

A person wearing a denim vest over a white shirt, light blue denim jeans, and brown rubber boots is standing in a garden. They are holding a shovel with a yellow handle and a green head. The background is filled with green foliage and trees. The text "NDABUKO" is overlaid in large, bold, black letters across the top, and "HER YARDNER" is overlaid in white, distressed letters below it. A quote is visible on the left side.

# NDABUKO

## HER YARDNER

"My life was planned by  
a dead man..."

Ndabuko Her Yardner

## Prologue

Everyday he sat under the shelter built a few yards away from where the taxis ranked in the mornings. It was his favourite spot, he liked watching the morning traffic and passengers pushing each other in the queues and the taxi conductors trying to intervene and calm everyone down.

The first time he saw her she was climbing out of a school bus. There was a feud between the municipality buses and them, the Mkhuba taxi association.

He fired shots in front of the bus and the driver hastily pulled up at the side of the road and asked his passengers to alight.

Most of them were school children but he didn't feel

bad. They had warned the parents, it was their stubbornness that put their kids in the middle of a war.

But before the bus driver closed the door, a girl holding her backpack closely to her chest and her braids let down over her lean shoulders, climbed out and looked around fearfully.

She looked nothing over eighteen and by the look on her face, she had never been to the Mkhuba taxi rank before.

She was in matric. She had a name tag loosely hanging beneath her blazer's pocket and somewhere near the school badge was written; Matric Class of 2010.

He didn't feel bad when most of them scattered on the road and tried to find directions to their schools. But with her it was different. He wanted to go closer to her and maybe offer her a lift in his Golf 6, but she didn't look naive.

So, he just followed slowly behind her and sent a

threatening look to the dagga-boys who were starting to throw their dirty eyes at her direction.

He didn't speak to her that day, but he had something to take home; her name, Ndondo Sibisi. A grade 12 student in Greenlake Secondary School.

He wanted to go to her school, maybe just park outside the gate and watch her from a distance, but that would've been creepy. He was bad, everyone in the industry was, it was an essential element to survive the streets. But he wasn't a stalker and he was definitely not a pervert.

It was only a month later when he saw her again. She was with her parents, wearing church uniforms and carrying Bibles. They were walking on Magagula Street, coming from church. Right there and then, he knew that it was going to be hard to get close to her. A church girl was going to ask him to quote a few Bible verses to support his love confession and he wasn't a church person. In his

lifetime he had been inside the church twice, that was during the Easter season when goodies were served after church services and he was still a little boy. He was familiar with pastors only because he attended a lot of funerals. People died like ants in his industry.

He had met her twice; at the taxi rank and on Magagula Street. But she only met him for the first time a day after he saw her with her parents coming from church.

His taxi had a leaking pipe and he was standing with a few other taxi owners trying to fix the problem.

She looked around the rank a few times and then walked straight to him.

As dangerous as his line of work was, some people, especially women, found it safe to be around them. And she saw him, out of all people in the rank, and decided that it was him who was going to show her the taxi to Mangethe without trying any funny move

on her.

“Sawubona Bhuti. Can you help me? I'm looking for a taxi to Mangethe,” she said and innocently looked into his eyes with hope.

He didn't say anything, he just took her hand and crossed the road with her. It was a battle to breathe and act normal while she was just a few inches away from his skin.

“Who are you visiting?” he finally managed to ask.

“Study group,” she said briefly.

“Oh, good luck.”

Awkward silence fell between them after that short conversation.

He wished to say more but he didn't know where to start or what to say.

Maybe as the day went by he was going to sum up the courage to ask her out. He cleared his throat and stopped just a few feet away from the taxi that was loading to Mangethe.

She also stopped and looked at him.

“Can I have your cellphone number, please?” he asked.

She sighed; ‘There he was being a typical taxi man.’

“I don't have a phone. By the way thank you for your time.”

It was just a common line all girls used to avoid giving out their numbers.

“When are you coming back? I'd like to fetch you.”

His question was met by furrowed eyebrows. He swallowed as he realized how impossible it was going to be to even get a chance to introduce himself to her.

She turned around and walked towards the taxi. The conductor ran to her and helped her with the bags.

“I love you,” he said breathily, without even realizing it. He had never said those words to any girl in his life. His life was all about working and surviving the industry.

Her head turned back to him for less than two seconds and then she carried on with her life. She

could've heard him and she could've just turned her head to see if he was still there.

He wasn't a patient man but with her he was going to try. No matter how long it was going to take. One thing he was sure of was that she was going to be a Mngomezulu wife. Ngidi was even tempted to take him to the doctor for a mental analysis when he started planning his future. His future that had her at the centre of everything.

“Nhlanzeko this was supposed to be your legacy. You worked this long and this hard to get out of here. To leave this life and start afresh.” He was in disbelief and he was mad. He loved him like his own son and it drove him crazy to see him waste his time and money on someone he wasn't even sure that he was going to get.

Nhlanzeko tapped his fingers and looked at the documents in his hands carefully. He had no regrets and he had no doubt in his heart that things



were going to work out, in his presence or in his absence.

“Things are getting worse around here. Ndabuko is still too young. If anything happens to me I want you to run this company and when she's ready to take over you'll step down,” he said in his unfazed commanding voice and looked up at Ngidi.

“You cannot speak like that, son,” Ngidi pleaded. He didn't like people who randomly spoke of death because most of the times their words turned into reality.

“You know I love being two steps ahead of everything. I want Ndondo to be comfortable, to live the life of her dreams even when I'm no longer around,” he said and stared into space for a moment. His lips curved into a smile as thoughts crossed his mind. He glanced up at Ngidi who was still worried about his earlier statement.

“If I'm not here she'll live that life with Ndabuko.”

“Nhlanzeko!” Ngidi exclaimed. What was wrong with him? First it was the bursary. He created the

bursary for a girl that didn't even know his name and bribed whoever he bribed at her school to reward it to her under pretense. Then it was the company, Bantwana Holdings, registered under Ngidi's name but belonging to her.

12 January 2011, he got in his Golf 6 and headed to KwaNdamase. Someone had seen her sitting in the tuck-shop with a group of friends and alerted Nhlanzeko. He was going to confess his feelings, he wasn't going to hold anything back and he was going to prove it to her right there and then.

Ten minutes away from reaching KwaNdamase a taxi stopped in front of his car. Shots were fired directly to his seat. The one that took his soul went through his skull and he died within six seconds.

He was 26 years old when he died and it only took one bullet and six seconds for him to succumb to death.

Six years later he visited his brother, Ndabuko, in

his sleep just a day after his huge 26th birthday celebration. There was someone he needed to bring home...his wife, Ndongoyamahlase Princess Sibisi.

Ndabuko Her Yardner

## Chapter 1

I always try my best to avoid hosting people in my house. Having Khosi alone for a glass of wine always leaves me with a pile of dishes to wash, misplaced cushions and magazines lying on the floors. I can't imagine how it would be like hosting, not just her and her crazy twin sisters, but the whole Bantwana Holdings staff members. But they insisted; “Ndondo you're now the CEO, we're coming to throw you a mother of all parties.”

Mother of all parties? I see my cups being broken by the ever-so-clumsy Nsele twins, dirty floors and lipsticks all over my couches. My kitchen will be turned upside down and I'm getting anxiety just from thinking about it.

“The ice guy is here,” Andiswa’s joyful scream comes from the kitchen passage. The only time she gets to drink is during gatherings like these. She's already dressed up and ready to slosh it down. She's been running around like a headless chicken, making sure that everything is set accordingly.

I'm not a strict deputy-parent, I just make sure that she does what she came in Durban to do; studying. If I see that tall guy she was hugging last week again, I won't be responsible for what I'll do. He'll get more than just a glass of water splashing on his face. I don't have a sister who's going to be played by these Durban hood-rats. They inserts themselves under every skirt and plant their seeds everywhere. But when it's time to support they run faster than Caster Semenya running her London Olympics.

I have broken the family curse; I became the first Sibisi graduate, the first female to wear the cardinal red gown, the first two-seater car driver and the first

family member to afford a mansion in Kindlewood estate. Obviously, I, along with my Christ-covered parents, want Andiswa and Bahle to follow up on my footsteps.

“Look up to Ndondo,” – is now the chorus everyone in the family sings. My mother’s sister always tell anyone who cares to stop and listen that; “The Ndondo who drives fancy cars with no roofs is actually her niece and she used to comb her hair every morning before school.” Of course, I don't remember all that softness and pampering. It must've slipped my memory, the Aunt Vumile I remember whipped my ass like it was nobody's business.

“Khosi is here!” Andiswa’s scream again.

I bid goodbye to my squeaky-clean kitchen. The first thing Khosi does when she enters is to open my fridge and drop the container of margarine on the floor.

I hate being this employer but.....

“Aunty can you come here with the mop?” I yell loud enough for her, the aunty, to hear wherever she is.

A woman I've seen around a few times emerges with her cleaning equipment. Before you judge me for not knowing their names just know that I haven't been in the country the last two months and the few weeks that I've been back I've been trying to warm my new CEO seat.

I'm not good at multi-tasking, which is why Andiswa is in charge of all the domestic paperwork, hiring and firing. Besides the misuse of finances; sometimes she takes the money without telling me and invests it in her obsession of sneakers, other than that I think she's doing a good job. For the past two years that she's been here I haven't had any headache regarding my house. Everyone excels on their job. The cook knows what her story with the pots is, whoever cleans the house must be a neat-freak herself and that man I've seen a few times on my yard is friendly with the nature.

“I think you should take this organizing thing seriously. Look at these flute glasses!” Khosi tells Andiswa whose lips are stretched to her ears. My sister and compliments!

“How much are they? Where did you get them? They deserve to serve only the best of the bestest.” She's now scanning Dom Perignon into the tulip glass with a grin of satisfaction brimming from her lips. My friend loves flashy things and more than anything, she loves drinking and having fun.

Andiswa steals a glance at my face with the corners of her eyes before telling her that she ordered the set from Houston and had it shipped for the party that happened last month, in my absence.

“How much were they?” I ask. This child thinks I have a garden of Mandela notes that I harvest from every damn week. Shipping lousy glasses from America for what exactly? And we still have to fill them with our own drinks?

“These are Reed and Barton, they're worth every cent, I've been on the hunt for them ever since I

started breathing. Pass me the ice-cube tray there,” Khosi says, waving away my rising anger. I clench my teeth in composure and exhale breathily before turning to the freezer.

“She's careless with the money,” I imply to the organizing idea she was coming up with. Who'd want the organizer that orders chairs from the Europe? She's fine there in the filming industry. Maybe when she finally goes to Johannesburg, the city of so-called gold, to pursue her filming career she'll understand the value of money.

“I'm a blessing in your life,” she murmurs and moves behind the counter before I can turn to her.

“Blessing?” I let out a brief chuckle and shake my head. A blessing that's going to bankrupt me before I even get my own kids?

“Yes, she's a blessing. Look around you and remember how this house looked like before Andiswa came here and did her magic,” Khosi jumps into her defense.

Ganging up on me as usual. I roll my eyes and pick



the immigrant-glass and pour myself a drink.

When Nakho and Nalo arrive the party officially starts. No party begins before these two birds of the same feather make their grand entrance. It's always been like that, they bring the glam and the vibe. As soon as they entered in their matching glittering black outfits and blonde-dyed dreadlocks, Snakho demanded the DJ to change his playlist to something more-Ndondo like.

I had my uptight ass on the chair the whole time before they arrived and I was mentally judging every movement the guests were making, but when the DJ turned up Patoranking my feet carried me to the dance floor and I found myself dancing and twerking.

“Yes Boss-Lady,” Snalo screams with the bottle of champagne in the air. Everyone starts chanting my name, she pops the bottle and orders me to open my mouth. I do party from time to time but I don't do these crazy things.

Maybe I can do it this one time to get them off my back because they won't stop chanting my name if I don't.

DJ Neptune bursts through the speakers and I find myself dancing in the arms of my least favourite associate, the arrogant Xolani Mavimbela who thinks the world is his oyster.

I should take a break before the wine leads me into doing things I'll regret later.

I sit with Khosi and few other ladies from the production department. We are catching up in the kitchen, leaving the rest party-animals to their noise in the backyard.

“Do you still remember that you owe those Tinder guys their dates?” Khosi really has no timing. Now she's discussing my personal affairs in front of my employees? Hhayi khona.

“Senzo from Transnet has been pestering and begging me to tell him when you're going to be free,” she continues and everyone's ears are

sharpened up.

“Not now Khosi,” I say, hoping that she'll get the hint. But she's Khosi and the tipsy Khosi has no stoppers.

“We don't want to have a salty boss who'll snap at us over minor mistakes. You need to get laid,” she says.

They want to laugh, she's their Trevor Noah, but my icy stare has them sipping on their glasses with silent grins stretching from their lips.

Someone walks in. Thank God, their attention is turned to him for a moment.

“Sanibonani,” he greets and looks at me. It's the yard man, I'm not familiar with their faces, I'm hardly home. Even when I am here their boss is technically Andiswa, she deals with them and I deal with real work.

“I think the pipe outside is blocked, the tap hasn't been working the whole day. Can I wash my hands inside and...” Oh, Andiswa needs to attend to this matter tomorrow morning.

“There's a bathroom at the end of this passage,” I say and turn my attention to the ladies on the table who look awe-stricken for some reasons.

“He cleans your yard?” Betty asks, pointing where the man disappeared with her thumb.

“Yes,” I nod my head and fill my glass. Oh shucks, we've ran out of the ice-cubes.

“What's his name?”

I look up and find them staring at me curiously.

“I don't know his name,” I say and shrug my shoulders.

Eyes widen!

They shouldn't look at me like that. I can't know every human being there is under the sun. It's a not compulsory.

“He cleans your yard and you don't know his name?” Khosi. Now she wants to be Judge Judy, more than anyone on this table she knows how crazy my schedule can be. She's the one who arranges it, duh.

“I’m hardly home,” I say and give her a stern look.

The man walks back with his gloves folded in his hand and we cut the conversation like church-gossips. He looks around uncomfortably and then his eyes land on me.

“Thank you Hlasekazi,” he says, bows his head slightly and walks out the door.

The atmosphere is light again after his exit. He has saved me from the “get-a-boyfriend” talk. We are now gossiping about Xolani who thought his presence would have everyone falling down on his feet. His father is a shareholder at Bantwana and I’ll see more of his arrogant ass from now going forward. He’s one of those who thought I didn’t stand a chance at this position and now he’s here to celebrate my victory. That’s the reality of life; everyone wants to rise with you, even those who stepped on you when you were down.

They honor my request, everyone leaves before 19h00 and they don’t leave too much mess behind.

Xolani invites them to his house for another round of drinks. It's just a show-off, I heard that his father recently brought him a mansion. I had to drag Andiswa out of his car back inside the house. I know men like him, the type that pops expensive bottles and make girls twerk for them.

“I'm twenty-one, not fifteen.” She throws her hands up and sinks on the couch angrily.

“There's no need for you to go there,” I say.

“I want to have fun like everybody else.”

“Andiswa!” My tone sends a warning.

She exhales and picks an almost-empty bottle from the floor and deliberately empties it into her mouth.

“The yard man said the pipe outside is blocked. Can you attend to it before Monday? Tomorrow I'm going to see Aunt Vumile,” I say.

“Why would you go there on a Sunday? She'll drag you to church and put you on the spotlight.” She's right, but I have memorized my escape strategy. I have nothing against God, in fact I pray to him every

chance that I get, my problem is the pastor who thinks that his son and I are a match-made from heaven. Everytime I go to that church they start treating me like a daughter-in-law and their son's ego builds up into mountains. Just like any other girl, he expects me to jump and twerk at the idea of being married to a surgeon. The shock on his face everytime I turn down his extravagant lunch invites!

“Did Mngomezulu complain about anything else beside the blocked pipe?” she asks.

“Mngomezulu?” I'm lost.

“The yard man,” she says.

“Oh! It was only that. I should get some sleep.” I get off the couch and drag myself to the bedroom.

Monday I have a board meeting, there are a lot of expectations to be met, some had their eyes on the position and they'll be keeping tabs on my progress like hawks. I won't be long at my aunt's house, I'm only delivering her medications and grabbing a cup of tea to avoid looking like a rich-snobish cousin, then I'm coming back to start drafting my Monday

propos als.

When I wake up Andiswa is sleeping on the couch. Empty bottles are lying all over the floor. This is why I don't want her to drink, once she starts she doesn't stop. The cleaner is off today, I clear everything with the broom and dust the furniture. She'll do the rest when she wakes up.

I'm not big in the kitchen, I cook for the stomach, not the tastebuds. I know Andiswa won't eat this food I'm leaving for her, she'll order in or go eat out. It doesn't bother me, you can't be good at everything, at least I know how to bake scones.

My timing is perfect, the family is still watching some gospel show, by the time they ready themselves for church I'll be long gone.

You'd swear that Aunt Vumile was born in Bethlehem next to Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that she forced her husband and kids to sit and watch this show. I'm sure she even dreams of the



almighty son in her sleep.

“Is this my Ndondo?” She rises from the couch with her smile widened and arms stretched. You'd think that just because she's a die-hard Christian she walks around wearing long robes with “Hallelujah” boldly written on the back, but that's not the case with Maria's cousin here. She's a huge fan of skirt-suits and pantyhose. I'm not saying her wigs are still in the game, but when she puts those curls on, wears her pantyhose and black pumps, she immediately throws all the women in the house out of the game.

“Didn't you hear me drive in?” I ask while hugging her. Oh Lord, her body sprays! This woman is going to be the Beyonce of heaven when she dies. The likes of Maria will be running to her for fashion advices when they want to charm the likes of Davids and Holy Spirit.

“Is it not your uncle who has a hearing problem? We have to turn the volume to maximum for him to hear. But I told the pastor about it and he'll pray for him.”

Yeah, right. I was also prayed for so many times.

“I brought your medication. You have an appointment next Tuesday, I'll fetch you during the day.”

She takes the package, thanks God and disappears into her bedroom. I settle on the couch and glue my eyes on the screen while thinking about my upcoming meeting.

A cup of coffee and scones disturb me. No matter what your dietician said, when she gives you her scones and creamy coffee you eat like there's no tomorrow. Baking delicious scones must be a skill acquired from church because all these church-obsessed women in my family can play with the flour.

“You're so thin. You're paying those people enough money they should cook you real food,” she complains while plaiting knots on her head; for the church's hat to fit perfectly.

“You always say that, aunty.” I must excuse myself immediately, before ideas of taking me to church

for the pastor to pray for my weight start filling her head.

“That's because you're always thin. I will pack potatoes for you, you need to eat real food. Do you have maize meal in that mansion of yours?”

“Aunty I can afford to buy....” She slides into her flip-flops and heads towards the kitchen. She's throwing her hands up and mumbling her complaints about ‘the educated youth that don't even know how to do a proper grocery, all they know is buying pizzas and Facebook.’

I have fresh potatoes in my house and I have no space to store her crinkly-skinned ones. I was taught important life lessons growing up, one of them being grateful for everything that you have. Many people go to bed on hungry stomachs everyday and my mother always advised us against throwing away food. But who's going to take ugly potatoes like these? It would look like an insult, people are very sensitive out there.

I leave them on the counter and collect the bin bag from the storage room. I stumble on a piece of paper neatly folded and placed next to the lime hand-gloves on top of an old washing machine. Out of curiosity, I unfold the paper and run my eyes over the words written inside: “HOPE =Hold-On-Pain-Ends.”

I copy these words on my notebook and make a mental note to have them printed so that I can put them somewhere in my study room for when the going gets tough.

The most impossible thing to do is working while Andiswa is playing music loud and horribly singing along to it.

I need to find a peaceful spot outside where I can work without any disturbances. I take my notepad and laptop and head out.

Behind the house, hiding on the left side of the bed of asters, is a tree stump. Of course I've never seen it before, it's painted blue on the bottom and curved

with a STAR sign on its top. Where has this spot been my whole life? It's like a little world of tranquility. The fresh scents from the garden and chirping sounds of the birds isolate my mind from everything and absorb me into self.

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I'm not a heavy sleeper, I've never been one, not even in varsity. In Zulu they say "ayikho inkomo yobuthongo" and that's been my motto ever since I started hunting down success. But today I woke up just seconds away from 7h35 and I ran to the bathroom like a madwoman. At nine sharp I have a group of grey-haired men who've invested their last cents into the company and I need to assure them that the company is on the right direction. I can't be late. If it was any other day I would've asked Aunty to iron my grey suit instead of this pencil, white dress. To put a more professional look I cover my shoulders with a formal black blazer.

I straighten my weave and brush my eyebrows,

there's no time for make-up. Chop-chop! I'm out with my bags and running to the car.

“Hlase...” Not today! They know who to talk to when they have problems. I can't be late for my meeting because of domestic issues. And what makes him call me this way? Not that I hate it, it's just a bit off, however I prefer it over “madam.” That one makes me feel like a white woman of the Apartheid era.

“Take it to Andiswa,” I say and silence him with a hand. I unlock the car, throw my bags at the back and hop on my seat and drive out.

Khosi has a cup of coffee and a muffin ready for me in the office. I don't know what I'd do without her. Mr Ngidi was reluctant about her but I insisted. I wanted the girl of deadlocks who, against the rules of every company in the world, carried out her interview in Zulu. She answered every damn question in Zulu and her reason was that the whole interview panel were Zulus, so she didn't see the need to use a foreign language to communicate.

Mr Ngidi, the former CEO, worried that she was going to mess up my schedules and turn my office upside down. But if I was going to get a PA it was going to be her, nobody else! I liked her, something about her confidence and steadiness drew me to her.

Six months later her twin sisters, Snakho and Snalo, were here and working in the production department. I swear it wasn't me who she bribed for them to get the jobs.

“How did you know that I skipped breakfast?” I ask and bite a huge chunk of the muffin. Delicious!

“Because I know how you become if you have an early meeting. You look gorgeous without make-up by the way. Japan treated your skin well,” she says.

I doubt my skin can be flawless as hers, no matter where in the world I go. I remember back in the days I'd go to her house and steal her facial skin products so that I can have a skin beautiful as hers. But she's a natural chestnut and she only does those skin scrubbing routines once in a while.

“Forget about my skin, that Senzo guy dm’ed me. Did you tell him to?” I ask.

“Yes,” she says boldly.

She's unbelievable!

“Khosi! I can't go out on dates right now. I just got promoted, my whole attention should be on taking this company to another level, not men.”

“Nobody is asking you to go out during the office hours. You need to chill and live your life Ndondo. Soon you'll be 30 and single.”

“And what's wrong with that?” I ask.

She picks her iPad and sways her hips towards the door.

“Saturday evening. Snakho will do your make-up and I will bring the outfit.” She strides out before I can object. Do I really have no say in my own life? And why is this Senzo not going after the girls in his area? I bet they're tired of him. Cookie-chaser.

There's a knock at the door. I let out a sigh and put



away the document I was trying to review. The meeting starts in the next thirty minutes, I really need this time to myself.

It's Bab' Mbambo, the security guard.

“Ndondo yegolide,”

A smile spread from my face. This is how he calls me. He has a warm aura. He has always treated me like a daughter. From the first day I stepped on the grounds of this company as nothing more than just a marketing officer, he'd playfully tell me that I'll go far in life; “Wena ngane yakwaSibisi uzoya kude nempilo.”

When I got that call from Mr Ngidi saying that he was stepping down and he needed me to catch the first flight back in the country, his words rang in my ears like a prophecy.

“Baba,” I say and step aside for him to get in. But he doesn't walk in. He stands with a freckled smile and stares at me for a few seconds.

“You look very beautiful today, you remind me of my late daughter,” he says.

I know that his daughter is a heavy subject so I don't dig much about her. I just listen to those bits that he's willing to share and celebrate her memory with him.

“We should hang out this weekend. You've never really hung out with the CEO,” I say.

He chuckles and nods his head. Look at me making other plans about my life! Khosi will kill me.

“There's a boy looking for you at the reception area,” he says.

Gosh, not now. Who's that boy anyway? I don't entertain boys in my workplace.

“Tell him to leave,” I say.

“He said it's urgent and trust me, he looks like someone who jumped out of the hole and ran here.”

“What's his name?” I ask.

He frowns and clicks his fingers a numerous times. Sometimes I worry about him, he should be sitting at home and enjoying his marriage. He's too old to be guarding gates. But his type is stubborn. He

brushes off the subject everytime I suggest that he retires.

“Ndabuko...yeah, I think that's what he said,” he says and nods his head to verify his thoughts.

I don't know anyone by that name. I pull the door behind me and follow him to the reception area. Precious is late again, she's still not on her desk. I'm getting tired of talking to her about one thing, there are so many people who'd like to have this job.

“There he is,” Bab' Mbambo says, pointing at..the yard man from my house?

He's wearing the same dungaree and boots. My mind quickly runs to Andiswa and fear creeps up to my bones.

“Did anything happen?” I ask before he can shift his eyes from Bab' Mbambo who's staring at him as if he's daring him to do something stupid.

“No, you dropped this. I tried to stop you but you were in a hurry.”

My flash drive! What was I going to present in the

meeting? Everything is stored here. My Gosh!

“Thank you so much. I don't know how this happened, I lost track of time and I was...fuck!” I cannot believe this. I didn't even check when I got here.

“It's okay, I'm glad you got it on time. I have to get back to work.” He glances at Bab' Mbambo's now melted face and then gives me a nod of goodbye.

He makes his way out as Precious runs in with a fake apologetic look on her face.

“My boyfriend's car broke....” I really don't have ears to listen to her excuses today. I leave her explaining to Bab' Mbambo.

Khosi is in the office, applying polish on her nails. Trust her to do this twenty minutes before the meeting.

“I was wondering where you disappeared to,” she says.

I sink on my chair and let out a deep sigh.

“You won't believe what happened. I dropped the flash drive at the yard and the yard man came to bring it. I don't know what I would've done,” I say.

She blows on her right hand to dry up the nail polish and then lends me her unbothered attention.

“And this yard man of yours doesn't have a name?”

I can't believe this is what she caught from all this. I left a bloody flash drive with all our hard work at home, hello!

“His name is Ndabuko. Andiswa calls him Mngomezulu, so I guess he's Ndabuko Mngomezulu in full. Anything else Miss-Know-Them-All?”

“Yes. How did he get here and how is he getting back to the house?” She stares at me. My mouth is hanging open. How did Ndabuko get here? And most importantly, how is he getting back to the house? It's about 20 minutes away from here.

“Call him and tell him to wait for the car by the road. He just saved your ass, the least you could do is provide him with transport back to the house. In

fact, you should've given him a day off. The poor guy must've walked all the way here to save the boss who hardly ever talks to him.”

I'm not the kindest person on earth, sometimes I think less about others, especially if I have no personal relationship with them. Right now I feel like the Devil's PA. He shouldn't have come here after the way I spoke and silenced him when he tried to speak to me earlier. It baffles me how he was able to ignore my unkind gestures and came here.

My hope of getting his contact details dies when Andiswa's phone rings unanswered.

“I'm cruel, aren't I?” I sigh and lean back on the chair hopelessly.

“No, you're self-absorbed,” she says with a mocking smirk on her face.

“Sounds better, you're a good friend,” I say.

She rolls her eyes and blows her left hand's nails.

“Now stop saying you don't know the poor guy. He's Ndabuko, your yardner.”

Ndabuko Her Yardner

## Chapter 2

I look at the documents in front of me that contain their background information. Mam' Zodwa started working as a cook when she was just twenty-three, she had a long working relationship with a woman named Mrs Priyanka in Stanger and she speaks highly of her. She has four kids and two grandchildren and she resides in Waterloo.

Hloniphile has worked in several retail stores as a cleaner. There's nothing much about her. She doesn't have children and she lives with her parents. She's only 32 years old, I have to stop calling her Aunty.

Ndabuko graduated in aeronautical engineering from Wits and he has actually worked with Airbus

Industries for two years. A guy like him would have something a bit more concrete on his name but his past is just blank. All there's here is his educational background, his residential address that points him at Umlazi and his age; he's 27 years old. He's never worked as a gardener or a yard cleaner anywhere, this is his first job of this kind and I can't help but feel sorry for him. Bantwana Holdings had already approached me and offered me a job when I graduated, but I know the struggle most young South Africans go through even after obtaining higher education qualifications. Education is no longer the key to success; connections are.

Now that I know a little bit about them maybe I should take Khosi's advice and try to be friendly and get closer to them. After all, these people take care of my house and look after Andiswa when I'm not home. They're like family, Hloni and Mam' Zodwa have been working in my house for over a year now. It's Ndabuko who was hired a week after I left for Japan. He personally stood at the gate and begged Andiswa for a job and she ended up hiring him to



look after the yard.

“There's a staff meeting at the reception, just briefings from the management and disciplinary for a few machine operators.” That's Khosi letting herself in with her blabbering mouth already loosely opened. I lift my head up and look at her. She tosses my car keys to me. “Other than that, you've reached the end of your schedule for the day, you can go home and relax. Remember you're going on a date after tomorrow, you need to rest so that you'll glow,” she says and starts packing my bag. I'm only going on this date for her, I just want her to buzz off, I don't care about the glow.

“What's this?” She snatches the documents in my hands and briefly runs her eyes over them. Then she frowns and looks at me eyes-widened.

“He has a degree?” She's asking about Ndabuko. I was shocked as well, I guess books cannot be judged by their covers for real.

“Aeronautical engineering, can you believe it? And he's cleaning people's yards!” I release a sigh and

push back my chair. It's been a long day, I need a cold shower and a glass of wine.

“I'm not saying your yard doesn't deserve him, he's doing a great job there, but I think you can help him find something more decent. He's capable of more,” she says.

“I'll speak to Andiswa, most of the times I get home after they've knocked off,” I say.

“Yoh, some people are unlucky, the poor guy!” She claps her hands in disbelief and collects the empty tea cup on the desk and disappears.

I drive past Mount Edgecombe Plaza to get a few items and then drive home. Andiswa has a couple of friends over and their conversation is held in roof-bursting voices as if one of them has a hearing problem.

I drop the shopping bags on the kitchen counter.

“Hello guys and bye,” I say and disappear into the spine-glass stairway leading to the upper floor.

I strip my clothes off and fold them into the washing basket. As if someone knew the exhausting day that I had, there's a bottle of Hogan Chenin Blanc on top of the Filbook bedside pedestal.

I down a glass before stepping into the shower. I love the feeling of cold water running down the sides of my body like a waterfall and drenching every inch of my skin. My mind just fades into a different world; everything becomes a foggy illusion. It takes my mind off everything. I have an OCD and I spend most of the time worrying about things that don't matter to most people.

I slide into a fleece-lined hoodie, cuffed joggers and slippers. I'm very lucky that I discovered that tranquil spot behind the yard, this noise they're making here would've distracted me. I grab a box of grapes and a bottle of water from the fridge and make my way outside.

And then? Why is Ndabuko sitting on my tree stump?

I thought he has left.

When he sees me coming he jumps off it and looks at me a bit shaken off.

“This is my spot,” I tease. But he doesn’t get it, instead he looks even more frightened. Am I that uptight that even when I try to crack a joke people look frightened?

“I’m kidding. I only found this spot last week. Did you bring this stump here? Was it painted and designed like this or you did it? I really like it. And it's next to the garden, it's very calming...”

Owkaaaaay. I clear my throat and stop.

He's been frowning the whole time that I was talking. Is it that weird when I talk?

“How are you?” he finally asks and for some reasons I have so many things to tell him. Like my meeting with Mr Jones, signing two new clients and Hlomuka Logistics renewing their contract with us. How can I forget the fight between some guy from the maintenance and his babymama who showed up at the gate with the baby in her arms and yelled

at him about his poor bedroom performance and small penis.

“And Khosi wants me to go on a date with some guy from Transnet this Saturday,” I sum it all up with a sigh.

“A date?” His lip is curved up. Eyebrow raised.

“Yeap, and she'll kill me if I don't go. So, I'll just postpone taking Bab' Mbambo out until next week.”

“The security guard?” he asks.

“Yes, he's like a father from the workplace. I haven't really hang out with him since I came back from Yokohama,” I say.

“Who is this guy? His name?” His lip is still curved up to express something I can't explain.

“Senzo Machi, I think that's what is said,” I say and shrug my shoulders.

He nods his head and continue staring at me.

He's not sitting on the stump, I guess he's letting me have it. I slide on top of it and open the box of grapes.

“Do you like grapes?” I ask and pull out the box to him. He only takes a few and returns it back. I guess he's not really a fan.

“You have the aeronautical engineering degree?” I ask.

He clears his throat and does a thing of scratching the side of his face with one finger. This man looks fine. I mean it, he has the looks and beneath this dungaree is a model waiting to be discovered.

“Yes, I do.” He lacks the pride. He has a whole engineering degree, hello. But I understand, there's no joy in bragging about something that's floating on the dust in your house and benefiting you with nothing.

“I'm not saying I have connections but I know people who know people from higher places,” I say.

His eyebrow is cocked up the whole time.

“I know that you're capable of more than just cleaning the yard and doing the garden,” I say. Hopefully I'm making sense.

“Oh, okay.” He nods his head reluctantly and scratches his cheek with a finger again.

“Bring your CV, certified copies of your ID and certificates, and I’ll see what I can do,” I say.

He smiles but it doesn't reach his eyes. Then he rubs his palms together.

“I appreciate that Hlasekazi, I really do, but I don't want another job. I'm fine here and I enjoy doing what I do.”

This is strange. Why is he giving up on his dreams so easily?

“You'll earn more money, Ndabuko,” I say.

“It's not about the money,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

“What is about?” I'm really confused. Everything is about money in this world.

“It's about happiness,” he says.

“You're happy cleaning someone's yard for the rest of your life?” He needs to be serious. We're living here, not practicing to be living.

“Maybe,” he says and smiles. His smile is contagious, I also find myself smiling and shaking my head at his lack of ambition.

“Where do you live and how do you get there?” I ask.

“I live somewhere in town and a friend always picks me up,” he says.

It's time I return the favour. This guy saved my life Monday and I haven't got the chance to thank him with anything.

“I will drive you home today,” I say.

He freezes. Am I being too forward?

“If you don't mind,” I add, awkwardly.

He clears his throat and flashes that fake grin again.

“No, I don't mind at all, in fact I'd enjoy getting your lift. But I'm not going straight home, there's somewhere I need to go first. Somewhere private.”

Oh! This is disappointing but I have to respect his decision. Maybe he's going to his girlfriend and he's scared that it will give her the wrong ideas.



“More grapes?” I ask.

He shakes his head.

“No, thank you, I need to say goodbye to Andiswa and go.”

“You say goodbye to her before leaving?” I ask in awe. I hope he's not trying to make funny moves on my little sister.

“Yes. She's a great kid by the way.”

I burst into laughter. Did he just call her a kid? Andiswa would die.

“Be safe,” I tell him.

“Thank you Hlasekazi, stay well.”

This...why doesn't he call me Ndondo like everybody else?

“Why do you call me like that?” My question stops him five steps away. He looks back with his eyes squinted against the sun that is setting down.

“Nomashingila kaBango. Do you want me to call you Nomashingila because you live to that one?”

His question confuses me but I'm laughing. Ukushingila can be translated as flouncing off or modelling in a traditionally Zulu way which I think he's referring to. I do own the grounds when I walk and I can sell my confidence for a million. As a young girl I'd frequently get; “yaze yashingila bo le ntombi,” wherever I go and pass a group of men. He chuckles and jogs on, leaving me bursting my stomach.

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“Ndondo yegolide,” It's Bab' Mbambo making his way towards my car. “You're in a hurry today?”

“Urgh! I have a date. I was just dropping a few files for Mr Mavimbela,” I say.

“Naziya! Sibisi also wants cows, you young people think money and cars are everything. We want cows for our daughters, we want to marry you off and go to our graves in peace knowing that we're leaving you in safe places.”

He was born in 1964, marriage still matters more than anything to him. I remember back in the days when Mr Ngidi was still the CEO and we'd sit by the gate and gossip about him. One thing he used to single out was that Ngidi will remain a boy because he has no wife. He'd say; "I don't care how rich he is or how many taxis his sons have, to me he's a boy, uyongcwatshwa ngothwalofu," (-he'll be buried at 12o'clock- a standard time to bury someone who is unmarried back in the rural areas.)

"Baba you still call nowadays men 'safe places' whereas thousand of women die in their hands daily?" I ask.

"It's this thing of not marrying, I'm telling you. Nowadays men spread their seeds everywhere and leave children being raised by mothers single-handedly. In our time a boy child was groomed by men, uncles and head-chiefs. And there was induna yezinsizwa in every village. Do you know the job of induna yezinsizwa?"

I need to put these things inside the car, I might leave after two hours. Lord, why did I start this

conversation?

“He guides the village men and protect them,” I say.

He nods and steps closer with his hands positioned forward for explanations.

“Not only that. You know when selecting induna yezinsizwa we’d choose someone with dignity. Someone with the right voice and respect for manhood, culture and traditions. In our time induna yezinsizwa called men for imbizo every month and we would groom each other and share advices. Let's say there's someone who's having marriage problems...” Lord, why are we saying that? Khosi is going to kill me if I'm late for this date, she'll think I did it on purpose.

“We'd never advise him to become Mike Tyson with the poor woman. Instead, we'd give him strong mixtures of herbs that would keep him up and strong the whole night. Umfazi othola induku yethusi akahluphi, umbhule nje.”

My stomach is going to burst and these other security guards will think we're planning something

against them or mocking them for something. Most of them are new and not used to our relationship.

“But some men also raped and kill women in your time,” I say.

“It wasn't fashion. Your agemates are doing these barbaric acts out of fashion and those stupid lawyers would be like ‘nywe nywe he's not mental stable,’ nonsense man! If you're mental unstable start by pulling a cow's tail- dons a ishoba lenkomo then we'll see that you need help,” he says.

“Only if someone pulls a cow's tail you believe that he's not okay upstairs?” I have tears rolling down my cheeks.

“Niyadlala nina Ndondo! What kind of a mental unstable man waits for the robot to turn green before crossing the road but when inserting himself in a woman without permission he's mental unstable? Mbhekeni lo hulumeni, Ndondo.

Mbhekeni!” He pushes his arms behind his back and walks away. Another duty; looking into the current government. He needs to be checked!!!

Oh hell, Khosi and Nakho are already here. I'm in trouble!

“Seriously Ndondo?” She's pissed.

“Bab' Mbambo kept me with his stories. Where am I meeting this Senzo and what am I wearing?” This whole date is hers. She'll determine what I wear and where I meet this guy.

“9th Avenue Waterside. Worry about getting this face fixed for now, I'll get the outfit ready,” she says and marches off.

Nakho impatiently pulls me down on the couch and starts scrubbing my face with a wet wipe.

“Now we don't have enough time, we'll only do the basics. By 4pm you need to be at the restaurant, Senzo will find you there,” she says.

I have to drive myself there?!

“He's not picking me up?” I ask.

“He had to rush his mother to a sick relative. You can wait for him if you want to, but know that the

date will delay and you may be back home after seven.”

What? No. I'd rather drive myself there than to be home that late. I don't want him to get the “sleep-over” ideas.

“I thought as much. Fold your lips for me.” She's not a professional make-up artist. Some people just know how to do these things naturally. I can put a mascara on, lay the foundation perfectly and do my eyebrows. But I don't know how to trim them, I can't glue the eyelashes on and I don't think I'll ever be able to do the eyeshades.

“I don't want to be too bright,” I tell her.

“I know babe. Can you keep your mouth and eyes shut?”

I'm probably getting annoying. I follow the instructions and sit still for almost twenty minutes. Beauty doesn't only come at a price, it's time consuming as well.

“Done. Look at this doll!” She's satisfied with her own skills. I grab the mirror from her hand and stare

at the reflection of my face. I don't recognize myself. My nose is sharper, my cheeks look like sand walls and the eyelashes are too heavy and moving rhythmically when I blink.

“Are you happy?” she asks.

“I love it but I wouldn't survive on this heavy make-up on daily basis, I feel like a walking painting,” I say.

“Women are art babe. This guy better compensate all these effort with a mind-blowing orgasm and lot of cash.”

I wouldn't mind the ‘lot of cash’ but the mind-blowing orgasm can miss me. I'm not opening my legs for every Dick and Tom that I go on a date with. It'll take more than one date for us to get there.

Khosi forces me into a thigh-revealing wrap dress and cut-out heels. She insists that I'm not overdressed and sprays me with a Gucci Bamboo to the point of nose-blocking.

“Go represent us, girl!” She kisses my cheek and



starts taking pictures. I have a feeling that this won't turn out the way they're expecting.

I'm not that punctual myself but I do respect people's time. What kind of a man in his right mind makes a girl wait for him for over thirty minutes? I'm on my second drink now and this Senzo guy is nowhere to be seen. To make this even worse he has switched his phone off after calling me and asking me to order.

The food is here and turning cold. Where the fuck is he? I have better things to do with my time.

“Ndondo,” the voice comes from behind and startles me.

I turn around and find this sweaty man, walking barefooted and looking like he just jumped out of a moving train.

“And you are?” I ask.

“Senzo Machi. I'm sorry I'm this late, something...”  
Lord! Lord! Lord! What is this? His head is a horrible

mess. His hair look like it was cut with a scissor and some parts were shaven with a hair-remover. Do I look like a joke? What happened to the Tinder guy I saw in the pictures? He did look like this but he was a decent man. He had a car, neat afro and colgate-white set of teeth.

“I will explain what happened. Can I get something to drink first?” he asks.

I give him a “suit yourself” shrug. He downs a glass of beer I ordered for him and proceeds to my wine and gulps it all down. It spills on his creased shirt as he tries to swallow it all at once.

