: Let's make a quick and simple one: egg and bacon.

Derek: I'm going to tell Dr. Modisa.

Me: Snitches get stitches.

He chuckles as he takes out the ingredients and I switch on the stove for him.

Me: I miss my peaceful sleep yazi.

Derek: Two more months.

Me: The movements are annoying.

Derek: Maybe your next pregnancy will be better.

Me: Next what?

He smiles slyly.

Me: Uyanya.

Derek: I want at least 4 kids.

Me: U-right phela. You'll carry them yourself.

He laughs.

Me: You think this is an easy job? I'm dying here!

I watch as he makes my sandwich. Once he's done, he hands me the plate.

Me: Thank you, lover.

He grabs another high stool and sits next to me.

Just as I take my first bite, my eyes land on my ring and I squeal.

Me: I forgot!

Derek: What?

Me: I'm engaged, booboo!

He smiles as I wave my left hand.

Me: If you like it then you should have put a ring on it...

He laughs as I continue singing.

Derek: You're not a single lady.

Me: Yaas!

He watches as I eat my sandwich.

Me: Want a bite?

He nods and I shake my head.

Me: Then, make your own sweetie.

Derek: You're such a meanie.

I give him the other half and we eat.

Me: I'm a bit hyper.

Derek: I can see.

Me: Let's have a party of two!

He looks at me in defeat. He looks tired, but who's business is it? I can't be up by myself.

Once we're done, I help him clean up and then we go to the lounge where I put on one of my playlists.

Me: In the mood to dance!

I turn to look at him, and he yawns.

Me: Don't be a party-pooper.

I play Destiny's Child's (Bey's :p) No No No.

He watches as I attempt Beyoncé's choreography. I refuse to allow this baby to prevent me from flourishing right now.

Derek: If this is not abuse...

Me: Don't come for me.

After a few Beyoncé songs, I'm huffing and puffing.

Derek: Are you done?

Me: Didn't you say you want dance lessons?

Derek: I'm not dancing to Beyoncé, Ziyanda.

Me: Come on!

Derek: Forget it.

Me: What do you want to dance to?

Derek: The sound of your snoring.

My jaw drops and he laughs.

I throw a cushion at him and he laughs.

Derek: I'm sleepy, baby.

Me: Then go sleep.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: You know I can't sleep without my melons.

Me: Mxm.

I switch off the TV and he smiles.

He switches off the lights and we make our way to the bedroom.

As soon as his head is on my right boob, he's out.

I have no choice but to reflect on the amazing day that I had.

Another month has passed...

I feel like if someone were to push me, I'd fall and never be able to get up. I am literally counting down the days till my due date. I can't take it anymore, I'm exhausted all the time.

Derek is finally done with the nursery and I must admit that I love it. I'm glad he didn't go the obvious route and choose blue as a theme, instead he chose grey with elements of green, yellow and white- very cute and different.

Me: I had no idea that you were an interior designer.

Derek: Well... There's a lot you don't know about me.

Me: Surely that's a bad thing, seeing as we're engaged?

He places his arm on my shoulders and we walk out of the nursery.

Derek: We have the rest of our lives to learn more about each other... That's a lot of time.

Me: Ohho.

When we get downstairs, we find Dean there.

Me: Look what the wind blew in!

Dean: Nolwazi and I are hosting Christmas this year.

Derek: We can't come.

Dean: Uyanya.

Me: Dean, I might be pushing this baby out.

Dean: Shit, is that your due date?

Me: Possibly.

Dean: So, we're going to spend Christmas in a hospital?

I laugh.

Me: We'll see.

Dean shakes his head lightly.

Dean: Nothing surprises me anymore in this group.

Derek: Your mom will be here soon, Zi.

Dean: Did you remind her to bring my chicken?

Me: Yes, how could I possibly forget, with you breathing down my neck every second?

Dean: I'll fetch it later. I have errands to run.

Me: Bye!

My mom is obsessed with the house. Lol, actually, obsessed is an understatement.

Derek: I'm glad you love it. Would you be willing to move in with us once my son is born?

He has been annoying me with this. He wants my mom to move in with us, because he doesn't want strangers to take care of the baby.

Mom: You want me to move in?

Derek: Not permanently. We'll need you for the first few weeks.

My mom laughs and looks at me questioningly.

Mom: Are you sure?

Me: I'm not sure about moving in, but we'll definitely need you.

Mom: Well, it's not like I have experience with children. I only raised one.

Derek: I trust you.

My mom sighs.

Mom: Alright then.

He smiles ever so brightly.

Mom: So, everything is ready for our baby?

Derek: Yes, 100%.

Mom: Unamanga. What about names? Have you decided on any?

Lord. That has honestly been the least of my worries. It completely slipped my mind.

Me: I forgot.

Derek: Wow, I also forgot.

My mom shakes her head.

Mom: Well, your dad and I came up with a few names.

Derek: Really?

She nods.

Mom: What would you two like to name him?

Derek: Hmm...

I take out my phone.

Mom: And then?

Me: I'm going to look for names.

Mom: Haibo, Ziyanda, really??

Me: What? I don't want my child to have a basic name. I'm sure the internet has some nice ones.

Derek chuckles.

Mom: This internet has ruined your generation!

Me: How many names do you want him to have?

I look at Derek.

Derek: I don't know.

Mom: Will you give him an English name?

Me: Eueew, no! I won't oppress my baby!

Derek: Wow!

My mom laughs.

Me: Ayikabi, Derek. Apartheid is over, our people can flourish now.

Mom: I agree.

Me: One name I won't compromise on is Nkanyezi. We are definitely naming him Nkanyezi.

Derek tries to hide it, but struggles- he's blushing profusely.

Mom: It's a beautiful name.

Me: Love it. He'll be Star junior.

Derek smiles.

I look at my mom.

Me: Nkanyezi will be his first name.

I look at Derek.

Me: Are you happy with that?

Derek: I'm flattered.

He stifles a smile.

Me: Mom, what are your options?

Mom: First, we have Mphikeleli. He who perseveres.

I begin laughing and they stare at me.

Me: Mphikeleli sounds like a 50-year-old man's name!

Mom: Ziyanda!

Derek tries by all means to smother a laugh. He knows I'm right.

Me: Ngathi my child will pop out with a beard and everything! Uh-uh mama.

Mom: You are unbelievable!

Me: Hai, I love you, but that name is the worst.

Mom: Wow.

She looks at me, clearly offended.

I don't even feel bad. I'm not about to give my baby a shady name. He'll have this name forever; it will be part of his identity. Mphikeleli? Nope.

Derek: Zi, stop being rude.

Me: Okay, I'm sorry.

I keep quiet and look at my mom.

Mom: Wow, I don't even want to do this anymore. You're so rude.