“I was hijacked,” he finally says.

I think I know this story. I've read it on Facebook a couple of times in those worst date threads; a guy gets hijacked on his way to the date and the lady ends up paying for everything and giving him money for the transport back home.

“A taxi with three guys pulled up in front of me. They took my car keys, cellphone, wallet and shoes. Then they roughed me up with slaps and shaved my

hair like this.”

“Have you ever thought of writing for Mzansi Bioskop? You're really good Senzo,” I say and tap my fingers for the waiter.

“You have to believe me Ndondo. I've been looking forward to this day for months, I'm not spinning you a story.”

Deep breath Ndondo! I lift my eyebrow and look at him while taking a bill from the waiter.

“Are you going to pay for this food? How are you getting home?” I ask.

He rubs his neck and gives me a puppy look.

“I will pay you back, I promise,” he says.

Funny! I settle the bill and toss him a R50 note. I hate men who do this. I wouldn't be surprised if that whole Transnet story was a lie as well. He's going straight to blockville.

“Ndondo please believe me. I was hijacked by some taxi idiots, I swear.”

“I believe you and it's okay. I'm just going home,

please do enjoy your meal.” I pick my bag up and find my way to the exit door. I can't believe I came all this way to feed a man and give him transport money. He's never seeing my face again, he'll only see it in the pictures.

[03/14, 08:57] : Chapter 3

Khosi says Senzo has been trying to reach to me and he's asking to be unblocked. Apparently, his car and all his belongings were left outside his house by the hijackers. I don't know what kind of a prank he was playing on me and I don't care to find out.

I haven't even healed properly from Saturday's embarrassment but Khosi is already suggesting that I agree to the second guy's date. I need a month or so to catch a break.

My Wednesday was very short, I have decided to take myself out with Bab' Mbambo for an evening snack and a couple of drinks. He'll knock off around 4pm, so long I'll be in the house and refreshing my

mind.

I find Hloni grilling something on the stove, I greet her and walk past. I guess Andiswa isn't home yet which is even great.

I kick off the high heels, slip into my sandals and exit through the balcony door to stand over the rails and watch the quiet street. I notice him working next to the pool in his dungaree and instantly remember that I haven't seen him since Thursday.

He probably won't hear or see me waving at him over here, I quickly turn back inside the house and follow down the stairway.

“Madam,”

Gosh, not this title!

“It's Ndondo...is everything okay?” I ask.

For a moment she looks puzzled. Obviously my relationship with her hasn't improved as mine with Mam' Zodwa and Ndabuko. Ndabuko never started

on this “madam” title, on our very first interaction I was Hlasekazi to him. And Mam’ Zodwa has gone from “Madam” to my name, Ndondo.

“Andiswa just called a few minutes ago, she’ll be home late,” she says.

“Why didn’t she call me directly?” I ask.

“I don’t know.” She shrugs her shoulders. I release a sigh of defeat, I have a bad feeling about this. Didn’t that tall boy disappear as I told him to? When was the last time I had “the talk” with Andiswa?

Nowadays children forget easily, I need to remind her again.

“Okay thank you for letting me know,” I say and walk out.

Maybe this time I need an intervention; Khosi and the joined force of her twin sisters. I need to be practical instead of trying to prevent nature, she’s obviously in the stage of sexual cravings and the best I could do is make sure that she’s well-informed about the whole thing. As the eldest one I never got anyone teaching about those things, my

mother's Christianity didn't allow her to hold such sacred conversation with a child. But from a very young age I was a success-hungry girl, I had no time for boys until that day a strange man decided to protect me at the taxi rank during some taxi fights and professed his love for me in a low whisper a month later. I never got to see him again and Khosi advised me to let go of fantasies. My trip to Japan released me from a lot of things, one of them being a fantasy that one day, somehow, somewhere, I'll meet that man and we'll have a fairytale love story.

“Ndondo you don't even know his name. He probably died or got married or even left the country,” Khosi would say with a defeated look on her face everytime I tried to excuse my abstention by saying I had a man waiting for me somewhere. Before leaving for DUT back in 2011 to further my studies I went back to the taxi rank where I had first met him and he wasn't there. I didn't know his name nor his surname. Finding him was a mission impossible since I didn't even have his picture. And

I kept asking myself; what kind of a girl turns the town upside down for a man who showed interest in her only twice? I'm still backwards like that, I believe in a man sweating to initiate the relationship, not me.

“Mngomezulu,” I greet and lie back on the sun lounger that's facing the pool.

He takes his gloves off, puts down the leaf rake and joins me.

“You never get dirty?” I ask and look up at him with my eyes shielded by the hand.

“I'm just careful. How was your day?” he asks.

“Not bad. I have a date with Bab' Mbambo at 5pm, we'll have a snack and drinks. That will brighten everything up.”

“You love going on dates?” he asks.

“I love going out with Bab' Mbambo. Not these Durban chancers,” I say.

He's looking at me with a slight frown on his face. I release a sigh and take him through my date with



Senzo.

“Maybe he really got hijacked,” he says and keeps his eye narrowed at me. He's a man, obviously he wants to defend his gender.

“I really don't care Ndabuko. I'm not interested in going on a second date with him or even see him again,” I say.

He balances his elbow on the top slat and lowers his eyes to me. His curving lip gives me some bubbly feeling that unsettles my nerves.

“If I were to ask you out on a date, show up looking decent and settle the bill, would you say yes?”

Oh, hell no. I laugh and look away. I hoped he was going to laugh along with me but he's dead serious.

“Ndabuko you're my employee. Obviously I wouldn't even think about it,” I say.

For a moment he's just staring at me and not saying anything. Being around him is starting to feel different. I want to look at him but at the same time I feel like if I keep looking at his face whatever it is

that pulls me to him will become stronger, and I can't have that.

“Is that the only reason?” He lowers his eyelids.

I nod my head before I even think through.

“Let me get back to work. Enjoy your date with Mbambo,” he says and leaves.

I just lie there and watch him as he walks away. I haven't been attracted to any man since...since him. My next interest can't be my own employee, someone who cleans my yard and garden!

I drag myself back inside the house and soak myself in a bath. What's wrong with me? Khosi will ask if I left my brains in Japan, Ndabuko is my yardner for Christ's sake!

It's almost 4:30, I lotion up and get dressed. I don't want to keep Bab' Mbambo waiting and after what just happened outside, I need a lot of drinks.

I find him sitting by the gate with his lunch bag, he's

with the night shift security guards and entertaining them with his stories.

I'm in no mood to climb out and do the greetings, I just hoot and wait for him inside the car.

I know he's going to begin with his stories as soon as he gets inside the car and I'm not in a good space right now. I turn up his favourite Hhash'elimhlophe and he's bouncing his head as soon as he gets in.

I drive to my favourite Pub & Grill, as if God knows that my soul is too heavy for crowds today, the bar lounge is almost empty; only a few customers sitting separately and minding their own business.

“I'm ordering a salad, mild chicken wings, waffles and a whole bottle of Moet,” I say, staring at the menu in my hand.

I don't drink during working days, I take my job seriously more than anything, I'm only making an exception for today only.

“Is everything alright, ndodakazi?”

I look up and find him staring at me.

“Yes,” I say and nod my head.

He doesn't believe me. I heave a sigh and sit up straight.

“Is it about the boy you went out with?” he asks.

I let out a chuckle and shake my head. That one is enjoying his warm chair in blockville.

“It's just one of those days when I feel like there's a flame burning inside me and I just want to explode for no reason,” I say.

“What did they do to you now?” He looks up at the waiter, recites his long order then releases a sigh and looks back at me. I always talk to him about work related issues, my family and friends, goals and general gossip. But I've never talked to him about this, only Khosi knows and she has convinced me that it's madness.

“I think I'm falling for a wrong person,” I say.

He relaxes and breaks a brief chuckle.

“I always thought you're those Miss-Know-It-All Ndondo. Are you scared of men?” he asks.

“Noooo! I'm not scared of anyone.”

He likes it when I'm bossy. He's smiling.

“Then what is it?” he asks.

“He's my employee. And you know what's confusing Baba, the fact that it feels okay. I don't have that soft knock in my conscience and I don't...” I stop and take a huge breath. This is madness.

“You don't do what?” He narrows his eye.

“I don't feel guilty about having those type of feelings towards him. The only thing I feel guilty about is that he's my employee and he's at his lowest. You know, he's a qualified engineer and he's not employed. He works for me to make end-meets,” I say.

“But why would you feel guilty about falling in love?” He snaps his brows and scratches his hairy chin with a finger.

I can't tell him. It's madness. I can't!

“Ndondo?” He's staring at me.

“I..I..I have...” No, Ndondo you can't do it. But he's staring at me and his eyes give me no choice but to spill the beans.

“I was kind of holding on to someone. I don't know his name or where he lives.” There I've said it. My deepest secret. I lift my eyes up, expecting to find him judging me with his eyes. Khosi always does when I mention this.

“You'd feel guilty when you're mingling with other men?” he asks.

“Yes, like I was letting him down or something. I know it's silly,” I say. Luckily our food is here. I open the bottle and fill my glass up.

“When did you meet this person and how did you meet?” His food is in front of him. He hasn't even touched his beer. I guess he finds this “madness” interesting because the Mbambo I know would be half way through his meal by now.

“Taxi rank, back in 2010. I was hoping that he'd make more efforts but he didn't,” I say.

“Tell me about your relationships. I remember you once had a thing with that big-headed boy who rode a scooter.” He picks the knife and slice his steak. The big-headed boy is Sphamandla, the one who took my virginity three years ago, I hate everything about him.

“I left him. He was annoying,” I say.

“Annoying? How?”

Deep sigh!

“He was just annoying. I don't know what I saw in him. He made me angry most of the times,” I say.

“You'd be angry with him for no solid reasons, right?”

I give him an innocent look and nod my head. I don't want him to think I'm a madwoman, it was just those Ndondo moments that nobody can understand.

“Were you, at any point, angry with him to the point of getting violent?”

I choke on the drink. I can't tell him that. I have a

reputation to maintain, revealing these things...no, I can't.

“Did you ever fight boys that showed interest in you?”

I take another deep breath and nod my head.

“Violently?” he asks.

“I did slap Sphamandla,” I say and hold back the details of that eventful night. Even Khosi doesn't know, she thinks we just broke up over an argument, if she was to find out about this she'd send me straight to a psychiatrist. It was the second time after he broke my virginity, we did it before going to bed, it was off but I let him finish his race. It was the next morning when I woke up to a man trying to insert his penis in me with his hands caressing every part of my body. I flipped and attacked. He wasn't supposed to. It wasn't his place to do that. I slapped him so hard that my own finger joints ached. Then I grabbed my clothes, ran to the bathroom and dressed up, and I ran off.

I won't mention that incident where I screamed at a



guy for merely asking for my contact details. I nearly bite the poor guy's head off. That's when I realized that this thing was becoming more than just a fantasy of a taxi driver, I was slowly losing my ability to function and so I started putting my work before everything else. I depended on work to mentally survive.

"I'm crazy, right?" I ask and look at him.

"No, you're not crazy," he says and lifts his beer and sips. Then he looks at me again, with pity lining up his eyes.

"Why you didn't tell me this?" he asks.

"I don't want people to think I'm crazy," I say and shrug my shoulders.

"Ndondo yegolide! I'd never think that of you. I know that I'm old and boring, but I understand these kind of situations."

"These kind of situations?" I ask.

"Carrying the spirits of the dead."

What?! I'm not carrying dead spirits. I'm simply

holding onto someone and it has killed my ability to love.

“It's anxiety and...” He lifts his hand up before I can even finish telling him what Dr Makhoba told me.

“You're not a fighter, there's a spirit fighting men through you. I don't know what it means, I don't want to scare you but it is against you falling in love.”

“What does that mean?” I ask. It's too late for him to hold anything back, he's already scared me by assuming that I'm carrying dead spirits.

“It's either you have a calling to tie yourself to the work of the ancestors before tying yourself in any romantic relationship or you have been chosen for a specific person.”

I was raised in a Christian family, the ancestors and all these “chosen” things are not familiar to me. I have never dismissed my African roots, I just have never considered myself to be someone who'd be affected by such things. Work of the ancestors? I can't be a sangoma. Chosen for a specific someone?

I want to choose my own husband.

“What if I don't commit to those demands?” I ask. My nerves are scattered all over the place.

“You will pay thousands for your western doctors and they'll diagnose you with those mental illnesses with long-ass English names,” he says and throws the fork down. He's done acting fancy, he digs in using his hands.

I just lost my appetite. I keep filling up my glass and thinking about what he just told me. I can't ask Aunt Vumile for advice because she'll tell my parents and they'll take it to the pastor and then the whole United Kingdom church will bring a special prayer to my house.

Khosi will take me to a club, force whisky shots down my throat and tell me to get laid. And the twins will speak at the same time, whatever the other one thinks the one will agree. I know they're not into these “ancestors” thing as well.

“Things will fall into place, ndodakazi. Don't let this burden your soul, don't even think about it,” Bab'

Mbambo says.

I just nod my head and fill up my glass. I have to find a way to get control of my life. I can't be controlled by dead people's spirits. This is my life, I'm entitled to make my own choices.

I take out my phone and review my block list. Deep breath! I click on Senzo's number and unblock him. Then I send him a text, he responds instantly.

I won't be going home tonight. Whatever it is that haunts my soul needs to realize that I'm a woman responsible for her own life. It can't control me. It can't control my emotions. It can't control who I talk to, who I sleep with and who I fall in love with.

“Baba I will call the driver to come and pick you up.”

He frowns.

“You're leaving already?”

“Yes, I'm tired.”

He nods his head but the lines on his forehead are still creased. I settle the bill and leave. I hope he has shaved all his hair and he's wearing shoes today.

Now I'm feeling the Moet settling in my system and slowly messing with my head. I feel a bit lighter and happy about my upcoming night. I'm not going to let anything spoil this night for me, not even spirits or whatever they're.

“Hlasekazi,”

WTF! I turn around slowly. It's him in flesh. What is he doing here with Mr Ngidi's sons? How do they know each other?

“Ndlalifa what are you all doing here?” He's the eldest so I expect him to explain. Aren't they supposed to be at the taxi rank? Mr Ngidi was always complaining them. If they're not fighting with the drivers they're fighting with the associations.

“We were hired by some ladies. They're somewhere doing their things and we are just chilling and waiting for them,” he says.

“Ndabuko?” I look at him. He's in a Tom Ford stretch-linen T-shirt, Denim jeans and black kicks. He looks

way too different from the yardner working in my house. What brings him here with the ever-havoc Hlomuka sons?

“New job. New bosses,” he says and glances at Maqhinga.

“He's our new driver,” Maqhinga says and empties a packet of peanuts inside his mouth. What are they saying? Ndabuko is their driver? Since when? He refused my offer to find him a better job only to be a taxi driver?

“I don't understand,” I say and stare at him.

He gives them a look and they step back and give us space.

“What is this?” I ask.

“I have resigned as your yardner,” he says.

“I see, but why? Taxi drivers don't earn that much. Allow me to find you another job, something you're qualified to do,” I say.

He chuckles and leans on my car. I don't like how he's looking at me, like he has something huge

planned in his head.

“The goal is to get a date with you. I hope you'll give me a chance as well because I'm no longer your employee.”

“Ndabuko!” I can't believe this. He took my words way too practical.

My phone rings. It's Senzo. I reject the call, silence the phone and put it inside the bag.

“That's not what I meant, Ndabuko,” I say.

“You can't say that. You can't change what you said when I've already held onto your word and gave up my job for you.”

I release a sigh and ignore the soul-gripping stare he's giving me.

“Take your job back,” I say.

“No, I want you. Not the job.”

My heart might've skipped a second or two. My moist grip tightens on the bag and I stand frozen on the same spot.

“Saturday, 17h30 be ready. I also deserve a chance to shoot my shot.”

Say no, Ndondo. Say no!

“Okay,” -my mouth.

[03/14, 08:58] : Chapter 4

Andiswa is already rolling her eyes at us. To her all this is unnecessary; “they were taught everything in primary school and if she needs any information she'll easily consult a professional.”

Well I'm not taking any risk, I want to do my part and I want do it well. Khosi is already here, I think it's the twins that were just dropped off by a cab outside the gate. She's turning 21 in a few months, I know the ‘sex before marriage’ threat won't work, it's probably already too late, we're just going to preach about contraception and condoms.

“Really?” She's looking at door with a defeated look on her face. Khosi and I both turn to the door and guess what? There's a fifth guest speaker. She's



carrying her black 1885 purse and her thick Bible. Why would they invite Aunt Vumile? This was supposed to be a 'big-sisters-grooming-a-little-sister' session not some "Paul-the-apostle-says..." kind of sermon.

"Zingane," she says collectively and goes straight to the fridge. Andiswa gasps when the fridge door opens. What is wrong with her? This woman always fill her stomach first whenever she's here for something and then complain about all the 'unnecessary things' I have in the house.

"Is this a beer?" She lifts the bottle of Hennessy up and I turn my face to Andiswa. She needs to explain this because I also have no idea what a bottle of alcohol is doing in my fridge either.

"Ndondo usuyaphuza?" she asks.

Of course I drink, but this is my father's sister and she has connections to the heavens.

"I had a couple of business associates over," I lie. Andiswa sighs out in relief and I shoot a look at her, not yet little girl.

She puts it back inside the fridge, if it has anything to do with me making money then it's fine. She takes out the yoghurt, grabs a spoon from the drawer and sits on the chair.

“So?” Khosi looks at me and then at her twin sisters. I also don't know how we are supposed to do this now. I have a strange date with my yardner tomorrow, I need to prepare and come up with a good lie I'm going to tell Khosi. The last thing I need is having this very same sister-army ganging up on me and bashing me for falling in love with my employee. Yes, I still regard him as my employee, he's taking back his job after the date. I can't let my feelings or whatever it is that I'm feeling to stand in the way of someone's bread. As much as he's attracted to me, or simply wanting his shot as a human being with a di€k between his legs, I know that he needs this job more than anything.

“Andiswa are you seeing anyone?” Snakho goes first. I guess we're doing it right here in the kitchen. This is not how I imagined it. I thought it would be

formal, around the table with snacks and drinks, everyone looking serious and matured. But Nakho is always like this; when something needs to be done she does it quickly and gets over with it. That's one of the few differences between her and Snalo. They look exactly the same, with them there's no slim and fat twin, they're one person. Everyone struggles to tell them apart, it also took me a few months to know who is who.

“Maybe I am,” Andiswa says and shrugs her shoulders.

Phewww! Embrace yourself Ndondo, your sister is a grown up and it's about to go down for real.

“Is it that tall boy?” I ask.

She nods her head. I guess a glass of water didn't scare him. He wants what's between her legs and he'll stop at nothing to get it.

“Sex...?” Snakho. She clears her throat and glances at Aunt Vumile who is surprisingly very quiet and focused on her yoghurt. “Are you already doing it?”

“Already? Why are you making it sound like it's too

early whereas I'm 21 years old and..." It's fuckin early! Way too early.

"I lost my virginity at 23. You're not even 21 yet," I object and get a scolding look from Khosi. Well, we agreed that I wasn't going to bring thee Ndondo out, I was just going to be a concerned, nice big sister. I take a deep breath and pull myself together.

"I'm only a few months away so it makes no difference."

It does make a difference but let me keep my mouth shut.

"Which condoms do you use?" Snalo asks. Health staff is her thing, if life had a manual she would've been a professional in that field.

"How is that necessary? The most important thing is I know how to protect myself."

"Do you use lubricant? Water-based ones are safe with condoms. Make sure it's worn correctly and don't do anything you're not comfortable with."

Andiswa rolls her eyes and releases a dramatic sigh.

“Don't sleep with him to satisfy his needs. Sex is all about you, do it for your own orgasm and be vocal about what you want and not want,” Khosi throws her too-deep opinion. I'm also uncomfortable now, and Aunt Vumile just lifted her eyes.

“Aunty talk to your niece,” Snakho tells her.

She rubs her lips together and pushes her eyeglasses on. I still don't know why they brought her here. She may be only 42 and moving with times, but this is sex we are discussing here, a SIN.

“1 Corinthians 6.” Lord, I knew it!

She looks at me and there's that look that used to get me off the couch and picking a broom when I was young. I know that I have to find my Bible wherever it is and read the Corinthians.

I pull aside the brat that got all of us here.

“Where is the Bible?” I ask, pulling her towards the stairway

“How am I supposed to know?”

This child! She lives here and controls everything

that's happening in this house.

“Andiswa I spent R175 at CUM Books to get that book. I need to find it otherwise the whole family will be here and asking how we go to bed without reading a single verse.”

“I think it’s in your study,” she says.

We rush to the study and turn everything upside down, the holy book is nowhere to be found.

“Andiswa think!” I say impatiently and tap my fingers, trying to collect my memory. I remember that I last used it at my parents 30th anniversary celebration. I haven't been to church in a long time and it's not because of work. It's something about being groomed into a particular religion from birth, when you grow up you start seeing things differently; your faith is shaken and you question who you are as a spiritual being. It all comes down to -believing and to -be told to believe.

“Now I don't know where else to look,” she says and looks at me defeatedly.

“Where are we going to get the Corinthians?” I ask.

This is all her fault. Had she not decided to sleep with that tall boy against my word we wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have asked the twins to come over and they wouldn't have dragged Aunt Vumile here.

“We are downloading the Bible from Playsstore. That's the only choice we have,” she says.

This child is smart. Why didn't I think of that? Soft copy of the Bible, most people use it these days. There's no ‘open your Bibles’ in churches anymore, it's ‘scroll down your Bibles.’ We are moving with times, Christians and all.

They're silently waiting for us. Church mode activated.

“Which paragraph?” I ask.

Khosi clears her throat. Fuck! Has it been that long? Novels are messing with my head. It's a verse, not paragraph.

“Sorry Aunty, which verse?” I control the damage that's already done.

She blows out and shakes her head. Rotten brother's children!

“19-20,” she says.

I clear my throat and start reading; “He asks, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.””

Silence.

She's staring at Andiswa. I like the direction this session is taking, we're sealing it off with a Bible verse. Hopefully this child is listening attentively.

“Did you hear that?” I ask, deputy-parenting as usual.

“This verse isn't for her. It's for you and them.”

Huh? We all look at each other.

“Us?” Snalo asks.

“The four of you sit down here.” She points down on the floor. I'm not sitting on the cold floor in my own house! These chairs were probably flown from the Europe just for me to look like a rich snobbish



woman that I am.

The twins sit with no questions asked. They don't discuss things, sometimes they just do things or speak at the same time as if they share the brain too.

“Aunty you know how fat I am, getting up from the floor will be one job and half,” Khosi says.

“On the floor Nomkhosi!” Her tone isn't begging, it's daring her to do otherwise. I don't understand how this turned to be about us. She was called here to help us groom and teach Andiswa about grown women things.

Khosi sits. I remain standing because, well, I'm Bantwana Holdings CEO and I own this house.

“Ndondo?” She glares at me.

“I don't sit on the floor,” I say.

“And I don't argue with a child, you know that very well. I let the belt do the talking.”

She mustn't even think about that. Hhayi-bo!

“I'm too old for this,” I hiss through my teeth.

“Letting someone inside your father's kraal at 23 has you thinking that you're an adult? Phansi Ndondo!”

Really? Now she's using my words against me. I was trying to reason with her niece who's chasing a tall boy's di€k all over Durban.

I sit because I'm tired of arguing and it won't benefit me with anything rather than more Bible verses.

“So the four of you has gathered here to promote the devil's work?”

Huh?

“Don't act so confused. I was here and listening, you're all motivating my brother's child to sleep with boys; to disrespect the God's temple.”

Urgh! I really fail to understand how two grown, identical sexual-active women thought bringing Maria's cousin here was a great idea. Well, sometimes when one decides not to use her brain the other one takes a thinking-leave too.

“Aunty, Andiswa is a young adult, craving for sex

and being curious about men is normal at her age, we just want her to do it safely,” Snalo explains.

By the look on this woman's face I can tell that she just made things worse.

“Sex happens between two married people. None of you are married, but that's for you and Father to discuss in the other world, I'm just going to pray for you and hope that whatever demons you have go away.”

“Seriously?” Khosi sighs in defeat.

She turns to her. The hopelessness in her eyes. I think Khosi might have more demons than the three of us.

“I don't understand how you turned out this way mntaka Mbongeleni. Your father was such a gentle soul, he used to sell high quality pots in town, I still have one even today. He'd be so disappointed to hear his daughter talking about orgasms.”

I'm not the type that mocks people but I'm going to laugh at Khosi for this on WhatsApp.

“Hold each other's hands and close your eyes,” she orders.

I'll never forget this day. What a turn of events!

“Wena? Why are you standing? They're using you to achieve their evil doings. You need God's protection, sit here,” she tells Andiswa, who has been turned into a victim in all this, and she quickly sits next to the devil agents, that's us, and join hands. Must be nice!

My aunt is the type that breaks the roof when praying. She was always the last woman praying at church. Once she starts she doesn't stop. Even the food blessing prayer, which isn't supposed to exceed two minutes, takes up to five minutes with her.

By the time she ends it with a powerful Amen I'm dying for a glass of water.

There's someone at the gate. I don't know how long the person has been parked there, hopefully it's not one of Andiswa's unnecessary deliveries. This child

knows how to spend money.

“I need a glass of wine,” Snalo says, pulling down her dreadlocks.

I quickly snap my brows at her, giving her a silent warning. I don't want to be in another prayer, for alcohol this time.

“Ndondo this is for you,” Khosi says, coming from the door with a huge black box in her hands.

“Andiswa what did you order?” I ask and make my way towards Khosi. This box, whatever it is inside, looks do damn expensive.

“I don't remember ordering anything under your name.” She sounds very hesitant. We'll talk about this some other time, when Maria's cousin has left because I don't want her to think we're having a sibling-fight and pray for us again.

There's a card; “When I saw this pair of shoes I thought of you,” -that's what it says. There's no name of who the generous sender might be. My

circle is very small, my address is private, I have no one in mind.

“Are those Saint Laurent heels?” I'm so lost in my thoughts, I have no idea who asked that between Nakho and Nalo. I know how expensive this label is, obviously they expect me to jump up and down and try them on. But I worry about less important details of life, that's just how I am, right now I'm worried about the possibility of someone having my address and buying me R18 700 heels because “when she/he saw them they thought of me.” This person even knows my shoe size!

I don't like this one bit.

“Are you seriously not even going to try them on Ndondo?” Snalo asks.

“Who sent this?” I'm frustrated.

“Really? The delivery man said this was sent to you. Why does it matter who sent them? You have a pair of YSL.”

I let out a sigh. They don't understand. Life is not all about the flashy materials and gold, some people

value privacy more than anything and right now I feel like someone has invaded my privacy. My whole address and shoe size!

I don't know when Aunt Vumile and the twins left. I've been on bed since I received that gift from anonymous. I haven't tried the shoes on and I probably won't. If it was something else I would've thrown it in the bin, but it's an expensive pair of shoes, so I'll wait for whoever it is to show up and reveal themselves then I will give them back.

My phone is ringing on top of the table. Khosi and Andiswa are watching some Turkish series and getting all emotional over it. I don't recognize the number, instead of turning down the TV volume and give them another reason to cry, I excuse myself.

“Who are you?” Yes, I know how bitter I can sound. This is not a way to greet a person, but I've had one hell of a day with my aunt thinking I'm possessed by demons and someone I don't know sending me a

pair of expensive shoes.

“What if I was a client?” It's a man. The last gender I want to talk to when I'm in a mood like this.

“This is my personal phone, I don't take business calls here and I don't take them at this hour.”

“Oh,” he mutters and goes silent for a few minutes.

“Who are you?” I ask for the second and last time.

“Ndabuko.”

I glance around and quickly disappear behind the bathroom door. My heart is pounding against my chest, which is strange because I'm Ndondo Sibisi and people don't scare me.

“Ndabuko, hello.” Why do I sound like a sick cat?

“You sound..a little bit rough. Is everything okay?”

Sigh!

“Someone just sent a pair of shoes to my house and I have no idea who it was.”

“Is that all?”



Obviously he thinks this is nothing to worry about, just like everybody else.

“Ndabuko someone sent a parcel to my address. Exactly my shoe size!” I say, somehow even more frustrated that he, out of all people, fail to understand me.

“I get it,” he says.

I sigh out in relief. At least someone understands me.

“I will just keep them in my closet and wait for whoever it is to show up,” I say.

“You won't wear them?” He sounds a bit surprised and wounded. Was he listening with his balls?

“I'm not taking a gift from someone I don't know, Ndabuko,” I say firmly.

“What if you know him?” he asks.

“I don't care, I can buy my own shoes.”

There's a deep sigh followed by a brief silence.

“Am I going to see you tomorrow, Hlase?” His

hopeless tone gashes through my heart. I'll never break my promises just because he's not on the same standard as me. I'll go on a date with him but I don't know if I'll act on my feelings.

“Yes,” I say and inhale a sharp breath.

There's something between us. Something that I can't put into words. Talking to him is easy, he only need to ask one question and I open my chest to him. I'm not that person who open easily to people, that part scares me more than the feelings I've secretly developed for him.

“Namhlanje ngisacela ulale wazi ukuthi ngiyakuthanda.” (Today please go to bed knowing that I love you.)

He doesn't end the call, he stays on the phone and listens to my silence. I don't know what to say because nobody has said these words to me the way he just did. The way “he” also did years ago and disappeared. That “ngiyakuthanda” that's more than just words. The one carrying a man's whole soul and his bareness.

“Are you going to disappear?” I ask. A drop of tear running down my cheek makes me realize that I'm crying. A whole me crying!

“No, I'll be here, always,” he says.

Obviously he doesn't understand where the question comes from, but his word, his promise, gives me a glimpse of hope.

“Thank you,” I say and drop the call. Now I'm more confused than ever. He's my yardner and barely making end-meets. A relationship can't happen between us but I also... Wait, where did he get my number? Another privacy-invader

[03/14, 08:58] : Chapter 5

Ndabuko

He's been awake since 3:45, just turning and tossing on bed. Things weren't supposed to be this way. Looking at Zamafuze breaks his heart into a million pieces. Four years down the drain! He

knows that it's "down the drain" because things didn't go according to plan. Ndlalifa had it all figured out, this was between life and death and he had to do it for his brother. Ndlalifa got him all the information, where she was and when she was coming back. The plan was to charm her, get on bed with her and bring her home. It was simple. But no, he just had to involve his stupid heart. Only God knows how that happened because he's had his eyes on Fuze for the past four years of his life and she's been nothing but a great partner anyone could ask for. Even when Nhlanzeko was coming too hard on him, affecting his work progress and health, this woman stood by him.

It must've all changed that day when a limo pulled outside the mansion and dropped a fierce-looking woman with her weave bouncing below her neck. Ndabuko has always been a head-turner, beside his status, his looks alone had girls dropping to his feet. But that one wheeled her large suitcase right in front of him, whispered a low "hello" without even looking twice at his direction and disappeared

inside her mansion. Right there and then he know that he was in for a challenge, but he didn't knew that he was in for the heart as well.

He loves challenges and she challenges him. She says what she wants to say and when she wants to say it. She doesn't like people very much and she doesn't have a problem showing it. She's Ndong. Her and Fuze are different. Way too different. He knows this because now he's comparing. Fuze is not a woman of questions, she'll never put him on the stand and grill him with questions as if he's standing in court. But Ndong would. She'd definitely put him on the stand and interrogate him about a mere pair of shoes. That's the part Ndalaifa doesn't like about her. He always says that; "It's Nhlanzeko's nature of being attracted to danger that got you here, that woman is a lioness."

Him and Nhlanzeko were five years apart. While Nhlanzeko looked exactly like their father, Mnikezwa Mngomezulu, Ndabuko took his mother's extra-ordinary looks. If there's one thing they shared as brothers, it's their daring nature and

stubbornness. When Ngidi told him what Nhlanzeko had planned before his death, he didn't doubt it one bit, it sounded exactly like the brother who'd tell him which shirt to wear and which boys to hang out with. Back then, when they were young, he thought he was looking after him as a big brother, but it started to get too much as he reached his teen years.

At 21 years Nhlanzeko already had two taxis. He did what a man does to change the situation at home when all other options have been exhausted, and Ndabuko started being "just the child" of the family. Every decision had to be passed by the hand that fed. Every evening chat between his parents were all about the beloved son who owned taxis. Him passing his Maths with 97% was nothing compared to Nhlanzeko coming home with a full roasted chicken and a stack of money for grocery.

His death was supposed to make him happy, but that's not how it works with siblings. No matter how much they think they hate each other, something about lying on the same womb with a person ties

you to them forever. He was pulled out of the campus by Ndlalifa, who at that time was very close to Nhlanzeko because of his father, and he was a mess of tears. He didn't like being the second best in the family but being brother-less was something he had never imagined.

Nhlanzeko had left all his taxis under Ndlalifa's care because Ngidi was retiring from the taxi industry to chase greener pastures; now revealed as Bantwana Holdings. As soon as Ndabuko graduated from Wits Ndlalifa took a flight and fetched him. His taxis were waiting for him. Yes, Nhlanzeko left all his taxis to his name. But he had gone to Wits to pursue his own dreams, so three days later he left "Nhlanzeko's taxis" and took a flight to Joburg.

He didn't last very long at Airbus Industries, he only worked there for two years and his dead brother needed him home. Things fell apart after he lost his job, being in the taxi industry wasn't his thing, but he had Fuze by his side and she was there to pat his back.

He was supposed to leave him alone after he

honored his wish of continuing his taxi business. But no, the selfish Nhlanzeko wanted more from him. Just after his 26th birthday he came to his dream, still covered in blood with teary eyes, he asked him to find “his wife;” Ndondo Princess Sibisi and bring her home.

Oh, Ndabuko wanted to die. He wanted to go to his grave and tell him that he's going to live his life the way he sees fit, that those days were over and he now didn't live according to anyone's rules. Weren't they all in heaven, gathered as a happy family; mother, father and their beloved son? Nhlanzeko took everything away from him. Even when he was dead his parents still chose the beloved son over him. They chose to die and leave him a day before his graduation. Who dies from a minor car accident before his own son's graduation? And what kind of a mother faints from discovering that her husband is dead and never wakes up? She couldn't hold on and live for him. It was his time to shine, at last, and nobody was there to celebrate with him except Ngidi and his sons. It's not that their time had come,



it was his success that they didn't want to live and witness.

It sounded just like Nhlanzeko to want him with a woman of his choice. Because uyispoki esingafi Ndabuko had to get into a dungaree and gumboots and pose as a poor yardner to meet that woman. And finally meeting her ruined everything, his plans and relationship with Fuze.

She mumbles something in her sleep and searches for his chest with her hand. She's about to wake up and Ndabuko wishes to vanish. Guilt chews and spits him out everytime he looks into her eyes.

“Hey,” she whispers and smiles.

Get it together, Ndabuko!

“You're awake?” he asks and plants a kiss on her forehead.

“Yes, when did you wake up?”

He can't tell her because she'll worry and think he's sick.

“I just woke up,” he lies without an ounce of guilt. There are bigger lies he's told her. Bigger than him staying in Maqhinga's house and saying he's dealing with the taxi route issues for the past three months. Lies bigger than a pair of gumboots hidden in Maqhinga's garage.

“Your body feels warm,” she says and snuggles herself on his chest. He knows what she wants, it's something he hasn't been able to give to her probably the last two months. But Fuze doesn't complain. She doesn't nag and that was what a Zulu man in him enjoyed before meeting Ndondo.

“What do you want?” He lowers his eyes to her and she blushes and looks away.

He smiles and lifts her chin up with his finger.

“Fuzee,” he calls softly.

“Ndabuko, I know that you're tired and dealing with a lot at the rank,” she says, staring at his eyes like she's looking at her own beautiful pet.

“Are you going to be busy today?” she asks.

Yes, today he's going on a date with Ndondo. That's why they're here in the hotel, the house is ready for Ndondo. Everything of Fuze's was packed and hidden in the garage.

“Yes,” he says and buries his head behind her shoulder. He can't look at her in the eyes, not when he keeps lying to her like this.

He starts on her neck, below her ear and goes up to her earlobe. She hates morning kisses so he plays far from her lips. But he kisses every inch of her and she's enjoying every part of it.

When his hard shaft rests on her thighs she involuntarily opens her legs and begs him to fu€k her. It's been too long, even though she understood but she craved for him every night, sometimes he was lying next to her and lost in his thoughts and sometimes away, with Maqhingana or whoever, attending to their business matters.

“Please sthandwa sami, fast and hard.”

He lifts her leg over his shoulder and obeys. He pumps faster and harder. She's screaming his

name and speaking in tongues. His head is facing up, his eyes are closed and..Ndondo is there, bigger and bold in his mind.

“Ngiyakuthanda,” he says and lets out a moan.

“I love you too babe,” Fuze responds before her body jerks.

He goes harder. His jaws are tightened and her name is itching in his throat. Eventually all knots are untied, he falls down on her chest and lets out a groan.

“Ndondo yami,” he cries.

Fuze is lost in the world of her own. Her Ndabuko is back, emotionally and physically.

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He hates smoking but when the going gets tough the cigarette gets lit.

“Zithini ndoda? You look tense. I thought you'd be happy going on a date with Mrs Fierce,” Maqhinga says, joining him in the balcony with a glass of light-

brown liquid.

Ndabuko takes a deep breath and leans over the rails.

“I called Fuze by her name,” he says and take another puff.

“How are you still alive?” Maqhinga knows everything about women. He's been to; courts for child support, paternity court, hospital for a hand that was burnt with hot water in his sleep, pris on cell for slapping one or two of his girlfriends, under the tree with induna and being interrogated for fu€king someone's wife. He's been through it all and he's only 29 years old.

“She was still out of it,” Ndabuko says, a bit annoyed and regretful. Maqhinga is the last person you come to with your problems.

“Oh, I see. So what's going to happen? You'll call Mrs Fierce Fuze and call Fuze by Mrs Fierce's name?”

“No!” That came out breathily than he intended. Imagine calling a whole Ndondo by someone else's

name!

“You know what, mina ngiwuMaqhinga, I always bring fresh ideas and solutions. Whenever you're about to slaughter the pu\$\$y take a piece of cloth and wrap it around your mouth. Like aboKris Grey; 50 shades or whatever they call it,” he says, taps Ndabuko’s arm and walks back inside the house.

Ndabuko finishes his cigarette and follows him inside the house. He needs to dress up, the last thing he needs is to be late like that idiot, Senzo. Torturing people is not his style, he only wanted to take his car and wallet, he knew that Ndondo wasn't going to give a second date to the guy who couldn't even pay his own meal. But Maqhinga insisted on cutting his hair, to fulfil his strange “having fun” games. And Ndlalifa got fed up with his whining and started slapping the poor guy.

“Are you going to drive your car or I should drive you there with a taxi?” Maqhinga yells from the kitchen.

“I will drive,” Ndabuko says loud enough for him to

hear.

“What if she asks questions? How are you going to explain yourself because this woman seems to have you by scrotum?” Maqhinga.

Ndabuko doesn't answer. It will happen when it happens. It's not like he's ever told her that he is financially struggling, she chose to believe that on her own.

He adjusts his collar and stares at his own reflection on the mirror. How did he get here? How did he get to the point of hurting Fuze repeatedly and now, willingly.

“Bafo,” Maqhinga says behind him. Now he's serious, he's the soft brother figure he has at the taxi rank. They became his brothers when Nhlanzeko died; they're his family.

“Zithini kanti? I thought it was something light. This is more than just screaming her name on top of Fuze, right?”

Ndabuko nods his head and releases a deep sigh.

“What's going on?” Maqhinga asks.

“I'm in love with her,” he says.

Maqhinga gulps down the content in his glass.

“I know, this girl has been stuck with you for years. She puts up with your bulls hit and hot head.”

“Not her, Ndondo.”

Whaaat??!

“Mrs Fierce?” He's in disbelief. Wasn't Ndabuko doing this to get Nhlanzeko off his back? What's this love thing he's talking about now?

“I really love her,” Ndabuko says, breathing heavily between each word.

“Where does that put Fuze?” Maqhinga asks.

“Ndoda, I don't know. I really don't.” He grabs his car keys, cellphone and wallet, and walks out.

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NDONDO



A lot of things are strange here. Obviously, I'm not judging him. He once worked at Airbus Industries, he could've saved or maybe paid off his instalments before losing his job. I like him for respecting me, showing up on time and actually driving me in to the restaurant, and for looking representable. He also smells good. It shows that he made efforts for this day and he respects the thing called a woman.

But he looks so uncomfortably strange. Very strange that even his eyes are dark, there's no spark in them, he has no smirk. Rather he looks sad or broken, I don't know. It must be employment problems. Taking away his job for my stupid feelings would be the most selfish thing to do.

“Did you think about what I said?” he asks, breaking a long moment of silence and stealing glances at each other.

“What did you say?” I ask, obviously faking memory loss. It's all I've been thinking about since last night.

“I said I love you and I meant it. I know it might've

come as a shock but I've been in love with you from the first day I set my eyes on you. It wasn't supposed to happen but it did. I'd be honored to get a chance to prove my words to you.”

One long sip! Another one. I lift my eyes to him and find him staring at me. He looks way too handsome in this white T-shirt and Cargo pant. Casual but dripping hot.

Oh, fuck! I'm drooling instead of answering.

“We can't do it, Ndabuko. You have to come back to work tomorrow, if you want us to work you'll allow me to find a job for you and when we have no professional relationship between us then we can act on our feelings,” I say.

“Our feelings?” The spark is back in his eyes.

“What time is it?” I ask after clearing my throat. I wasn't supposed to say that. I don't talk about feelings on a first date, this was supposed to be a “Get to know you” type of thing but we're already too deep.

“Ndondo...” He's whispering next to me. When did

he get off his chair? It's a great thing that it's only the two of us in this section.

"I love you," he whispers

Before I can process my thoughts and calm down my throbbing heart, his lips have captured mine and he's tenderly sucking them. There's something about his cologne..or is it the softness of his lips..or his strong hand safely holding the back of my neck? I don't know but it's something in him. Something I don't want to get away from, at least not today.

"I have a hotel room..." I say, breaking off the kiss.

He pecks my cheek.

"And I have a house," he says.

"Not far, right?" I ask.

"Depends on how I'm driving."

Okay, thirsty bitch, biggest sinner on the planet. You're going to sleep with him tonight and then force him to take his job tomorrow. That will definitely work. It's a win-win situation from every

angle.

Ridge Estate? Parked in front of..is it a house or just a series of rectangles constructed of steel and glass? I'm not sure where I am or who I'm with.

When my eyes get tired of staring at the geometric piece in front of me I turn my head to him. He expected me to, he's waiting for me to say something.

“Are we going in?” I ask.

He frowns. I also frown, it's not like I don't know how to frown.

“Okay,” he says and holds my hand.

I have a lot of questions. Nobody can drive a G-class, own a house like this and still work as someone's yardner. Something doesn't add up and I don't know if stepping into this house is a great idea but I'm already inside and I'm feeling kind of settled.

[03/14, 08:58] : Chapter 6

He led me through the double frosted glass doors, up the architectural stairway between stainless steel banister and left me sitting on bed, my feet sinking into the icy grey carpet, with a glass of raspberry juice and some fashion magazine I've never heard of next to me. Who said I like magazines? I want to talk. He's been gone for almost an hour. So much for a first date! He knows that I will grill him with questions, because he owes me answers. Who is he? What's his story?

Footsteps!

At last he remembered that he brought a girl home. He stands by the door and clears his throat. I close the magazine and sits up straight with a glass on my lap. I was waiting for the minute he steps into this room and I'm not going to waste a second.

“Who are you?” I ask.

He chuckles and walks in. He sits next to me and stares at me; studying my face which is obviously pissed.

“Ndabuko Mngomezulu. You already know my background.”

“I don't know your background!” Did I just snap at him? The look on his face shows that he has grasped the seriousness of this conversation.

“I studied aeronautical engineering at Wits and worked at Airbus Industries for two years. Then I had to come back to KZN to take over my late brother's taxis,” he says and stops, as if he's explained everything.

“Why were you in my house Ndabuko?” This is what I want to know more than anything. He's obviously not short of anything and he's been lying to my face all this time.

“I was hunting down the girl I was shown in my dreams,” he says.

“So you chose to do it in my house? Did you find her?” I ask. He scratches the side of his face with a finger and just stares at me.

“Ndabuko?” I'm trying to be calm here. As much as I want to leave, to cut whatever ties I might've had

with this man, a huge part of me wants to spend the night with him. With his lies, two lives and all, he's still a snack and one night on his deceitful chest won't kill me. After tonight we can go our separate ways, before I get attached to the idea of him. He's a liar, we can never be together.

“I did find her,” he says and picks up my fingers. He rubs over them with his thumb and keeps his eyes glued to me.

“She's here in front of me and shouting at me,” he says.

Okay, first of all I'm not shouting at him. Secondly, I wasn't shown to anyone's ancestors or anything like that.

I put the empty glass on top of the bedside pedestal and slide on bed. That's it for today, we're done talking and covering up our lies. We'll do what both of us left the hotel to do and then go our separate ways. Andiswa needs to find another yardner and now I need someone professional to do the background check on everyone that enters and

works in my house.

“Let's talk Ndondo, please,” he says after taking his shoes off. I just stare at the magazine in my hands and wait for him to get on bed.

“No, I want to fuck.” I'm also shocked by this Ndondo. But lies annoy me more than paper straws. I don't care what he'll think of me, at least I'm being honest.

“I love you,” he says and looks at me; his eyes burning with hope.

“Are we doing it or you're driving me home?” I ask.

His eyes shift. He stares up at the ceiling with his hand over his forehead for a good moment, then he exhales loudly and turns back to me.

“I was sick, really sick. I wasn't coping at work, the dreams wouldn't leave me alone, I had to find you Ndondo Sibisi and I fell in love with you.”

You know what's the most confusing part? That he's dead serious.

“You seriously think that I'm going to believe you? I



don't know who you are and what you wanted from my house. But I will fuck you and we'll never see each other again," I say.

He goes silent. I pull my dress out and lie on the pillow with nothing but lacy underwear and bare thighs out on full display.

"Angifuni," he says.

I'm thrown back. Did he just say no? I know that I don't have Kim Kardashian's body but I'm a woman and I'm half naked for him. Men don't need you to look a certain way, not when you're on their bed, what matters is what's between your legs.

He gets up and storms out of the door. What the heck just happened? He's leaving me dry like this?

I type a text and forward my location to the driver. I'm so pissed, by his lies and his ability to turn me down. The first man I ever offered my vagina on a first date, without any expectations, turns me down? I need a cleansing, two white chickens and a fat goat.

The house is huge but I've been to places, I wouldn't get lost in a double-storey. I find my way to the stairway and rush down.

I have my shoes in my hands, I don't care what the driver will think, I just want to get the hell out of here as soon as possible.

Which way to the main door? I think it was this one; we passed by this Guernica painting and turned...

Strong hands grab my waist. I'm forcefully turned around and fiercely stared at.

“Wenzani?” I ask

“Uyaphi?” he asks.

“Imibuzo ayibuzani.”

“Abantu bayabuzana.”

I let out a sigh. This is really not worth my energy.

“Can I leave?” I ask calmly but my question is obviously wrapped in a wave of anger.

“Didn't you say you want to be fucked first?” The way he puts it makes me feel like some Point corner

-slut. But I own up to my words, I'm that woman.

"I did and you turned me down," I say.

Inch by inch, his arm has been pulling me, and before I can even realize how close I am to his chest he scoops my legs up and lifts me up.

"Ndabuko, I want to go!" I scream.

He kicks one of the rooms open and walks in with me. This "scooping up" thing happens a lot in romantic movies, some women may find it cute but I don't. Angiqukulwa nje sdalo! If I want to go somewhere I walk on my own.

He puts me..no, scratch that, he literally throws me on top of the bed and charges back towards the door.

"Ndabuko don't you dare lock that door!"

He goes against my word and locks it. My phone vibrates inside the bag. It must be the driver.

I'm fuming.

He strips his clothes off and pushes down his boxers. He's in his fine birthday suit and my anger

seems to be slowly dissolving.

“That's voyeurism,” he says as he unhooks his wrist watch.

“Huh?” I'm drooling over his body and my eyes keep going to the flesh-tool dangling between his thighs. I remember a song by Izingane Zoma- Wayigcina Nini Indoda Inqunu. Gosh, has it been that long? My clit is dancing at the mere sight of a penis.

“Watching someone undresses for your own sexual gain,” he says.

“Huh?” I'm still lost. What is he talking about?

“Voyeurism; the thing you're doing. It's a serious offence,” he says.

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. He chose to undress in front of me, if he has a problem he can take it to my clit.

My phone rings. What's wrong with this driver? I'm dealing with a serious situation here.

“So you planned this day? I saw that you're wearing some lacy cute thongs.”

“I didn't wear them for you,” I say with a frown. What makes men think they're so special? I always wear good underwear. I haven't been with a man for over two years but that didn't keep me from the sexy underwear section.

“Oh, you only brought me the cookie?”

Now he's annoying. All this interrogation for a penis?!

“I'm not desperate, Ndabuko. I can just make a phone call, I have people in my DMs and they'd be in my house with just a finger click,” I say.

He's not worked up, mission failed. He chuckles and climbs on bed.

“Ngeke uphisane ngesidlo sakwaMngomezulu,”  
(You won't give away the Mngomezulu meal)

Someone kill me now! He went to Wits and mingled with men from other tribes. He should've learnt manners and how to be a gentleman.

“I'm not a meal!” I nearly bite his head off.

He laughs. I want to scream my lungs out.

“If you say something like that again I'm going to leave,” I say. He better believe me because I mean it.

“How are you going to leave? The door is locked and your car has left.”

“I don't know but I will leave.”

He stares at me with his lip curved up into a sexy smirk.

“You're so stubborn. I hope you're stubborn like this on bed too.”

Didn't I tell him that if he says one more stupid thing I'll leave? What's this -stubborn on bed- thing? I'm leaving.

“Ndondo,” he says and pulls me back on bed.

“What?” I snap and glare at him.

“Nothing.” He smiles and gently pulls down the arm of my dress. He plants a wet kiss on top of my shoulder and my anger instantly vanishes. He pulls down the zip at the back and pushes me on bed.

I'm a bit embarrassed when he takes out my soaked thong. It'll be even more embarrassing when I have

to come into action, your girl has never done those woman-on-top and reverse cowgirl things. Even when I see those women-to-women posts sharing ideas of how to master bedroom styles I always scroll past.

He pecks my navel and lifts his eyes up to me.

“I love you,” he says.

He shouldn't be saying this. He knows that this is our first and last time together.

He doesn't take offence when I don't respond, instead he bites his lip to suppress the smile spreading across his face. I hope he's not thinking about something stupid because I've heard enough of his ignorant remarks for the day.

“Asekhona nje amalahlle? Awuvule ngibone,” he says.

I pick a pillow and slam it on top of his head. How dare! Coals inside my vagina? Why would I have coals in the first place? He knows how to kill someone's mood, I'll give him the credit.

He's choking with laughter. I think he's now annoying me on purpose.

He lifts my chin with his finger, humour is still in his eyes, he gives my lips a soft peck.

“I like how you make me feel when I'm around you,” he says and his eyes suddenly go from humorous to emotional.

“Of all things he's done for me, with and without consent, choosing you for me will remain at the top. I'll be eternal grateful to have met someone like you.”

I don't know who “he” is and I'm not interested in this ancestor or dream lie he keeps talking about.

“Get a condom,” I say.

Disappointment flushes across his eyes but he quickly blinks it away and leans down for a kiss.

He tears the condom foil with his teeth and I watch cautiously as he rolls it onto his erect member.

“You're beautiful,” he says before deeply smooching



the life out of my lips.

“Are you comfortable without a pillow?” he asks.

I nod my head. I'm not comfortable but him inserting himself inside me is more important and urgent than a pillow beneath my neck.

Regardless of my horny nod, he picks the pillow and asks me to lift my head up and places it under my neck.

A seductive sloppy kiss leads to my leg opening wide like a tollgate and him positioning himself between. His hands leave my boobs and hold my legs up.

He pushes in, stuck and pulls out. He pushes in again, moves an inch in and then pulls out.

“Sthandwa sami,” his rough-croaking voice breaks into my ear in a supposed whisper.

I'm not sthandwa to him, but I don't have to spoil the moment with that, so I look at him and flutter my eyelashes in response.

“I feel like I won't last very long here. Please borrow

me this round,” he says as he finally inserts himself in fully.

I'm also doing this for my pleasure, there's no round-borrowing happening here.

“Yours will follow,” he whispers.

“No,” I hiss through my teeth as I cluelessly buck my hips up to meet his thrusts.

“You're punishing me?” he asks and pushes my legs to my chest. A deep stroke forces his name out of my lips. He furiously pumps in several strokes and then pulls out with a loud groan.

“No, Ndonga,” he says and reverses back on his knees. My thighs press on either side of his face and he peeks into my throbbing, wet cookie. He's robbing me, men and their tricks!

He sweeps his tongue around my soft walls and gently sucks my swollen clit.

It doesn't take much, just his finger dipping inside me and his tongue playing around my clit, I explode and drift into a temporary world of my own.

I'm snapped out by a man grinding himself on top of me and cursing.

“Ndondo yami,” -these are the last words to escape his mouth before his handsome face transforms into a baboon-squeezed face.

He falls on my chest and releases breaking moans. Eventually, he just lies still and breathes heavily on top of me.

He has rest enough now. I push him to the side and roll to the other side. Even though I did release my steam but he robbed me. This was daylight robbery.

“I'm sorry,” he whispers with his face buried on the bed.

“You'll pay me back Mngomezulu.”

He chuckles and lifts his head up.

“Come here,” he says and pulls out his arm. I don't want to get attached to him, I already have feelings I'm not sure if I will be able to bury as I move

forward, the last thing I should do is lie on his chest after sex.

“Please,” he begs and I have no choice but to close the distance between us and lie on his chest.

He starts playing with my hair. His silence is too loud; it speaks a thousand words.

Eventually he clears his throat and plants a kiss on my forehead.

“Let's go take a shower,” he says.

“Together?” My tone is unnecessarily too shocked and his eyes are like; “duh, we just fucked.”

It was very awkward showering with a man whose di€k wouldn't rest down. I had to look over my shoulder the entire time and he'd purposefully get too close to my butt.

We just finished the snack and I want to at least watch the news before dishing it out again. But he's all over me, he can't sit still even for a minute and I regret sitting on the same couch as him.

“Let's go watch the news in the bedroom,” he suggests.

“Ndabuko get a grip,” I say.

“The only grip I want is from your...” I shoot him a look and he stops. He's unbelievable, I only want thirty minutes of the TV, how hard can that be?

“Let me touch Hlasekazi, they're still on the ad-break.” His hand sneaks under the gown I'm wearing.

We end up making out on the couch with the TV presenter reporting some important economic issues that affect every citizen.

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Lord! What is the clock on the wall saying? 7:22 in the morning? I have a yoga class at eight. I was supposed to wake up before the sun came out and go to my house.

And where is this man? I drag myself out of bed and check in the bathroom. He did take a shower, the

clothes he was wearing yesterday are peeking out of the basket.

I wash my face and brush my teeth with the new toothbrush I suppose was left for me. But where the heck is my dress? I need to leave. I can't go all the way to Kindlewood in a gown.

Before exiting the bathroom I notice that he left water inside the bathtub. I'd die if someone did this in my house.

Wait...why is that thing soaking inside the water look like my dress?

It is my dress and my bra and panty. His phone is switched off.

I'm shaking with anger. What am I supposed to wear? Is he now a laundromat?

I go through every room, kicking doors open and yelling out his name. I can't call Khosi and ask her to send me something to wear because how would I explain my presence at the "yardner's house?"

There's one more room next to the gym. Maybe he's inside. It's closed, as if it's hardly ever opened, and unlike other doors it's a fibreglass door with a rusty lever-latch.

I don't yell out his name this time, I just lean by the door as my heart drenches in heavy melancholy that I can't explain and listen to my throbbing heartbeat with my eyes closed.

“Hlase...” I open my eyes to the sound of his voice and fly to his arms.

“Where were you?” I ask, buried on his chest. I don't know what's going on but I'm not mad at him and somehow I'm glad he's here.

“What happened?” he asks and glances at the door behind me.

“You soaked my clothes, now I don't have anything to wear and I need to attend my yoga class at eight.”

“I don't want you to leave.”

I lift my eyes up and meet his sulky stare. No, he

can't!

“Ndabuko we are not dating. Last night was great but...” A kiss shuts me up. By the time he breaks off I'm gasping for air.

“I wish it was simple but it's not. I'm sorry I lied about who I am, getting close to you is not easy Ndondo, you're not an easy person.”

I lift my eyebrow. I'm not an easy person?

“Ndlalifa is the one who found you for me. Not exactly that he found you because his father knew you all this time, but he made plans for me to at least step into your house.”

“You really dreamed of me?” This is getting scary. I thought he was just lying so that I'd stay.

“Nhlanzeko haunted me every night, you'd appear in a young version of yourself wearing a school uniform and he'd just say; “bring her home.”

“Who is Nhlanzeko?” I ask.

“My brother. He died on the 12th of January in 2011. They shot him in his car on his way to...” He stops



and pulls my hand. "I don't want us to stand here," he says. I guess we're standing in front of his brother's room and reviving sad memories.

"I'm sorry about your brother," I say.

He squeezes my hand in response and pulls me down to the kitchen where a table is laid for breakfast.

"Sit, I will get your coffee," he says as if he knows exactly which coffee I like and it's already made.

[03/14, 08:59] : Chapter 7

Ndabuko

He managed to keep "Mrs Fierce" in his house for two days. Even though she didn't say the important words, he feels like his lie cannot stand between them anymore. It'll take time for her to trust him again and he's still hiding some things from her, but they'll be fine. He can feel it in his bones, they'll be okay.

He's humming a song as he cracks the eggs into a

pan on the stove. There's no day-off in their industry, mostly for drivers, but him and Maqhinganga only go to the rank if something really needs them or if they're bored. Unlike Ndlalifa, who's suddenly obsessed with work and waking up at the crack of dawn everyday.

“Long-lost son, you're back,” Maqhinganga teases as he makes his way inside the kitchen followed by a short, big girl with blonde hair. Only God knows where he found this one.

Ndabuko lifts up his eyebrow.

“How old is she?” He doesn't care if the girl is listening. She looks too young to be doing sleepovers in a 29 year old man's house. Maybe she's just a varsity student chasing the flashy lifestyle.

“Old enough to satisfy Hlomuka.”

Ndabuko shakes his head and watches as he hovers over the girl and inappropriately touching her. His hand slides in front of the girl's skirt, she's giggling as Maqhinganga whispers something to her.

He left his own house because he cannot face Fuze, he cannot stay there because she'll come over and shower him with the love he doesn't deserve.

Watching Maqhingana changing girls everyday and listening to them screaming at his di€k at night is the price he's paying for staying here.

He finally lets go of the girl, he gives her a few R100 notes and kisses her on the cheek.

“Don't give anyone my cookie,” he tells her before she goes out of the door and she blushes and nods her head.

He closes the door after her and walks to Ndabuko who's preparing breakfast.

“What are we eating?” he asks as he attempts to grab a piece of egg.

Ndabuko yanks his hand off.

“Go wash your hands,” he says.

“Ndoda, I showered when I woke up.” Still, Ndabuko blocks his hand from reaching the eggs.

“She's your girlfriend alone, don't feed me her pu\$\$y.

I also don't finger Ndondo and touch your food afterwards.”

“Ndondo? Not Fuze? Is she now officially your only girl?”

“Maqhinga go wash your hands!”

Because Ndabuko is annoying and he wants the scoop, he jogs to the bathroom and quickly washes his hands as asked.

He grabs the plate prepared for him and adds four more bread slices, Ndabuko thinks everyone went to Wits and studied with white people. He eats seven slices, not three. He's not a girl and he is not trying to maintain a figure.

“I take it Mrs Fierce is also fierce on bed,” he says and stuffs the egg inside the mouth with his eyes glued on Ndabuko.

“No but she's hoot. I nearly lost my sanity there, and you can feel that nobody visits that palace regularly.”

“Not nearly, you did lose your sanity, look at how moody you're because she's gone back to her house,” Maqhinganga says and they both laugh.

Maqhinganga stops laughing. Now his eyes are filled with pity.

“There's Fuze, she doesn't know what's going on. Don't you think it's fair to just come clean? I know that I'm the last person who can advise someone on how to treat a woman, but before that's Zamafuze, she has loved you through thin and thick. It'll be better to hurt her by “moving on too fast” than to cheat on her.”

Both these options are bad, he'll break her heart either way.

“And you could lose Mrs Fierce while at this game,” Maqhinganga continues.

Ndabuko's appetite runs out. He knows this. He'll talk to Fuze before making things official and coming out with his relationship with Ndondo. But Maqhinganga needs to understand that he's not him. He's scared to dump her because he knows what

she's done for him. Unlike Maqhinga who even dumps a girl in front of a new one and lives his life like nothing happened.

“I don't even know what I'm going to say,” he says and inhales deeply.

“Nothing beats- you deserve someone better and I'm not that someone- and then look like an asshole,” Maqhinga says.

“We are talking about Fuze.”

Maqhinga sighs and shrugs his shoulders.

“Yeah, right. You have to be nice and try to make her understand.”

Ndabuko exhales deeply. He's never been those guys, it's easier when a girl breaks up with you because you walk away without any guilty conscience. But he has to break up with a woman who's been with him for four years, he hasn't been in love with her the past two months and that alone breaks his heart. Fuze doesn't deserve this..but she doesn't deserve to be fooled either.

He types and sends her a short text. They have to meet in his house in an hour and talk.

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Her silky hair is tied neatly on top of her head, she's wearing a short yellow dress and sandals. Her bag is clutched under her arm and she's lost in her phone.

When Ndabuko pulls up she lifts her head and stares as he climbs out of the car.

“You changed the locks?” she asks.

He clears his throat and looks away.

“I'm..I was..I was going to tell you.” This will be harder than he thought. Out of all days, today she chose to dress up exactly the way she looked on their first date. It's the same dress and same hairstyle.

They hug. His heart is beating like a drum. He's imagined how this might play out. She'll cry and beg him to stay with her.

“Must I get you anything to drink?” he asks, still unable to look straight into her eyes.

“Water is fine. Why are you acting so strange?”

He ignores her and fetches the drinks from the kitchen. He should've drunk for this. He's not a man enough to just do it.

She's waiting for him on the couch. This might be the right time to tell him what she's been keeping from him. He deserves to know.

“Fuze we need to talk about our future,” he says and instantly regrets his choice of words.

“There's something I need to tell you first,” she says.

He gulps down his juice and looks at her. Her hands are shaking and he's getting even more worried about the break up that's following. She won't take it well.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

“Yes, I'm okay. I think I'm fine.” She's nodding her head as she says but her moist eyes speak a



different language.

“Do you remember when I called you and said I was at the doctor’s? Two weeks after you moved in with Maqhingana.”

He nods his head before even collecting his memory of that day. He's anxious to find out what's going on with her. Why she looks so troubled.

She rubs her palms on her thighs and releases a sigh.

“I was in so much pain and heavily bleeding. But I thought it was just one of those months where I get...” She shakes her head and wipes the watering corners of her eyes. She is fine, that's what she keeps telling herself everytime a weak inner her wants to break down. It's not that deep, is it?

“I had a miscarriage,” she manages to get the words out and then buries her face in her hands.

Words record slowly in Ndabuko's head. He wants to process everything, grasps the reality of what he just heard, but she's wailing next to him and he needs to find a way to comfort her.

“Why didn't you call me?” He can't recognize his own voice. Something huge, something he didn't even know was a part of him, has been cut into pieces and taken away from him.

“How far were you?” he asks. He could ask her about the pill but now is not the right time for that.

“Three weeks,” she says between the sobs.

“Why didn't you tell me?” he asks again.

“You were busy with work and I didn't want to stress you at that time,” she says.

No, he was busy with Ndondo. He was posing as a yardner and stalking another woman.

“What did the doctor say? What was the problem?”

“Everything was perfectly fine, that's the problem Ndabuko; nothing was wrong.”

He pulls her into his arms and tightly embraces her. He's trying not to break down in front of her. Maybe if he was home with her the baby would've survived. Maybe if he paid attention and didn't fall head over heels with a woman his dead brother wants him to

marry this wasn't going to happen.

“Please forgive me Zamafuze, I'm really really sorry.”

“It wasn't your fault s thandwa sami.”

He cups her face and looks at her in the eyes. She's broken, something he hasn't cared to notice the last couple of months.

He lifts her chin and kisses her lips. Guilt is poking his heart from every angle. It's all his fault.

“What did you want to say? You said we must talk about our future and I just wanted to let you know that we once created a soul. Just in case you're thinking of doing something, inhlawulo should come first.” They're talking about their future, right? It's something she's been waiting for years.

Ndabuko is shocked by her conclusion but he can't show that to her or object what she's saying.

“I will discuss inhlawulo with Ngidi. I don't know how these things are done,” he says after clearing

his throat.

“All I know is that the damages come first, before lobola.”

He nods his head. This is not the direction he was taking but he can't tell her. He's already broken this woman.

She lifts her eyes to him and flutter her eyelashes with a weak smile on her face.

“I have missed having you, all to myself, like this.”

“Me too,” he says and plants a kiss on her forehead.

The day didn't go as planned, it's sad and sour. They're still together and living with the scars.

She orders the food and they just cuddle on the couch throughout the evening.

It's 9:56 pm and Fuze is fast asleep on the bed. He's been doing one thing since he found out about the miscarriage and that is to stare at her.

He received a text from Ndondo earlier, which is

very strange, and he hasn't read it. It feels wrong to even have feelings for her. These feelings are what drove him away from Fuze, they're what stood between him and his baby. He could've been there, protected Fuze from whatever and supported her. But he couldn't because Ndondo stole his heart and sanity.

No words can express how sorry he is to Fuze. But more than anything he's sorry to himself; to Ndabuko. He's sorry that he robbed himself a chance to be a better father than his own father. He robbed his baby a chance to be alive. He should've protected them. Maybe if he was here...

His phone is ringing.

It's Ndondo. His hands start sweating as he contemplates whether to answer or not.

He lets it ring until she drops the call. It was okay when she was being Ndondo and not giving him the benefit of a doubt.

He clicks on the text he hasn't read since it came

through:

WHAT YOU SAID ABOUT ME HAVING FEELINGS  
FOR YOU WASN'T A LIE. NDABUKO I HAVE FALLEN  
IN LOVE WITH YOU AND I'M SCARED.

God knows how much he wanted to hear her saying  
this but now he can't even be happy and celebrate.  
He can't even reply to her text or return her calls  
because that would make him an asshole.

He lies next to Fuze and wraps his arm around her.  
Now he's torn between two worlds; being with the  
woman his heart and Nhlanzeko wants for him and  
being with a woman who'd catch a grenade for him,  
the mother of his child.

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It's been a week since Fuze broke the news to him.  
He hasn't been to work and she hasn't left his house.  
He had to sneak her belongings back in the house

in the middle of the night and leave things as they are. They're making up, he's trying to pay for his sins but nothing is good enough to clear his conscience.

He hasn't spoken to Ndondo nor replied to her text. He's scared to even log on WhatsApp because she's there and she'll see that he's alive and just ignoring her. Strangely, Nhlanzeko has been quiet. No bad dreams and no pounding headache.

“So you're paying lobola for Fuze?” Maqhinga asks.

“That's what she thinks,” Ndabuko says and heaves a sigh.

“That means the Ngcobos are expecting cows altogether with inhlawulo. Is Ngidi aware of this?”

Another sigh!

“He wants me to do it.”

“Do what?”

“Pay lobola and marry her.”

Maqhinga's eyes pop out of their sockets. Marriage is a big scary animal to him.

“What about Ndondo?” he asks.

“I have to marry her as well. I love her and I have to honour Nhlanzeko's demand.”

“Polygamy? Ndabuko you don't even love Fuze anymore. Break up with her, there's no need to marry someone out of guilt. It's not fair on you and it's very cruel to her. You've already wasted this girl's life.”

“I don't want to hurt her. Why can't you understand that?” he bursts out. This is not easy for him. Yes he knows that he's being selfish and the chances are; Ndondo will walk away and Nhlanzeko will haunt him for life.

“But you're hurting her. The day you stopped loving her and continued to keep her in your life was the day you started hurting her.”

“You're a fine one to talk,” Ndabuko says, annoyed.

“I'm an asshole and everyone knows it. I'm a fuckboy waiting for God's sentence. Don't be like me, you'll sleep and not wake up the next day,” Maqhinga says.



“Because?” Ndabuko asks with a frown.

“You won't be able to handle two women. Especially not when Mrs Fierce is one of those women. Have you spoken to her?”

He shakes his head.

“Exactly, you fail to even face one of them if you're busy with another one. Polygamy needs balance, boy. Whatever happens on the right should happen on the left.”

“I know that but my biggest fear is losing Ndondo along the way. I love that woman mfethu.”

“If you're not scared of losing Fuze why don't you just lose her once and for all,” Maqhinganga asks.

“I don't want to be an asshole.”

“But you're an asshole already.”

“Yeah but I'm still below your level, I don't want to surpass your shitty ass.”

Maqhinganga laughs and attends to his buzzing phone.

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## NOMKHOSI

I know that I'm losing her again. I really thought she was done, that was the whole purpose for her Japan vacation; to get over him. This time I don't know what triggered it. I don't know what pushed her inside this dark box again.

The thing about her is that when she builds walls around herself she makes sure that she builds them high. The problem about her is that she doesn't cry, the only way I know that she's in pain is when she buries herself with work. This week she's been clocking in at 6:30 am, if not early. Andiswa says some days she comes home after eight.

I put her coffee on her desk and she doesn't even notice that I'm standing in front of her.

“I thought you said you were ready to move on,” I say and snap her attention instantly.

She takes a sip from her cup and lifts her eyes to me. I don't need eyeglasses to see that she's in pain. She's empty and just living to get through the day and get this thing called life moving.

“I did move on,” she says.

I need to sit down for this. I thought Senzo and her didn't work out.

“With who? And what happened? You don't look like someone who's in love,” I ask.

She chuckles and shakes her head.

“Khosi you know my fate. Once I love them back they disappear. He's gone as well. But the difference with this one is that I know where he lives and I know that he's okay wherever he is.”

“Then what's the problem?” I'm really confused.

“I tried to call and text, and I got ignored.”

“My gosh, friend are you sure that you were both on the same page? Maybe he just wanted a dish for his sperms, you know how men are like out there.”

She releases a deep sigh and looks back on the

documents in front of her.

“Forget about him Ndondo. He's not worth your energy.”

You know what, I'm taking her out on a wild weekend with the twins and a group of hot guys. I'm not letting her go through this again, not for an asshole that probably doesn't even deserve her.

We are going to Himeville this weekend. We'll fuck around and get wasted.

[03/14, 08:59] : Chapter 8

It's actually funny that I've been in love only twice the whole 26 years of my life and both times left me miserable. Ndabuko made me forget about my taxi rank lover that got away, he took me out of that misery and introduced me to a new one. I have blocked his number because I can't handle the pain of seeing him online and not speaking to me. I guess Khosi was right, all he ever wanted was to have me on bed and I was stupid enough to fall for every word he said. Even the- “I'll be here, always.” I

thought he was real, he even brought the ancestors and dreams to cement his lie. I'm so dumb.

Andiswa is all dolled up and smiling on her phone from ear to ear. Just watching her blushing makes me envious of her. I may be against the relationship but I love how happy she is, and somehow I wish I had experienced this for once in my life.

“We are not chatting about sex,” she says and I realize that she caught me staring at her. People always misjudge me, I'm not that uptight.

“I wasn't staring because of that,” I say and join her on the couch. 12pm seems to be far, I can't wait to get out of Durban, even if it's for two nights only, I want to break free from these agonizing feelings that are caging me in.

“Any luck in finding someone to work on the yard?” I ask.

“He'll start Monday,” she says.

“Hopefully this time you're bringing someone legit. I can't believe you let Ndabuko fool us into thinking that he was poor and desperate.”

Her eyes shift from the phone and she looks at me with a frown creased on her forehead.

“Mngomezulu? How did he make us think he is poor?”

Are these news to her? Yes she doesn't know half of the story but now we both know that Ndabuko faked his identity.

“He didn't mention that he owns taxis, duh!” I say.

“Who doesn't know the Nkabanhle Taxis? Have you never seen Mngomezulu at the taxi rank in Verelum or Tongaat?”

She knew him all this time?!

“No!” The last time I went to a taxi rank was probably three years ago.

“Oh, well.” She goes back to her phone and her face brightens up as messages beep in.

Why am I attracted to taxi men? That place is my source of pain. I've had so many suitors who are in the same industry as me. Why can't I give someone different a chance?

I know that Andiswa is just waiting for me to leave and then she'll either go to that boyfriend of hers or invite him here. I've been advised to be gentle and open-minded about their relationship; young girls are like sand, if you squeeze too tight they slip out bit by bit. I pack my bag and change into leggings and sneakers. This week has been hard, I'm scared to even look at my face on the mirror, I'm sure it's evident of everything I've been going through.

Khosi calls and says the car is driving towards my house. It's one of the "hunks" she invited to come with us, there's no fun if you're driving, so the guy is in charge of the travelling.

"Please keep my house clean," I'm indirectly telling her not to have sex on my couches. She gives me a thumb and watches as I put my hat on and exit with my bags.

I don't know if this trip will achieve its purpose, it has taken me years to get over "him" and it'll probably take other years for me to get over

Ndabuko, but I'm looking forward to the fun.

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Resort Sani Pass hotel, we are finally here. I've managed to down three glasses of wine and still remain in my "dark mood." I think I was already set up with someone, he's been asking me useless questions and trying to chit-chat. I'm only friendly and entertaining this crowdly company for the sake of Khosi. If it wasn't for her I'd be on bed already and going through my emails.

"I wish to come to this place again, with just you," he says.

Excuse me but...

"Who are you again?" I ask.

"Ade," he says and smiles.

I notice that he has silver grillz. Yeap, I'm only seeing this two hours after meeting him.

"Can you take that thing off?" I ask.



“Do you hate them?” He's still smiling. Honestly, I don't have any business hating his decorations and style, I'm just curious because I've seen rappers wearing this thing.

“No. Can you take it out yourself or you need a dentist?”

“I can take it off,” he says and attempts to take them out. I block his hand and shake my head. This whole trip is about me getting loose and having fun. Kissing someone with silver grillz all over his teeth has never crossed my mind. I even survived the “gold tooth” pressure in high school. But today is all about burying the real Ndondo, the uptight one who get depressed over taxi men.

“Do they taste metallic?” I ask.

He smiles and cocks up his eyebrow. He doesn't look bad. All Nigerian men don't. They're the epitome of African masculinity, mostly. He's very tall, I have to lift my head up to see his face. His espresso skin reminds me of the first man I fell in love with. Even though Ndabuko is fair than them, I

think dark men are attractive. But that doesn't mean I'm falling in love with this man, remember I only give my heart to men who are associated with taxis.

“You have to taste them to find out,” he says.

I catch a glimpse of Khosi's face sitting a few feet away from us with the twins and other guys. She cracks a brief motivating smile. I refill my glass and shift my attention back to Ade.

“Why did you leave your country?” Gosh, I sound so xenophobic.

“I mean it's the richest country in Africa,” I say to support my distasteful question.

“South Africa is the most developed. There's so much political violence where I come from, surviving is a struggle, and like many other African countries, there's a high rate of youth unemployment.”

I nod my head. I like how calm he is as he explains this. Obviously, I have other useless questions I'd like to ask, like; where is Davido and why is religion such an issue back in Nigeria..the Bokomo Haram?

“Are you married?” I ask.

“I wouldn't be here if I was.”

As if men care about their marriages.

“I need my throw. It's getting cold here,” I say and empty my glass. He needs to read between the lines and follow me inside the room.

“Let me go with you. I need a bathroom,” he says.

Clever boy! I heard they start school at three years and finish high school around twelve. Nigeria is blessed.

And then who is this guy coming out of my room looking all shaken up?

“Do you work here?” I ask.

He nods his head fast, before I can even finish the question. He is wearing some white overall thing, so I guess he's not lying.

“Why he looked so scared?” I ask as I walk in the room. My bags are on the floor, something I'd never

do in my sane self.

“Because you're intimidating,” Ade says. He's still standing by the door, also looking frightened. I'm drunk for Christ' sake! How am I intimidating? And I haven't said anything to anyone, in fact I'm the friendliest person alive.

“Didn't you say you needed a bathroom?” I ask him.

“I did, but right now I need you more than I need a bathroom.”

I smile and wink at him. How flattening? He needs me more than he needs the bathroom. Finally someone is choosing me over something.

“Come here, Igbo man. Are you an Igbo?” I ask.

He's in front of me after only taking two steps, that's how tall he is.

“A Yoruba man,” he says in a seductive whisper as he stares down at my face.

I think I love Yoruba men.

“Let me taste the grillz,” I say and hold his neck down to me. He smells so heavenly, something that

makes a man kissable.

Yes they taste metallic, now how about his lips?  
Aren't they just soft and delicious?

He releases a moan and pushes me backwards. I don't have the usual urge to push a man away, instead I'm pulling him closer to me and allowing him to push his tongue to my throat.

Eeh? What's this hard thing poking me now? It feels huge even inside his pant.

“Don't worry, I'm not doing that,” he says as he breaks the kiss. I hold his stare and wait for him to talk.

“However, I'd like to help you release some of this stress. You're too beautiful to be unhappy,” he says.

“Meaning?” I ask.

“Helping you blow off before we go for dinner,” he says.

“Blow..blow job?” I ask.

“You love the sound of that, don't you? Let Ade take care of you, gorgeous.”

He's gentle and his warm smile keeps assuring me that he knows what he's going and he's a man of his word. I crack up and laugh when he pulls my panty all the way down with his teeth.

I've never had a man licking my legs before. He starts his tongue game from my legs and gently separates my legs and works his way up to my mound.

His tongue brushes and separates my folds. I shut down every unwelcome thoughts and get lost in the moment.

“Relax baby, I got you.” I hear his voice with my eyes closed and feel his finger sliding through my opening. When I flinch he shushes me and presses his thumb over my clit.

“Tonight is going to be the best night this tight baby has ever had..I'm going to fuck you so good..Oh, you're so warm..Give me those juices baby, don't hold back.”

I don't..I mean I want him to do this a little bit longer..It feels so damn good..But then his tongue

is at it again, I can't hold back anymore.

“Ndabuko!” The name escapes my lips in a shuddering scream as I explode into another man's mouth.

I think I heard him say- “He ain't shit,”- but I'm lost in the wave of an exploding orgasm.

I'm embarrassed when I open my eyes and find him staring at me. Did I really have to call that dog's name?

“You were so beautiful,” he says.

I afford a weak smile of pretence.

“I'm sorry about...” He doesn't let me finish. He leans down to my lips and deeply kisses me. His member is angered up and his body is starting to betray him. He wants me and he wants me now.

But there's something going on outside. I can hear Nakho's voice yelling at someone, as if there's a huge fight going on. They rarely have sibling-fights, but when they do it's bad. I hope it's not Nalo and Khosi, those two can kill each other.

“Let me go check and come back,” Ade says and rolls off me. He dashes to the bathroom first and comes out after a minute. He looks clean but his huge giant is still poking out of his pant.

Whatever it is gets even more noisy when Ade gets there. There are men voices and “msunu kanyoko” flying in the air. I need to see what's happening. Clearly it's bigger than I thought.

I take off my panty, wipe myself and dash to the scene. At first my eyes are in disbelief, what are they doing here? And why is Ndabuko being held back and Khosi standing like that?

Ndlalifa grabs my arm and pulls me behind the crowd. I just got sober and him grabbing me like this won't be good for him. Yes he's old, nine or ten years older than me, but I'm not his child.

“Who is that man?” he asks.

I'm not sure what he's trying to do. The last time I checked he was just my ex-boss's son.



“How is that any of your business?” I ask.

He glares at me. He's naturally icy but I know his father. He wouldn't do anything to me.

They finally let go of Ndabuko, the man I don't know and Maqhingha, he's charging towards us. I don't know where the guys we came with have gone. Even Ade is nowhere to be seen. There's Khosi, her sisters and two security guards next to them.

“Ndondo,” he's emitting fire. I don't know who he thinks he is. He hasn't spoken to me in a week, he ignored my calls and texts, and now he's showing up to my trip and fighting people?

“So they brought you here to be fucked by Nigerians?” He's still yelling at me and I'm just folding my arms and rehearsing my one word answer that's going to put him in his place.

“Yes,” -is the perfect answer. I say, turn around and leave. Ndlalifa calls out his name warningly and I hear footsteps coming after me.

He walks in as I attempt to push the door on his face. The bed is all creased up and his eyes are

glued on it.

“Really? Com’ on, mfethu.” He sounds defeated. His shaking hands cover his face, he slides down and sinks on the floor.

“How can you do this to me?” I don't know if he has a short memory or what. He's just a guy who fucked me and forgot about me, there's no “doing this to him.”

“When you're done please get out of my room,” I say and fix the bed.

“I'm trying my best here. I also had my own life, I can't be an asshole and leave things hanging like that. I lost my baby and I didn't even know. My life was planned by a dead man.” He's crying and I'm not sure what my next step should be. I don't even understand what he's saying.

“He took my parents away from me and then took my baby. Now you're also doing this to me, Hlasekazi? You're hurting me like this?”

Deep breath! I sit on the bed and balance my elbow on the pillow.

“The last time I check I didn't mean anything to you. You slept with me and that was it.”

“You have no idea what I've been going through this past week. My whole life. Under the shadows of another man. My ex-girlfriend was pregnant and she miscarried. I only found out last week and everything just...” He buries his face again. I do have a heart and I'm feeling his pain right now. Obviously I have questions, there are lot of things I don't know about this man but that's for another day. Right now he's hurting and I need to find a way to comfort him.

“Is your brother responsible for that?” I ask.

“Yes,” he says.

“Why?” I don't understand what this dead brother wants from him. I mean the whole purpose of dying is to butt out of earth's business.

“Because you're the one chosen from me,” he says.

This thing is serious.

“Why am I the chosen one?” I ask.

“I will tell you one day,” he says and draws in a huge

breath. He dusts himself up and stands in front of me. His eyes are bloodshot and I realize just how much pain he's going through.

“I didn't sleep with him,” I say.

He clenched his jaws and looks away from me. Obviously he doesn't believe me, the guy looked fucked up when he left this room.

“I swear I didn't, but we did kiss,” I say and withhold the disturbing information. I don't want to hurt him more than this.

“Why?” he asks.

I'm not sure which reason he's looking for. Why I didn't sleep with Ade or why I kissed him.