Me: Askies, sthandwa.

Mom: Mxm.

She looks at Derek.

Mom: Can I have some Coke?

Derek: Sure.

He stands and walks away.

Me: Love you.

Mom: Hai suka.

She takes the remote and switches on the TV.

Mom: I can't believe you sometimes...

I laugh quietly.

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It's the 16th of December and I am beyond excited that Niki is coming over. We've been seeing each other a lot lately, like the good old days. I've been in a very good space, despite my physical barriers. I guess that's what happens when you stop trying to solve people's problems, huh?

Derek has also just been doing the most. When I say this man is heaven sent, I be telling the whole truth. He's been catering to my every need in every single way- except sexually. We've stopped having sex. I feel gross and truck-like. There's no way I'm engaging in coitus.

Anyway, just as I walk out of the bathroom, the door opens and Niki walks in.

Niki: Heyiii.

Me: Heyiii.

She throws herself on the bed and I dry myself.

Niki: You're ready to pop.

Me: Tell me something I don't know, fool.

She laughs.

Niki: Are you nervous?

Me: Nervous?

Niki: Wow, sisi, you're going to spread and bust it wide open!

Me: Niki, euww!

Niki: Apparently, when the baby is too big, they cut up the vagina!

Me: I don't need your negativity right now!

She sighs dramatically.

Me: Come put this lotion on me and stop talking nonsense.

I pass the lotion to her and she catches it.

Niki: We're way too close for my liking.

Me: Girl, Star and I may as well make you our sister wife.

We laugh.

Me: How's your future mother-in-law, anyway?

Niki: She's out of the hospital and now she wants to stay with Kwanele.

Me: Hai hai, ngoba?

Niki: She says Kwani's the only one who can take care of her.

Me: Wow, I hope you won't allow that shit!

Niki: Listen, I've made myself clear! That bitter old divorcee will not ruin my life!

Me: Maybe she's lonely.

Niki: Whose business is it? I don't blame Kwanele's father for leaving her ass!

I sigh.

Me: Hopefully, she won't come for you. From what I've gathered, she doesn't mind being dirty.

Niki: Mxm, I'm ready for anything she throws my way.

Me: As long as you're aware of her tactics.

Derek walks in and stares at us.

Derek: Wow.

Niki: Hey, boo!

Derek: Don't get too comfortable there with touching my fiancé.

Niki: Yoooh ngaze ngavelelwa. If it's not this balloon of yours flashing her ring at me, it's you throwing shots at me!

Me: Niki!

She laughs.

Derek: Baby, Vuvu wants you to come over for lunch.

Me: I can't, I'm with Niki.

Derek: Then, she'll join you.

I look at Niki and she shrugs.

Niki: I don't mind hanging out with Beauty. She's okay.

I chuckle.

Me: Alright, then.

Niki: I'll drive us.

Derek: Uhh, no.

Niki rolls her eyes.

Me: Hai, sisi. You drive like a maniac; I decline your services.

Niki: Mxm.

Derek: I'll drop you off.

Me: Okay.

He gives Niki a stern look.

Derek: You can stop touching her boobs now.

Niki: Fuseeg!

She squeezes them and I smack her hand.

Me: That hurts wena.

Derek walks out and I get dressed.

We're now in the car driving to Nomvuyo's house.

Niki: Friend, who would have thought we'd end up here? Look at us living our best lives.

Me: I don't feel like I'm living my best life right now.

She laughs.

Me: I've been craving a very potent mojito.

Derek: A few more weeks, baby.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: I also miss my whiskey. You seem to forget that I'm just as thirsty.

Me: Oh please, I know you've been drinking on the DL.

Derek: Me?? Never!

Me: Ohho.

We finally get to Nomvuyo's house and Derek helps me get out of the car.

Derek: I like your dress.

Me: You do?

He nods and looks at me all sappy and mushy.

Me: Staap!

He kisses my forehead.

Me: Walk me in.

Derek: Anything for y-

Niki: Excuse me, I'm hungry! Let's go!

She struts her stuff and we follow her.

Niki: A bitch is starving.

Me: You don't even know this house. Sit down and be humble.

Derek opens the door for us and we walk in.

Me: Vuvuuu!

Nomvuyo: In the kitchen!

Niki rolls her eyes.

Niki: Gosh.

Derek: Niki, is that jealousy I smell?

Niki: Derek, fuck off.

Derek laughs and I join him. I know she's low-key jealous of my friendship with Vuvu, but she always checks herself because she knows there's no reason to be.

We get to the kitchen and sure enough, Nomvuyo is there, looking gorgeous as usual, in her simple dress.

Me: Vuvu, I hate how beautiful you are.

Nomvuyo: Me too. It gets overwhelming sometimes.

Me: Bitch!

She laughs and we share a side hug, because I don't do normal hugs anymore.

Nomvuyo: Look at you in your floral dress! So adorable!

Me: Uhm, I wasn't really going for adorable.

She laughs and then looks at Niki.

Nomvuyo: Hi, Nikiwe.

Niki: Hey, Vuvu.

They share a hug.

Nomvuyo: We're going to eat outside, it's too hot in here.

We walk outside and I'm shocked to find Nolwazi, Nandi and Gabi out there.

I stand there, trying to process everything.

They all yell, "Surprise!"

Me: What's happening?

Nomvuyo: Your baby shower, silly!

I chuckle as I look around at the lovely décor.

Me: This is for me?

Gabi: Yes!

I continue chuckling.

Derek kisses my cheek.

Derek: See you later.

Me: Are you leaving?

Derek: Apparently I'm not allowed to be here.

I sigh and he kisses me again.

Derek: Have fun, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

Derek: Bye, ladies.

They all say bye to him and he jogs away.

Me: This is sweet.

Nomvuyo: You're not angry?

Me: No.

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Niki came up with the idea. We had already decided that we wouldn't have a baby shower, we'd just give you your gifts, but she insisted on it.

I look at Niki and smile.

Me: Thank you. This is really sweet.

Nomvuyo: This baby is already changing you, huh?

Me: Argh, whatever.

I walk to Nolwazi and we share a hug, I then move to Nandi and she rubs my belly.

Nandi: You're making me want another baby.

Nomvuyo: With Malusi?

Nandi: Hell no.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Me: Hey, Gabs.

Gabi: Hey, boo.

She gives me a peck on the cheek and then rubs my belly,

Gabi: Ready to pop?

Me: You have no idea.

Gabi: I am really enjoying this pregnancy, and funny enough, I've had so many men ask me out!

We all laugh.

Gabi: I feel sexier.

Me: Hai, I'm the complete opposite.

We all sit.

Gabi: So, we're going to play games throughout the afternoon. The first one will get us all warmed up and in the mood.