“I thought you had left me too,” I say.

“So you kissed him?”

Eer..that's what I said, mos.

“On the bed?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say, nodding my head.

“Was I not worth waiting for?”

“I didn't even know where your heart was. I'm tired of waiting for people who never come back to me. I've been down that road before and I thought with you it would be different.”

“I'm sorry,” he says.

“Do you want to be with me or it's because your dead brother wants you to?” I ask.

“I want to be with you. I want that more than anything in life. You're one thing that Nhlanzeko gave me that I'll forever be grateful for. I love you Hlasekazi.”

Relief washes all over me. I throw myself in his arms and he hesitantly hugs me.

“I love you too,” I say and look up at his chin.

“Ndondo,” he says and looks away. There's a difference in his eyes when he says Ndondo and when he says Hlasekazi.

“What?” I ask, even though I know very well why he can't stomach looking at me right now.

“Freshen up, I don't want to spend the night here,

we'll go somewhere else.”

“Khosi won't allow me to leave,” I say.

“Khosi? The bitch who brought you here and sold you to a foreigner?”

Yoh! It's not that deep.

“Don't call her a bitch,” I say.

“She's a bitch and if she ever does something like this again...” My eyes are widely opened. Is he threatening my friend?

“What will you do? Huh?” I ask.

The way he looks at me sometimes makes me believe that in his head I'm a mad woman.

“Go take a shower and you'll find me outside.” He brushes my chin with his fingers, because I'm too dirty for him to kiss since I kissed another man, and then walks out.

Was I really going to sleep with Ade just to get over Ndabuko? I doubt I was going to be able to get over him but it was going to be fun. Sadly, he didn't get to “fuck me so good.”

Well, there's another situation. When I come out of the bathroom Khosi and the twins are waiting for me. Can't they let this one slide? I've been through a lot.

“Your yardner Ndondo?” That's Khosi wearing her Judge Judy gown.

“It just happened,” I say and shrug my shoulders.

“How?” Everyone is staring at me and waiting for an answer to this one. I can't bring up the “dream” thing right now, they'll go crazy.

“We just clicked and talked. After my failed date with Senzo he asked for his own chance and from there we became more than just employer and employee.”

Khosi frowns and looks at Nalo then at me with disbelief.

“It was him, right? He is the one who attacked Senzo and took away his car and wallet.”

Honestly I don't care about that incident or Senzo.

“I'm leaving, Khosi you'll call the driver to fetch you,”  
I say.

“You love him?” Khosi. I know her, she doesn't like  
him.

“He's not a bad person,” I defend.

“Only time will tell. Be safe.”

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His mood has improved a little bit. We are back in  
Durban and I have no idea where Hlomuka's  
disappeared to. They're taxi owners, they obviously  
wouldn't sleep at the side of the room, but them  
appearing everywhere I go doesn't sit well with me.  
Am I being stalked?

And this one, why are we heading to the North  
Coast?

“Where are we going?” I ask. It's late and I want his  
huge warm bed.

“I booked us in Belaire, we can have breakfast by  
the beach in the morning and maybe shop some



weaves before going home,” he says and smiles at the “weave” part.

Sounds interesting but no, thank you.

“We are going to your house. I didn't leave a hotel to sleep in a different one,” I say.

“My house?” he asks. Why is he looking so shocked? I've been to his house before.

“Yes, drive to your house,” I say.

“I can't..I mean, the cleaners didn't come today and everything is upside down,” he says.

“I don't care Ndabuko, I'm not sleeping in the hotel,” I say.

“Let's go to your house then.”

This is getting strange. Why, all of a sudden, he doesn't want me to go to his house? For this weird reaction I'm not going to the hotel and I'm not going to my house and explaining him to Andiswa.

“We are going to your house Ndabuko or you're driving me back to Himeville.”

How is it possible for someone to sweat under this weather?

I hate it when people do this while I'm driving but we are here because of him, I pull up my jersey and lean back on the seat.

“Wake me up at Ilala Ridge,” I say and close my eyes.

I open my eyes and realize that I'm sleeping in a car, in front of his house. I look next to me and find him sleeping on the steering wheel. Didn't I ask him to wake me up when we get here? It's 00:56 at midnight.

“Ndabuko wake up!” I shake his shoulder.

It turns out he wasn't really asleep, just lost in his thoughts.

“My neck hurts. Why didn't you wake me?” I ask.

“I didn't want to disturb you.”

I thought people say this only if someone was sleeping comfortably.

“Let's go inside, I want to sleep on bed,” I say and open the door. I will leave the bags inside and fetch what I need in the morning.

“Ndondo wait, there's something I need to tell you,” he says before I climb out.

I pause, furrow my brows because it has taken him hours to tell me whatever it is, and I stare directly at his eyes as he fights to get words out of his mouth.

“It's cold sthandwa sami, what's going on?” I ask.

He gasps.

Well, I just called him “sthandwa sami” for the first time.

“I love you,” he says, faintly.

He's seriously stopping me for this?

“I love you too. Please come with the keys, I'm freezing,” I say. He looks even more puffed up. I climb out and leave him in the car.

[03/14, 08:59] : Chapter 9

Ndabuko

He was able to sleep with Ndondo in a guest room downstairs. His alarm was set for 4am and he'd wake up and go to Fuze upstairs. When it goes off Ndondo opens her eyes and looks around in confusion. He is up on his feet and putting his T-shirt on. Why has God forsaken him? How is he going to get out of this situation? Ndondo wasn't supposed to come here last night and Fuze was supposed to go to her parents house earlier this week. Why can't both these women listen to him, just for once?

“Where are you going?” Ndondo asks.

Why is she awake again? Couldn't she let him tiptoe out, wake Fuze up and sneak her out of the house before waking up? Everything is a mess.

“I have a headache. I want to eat something and take a pill,” he lies and holds his breath as pity swallows her face.

“I'm sorry, if you need anything wake me up,” she says and turns to sleep on the other side.

Relief! That was close. Now he needs to come up with another lie to get Fuze out of the house.

It's just a few minutes after 4, why is this one also awake? She's under the covers and watching one of her favourite American rich family reality shows.

“I thought you slept out,” she says when her eyes land on Ndabuko walking through the door.

“I did,” he says sheepishly and sits on the bed. Where do he start now?

She lowers the TV volume and takes a huge breath.

“I tried to call you,” she says.

He looks away. Things aren't going well between them, both of them know that they have emotionally detached, but they're still holding on. They need each other and he can't just dump her. Not after finding out that she miscarried their baby.

“I had to call the doctor after you left. I was in so much pain, my womb hasn't recovered and I keep having these cramps and weird discharge.”

“I thought you said everything was okay,” he says

as guilt blind his vision with tears. Again, he wasn't there to support her.

“The doctor said it will take time to heal and gave me painkillers.”

“I'm sorry,” he whispers and brushes her hand.

“It's fine, you're here now.”

He can't do it. He can't tell her to leave. It would be cruel and unfair.

“Do you need anything?” he asks.

“I need you,” she says.

His heart takes the jab. Can he give her that right now? What about Ndondo downstairs?

“I need to fetch my phone downstairs,” he says and kisses her cheek.

She nods her head and increases the TV volume as he walks out of their bedroom.

He cannot do this. He cannot solve this situation. He loves Ndondo and he knows that she'll leave for

good if he even tries to ask her to leave. And Fuze doesn't deserve this, not after everything she's been through for him.

Yes, he's not a man enough to stand up for his shit. He cannot control his life, that's why Nhlanzeko has to make decisions for him even in his grave. He snatches his car keys and leaves quietly. He can't be there when they wake up and meet each other. He doesn't want to see either of them being hurt by his lies and unfaithfulness.

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Maqhinga opens the door with an annoyed look on his face. None of his girls came through for him. He's horny and hung over, the last thing he needs is to be woken up by someone banging his door at 5 in the morning.

“It's you!” he says with a sigh as he opens the door for Ndabuko who looks like he's being chased by a bull dog.

“Ndoda, I'm in deep shit,” he says.

Maqhinganga sighs; here they go again. He goes to the fridge and takes out a container of leftovers. He eats anytime of the day, he doesn't have the eating timetable like Ndabuko.

He throws food inside the microwave and turns to the sweaty Ndabuko.

“What did she do?” That's Ndondo, she's the only one who can make Ndabuko sweat like this before the sun even comes out.

“They're both in the house, sleeping in different rooms and I don't know what's going to happen when they finally wake up and see each other.”

Maqhinganga's eyes widen. This is the kind of entertainment he signed up for. Yes it's about to go down! Why he never buys popcorn? This will be like a movie, an action movie.

“Wait for me, I need to put my clothes on and get a camera.” He attempts to jog away but Ndabuko furiously blocks his way. This is not a joke or a movie. It's his life!

“This is not a joke Maqhinganga. I could lose both of



them,” he says.

“No, you're just scared of Mrs Fierce. Bafo I honestly need to see this, maybe they'll fight physically and I want to see who is stronger between them.”

He should've gone to Ndlalifa, not this idiot. He leaves him in the kitchen and goes out to the balcony.

He calls Ngidi. He's the only parent figure he has and right now he needs the family to intervene.

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Ndondo

I can't believe Ndabuko left me on bed and never came back. I only entered his kitchen twice, the last time I was here we ordered most of our food. But today I have to wake up and find my way around the kitchen. I'm wearing a gown I found here because my bags are in his car and he left with them.

First, I need a cup of black tea, and then I'll see what I can come up with. Maybe eggs mixed with tomato relish and toasted bread. He'll have to get used to my cooking or join the take-out crew in my life.

Khosi is worried, I have to send pictures of myself in a man's kitchen and wearing his gown to convince her that everything is fine. It looks like my best friend and boyfriend won't get along. Khosi liked him as my yardner, not the taxi owner who lied to get into my life. And Ndabuko refuses to see Khosi for anything other than a bitch friend who sold me to the Nigerian guy.

There are footsteps approaching the kitchen. I thought I was alone in this house. Is Ndabuko back? I didn't hear any car driving in.

Is that Isabella Garcia I'm smelling? Who is...Oh, she's here in her gorgeous self and staring at me with her arms folded.

Long relaxed hair tied at the back of her neck,

Chinese eyes and thin curved eyebrows. Slim waist, wide hips and long legs.

I haven't been in the game that much but my instincts have spoken. I'm just lost for words.

Where is Ndabuko? Is she the reason why he didn't want us to come here and ended up using the guest bedroom?

“Who are you?” I ask.

She was waiting for me to ask this question. She chuckles, walks in and stands by the end of the counter.

“Zamafuze Ngcobo, Ndabuko’s girlfriend,” she says and smirks. Deep down I want to scream my lungs out and cry, but I don't give people that much power over me.

“I'm Ndondo Sibi...” She rolls her eyes and waves her hand to stop me.

“I know who you are. Ndondo Sibisi and you're Nhlanzeko’s girlfriend,” she says and cocks her eyebrow up, as if she's challenging me to say otherwise.

You got it, girl.

“Not really, I'm Ndabuko's girlfriend as well.” Gosh, I'd never participate in these type of arguments. I'm too matured for this. To say that I hate Ndabuko would be an understatement. He had the nerve to travel all the way to fetch me from Himeville while leaving a woman in his house.

She blows out a sigh and walks around the table. It looks like she was ready for me, she knows exactly what's going on and she knows how she's going to handle it.

“Nana, your own man died. He's six feet underground in the Mngomezulu burial site. You're not Ndabuko's girlfriend, I am. You're his dead brother's so-called wife and you're here because he's been haunting my boyfriend.” She smiles and shakes her head. “And you own what belongs to the Mngomezulus. You have Bantwana Holdings, Nhlanzeko's company.”

Hand over the forehead. She breaks out a chuckle that sets my whole body in a flame of fire.

“You actually thought that you worked for everything that you have, Miss Japan? No, you're who you are today because of my boyfriend's brother. You've never worked for anything in your life.”

Fight for your man, do anything you want, but do not take my work ethic for granted.

“I have never received anything for free in my life. I worked my butt off to be where I am today.”

She rolls her eyes and goes to the fridge. She grabs a slice of cheese and throws it in her mouth.

“Really? Why don't you go upstairs to your boyfriend's room and check his drawers. I'm sure you'll realize how your so-called hard work was all handed over to you in a silver plate.”

Who is this Nhlanzeko? What is going on here? I'm trying to be strong, not to give this girl satisfaction, but my body is failing me. I feel weak, my heart is pounding out of my chest.

“In the meantime, I will go find my husband-to-be and take him out for breakfast. He can't eat this

Japanese porridge you cooked here. Maybe dish up and take it to the grave...umh, include boiled eggs, I heard that your man loved them so much." She turns around, sways her hips and leaves.

I sink on the floor as soon as I hear the door closing. I don't have tears, nothing can help me express what I'm going through at the moment.

My phone is ringing. I have no doubt that it's Khosi. She was right about Ndabuko. I don't know who he is, everything I keep thinking I know about him changes weekly.

With my last drop of energy, I drag myself up and go to the stairway leading me up. I don't know what I hope to achieve by going to this Nhlanzeko's room, that woman's words can't get out of my head. She could've just said all that for me to leave her man alone.

The key was left hanging in the keyhole. I guess she knew that I was going to believe her and come here,

hence she made it easy for me to enter.

My heart is heavy. Before I even enter this room its unsettling aura has me tearing up.

I turn the key and slowly push the door.

I step in with my eyes casted on the floor, I don't raise them until I'm in the middle of the room.

Deep breath! I lift them up and they land on the picture hanging on the wall.

Black leather jacket, brown knee-length pant and Nike curved cap. Exactly how I know him. Exactly how he looked the first time I saw him.

Is this how he chose me to find him? On the picture-In Memory Of Nhlanzeko Mngomezulu? Is this how he wanted us to meet again? Everything goes around in circles, I can't keep up with my breaths, eventually a wave engulfs me and throws me on the floor, face downwards. Everything is blank after that...

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Ndabuko

His uncle lives in Thulasi, at Mandeni. It will take him hours to arrive, that's if he finds it in his heart to come. Relatives make all kind of speeches on your parents' funeral, all kind of promises that they never keep. The last time he saw some of his family members was when the will was read, after finding out that everything belonged to Ndabuko they never cared to come back or check on him.

Ngidi has arrived and it looks like they'll have to leave. Ndlalifa and Ngidi can handle this on their own. They'll explain to Ndondo that her life is destined to be with Ndabuko. There has to be a gentle way that can make her understand.

“Ndabuko your car is outside,” Maqhingga says, walking in with a confused look on his face.

“Yeah, so?” Ndabuko.

“The Land Rover,” he says.

Fuze walks in before they can swallow the



conversation. She hardly ever drives Ndabuko's cars, which is why they're all staring at her.

"Babe, I came to take you out," she says, looking at Ndabuko.

No reaction, just widen eyes staring at her.

Where are her manners? She clears her throat and looks at Ngidi.

"Morning Baba, ninjani?"

"We are well ndodakazi. Where is your sisterwife?"

Ngidi is not about to mince his words, they both love Ndabuko, right? Polygamy is not something new so there's no need for drama and beating around the bush.

"My sisterwife?" Fuze frowns.

Ndabuko's breath is held up. They promised that this will be carried out smoothly, with the utmost respect.

"I'm sure you've met her," Ngidi says.

"Well, not really. Love, let's go." She's now looking at Ndabuko. He can't go out with her for breakfast

knowing very well that Ndondo is back in the house. Whether they have met or not, that will be sorted once they're all in the house.

“We have to talk,” he tells her and looks at Ngidi and Nhlanzeko. They all stand up and follow each other out of the door. Maqhinga wasn't invited but he wouldn't miss out on the drama.

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Someone was cooking. There's a pan on the stove and Ndabuko's sleepers on the floor. But Ndondo is nowhere in sight.

He checks the room they slept in. It shows that she woke up and took a shower. He takes out his phone and calls her number. Her phone is on voicemail.

“Where is MaSibisi?” Ngidi asks when Ndabuko walks back without Ndondo.

“I can't find her,” he says and rushes to the stairway. Maybe she's somewhere upstairs.

“Hlase?” He yells out several times and looks in

every room. Well, except the locked one. She is definitely gone. If she didn't see Fuze in person she must've suspected that there is another woman. Maybe she came to the main bedroom and saw Fuze's belongings.

He scrolls down for Andiswa's number and calls her. He was hoping that she'll say Ndondo is back in her house and he would've tried to fetch her. But as far as Andiswa knows Ndondo is in Himeville. Now he has to call that Khosi woman.

Sigh! Andiswa forwards the number and he makes another phone call.

“Yeyi bhuti! You took my friend and now you're asking me where she is? I want her home and safe. Do not test me!” With that said she drops the call.

Her clothes are still in his car, she couldn't have somewhere far. But it's strange that she didn't even send him a text, lashing out on him or confronting him.

Fuze has served breakfast and these people are happily digging in as if everything is okay.

“Babe, sit down and eat,” Fuze says. He's not surprised by her calmness, she'll never put him on the stand, no matter what. She's probably waiting for him to explain what's going on in his own time.

“I need to find Ndondo,” Ndabuko says.

“And who is that?” Fuze with a frown on her face.

“I will tell you everything. Right now I need to find her and bring her back home.”

Home- doesn't sit well with Fuze but she lets it slide. This is her house, her home.

“Ndlalifa?” Ndabuko says, looking at Ndlalifa. He folds the last slice of bread, shoves it in his mouth and gets off the chair.

“Do I have to ask you too?” He's looking at Maqhinga.

“We are always running after her,” Maqhinga mumbles as he pushes back the chair. Ndondo is going to be a task; every time they have to follow

her around and fight people for her.

“Baba we will call you once we've found her,”  
Ndlalifa says.

Ngidi just shakes his head and picks his hat from the table. This is going to be one hell of a journey. This is why he never got married, women are hard to keep up with.

“Later MaFuze,” he says and walks towards the door. He has things to do and Ndabuko’s spinelessness is costing him money.

Cars drive out and Fuze throws down her fork and take up the stairs. She knows that Ndabuko didn't bother checking in Nhlanzeko's room because nobody ever goes in there.

She pushes the door and it opens. Oops! There's a situation inside here.

[03/14, 09:00] : Chapter 10

Ndabuko

This Khosi chick is calling again. It turns out she's more crazy than he thought. He silences the phone and puts it away. He knows what she wants and right now he's also trying to understand everything that's happening. Just a few hours ago he left his Hlasekazi fine on bed and now she's been admitted to the hospital? How is he going to explain this to her crazy friend and family? What if Fuze didn't find her lying unconscious on the floor in Nhlanzeko's room? They would've searched for her all over Durban and maybe by the time they find her would've been too late.

It's shocking and confusing. What made her go to that room? And what made her unconscious? Couldn't Nhlanzeko protect her? Or this is one of his tricks of punishing Ndabuko? Really, nobody deserves to have a dead brother like him.

Ndlalifa dropped out of school in grade 11, some people are just too cool for school and really don't need education, he was one of those. He started driving his father's taxis at the age of 20, on the road he's very experienced, which is why he's the

one on the wheel and speeding past every vehicle. They're in Umhlanga Netcare Hospital in no time. Despite having other important duties Ndlalifa knows that Ndabuko needs them now more than ever. He's the type that cares way too much about other people. If it was up to him he'd never hurt a soul, but that's not how life rolls, people hurt those they love the most.

They're welcomed by an Indian male nurse at the reception. They have to explain how they're related to Miss Sibisi, of which Ndabuko lies and says he's her fiance.

“We had to admit Miss Ngcobo as well. Her blood pressure was very high when she came here with the patient, the doctor is still monitoring her.”

Ndabuko shuts his eyes and exhales loudly. Instead of getting better things are turning worse. Now Fuze is also lying on the hospital bed, probably because of him.

“Can I see Ndondo Sibisi first?” Right now, at this moment, he realizes that he'd never survive

polygamy. He's not going to get into two marriages with different women. Just a week of dating two women has shown him flames, how would a lifetime be like?

“We'll wait here,” says Ndlalifa. He stops before the ward entrance and orders Maqhing, who's eager to watch everything unfold, to do the same.

He feels her eyes on him as he walks in with the nurse. He wants to look at her but he's afraid of the hatred he might see in her eyes.

Before giving them privacy the nurse turns to him with a smile spread across his face.

“Congratulations Mr Mngomezulu,” he says.

Welcome to Umhlanga Netcare Hospital where you get congratulated for having an ill, angry girlfriend staring at you!

He finally lifts up his eyes and looks at her. The hatred he expected to find is not there, she's just



staring at him as if he's a stranger she's never met in her life. The lack of emotions on her face hurts more than anything. She loved him, right? Then why she is not angry? Why is she just staring at him like this?

“Hlase...” She removes the oxygen mask from her face and puts it next to her pillow.

“Don't call me that,” she says calmly.

“I'm sorry. I know that I have disappointed you,” he says.

“It's too late for apologies Ndabuko. I only need one thing from you.”

“Anything you want,” he says, nodding his head.

“How did Nhlanzeko die?” Her question gags him. He doesn't know what really happened between Nhlanzeko and Ndondo. He doesn't know whether they both knew each other or if the feelings were mutual. And that's the scary part; the possibility of her being in love with his dead brother.

“They shot him,” he says and keeps his eyes away

from hers.

“Where?” Not this question! It will hurt her..but he can't lie to her again, can he?

“Where, Ndabuko?” she asks firmly.

“On his way to you. 12 J anuary 2011, he heard that you were in a certain shop in KwaNdamase. He wanted to confess his feelings for you and didn't get the chance to.”

She shuts her eyes, tears stream down her face like a waterfall. He has no right to be jealous, Nhlanzeko met her first and he's the reason why they're together, that's if they're still together.

“I've been looking for him all my life,” she says and wails louder.

Two nurses run in and ask him to step aside. His heart is torn into a million pieces as he watch the woman he loves with all his heart crying over his brother.

“Mr Mngomezulu we'll have to ask you to leave. Your presence is not good for our patient and the

baby,” one of them says.

“The baby?” His agonized voice comes out in a whisper.

Nobody has time to break things down for him. He steps backwards and turns around and leaves. He can rip his heart out and hold it in his palm until it cools down because it hurts more than anything he's ever experienced.

“How is she?” Ndlalifa’s voice snaps him out of his misery, reminding him that he had company coming here.

“I don't know,” he says.

They know this tone and squeezed face, they don't question further.

He doesn't tell them their next stop but they follow him and wait in another passage.

Fuze has that BP thing around her arm. He waits until the doctor is done recording in his files.

She knows him like the back of her hand. She

knows what makes him happy and what breaks him. The condition he is in right now is what she feared about this whole Ndondo nonsense.

“Thank you Zamafuze,” he says and sits on the chair next to the bed.

“You're welcome but you have to tell me who she is and what she was doing in our house.”

“That's Ndondo Sibisi..I love her.” Saying it is not hard as he thought. As much as he wants to protect everyone's feelings, the truth will free him from this triangle.

“What was she doing in Nhlanzeko's room?”

He's a bit shocked by her reaction. No matter how soft hearted you are, hearing your partner of years saying that he's in love with another woman must evoke some kind of wild emotions.

“I don't know.” He tries to keep his voice intact. It's the truth, he doesn't know what Ndondo was doing in Nhlanzeko's room.

“I hate seeing you like this. If this is how she makes

you feel then I will protect you from her. You don't deserve all this. Nobody has the right to make you feel like the second best version of Nhlanzeko. You are not him and you're enough as you are.”

She has pushed the right buttons. Ndabuko's face is buried in his hands and he's sniffing back his tears. Ndondo's words- "I've been looking for him all my life"- are still ringing in his ears. He can still see the hurt and pain on her face as she heard that Nhlanzeko got shot.

She knew him and she was in love with him. Even now she's still in love with him. Again, Ndabuko will be the best number two, just like he was to his parents.

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NDONDO

Khosi is here again, for the third time in one day. I don't know what she wants me to do. Cry?

Terminate the pregnancy? Kill myself?

What happened has happened and there's nothing I can do about it. My dreams were crushed, all in one day. The man I had believed was the love of my life for years died seven years ago, on his way to me. He's the brother of a man who dated me for a few days and crushed my heart into a million pieces. He's the ancestor that wants me married to his asshole of a brother. And to complicate everything, one mistake of being "lost in the moment" has left me with a Mngomezulu seed in my womb. I was only in his house for two days and we used protection most of the times. It was that one incident on the couch where condoms were just too far and Ndabuko was like a hungry lion.

I was the side-chick. Imagine, a whole me turned into a side dish by some taxi idiot! He has not fooled me once, not twice, my whole life has been turned into a joke. I have to live with the evidence of our relationship, or whatever it was. His child.

Khosi hands me a glass of wine. This one didn't hear what the doctor said. I'M PREGNANT.

I take the glass and put it next to me.

“I made calls and it's true,” she says.

This one thinks I live in her head. What is she talking about now? I just stare at her and wait for the explanation.

“Nhlanzeko Mngomezulu is the founder of Bantwana Holdings. Mr Ngidi was just a face and it was known that you'll graduate, work under him for a few years and then take over.”

I need to stay calm. I can't allow these people to break the broken me any further.

“I can't believe that I trusted Mr Ngidi.” My whole life is a joke!

“Nhlanzeko was like a son to him. He's the one who groomed him in the taxi industry and helped him buy his first taxi. If anyone was in this, it's him more than Ndabuko.”

“I don't want to hear that man's name in my house,”  
I say.

“Sorry friend, but you're pregnant with his child and  
your parents will find out about it.”

I'm not worried about my mother, it's my father and  
aunt I fear. Pregnant before marriage? What a  
disappointment!

Andiswa walks in. Earphones tucked in the ears and  
fingers swiping all over the screen of her phone.

“Mngomezulu is here.” With that said she turns and  
leaves.

This new behavior is really starting to annoy me.  
But I have my own drama in life. For instance, the  
ugly man in my house right now.

“I will deal with him,” Khosi.

I stop her with my hand. I will handle this one on my  
own.

She's not convinced but when I pick the glass of  
wine she brought her face relaxes.



He's in his dungaree, boots and gloves. If this is his trick then he doesn't know who he is dealing with. I can freeze my heart when I want to.

His eyes quickly land on the glass in my hand and his face instantly transforms into anger. He must just try me!

“What do you want?” I ask.

“I want my job back,” he says.

Deep breath, Ndondo.

“We have found someone else.”

“I'll be his assistant..you don't have to pay me.”

Yeah right, you're a stinking rich swine!

“Your game is over Ndabuko. If you want me out of your brother's company just say the word and I will resign with immediate effect.”

“I only want your love back. I know it's too early for you to believe me but I never meant to hurt you. I love you with all my heart.”

“And Zamafuze?” I ask.

“She's the mother of my child and she's not well. It's hard to just let her go but I'm working on it. You're the one that I love and we're destined to be together.”

“I suggest that you work on your relationship with her because you and I are over. I did love you and I did love your brother. But both of you have hurt me in the way I can't explain. Your brother thought it was okay to drive my life to his own direction, even now he still wants to dictate me. You on the other hand, you're a liar and a cheating asshole. I want nothing to do with the Mngomezulu surname.”

I hope this gets through his thick skull because I mean every word. I'm not going to be fooled by the Mngomezulus. They're not going to make me feel less of a woman and a hardworking person that I am. I'm not going to allow them to take my power.

He grabs my hands. That was expected because he knows nothing about respect. The glass I had slips and cracks on the floor.

“Ndabuko let go of me!” I'm fuming. He really has the nerve to even beg me to be with him while he hasn't even grown a pair of balls to end his relationship with Zamafuze. I'm not going to be a part of this triangle.

“I love you Hlasekazi, please give me another chance.”

Do I need to speak Portuguese with this man? It's OVER!

On his knees...seriously?!

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Thalente

“Thale chop the cabbage, we'll run out of coleslaw.”  
That's Sis' Thandi throwing another instruction.

I have to keep reminding myself that this is better than sitting at home doing nothing. My aunt's friend got me this job and I'm grateful. It's behind the noisy taxi rank and I have to open my mouth and

greet people I don't know all day long. But half bread is better than nothing. Like other 27 year olds, I'll be able to take care of my parents and siblings. The pension money is not enough, even combined, my little sister decided to add to the family and got pregnant for her grade 10 classmate.

All the way from Khangelani to Verelum taxi rank to cook and sell food. I've been here for two days only but I'm already expected to cook stew and deliver food all over the rank.

“Things happen fast around here,” - That's what Hlelo, Thandi's young cousin who also works here with me, has been saying since I got here.

It's just a food shelter with two benches for customers who want to eat in. We get here before 5am and cook rice, pap and different stews. Taxi drivers place their orders every morning and fetch them, or demand that we bring their food to them, as the day continues.

I've never been a fan of taxi drivers, mostly because

I believe that they undermine women. Even here, they have started with their “mamazi” remarks. I want to die everytime one of them demands that we bring his food to where he is because it ends with- “can I have your number?”

Others are kind, they fetch their food or send someone if they're busy. Like the one they call Hlomuka, his helper always place his order and fetches it. And he never make up stories when it's time to pay.

Because he's a good person today I dish him extra pieces of meat before I seal his plate.

“You need to learn how to seal properly,” Hlelo says. In her head she's Sis 'Thandi's deputy and I have to take orders from her as well.

Well, I'm the only Thalente in the world who doesn't have any talent. I have disappointed my name. I remember taking the 15th spot in a dance competition in high school. I won't even mention how I was chased out of the choir practice for singing too high and messing the song for other

kids.

We have dished all morning orders and now we have to wash the pots and start cooking for lunch orders. Yes, taxi drivers eat full meal in the mornings and throughout the day. It's something I'll never understand.

“Thale! Hlelo!”

What have we done now?

“Who cooked the beef stew?” she asks.

Hlelo wastes no second, she points at me. I have the urge to roll my eyes. We are supposed to stick together and I was taking instructions from her with that stew.

“Here is the one who cooked,” Sis’ Thandi says, directing to the tracksuit guy standing in front of the shelter.

“Hlomuka says this food is too salty,” the guys tells me.

I can't believe this! The same Hlomuka I sneaked

extra pieces of meat for is dissing my cooking.

“There's nothing wrong with the food, otherwise everyone would've returned the food by now,” I say.

“Thalente! Yey yey!” She raises up her hand and I know that I have fucked up. The customer is always right bla bla bla.

I had reserved a plate of chicken for myself, we are allowed to do so, now I have to give it to this Hlomuka person.

“Give him this one but it's chicken,” I say and exchange the plates with the guy.

We get back to work. Luckily Sis' Thandi has to rush somewhere, there's no time for her to shout at me.

“I can't believe you messed up Hlomuka's food. Do you know who he is?”

No, I don't but she's about to brief me. And I don't know how short one's memory can be. She instructed me on everything, if the beef stew was too salty then it was her fault.

“His father is about to become the association

chairman and they own five taxis in this rank alone. You're lucky it was Ndlalifa and not Maqhinga. That one would've told the whole rank that you cook salty food.”

This thing of worshipping other human beings is boring. I'm lucky my left foot!

“They can get Sis Thandi out of this shelter any minute they want. And where will that put us? You're going back to Ngudwini to drink water with the goats and plough crops.”

Did I say I have no talent? Well, not really. I have a good clap. I'm going to slap this girl so hard that she'll see Durban station lights flickering right in front of her eyes. Who said we drink water with the goats? I hate being undermined.

“Yey sistera!”

We look up. It's Hlomuka's errand boy again. What now?!

“Ndlalifa says he can't eat this. He ordered beef



because he wanted beef,” he says and puts the chicken plate I gave him on our small table.

Hlelo is scared. She wants me to get on my knees and ask for forgiveness. Maybe even run to Chester, use my last cent and buy a tray of meat to specially cook for this Hlomuka guy.

“Where is he?” I ask.

He frowns as Hlelo’s eyes widen.

“He's in that white quantum,” he says and points at it.

I take the beef plate that he returned earlier and make my way to the quantum. The errand boy remains with Hlelo inside the shelter.

He's sitting behind the steering wheel with his cap covering his face. I don't know if he’s sleeping or just resting because his father kinda owns this rank.

“Hey. Are you Ndlalifa?” I ask outside the window.

He wasn't sleeping. He removes the cap from his face and frowns. Gum? I hate people who chew

gum, they remind me of goats; always chewing something you can't see.

“Yeah,” he says flatly but his stinking attitude is much evident in his tone.

“You ordered a beef plate, didn't you?” I ask.

“Yeah.”

I hate this flat “yeah” of his.

“Well, here is your order. It's the beef that you ordered. I'm not going to lose my job because you think you have the right to judge my cooking skills. Everyone has eaten their food, so will you. If you feel like the salt is too much for you, you'll either bring your own food or wait until I've learnt to cook up to your satisfaction. But you will not send people to turn me against Sis' Thandi.”

He's still frowning. I give the plate to him and he hesitantly takes it. I wipe my hands on the apron and cross the road. I've come too far, two towns away, I can't lose my job only after two days.

Imagine wheeling the suitcases and going back home without a dime!

Sis' Thandi is back and we are sweating on the stoves and chopping salads. Every now and then we have to wave our hands at regular customers and cast evil eyes at Mam' Ntombi across the road because she is selling hotdogs and taking some of our customers.

“Hlomuka where are the boys?” Sis' Thandi asks in an extra-cheerful voice.

I lift my head up and my eyes meet the Hlomuka man's. My heart starts pounding against my chest. I hope he's not here to tell her to fire me.

He tears his eyes away from me and looks at Sis' Thandi.

“They're around. I'm bringing your plate, thanks for the food.”

I release a sigh of relief.

“Ndlalifa bakithi! There was no need to wash the plate, they would've washed it.”

Who is “they”? Hlelo is nodding her head with a

stupid smile on her face.

“Who is this new lady?” he asks.

I crease a huge frown on my forehead. He mustn't dare!

He gracefully frowns back. Oh, so now we are in a frown contest?

“This is Thalente Mbatha, my new assistant. Don't leave her stranded if you see her on the road,” Sis' Thandi says. I still can't believe she has this cheerful side in her.

“Definitely. Here, get yourselves a cold drink,” he says and hands Sis' Thandi a R50.

Most of them do this and we never get any cold drink.

He puts his cap back on and walks past me and Hlelo chopping the vegetables at the end of the table. I have a carrot in my hand, he snatches it and leaves.

“Shhhhh!” Hlelo says and passes another carrot to me.

It seems like I will have to keep my heart beat monitored in this place because, wow!

A few steps away he turns his head and looks back. He's chewing the carrot and something in me believes that he did this on purpose. Explain that smirk on his face!

“It's just a carrot,” Hlelo whispers.

I take my eyes away from him and release a sigh.

“Yes, but I was chopping it. He could've taken another one,” I say.

“He's Ndlalifa Ngidi.”

Sigh!

(Hlomuka is the Ngidi clan name. Sorry for the confusion, sometimes I think everyone is Zulu

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[03/14, 09:00] : Chapter 11

Zamafuze

She's still here, doing her best as the girlfriend. Ndabuko is taking the break up the hard way. It's actually ridiculous, he's not the first man to get dumped and definitely not the last one. He's acting as if his world has ended and Fuze's goal from now onward is making sure that he realizes that Ndondo is nothing other than one of Nhlanzeko's many spoilt-brat entitlements.

He has his back against her, drowning in his sorrow as he's been the whole day, Fuze throws her leg over him and wraps her arms around his waist.

His body doesn't react to her touch. Annoying! She collects a few breaths and removes her leg.

“Ndabuko you have to get yourself together. I can't bear seeing you like this because of Nhlanzeko,” she says.

He doesn't say anything. Sigh! She crawls over him and stands in front of his face.

“I’m here, just like I told you four years ago, I’m not going to leave.”

He lifts his eyes and looks at her. They both know it's over, she has lost him and he has lost himself on someone else. Why is she still here?

“Why ZamaFuze?” he asks.

“Because I love you,” she says.

“Your love needs to be reciprocated, why are you still here? You deserve better Fuze.”

“If I wanted to be somewhere else I would've left three years ago when you turned into a vegetable and I had to put my life on hold to bathe you, feed you and wipe your arse.”

He tears his eyes away from her. She realizes what she has done and rubs her palms over her thighs. That's not how she was supposed to talk to him. She doesn't talk to him like that.

“I’m sorry, I know that was the hardest year of our lives. What I’m trying to do is show you how Nhlanzeko keeps making your life miserable. This

Ndondo thing is one of his stunts.”

“I don't want to talk about it,” he says and pulls the covers over his head.

A wave of fury crashes through her veins but she stays calm. She may have forgotten how happiness tasted like but he makes her comfortable. He provides like a man, a man her own father never was. She's living the life her mother never got to live. Whatever it takes, she has to do her best to keep him.

“It's been over a week Ndabuko and we just sleep. You don't even touch me!”

Silence.

“Ndabuko I understand that you're under a lot of stress and confused by everything that's happening. But the last thing I want to do is seek pleasure elsewhere.”

That's it! He tolerates her presence because she doesn't talk. She doesn't nag. But this new Fuze; the one who demands to be touched and noticed, is irritating.



He takes his phone and pulls one pillow. Her eyes grow wide in shock.

“Where are you going?” she asks.

He takes off without saying a word. When he closes the door behind him she sinks on the bed and hugs her own knees in tears.

It's late, almost nine, but her mother will always be there when she needs a shoulder to cry on. She's always there, patting her back and telling her to soldier on.

“Do whatever you have to do Zamafuze. You cannot lose that man, imagine what your cousins would say! Your uncles are waiting for abakhongi. Please pull yourself together.”

They chat for a while, by the time she gets off the phone she's feeling better than she was before. Who said it was going to be easy? She has put up with this man for years, this will be one of those phases where she'll have to put her needs aside and make sure that Ndabuko pulls out. She knows how

aggressive Nhlanzeko can be.

When she wakes up she goes to the guest room to check on Ndabuko. The bed is empty; he's gone.

She'll apologize when he comes back, probably late in the evening because when he wakes up early like this it means he's gone to the taxi rank and will be back late.

She also has to skip breakfast, the man she wants to see is a busy bee. She gets out of the shower and puts on her dark green peplum dress, scarf around her head and lace-up sandals.

Ngidi is a Zulu man, he may not have much interest in taking a wife himself but he must have some stereotypical “wife material dress code” expectations. By love and loyalty, he's Ndabuko's father, and to cement her position in Ndabuko's life Fuze needs this man's approval.

No, she's not going wear a “gold digger” tag on her back by driving Ndabuko’s sport cars everytime she steps out of the house. She requests an Uber and

heads to Ngidi's house.

To avoid going through security checks and all, she decides to give him a call as the car drives towards the gate.

It sounds like he's in the rush to somewhere but when he hears that it's Ndabuko's long-term girlfriend he orders for her to be let in.

In the black society where most men head to Johannesburg to dig mines and squat in crowded hostels to have a shelter above their heads, it's eyebrow-raising to see a man this successful without anything tangible from his background, and on top of that he stays alone. Why is he not married? Obviously, the word is out there, kept under breaths, that Ngidi practiced ukuthwala to get where he is. But that's the story for another day.

He's staring at Zamafuze as she makes her way towards the widely opened door.

"Is Ndabuko okay?" he asks, clearly concerned more about the absent person than the one in front

of him.

“He's fine, baba,” she lies with a smile on her face. It's a skill she has learnt to master excellently over the years. She comes from a very large family; aunts and their rebellious children, uncles and their different girlfriends. Everyone is there and she's the most stable one in the family. With all the money Ndabuko gives her, all the gifts and luxurious trips, she's expected to always have a smile on her face.

They settle in the lounge and Ngidi's housekeeper rushes in with snacks and drinks. A very beautiful woman she is, housekeeping with a mud of make-up on her face and a body-hugging tight uniform. But we are not there, it's a story for another day.

“What brings you here?” Ngidi asks.

A heavy sigh! She wears a concerned face and takes a little sip from the orange juice in her hand.

“How was the relationship between Nhlanzeko and his mother?” she asks.

It's a strange question; she's with Ndabuko, not Nhlanzeko.

“Why do you ask?” Ngidi cocks up his eyebrow.

“I feel like Ndabuko needs to talk to someone professional about the deaths of his brother and parents. Out of curiosity, I also want to know how my mother-in-law was, I can't get anything out of Ndabuko. He says they were not close.” She accompanies her words with an innocent smile. Ngidi can't help but be pleased about this young woman's dedication and love for Ndabuko.

“Ndabuko has always been...” He's struggling with a good, fitting term. Cheeseboy? No. Model C guy? Not really.

“He's educated, more educated than necessary. And that has always been the problem.”

“That he is educated?” She's confused. This doesn't make any sense.

“He wanted to be treated like a white child. Hugs, kisses, bedtime stories and all that nonsense. While Nhlanzeko was out there, doing whatever he needed

to do to put food on the table.”

“But mothers always get closer to their emotional needy children.”

“There was no time for that. He needed to grow up but he refused. Nhlanzeko tried, he really did. He even took him to one of the night missions, hoping that he'll see life of a black child as it is, but he wanted to build aeroplanes.”

Her head is graced with curiosity, but now is not the time to fish information about night missions.

“So the mother chose the rebellious son?” Words are a bit blunt but Ngidi seems not to be offended on Nhlanzeko's behalf.

“Nhlanzeko got things done. He didn't need to be kissed on the forehead, a basin of warm water and a plate of food were all he needed before going to bed. A hand squeeze and packed lunch were enough to get him ready for the day.”

He takes another sip from his drink and lets the smile on his face broadens at the memory of Nhlanzeko.

“One mama-boyish thing about him was that, up to the age of twenty-six he still needed his mother to comb his hair. She was a woman of perfection and he was a boy of the streets. He was the only man, in the whole taxi rank, who'd come in the mornings smelling of coconut hair oils and sprays.” He breaks into laughter, as if well-kept hair is the most ridiculous thing a man could ever do.

“What about Ndabuko's hair?” she asks.

“I don't know. He was a school boy who spoke big English words and wore ties.”

“Really?” There's a smile on her face, a genuine one. Despite everything that has happened and the fact that Ndabuko no longer lives the life he once dreamed of, she's proud of him and what he accomplished.

“Yes, there was this one time when a white man from Germany came to meet us for a certain deal, Ndlalifa and Nhlanzeko had to go kidnap Ndabuko from school so that he could come and translate for us.”

“Kidnap?” she asks with a chuckle, thinking that maybe he misused the word.

“Yes, kidnap. He had an important science thing to attend and blatantly refused to help out when Nhlanzeko asked. He had no other choice but to forcefully take him out of whatever event it was.”

Jesus Christ! What kind of a brother was he?  
Kidnapping your own brother!

“Did he love Ndabuko?” she asks what she thinks Ndabuko also asks himself everyday.

“Boys are not like you girls, they don't send each other bunches of flowers and glittering earrings. He may have not shown it the way Ndabuko understood but my boy loved his family. He loved his brother and he trusted him with everything.”

“You mean Ndondo?” She's fighting the urge to roll her eyes but her face sells out her emotions. Ngidi's eyes are on her as she lifts the drink to her lips and gulps down a huge sip.

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According to what she saw the other day, her competitor seems to leave her Miss-Know-It-All brains out of the kitchen. The girl is clueless in the kitchen, even her own mother no longer cooks tomato relish like her. Not to mention her burnt, dry eggs that would've required Ndabuko to stand up and stomp his foot on the floor before swallowing. She has gone out of her way with dinner. Creamy samp, French stir fry and chicken drummets. Ndabuko's favourite cinnamon flavoured butternut is almost ready, she just need to get everything to the table.

He's sober, one of the things he hates about himself; the inability to drink his sorrows away. The mouth-watering aroma coming from his house is evidence enough that Fuze is still very much present.

It's been days, he's sending text messages every morning without fail. He makes sure that a bunch of flowers is delivered to her office everyday. There

haven't been any response so far, but he's not giving up. He'd rather make a fool of himself than to let go of his “family.”

“Mngomezulu you're home.” It's Fuze's voice but it reminds him of that day near the pool in Hlasekazi's house when she called him this way for the first time.

“Hey,” he says, trying not to sound too flat and bored.

“How was your day?” she asks as she takes his jacket off his shoulders.

“Busy,” he says after clearing his throat.

She grabs his hand and leads him towards the dining room. Food is the last thing to lighten up his mood but a basin of water placed on top of the table just for him causes his heart to leap up.

“Wash your hands and sit,” she orders and goes out of the room.

For a moment he's just standing there and scanning his eyes around the table. Then he soaks his hands inside the basin of warm water. It's just water, there's no need to feel so honoured.

She's back at being the Fuze he knows and had once loved. She's sitting quietly at her side and focused on her food.

“One of the drivers got arrested. I have to go past the police station tomorrow and see what I can do.” Bribe whoever he finds there and get his driver released, that's what he means.

“They have a final meeting next Wednesday. Ngidi will either become the chairman or we are emptying the ranks,” he says.

“Won't that lead into another fight?” Fuze asks.

“If Bhengu doesn't step down then that's where it might end.”

She's been around for four years; she knows this life. But no matter how many nights your man

comes home in one piece, you cannot help but wonder if one day you'll receive a call to go identify the body. It was better when Ndabuko hated this life, Ngidi didn't let him partake into fights, but now he's like one of them. He leaves with a gun tucked behind his waist and a Golf full of bodyguards following him around.

It's a normal dinner they haven't had in a long time. The conversation is nothing about themselves but they're talking. That's something, right?

She was tempted to ask going to the shower with him but she doesn't want to be pushy. Not when he's starting to come around.

He comes back wearing pyjamas, clearly denying her the view of his tempting body.

She smiles and goes over him with a bottle of First Class coconut hairfood in her hand.

“I knew you wouldn't comb your hair,” she says.

He frowns as she pulls out a fine-tooth comb.

“Come and sit on bed,” she orders as she pulls his hand towards the bed.

“Fuze my hair is okay,” he says, regretting why he didn't shave when he had time.

“Sit Ndabuko!” Her voice is steady but the soft Fuze is still there.

He obeys and sits.

Her fingers run tenderly on his scalp as she applies the hair food. His eyes are closed, allowing his nerves to settle down and the smell of coconut to fill up his nostrils.

He picks his short hair with a comb softly from the front and pulls it all the way to the back of his head.

A kiss on the cheek opens his eyes. He looks at her, everything in him has been soften, he just wants to snuggle himself in her arms and feel her warm embrace.

“You look so cute,” she says with a huge smile plastered on her face.

He pulls her into his arms, they snuggle into what feels like the world's longest hug.

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NDONDO

~ I don't know where I am. I can't recognize any familiarities around me. It's just an open field with dry grass and fallen trees. I should've worn my shoes. How did I leave with no shoes on? What if I step on sharp thorns or a huge snake? My body starts sweating as I look around to see if there's anyone I can ask for help.

“Ndondoyamahlase,” the voice comes in front of me. Where did he come from?

“Hey,” my voice seems to pressed down at my throat. The state he is in is traumatizing. I can literally see the bullet hole in his head. He was shot, I don't know how he's still able to stand on his own. His white Uzzi T-shirt is soaked in blood.

“I didn't leave you,” he says.

I realize that I'm crying when tears drop down my neck. But I hold it together.

“Nhlanzeko,” I call his name softly. I still can't believe he's right here, in front of me.

“Mkami,” he responds in a relieved voice.

“When are you coming back?” I ask.

“I will be here, looking over you. Ndabuko will love and take care of you,” he says.

I nod my head because I trust his decision. He will keep his word, I know it.

“Why are you not going to the hospital? You're bleeding, Nhlanzeko.”

He touches the hole in his head and looks at his bloodied hand. I'd be screaming if it was me, but he doesn't seem to be fazed.

“It's just this T-shirt,” he says and looks at his T-shirt with disgust. “It's dirty and soaked in blood. I want to change but I don't have any clean clothes. Ngiyanuka nje,” he says.

“Let's go home, I will run you a bath and get you...”

Where is he now? He was here just now.

“Nhlanzeko?” I raise my voice and look around.

How can he just leave like this? I wanted to help him.

“Nhlanzekooooo!” I scream at the top of my voice and pick up my feet to run after him.~

My head slams against something hard and the pain forces me to open my eyes. It's the headboard! I'm on bed? Where is...? No!!!

(Reminder: The Beloved MaShenge is available in bookstores nationwide)

[03/14, 09:00] : Chapter 12

Thalente

Hlelo thinks it's funny that I complain about waking up too early in the morning, in her mind people from the rural areas wake up at the crack of dawn to



plough fields and watch cows kissing one another inside the kraal.

Making my hate of mornings worse is the on and off electricity in these shacks. I had to bath with cold water again today because the police have been snooping around and the fact that we have izinyokanyoka doesn't allow us to light our shacks when they're around.

I'm so ready to answer- how is Durban- question when I get home. The place of so-called banana is actually kaak.

One good thing about being here is that nobody feels entitled to your greeting. You can just pass a 50 year-old and not open your mouth, and nobody would call you out for being disrespectful.

.It's not even 5am but the streets are already crowded; some are rushing to the train station and some are here to hop in the taxis. At least I'm not the only one with a crazy boss that demands me to be at work by 5am.

I isolate myself from the crowd and stand by the pole with my sweater pulled over my knuckles. It's so damn cold. Where are the taxis? They've been hooting since the clock ticked 4am but now that we're here they're nowhere to be seen.

Oh, finally a white quantum approaches. I take a few steps forward and put my finger up.

When it passes the crowd without stopping I realize that it's just one of those parading ones and step back.

It slows down and stops before driving past me.

"Thalente," It's that carrot man whose father owns the taxi rank.

The window rolls down, he peeks out and asks me to get inside the quantum.

I steal a glance at the crowd and I know that the low mumbles are of disapproval.

"They're also waiting for transport," I say as soon as

I climb in.

“I’m not on the road.”

Is his quantum flying?

“I was asked not to leave you stranded on the road. The taxi is coming in a minute,” he explains and the confusion on my face disperses.

“Oh, thank you,” I say and make myself comfortable on the seat. I put my bag on my lap and connects the headsets into my phone.

“I’m here,” he says with his eyes on the road.

“So am I,” I say what seems to be the only logic response. I scroll down my music playlist, now I can't find my favourite song. I can't wait to have money so that I can buy music from real digital stores, this thing of receiving songs via WhatsApps - audio000- is a complete turn-off.

“Who lies on these breasts?” he asks randomly.

I lift my head up just as he darts his glance away from me and focusing on the road.

“I bet your pardon?” I just want to hear him repeat

his words.

“You heard me,” he says.

I click in a random song and press- play. Fuck these bloody headsets. The other ear is not working so whatever this man says, I will hear it.

The nerve this man has! He's just like the rest of them. He sees women as nothing other than breathing sex machines.

“Usholo ukuthi engangigingqa mina?” (Do you think he can knock me out)

“Who?” I ask.

“The one who keeps you warm.”

I don't have him, he found someone else and we broke up. But I need to get this man off his high horse.

“Yes, he'd knock you out,” I say.

The loud laugh he breaks rings in my ears even five seconds later after he's stopped.

“What's funny?” I ask.

The smile grows back on his face. Honestly, I can't take anymore of his inside jokes.

“I laugh when I'm scared,” he says.

Weird much!

“Oh, so what are you scared of?” I ask.

“I'm scared of being knocked out by your man,” he says. The look on his face is the opposite of what he's saying.

“Why would he knock you out?” I ask.

He glances at me briefly, just to take a sight of my face, and then turns his head back to the road. He's driving too slow for my liking.

“Because of you,” he says and reaches out to his ringing phone from the dashboard.

I don't get the chance to ask what I did so badly that might lead into him being knocked out by my so-called boyfriend. He's on the call, insults are flying out of his mouth like a national anthem verses.

All of a sudden, the quantum is flying and the taxi that was a few yards away from us lifting commuters is now speeding away.

“Are you trying to kill me?” I ask when he overtakes the truck. Is he trying some Fast and Furious shit on me?

“This dog is fucking with us,” he says and applies more force on the accelerator. I hold onto the seat and shut my eyes.

Defeaning hoots are everywhere. We are just past the bridge when he finally pulls over at the side of the road. The taxi he was chasing is in front of us and the driver is out with his hands up.

This one jumps off his seat and charges towards him. I heard about the famous taxi fights and I hope this is not one of them.

After a few minutes of exchanging what looked like harsh insults Ndjalifa goes to the man's taxi and opens the door.

He has a phone against his ear and all the commuters the man lifted are now standing at the

side of the road. It seems like they'll be fetched by another one.

I'm late for work; it's almost half-past five.

“Steal our passengers again and I will burn you and this skorokoro of yours!” Ndlalifa says.

He comes back, still singing colourful words to the man.

He doesn't even apologize to me, he just starts the car and drives off. The man he is and the man who lifted me up a while ago are two different people. This one looks like he'd kill a person with just a flip of his knuckles.

But I will make my feelings known when I reach the taxi rank.

“You look angry,” he says, finally acknowledging the uncomfortable passenger.

“So do you,” I say.

He chuckles and his face immediately switches back to what I know.

“I have a reason, there's inja trying to fuck with us so early in the morning,” he says.

I could remind him that people are rushing to work and it's him and his colleagues slacking at their job. Why can't people stop any taxi that's on the road? It's very unfair.

“I'm also angry because someone tried to kill me,” I say.

He nearly loses his grip on the steering wheel. His face might never return to its position after this huge frown.

“What? Who tried to kill you?” Ever heard of “wrong” himself asking you what is wrong? This is the same situation.

“You,” I say.

His frown slowly disperses.

“Me?” he asks.

“Yes. Do you think you're Vin Diesel?” I ask.

The frown again!



“Which monkey is that? I'm Ndlalifa Ngidi.”

As rural as I am, I know who Vin Diesel is. He seems so disgusted by the comparison, in his mind he has already punched this Vin Diesel monkey on the jaws.

Because he's an asshole I will not explain who Vin Diesel is. He'll boil and burst if he wants to.

He does something and the white Polo on the other lane slows down. The driver rolls down the window and ask if everything is okay. It's a young man who could be rushing to work.

“We ndoda, do you know who Vin Diesel is?”

I cannot believe this!

The guy is clearly confused. Who, in their right mind, stops a car in the middle of the road to ask about actors?

“It's Mark Sinclair,” the guy says.

This one seems to be more confused.

“Is it Vin or Mark?” he asks, frowning.

“Mark is his name. Vin Diesel is a stage name. He was Dominic Torreto in Fast and Furious.” He's said it all, but this man here doesn't seem to have grasped a thing he said.

“Okay, dankie bafo.” He finally drives off. I'm proud of myself for causing this confusion, now I can say I have a talent of confusing taxi drivers. But that's something to celebrate later, right now I have Sis' Thandi to deal with.

“I will remember next time to never take your lifts. Now I have to take...” I lift my head up and find him staring at the R20 I'm handing to him. Now he wants me to be more late? I need my change asap!

“Ndlalifa?” I frown.

He smiles and takes the money. He thinks I like calling out his name? Hhayi-bo this man!

“I'm sorry, uyezwa?” he says as he fishes out his wallet. My change is R9, I don't know what the R50 is for.

“And?” I ask.

“Your change,” he says.

“I gave you R20, my change is R9.”

He has a stunned look on his face.

“Really? I dropped out of school at grade 11 and Maths wasn't really my thing. Tell Thandi that you were with me.” With that said he reverses with the door opened. When he's in a safer distance he closes the door and drives off.

The extra change is still on my palm where he put it. I'm stunned. My grandmother is not resting in her grave; just when I was starting to worry about money she sends an illiterate taxi driver my way.

Snap! I need to hurry to the shelter.

“Sis Thandi I'm sorry, the taxi I was in delayed.” I'm not going to mention his important name to get out of trouble. I can handle my own shit.

“Thalente if you don't get yourself together I'm going to send you back home. This is Durban, time

is money and money is time.”

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NDONDO

I have been trying to forget about the dream I had. I was born a Christian, honouring dead people is not my thing. But the dream cannot get off my mind. In the world that I was told was demonic, dreams have meanings and dead people communicate through them.

“Are you okay?” Khosi asks for the zillionth time. No matter how much I try to keep it together she sees through me. But this is not something I can discuss with her.

“I need to see Bab' Mbambo,” I say and push the documents in front of me to her.

“About what? He's on a tea-break,” she asks.

“It's personal,” I say and leave before she bombards me with more questions.

He's in the middle of storytelling with his colleagues. I clear my throat and greet them all. But they know I never do small talks with anyone else except Bab' Mbambo. They quickly excuse themselves to give us privacy.

“Is everything alright?” he asks as he pushes an empty chair to me.

I never have to beat around the bush with him. I know he'll never judge me.

“I had a dream and I'm not sure what it means,” I say.

He's waiting for me to go on.

“A man who died seven years ago came to my dream. I don't remember most things we talked about but I remember him complaining about the smelling blood on his clothes and that he didn't have any clean clothes to change into,” I say.

“How did he die?” he asks.

“He was shot,” I say, ignoring the ache in my heart.

Nhlanzeko has not revealed himself to me for years. But now that I have met and slept with his brother he's coming to my dreams.

“Did they clean him before the burial? I know badly injured bodies are not touched, but something is done to remove the blood.”

“I really don't know. I wasn't there when he died.” I don't want to go into details and I appreciate that he's taking what I'm giving and not questioning further.

“Find out then. He came to you for help, if his body was never washed you'll need to slaughter a chicken, sprinkle inyongo over a clean shirt and present it to him so that he can change.”

I press down the lump forming in my throat and nod my head. Why is Nhlanzeko doing this to me? My parents would die if they found out I'm promoting the culture of slaughtering chickens and dreaming about dead men.

And now I have to speak to Ndabuko? I've been trying my best to ignore him and his constant texts.

I have instructed Precious not to send any flowers to my office. I didn't expect him to back down easily since he knows that I'm carrying his child, but he's overdoing it. Now everyone in the company knows that I have a persistent ex who won't let me go.

Khosi is still in my office. I know she's waiting for me to open my chest and tell her what's eating me.

“I thought you weren't coming back. What were you two discussing?”

I can't tell her, mainly because I don't need her wise opinions in this situation. She'll want to protect me under her wings and go out of her way to get the best pastor in town who'll chase Nhlanzeko's ghost away.

“Didn't you say there was a limited Spitz sale?” I ask.

She gasps in shock and grabs her phone from the table.

“And you're only reminding me now Ndondo?” She's dashing through the door and leaving all the

documents on my desk. Sometimes mixing business with friendship is an extreme sport. Knowing how Khosi is, she may only come back around lunch time.

I close the door and sink on my chair. I have to talk to Ndabuko, thanks to Nhlanzeko!

I'm hesitant about clicking on the call button, from what I've seen he isn't much fond of his late brother. And knowing that I had a thing for him and he's the reason why we met this will completely set him off. But it has to be done, I'm willing to put the beliefs aside and do this for his brother. A huge part of me feels like it's my responsibility. I mean why would he come to me if he didn't want me to organize this cleansing thing?

His phone rings a few times before he answers in a voice surged with relief.

“Hlasekazi,” he says.



Shut down your heart, Ndondo!

“Ndabuko we need to talk,” I say.

There's a deep sigh of relief.

“Must I come over? I know that I did you wrong babe and I'm willing to do anything you want me to do. Punish me anyway you want but don't...” I clear my throat before he rumbles even more. I expected this and that's why I was hesitant about making this call.

“I had a dream,” I say.

He goes silent.

“He has complaints.” For some reasons I feel like saying his name to Ndabuko is offensive.

He hasn't dropped the call so I know that he's listening.

“He needs clean clothes. He cried about being dirty with all the blood he has on his body,” I say.

Eventually, he clears his throat after an audible sigh.

“I will try to call home,” he says.

I don't know the relationship he has with his relatives or if his home still exists back in the village. I wish I can be there to support him but knowing how he is, he'll misread the signals.

“I miss you Ndondo, everyday that passes by without you in my life feels like a decade.”

It would be rude to drop the call on him, but this is not what I called for.

“Please soften up your heart and hear me out,” he begs.

I let out a long sigh.

“I don't have time for this Nhlanzeko. It's not what I called for,” I say.

Silence.

Did I call him Nhlanzeko? Oh my gosh!

“Ndabuko?” I call out his name in panic.

“You called me Nhlanzeko?” he asks sternly.

“That's not what I meant. It's just that I've been thinking about this dream the whole morning and...”

The line is dead. He dropped the call on me?!

I call him again and he rejects my call. I send a text and get blue-ticked. Okay, breathe Ndondo.

If he keeps doing this to me I swear I'm going to lose my mind. Just as I'm pacing up and down with the phone in my hand, someone knocks at the door.

It's just after tea-break, don't they have work to do?

I open the door and find the forever-cheerful Khaya, our accountant.

“Girl, I need you to sign these for me.” He's the only employee, except Khosi and the twins, who refers to me as ‘girl.’

I blow out a sigh and go around the desk to my chair.

“Are you okay?” he asks with his eyes fixed on my face.

I don't talk to my employees about my personal life, but right now I need a pair of ears.

“My boyfriend..I mean ex-boyfriend, is not speaking to me,” I say.

“Oh, why don't you call and iron out whatever it is? Or even better, go to his place. You are the boss, nobody is going to bite your head off.”

“The thing is, I don't talk to him. It was just this one phone call and it ended with him not talking to me as well,” I say.

It looks like I'm not making any sense, judging by the frown on his face.

“Let me get this straight, you guys were not on speaking terms, right?” he asks.

“No, he was talking to me. I wasn't talking to him. And now both of us are not talking to each other.” I can't believe these are the kind of problems that I have.

“Then it's settled,” he says and leans back on the couch, waiting for me to sign the documents in front of me.

“I don't want him to not speak to me. I don't want

him to be angry with me,” I explain.

He looks defeated, like my problems are the most strangest thing he's ever heard.

“But you're not speaking to him either. What is the problem?”

Sigh!

I read through the documents and fill them with my signature. He's a man, obviously he won't understand this.

Yes I don't talk to Ndabuko but I sleep tight at night knowing that he's going to send me a good morning text and a bunch of flowers. But now he's not talking to me either, how is me not talking to him going to haunt his life when we are on the same wavelength?

My life is a mess, babydaddy is not speaking to me!

[03/14, 09:01] : Chapter 13

Ndabuko

It's been so long since he was in this place. Two years have passed and everything still stands the same. His brother's brick six-corner house just beside what used to be a kraal; it remains still with its door shut and gloom windows covered in dust. The grass is lengthy enough to hide a snake.

He walks past it, he doesn't open it just like he never opens his room back in Durban. He fishes the key inside his pocket and inserts it in the door. This house still remains the most modern, stylish and biggest in the whole village. There are two rondavels, built modernly and roofed with tiles. It's all Nhlanzeko's hard work, one of many things he got praises for; renovating the houses and wrought-iron fencing the homestead.

His parents' pictures hanging on the wall in the lounge welcome him and he tries his best to keep his eyes off them. He opens all the windows and drags a chair from the living room to the balcony.

His uncle may not even come. He's been on his own

ever since his parents passed on. Maybe if Ngidi wasn't there he would've followed after his parents. Ngidi guided him and made sure that he honoured all the rituals that follow after someone's death.

He left the gate opened because he's still going to drive to town to get a chicken and candles as he was instructed. Two young boys run through the gate and he instantly knows that he's opened a can of worms.

“Malume can we wash your car?” one asks before they even get to him. Years ago it was Nhlanzeko in this position, he was the “it” of the area. Every child dreamed of being like Malum’ Nhlanzeko and they would offer to wash his car everytime he was home.

His car is clean, so he asks them to pick dirt around the yard and rewards them with R20 and few coins. The word is about to go out to the streets - “Malum' Ndabuko is home,”- and every child will want a piece of him. He's not complaining, he loves children, but he's not in a good space. He's always

questioned himself as a human being, mainly because he has not been able to live out of his brother's shadow, and hearing Ndondo mistaking him for his brother cut deeply into those insecurities. Nothing can verify that and he can't live like that. He can't live with someone who mistakes him for his brother, but then again, he can't live without Ndondo. The horrible three weeks he's had since their break-up are proof enough of that.

He calls Dlokovu as he drives out to town, confirming the list of things he needs to buy for the ritual taking place late in the evening. Unfortunately this time none of the Ngidis could make it. He knows their schedules and that they would've come if they weren't too busy. But his uncle has no excuse for not coming, he's just letting him down on purpose. He fights the urge to take the off-ramp to Thulasi and confront him. He's grown, he doesn't need them, he can do this on his own.



He needs to start at the mall and get something he'll eat the few days that he's going to be here. Tonight he's not even cooking, he'll simply buy take-outs and greet the kitchen in the morning. Hopefully Dlokovu's 1960's appetite won't have a problem with pizzas for dinner.

After getting everything he buys chicken in the market and goes to pick up Dlokovu. He always helps him with the rituals, he's the same man his father consulted for traditional ceremonies, which makes him the Mngomezulu long serving traditional doctor.

“Did you manage to get everything I told you to buy?” he asks as Ndabuko loads his bag inside the car.

“Yes, I hope this chicken won't shit on my seats.”

Still the fancy boy he's always been!

“Where is the wife?” he asks.

Ndabuko frowns.

“The wife?”

“MaSibisi. There's nothing we can do without her.”

Deep exhalation!

They haven't talked since that day he called him Nhlanzeko. He even failed to update her about the ritual proceedings. He can take anything but he can't take her choosing Nhlanzeko over him. As stupid as it sounds, he wants her as his and his alone.

“She needs to come,” Dlokovu tells the sombre Ndabuko.

He still has stuff to fetch inside his house and that gives Ndabuko the chance to make a phone call.

For a few seconds they're both silent, eventually Ndabuko clears his throat and says a low “hello.”

“What do you want?” Is her annoyed response.

“I'm home and you're needed for the ritual.”

A brief moment of silence passes. He's holding his breath and on the other side, she's chewing on his sullen tone.

“You're home? Who are you with there?” she asks

with a stance of concern.

“I’m alone,” he says.

“I don't know where exactly your home is, maybe if you can send me the directions and I will call once...”

“I will send the driver to pick you up. Please bring a few clothes.”

She's quiet for a moment, her independent woman is still negotiating whether to bow to this demand or not.

“Please,” he begs.

“Okay, I have to call Khosi first, I need at least thirty minutes to get ready,” she says.

Well, it went better than he expected. Now the problem is facing her, they'll have to talk and touch on the subjects he's not looking forward into discussing.

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## NDONDO

Andiswa is starting to be suspicious. Just a few weeks ago I called a meeting on her and preached about unplanned pregnancy. But look who is pregnant now! Miss preacher herself.

My bag is packed and her eyes grow wide as I walk into her watching TV.

“And the bags? Are you going home?” she asks.

“No, somewhere else. Please take care of yourself and call me if you need anything. No alcohol, Andiswa. No boys in my house!” I sound like an irritating parent and by the look on her face she'll dance in victory as soon as I step out of this house.

“Don't tell the parents that I'm not in the house,” I say with a stern look on my face.

“Owkaaaay,” she pulls up her lips and I have no doubt that she's judging me in her head. Yeah, Miss Holy isn't so holy after all.

The silver-grey Honda Camry is parked outside by a man I don't know and waiting for me. I didn't expect Ndabuko's call. Me calling him by his brother's name seemed to have been a deal-breaker. He's been too silent, I had to stop myself from pulling a babymama stunt and call to tell him that his baby, in the stomach, is coughing.

I think this driver was instructed not to speak to me because wow, the man can keep his mouth shut. I'm not big on striking conversations with strangers either, but it's a very long drive and he didn't even care to switch the music on.

“I need a bathroom,” I tell him.

Instead of taking the off-ramp to Nandos where I can find the bathrooms, the man decides to make a phone call.

“Mngomezulu..she says she needs a bathroom..no..yes..okay.” He ends the call.

I'm in awe. I need Ndabuko's permission to pee? He had to make a phonecall first?

After my pee stop I'm angrily silent, at this driver and Ndabuko. If this wasn't for Nhlanzeko I wouldn't have bothered continuing with this journey.

It's around 7:30 when we drive through the gate of Mngomezulu homestead. It's very dark outside, I can't see a thing, but the emptiness of this huge homestead can be felt even through the dark. The grass is hugging my ankles as I step on the ground.

His cologne fills up my nostrils and the feelings I have buried for weeks crawl back and overwhelm me.

This is one of the most complicated situations I've ever been into. I wonder if he didn't bring her here, you can never know with this one; he had the nerve to fetch me from Himeville and make me sleep in the same house as her.

He stands behind me. I don't turn my head, my nerves are scattered all over the place.

“Thank you Robert,” he says to the driver before taking my bag from him.

After bidding his goodbyes Robert gets in the car and drives off. Ndabuko follows after him to lock the gate; leaving me grounded in front of the verandah.

“Let's go inside the house,” he says and leads the way towards the door. I guess he's still wounded by that incident.

We pass the kitchen, on the counter there's a tray with slaughtered chicken and bloodied knife lying next to it.

I want to ask about the rich smell of umqombothi but this is not some kind of house tour. He's sliding through the passages and not even taking a single glance at me. I have to pick up my pace to keep up with him.

A creamy painted room with a huge bed and isolated bookshelf filled with books. It smells fresh, the windows are opened, you don't have to ask to know that it was cleaned not so long ago.

“The bathroom is down this passage on your left.

When you're ready please come to the lounge, it's the second large room from the front door." With that said he turns around and leaves.

Awesome, I feel so welcome!

I don't even know if I'm expected to wear below my knees and cover my shoulders. As far as Nhlanzeko knows I'm his wife, I don't know why I'm suddenly in tune with this idea. I feel like it's the least I could do for him since we didn't get the chance to love one another. My parents would probably kill me if they found out.

There's a man wearing umqhele and iziphandla circling his wrists. I wasn't told, but who cares about Ndondo? The smell of impepho has filled up the whole yard and for some reasons I'm not unsettled.

I lower myself on the couch and greet the man. Unlike Ndabuko, he looks happy to have me over. We even shake hands. He's calling me MaSibisi and complementing me.



“I only need you to sprinkle the bile over his shirt and then Ndabuko and I will take it from there. We don't want to anger your ancestors, this man hasn't paid even a calf to your father,” he says and chuckles. Ndabuko doesn't seem to find humour in anything. His dead expression is really knocking me in the stomach.

The chicken is not even plucked, how the hell am I supposed to get the bile?

I take the knife and rinse it. The chicken's body is still warm and my heart beat is accelerating.

“MaSibisi, you can't cut it before removing feathers,” Dlokovu says and passes to the lounge.

They're busy and I'm supposed to get everything in the kitchen done, all by myself.

I plug the kettle of water and wait for it to boil. I have to find everything on my own, right now I'm opening all the cupboards, looking for the basin I can use to pluck the chicken.

It takes me almost thirty minutes to get the chicken naked and now it's time for the real horrific job. The cutting and skinning.

The knife is trembling in my hand. Yes there's no head but it's still a chicken and I'll be responsible for taking its inside out. What if it was a mother chicken? A breadwinner to its chicks and they're waiting for their mother to come home? What if one of the chicks is sick? I'm also going to be a mother. I..I can't..I can't do this.

“Hlasekazi!” The alarmed voice comes from the door and quick steps approach the counter I'm standing against.

“What's wrong? Why are you crying?” he asks and grabs my hands, paying no attention to the knife falling to the floor.

“I can't kill a chicken,” I say and sniff back the dam of tears.

“But it's already dead,” he says.

I don't know how to explain it and I hate this look of confusion on his face. I'm scared, okay!

“Fine, go to the lounge. I will call you when the bile is taken out and ready.”

He's god-sent. I rinse my hands in the sink and hurry out of the kitchen.

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“Hlasekazi,” the voice calls my me and my shoulder is shaken tenderly.

I open my eyes slowly and look at him. Fuck, I slept on the couch. I wonder how long I've been asleep.

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to just doze off,” I say guiltily.

“It's okay. Your man probably didn't want you to do the work. Everything went well. Dlokovu will leave early in the morning.”

Wow, okay!

“I made you food and left it in the microwave. If you

need anything else let me know.” He walks away with his head hung down and his hands tucked inside his pockets.

“Ndabuko I said I made a mistake,” I say.

He turns back his head.

“It’s fine. I don’t want to talk about it,” he says.

“Oh, really? You called me here so that you can give me silent treatment?” I ask.

“You’re not here for me and you know it. So don’t act like you’ve done me a favour,” he says.

His tone is so harsh! I have to blink and relook at the Ndabuko in front of me.

“I’m doing this to make sure that your brother is okay where he is. You think this is a nice trip for me? No sweetheart, I’m trying to stay far away from Fuze’s husband-to-be.”

He takes a deep breath and steps back inside the room.

“I know that you’re sending lobola and I’ve been told that the only man I’ll ever own lies in the grave. You

both deserve each other and I'm not going to lose my voice apologising for a mere mistake of calling you by your brother's name, whom I've never shared even a hug with.”

“Who told you that? Fuze?” he asks with a frown on his face.

I roll my eyes, because he's so slow and annoying, and cover my face with a scatter cushion.

“Ndondo speak to me. Who said those words to you?” His voice sounds very close to my face. I remove the cushion and meet his piercing stare.

“Are you still with her?” I ask.

His eyes shift from me and that's the enough response. My heart tears into pieces. But what was I hoping for? I left him for her.

“Why did you choose to lie to me? You should've told me the truth and let me decide if I want to be in this triangle,” I ask.

“It's not a triangle, I love you,” he says.

“But you sleep with her every night?” I ask.

“Next to her, not with her.”

Well, I've seen how high his drive is on bed. He cannot fool me on this.

“As long as you're still with her and sleeping “next to her” you and I cannot be anything other than two people who fucked and made a baby,” I say.

“I will break up with her. Will you take me back then?”

“Will I be banned from mentioning your brother's name?” I ask.

That expression is back on and I know that this one is not going to be solved in one night.

“Ndabuko you have to understand where I'm coming from. I need time to get used to this setting. The man I waited for years died and he's the brother of the man that I love.”

The corner of his lip curves up and I realize how much I've missed his cute smile.

“The man you love?” he asks with his eyebrow cocked up.

“Love is a strange thing, isn't?”

He lowers himself next to me and pulls me into his arms. It's so warm lying on his chest, covered by his strong arms and suffocating in his 212 and shirking smell of nicotine.

“Tell me about the pregnancy. How does it feel like? What are your cravings?” he asks.

“It's too early Ndabuko, beside the fatigue and natural mood swings, there's nothing out of normalcy.”

“Do you eat enough?” he asks.

“I'm still a normal person on Ndabuko. I eat when I'm hungry.”

His face melts. He nods his head and plants a kiss on my cheek.

“I love you Hlase and I'm glad you've come home.”

Home???

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The sound of the door shifting forces me to open my eyes. It's Ndabuko with his pillow.

The light coming through the window shows that it's in the morning.

I don't know how I got to bed, all I remember is cuddling with him on the couch and listening to his varsity stories. He didn't talk about his time growing up here, no matter how much I tried to poke the subject.

“Good morning, what's wrong with your room?” I ask.

He slides in bed and wraps his arms around me. His hands are so damn cold!

“I'm cold,” he says.

“I'm not a heater, what are you hoping to achieve by coming to me?” I ask.

He presses his erect manhood against my butt. And you'll tell me this person doesn't sleep with Fuze?

“I cut the chicken for you yesterday. Be fair and let me in for a few seconds.”



“Seconds?” I ask in shock.

“Yes, I will only thrust in twice and pull out. I only want to feel it, please my love.”

Slowly, I lift my leg up. He shifts my thong aside and holds up my knee.

“We'll count,” I say as he inserts himself. The response I get is a moan. As he fully enters he bites the back of my neck.

He moves...I lick my lips, it feels so damn good. But I'm a woman of my word, we are counting these thrusts.

“One,” I count.

“No, zero baby.”

Oh...okay!

He pulls out and thrusts in again.

“One,” I say and release a low moan.

“0.1 baby.” His fingers are dancing on my clit and I'm having a hard time controlling my moans.

We are at 0.7 when he lifts me up and turns me down on my stomach. He pulls up my bottom, places a pillow beneath my stomach and inserts himself from the back.

“Keep counting,” he says.

Did he need to smack my butt cheek though?

“Oh, fuck!” I scream as he thrusts in too deep and rubbing me in circles.

“I said count.” He spanks me again. I want to yell at him but his shaft is doing the things that keep my voice below my throat. All I could do is moan.

“Count Ndondo,” he says.

“1..5..2..Ndabuko...” Another spank!

“I’m not a number,” he says.

My scream fills up the room. He slams in furiously and I know that I won't be able to hold in for too long.

“Ndondo yami, don't you know numbers anymore? Count for daddy,” he says.

My toes are curling up. It's coming. His name escapes my lips as I lie flatly on the bed and losing my senses in the wave of pinnacle.

“I promise you, I'm going to do better,” he whispers as he turns me on my back and separating my knees. I have no strength in me, he can do as he please, all I know is that we were somewhere at 0.7.

[03/14, 09:01] : Chapter 14

NDONDO

We've been here for two days and this man is not mentioning when we are going back to Durban. I'm also not pushing because being here is full of bliss. The only problem is that I have a company to run and my personal assistant isn't exactly fond of this relationship.

By the way, I'm starving. He said he was starting with dinner an hour ago, I thought by the time I wake up from my nap he'd be done. I drag myself to the kitchen and when I pass the lounge I notice that the pictures on the wall have been taken down.

They intimidated me, it felt like his parents were watching us, but taking them down is disrespectful. However, this is not the subject we touch, I don't know if he'll ever open up about his family and I have to respect his decision.

“Are you cooking a goat?” I ask as I walk inside the kitchen. He's only wearing boxers, the aroma is delicate enough to send my hand inside the cooking pot.

Ouch! I burn. He laughs at me and takes out a piece of meat. Like I'm his child, he blows over it until it cools down and then pushes it inside my mouth.

“Undress and go sit on the table,” he says.

“Undress?” I ask.

“I want to eat while staring at my baby,” he says.

The baby is still inside my stomach, it's not even a human yet. I fold my arms and challenge him into a stare contest.

“It's just the two of us. I locked the gate. What are you scared of? I want to have a naked-dinner.”

“Am I going to be a dessert?”

He shakes his head but the naughty grin on his face says otherwise.

“Is it not disrespectful?” I ask.

“No, this is not the ancestors’ room,” he says.

I can't believe I'm about to have a naked dinner in his family house. I walk back to my designated bedroom and strip my clothes off. My body has picked a few kilos, hopefully I'll be able to burn them down after giving birth. For now I'm going to enjoy every bit of my pregnancy and not worry about things that are out of my control.

It's very weird being served by a naked man. There's a rod dancing between his thighs as he walks to and from the kitchen, getting all his dishes.

He really tried. No, scratch that, he's a better cook than me. Beef stew, savoury rice and Greek salad. It's such a homely meal and the fact that it was cooked by my naked man makes it even more

delicious.

He's struggling to finish his plate so I generously help him. The mistake I make is moving to his side, now instead of eating his hands are all over my thighs.

“Ndabuko our dessert is melting,” I say.

“I want the hot one.” He licks the side of my face; literally runs his tongue over my flesh! I knew this would happen.

“One-two and I'll be done.” He's always singing the same “one-two” song and it always ends with me fu€ked to sleep.

But this man knows my body, he knows where to touch and rub to make me wet. We don't go to the real dessert, instead I'm scooped to the lounge and put on the couch.

He onslaughts me with a kiss and pushes his head between my thighs. His tongue against my nub always sends me into heavens.

He positions himself between my legs and do what

he always does. My screams are bursting the roof and hopefully the cold weather outside is enough to keep the neighbours indoors.

“Babe..sthandwa sami..please come on top.” He sucks my lower lip and flips me over like I haven't gained any weight.

I've just snapped out of di€k-mode. My chest is beating drums. Come on top for what now? What am I supposed to do? Yes I know that I have to sit on his shaft and kind of move my ass. It's the rhythm that I don't get, and I haven't been into the gym in weeks. Maybe if I knew how to twerk it would be better. I'd just twerk on top of him. But I know nothing, those things were too ghetto for me.

“Don't stress yourself, I will help you. Be comfortable,” he says. Instead of being relieved, I'm embarrassed. Maybe Zamafuze bounces like Nicki Minaj on top of him and I'm just a downgrade.

“J ust move your waist..yes sthandwa sami..bounce on it baby.” I guess I'm not doing too bad, his hands

are on my waist and he's meeting up with my thrusts.

I hear someone exclaim loudly and quickly turn my head around. My heart almost stopped beating. It's Maqhinga. God knows what he's doing here and how he got in.

I jump off Ndabuko, ready to revive the Caster Semenya in me, but Ndabuko's strong hands pull me back and pins me on the couch beneath him.

“Maqhinga get the fuck out!” To say that he's pissed would be an understatement.

“Is this what you two get up to all day long?” He's unbelievable! I'm naked, the only privacy I have is Ndabuko lying over me, he should be walking out of the scene to give us time to get decent.

“Maqhinga!” His tone carries a thousand warnings but Maqhinga stands where he is with a stunned look on his face. Is he mentally okay?

“Hey Ndabuko mfana! Is this you? Mrs Fierce?”

Who the fuck is Mrs Fierce? Once I get dressed I'm



going to kill...

“The parents are here, you two adjourn this glorious meeting for later. That if there will be any later.”

“The parents?” We both ask.

“Mr Sibisi and Mrs Sibisi. Deep shit, I tell you. Where is the gate key? I kind of climbed over the fence to get in. They want to drive in,” he says and walks towards the vase. Humming Khuzani's song, he empties everything from the vase and searches for the key.

We really don't have any choice, Ndabuko pulls me to the bedroom butt-naked.

Okay, I need to breathe. My father is here? I don't understand this. I mean, how? Why? Who sold me out?

I hear the car driving in and look at Ndabuko for answers. I'm a grown girl, I have my own house and I'm the breadwinner at home. But none of that is going to matter, if there's anything my father

doesn't stand it's disrespecting Christianity. It's his child committing a sin and embarrassing his name.

“I will take the blame,” he says.

I wish his words could make me feel better but I know my father, this is bigger than he thinks.

“Ndondo,” he stops me before going through the door.

A breath taking kiss!

“I love you mama. It's going to be okay,” he says with an assuring look on his face.

I really don't know. I don't. All I know is that shit is about to hit the fan.

The bishop? My knees buckle together and I start losing my steps. My father is sitting on the same couch we were fu€king on. I'm going straight to hell. There's no heaven for me! Not even a sneak peek of Maria.

“Ndondo what are you doing here?” My mother goes first. My father and the bishop are staring at

Ndabuko. He couldn't even button up his shirt properly, they have seen his tattoo. Taboo, tattoo!

“Princess I'm talking to you!” Second name? I have no one on my side.

“Sanibonani,” Ndabuko greets.

Silence. If stares could kill he would've been long gone.

“I asked Miss Sibisi to visit me,” he says.

“And you are?” My father asks. A man who has never lifted his finger on anyone but is feared like a lion. Mainly because most people believe that he's related to Jesus Christ, an uncle or something.

“I'm Ndabuko Mngomezulu,” he says.

“Where are the elders? We need to talk to them about this.”