Niki: We know how corny you can be, so this baby shower is going to be old school- chilled and fun.

Me: Yay!

I'm beyond excited.

Gabi: The name of the first game is Play-Doh Babies.

She gives each of us gift bags.

Gabi: There's different coloured play-doh in there. The objective of the game is to create the cutest baby you can with the doh. We have pencils, beads and some toys, just to help you get creative with your babies.

Nolwazi: I used to love play-doh when I was young!

Nandi: It reminds me of Lele. She's obsessed with it.

Me: Then, clearly you two have an advantage here.

Gabi: The one with the cutest baby will win something! Are we ready?

We all nod.

Gabi: There goes my manicure...

Nomvuyo: I don't know how you cope with those long nails. I always tell Ziyanda to get rid of them.

Nolwazi: How do you even function with them?

Gabi: You get used to them.

Me: It's not that bad.

Niki: You have to get rid of them, now that you'll be changing diapers.

I sigh heavily.

Niki: Gelish is good for your nails, boo, uzoba strong.

We all focus on our play-doh.

Nandi: Are you excited, Zi?

Me: I don't know. Somehow, physically, I'm over it, but emotionally and mentally, I'm at peace. It's so strange.

Nandi: That's good.

Niki: Derek contributes to that peace, neh?

Me: Most definitely. He's awesome.

Niki: All of you have kids?

Nolwazi: Except Gabi- well, she's expecting her first child.

Nomvuyo: Would you have a child with Kwanele right now?

I have to stop myself from choking. Why is Nomvuyo this person? Yeses!

Niki: No, I'm not going to have children anytime soon.

Nomvuyo: Really?

Niki: I'll live vicariously through Zizi.

Gabi: Konje you're dating Lwazi's ex!

Yoh, nkos' yami.

Niki: Yep. Not awkward at all.

Nolwazi laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: I don't feel awkward. Please don't feel awkward around me?

Niki smiles and nods.

Lwazi is such a sweetheart.

Nolwazi: How is he?

Niki: He's good...

Nolwazi nods.

Nolwazi: That's good.

Nomvuyo: I hope you're dealing with that psycho mother of his.

Niki chuckles.

Niki: That one is a problem.

Nolwazi: Is she still crazy?

Niki: Mxm, she is. I thought being in hospital would change her, but clearly not.

Me: Okaaay, can we not discuss Niki's relationship? It may not be awkward for you, but it sure is for me!

They all laugh.

Gabi: Okay, 5 minutes left!

We all focus on our play-doh and try to finish up.

INSERT 175 (Part 1)

Gabi: Ladies, we're going to play the next game now! This is a nursery rhymes quiz.

Nolwazi: Nursery Rhymes, as in Twinkle Twinkle Little Star?

Gabi giggles and nods.

Gabi: I have made copies of a few nursery rhymes, but there are missing parts. Each of you will get a copy and you have to fill in the missing parts.

Niki: I grew up in the township. We didn't sing these English songs!

We all laugh and I nod.

Me: We really didn't!

Niki: Well, at least you teach kids. I'm sure you've heard these songs!

I continue laughing as Gabi hands out the papers.

Gabi: Alright, the first one to finish is the winner. Go!

We all focus on our papers. I'm not that shocked that I know all of them, I've heard them in the Grade R classes.

I quickly fill in the missing parts and squeal.

Me: Done!

Nomvuyo: Argh, what's the last one?

Me: Vuvu, really? Three Blind Mice.

She laughs and shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: I didn't sing these songs to Nyami. She loved jazz, for some odd reason.

Nolwazi: The twins love classical music... Especially Khule.

Me: I'm sure uSimo prefers Beyonce.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Don't come for my baby.

For the next few minutes, we discuss the different nursery rhymes, and I am declared the winner.

Gabi: Alright, it's time for gifts!

Me: Can we eat first? I'm starving!

Niki: Me too.

Gabi looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Okay, I'll get the food.

Niki: Need help?

Nomvuyo: Yep.

Nomvuyo, Niki and Gabi stand and make their way inside the house. Nolwazi looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: This pregnancy hasn't been easy, but you seem softer.

I sigh.

Me: The past two months have been a dream,, thanks to Derek.

Nolwazi: These men really go the extra mile.

Me: Are you and Dean okay? I miss his arrogant ass.

Nolwazi: You two are crazy. It hasn't even been a week since you last saw each other, but you're being dramatic.

I chuckle.

Nolwazi: To answer your question, Dean and I are in a good space. I prayed very hard for God to open up my heart and allow me to forgive him.

Me: Wow, you really are a great person. I would have tossed his ass.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

She laughs lightly.

Nolwazi: At the end of the day, he was also a victim. There was no way I was going to let him take the blame for everything. Yes, he played a role in the mess, but he wasn't responsible for everything.

Me: How are the therapy sessions going? Does he open up?

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: Yes, he does, surprisingly. I've learnt so much about him in the past month, and it's all thanks to these sessions.

I smile.

Me: See? There's nothing wrong with having an extra pair of ears.

Nolwazi: I must admit that I was sceptical in the beginning. It's been an interesting experience, a good one. Thank you for basically forcing us to do it.

Me: I've come to realise that talking helps. Through talking, you figure out a lot shit.

Nolwazi: True. You're such a mature young lady, Zi.

Me: Hmm, not everyone would agree with that.

We both laugh.

The ladies come back with the food and we immediately dish up for ourselves.

Overall, it was a lovely baby shower.

My circle may be small, but it is definitely filled with powerhouses- women who don't back down when they're faced with challenges. Women who are thriving in all aspects of their lives... This is some deep, inspirational shit, I tell you.

It's now the 24th of December.

Derek has been on me like an STD. I have never seen him this panicky. Every move I make, he's right there, watching and lurking.

Nomvuyo and my mother have also been doing the most. My mom is officially staying with us and Nomvuyo is also here most of the time.

We're now on our way to the hospital.

Is it normal for me to feel this calm? I genuinely don't feel like a person who's about to give birth. Yes, my lower belly is heavy and uncomfortable, but I'm not in pain or anything.

We finally get there.

After a while, Dr Modisa confirms that I'm not ready to give birth.

Derek: What? What do you mean?

Dr: You need to remember that a due date is not concrete, it's an estimation.

Derek groans.

Dr: The next week is going to be her 36th week. Her contractions should intensify then. Right now, the baby is not positioned perfectly.

Derek: Okay.

Mom: We just want him to come out already.

Dr Modisa smiles.

Dr: I understand, even I can't wait to meet little Nkanyezi.

Me: Alright then. See you soon.

Dr: See you soon.

We share a hug and then she walks out. I get up and my mom fixes my top.

Mom: One more week.

Me: Thanks for packing the bag, Vuvz.

Nomvuyo: You're welcome, love.

Me: Can we get something to eat? I'm hungry.

I look at Derek and he nods. I can tell that he's disappointed about having to wait another week.

Uzoba strength.

It's been a couple of days since we saw Dr Modisa. Melinda has also been coming to see me, because my biggest concern right now is Postpartum Depression. We've been openly discussing my anxiety and how I can weather the storm. I don't want to suffer after I give birth, so I'm trying by all means to focus on the positive every single day. I am blessed with an amazing family: my mom and dad are supportive as hell, and they always make it clear that they will never turn their backs on me- that unconditional love makes me feel secure. I am blessed with amazing friends: my circle has my back, these people never fail to stop their agendas just to cater to me. Last but not least, Sexy Beast is the greatest. This man has come into my life and changed my whole outlook on life and love. He loves me deeply, and I don't even doubt it. This man has managed to unpeel every layer of me, and loves me regardless of the mess he has discovered about me along the way. There is no way I'm going to allow any negativity to fill and cripple me- I refuse. I will fight for my happiness, especially now that I'm about to have another human being who'll basically depend on me with their life.

Anyway, it's now the 30th of December, and Derek has been too excited for my liking.

He is convinced that his son will be born on the 1st of January, his birthday.

Derek: Isn't there a way we can get him ready? He needs to be born on the 1st.

I laugh.

Me: I'm a vegetable right now. I want him to come out more than you.

He smiles mischievously.

Derek: I miss being inside you.

Me: Derek!

He shrugs.

Just then, his phone rings and he frowns.

Derek: It's Busi.

Me: What?

He nods as he answers it.

Derek: Busi... You're outside?... Why?...

He listens for a while and then ends the call. I watch as he stands and walks away. I don't even bother asking. I try not to be too vocal about Busi, especially when Lelo is around. The last thing I want is to be that person who paints a bad picture of a child's mother, then ruin their relationship. I do think Busi's parenting is questionable, but I keep that shit to myself.

A few minutes later, Derek walks in, Busi follows him.

Derek: Have a sit.

He sits next to me and she sits on the other couch.

Derek: What brings you here?

Busi glances at me.

Me: Hello, Busi.

Busi: Hi.

Me: Are you well?

She nods and looks at my belly.

I focus on the TV.

Derek takes the remote and lowers the volume. Angazi why ahlupha mina when they can easily go to another room.

Derek: Busisiwe.

Busi: I am moving permanently to PE.

Derek: Okay.

Busi: I'm taking Lelo with me.

Derek: Ukhuluma amasimba.

Yoh.

Busi: Derek!

Derek: What?

Busi: I have been offered a promotion.

Derek: Good for you.

Busi: I am taking Lelo with me.

Derek: Over my dead body.

Busi: Why??

Derek: You have just introduced him to me, now you want to take him away? Are you crazy?

She doesn't say anything.

Derek: You don't have the right to do as you please. I refuse to let you separate me from my son. You can do whatever you want with your life, but I won't allow you to negatively affect my relationship with my son. Forget it.

She looks at him intently.

Busi: You have another child coming. Why are you so bothered?

Derek: The fact that you can even ask me such bullshit shows me how immature you are. This baby will not erase Lelo.

She rolls her teary eyes.

Derek: Lelo will stay with your mother, here in Johannesburg. You will not take away my son from me.

Busi: I'll think about it.

Derek: Ungazobheda wena, there's nothing to think about. If you want us to take this to court, then trust me, we will. And, we both know who's more credible here.

Busi: You wouldn't!

Derek: Test me, you'll see.

She stands and looks at him angrily.

Busi: I hate you!

Derek: Hmkay.

Whenever Derek becomes this cold, all I see is Dean and Liwa. They have this cold side that scares the shit out of me.

Busi storms out and then Derek follows her.

He comes back after a few minutes and sits next to me again.

Me: Uhmm, I'm getting Ntsiki vibes right now.

Derek: Me too. She's too angry.

I sigh.

Me: If that bitch touches me, I'll kill her!

Derek: Me too.

Me: At least our security is good.

He nods.

Derek: We have to be vigilant. I doubt she'll try anything though, she's not that crazy.

Me: Hmm, I'm sure that's what Dean said about Ntsiki at first.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll keep an eye on her.

Me: You better.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Do you think I overreacted?

Me: I think your delivery was too cold. You know she has the potential to be crazy, so address her like that?

Derek: I couldn't control myself.

Me: Uh-uh, you always tell me to assess situations before I react. Practise what you preach.

He sighs and rubs his chin.

Me: You mustn't fuel her anger more, even though she has no right to be acting all innocent.

Derek: Okay.

Me: You're putting us in danger.

Derek: I hear you.

Me: Good.

He smiles and leans closer to me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too. Now, please dish up for me.

He chuckles and stands.

Derek: Yes, ma'am!

I'm in bed, sleeping ever so peacefully, when I'm awakened by Derek. He shakes me lightly, but I refuse to wake up.

Derek: Ziyanda!

I open my eyes and look at him. Why did he switch on the lights?

Me: What?? Stop annoying me!

Derek: Ziyanda, I think your water broke!

Me: Huh?

Derek: Look!

He removes the cover and as soon as I shift, the wetness hits me. I am really wet. How did I not feel any of this? What's going on??

I look at him in shock and he also stares at me in shock.

Me: My water broke?

Derek: I'm assuming that's the case!

We continue staring at each other in shock.

Derek: Are you in pain?

Me: Not really.

He walks to my side and helps me get up. We look down at the puddle that has filled almost half of the bed.

Derek: Shit.

Me: Should we go to the hospital?

Suddenly, I'm numb. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel.

Derek: Let me call your mom.

Naye he seems to be paralysed

I watch as he walks away. When he gets to the door, he stops, and turns.

Derek: Should I leave you here? Let's go together.

Me: You want me to come with you to my mother's room?

Derek: I don't want to leave you here by yourself.

I sigh as I start walking and follow him.

We get to my mom's room and he knocks.

Mom: Come in!

Why is she still up? It's literally 12am.

We walk in and find her in bed, reading the Bible.

Mom: Hello, my babies. Yazi I struggle to sleep without my husband. I have no choice but to read and reflect.

Derek: Uhm, ma-

She looks at us sweetly. She has no clue.

Derek: Ziyanda's water just broke.

Her eyes widen and she quickly gets out of bed.

Mom: What??

She walks to me and immediately starts touching me.

Mom: Are you in pain??

I shake my head.

Mom: Alright, we should go to the hospital. Derek, call Dr Modisa.

Derek: Okay.

Mom: I'll get everything, then we can go.

Derek rushes out.

Mom: Baby, let's pray first.

She closes the door and takes my hands. We bow our heads and start praying. Overall, we thanked God for keeping me safe throughout the 9 months. In addition, we asked him to guide and protect me as I'm about to embark on this new journey.