Even centimeters away from me, I feel his skin cringe at the question.

“I'm an elder, the parents are no more,” he says.

The attention shifts to me. My father's stare is a

burning like a flame.

“What did I say about rebellious boys with no direction in life? Didn't I say stay away from demons like him?”

Maqhinga frowns and steps forward. He's been standing by the entrance and glued to his phone the whole time.

“Baba I love your daughter. I wasn't disrespecting you or anything. We had personal issues to solve before involving families,” Ndabuko explains.

“Families?” My mother asks with a mocking chuckle.

“Didn't you say you have no family?” Bishop Khawula asks.

“Parents. He doesn't have parents! Family, he has,” Maqhinga says, his attitude wrapped in each word he spits out.

Eyes on me again!

“What are you doing here Ndondoyamahlase?” -my father.

Ndabuko clears his throat and answers before I can

find my voice.

“I asked her to visit,” he says.

He should've shut up because my father is about to jump on his heathen ass.

“Ukhonzaphi wena mfana?” (Where do you attend church)

This one is a determining question. I wish my mother can stand up for me. I would've understood if it was Aunt Vumile, but with her I don't. Mothers should always side and protect their daughters.

“Ngikhonza emadlozini,” Ndabuko says. (I believe in the ancestors)

I guess this is it! Bishop Khawula is up on his feet. Me and my house need a huge prayer.

“Mam' Sibisi please call the deacon and tell him we're on our way back. Ndondo, did you bring anything here? Get your bags and let's go.”

Ndabuko's hand grabs my arm. I swear my heart is about to leap out of my mouth.

“Ngizogeza amagceke akoSibisi kuqala. Ngiyawazi

umonakalo odalekile nokuthi ngidelele umuzi wakho.” (I'm aware of the damage and the fact that I disrespected the family, so I'm going to cleanse the premises.)

The silence that falls after him is thick enough to be cut by a knife.

Then my father looks at the hand that's stopping me from leaving. It's not a tight grip, I could break free and do as I'm told, but I got here on free will.

I clear the dust lying in my throat.

“I took days off work, Faith is holding the ropes while I'm here.” I try not to sound disrespectful.

They're silent; waiting for me to get straight to the point I fear more than anything.

“I'm not leaving,” I say.

The disappointment on my mother's face will haunt me till I give birth. But Ndabuko and the baby are about to become my own little family and I have to learn to stand by them.

I lie on bed and listen as the car drives off. I don't know how I'll face my parents and on top of that, I have to announce the pregnancy.

“Hlasekazi I'm sorry, I promise you I'm going to make this right.”

He's sitting next to me, with his hand placed on my hip and drowning in the same sorrow as me.

“They won't accept goats or whatever you're going to offer to them,” I say.

Deep sigh!

“I know this won't be easy, especially with different beliefs involved, but you're coming to these premises Ndondo yami. Uzongena ngebhokisi oyophuma ngalo. I will pay lobola, fetch you by the crack of dawn from your home and bind you to the Mngomezulus where you belong.” He lies next to me and pulls me onto his chest.

“Thank you for standing with me. We'll accompany you home tomorrow morning with a goat.”

I guess “we” is him and the Ngidis, who seem to be

now his family.

“I don't understand why Andiswa sold me out. Yes, I do act like Maria's first daughter at times but that's because I want to protect her.” I don't bully my siblings but Andiswa is going to wish she was never born when I get to Durban.

“It wasn't her,” he says.

My forehead grows into a frown.

“Who was it then? I know that Khosi doesn't like you but she wouldn't...” He clears his throat and tears his eyes away from me.

“Zamafuze, right?” I ask and he nods his head.

Damnit!!!

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THALENTE

This is too coincidental. Yesterday I got this taxi, again today it comes just as I stand at the side of



the road. I never understand why he always looks so entertained to be around me. It's not like I sing or crack international jokes for him. If anything, I get irritated by his pompous ass.

It was better when he sent for his food and made demands that we dish for him a certain way. Now he personally comes to the shelter, sits on the bench like a boss and specifically asks me to prepare his plate and serve him. Obviously, I don't say no, not even when he asks me to pour his water in the glass for him.

He treats me like his designated maid and to get my revenge, I do it with a smile on my face and then punish him with silence in the taxi back home.

I also don't understand how I'm always the last passenger in his taxi. It's like he does everything to get under my skin, like stopping the music while I'm still enjoying the song.

“I was listening to the song,” I tell him, opening my mouth for the first time since I got inside his taxi.

“I can sing it for you, the radio is finishing my petrol.”

Oh! Coming from a struggling family that owns only a wheelbarrow with a broken handle, I didn't know that the radio in the car used petrol as well.

“Let it be. I don't want to hear you sing,” I say.

Surprisingly, he doesn't say anything back. We are just a few minutes away from my stop, may this silence be forever held!

“Second corner!”

“I know,” he says.

It was just a formality, he must stop acting like an ass.

He stops.

I clutch my bag and open the door. He opens his as well.

I climb out of the taxi. He also climbs out.

Owkaaay!

“Where are you going?” I ask.

“I’m thirsty, do you mind giving me a glass of water?”

Yes, I do mind. I don't have a glass in my shack, I have a plastic mug that I took from home.

“No, I don't have water,” I say.

His eyes widen in awe.

“You can be stingy all you want. But you can't deny someone a glass of water.” Too smart for my liking!

“It's my water, I carried the bucket all the way from the tap down the road. I can deny you if I want to,” I say.

He doesn't say anything. He folds his arms and stares at me.

Sigh!

His footsteps follow behind me. Whoever told this man that the world revolves around him got all of us in a huge problem. Now he can't even respect my decision of denying him a glass of water?!

All the shacks look alike. I just keep in mind that mine has a cross sign on the door and my neighbour is a loud Zimbabwean lady who's always shouting at her boyfriend.

My follower stands outside as I unlock the door and walk in.

I contemplate whether to give him water or not. I know this is one of his million strategies of- How To Annoy Talente. Something I never understand. Is it still about the beef plate I forced him to eat?

I take my time; I change into my flip-flops, throw my lunch tin inside the washing basin and then get him his water.

“I don't drink while standing, I choke,” he says.

Talk about giving someone your hand and they demand the whole arm!

“Okay, come inside,” I say with my last drop of patience.

He's taller than my door. He bends his head and walks in. I'm sorry if his rich-ass has never been inside a shack. This shack is my bedroom, kitchen, lounge and bathroom. It's an all-in-one shack.

“You can sit on the bed,” I tell him and question my sense of cautiousness as a female living in South Africa where women are raped and killed everyday. I just let a man I hardly know inside my living space and let him sit on my bed and look like a shocked goat.

He sips the water and put the mug on the table. Yes, the table is just an arm away from the bed.

“Thank you MaMbatha,” he says.

“Pleasure, Hlomuka. Drive safely,” I tell him.

“I'm not driving yet. I need a few minutes of rest.” With that said he pulls the pillow, places it against the wall and lies on his back.

Minutes later he's snoring softly. He's too big for

me to drag out and knowing how early they wake up every morning to get us to work, I think letting him have his nap on my bed is fair.

I always start by having a bath before cooking. But today I can't have things my way since I have an uninvited company. I wash the rice and put it on the stove. I have no fridge and I'm too new to bother people and ask them to keep my meat. So, I live on baked beans, tin fish and vegetables.

I cut a slice of cabbage that will be enough for my dinner and lunch for tomorrow. Onions, garlic, curry powder and oxtail soup; these are my only ingredients. There's no mouth-watering aroma coming from the pot but my food is still tasty.

There's a yawn. He's awake? Oh, finally I'm going to have my space back.

“It's late,” I tell him.

He yawns again and stretches his arms. This is not “I just woke up” yawn, now it's “I'm hungry” one. I've already been told that I'm stingy, I don't want that

perception of me to solidify.

“Do you eat cabbage?”

Please say no!

“Yes,” he says.

I never get anything I want in this life!

I take a spice container, I can't give him the Tupperware one that I use for special occasions, and I dish up for him. I know he doesn't doesn't eat without a glass of water, I put it on the table next to his food.

No thank you, no nothing. The person just takes my food and digs in.

He wipes the plate clean and puts it back on the table. His mug is empty, he refills it with water from the bucket and sits back on the bed. I'm not a horrible person, but when is he leaving?

He's too quiet for my liking. Yes he annoys me everytime he opens his mouth but I also don't want him to be completely silent.

“It looks like we'll have to swipe houses. You like being here, don't you?” I'm teasing him but the seriousness on his face doesn't melt.

“Not really, I like being around you,” he says.

“I know I'm a great person to be around, but I need to bathe and sleep,” I say.

Hopefully he can see the pot of boiling water on top of the stove. He's overstayed his welcome.

He lifts himself up and stands in the middle. The way he's scanning around makes me uncomfortable. Is he judging my shack?

“Woza, ngifuna ukuvalelisa,” he says. (Come, I want to say goodbye)

“You can say it right where you stand,” I say, suddenly not too confident. I have never looked at him in a strange sinful way, well, until now. He's always been an annoying taxi driver whose father owns a taxi rank. But at this moment I see him as a man, and not just any man, a man who could make



me lose control. The wide chest, stacked shoulders and the Adam's apple that keeps popping up. His defined cheekbones and unapologetic upturned eyes.

“Are you scared of me?”

Maye! Who does he think he is?

“Noooo!” I fulminate in a screech.

“Then why are you standing there? Woza ngivalelise.”

I take a deep breath and a few steps towards him. I stand in front of him with my arms folded and the “I'm not scared of you” look boldly portrayed on my face.

“I want Vin Diesel to knock me out,” he says and pulls me into his arms. Before I can protest I'm squeezed tightly on his chest.

A baby kiss lands on my cheek before he frees me from the hug.

“Ndlalifa!” I'm torn between anger and funny feelings feathering a nest below my tummy.

That hug was out of this world. It's a hug that can never be hugged by any other man.

“Thank you,” he says. I don't think anyone can say “thank you” the way he just did. What a “thank you”!

My fat legs are behind him, hands are fiddling before my chest, as I see him out of the door. Stupid girl! Where's the real Talente? This new one is talented in stupidity.

I stop outside the door. He also stops and looks at me.

Nosy tenants, what are they looking at?

“I will see you tomorrow, uyezwa?”

I nod my head. He turns around and leaves.

It's still today? Did the ANC steal the time funds? Because the watch is not working properly on my phone. It was 19:38 a minute ago and now it's 19:39 instead of tomorrow. What the hell!

[03/14, 09:02] : Chapter 15

## NDONDO

In this life you must never think you know anyone. My mind still refuses to believe that Mr Ngidi was Nhlanzeko's "groetman" and he's behind all my success. I thought he saw potential in me, that he was impressed with my work everytime he passed those compliments and took me into meetings with him. But the man was just keeping Nhlanzeko's promises and now that I think about it, Bantwana Holdings held back his life. His passion is in taxis and now that he's running for the chairman position in the association and no longer the CEO, he smiles more often.

I don't know what he did or what he said to get Ndabuko's uncle here. He heard that the man refused to come and asked that we give him a few minutes to go have a word with him. And he came back with him.

Never in my wildest dream have I ever thought that

one day I'd be accompanied by four men back home with a white goat to cleanse the fact that I had sex. If we were in the hotel or in my house none of this would've been necessary. But I was at the Mngomezulu homestead without the parents' consent and in Ndabuko's world the only way of apologising to a man is to send an animal.

I really don't know what's going to happen when we get home, my father is a hardcore Christian that never slaughters. He doesn't believe in spilling blood or in the belief that dead people's spirits live even after death. Which is why we haven't been to Nyandeni in thirteen years. The last time we were there was when our grandfather died and we left shortly after the burial.

I think it was that day when the family split into two. My father and Aunt Vumile chose to leave because their hard-headed big brother, Maqhawe, insisted on slaughtering goats and burning impepho to send off mkhulu. As the kids, we weren't allowed to visit at Nyandeni anymore because Bab' Maqhawe would've definitely welcomed us with impepho and

slaughtered chickens to let “his ancestors” know that we're home.

His hand brushes my tummy and I snap out of my thoughts and look at him. He's nervous just as I am but he's trying to be positive for my sake.

“I want to smoke. Akuphi lamakhehla?” Ndlalifa says behind behind the steering wheel.

“They're behind,” Ndabuko says.

He stops at the side of the road and they both get out of the car. Their smoking break turns into a deep, low discussion that takes almost ten minutes. When Ndabuko turns his eyes to me inside the car I send a fierce stare his way. I can't believe I have mastered the “boyfriend reprimanding” stare so early in a relationship. He's getting back inside the car with immediate effect.

Mr Ngidi and Ndabuko's uncle arrived before us. Is it not the multiple smoking breaks that delayed us?

It's just a few ticks away from eleven, hopefully my father is home and not running his Christianly errands.

I stay behind with Ndabuko in the car as others go and stand in front of the locked gate.

“Sikhulekile ekhaya, koBhovungane, oZibisi zikaSishaka, ngubo zokwembatha zikaZulu. Mahlase!”

The praises don't do a thing to my father. He's not that man who gets tickled by clan names. Maybe if they quoted a few verses!

“Lona okhulekayo uMngomezulu. UNkabanhle, uDlakadla. UMasok' anqunu ngemizimba yawo! Sizocela isihlobo esihle layikhaya...”

What the hell?!!

“Ndabuko?” I look at him. My jaws are on the ground.

“Sthandwa sami?” he responds very unbothered.

“What is this? I thought we were here to apologize for the unconsented visit,” I ask.

“It's all in one process. Sizocela usuku, sigeze bese sibuya nenhlawulo namalobolo.”

“But we didn't discuss marriage.”

“We did. I told you I was going to make you a Mngomezulu.”

He's unbelievable! Just when I thought he was a romantic gentleman who understood what communication is.

“I didn't agree to anything. I didn't even think that was a proposal. I mean what kind of a proposal is that? I thought it was just a future reference.”

“My future is now Ndondo, with you” he says.

“What about Zamafuze? Because as far as I know you haven't called things off with her and she's also expecting lobola from you,” I ask.

“I will pay for the damages and do the rituals for the baby,” he says.

“Do you have the balls to do that to her?” Words just slip out of my lips and by the frown on his face, he's pissed.

“Meaning?” he asks.

“I don't mean to offend you but I don't think you're brave enough to break up with that girl. You keep saying that you don't love her anymore and you want to be with me. But she's still living in your house, turning me against my parents and rubbing Nhlanzeko's death on my face. I didn't ask you to love me and I didn't ask Nhlanzeko to give me everything that he gave me. I'm still proud of my achievements and how far I've come. And I swear Ndabuko, I'm not going to share you with her. It's her or me!”

“So she opened Nhlanzeko's room for you that day when you fainted?”

What did he think? The worst could've happened on that day. She could've strangled me to death and dumped me on the railway. He wouldn't have found out because in his eyes this Fuze is a saint.

I only let that incident slide because I was also wrong. Even though I didn't know of their relationship but I was part of the reason why she



was hurting.

“I need to make a phone call.” He untangles his arm from me and climbs out of the car.

I also need to make a phone call. I want to know what's happening inside. Are they even aware of the people outside the gate or they're ignoring them on purpose.

He picks up with a rehearsed response.

“You have reached Bahle Sibisi, how can I help you?”

I roll my eyes. Yes, I've been called uptight many times than I can remember, but I wasn't like him at the age of 14. I didn't lock myself in the room, wore eyeglasses and read Science books.

“Come outside urgently,” I tell him.

“Is that my sister? Well, I can't come out right now. Maybe after a few min...” Hhayi-bo, this child!

“Now Bahle! I will count to ten,” I clear my throat and change my tone. “Don't tell the parents where

you're going,” I say.

“Why can't I tell them? I mean...” I drop the call before more questions follow. He wants scientific explanation for everything in the world.

Ndabuko is sitting next to me, looking like he's about to burst into flames. Things weren't supposed to go this way. I do love him and I don't mind getting married to him. But he was supposed to sort out his life first and directly discuss with me that he's coming to ask for my hand in marriage.

Bahle walks towards the car and when he sees that I'm with someone he adjusts his eyeglasses.

“Is mom aware of the people outside the gate?” I ask after rolling down the window.

“Hello, how are you?” he says, directing to Ndabuko.

“I'm good and yourself?”

“I'm well, thank you. Sisi, what were you saying?”

You just have to embrace yourself for formalities before engaging with this child.

“Is mom aware of the people outside the gate?” I repeat.

“Yes,” he says.

“Why aren't they opening for them?” I ask.

“I just opened it, they can enter if they want. When are you going to CNA? I need a few books for my research.”

Can this conversation be about me?

“Which books do you need?” Ndabuko cuts in as I'm busy dialing my mother's number. I didn't expect her to do this to me. I have been a good daughter, I lived by the rules and achieved what most of my peers couldn't.

“Ndondo, what do you want?” she asks as she picks up.

“Mom the Mngomezulus are outside the gate,” I say.

“I don't remember inviting them to my house. Their goat is making noise, tell them to go and abuse God's animals far away from my house.” With that

said she drops the call. Animal abuse? Really? Her husband cannot live without steak, is it not animal abuse when white people slaughter animals for butcheries?

I try to stay calm, I really do. But when they make their way back an hour later I break down and let tears ruin my make-up.

“Sthandwa sami please, we'll keep trying,” he says, pulling me onto his chest. I know how my father is, he's not going to change his mind. Only my mother knows which buttons to press to get him calm, but she's not on my side either. The only way they'd ever accept him is if he attends church and live by the word of God. I don't see that happening either. Ndabuko is guided by the ancestors, I don't think he even believes that there was a man called Jesus Christ who died for our sins.

“Ndondo you'll upset the baby, ngicela wehlise umoya.”

Now everyone is watching us with pity canopying

their faces. Why would my family embarrass me like this? They could've just let them in and turned them down decently.

I eventually get a grip of my emotions and take my bag out of the car. I was only allowed to enter the premises once the goat has been presented to the family, but since that didn't succeed I'll let myself inside.

“Are you going to be okay?” he asks.

I wish I can give him something more convincing than just a nod.

“I'll wait here, come back to me if they kick you out or make you uncomfortable.”

Well, I bought this house and I'm paying all the bills monthly. There's no way they're going to kick me out but they'll surely make me uncomfortable. I wouldn't be surprised if church women come with Bibles later to bring me a powerful prayer.

“I won't give up on us. Please be patient with me,

I'm going to bring you home the way you're supposed to come.” He pecks the side of my face and stares deeply into my eyes until I release all the tension with a heavy sigh and nod my head.

“I will call you. Please keep your promises Ndabuko,” I say.

He knows which promises I'm referring to.

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My father has been ignoring me by reading the newspaper over and over again. My mother is sipping on the tea and acting like nothing happened.

The only way to get their attention is to announce the bigger news.

“There's something I need to tell you,” I say.

Mom lets out a sigh before putting her cup on the saucer.

“Baba, lend her your attention for a few minutes. I hope this has nothing to do with that family you brought to our gate.”

Well, it does and there's more to it.

Sibisi is staring at me. His eyes are peeking under the eyeglasses and I know that he's ready for a war.

“I'm pregnant,” I say.

They both freeze.

No movement or whats oever.

“Ndabuko wants to pay for the damages and start with lobola negotiations,” I say.

Sibisi picks up his newspaper, folds it nearly and leaves the room without breathing a word.

“Ndondo why are you embarrassing us like this? Out of all decent men who would've killed to marry a beautiful girl like you, you went out and dated umageza?” Oh, this is about Nkosinathi, the pastor's son who thought I'd jump onto him and offer myself as his submissive wife.

I have no energy to explain how Ndabuko ended up in the taxis. She can judge him all she wants but the guy has double the brains of her and her husband combined.

“When must they come?” I ask.

“Ndondoyamahlas e, you're never going to marry into that family. All you need to focus on right now is asking God for forgiveness.” She collects her tea cup and saucer and follows behind her husband.

They have left me with no choice but to go back to the world they have kept me from for thirteen years.

I've always had his number but I've never called him because I had to choose my parents.

He picks up after several rings. He's on the line but he's waiting for me to speak.

“Bab' omdala, it's me,” I say.

“Ndondo?” He's shocked but I can hear the happiness in his voice.

“Yes, it's me,” I say.

“Ndodakazi yami, are you okay? Is everyone alright?” I guess he doesn't hold grudges against his brother and sister who chose to disown him and never go back home.



“Yes everyone is fine. It's just me, I have a few problems and my parents aren't helpful,” I say.

“What kind of problems?” he asks.

“I met someone...” I'm struggling to find a good explanation that could paint him a clear picture of what's happening. I don't think a Zulu father in him would understand how a penis got inside his daughter's vagina.

“I knew this day would come,” he says before I can explain. I'm not sure what he means. He knew that I'll need him one day?

“AmaHlase are waiting for you, please come home,” he says.

I think this all I needed; him to ask me to come home. It has taken me this long to find my spiritual-self. Twenty-six years! I was told what to believe in and I believed. And there's nothing wrong with that, parents have to show their kids the path they think is the best. It's only unfair when they deny them the chance to choose their own spiritual path as they grow.

I still believe in God and the principles of righteousness. But I'm going home, where my grandparents and those before them rest, the Sibisis.

It's not disrespect. I choose my own path, it's a part of decisions I have to take as a grown up, a mother and someone's wife-to-be.

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I cannot let my personal life interfere with my work. I promised to take this company to the next level, the ownership doesn't mean I have to work less and put everything on Faith.

“Your meeting with the suppliers has been postponed to Wednesday. Before you bite anyone's head off, I'm the one who postponed it. You need to catch a break, don't even think about fighting me.”

Owkaaay! Brown paperbag? Wine glass?

“Khosi we're at work!” I'm stunned by the bottle of wine.

“Work in whose company? Your juice is coming, babymama. Us, people who know how to use condoms, will indulge in real bottles.”

I should've known this is what it would lead into. But I don't stop her from drinking, she has worked hard to have a friend who owns a company.

“Ndabuko owns half of it,” I remind her and she rolls her eyes. I haven't told her about my Saturday trip to Nyandeni.

“He doesn't even care about his shares,” she says and waves the subject off with her hand.

She takes a sip from her glass.

“Tell me about the Maqhingana scene. What did you do when he walked on you guys tlof-tlofing?”

Gosh, why did I even tell her about this? Now I have to tell the story for the fifth time.

“He just stood there and watched as I attempted to run. Ndabuko held me back and hid me under his body on the couch.” She chokes with laughter and nearly spills out the wine.

“Then he was like- “Is this what you two get up to all day long? Get dressed, you'll continue smashing later because the parents are here,” – we had no other choice but to get our naked butt and leaking genitals into the bedroom.” I don't know why I find this funny because it was embarrassing. I don't know how I'm going to face Maqhinga the next time I see him.

The laughter and wine office-party is disturbed by the shifting door. My face lightens up as Khosi rolls her eyes until they touch her brain.

I've never had this guest in the office before. The last time he was here nobody knew that he was actually the co-owner.

“Nomkhosi,” he acknowledges her and she just waves her hand at him and walks out with her bottle under her arm.

“It must be nice!” Ndabuko says as he watches her walking out of the door. I'm not getting myself involved in their ludicrous beef.

“She takes care of your company while you're chilling at the taxi rank. What brings you here Mr Mngomezulu?” I ask.

He lowers himself on the guest couch.

“Matters of the heart,” he says. For someone who's inside my office for the first time he's not much interested in my expensive beautiful desk that has a return cabinet. Everyone compliments it when they walk in here.

“Have you been here before?” I ask.

“No.” The smirk! I don't believe him. I've never owned this life, have I?

“I've been missing you. Remember we have unfinished class?” He cocks up his eyebrow.

That would be the W-O-T class that I was just a blink away from passing when Maqhingana disturbed us.

“You'll teach me later, Sir. I hope your house has been vacuumed.”

Why is he sighing now? He mustn't dare sigh on me!

“It is, right?” I ask.

“She moved out but...” Another sigh. Lord what happened?

“She refuses to let me pay for the damages. But that's not what I'm worried about, what stresses me is that she doesn't want me to do the naming ritual for my baby. I don't want to have angry spirits hovering over me and I don't want anything to happen to our baby.”

I don't know what this means; “angry spirits-anything to happen to our baby.”

But it could be bad, judging by the way his fingers just balled into a fist and his facial muscles tensing up and revealing the throbbing vein on his forehead.

“I know that I have wasted her time. Four years, Ndondo. But punishing my baby instead of me is unfair.”

It looks like we have more than just family problems. I really don't know how he's going to deal with this, all I'm praying for is that nothing harms my baby.

[03/14, 09:02] : Chapter 16

## THALENTE

I didn't get his taxi today and already my mood is sour. I don't want to sit behind this oval-headed driver who plays Casper Nyovest. Who plays Casper Nyovest in a taxi? Why doesn't he play maskandi like other drivers? Or must I say like a certain driver? This one even gives me the change exactly like it should. He's scamming me. Whenever I pay I get my change plus R50 on top.

I'm annoyed so early in the morning. I don't even realize how empty the taxi rank is as I walk towards the shelter absent-mindedly. Why am I even feeling this way? Has it been that long since I was entertained by a man that a mere hug and baby kiss have me stretching my neck like a giraffe looking for a man who hasn't said anything to me?

It looks like I'm too early. Even Sis' Thandi is not here yet. I wipe the wooden bench and lower myself

on it. Even though only one ear is working, I plug my headset in the phone and play music. I could start by sweeping inside the shelter but I'm too lazy. I'll just pretend as if I couldn't find the broom when they get here.

The whole taxi rank was empty when I got here. There were only few Spar workers and taxi commuters who were heading to their work destinations. I'm relieved to see one slim guy jogging towards the shelter.

The orders have started!

He gets to me and pulls out his phone. Maybe he has an important call to make, so I wait for him to get over with it with a notepad and pen in my hand.

“Bafo, is it the afro one with a big forehead?” he asks the other person as his eyes sweep over me.

I shift on the bench and put aside the notepad that I had in my hand.

I have a plastic-covered hand mirror that I bought



from a street hawker and as cheap as it is, I still see a clear reflection of myself on it. Afro? Big forehead? That's definitely me, now I'm stuck on who gave this guy the right to call my big forehead big?

“Kanti eyani imzuzu? Abeze phela!” (What's the wait for? They must come.) He's talking about something else, something that seems to upset him. His “small” forehead grows into a familiar frown. He clicks his tongue as he drops the call. Then he comes straight to me and grabs my bag next to me.

“Let's go!” he says.

I get up on my feet and grab his arm before he takes another step. Who the hell is this?

He looks back at me and exhales.

“You shouldn't have come here today. Now do Ndlalifa a favour and cooperate with me.”

The mention of Ndlalifa's name calms me down a bit but I'm not cooperating with a stranger.

“Bring back my bag,” I say.

He's so annoyed but I've seen enough annoyed

people in my life that it doesn't affect me anymore.

“You can't be here today. Nobody is allowed to be here,” he explains slowly, making sure that each word sticks through and register inside my big forehead.

“Fine I'll go back to my house. I don't need you to pull me,” I say.

He takes a deep breath and shrugs his shoulders. Within the blink of an eye my legs are floating in the air and I'm placed against his shoulder. I don't even understand how he did that, I'm size 34 for crying out loud!

“If you don't put me down now I'm going to scream,” I threaten but he doesn't care. He crosses the empty road with me on his shoulders and stops in one of the few taxis that are here.

He shoves me inside and closes the door after me. Seriously? Ndlalifa sent this asshole to do this to me?

The asshole jumps on the driver's seat and starts the taxi. I've never been to any driving school but I don't think it's allowed to speed like this while reversing. The robot is still red when he crosses it as he drives out of town.

We are driving to the north. No, scratch that, we are flying to the north with a taxi. Even if I open my mouth he won't hear me. I've heard rumours about disagreements between the taxi association big shots, so I guess this is what it has led into. What I don't understand is why am I going to Everest Heights instead of Cannelands where I squat.

He parks the taxi in front of a hazey- grey painted rambler house.

“Why did you bring me here?” I ask.

He jumps out of the car and hurries to my side. He opens the door and signals that I climb out. He looks impatient more than ever.

“I'm not getting out before you tell me who the hell you are, whose house is this and why am here,” I

say.

“Why don't you call your man and ask him? I did what I was told to do.” He fishes something out of his pocket and hands it to me. House keys?

“I want to leave,” he says.

With confusion threatening to burst my head, I climb out with my bag. He closes the door and rushes to the driver's side.

He speeds off, leaving me standing in front of the strange house like a lost sheep.

What the fuck is happening here?!!

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NDLALIFA

What was supposed to be a gunfight of powers between Bhengu's people and Ngidi's taxi drivers has ended with a dead policeman. Their rule was that no taxi will operate if Bhengu refuses to step

down as the chairman. And he refused, Ngidi had to keep his word and stop taxis from ranking. Now it's gone from bad to worse, Maqhinganga gunned down the policeman and now they have Bhengu and the police on their backs.

This is no time to worry about taxi users or street vendors. Right now only Ngidi getting the position he's always wanted matters, but not to Ndallalifa. He's worried about Sis' Thandi's shelter that employed the woman who forced a plate of salty beef down his throat and stole his heart. It might take a while for things to get back to normal. The food shelter ensured that he saw her every morning to work, ate the food she prepared for him and saw her in the evenings.

They all head to Ngidi's house, something they don't do very often. Ndabuko and Maqhinganga stay a few streets away from each other at Umhlanga and they show their faces at the taxi rank once in a full moon. Maqhinganga's main focus is on girls and living like an animal all over Durban. Ndabuko may own taxis and

sits behind the wheel for a few hours, but he's still too fancy to sit at the taxi rank day in and out. He speaks a different language from other taxi owners. He'd be interested in car engines and inflation rates while others want to discuss which one is fast between Nkwanyana's taxi and Mhlongo's sprinter.

Ngidi became the CEO of Bantwana Holding and he had to live like a decent man. So, he bought a mansion in the same estate as Ndabuko and Maqhinga.

Ndlalifa isolated himself from everyone, mainly because he has unresolved issues with his father. He stays in Everest Heights in a rambler house that doesn't even represent his pocket properly. He's never been fond of big houses, let alone a double-storey house that would need him to climb up and down the stairs.

“Do you still remember that you have a guest in your house?” Maqhinga asks as he squeezes himself in the couch between him and Ndabuko.

“What guest?” Ndabuko asks. Ngidi is silently

listening. No woman has ever been introduced to him as a girlfriend or even the one-nightstand. Of course, he doesn't want his sons to be like him. He wants them to marry and have functional families.

“None of your business. Where is Fuze?” He changes the topic, making Ndabuko uncomfortable.

“She moved out. I don't think she went back home. She must be somewhere crying,” he says with a knock of guilt in his stomach. He never imagined them ending things on a bitter note.

“Or planning her revenge against MaSibisi,” Ngidi says.

They all stare at him. He, out of them all, worshipped the grounds Fuze walked on.

“She paid me a visit. Keep an eye on her.” He picks his glass and empties the contents inside his mouth.

It's time for the real discussion. The one they all gathered here for.

“The war has started. I need everyone to be prepared and strengthened,” Ngidi says and looks

at Maqhinga. “Wena, you'll need to cleanse first. I'll handle the policeman's case, your duty is to purify your spirit and get ready for a bigger war.”

His eyes turn to Ndabuko who's playing with his wrist-watch.

“Are you in?” he asks.

“Yeah,” Ndabuko says.

“No woman this week. Are we all clear?”

Ndabuko lifts up his head and looks at Maqhinga, when their eyes meet they both frown. How to live without sex for a week?

“Tomorrow night the strengthening will begin. You can all go see the women in your lives and do your goodbyes because from tomorrow onwards I don't need any female smell from you,” Ngidi says.

They both nod their heads. Ndlalifa is quiet because this one doesn't apply to him. He has never had a problem staying far from women. Maybe he was still under 30 when he kept a woman for more than three months.



“That's all,” Ngidi says, adjourning the meeting. Maqhinga is the first one to make a phone call and leave.

They discuss Ndondo's parents for a few minutes before Ndabuko leaves as well.

Ndlalifa remains on the couch, staring up at his mother's photo in a huge frame that's hanging from the wall. He last saw her on his 8th birthday, Maqhinga was only two-years old when she left with a huge stomach and only her purse with ID and taxi fee inside. Her clothes, lotions and earrings, all of it is still packed neatly inside the suitcase that is never opened and kept inside his father's bedroom. It moves with him into every house he lives in.

Ngidi decides to excuse himself from the room. They've been here many times before. They've discussed her, accused one another and some years they weren't father and son.

Who leaves with no trace for twenty-seven years, leaving her two sons at the hand of a man who

loves his taxis more than he loves God himself? No letter. No visit. She just disappeared and never looked back.

“Ndlalifa,” his father's housekeeper disturbs him in his thoughts as she puts a plate of food in front of him.

They share a brief look before she walks off. She's trying her best to become more than just a housekeeper, all these thigh-revealing skirts and popping cleavage threatening to burst her shirt. Hopefully she'll be fired soon because his mother can't be replaced by a girl he once fucked behind the taxi.

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He's a nerve-wreck as he drives towards his house. What he feels for Thälente scares him. It's not everyday that he meets a woman who forces him to eat badly-cooked food and challenges him like her. She's feisty and not intimidated by anyone, and that's what he loves the most about her.

It's almost 9am and she's been in his house alone since 6am. He knows that he's stepping into a war zone. In his head she went through his kitchen, made herself something to eat, looked for something to change into from his closet and maybe put on his shirt. He's expecting to find her watching TV in the lounge.

But that's not the scene he walks into. He walks in to an angry woman sitting on the floor with her arms hugging her knees. She hasn't moved a single thing inside the house. Not even the remote.

“Hello,” he greets and mentally prepare himself for a war.

“Where are you coming from?” The scornful question has him feeling the things he's never felt before. Strange how he'd find it heartwarming to have someone interrogating him about his whereabouts.

“Fighting Bhengu’s people at the taxi rank,” he says and lowers himself on the couch behind her.

The silence is palpable. He clears his throat and she

turns her burning face to him.

“Did anyone get hurt?” This is not the question he expected. Why is she so angry but still calm AF. Women scream when they're angry, right?

“One policeman died,” he says.

“May his soul rest in peace.”

He frowns.

She keeps the burning stare on him.

“Thalente I'm sorry. I just wanted you to be somewhere safe. I could've warned you yesterday but I didn't think things would escalate so quickly. I hope you didn't find this disrespectful,” he nails himself on the cross.

“Which one do you wish I didn't find disrespectful? You telling that man you sent that he'll see me with afro and big forehead or you instructing that he drives like a maniac and bring me here against my will?”

“Both,” he says before she even swallows her questions.

She dusts herself up and slides into her pumps.

“I want to leave,” she says.

Noooo! The reason he wanted her to be here was that he wanted to spend time with her.

“Can we have lunch first? Please.”

“No, I don't want any lunch.”

The stare contest begins and lasts for a few minutes.

“Ndlalifa?” she scolds.

“I can't drive right now. I'm tired.”

“Then call that man who drove me here.”

“My brother is tired too.”

No. Not to her!

Her hand grabs him on the chest by the T-shirt. Her attempts of shaking him fail. No matter how hard she tries to push him he steadily stands on his feet on the same spot.

“Please, I want to leave.” She's tired of fighting. She

sinks on the couch and buries her face in her hands.

“I don't bite Thalente. It's so rude of you to refuse my lunch offer whereas I also spent time in your room and ate your food.”

She lifts her head up. Now this is the Thalente he knows.

“Oh really? Did I ask you to come to my room and eat my food?”

“Yes you did,” he says.

She balls her fingers into a fist and hisses through her teeth.

“It's just food with your favorite taxi driver,” he says and cocks up his eyebrow in waiting.

“My favourite?” Her eyes are widened.

“I thought you liked me,” he says with his hand across his chest.

“Sweetheart, not everyone likes you,” she says.

“But you're not everyone, you're Thalente and you like me.”

“I am everyone. Why don't you go outside and smoke? Just to clear the fog in your head.”

His face melts as the smile spreads on his lips and reaches up to his eyes.

“I want a hug, not cigarette.”

She clears her throat and shifts uncomfortably on the couch. He's got her!

“Just a small hug to clear the fog in my head, please.” He's lifting her off the couch and she's not resisting hard enough. He gets her up on her feet and pulls her arms around his waist.

No, it's not a small hug. He's dismantling her ribs.

“Thank you,” he says as he finally lets go of her.

The bull is down, he needs to make breakfast quickly.

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THALENTE

I look down at my plate and it's clean. How the hell did I finish so much food? I must give it to him, he makes eggs very nicely. I expected bread and polony, seeing that he's a bachelor and a driver who always eat take-outs. I didn't expect him to make full English breakfast on his own.

He clears the table and spends a few minutes in the kitchen organising dirty dishes inside the sink. So much energy!

“Uyayithwala yini indlu yami?” he asks as he walks back in the lounge.

I ignore his stupid question.

“Let's go. I have eaten your food as well, we are now even.”

He frowns and sits on the couch. He picks the remote and turns on the TV.

“We agreed on having lunch together. What we just ate was breakfast. Or you eat lunch at 10am where you come from?”

Oh now he's white, he differentiates between



breakfast and lunch. Whatever meal you eat once the sun is up it's lunch, finish and klaar!

“I'm not playing a game with you Hlomuka,” I say. Hopefully he can hear how dangerous I sound right now. I failed to shake him, he didn't move even an inch despite me applying all the energy I had in my pushes, but that doesn't mean he can underestimate me.

“You'll only leave if you give me a date on when you're going to come and have lunch with me,” he says.

“What if I don't?” I ask.

“Then I'll keep you here, hug you every minute and kiss you.”

No, I can't have that. His hugs turns my legs into a jelly.

“Fine, I will come Saturday when I'm off at work,” I say.

His smile of victory is so annoying. I can't believe he cornered me like that and got away with it.

“Deal?” he asks.

“Yes, deal.”

Why is he standing up now?

“Let's seal it.”

Are we 10 year-olds now? What do I do with this childish adult!

He links his pink finger on mine. Before I even blink I'm on his chest again, his hands are gently holding my waist.

“My name is Ndlalifa Ngidi. I'm 35, I have a brother and another sibling that we don't know of,” he says against my shoulder. We've never done the introductions properly, have we?

“I'm Thalente Mbatha and your hugs make me uncomfortable,” I say, still snuggled on his chest.

He chuckles and releases me. Phewww, now I can breathe!

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I had to put my foot down and stand my grounds when he wanted to come to my shack, again. That wasn't a part of our deal and I want to spend this miraculous day-off resting.

My phone rings as I lower myself on the bed, ready to listen to my neighbour's radio until I doze off.

“Sis Thandi,” I answer.

“Hey Thamente. Things are bad, I don't think there will be any work until things calm down at the rank. It could be days, weeks or months. You never know, hence I've decided to go see my relatives at Manguzi.”

“Oh, okay.” That's all I can say. I'm beyond shocked. I just got here not so long ago and now this?

“I will transfer your full salary so that you can also go home,” she says.

Minutes later the money reports into my account. I didn't think I'd be going back home so soon.

Most of my clothes are still inside the bag. I need to pack the dirty ones and let the landlord know that

I'm leaving. If the train is fast enough I'll be in Stanger before 2pm; before the sun sets down I'll be home.

(Your insert was delayed by the thunder last night )

[03/14, 09:03] : Chapter 17

NDONDO

It's Friday and I have wrapped my day earlier than expected. I know that Khosi is still averse about me and Ndabuko but today she'll need to put their beef aside and be there for her friend. I'm leaving tomorrow, going back to Nyandeni to meet the family we left behind, and I want to surprise Ndabuko with a farewell-night that he'll never forget. I just pray that he won't ask me to come on top this time. I last saw him on Monday when he surprisingly came to pick me up at night. He said his schedule was going to be tight the whole week

and he wanted to spend the night with me.

Andiswa is not a child anymore, I had no choice but to tell her the truth about my relationship with Ndabuko and the pregnancy. Unlike Khosi, she was over the moon. In her head she's the third member of the relationship. I haven't told her about Nyandeni yet, her and Bahle will also make their own decisions as they grow. I don't want it to get to the point where she has to take a side between the parents and me. Oh, by the way they're not speaking to me. I tried both their phones and neither of them picked up. They must take their time, I know that they'll be needing something from me soon.

Khosi is glued into Precious' gossips by the reception desk, I pull her aside and ask that she comes and briefs me about the AfriTrans proposal. We get inside the office and I shut the door after us. Most people have left, those who are still here are also preparing to leave, so I don't think anyone

would come knocking.

“What’s going on?” she asks with her eyebrow lifted up in anticipation.

Where is this bag now?

Oh, here it is. I made sure that I hide it where no one could see. Its bag is boldly labelled- Blerry Lingerie. I don't want people to see me as the sex addict who brings lingerie to the office. They'd definitely think that I shag inside the office as well.

“I saw something online and ordered it. They delivered today and here it is,” I say and pass the bag to her.

She takes out the red lingerie, checks it all around and nods her head with a smile of satisfaction on her face.

“I love it. But where are the whips?”

Whips of whipping who? I'm not Anastasia Grey, I'm just trying to show this man that I may jump like a frog on top and move my waist as if it has rusty screws all around it, but I do have that sex animal

inside me. You just have to look in too deeply and maybe break up with your crazy ex for it to spring out.

“Did you at least practice how to twerk?” she asks.

“No, I'll catwalk for him and do the vosho,” I say.

She laughs so hard that she nearly trips over the couch. Is vosho not sexy? I can do it in slow motion, not like Babes Wodumo.

“You know that I love you more than life itself, right?” she asks and I nod my head.