As soon as we're done praying, everything sinks in.

I am going to be a mother.

I am about to give birth.

I immediately start sobbing. I don't know why, or how I feel, I just sob.

My mom makes me sit down and comforts me.

Mom: Calm down.

Me: I'm fine.

She gives me some water.

Derek walks in and rushes to me in panic.

Mom: It's sinking in...

Derek kisses my forehead.

Derek: Let's go.

He helps me stand and then we all walk out.

Mom: Did you call Nomvuyo?

Derek: Yes.

Mom: Dean is going to fetch Ziyanda's father.

Derek: Okay.

I zone both of them out. As we get in the car, I start feeling very uncomfortable. I start feeling the way I usually feel when my period pains are about to start... Like my vagina is being pulled and pressed at the same time.

Me: I think I can feel the contractions.

Mom: Oh, baby... This will not be easy. Please gather up all your strength, because you're about to go through something else...

I don't know if she thought she was helping ngoba now I'm starting to freak out a bit.

I want Derek to hold me, but he's too focused on the road. I settle for my mom, and take her hand.

INSERT 175 (Part 2)- Unedited

By the time we get to the hospital, my contractions have intensified a bit, not too much. Now, I feel like I'm experiencing minor period pains. It's nothing extreme.

We get to my room and Derek helps me take off my clothes.

Nurse: Dr Modisa is on her way.

Derek: Can you please check if everything is fine.

The nurse smiles.

Nurse: I'm about to do that, sir.

She looks at me.

Nurse: You're in the first stage of labour. Contractions will make your cervix gradually open up, and the term for this process is dilation. This is usually the longest stage of labour.

Just then, the door opens and Dr Modisa walks in.

Dr: Hello, there!

We all greet her back. I wonder who her husband is. Imagine being married to a doctor? These people's work hours are too crazy for my liking.

Dr: I see Nkanyezi will be born the same day as his dad.

Me: Uhm, it's only 1am right now. Derek's birthday is tomorrow. What are you trying to say??

Haibo, phela it's the 31st!

Dr: Right now, your cervix is starting to soften so it can open. This is called the early phase, and that's why your contractions are bit irregular.

Me: What?? How many phases are there??

Dr: We spoke about this, remember?

Derek: She zones out a lot.

She chuckles.

Dr: There are three stages. The first stage can be categorised as the Dilation and Effacement of the Cervix. Under this stage we have three phases: early phase, active phase, and transition phase.

Me: I'm still on the first phase?

She nods.

Me: So, I still have two other phases to get through before I even move on to the second stage of labour?

Dr: Yes, dear.

I groan.

Mom: So, she might give birth tomorrow.

Dr: Yes.

Me: Yoh.

Dr: You have to wait it out, there's no other way.

Me: Then how do you explain my water breaking so early?

Dr: If your water breaks, contractions usually follow within 12 to 24 hours. You have to remember that everyone is different.

I sigh heavily.

Dr: So, you can go back home. Your labour is not yet established. Your cervix needs to open up about 10cm for your baby to pass through. That's when you're fully dilated.

Mom: This is going to be a long journey.

Dr: Don't stress. The baby is perfectly fine. He just needs some time, so we have to wait it out. Go home, get some sleep, and make sure you eat, so that you will have the energy when it's time to push.

Me: I have to go back home?

Dr: You'll get bored here, time will move slower than usual.

Me: Okay. So, when should I come back?

Dr: When the contractions are regular and coming about 3 in every 10 minutes.

Me: Right now, I don't think I'm having contractions. I just feel like I'm experiencing minor period pains. The pain is just there.

Dr: Exactly, so your contractions are still irregular. Monitor them.

Me: Okay.

Dr: Take a warm bath as well, okay?

Me: Okay.

She smiles.

Dr: I can't wait!

She gives me a hug and then walks out. The door opens again and in walks my dad, Dean and Nomvuyo.

Dad: Are you ready to give birth?

I shake my head.

Derek: We have to go back home.

Nomvuyo: She's still on the early phase.

I let Nomvuyo the Nurse, explain all of this to my father.

Dean: Manje we woke up for nothing?

Everyone chuckles.

Mom: Asambeni.

They all walk out and close the door. Derek helps me sit up and holds my hands.

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He looks so stressed, I just want to hug him, but I can't.

Me: I'm good, Star, I promise. I'm not even in that much pain. My usual period pains are far worse than what I'm experiencing right now.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Now, let's go home, take a bath, and sleep.

Derek: Okay, baby.

He kisses me and then helps me stand.

We get to the house.

My dad goes straight to my mom's bedroom to sleep.

Me: Mama, get some rest. We'll be fine.

Mom: Are you sure?

Derek: Yes, I'll run a bath for her.

Mom: Okay, call me if you need anything.

Derek: Okay.

She goes to her bedroom, and then Derek and I go to our bedroom.

Derek: I'll run a bath for you.

Me: Okay.

I watch as he walks to the bathroom.

It's 2:30. I'm still okay. I haven't died.

After a while, Derek walks back and he helps me undress. He's already naked, and as much as I want coitus, it's honestly impossible.

Me: Do you think my vagina will recover?

He laughs.

Derek: What a ridiculous question. Of course it's going to recover.

We walk to the bathroom and he helps me step in the tub. He sits behind me and I relax on him.

Me: When is Busi leaving?

Derek: On the 3rd.

I sigh.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I'm just wondering how you'll be able to juggle your two sons.

Derek: I think I'll cope.

Me: Hmkay.

We're silent for a long time. When I start dozing off, he kisses my ear and I groan.

Me: I've been craving coitus lately.

He laughs and rubs my belly.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: I've been trying to initiate, but you always stop me.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Let's get you out of here, the water is cooling down.

Me Okay.

I move so that he can get out, and then he helps me stand.

I am awakened by Derek.

Derek: Here's your breakfast, baby.

Me: What time is it?

He chuckles.

Derek: 11am.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm over this!

He plants a kiss on my cheek and I begin eating.

The door opens and Dean walks in. I've missed him a lot.

Dean: Dlamz.

He comes to the bed and sits next to me.

Dean: When are you giving birth kanti? This is too much.

Me: You have no idea how fed up I am. I can't function right now.

Dean: Our lives have stopped now, because we're waiting for this fucktard to come out!

Derek throws a pillow at him and it lands on his face.

Derek: Fuck you.

I laugh.

Me: Why are you calling my child a fucktard? You are so mean.

We continue chatting while I eat. After a while, I take a shower and get ready for my daily walk with Derek around the block.

As we're walking back to the house, I stop and look at Derek.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I think I'm in pain.

He looks at me worriedly.

Me: Not extreme.

He takes my hand and we walk back to the house.

Derek: I'm calling D-

Me: No, she said we must monitor my contractions. I'm still fine.

He tries to say something and I shake my head.

Me: I don't want to go to the hospital right now. I'd rather be in pain here.

Derek: How bad is it?

Me: The pain keeps going and coming back.

He makes me sit on the couch and places my feet on his lap.

Derek: Massage time.

Me: Yaas!

My dad walks to the lounge and sits.

Dad: This is a beautiful home you have here.

I'm still getting used to this whole living situation, especially because I'm not really contributing much. It's nice and all, but I can't help but wonder what will happen when Derek and I have a crazy fight and we decide to separate (extreme, I know). Do I pack my bag and hit the road?

Dad: I wouldn't survive though. It's too quiet in these suburbs of yours.

Me: It gets to me sometimes.

Derek: I wouldn't survive in the township.

Me: You're such a snob.

Derek: I won't even deny that.

Me: Your hands are making me sleep.

Dad: Have you eaten?

Me: Yes.

Dad: Alright then, I'll be outside, enjoying the fresh air.

Me: Okay.

He stands and walks away.

Derek: I miss hugging you properly.

Me: Let's not even go there.

He looks at me and smiles.

Derek: Do you realise that we will never have this moment again, where it's just the two of us?

Me: I'm just glad we're having a boy. I don't know how I'd handle a girl.

He groans.

Derek: I really wanted a girl.

Me: Hai, get over it.

He continues massaging me, while we chat.

Eventually, I doze off.

I am awakened by a very sharp pain.

Heyi, I jump up and my eyes pop out.

The pain subsides.

What the hell was that?

I sit there, trying to understand.

Before I know it, another one flashes back.

Whoaa!

I close my eyes. Surely I'm dreaming?

The second it comes back again, I let out a scream.

Me: Mama!

Nomvuyo emerges and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Derek left with your parents, I don't know where they went.

Me: Vuvu.

I moan loudly and cringe as the sharp pain hits again.

Nomvuyo raises an eyebrow and stares at me softly.

Nomvuyo: Are the contractions kicking in?

I nod and look at her worriedly.

She walks to me and rubs my belly.

After some time, she clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: It seems like they're still spaced farther than 5 minutes apart.

Me: What does that mean?

Nomvuyo: They're still mild.

Me: Yoh.

She stands.

Nomvuyo: I'll be back.

She walks to the kitchen, and comes back after a few minutes with a towel. She places it on my belly, and somehow the warmth makes me feel at ease.

Nomvuyo: The trick to surviving contractions is to stay calm and allow yourself to feel them. Don't fight them.

Me: Is it going to get worse?

Nomvuyo: Yes, but remember we're all different. You could be lucky and not experience anything worse.

She looks at me softly and smiles.

Nomvuyo: You can do this. Don't freak out, okay?

I nod and relax.

She is definitely right, these contractions are intense, but they're spaced out a bit, so I'm not in too much pain. It comes and goes.

Nomvuyo: I'll be right here, don't worry.

Me: Thanks, mother hen.

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

Me: I think it's coming...

Nomvuyo: Relax...

I shut my eyes and groan loudly as the pain rushes through my back.

I feel it for about 10 seconds.

I let out a loud sigh once it's done.

Nomvuyo: Let's take a walk around the yard.

Me: Okay.

She helps me stand and I wobble behind her.

Me: I miss Derek, where is he?

Nomvuyo: Hai suka, forget about him and love meee!

Me: Mxm.

We get outside and walk around the pool.

Me: How is Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: She's fine, why?

Me: She's been MIA, and that unlike her.

Nomvuyo: She's going through her own shit, I guess.

I look at her.

Me: Are you telling me the whole truth?

She laughs lightly.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

Me: Hmkay.

We continue walking.

Me: I don't want to walk anymore. I feel like it's getting worse.

We walk back inside the house and as I sit on the couch, I feel like someone is stabbing me with a blazing sword on my back.

I let out a scream and Nomvuyo rushes to me.

Me: Vuvu, no, what's happening??

Nomvuyo: Baby-

Me: This is painful!

Just then, Derek walks in, all smiles.

Derek: Hey, you're awa-

Heyi, another sharp pain hits me and I let out a scream.

Derek rushes to me.

Derek: What the fuck??

Nomvuyo: Her contractions are intensifying.

Derek: Why didn't you call me??

Nomvuyo: Stop being dramatic, she's fine.

Me: I'm not! I'm in pain!

Derek takes out his phone and dials Dr Modisa's number.

Nomvuyo: Dere-

Derek: Shut up.

Nomvuyo: I won't respond to that.

She pushes Derek aside and then places another warm towel on my belly. I sigh as I feel my muscles relax a bit.

Derek: Doc, we're about to leave the house now... Yes.... I don't care, we're coming...

He ends the call and then pushes Nomvuyo lightly.

Me: Derek, stop the drama.

Nomvuyo: Yazi!

I want to laugh at him, but I don't have the energy.

He helps me stand, and my parents walk in.

Mom: And then?

Derek: We're going to the hospital.

Mom: Yoh, okay. Vuvu, go get our things, baby.

Nomvuyo: Ma, Ziyanda is fine. Derek is being dramatic.

Mom: Yini kanti?

Nomvuyo: Her contractions are still inconsistent.

My mom looks at Derek.

Derek: I don't care. We're going to the hospital.

My mom sighs and nods.

Mom: Alright then, I don't want you to die of stress.

Derek rushes up the stairs and we all look at each other.

My mom laughs.

Mom: He's really stressed.

Nomvuyo: More like annoying.

Dad: Mina you'll call me once the baby is ready to come out. I hate hospitals.

Mom: Okay.

He walks to me and smiles.

Dad: Stay strong, okay?

Me: Okay.

He gives me a kiss and then disappears. I check the time and it's almost 5pm.

Derek comes back and looks at me.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Ya.

As I take a step, another pain hits me and I moan. I stand there for about 30 seconds and then look at Nomvuyo.

Me: This shit is not nice.

Nomvuyo: You'll think twice before having unprotected sex.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Nomvuyo, just get our things, and stop talking shit.

Nomvuyo laughs as she walks away. Derek and I walk to the car and he helps me get in. My mom follows after.

Me: Are you driving?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Nomvuyo can drive.

He stares at me for a few seconds and then nods.

Mom: How cute.

She gets in the front seat. Soon, Nomvuyo walks out with our things and Derek helps her put them in the boot.

Nomvuyo: Am I driving?

Mom: Yebo, Zizi wants to be close to Derek.

Nomvuyo: Hmkay.

They get in, and she starts the car.

I hold Derek's hand.

Derek Are the pains bad?

I nod.

Me: Very sharp.

I rest my head on his shoulder and try not to vomit. The motion sickness is also kicking in now...