“I just put the lingerie on, cover with a long coat and then while he's not in the room take off the coat and lie on bed like this.” She lies on her side on the couch and places her hand over her hip.

“No catwalk. No vosho. Please help the women of Africa!” she says.

Well, she knows men better than I do. She's with a different guy each year and I trust her judgment.

I pack my belongs with her behind me and preaching to me about the do's and don's.

Tonight I plan to deliver!

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I heard that the taxis are not operating so I'm hoping that I'll find him in the house, alone. Hopefully I won't bump into traffic cops who'll demand me to get out of the vehicle to search it. I'm only wearing a coat over the lingerie, they might just give me a ticket for driving while half-naked. Andiswa also gave me a frown when she saw me walking out in this coat. I hope she doesn't know this strategy, I don't want to be the slutty example of a sister to her. But with people discussing everything on social networks, I think she knows all these things.

Okay, I'm here. Lipstick, check! Weave, check!  
Heartbeat, check!

I take a deep breath and make my way towards the door. I could just let myself in but his surprised face when he sees me at his door would be more fun.



I ring the doorbell and wait. The lights are on so I'm certain that he's home. With the taxi fights and all, we haven't been in contact that much this week, and I had one of the craziest schedules throughout the week as well.

He opens the door, rubbing his eyes like he just woke up from sleep. Akulalwa la, not when you're dating Ndondo!

I stand on my toes and kiss his lips. It takes a moment for him to respond to the kiss. Okay, get a grip Ndondo, the night is still young.

“Mngomezulu,” I greet. Yes calling someone's name or surname can be a greeting in South Africa.

“Ndondo, what are you doing here?”

Huh? Why does he look so shocked and uncomfortable to see me?

I hope he didn't bring her back because I swear I'm going to burn down this house.

“I'm here to see you.” I let myself inside and scan

around with my eyes. It looks like he's alone but you can never know with this gender. I once slept downstairs while the other girlfriend slept upstairs. One of the shocking tales the next generation will hear.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

He rubs the back of his neck and stutters for a minute.

“Yeah..yes, I'm okay. I just didn't expect you to be here.”

Oh well, I'm here now. He better start expecting it because I'm here to play a good game.

“Are you hungry?” he asks.

Yes, I'm hungry for you.

“Not really but I wouldn't mind a banana.” This is all Khosi. She's the one who said I must peel a banana and suck it in front of him before biting it.

Apparently it makes them wish they were bananas; if you were sucking them instead of a banana.

I can't say I know him but this man right here is not the Ndabuko that I know. Am I ugly? Why would he become so uncomfortable at my presence? The Ndabuko I know can't keep his hands off me and this one hasn't even attempted to grab my butt.

He takes the banana and passes it to me. I run my fingers over his hand purposely as I take it from him. I don't know if he noticed and chose not to read much into it.

I sit on top of the counter, peel the banana and slowly push it inside my mouth. I run my tongue around it, suck and take a small bite.

He's staring at me, if he doesn't shift his eyes I swear my forehead will have a hole on it.

“Do you want a bite?” I ask.

“No,” he says.

Well, Mr Banana it's just you and my mouth, enjoy!

He releases a sharp breath.

“Come on, just eat the damn thing,” he says.

The damn thing? It's called a banana, a very

delicious fruit.

“You said you don't want it. Why are you bothered?”  
I ask.

He's pissed. Khosi was right. A woman can't even eat a banana slowly without them wishing it was their di€ks.

“Yes I don't want it but you're wasting time by eating like that,” he says and tears his eyes away from me.

The score reads; one-zero. I get a glass of water to wash down and mentally prepare myself for the semi-finals.

“I need to smoke,” he says, clearly frustrated. Maybe it's the taxi wars putting him on the edge like this, but I intend to put him in a good mood.

“You'll find me in the bedroom,” I say and wink at him.

I can feel his stare burning my back as I sway my hips and walking away.

Khosi would be so proud of her student, I'm doing very good.

Now I have to sleep on the bed exactly the way she showed me.

Elbow on the pillow. One hand against the cheek and the other one on the hip. Even Kim Kardashian poses like this in her photos on Instagram. I have imagined him walking in and nearly breaking his jaws on the floor as he runs to the bed to take a closer look.

The footsteps are coming!

“Babe, why is the light off?” he asks and turns it on. The room brightens up and there is Kim Kardashian on bed. Ta-da....

Well, not really. He freezes by the door with a huge frown on his face.

“Hi,” I say.

He swallows hard.

“Ndondo I'm..I have..kodwa J ehovah!” Now his hand is on his forehead. He's frustrated.

What's going on here? He can't be turned off by my stomach because it's him who made me pregnant.

He takes a deep breath before he walks in slowly and stands with his hands balanced on the bed. Guilt is written all over his face.

“Hlasekazi you know that I love you, right?” he asks.

Lord, he cannot do this to me. He cannot reject me after I've made so much efforts to crawl out of the nutshell for him.

“Babe, you look amazing. You are the most beautiful woman I've ever laid my eyes on, but today I'm not in a good space. See, the thing is...” He pauses. His eyes run over my hip as I sit up. “Damn! Whose wife are you going to be?”

He climbs on the bed and pushes me back on the pillow.

I thought he was explaining something and not much interested in me.

“Ndabuko let me up,” I say.

He pins me down instead and kisses me to suffocation. The lingerie is not meant to be stretched like this. I spent a whopping R350 on this, can't he at least let me take it off?

He has torn it on the chest. My breasts are out and cupped in his hands. His tongue is sweeping all around my neck, he's biting here and there, hopefully I won't have hickeys. I'm too old for that.

He feels my temperature below the waist. His hand comes back licking and it disappears inside his mouth. Men must live!

His T-shirt flies out, revealing new razor marks all over his chest. I respect people's beliefs but these kind of things always scare me. I want to ask about them but I don't want to spoil the moment.

“You're making me do the things I wasn't supposed to do, I'm going to make every minute of this count. You're going to regret this, I swear.”

What is he talking about? It sounds like a threat and that makes me a little bit nervous.

“Woza la!” he says.

My eyes widen. I don't like his tone.

He scoops me up, wraps my legs around his waist and walks with me out of the room.

This is not what I had in mind, I thought I'd be the one in charge.

We are inside his study room. It almost looks like a mini-library. His graduation picture is displayed in a huge frame on the wall.

He puts me on my back against the desk and spreads my leg. The lacy lingerie will be resting inside the dustbin after this, waiting to unite with other trash because there's no way it could ever be fixed.

He kneels down and sucks me like a calf feeding from its mother.

I thought it would be the usual; him sucking me to orgasm and fu€king me to another orgasm. You



know, the trail of orgasms for madam. But not today, he stops just as I start speaking Portuguese.

He leans against the desk and stroke his erect shaft. My chest is so dry, I think I need two litres of water. Did I call myself a sex animal? Please scratch that off because, wow!

“Sthandwa, please,” he says in a strained voice and I know what he wants me to do. I just didn't think he'd want me to do it today.

I slowly get down on my knees.

I hold it and try to think of it as a beef sausage and not a sex organ that produces fluid.

As my tongue presses on his tip he lets out a groan and places his hand on top of my head.

I try to get it all inside my mouth, I really do. But I fail dismally. He grabs my weave out, leaving me with two weeks old cornrows. Both his hands hold my head and he thrusts in and out of my mouth.

I don't think he still remembers that I need air to survive. If I don't do something I'm going to throw

up. He's too deep in my throat.

I dig my nails into his skin. He lets out a groan mixed with pain and pleasure and pulls out. I fall down on my butt and catch up with my breaths.

Hands scoop me up as breathless as I am. I'm back on the desk, now with my chest flat on it. Oh boy, it's going straight inside my womb. I start apologizing and promising to be a good girl.

I'll never try to be a sex star again.

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NDABUKO

Ndondo leaves early in the morning to get ready for her trip to Nyandeni. It warms his heart to see her making all these efforts for their relationship.

The previous night shouldn't have happened but he doesn't regret it one bit. After seeing her off he goes back to the bedroom and sleep. It was a busy night.

The persistent ringing phone disturbs his sleep. He takes it with his eyes closed and puts it against his ear.

“These fools are on the road and transporting people. We are meeting at Ngidi’s house in the next thirty minutes. Be ready,” Ndlalifa says and ends the call without waiting for his response.

He hisses a curse and jumps out of bed. He's out of the shower within five minutes and dressing up in all-black. As much as he loves peace, Ngidi is like a father to him and he's done a lot for people in the taxi industry. Even when he was running Bantwana Holdings he kept in touch with everyone and did everything in his power to get rid of buses from their routes. The chairman position belongs to him and Ndabuko is more than willing to fight the Bhengus and kill if he has to.

He's the last one to arrive. All their taxi drivers are gathered in Ngidi's house. Inyanga came earlier in

the week and strengthened them. Their heads, chests and wrists were slit with razors and black powder was inserted into their blood. They had to bath with intelezi every morning and afternoon for three days. In fights like this you need more than a gun. You need protection from external forces. Your blood needs to be thickened, otherwise you die from a mere wound of a bullet.

Ndabuko is dressed like all of them but he looks different from them. They're sweating bullets, their eyes are balls of flames and covered by darkness. Jaws are clenched. Boots are stomping impatiently on the floor. The urge to spill blood is threatening to burst their throbbing veins. This is the effect of intelezi. It works in your conscience, eating up every bit of humanity you may have in your heart. It turns you into an animal that's on the hunt for blood.

Ngidi always makes sure that after the purpose has been served he gets inyanga back to clean intelezi off their systems.

He's staring at Ndabuko as he walks in with his hands tucked inside the pockets.

“Wena why are you glowing?” he asks.

Ndabuko clears his throat and rubs the back of his neck. Maqhinga has his fist rolled over his mouth, he's patiently waiting for the response.

“It must be the lotion, I just took a bath” Ndabuko says.

“Well Mr Lotion, go take your gun from the drawer,” Ngidi orders angrily. This boy is not going to fool him, he's been around for a very long time.

Ndabuko takes the gun, loads the bullets inside and cocks it.

“Put it on my forehead and look at me in the eyes,” Ngidi says.

Very calmly, Ndabuko puts the gun on Ngidi's forehead and gently stares into his eyes. His skin is bright and glowing. Obviously he did something that

sacked out intelezi powers. And that thing is a woman, a very powerful form of human being. It's been known for centuries that a woman's scent can kill the power of muthi, which is why Ngidi asked them to stay away from them while fighting the Bhengus.

He clicks his tongue, slaps Ndabuko's hand and grabs the gun from him.

“What did I say to you wena sfebe senja?” he asks.

Someone bursts out in laughter, Maqhinga. But it instantly turns into a cough when Ngidi turns his bloodshot eyes to him.

“Hawu Baba!” Ndabuko rubs the back of his neck. God knows how much he tried to resist Ndondo. It was impossible, he had to tear that sexy thing off her and warms himself in her.

“Klawu klakla amasimba? Get the fuck out of here sfebe, I don't want to bury you.”

He scratches his head and steps backwards. His eyes meet Maqhinga's and he bursts into laughter again. This time he fails to stop himself even when

his father's eye threatens to bore his forehead.

“Follow him!”

What? No!

[03/14, 09:03] : Chapter 18

NDONDO

Nothing has changed that much. The village still looks the same; mud-built houses, cattle grazing the fields and young children scattered around the road, playing with no care in the world. I spent five years of my life here. I was like one of them, with nothing fancy but still happy. But even for them, one day they'll have to move to the big cities to chase better lives, better education and better jobs. It will all come to an end and they'll have to deal with the cruelties of this world.

Dogs barking at my car driving inside the yard alert the people inside. I don't know the kids but they must be Qondani's, I heard that he's the baby-

making machine. Behind three little humans it's Bab' Maqhawe. He's now grey-haired, his eyes are heavy-lidded and wrinkled below. But despite of his ageing, his smile is still warm and welcoming as I remember it.

He's right next to the door as I climb out. I throw myself into his arms and we both break into laughter. It's been that long, we just had to laugh at meeting each other again.

“Oh ntombi yami, you're so grown and beautiful.” He holds my arms and turns me around. I'm rolling my eyes as he does it. I'm not 4 years old anymore, my height and weight don't represent my growth. He needs to sit me down and ask me adult questions.

“Arh! AmaHlase madoda. How old are you now? Thirty-five?”

Thirty-what? My eyes are out of their sockets.

“Bab'omdala you need to get your calendar right. I'm not that old.”



He's laughing. This old man will be the death of me!

“I was just kidding. Do you see your brother's children? Luyanda, Bandile and his daughter, Zemvelo?”

Well, I'm an aunt. The first one is tall enough to reach in the boot and take out the shopping bags I brought.

“Do you still have the cows? Where are they?” I ask as we walk towards the four-room house in the middle that is the biggest house on the yard.

“They're in the veld. Didn't you miss home?”

“I did but I didn't dwell on it.” I step inside the door and meet his wife, Jabulile, tying a scarf around her head. It looks like she's going somewhere.

“Hello Ma,” I greet.

She adjusts her sishwes hwe dress and comes to me with her arms opened.

“You're early, I was still going to polish the kitchen floor and tell these kids to pick dirt around the yard.”

My word! This woman is still like this. I bet she dressed up like this because I was coming.

“Am I the president now? There is no need for that. You still look young, unlike your husband here.”

Bab'omdala clears his throat behind us. This was my clapback, he said I'm thirty-five.

“Your mother knows that I'm not old, I still move like a youngster.”

Oh, gosh! I cover my ears with my hands. Isn't he too old to “move like a youngster”?

“Maqhawe stop traumatizing my child, go and check your goats, I don't want any cases,” Mam' Jabu scolds him and gives him a fierce stare until he walks out.

“This man!” She's shaking her head and leading me to the lounge.

The furniture is different from the one I know. Even though it's not new, it is kept in a very good condition.

I lower myself on the couch and sigh out in relief.

Finally, I'm back.

“Welcome home, baby. How old is Andiswa now?” she asks.

“Twenty-one and Bahle is fourteen.”

She gasps and claps her hands.

“Yoh! Is Sis' Vumile okay?”

“She's okay and crazy. Menopause is dealing with her badly.”

“And you?” she asks.

Oh well, me? I don't even know where to start.

Maybe let me start from the day I found a yardner in my house. That's where it all began, leading to this day.

She's not shocked as I expected. If my mother were to find out about all these details hell would break loose. Maybe she'd take me straight to T.B Joshua.

“At some point this boy has to rest in peace. He'll need to free his brother. And the only way to do that

is to present to him what would belong to his name. Of course, not you, because it seems like your current boyfriend wants you all to himself.”

I'm lost and she can see it. She pours a glass of juice from the jug and passes it to me.

“This baby you're carrying.”

My eyes pop out of their sockets.

“My baby?” I ask.

“Yes, offer this one to him. It won't make any difference because this Ndabuko boy will still remain a father figure to the child.”

I don't see that happening. Ndabuko will probably lose his mind if I dare mention this to him. He already feels like he's given Nhlanzeko a huge part of his life that he can never get back. He'll definitely refuse to give him his sperm as well.

“Is there no other option?” I ask.

“Not in this case,” she says.

It looks like I'm still at the bottom of the hill, yet to climb up.

“Yeyi wena tsheketshe!” the voice yells from the passage. Now this is the loud black family that my father ran away from.

“Baby-maker,” I respond.

“I will slap you green. Get up, I want to see how tall you are now.”

It's Qondani, Bab'Maqhawe's only child. He used to bully me when we were growing up and he was two years younger than me. Men have always been bullies!

“I'm taller than you, that's what you need to know. I thought you were at Esikhawini,” I say.

“I arrived yesterday after I heard that you were coming home. Where is Andiswa? Are her legs still thin? I hope the church boys are not trying anything funny with her.”

He's the only child, so he's the son and the daughter in this family. I don't know if he can stay quiet for five minutes.

Mam' J abu leaves the room, probably because we're talking on top of our voices like idiots.

“Do you know any girl with a broken heart?” he asks in a lower voice.

Seriously? I roll my eyes.

“Now you mend people's hearts?” I ask.

“Yes, I want someone who feels like her world has come to an end. I want to be her hero.”

This boy is going to burst my intestines? He thinks life is a game. He has three kids for crying out loud!

“You need to start acting your age and setting an example to your children,” I say.

“Hhayi, Ndondo. Imagine living your whole life as an example! I also figured this life thing on my own, I didn't watch any examples.”

“You have figured life out?” Shock me again!

He pushes my shoulder playfully and we spend the next hour talking and arguing over small things. I don't have to be a big sister to him, he's younger than me but he thinks he's older.

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Bab'omdala wants to take me somewhere after supper. We haven't discussed the purpose of my visit yet. It's still day one, there's enough time left.

“Maqhawe you know that Ndondo lives in the suburbs, she can't walk long distances. I hope you're not taking her far.”

He just waves her off with his hand and she folds her arms with a pissed look on her face.

“She swallowed a whistle, don't mind her,” he says as he holds my hand and walking out of the yard with me.

“But you love her like that,” I say.

“What can I do? I vowed to love her till death,” he says and chuckles.

I'm still yet to see my own parents teasing each other over small things and arguing like this. Those two are too perfect.

“Where are we going?” I ask as I realize that we're

living the homestead far behind us.

“Your tree,” he says.

I have a tree? All this time I didn't know that I have a tree.

We turn off the road and walk towards old walls that must've been someone's home back in the 80s.

“This was your grandmother's house. You see that tree below there, it's where you were born.”

What???

“I was born under the tree?” I ask.

“One of the scariest moments of my life. I guess you've always been one step ahead and exceeded expectations,” he says.

“I thought I was born in the hospital.” I'm beyond shocked. Who has ever been born under the tree?

“You were already sucking your mother's breast when you got to the hospital. There was a stoep here that I was standing on and watching as women



helped your mother deliver,” he says.

“You were here?” I ask.

“I heard your first cry and held you in my arms just a minute after you were born. You were different and I was so scared thinking that something was wrong with you.”

“I was different? How?” I’ve never heard this story before.

“You were born covered in a white sac.” He doesn’t continue. His hand squeezes mine as he consumes a deep breath.

“Amniotic sac?” I ask.

“Yes. I knew you were something extraordinary, a beautiful trophy of AmaHlase. The only thing your mother allowed me to do was to give you a name. I said uyiNdondoyamahlase.”

That was heartfelt. I wrap my arms around him and whisper a -thank you.

“I don’t want anything bad to happen to you and your mother knows that. She knows that you were

meant to be special, to reach greater heights and run the world. And you did, but not on your own. The ancestors had to intervene, hence your husband has been chosen by them as well.”

“I don't understand Bab'omdala.”

“Ingubo owazalwa uyimbethe ayikaze imbulwe. Buka manje uzithwele kodwa ugubazele.” (The sac you were born in hasn't been unveiled. Look now you're pregnant but you're still closed in that sac.)

“Is it a bad thing?” I ask nervously. I didn't think my visit here would dig me more challenges. I came here for solutions but it seems like my life is more complicated than I thought.

“It's luck being born that way. But certain rules have to be followed. I don't even know where your amniotic sac went. Only your mother knows!”

He hardly mentions his brother, my father.

Everything is “your mother” this and “your mother” that.

“Where was my father and what did he say?” I ask.

“He was around.” He shrugs his shoulders and doesn't go further.

“Do you think you can help me?” I sound so desperate right now. I'm going to do everything to save my baby and my relationship.

“I have to speak to your mother first. But I promise you, everything will be alright. You are home now and I'm still alive.”

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THALENTE

I'm back at the village and I fit in. It's like I never left, I came back before I could even pronounce “nga” the way Durban people do. I don't even qualify to be scared of goats, they'd quickly tell me to chill- I didn't even stay a minute in Durban.

The sun heats differently this side, to keep my Durban glow I apply calamine on my face every morning before stepping out of the house. I don't

want to turn grey.

“Thalenteee!”

Who's screaming my name so loud early in the morning? I slide into my flip-flops, tie the panifore at the back and walk out.

This woman again!

“Makhi, how are you?” I'm trying to play a -nice-button. I know that whatever is it that brought her here is bad. I hope it's not about the goats again.

“How I am? You're asking how I am? Your mother's chickens are fighting my chickens in their own home.”

Welcome to Khangelani where neighbours fight every week and still ask food from one another.

“What would you like me to do?” This is an honest question. Must I go make peace between the chickens? If so, what must I say to them?

“Tell your mother because it won't be nice when I break their legs with a stick,” she says and turns

around and leaves.

I thought it was chickens that were fighting, why would she take a side and attack the other one? Is she not human?

“MaNgobese you have a case of fighting chickens,” I tell my mother as I let myself inside the kitchen where she's cooking porridge for Elethu's 3 months old son. The mother went to the library for a school research and the grandmother is here mothering. You can't tell mothers anything about their last-born. Before Elethu delivered we agreed that we were going to take the baby to his father's house so that Elethu can continue with school undisturbed. But when Elethu came back from the hospital I became a villain, the enemy of progress. The nappies were bought with pension money behind my back. Sometimes the baby sleeps on my mother's bed while Elethu is sleeping in another room and chatting on Facebook.

Growing up I was told that actions have consequences, but seemingly the rule have changed. Elethu sleeps out, gets pregnant and talks

back. And the only punishment, or should I say threat, she ever gets is- ask your sister about me! I'll hurt you.

“My chickens?” She snaps her brows. Bad mood already? Babies cry, mommy. Imagine becoming a mother to two generations in one lifetime.

“MaMgenge is complaining that they have attacked her chickens,” I say.

She puts the lid back on the boiling pot and opens the drawer. She takes out a yellow Shoprite plastic bag.

“Before MaMgenge comes to provoke me in my house she must bring back my potatoes. Her chickens were here yesterday, stepping on top of my plants and I didn't say anything.”

Owkaay! I wasn't fuelling a fight between the neighbours. I want to have a peaceful Saturday with my family.

“Ma, please let it be,” I beg.

“I'm not letting anything be. Go and fetch my

potatoes,” she says.

I bought potatoes when I came here, a whole sack and other vegetables. The cupboards and fridge are not empty, at least not for now. Why do we need potatoes back from MaMgenge?

I heave a sigh as I take the plastic bag she's shoving to me. The pain of being unemployed, I have become a child who runs errands again.

Oh, by the way I bought new headsets. I play music on my phone before crossing the road and heading to MaMgenge's house.

She's outside in her vegetable garden and loudly singing a Zion song. I wonder what happens to these women once they reach 45. They have mood swings become worse than those of a pregnant woman.

“Mom sent me to you,” I tell her and wait for a blow-up. Her sharp eye tells me to go on.

“You took some potatoes from her last week and

she wants to cook mash,” I say.

“Oh yes, I remember. Tell her to come and check my spinach later.”

I'll never butt into these grannies' business, ever. One minute they're fighting and next they're arranging spinach meetings.

I follow her inside the house and wait as she fills up the plastic bag with potatoes.

“I will add extra ones for Elethu's baby. I'm sure it's hungry, the father is not supporting and everything is MaNgobese's responsibility now.”

I practice my right to keep silent. Here everyone is into each other's business and they have no shame discussing things that don't concern them.

“Tell her to come today because tomorrow I'm going to church,” she reminds me as I walk out of the yard with a plastic of potatoes weighing down my arm.



Hlelo called yesterday, things are still bad at the taxi rank. A policeman was killed last week and earlier this week two drivers from the Bhengu side died. The problem with taxi fights is that only taxi associations can solve them. The police are almost useless when it comes to those people, they're dangerous and stubborn.

I really hope they reach an agreement soon, before more people die. I miss being ordered around by Sis' Thandi and preparing that one special plate. I even miss my shack and neighbours I've never spoken to.

Whoah! Who's this immature driver? What if I didn't lift my eyes up? He was going to run over me. Big shots with big cars, neh?

It stops in front of me and I'm forced to take the headsets off and lend my precious attention to whoever it is. I hope it's not one of those people who hijack girls and traffick them. But so far we don't have those incidents here in the village.

The window rolls down and the face that I see  
nearly sends me on the ground.

“Hi, hello,” he says.

No, my eyes aren't fooling me. What is he doing  
here? How did he even know where I live?

“Ndlalifa?” My voice seems to pressed down below  
my throat.

“Thalente,” he says.

My goodness! It's him in his taxi-driving self.

“What are you doing here?”

His lips crack into a brief smile. This is a test!

“It's Saturday on my calendar.”

What Saturday? Oh, hell no! He can't be here for that.  
I mean that would be very stupid of him, given the  
circumstances. Our deal stood because I had a job,  
a reason to be in Durban.

“I'll drive to those trees and wait for you...unless if  
you want us to have our lunch with the folks here.”

WTF! The plastic bag in my hand drops on the

ground and the potatoes scatter all over the road, each running to its own direction.

I've never been so embarrassed in my whole life. How can MaMgenge's potatoes do this to me? I want the earth to open up and swallow me.

"MaMgenge actually borrowed..." Fuck! What am I doing? I'm only making a fool of myself with lame explanations. I need to collect the potatoes before another car comes and run over them.

"Do you need help?" He's out of the car and bending down to pick the ones next to him.

"We do have potatoes at home, just so you know," I clarify.

"Lucky you!" he says.

Oh, he's here to mock me?

"I'll go inside and not come back," I threaten and he just grins like an idiot.

[03/14, 09:04] : Chapter 19

THALENTE

I need to breathe and think. I need to come up with a plan- how am I going to get out of here?

It's at times like these when I regret being black. I'm sure at 27 white girls don't need to explain their whereabouts to their mothers. But black mothers treat you like an adult only when it suits them.

MaNgobese would lose her mind if I just disappear - in whose house?

“Why are you standing like a pole inside my house?”

Think, Thamente!

“I just got a phone call from my landlord. Someone broke into my room and he wants me come and check what was stolen.” Silent applause to myself! That was a good one. I'm a good liar.

“Do you need someone to come with you? I can call Bhekizitha and ask him to...” Whoah! Not Malum' Bheki and his panga.

“No Ma, I will manage,” I say before she even finishes.

“Okay go and get ready. I will warm the beans for you.”

I can't believe Ndlalifa just made me lie to my mother like this. I sprint out of the kitchen to the rondavel that is my bedroom. I pour cold water into the basin and empty my cosmetic bag on the bed.

The panifore? WTF! Ndlalifa saw me in a panifore? I can't believe this. I'm sure now he thinks of me as a lazy village girl. I need to explain to him that my clothes were in another house, that's why I wore a panifore. I was going to change as the sun goes up.

I quickly wash my face. I need to leave before he comes here to check. I have no doubt that he'd come here and talk to my mother. This man has proved to be an idiot that's against my peace of mind.

And then? Why the fuck is this water so white?  
Calamine!

Shit, I looked like a monkey. I wonder what he thought of me. Potatoes, panifore and calamine. This is the worst day of my life.

I'm not sure where we are having this lunch and how am I expected to dress up. Fuck, I'm delaying myself even more with this. I pick one of the dresses I consider to be the most expensive one that I own. The ankle-length wrap dress that I bought from a boutique in town. I comb my hair and tie a bandana around my head. Lip-gloss, body spray and my wrist-watch that has been stuck on 00:44 since August last year. Why are the watch batteries so expensive though? People always look confused whenever they ask time and I fish out my phone instead of checking it on my wrist.

I pack my toiletries and a few dresses then walk out.

“Hhayi-bo Thalente, you can't leave hungrily.”

MaNgobese standing in front of the kitchen door.

“I will grab something on my way,” I say.

She gives me the once-over and disappears inside the kitchen. I fold my fist and release a low groan.

Why do I need to eat beans while going out for

lunch with a rich taxi driver?

She walks out with a Tupperware container after a few minutes. She covers it with a nameless black plastic packet.

I want to die!

“Here! I know that you won't cook when you get to Durban.”

This is MaNgobese, I have no choice but to take the parcel. Imagine carrying cooked beans and uphuthu all the way to Durban.

Once I walk out of the yard, where she can't see me, I unzip the bag and try to fit the parcel inside. The zip won't close and I can't remove anything inside the bag. I'm left with no choice but to carry the parcel in my hand. This universe has never loved me. Hopefully he won't question the contents of this parcel.

The door opens, he climbs out and stands proudly with his arms folded.

My knees start kissing each other, I'm losing my steps and getting very uncomfortable. Why is he staring at me like that?

For the first time I don't know what to do with myself while standing in front of him.

“Are you okay?” he asks.

Deep breath!

“Yeah,” I say.

He takes the bag from my hands. I hold the parcel tightly when he tries to take it as well. He just frowns and opens the back and throws my bag inside.

“What's that? I hope you're not armed to kill me,” he asks.

I just roll my eyes and get inside the car. He closes the door for me and I secretly feel like a girlfriend from those romantic movies.



We are both inside the car? Shouldn't he be starting it and driving away before the likes of MaMgenge see us?

“Why are you not driving?” I ask.

“I want a hug,” he says.

Are the doors locked already? He knows that his hugs make me uncomfortable. I told him.

I fasten the seatbelt and stare outside the window. He lets out a brief chuckle before starting the car.

It's a long journey, two towns away from his house, but the music has neutralized the awkwardness. We are talking less and stealing glances of each other more.

He makes a stop at Total garage and buys the drinks and a few snacks. He only takes the energy drink and puts the plastic bag on my lap.

I'm not going to make a mistake of putting down the parcel in my arm. I put the bag of Lays on top of it and bless my tastebuds.

He laughs when I pass the opened bag of chips to him. What's funny about eating chips?

“I will eat real food.” My mind imagines his eyes sweeping over my cleavage as he says it. Stupid imagination, right?

“I'll eat real food as well. It doesn't mean you're healthy than me, you smoke,” I defend myself as I unwrap the chocolate slab.

“But I didn't say anything about being healthy,” he says with a mocking chuckle.

“I read between the lines.”

“Really? I haven't noticed.”

And what's the meaning of that? I lift up my eyebrow. As if he can feel my burning stare on his cheek, he turns his eyes to me briefly and flashes a grin.

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His face changes as we arrive to a car parked in front of his house. The front door is widely opened

and the TV playing inside is loud enough to be heard from the driveway.

“Ndlalifa what if it's those people you're fighting with at the rank?” I ask, pulling my hand back from his.

“It's my brothers, I don't know what the fuck they're doing in my house.”

Plural? So it's not just one person inside the house, but two or more?

I want to turn and run back to the car but we are already inside.

There are two dirty plates on top of the counter, not inside the empty sink. I can see his jaw tightening. Whatever they ate was colourful, there are meat bones left on the plates and untouched cucumber slices.

There are two men sitting on the couch and watching a soccer match on TV. One of them is that

disrespectful guy that scooped me up at the rank and called my big forehead “big.”

“You two, leave my house!” Ndlalifa says and they slowly turn their heads to us. Instead of getting off the couch and leaving as they're told, their faces break into wide grins and their eyes stay on me.

“Why didn't you tell us that you cooked for a guest? What if we ate all the food? You're lucky because we had bread in my house before coming here.” It's the one who called my big forehead big.

The other one is just smiling and staring at me. I don't dwell on men's looks but his are outstanding. He's a compensation for all the ugly Thomas and Sandiles we have to look at everyday. One glance and you'd assume that he's a male model stepping out of the magazine cover. His smile is just too cute.

“Ndabuko take your friend and leave my house,” Ndlalifa tells him. I guess he's the one with working brains around here.

He taps the stupid one on the shoulder.

“Bafo, let's go,” he says.

They help each other off the couch. I guess they're had some alcohol as well.

“Leave with those dirty dishes in my kitchen. I want them back, clean and unbroken,” Ndlalifa says to them.

I give him a funny look. Who does that? He's too much as a big brother.

He switches the TV off and clicks his tongue. It seems like this is not turning out the way he wanted.

“Do you mind waiting in the bedroom? I just want to clean and set up,” he asks.

“Bedroom?”

“Yes,” he says.

Why am I feeling uncomfortable about this? He won't be there, mos.

“Okay, which way?” I ask.

“You'll find it yourself; reading between the rooms.”

I'm tempted to roll my eyes. He can be such an idiot.

I leave him fishing the remote left between the couches with a frustrated look on his face.

Funnily, I don't go through every room in search for his bedroom. I just find my way there.

His bed is neatly made; everything is where it should be, pillows are set in a particular order, and I'm hesitant about sitting on it. I just need to be careful and not wrinkle his covers.

Oh fuck, I left my phone inside the bag in the car. The beans as well, I left the parcel on the seat. What if he sees it?

I rush out of the bedroom to control the damage. I've had enough embarrassments for the day. The beans can't add to my stress.

“Where are you going?” He's putting the Tupperware container inside the fridge. He teared off the plastic bag. My bag is on the chair. I'm not sure whether I'm still breathing or not.

“You fetched my bag?” I'm frozen on the same spot.

“Yes, and the food you didn't want me to see.”

He opened the container? Can this day and already.

“We do eat meat at home,” I say.

“So what?” Anger sweeps across his face and quickly disperses as his eyes meet mine.

“I'm not stupid Thalente,” he says.

“I never said you were.” I move to the chair and sit.

“But that's what you imply, as if I can't relate to real life. I don't live in a bubble, just so you know.” He takes two bowls and walks out.

Okay, he's pissed and I'm not sure why. I sit on the chair and wait for him to come back. He's setting lunch somewhere in the house and not even asking me to help.

He makes two more trips and his last trip is to fetch me.

It's unsettling being with him when he's quiet because of me.

“You're angry at me?” I ask.

He pulls out the chair for me. He's set a cosy lunch table for two. His domestic skills don't complement his upbringing. Or I'm being judgemental.

“Where did you learn to cook?” I jump to the next question, seeing that he's not answering the first one.

“My mother left when I was eight, my father is in the taxi industry and I have young brother,” he says and shrugs his shoulders.

Now I get it. I have questions but maybe right now is not a good time.

He dishes up for both of us and pours the drinks.

“Thalente I want us to talk real business,” he says.

I reach to my glass and take a sip.

“I'm listening,” I say.

“I don't undermine you as a person and I don't see you as someone who needs help. I applaud you for



doing what you do; waking up every morning by dawn and cooking at the taxi rank. I think it's amazing, some girls stand on the streets every night and exchange their bodies for money. I don't judge them either, life is unpredictable.”

I take another sip. I'm not used to this serious side of him. He's always fooling around and annoying.

“Things might not go back to normal soon. There's an opening in one of the companies I know. They're looking for a girl who can help at their canteen. I said I know someone who might want the job and asked them to hold for a few days. You can accept or decline and I'll get back to them.”

Wow! Oh, okay.

“That's real business,” I mumble to myself as I try to digest all of it.

“We have more to discuss.” He's back at being the Ndlalifa that I know.

“What's going to happen when Sis' Thandi comes back? I'll drop the job and go back to the shelter?”

He chuckles and sips on his drink.

“Loyalty doesn't pay bills. But that would be for you to decide.”

I don't know how much time I have to come up with a decision. I don't know if Sis' Thandi will feel betrayed if I move to another job. I mean, she even paid me a full salary. But sitting at home is not an option either. I'm twenty-seven, I can't depend on my mother's pension money.

“Must I add the salad for you?” he asks and I shake my head.

“Okay, moving to the next subject,” he says and clears his throat. He wasn't taught the fourth rule of being a black child: you don't talk while eating.

“Why do you always give me a hard time? Why did you leave without telling me?”

What? My eyebrows are widened out in disbelief. Was he eight years old when he made me?

“You're not my father,” I say.

“Yeah, but I'm not just “nothing” to you. I deserved

to know and we had plans.”

“What are you to me?” I'm confused. Yes I may have been wrong for not informing him that I was leaving. But him and his colleagues are the reason why I left.

“I don't know, you will give me the title you think I deserve,” he says.

“Job-connector,” I say.

He laughs so hard that I end up questioning his sanity. Is he not giving me job connections? That's his title and it suits him perfectly.

“It's fine, uyezwa?” he says, still mocking me.

I change the subject and ask about the rank situation. He's calm about the whole thing and by the look of things, he wants it to drag even much longer so that some people can be taught a lesson. Unfortunately it's the taxi drivers, conductors and passengers that suffer the financial consequences. Some of their taxis are operating in other towns and their father owns the logistic company.

I force him to sit down and clear the table. I know that he wants his kitchen spotless, he just fed me the things I see on TV, so why not clean for him before I go?

I load the dishes inside the sink and wash them. Luckily, he listened and didn't follow me. After clearing up everything and packing the dishes inside the cupboards, I open the fridge and take my Tupperware out.

Where did he put my bag? I hope he didn't pack it as he decided to pack my beans inside the fridge.

“Ndlalifa where's my bag? I have to clean my room and see the landlord.”

He just stares at me. Did my nose move up to my forehead?

“Ndlalifa?” I raise my voice, hoping that he'll snap out of his zone and answer my question.

“What's going on?” he asks.

I don't understand his question. There's something

going on?

“We had the lunch that we promised each other and now I'm leaving,” I say the obvious.

He frowns like I just spoke to him in Chinese.

“I fetched you all the from Khangelani. When were you going to clean your room and see your landlord if I didn't?”

“But you did fetch me and I'm going to do all that.”

“Then you have to pay for my petrol. I didn't fetch you for the landlord, I thought we'd spend time together.”

Jesus Christ! I didn't ask him to fetch me and I'm not paying for petrol, not even for the drop of it.

“Where is my bag?” I ask firmly.

“I don't know,” he says.

Breathe Thalente!

“Ndlalifa?” This is the last warning before..I don't know before what.

“Leave me alone,” he says and walks to one of the

rooms and shuts the door after him.

Owkaaay, I need to find my bag. I'll walk to Cannelands if I need to. My searching skills are very fast and effective. I think this is the guest bedroom, he left it on top of the bed.

I take it and make my way to the front door. I hate that we are parting this way but I refuse to be bullied by him.

“Thalente,” – the hand grabs me and pulls me back inside the house.

I hope this is not what it looks like; a fight.

“What?” I stare into his fire-blazing eyes at a closer distance. He's still holding my arm tightly and I know that I won't be able to fight him off.

“You really don't see that I love you?” His question catches me off guard. I was prepared for an argument, not a love confession.

“Maybe I don't show it enough. Maybe when you see me you just see a random taxi driver who's

always on your face. I don't know, maybe you just see a rich man's son who never have to fight for anything in life. But behind whatever you see is a man who is hungry for your love. I'm in love with you Thalente Mbatha.”

I don't know how I lost the grip of the bag and Tupperware. Everything I had in my hands meet the floor. The container lid flies off as uphuthu and the beans scatter. I need two buckets of sea water. Maybe my ancestors are angry with me, because no one can have so many bad lucks in one day.

His hand lifts me as I attempt to pick up the bag and possibly find a way of getting the beans off his clean floor.

“Thalente look at me. I'm talking to you,” he says.

I can't look at his eyes. Not after what he just confessed.

“Will I ever be more than just a job-connector?” he asks.

“Yes...” Wait, what the fuck did I just say?

[03/14, 09:04] : Chapter 20

NDONDO

Being home was amazing. Yes, I call it home. But unfortunately I have to go back to life.

Bab'Maqhawe and his wife are coming with me.

They've made it clear that they won't set a foot in my father's house, hence I've urged Andiswa to arrange a family dinner in my house. I'm hoping that we'll talk, put aside our differences and reach common grounds. We don't have to share beliefs, we just have to respect one another. I pray and hope that my father keeps his emotions in check. Bab'Maqhawe has his reservations on Christianity too but he's not as vague as my father is about the ancestors.

The sooner they work towards accepting Ndabuko's proposal and letting Bab'Maqhawe handle things, is the sooner I can also focus on my relationship and the pregnancy.

I also have to talk to Ndabuko about what



Mam'J abu said. I don't want any complications and I also want Nhlanzeko to rest in peace. If giving this baby to his name is going to give him peace then so be it. It won't take anything away from us, at Home Affairs we'll still be the baby's parents and we'll raise him or her as our own.

Bab'Maqhawe is forced to eat two bananas so that he won't demand us to make "pee" stops along the road. They always argue over stupid things and Mam'J abu always wins the argument. This man does everything she wants, but not without a fight. I can stay with them all day. I wonder how life would've been like if we stayed back in Nyandeni. Maybe we would've turned out differently.

“Are you supposed to drive while pregnant?”

Mam'J abu asks.

“I'm still on the first trimester Ma, please don't turn into another Ndabuko,” I beg.

“Hhayi-bo, we don't want anything bad to happen to our grandchild. That's why we are here, and you

better not reveal the Sibisi stubbornness to that poor boy,” she says.

“Sibisi stubbornness?” Bab’Maqhawe asks with his eyebrow lifted. I’m also curious.

“Don’t even start Maqhawe, you know yourself,” she says.

He mumbles something under his breath and goes mute as Mam’J abu gives him a stare.

I discussed this with Qondani and he told me that the only time his mother apologizes to Bab’Maqhawe for her controlling and dictating behavior is during the late hours of the night. That was enough for my ears, I didn’t tiptoe to their free-standing bedroom to eavesdrop. But now I think she does all this on purpose; to provoke him so that the “late night” punishment can be severe.

They’ve never been to my house before, let alone my kind of neighbourhood. I can tell by the way Mam’J abu’s nose is wrinkled up that, nope, it looks all fancy and modern but she wouldn’t give up a day

of her life to live here.

“Is it divided into two?” she asks, about the house.

“Yes,” I say.

“How many bedrooms?”

“Seven.”

“For you and Andiswa only?”

“No, people do come over.”

She doesn't say anything further. She's just stunned, I guess. I don't think I live exaggeratedly. There are bigger houses in this neighbourhood, some of them don't live anyone, they were just bought because the owners could. Ndabuko is the one I could say is exaggerating this whole life thing, his house is ridiculous, so are his sport cars.