0-100.

That's what happened to me.

Things went from 0-100.

I have never, in my 25 years of living, experienced this much pain.

It genuinely feels like my enemy is in my body, playing tug of war with my organs, trying to pull them out, but also trying to pull them back in.

Derek has been by my side, but I can tell that he wants to run and hide.

I've been screaming my lungs out.

I can feel the pains in my lower back, abdomen and thighs.

Dr: The cervix has dilated to 6 centimeters.

I'm not even listening to her, I don't care.

These pains come back after 3 minutes or so.

Dr: I'd like you to take a shower. It will help immensely.

I groan as another pain approaches.

My mom has been sobbing for the past hour. I think she is traumatised as well.

Dr: Ziyanda.

I open my eyes and look at her.

Dr: Take a shower.

I nod and Derek helps me get up.

Nomvuyo: Derek, take a break, I'll keep an eye on her.

Derek ignores Nomvuyo and walks with me to the bathroom. He gets in first and then tells me to come in once the water temperature is fine. I get in and he looks at me.

Me: Derek, you can get out.

I know the germaphobe in him is freaking out right now, having to shower here without flip flops. At least Nomvuyo brought my flip flops.

He is being extra stubborn, so I decide to let him be.

We stand there for the longest time. The shower is doing its job, because the pain is no longer extreme.

Derek: If you ever doubt my love for you, think of this moment.

I laugh.

Me: You, barefoot in a bathroom that isn't yours?

He nods tightly and I wrap my arms around his neck.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I hate seeing you like this.

Me: I'll be fine.

He makes me turn around so that my back is on him. He wraps his arms around me and plants a kiss on my neck.

Derek: I don't like whatever this phase is.

Me: Me too. I hate being in pain.

Derek Maybe you shou-

Me: No, Derek. I don't want that epidural what what.

Derek: Ziyanda, you heard Dr Modisa, you still have more hours to get through.

Me: I'm not going to take any medication. What if something happens to my baby?

He sighs and shakes his head.

Me: If all these other women can do it, then nothing will stop me. I will be fine.

Derek: I hate seeing you like this.

Me: You know what Vuvu said?

I turn and look at him.

Me: She said now we'll think before we have unprotected sex.

He chuckles.

Me: Between you and me... you need to calm down a bit. I'm surprised Vuvu hasn't smacked your ass.

He rolls his eyes.

I plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: This shower is really helping.

Derek: I can see...

Me: It's a pity we can't do more than just hold each other like polar bears.

He laughs.

Derek: I'm going to leave now, before you tempt me.

He takes my hand and helps me step out.

Once we're dry, he applies lotion on both our bodies and he gets dressed, while I put on my gown.

Before we walk out, he wraps his arms around me again.

Me: What's wrong?

I've never seen him this needy.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

We share a kiss and then walk out.

We find Dean, Liwa and Zimkitha in my room.

I'm actually shocked to see Zimkitha because she has been MIA.

Dean: Aww, look at my fattie...

Zimkitha: Langelihle!

Dean laughs as he attempts to hug me and I push him away.

Me: Your cologne is revolting. Get away from me.

Dean: Hai suka.

He hugs me anyway.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hey, Liwa.

Liwa: I'd hug you, but...

Me: Understood.

I look at Zimkitha.

Is it weird that I don't feel like seeing her?

Somehow, I'm not happy about her presence.

Zimkitha: Hey, sweetie.

Me: Hey, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Unjani, love?

Me: I'm okay, I guess...

Liwa: Haibo, why are you being so cold now?

Me: I'd like a moment with Derek, please.

They all look at me in shock.

Even Derek is a bit shocked.

Dean: I'm not going anywhere. Uyahlanya wena. We've been up for 2 days now, because of you. Angeke sizwe ngawe.

Zimkitha stands and smiles.

Zimkitha: I have to make a few calls.

She walks out.

Liwa looks at me intently before following his mother and closing the door.

I look at Derek.

Me: I don't want to be overwhelmed by too many people.

Dean sighs.

Dean: Why do you think no one is here? We all know how you are about your privacy.

I keep quiet.

Dean: Zimkitha just wanted to say hello. You didn't have to do her like that.

I roll my eyes.

Me: How about you also follow her and disa-fucking-ppear?

Dean: Ye wena Ziyanda. Asingaphaphelani.

Derek helps me sit.

Me: What happened to Ntsiki? Did you end up finding her?

I look at Dean intently and he looks at me blankly.

Dean: Ya.

Me: And?

Dean: And, what?

Me: What happened?

He glances at Derek, who is looking at him seriously.

Dean: Uhm, she's going to stay away for good.

Me: And, you believe her?

He nods casually.

Dean: Can we stop talking about that woman? She won't bother us anymore.

I shrug and look at Derek.

Me: I need water.

Derek: Yes, ma'am.

Dean: You must be enjoying bossing everyone around.

Me: Mxm.

I sit comfortably and sigh heavily as the pain builds up again...

Dr: Ziyanda, I need you to breathe.

Me: No! I can't!

I am kneeling on the bed, crying my lungs out.

Dr: Ziyanda...

I cry hysterically as the pain shoots up again. It feels like a hot pot has been placed on my back. I can't function.

I hear them calling my name, but I can't hear what they're saying.

The contractions are not that spaced out now. It seems like I have less than a minute before the next one comes back.

I scream loudly. I think someone is trying to slice my back into pieces.

I feel like I want to poop, but I can't.

There it is again... I shut my eyes even more and my body literally shakes as the sharp pain rushes through me.

Me: I can't! I can't! Please make it stop!

I shake even more as the after effects of the rush kick in.

As soon as I recover, another one hits me and I let out a loud and long groan.

Derek: Please get the epidural.

Mom: No, she will pull through.

I try to speak, but it hits once again and I scream.

I'm burning. My whole body is on fire, especially my back.

Me: Make it stop! Please!

I take a deep breath and try to change position, but struggle. I want to stand.

Derek helps me stand and then I place my arms on the bed and bury my face on the bed.

It comes at me like lightning.

Me: Nooo!

I start crying hysterically again.

Derek: What can we do??

Dr: She has to go through this...

I can tell he is pained as well.

Me: My back!

I try to touch it, but I can't.

Me: My back!

I grit my teeth as the pain crushes me again.

Suddenly, I feel someone's hands on my back.

Nomvuyo: I'm going to put some pressure here, okay?

I nod frantically.

She starts massaging me.

Nomvuyo: You are allowing these pains to contro-

Me: Fuck off!

I push her away.

Me: Derek!

I continue crying as Derek takes over the massaging.

Nomvuyo: Derek, you're the only one who can get through to her.

My whole body is shaking at this point, I can't stand anymore.

Derek helps me get back on the bed. I lie there, feeling so defeated.

I just want to die right now. I don't want this. I hate this. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

Derek: Baby.

I can't even hear him properly.

I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: Baby, you have to take control.

Me: I can't.

Derek: You can, and you will.

I sob quietly, because all my energy is gone, and I can't scream anymore. I don't have it in me.

Derek: Listen to me...

He plants a kiss on my cheek and I continue sobbing.

Derek: I need you to take a deep breath. Focus on your breathing.

I shake my head.

Me: It's too much. Derek, it's too much!

He sighs and steps back.

Nomvuyo: No, don't...

Derek: I can't-

Nomvuyo: You need to be strong for her...

Derek: I can't...

I shut them out and drown in my pain. I drown and hope to die.

Seconds later, I feel Derek's lips on my ear again.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Is this Dean?

Am I hearing things?

Dean: Stop being a pussy and toughen the fuck up.

Nomvuyo: Dean!

What??

Really??

Am I hearing things??

Dean: Get the fuck up and deal with this shit.

I let out a scream and feel my whole body tremble even more.

Dean: Shit, what's happening?

Dr: These pain are serious.

I feel his lips on my ear again.

Dean: Dlamz... I know you can do this... Come on... please?

I continue sobbing.

Dean: Come on...

He pulls me up and makes me lie on my back.

Dean: Derek, come wipe her face... Nomvuyo, massage her feet or something...

Derek wipes my face and I finally open my eyes.

Nomvuyo is massaging my feet. My mom is sitting in the corner, clearly traumatised. Dr Modisa is looking at me sympathetically.

Dean: We are going to breathe, okay?

I look at him.

Dean: You have to stop crying.

Derek wipes my face gently and I look up at him. He looks like he has just seen a ghost.

Dean puts the straw in my mouth and I drink some water.

Dean: There you go...

He smiles warmly.

Nomvuyo: Baby, you have to focus on your breathing. I promise you the pains will be tolerable.

I nod and she smiles.

Nomvuyo: Finally.

She stops massaging my feet and then walks to the left side of my bed, where Dean is. She pushes him away and then takes my hand.

Nomvuyo: Derek, hold her hand.

Derek does as he is told.

Nomvuyo: Alright, let's take a very deep breath in.

I do as I am told, but as soon as the pain hits, I squirm.

Nomvuyo: Calm down and allow yourself to feel all of it. Understand the pain, don't try to push it away.

I try by all means to do what she says.

Nomvuyo: Good...

I don't know when my mom got next to Derek...

Nomvuyo: Well done...

Me: Happy Birthday, Star...

He plants a kiss on my lips.

We continue doing breathing exercises, till I feel a bit stable. The uncontrollable shaking has stopped.

Dr: It's time to monitor the heartbeat now...

At this point, Nomvuyo's techniques can't even help me.

I have gone crazy.

I genuinely want to poop. Dr Modisa keeps telling me it's because my body is working hard to reach complete dilation and effacement. I just want to push, now! My vagina is also pulsing, and Dr says it's because the baby's head is moving towards my vaginal opening.

I wanted to give up and get the epidural, but my mom insisted that I don't need it, yet she's the most traumatised out of everyone.

I have been told not to push, no matter how "pushy" I feel.

I'm finished.

There's nothing left in me. These pains have chewed me up and swallowed me.

Dr: Let me check...

I don't even have the energy to react to her finger invading my space.

Dr: Hmm... You are fully dilated!

I look at her, lifeless as fuck.

Dr: We are going to start pushing now.

Nomvuyo: Yay!

I look at Nomvuyo, who's recording all of this.

I don't even have the energy to blink.

I close my eyes.

I want to die. Surely death is better than this shit.

Dr: Ziyanda.

I think I'm dying.

I am lifeless.

Derek: Ziyanda!

I can't bring myself to move or open my eyes.

I feel someone placing the oxygen mask on my face.

Derek: Baby, breathe, please... Please breathe...

The desperation in his voice hits me hard.

I open my eyes and look at him. He's a bit blurry... everything is blurry.

Is he crying?

I want to reach out to him, but I can't.

Dean: Ziyanda, breathe...

I look at Dean... or is it Derek?

I close my eyes again... Blinking is taking up too much of my energy.

Derek: Baby, breathe... I don't want to lose you, please...

I gather up the strength to take a breath.

I touch my belly.

I don't know what happens, but something clicks.

I open my eyes and look at everyone. They look worried.

I take more breaths. I can literally feel the oxygen circulating in my body, igniting something in me.

Dr: And, Ziyanda Dlamini has arrived! Are you ready?

I moan.

I want them to remove this mask, it's suffocating me.

Derek removes it and I exhale deeply.

Dr: Are you ready?

I nod.

Dr: Perfect.

My mom is holding my left hand, and Derek is holding my right hand. Nomvuyo is recording and Dean is standing behind Derek.

Me: Where's my dad??

Mom: He's been vomiting. There is no way he is going to survive this.

Dr: Are you happy with everyone who's here?

I look at everyone and nod.

Dr: I normally don't allow this, but I'll make an exception for you.

The nurse keeps telling me about what is about to happen, but I shut her out. I want them to tell me how to push.

Dr: Okay... We're ready...

She nods, and the nurse tells me to start pushing.

I push.

Dr: Okay, stop.

I stop.

Dr: You're pushing the wrong way... Do not restrict yourself. Push the same way you would if you were pooping.

She chuckles.

Dr: Don't be afraid. I've seen it all, okay?

Me: Okay.

They give me some oxygen before telling me to push once again.

Dr: Push harder...

They count me down and then I stop.

Dr: This push will allow the head to come out. We will push longer and harder, okay?

Me: Okay.

I take a very deep breath.

Dr: Alright, push...

I push as hard as I can...

I continue pushing and pushing...

I feel my vagina opening up.

Dr: Yes! The head is coming out... Push harder... harder... harder...

I can't describe the intensity of this moment.

Dr: Push... push... aaand the head is out!

I sigh heavily and Derek kisses my forehead.

Dr: The difficult part is over... Let's do this... Push slower now, okay?

Me: Okay.

Dr: Go.

I do as I'm told...

The rest of the body literally comes out smoothly.

Before I know it, there are loud cries.

I begin crying like I've never cried before.

I don't know how I feel- it's a wave of emotions.

My baby is out and alive!

Dr: Whooa!

I immediately stop crying and put up my head.

Dr: Oh my goodness!

Derek: What??

Nurse: Wow!

Me: What's wrong??

Dr: It turns out little Nkanyezi is a girl!

Me: WHAT?!

Dr: Congratulations!

Before I can even process anything, the baby is on my chest, and I am crying as loud as him/her.

Dr: Now, it's time to push out the placenta...

I continue crying.