Andiswa is standing in the middle of the lounge, looking confused and lost. She hasn't seen these people since she was a child. I don't think she even remembered their faces.

“Is this Andiswa?” Bab’Maqhawe asks with his arms widely opened. Andiswa hesitantly walks into them and wraps her arms around him.

“You're so grown!”

They're both staring at her in disbelief.

“It's my 21st birthday very soon,” she brags as she looks up to Bab'Maqhawe’s face. She has melted in their presence in an instant, that's how light their aura is.

“Your father should do umemulo for you,” Bab'Maqhawe says.

“Like virgins?” she asks.

Mam'J abu is going to faint. The word “like” has her eyes bulging out of their sockets.

“Please get us something to drink,” I tell Andiswa with a stern look. In these people's eyes she's still 7 years old, she's going to make their hearts stop.

“Do you guys want me to show you around or your feet are aching?” I ask them.

The waving hand and clenching of jaws from

Mam'J abu as she slides down on the couch answers me. Bab'Maqhawe is made out of steel, insimbi endala, he's up for it. I take him to the studio first, where Andiswa does all her secret auditions. He's charmed by the guitar, we spend almost ten minutes inside with him trying to revive the old guitarist inside him.

“When are they coming?” he asks as we leave the ground floor, taking up the stairs.

“Soon. I sent Andiswa a text before we got here. She must've notified them that we've arrived.”

“They're aware that I'm also here?” He's a man, he keeps the brave face on, but I've got to know him well during the past two days, I can tell that he's nervous.

“We didn't go into details with them but I don't think it's a problem since you're in my house and not theirs.”

“I just don't want to bring any noise around you and my grandchild.”

He's sweet beyond my understanding. I know that

it's wrong to compare people but he's way better than my father. He's more loving, more open-minded and less judgmental.

“Bab'omdala don't stress yourself about those two.” I'm not sure of my advice but stressing about it is not going to help. They'll be here and the confrontations will be done.

The picture of me in my graduation gown welcomes us as we enter the study room. He stands in front of it.

“Qondani heard about this and he told me. I was so proud of you,” he says in a mix of emotions.

“I wish you were there to slaughter a cow for me,” I tease.

He tenses up and reaches up to it. He unhooks the frame and takes the picture down. He goes around the desk and lounges himself on my chair. He's staring at the picture like a piece of treasure. I guess this is another room we're going to spend an hour in.

“Time flies. The day you were born still feels like

yesterday. I can't believe you've grown into this beautiful, intelligent young woman.”

I walk around the desk stand behind him and wrap my arms around his shoulders. He lifts up one hand and touches my arm with iziphandla around his wrists brushing tenderly against my flesh.

The door bursts open and my mother stands in the middle of the doorway.

Oh hell, she's angry.

“Mama, I thought you were...” I pause and follow her fire-blazing eyes.

“Maqhawe let go of my daughter!”

I'm the one holding Bab'omdala's shoulders and he's just holding my picture.

Without saying anything he puts the picture on the desk and gets off the chair.

“Mama! I was just showing Bab'omdala around.” I'm so embarrassed. “Baba I haven't shown you my bedroom, please don't leave,” I say.

He has this thing of listening to women. It's cute with Mam'J abu but I don't understand it with my mother. Why would he just follow the word of a woman he hasn't seen over a decade?

“Go and greet your father downstairs.” Now she's ordering me. Her hands are on the waist and she's ready for war.

Bab'Maqhawe passes next to her. Their shoulders touch and they share one deep stare.

“Leave Maqhawe,” she says slowly as she finally tears her eyes away from his.

“One day pray for you heart.” With that said he walks out of the room and disappears.

It must've touched the nerve, she's blinking timelessly.

“Why do you hate him?” I ask.

“Hate? I don't hate anyone. I said go and greet your father downstairs.” She turns around and leaves. Very weird!



I already know that the family dinner won't go well. Maybe I should've just called my father alone and he would've sorted this with his brother privately. Bringing my mother into this was the worst decision ever. I can tell that Mam'J abu has gotten uncomfortable and my mother is doing her best to make her feel unwelcome.

“I'm the one who asked you all to come here so I guess I'll speak.” I need a sip of water. This; their piercing eyes, my father's silence and the side eyes between Mam'J abu and my mother, it all unsettles me. Even though she has already chosen her side, I wish Aunt Vumile was here to neutralize the situation with her holy jokes.

“Baba I already know where you stand as far as my relationship with the father of my child is concerned. I'm not going to ask you to make sacrifices for me or to disregard your beliefs to do things for me. All I'm here to ask is that you allow Bab'omdala to be in charge of all the rituals and ceremonies that should take place. I love Ndabuko and I'm not going to break up with him or ask God for forgiveness

because I fell in love with someone who is not perfect in your eyes.”

He directs his eyes to Bab'Bab'Maqhawe, the whole room turns cold.

“You put her up to this? You turned my daughter against me, Maqhawe?” he asks.

“I went to Nyandeni myself, please don't shift this to Bab'omdala,” I jump in before Bab'omdala can breathe a word. I knew this was going to happen. He's always been a bad guy in their eyes. A devil himself.

“Right? You went to Nyandeni and you suddenly talk back to your father?” my mother asks and she's met by fierce stare from Mam'J abu.

“Nomagugu let men talk. Ungumfazi, stay out of it.”

“Yey wena sqhaza!”

Owkaaaay! Andiswa needs to go to her room. This is war.

“Take your food and leave,” I whisper to her.

She pouts her lips and folds her arms while resting

back on the chair. Now we have to argue just like these people?

“Leave!” I hiss through my teeth.

She doesn't budge. The noise is bursting the roof. Mam'J abu and my mother are just seconds away from scratching each other's face. I've never witnessed such a childish bickering between old people.

“She is my daughter!” Bab'Maqhawe's voice rises above everyone else's and brings the room into a standstill.

“Maqhawe!” my mother warns in a trembling whisper.

I'm not sure what's going on. Why is everyone suddenly so quiet and not looking at me?

“I did everything I was asked to do. You married Nomagugu because you were a better man than I was. A better son. I let you two marry, to take my daughter and play a perfect family behind the Bible. I had to start afresh. At 28 I had to start as a little boy! From the ground with nothing to my name.”

His voice tones down. He leans forward the table and stares at my mother with the corners of his eyes dropping tears.

“You didn't fight for me. You were happy to marry my brother despite all the promises we made to each other. But I understood because I was always the rebellious one. The one with no promising future. You had to do what was best for yourself. Please tell me how I became the bad guy? How did I become the devil to both of you? I stayed away, I didn't want to confuse my daughter and I respected all the conditions that were given to me. She came looking for me, not the other way around. Because the herder and the father will always be different, even if they're playing the same role.”

A cold liquid flows down my face, snapping me back to the world I wasn't even aware that I had left. Andiswa has me in her arms and everyone is standing around me.

I didn't faint, I'm still sitting on the chair, but my whole body feels like an empty sack.

“Baba you married your brother's pregnant girlfriend?” Andiswa asks with me in her arms.

“Shhhh!” someone shushes and I lift my head up. I want the truth. What the hell is going on here?

“Ndondo please...” I shake my head before she even starts. She lied to me for twenty six years!

“Mama who is my father and who is my uncle between these two men?”

Silence.

My fingers ball into a fist and crash on the jug of juice put next to the stack of plates. Andiswa holds back my arms and strains me back on the chair.

“Speak Nomagugu,” Mam'J abu says and the awkwardness multiplies like rabbits.

“Dumisani is your father baby, he raised you.” She finally manages to get the words out.

Maybe I need to reconstruct my question.

“Who made you pregnant?” I ask.

Gasps! What did they expect me to say? This

woman seems to be answering things I didn't ask.

“Maqhawe did but your father had more qualities of being a good father and a husband than Maqhawe was. We were in the same church and...” My ears cannot hear more of this. He had more qualities according to whose standards? The church people? And he agreed to betray his brother and hid behind the name of God?

“Mama is this what you wanted for me as well? To break up with Ndabuko and marry someone from your church so that we can play a perfect family? You really think this is okay. Lying to me my whole life and keeping me from my father?” I ask.

“I'm your father, Ndondo.”

I don't have words for him at the moment. I don't know what to say. He sees nothing wrong with what they've done to me and Bab'Maqhawe.

“I thought we were going to be civil about this but as usual, you two treated me like a piece of shit. This is not how I wanted her to find out but you left me with no choice.” Bab'Maqhawe gets off the chair

and rests his hands on the table. “Now, I want to perform ceremonies for my daughter. I don't care if you take her bride price but you're not going to let this fake Christianity of yours stand on the way of her happiness. Go and get Vumile and your church members to gang up on me, I don't care.”

I cannot believe this is happening to me. I watch Utatakho everytime it airs and I've never imagined myself being caught in the same situation. I'm angry, both at my father who just turned out to be my uncle and my mother. I don't know how I feel about Bab'Maqhawe being my biological father. I haven't processed my emotions yet.

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I slept on it and I was hoping that when I wake up everything will make sense. But I'm still in shock and confused as I was yesterday. I don't know what would've happened if Andiswa had left the room as I instructed. Even today, she's the one who woke up and took care of Bab'Maqhawe and Mam'J abu. I

haven't wrapped my head around him being Baba and not Bab'omdala.

I don't know if I'm ready to have a conversation with them yet. I grab my car keys and leave using the backdoor.

Khosi's text comes through as I settle behind the wheel. I don't bother checking because I know it's about upcoming birthday parties. She loves organizing events more than she loves her job. All themes and ideas are ran past me and I just have a lot of personal problems to deal with. Andiswa is turning 21 and the twins, Snakho and Snalo, are turning 27. Their birthdays are just two days apart. With them, the twins, we always try to make them feel special around the day. The most painful thing to happen to any mother would be to take the last breath as your babies open their eyes for the first time. The day brings different emotions to them; they celebrate adding another year to their lives and also mourn the death of their mother who never got the chance to hold them.



It's unfortunate that she died just a few days after returning home from God knows where. Her sister, Khosi's mother, says she was gone for 10 years. Nobody knows where she was, she didn't reach out to anyone until the day she showed up in her house with a huge stomach and nothing but her purse.

She was well looked after; her skin was glowing and the clothes she came wearing were those of expensive designs - Khosi's mother recalls. But something was missing in her; the happy girl that left home ten years ago.

She wasn't the same. She was emotionally drained and empty at heart. She found the colourful life she was chasing but there, she lost herself.

Two days later she went into labor. They never got to know of the life she left home for, death claimed her sooner than anyone had expected.

Behind she left two identical daughters, Snakho and Snalo. As years went by, the whole Ngomane family had to switch back to the Nsele surname. It

happens almost everyday. People give birth and gift their children any surname they see fit, and in the long run it comes back to bite them. The ancestors don't work at Home Affairs, when the time comes they claim those that belong to them regardless of what the Home Affairs paper says.

Khosi's mother and her siblings were claimed back by their rightful ancestors, those of their mother. And they switched back to Nsele, together with their offsprings.

That's another reason why I'm here, fighting for my child to have a true identity.

[03/14, 09:05] : Chapter 21

NDONDO

Ndabuko wants to be visited. I tried to reason with him and told him that I have guests in my house, but when he gets needy there's no talking to him. It would be rude of me to drive straight from work to his house, and I still have to talk to Bab'Maqhawe.

I spot him by the pool as I drive in. He has a slingshot in his hand and he keeps picking something from the ground. Gosh, I hope he's not killing birds, white people will call the police on us.

I park in front of the house and run towards the pool.

“Baba what are you doing?” I ask.

“I just looking for sparrows,” he says.

“And shooting them?” I ask.

He frowns.

“Yeah.”

“Baba!” I'm defeated.

He pushes the slingshot inside his pocket and releases a deep sigh.

“In the morning you left without saying goodbye.”

His eyes search in mine for anger. He's the last person I'd be angry at.

“All this is too much to process in one day. I'm still shocked,” I say.

“I understand. I should've fought for you but I guess, as they say, I didn't have enough qualities to become a father. I could've done something and fought for my role. I shouldn't have just let them take you away from me.”

I lift my eyes up to him. It's still hard to believe that he is my father, the real one whose blood runs through my veins.

“If I didn't come home, were you going to let me live my whole life not knowing the truth?” I ask.

For a moment he's quiet and rubbing his elbow.

“Maybe,” he says.

My heart breaks at his confession.

“Why?” I ask in almost whisper.

“Considering how Qondani turned out, I wasn't sure of my skills as a father. I guess words, like a seed, they grow into fruition. I didn't want to ruin your life.”

I can feel the pain and insecurities buried in his voice.

“He speaks highly of you,” I tell him, hoping that it will erase the insecurities. I don't know much about him as a father but what I grasped from Qondani's description of his parents is that they're both good people. A little bit too over romantic. But still good to be around to.

“I wish you both got the chance to bond as siblings,” he says.

“He's a bully!” We both break into laughter. I can't believe I share a parent with that idiot.

Another elephant in the room needs to be discussed. Nomagugu. I want to know the whole story.

“How long were you with my mother?” I ask.

“I courted her for a year. She was very difficult but I was patient because I loved her. Two years after she agreed to be with me she fell pregnant. Your grandmother found out when she was approaching the eighth week and arranged for her to be married in church with another man. Not just any man but my brother. They had wanted them to marry for a

while, not knowing that she was already dating outside church. The families talked, I tried to stand up for myself but I was a well-known havoc-maker. Dumisani won, she cared more about her family's image, so they got married. I was happy that at least I was going to watch you grow, I got to name you and hold you in my arms. But as you grew your mother grown to hate me, she suffered a miscarriage and I was suspected of witchcraft because I slaughter and wear these.” He lifts up his arm to show me the goat-skin bangles with a smirk on his face.

“So they left home and never came back. I could've fought harder but I didn't. I'm sorry ntombi yami.”

“I love you,”- words slip out of my lips and stun him. I didn't plan to say this but there are no lies in it.

“There's someone I want you and Mam'J abu to meet. I think you'll like him,” I say.

He creases his forehead and I know who graced his mind.

“Not the one who made me pregnant,” I say and his

face relaxes.

“He'll show you around Durban and you both believe in similar things. He's been like an uncle that I've never had.” I know that him and Bab'Mbambo will get along very well. I want him to leave this place in a good mood and I know that a trip to men's hostel to eat inhloko will put him in one.

Mam'J abu is helping Hloni clean. Correction, she's teaching her how to clean, and I don't see this ending well.

“You're back? Why didn't you tell me you have such a beautiful girl in your house?” she asks.

“Ma, Hloni doesn't want to be a stepmother to three kids,” I say.

Hloni's eyes are bulging out. I know that Qondani is searching for a vulnerable woman to play a hero to, but my employees are off the market.

“You should be speaking for your brother,” she says with a chuckle.

“No, I still want Hloni to be here. If she falls pregnant that would mean I have to employ someone else,” I say.

“You won't have any sister-in-law anytime soon,” she says in defeat.

Hloni is still stunned. I leave them to their cleaning for a quick shower. My phone has started beeping nonstop, he knows that I'm no longer in the office and in his mind I should've flown straight to his house.

Just as I step out of the shower Andiswa is in my room with a smug look on her face.

“Guess who is here?” she asks.

I open the closet and search for something to wear. She knows that I don't like her guessing games.

“Must I tell you or you want to see for yourself?”

Gosh, this child!

“Who is here Andiswa?”



She smiles and leans over my shoulders. I nearly fall on my back when she tells me.

“What is he doing here? Did Bab'omdala see him?”  
I'm panicking. How can he be such an idiot? I told him that I was coming to his house.

“He is with him in the lounge and asking him questions.”

Oh Father God! I didn't want them to meet yet. I don't know, but I feel like it's unfair for him to be interrogated, maybe if he had Mr Ngidi to speak on his behalf it would've been better.

Andiswa is laughing behind me. Maybe this is how she felt when I brought that tall boy of hers to the stand and attacked him with questions. Oh, I also threw a glass of water on his face.

“Is that how your father raised you?” It's Bab'omdala asking Ndabuko.

He answers in a low voice that I can't hear from a distance. He's sitting on the couch with his palms

on his knees and Bab'omdala is standing opposite him with a slingshot in his hand. Is he planning to shoot him?

A hand grabs me just as I'm about to step inside the lounge.

“Come and show me your maize meal. I can't find it.” She's pulling me all the way to the kitchen.

“Ma, Ndabuko is here with Bab'omdala,” I say.

“So what? He's a man enough to get you pregnant, let him man-up for his shit. Where is the maize meal? I want to leave you with amahewu, you can't starve the baby.” She's opening the cupboards and mumbling complaints about the kind of food she's seeing.

“Ndabuko doesn't deserve...” She turns around swiftly and lifts up her brows. I know that I should zip it.

“Mntanami I beg, don't ever interfere while your man is talking with another man. If it's a woman he's arguing with then you can interfere and defend him. But with other men, don't make him look weak. As I

said, he's a man enough to get you pregnant, he will handle his shit.”

I sink down on the chair in defeat. I just hope Bab'omdala will let him go soon. I hope he won't mention his parents or brother because I know that Ndabuko will lose it.

I watch as Mam'J abu happily mixes the porridge on the stove while humming a song. Andiswa is somewhere in the house- eavesdropping.

His cologne fills my nostrils and I turn my head around. He's not hurt anywhere, thank God.

“Ma, can I take Ndondo somewhere? She'll be back in the morning.”

Oh, now we ask for permission?

Mam'J abu gives him a long stare that causes him to scratch his head and casts his eyes to the floor.

“In the morning it must be,” she says and turns back to her porridge.

I thought they liked him. They even preached that I

must never get stubborn with him.

I take my bag and follow him out. Once we are safe in his car he bursts into laughter.

“Why didn't you warn me?” he asks.

“You didn't tell me you were coming,” I say.

“How was I supposed to tell you when you didn't even respond to my messages?”

“That's because you were annoying Ndabuko.”

“I'm sorry I annoyed you. I guess I have missed you way too much.”

Looking at his eyes I know that I've rubbed him the wrong way.

“I missed you too babe but I was gone for us,” I say.

His face melts as I bring it on to mine for a kiss.  
He's my big baby.

I lift up his chin with my finger and stare into his eyes.

“Did you take care of my di€k?” I pose the question he always asks me back to him.

“What?!” His ribs are going to crack. These men don't think we have it in us. They think they're the only ones who can ask us these questions and get us blushing over nonsense.

“I hope you didn't give it to anyone,” I say and sit back on my seat.

“Who polluted your mind? I don't want you to go to the village again. But to answer your question, Mngomezulu was well looked after, even though he's been hungry for days.”

“He shall be fed,” I say.

He narrows his eye. I give him a wink. He cracks into laughter again.

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He has prepared a light dinner and I think right now is the right time to fill him in about everything that happened. It's awkward but at least I'm still a Sibisi. That's one thing I'm grateful for, my life didn't completely change.

“Have you spoken to your father?” He's referring to the one that raised me up.

“Not yet. I need a few days to process everything,” I say.

“Babe please don't cut them off. I understand that you're angry but he still raised you to this intelligent, beautiful woman. His teachings and advices got you to this stage, he may be different in his own way and beliefs, but he still wants what he thinks is best for you. You're lucky to have two fathers that love you.”

“I guess you're right but I still need time,” I say.

He grabs a glass of juice and gulps it down. His hand wraps around it on the table and squeezes it. I hope it doesn't break, his grip is too tight.

“My parents went to the grave, they chose to follow Nhlanzeko without even saying “congratulations” to me on my graduation. I don't remember getting praises for anything from them. I don't remember them saying they love me. I don't remember my father teaching me how to ride a bicycle. I don't

remember my mother combing my hair and helping me with my backpack. I don't remember Nhlanzeko playing with me. He only came to beat the boys that troubled me in school and force the soccer coach to put me in the A-team.”

Okay, he's finally letting me in. The timing is wrong but I'm happy he's confiding in me, at last.

“Do you hate them? Do you hate your family?” I ask.

“I don't know. I'm here, still doing everything to make sure that they're okay in the other world. I still came home, pointed where their graves were to be allocated and slaughtered cows to send them off. I still burn impepho and talk to them. Nhlanzeko has come in my dreams, with his demands as usual, but at least he remembers me. My parents never looked back. They don't check on me, not even in my dreams.”

Why am I crying? He walks around the table and hugs me.

“I'm sorry babe. I shouldn't have made today about myself.” He wipes my tears with his thumbs and

brushes my quivering lips.

“There's something I need to tell you,” I say.

His hands are still around me but he's stopped moving. He wants me to talk.

“Please sit,” I say.

“What is it? You're scaring me.” He rushes to his chair and looks at me with a frown.

“Our first baby, this one, should be given to Nhlanzeko.”

He doesn't react. I take a deep breath.

“If he has someone carrying his name he'll rest in peace. We just have to present him or her to the ancestors as Nhlanzeko's.”

He pushes off his plate and throws the juice down his throat.

He wipes his hands with a serviette and gets off the chair.

“You'll find me in the bedroom,” he says and turns around to leave.



“Ndabuko we are still talking!” I yell.

“I’m not giving my child to Nhlanzeko. That’s the last thing. The last! I didn’t ask him to die.” He disappears.

That went exactly how I expected. He’s angry and offended.

I finish my food and clean his plate then take the dishes back to the kitchen. Yoh! I have to wipe the table and sweep?

He’s on the bed with a laptop on his lap. This is going to be a long night!

I start in the bathroom to brush my teeth and release myself. My baby bump is now visible, I have felt some movements at the sides. It’s really happening, I’m going to be a mom. I’m secretly hoping for a little me. A baby girl.

“Are you going to stay on your laptop the whole night?” I ask.

“I was waiting for you to come.” He switches it off

and puts it away. The way he's staring at me is unsettling.

“I didn't make it up,” I say.

He pulls me to his chest and lifts my leg over his waist.

“I don't want to talk about it. Not now, not ever. You'll never mention it again Ndondo, do you understand me?”

“What about the consequences of...” He shuts me with a sloppy kiss and I instantly lose my senses.

He loses the gentleness along the way. He's taking out all his frustration on me. His fingers are digging into my thighs, the intensity of his strokes has me arching my back and screaming out in pain and pleasure.

My mind shuts down as the third wave builds up, I feel my body violently shaking and minutes later my legs are floating in the air.

He has his dick pressed deeply inside me and his hands holding my bottom. He's not still, he's

moving around.

He throws me back on what feels like a bed and wraps my legs around his neck. I open my eyes and notice that we are in a different room.

“Babeee!” I scream as he slams inside me mercilessly. He should be slowing down by now; we've been at it for a while.

He pulls out and pushes his finger inside my mouth. I feel like a slut as I hungrily suck on it.

“Who is your man?” he asks.

“You,” I scream.

He slams in, deeper and harder. Then he pulls out, leaving my legs shaking.

“What's my name?” he asks.

“Ndabuko,” I scream again.

Two..three..four..I explode again and his name slips out of my lips.

He has his knees on either side of my chest and he's groaning like a bull getting slaughtered. I open

my eyes slowly and look at him. WTF! Since when he spreads his sperms on my breasts?

“What are you doing?” I ask in shock.

Instead of answering me he drops his forehead on mine and his sweat runs down on me.

“You're the mother of MY child. I love you more than anything in this world,” he says.

Something is just different. This room we are in, it feels heavy and dark, as if there's an invisible third company.

“Ndabuko!” I push him off and sit up. My joints are weak, he punished my body accordingly. I scan my eyes around and they land on Nhlanzeko's picture staring at us. I let out a scream in shock.

He scoops me in his arms and walks out with me. He goes back to his bedroom and throws me on the bed.

“Why did you do that?” I ask, swallowing back the lump forming in my throat.

“Did what?” He's lighting his cigarette and puffing it

right here inside the room.

“I'm pregnant, smoke outside the balcony,” I say angrily.

He doesn't argue. He wraps a towel around his waist and walks out to the balcony.

I curse to myself as I drag my body to the bathroom. My whole body smells of his semen.

I open cold water and stand under the shower. I was hoping that taking a cold shower would make me less drowsy but still, all I want is to throw myself on the bed.

I dry myself and walk back to the bedroom naked. He's done smoking and focused on his laptop. I throw myself next to him and shut my eyes.

“Do you want me to lotion you?” he asks.

I don't respond. The mattress bounces as he slides off. A few minutes later his hands are massaging my back with lotion.

“Hlase vuka!” I hear his voice from a distance. It becomes persistent and I'm forced to open my eyes.

“Did I hurt you?” He looks frightened.

“No,” I mumble and attempt to close my eyes again.

“What's going on? Where's this blood coming from?  
Baby vuka!”

Hearing the word “blood” awakens every sense in me. Sweat is running down his forehead.

I roll off the bed and notice the blood trails on bed. I check my bottom; I'm leaking.

He runs to the closet, picks a shirt and puts it on. The contents of my bag scatter on the floor as he searches for a clean underwear.

I only put the underwear and a gown, I can walk by myself but he insists on carrying me all the way to the garage.

I've never seen him so scared. His hands are trembling and now I'm praying that he doesn't lose the grip on the wheel before we reach the hospital.

[03/14, 09:05] : Chapter 22

NDONDO

It's the next morning and I've been cleared of any infections. The doctor defined the bleeding as cervical changes and said it's normal at this stage of the pregnancy, especially after sex. Yeap, he said that in front of everyone. Ndabuko panicked and called every living person he knows. Even my mother and father were here.

Mr Ngidi and his sons are still here, so are the Nsele sisters. Now everyone knows that he fucked me- I bled- we panicked and rushed here. Khosi has been giving me judgmental eyes all morning. I don't know why they are still here.

“Ndondo is fine. Some of you should be at work, don't you think?” That's Mr Ngidi being the CEO he was. The annoying man with a bushy beard and protruding belly- that's how they describe him.

He is looking at Khosi and the twins. Snakho visibly rolls her eyes before picking up her purse. If it wasn't for me Mr Ngidi would've fired this one a long time ago. Maybe two weeks after they started

working at Bantwana Holdings. She's not the type that believes in- you don't bite the hand that feeds you- Snakho bites any hand that annoys her.

“Owkaaay,” – Snalo stands up and snaps her thumb and middle finger while looking around.

“Your phone is in my purse,” Snakho tells her. She knows her sister very well. We all do. The snapping of fingers means she's looking for something.

She claps her hands with relief and leans over me and plants a kiss on my cheek.

“Keep well, boss-lady,” she says and follows after her twin sister. I know that Khosi, just like Ndabuko, she won't leave my side until the doctor discharges me.

“Why did she do that?” Mr Ngidi's question breaks a brief moment of silence.

We all look at him in confusion.

“The one-of-two, who just walked out. Why did she do that with her fingers and clapped hands?” He's trying to put us out of misery, however we are still



just as lost as we were. The fact that he still can't tell them apart is funny, even now he still calls the one that he sees “one-of-two.”

“Collecting her memory. Her brains stay in her fingers,” Khosi says and we both laugh. That's how Snalo is, even if she's not looking for anything, she snaps her fingers to process her thoughts.

“Have they said what they want for their birthday?” I ask Khosi.

“A huge birthday celebration. Not their words but mine. I mean, it's their 27th. We all know how hard it is for the twins to grow up without any difficulties, especially when they have no identity.”

I clear my throat and give her a look. We have unnecessary pairs of ears, there's no need to go into all the details.

“What are you getting for them?” I ask.

“Tickets to Lira's upcoming concert,” she says.

“Khosi! That's what I was getting for them.” My word! Now I have to think of another gift.

“I’ve already bought them. VIP section. I also arranged with the manager that they meet her before she goes on stage for pictures and autographs.”

“Did you steal my mind?” I ask in shock. I had something like this in mind. I should’ve acted on it sooner. I know how much the twins love Lira, this would’ve been my greatest gift of all years.

“Think of something else. I’m also cracking my mind trying to think about Andiswa’s gift,” she says.

“A tall boy that wears bucket hats, that would be her greatest gift ever,” I say and we both break into laughter.

“You should invite him to the party, whether you like it or not, moghel loves her boy.”

“I could give you the same advice.” I lead her to Ndabuko with my eyes and she rolls her eyes.

He’s still tucked in the chair with his head buried in his hands. You’d think we all got relieved to find out that my bleeding was normal, but him and Ndlalifa still look depressed as they were yesterday.

Maqhingwa walks in, sipping from a cup of coffee. He stands next to his father and draws loud sips - hlwi hlwi. Mr Ngidi is getting annoyed but it's his last born, so he doesn't say anything.

“Where is the combo?” he asks, looking around for the twins.

“They left for work,” Khosi says.

“Why didn't you tell me? I could've taken them there.”

He mustn't even think about it. They're off limits!

He smirks and looks at Khosi.

“Or I'll just drive the big sister, untanga yami,” he says.

Khosi is annoyed. Maqhingwa has always wanted to worm his way into her bed - into any woman's bed, except me. Only because he knew my destiny, I guess.

“I have a call to make,” Khosi says as she gets off the chair. She throws a look at Maqhingwa and walks

out with her phone.

He laughs. Idiot!

Ndabuko lifts up his head and looks at me. It breaks my heart to see him this broken. I don't know how the doctor is supposed to convince him that nothing is going to happen to the baby.

“Maqhinga get a sandwich for him,” Mr Ngidi says.

“Me?” Maqhinga.

The sharp stare answers him and he drags himself out of the room.

Now it's me, Ndlalifa and Mr Ngidi. Suddenly the stillness in the room makes me uncomfortable.

“Ndabuko what happened?” I guess they've been waiting for this moment, to have some privacy with us.

“They want to give my baby to Nhlanzeko.”

“They? Who is “they”?” I'm pissed. He's been crying blood because of what Mam'J abu suggested? Now

he's calling us "they" and making it sound as if we made all this up for fun.

"But that is expected. I believe you knew what you were stepping into. It's either that or you give Nhlanzeko his wife and take yours."

No, this old man got to be joking! Give me to Nhlanzeko and take what? He's not taking any wife while I'm still alive.

"Come on, bafo. It's not like he'll take the child away from you, it's just the honour to his name," Ndlalifa chirps in.

"That's the thing, I always have to do things for Nhlanzeko. I always have to give. I know what happened last night wasn't cervical changes or anything of sort. It was Nhlanzeko, he got angry because I..." My eyes are bulging out. We were going to address this in private. He can't tell them!

"What did you do?" Ndlalifa asks.

"I did something in his room. I was angry, okay? I'm tired of his demands. This is my first baby, I'm the one who fu€k..." I cough uncontrollably. What is

wrong with him? Mr Ngidi is almost my father's age, what is going to think of us?

“It's not what I'm thinking Ndabuko! Because you're not that stupid, you can't provoke...” He bites Ndlalifa's head off before he even finishes.

“Exactly! It's always about the Mighty Nhlanzeko-  
“Ndabuko you can't do this to your brother...you can't speak this way to him”- I'm tired of this!” He pushes back the chair and storms out angrily.

Ndlalifa follows after him. I'm left alone with Mr Ngidi.

I stare at him as he takes out his cellphone and types something. Moments later he pushes the phone back inside his pocket and lifts his eyes to me.

“You both need to apologize to Nhlanzeko. Whatever you two did angered him and unfortunately, he communicates differently from the other world. Ndabuko has issues, I don't want him to go through another loss.”

I don't like that he describes him as someone who has issues. He also has issues of his own; Where is the mother of his sons? Why is he not married? Why he never smiles?

“Is he ever going to be free from him?” I ask.

“Not when he's with you, which could be forever. But he can rest, as your village mother said, if someone carries his name he'll back off,” he says.

I let out a sigh. This is going to be a tough journey. I don't want Ndabuko to ever feel like a shadow when he's with me but in this case I have to be Nhlanzeko's babymama before I become his.

“He will go back to Zamafuze.” I rest my head on the pillow and fight back tears threatening to escape my eyes. With Zamafuze he never had to compete with anyone, especially not with Nhlanzeko. But with me, he's always going to fight for his role against his dead brother. Something he's been doing since birth. He wants to break free, to be his own man, but I'm here, holding him back.

“Hlasee?” He's back and removing my hands off my

face. Now it dawns to me just how much Nhlanzeko complicated my life. Why didn't he let me be? Why did he have to send Ndabuko my way? I was going to find someone else to love, so was Ndabuko. He'd be with Zamafuze and living life according to his own rules.

“Sthandwa sami what's wrong?” he asks.

I'm trying to hold back; I wipe off my cheeks, but tears keep flooding out like a rainfall.

“I love you Ndabuko but I don't want you to live like this. I don't want to see you in pain.”

He frowns and shakes his head.

“What are you saying?” He's lost and frightened.

“If you're not with me Nhlanzeko won't dictate your life. Find someone who can cut him off, I know that some traditional doctors do that. Right, Bab' Ngidi? Please help him. I will deal with Nhlanzeko on my own. Just set Ndabuko free from him,” I beg with tears flowing down on my face.

I hold his hand. Why is he frowning at me? I'm



making sense, right?

“Ndabuko we cannot go on like this,” I tell him.

He leaves and comes back with a glass of water. He takes my vitamins and folic acids and hands them to me.

“Here, drink your meds,” he says.

“Are you seriously going to pretend as if you don't see what is happening? You are not happy, your life would've been better with Zamafuze.”

“Ndondo lala mufuna ukulala.” (Sleep if you want to sleep)

I look at Mr Ngidi for support; surely he gets what I'm saying.

“You don't have to rush into making decisions. You and Ndabuko were destined to be together, and you can't raise a Mngomezulu child with another man.”

I should've know that he'd side with him. He hasn't been with a woman in years, surely he doesn't think clearly.

“I can raise the child alone. Of course Ndabuko will

be there whenever we need him. All I'm saying is that..."

"Baba did you manage to contact the minister's office?" He turns the chair around, giving me his back, and gets into the taxi conversation with Mr Ngidi. I guess I'm the crazy one here.

The doctor discharges me at 1pm, he convinces me that nothing is wrong, everything is perfectly fine. Khosi called the cab and left. Mr Ngidi left in his car with Ndlalifa. I don't know where Maqhinga disappeared to. He could be somewhere, banging the hospital's matron.

This one drives me straight to my house. The radio is played loud enough to prevent me from striking any kind of conversation. Who ignores the person that's trying to call off a relationship? Now I don't know who is more unstable between him and Nhlanzeko.

He drops me off and leaves. He doesn't even walk

me to the door or walk in to greet Bab'Maqhawe and Mam'J abu.

As expected of her, Mam'J abu has a blanket waiting for me, she gets me from the door and pulls me to the lounge. I'm put on the couch and covered with a blanket.

“But Ma, I'm not sick.”

Who am I talking to? She's gone and dishes are colliding in the kitchen.

“See why I can't stand her? She blows everything out of proportion.” I don't know where this one came from. He's throwing a shade at his wife as usual.

“You should tell her that I'm not sick. The doctor said it was nothing to worry about, the baby is fine,” I tell him.

“Don't they know everything?” He shakes his head and sits opposite me.

“Well, it was the medical advice and in his world, he's correct.”

He waves me off with his hand; whatever the doctor said was useless.

“You need to talk to that boy of yours and do what you're supposed to do,” he says.

“He refused to give the baby to his brother and told me to sleep when I suggested that we break things off.”

He's laughing? This is not funny.

“It's Nhlanzeko's way or no way. And that stands as long as we are together,” I say in frustration.

“Letting go of someone who is carrying your seed is the biggest mistake ever. I'm proud of him, you should sleep if you're tired.”

“Was letting go of my mother hard?” I don't know why I'm asking this but he doesn't seem to mind talking about that part of his past.

“I was the best man at their wedding, it was compulsory because I was his brother. She was carrying my princess and I stood there and listened as they exchanged vows. That year is when I

realized that men are not big beasts with stone hearts.”

“You cried?” I ask.

“Oh, yes I did. But not in front of people. I wasn't crying for your mother because there was no way I was ever going to touch her or look at her the same way. I was crying for my child that I was forced to give up before birth.”

My heart melts. I don't want him to ever leave, but his life is not here and he's leaving tomorrow afternoon.

“How was your relationship with my father before his marriage?” I see his jaw twitching as I refer to Dumisani as “my father” but he quickly pulls his face into place. Well, I've known him as “my father” ever since I was born, I can't just switch and call him differently.

“Perfect and imperfect brothers. It wasn't great but we didn't mess each other's lives.”

“My mother messed your lives?” I ask.

He keeps quiet. Mam'J abu interrupts with a tray of food. Since when she's the cook here? Someone must leave before she gets into trouble.

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Ndabuko refused to break up with me. We went back to his home to perform the ritual two days after I got discharged. He actually didn't even refuse, he shut down the topic and acted as if it was never raised. Nhlanzeko seems to be hard-headed than I had imagined. We had to slaughter a chicken to apologize for disrespecting him. Imagine! Sadly, I can't ask more details about him because it will unsettle my beloved boyfriend. I do have wonders of what kind of a person he was, what else did he love beside boiled eggs and fighting. Oh well, and me.

Bab'Maqhawe left. Him and Aunt Vumile had a private conversation before leaving, and seemingly the hatred between siblings is worse than before.

The most difficult part is that I still need my mother's blessing, her husband's as well, before Bab'Maqhawe can take the ropes. So, I'll beg and beg and beg. But for now we have to play the perfect family as we've always done; it's Andiswa's 21st birthday.

I'm in my bedroom, locked in there because I don't want to answer church members' questions about my visible baby bump. The parents are already ashamed of me, I choose not to create any drama on Andiswa's big day. I'll celebrate with her at the real party, later in my house. Right now it's all about prayers and gifts.

Who's at my door now? I thought everyone was busy. I close the bag of chips I've been stuffing myself with and drag myself to the door.

My mom. Sigh!

What does she want now?

I leave the door open for her and get back on bed.

“I brought you a slice of cake.”

I lie still. Why is she being nice? A slice of cake won't change that she lied to me and hurt Bab'Maqhawe.

“I know that you don't like me at the moment, but I did what was best for me at that time. Maqhawe wasn't what you see now.”

“But you dated him, mom! You loved him, right?”

She glances behind her shoulder, clicks her tongue and pushes the door close.

“Who are you yelling at?” She has the nerve to dictate how loud I speak while addressing this!

“Why did you hurt him? Couldn't you marry another man at least? Someone from a different family,” I ask.

“You're too young to understand. I did what I did and God knows that my intentions were pure.”

“Would you please stop using God? You're honestly disrespecting what Christianity stands for.”



“Who are you to judge me?”

Oh, that's so rich coming from Judge Judy herself.

“You declared Ndabuko as a sinner, yet you don't know him. But now I don't need your approval; you don't have to like him. All I need from you is for you to talk to your husband and make him agree to let Bab'Maqhawe take the ropes. He is my father and I want him to perform the ceremonies that are necessary for me.”

She lifts her hand up dismissively.

“That's not happening. That's not how we do things Ndondo.”

“You and your husband. I'm not you!”

“Princess...”

“No, mom!”

She clicks her tongue and takes the slice of cake she came with. I was going to eat it but it's what it is.

“I never thought that one day my children would turn their backs on me. A few days with Maqhawe and he has turned you against us.” She talks all the

way to the door and leaves with her piece of cake.

I thought she'd be sorry but no, Maqhawe is still to blame in all this.

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It's the official 21st birthday party; there are no parents and pastors. Only Khosi's mother will be in the house, we have prepared a room for her upstairs where she won't be disturbed by any noise. The twins' birthday is in two days and she's here as the only mother figure that they have.

As we park in front of the house I realize that we have more guests than Andiswa told us. The backyard is buzzing with music and girls are screaming above it.

“Is this a tavern now?” The village mother in her asks.

We didn't think it was going to be this too much, otherwise we would've booked her into the hotel.

“They'll leave before 19h00. Andiswa's boyfriend

has something set up for her in Zeros. They'll be at it the whole night, it's her 21st," Khosi says.

I snap my brows and look at her. Why wasn't I told about this?

"21st, meaning she's now an adult," she says with her eye narrowed at me.

I swallow back my thoughts and help her mother with the bags.

The elder girls are in the kitchen, engaging in gossips with a bottle of wine on the table.

"Ma!" Snakho screams as she jumps off the chair and rushes into her aunt's arms.

"Babies, I missed you." She hugs both of them and judgmentally scans their bodies.

"Did you pierce your nose Snakhokonke?" Oh Lord, if she finds out where Snalolonke pierced herself she'll go crazy.

"You know what, I'll fix you a cup of tea." That's Snakho trying to neutralize the moment. She

dash es to the kettle before more questions are asked.

Ndabuko is here, Andiswa insisted on having him in her party. He brought his partners in crime.

I didn't tell them there is an elder coming, when we walk in with Khosi's mother they nearly drop dead on the floor.

I don't understand why they're smoking inside the house. I've addressed this with Ndabuko before.

I allocate Khosi's mother on the couch opposite them purposely. Ndabuko instantly clears the beer bottles on the table and asks Ndlalifa to step outside with his cigarette.

“Your house is now a hostel?” she asks as soon as they leave the room.

Khosi is laughing, at Ndabuko obviously.

“It's a party Ma. I'm sorry, I didn't know it was going to be this chaotic,” I say.

“Maybe you should take me to the bedroom so that

I can rest.”

Snakho walks in with a cup of tea before we can leave the lounge. She has to sit and drink her tea first.

“Thank you baby. Your lipstick is too red, don't you think? But what am I saying, you have a role model who dresses up like a hooker.” She's staring at Khosi's tight legging as she sips her tea. We are all used to her, she complains about everything. The sun, the air, the rain and all.

I guess Maqhinga wasn't alerted of the new guest. He walks in with a cider in his hand.

“Khosi baby...” He stops.

His eyes pop out as they land on the unfamiliar face.

He clears his throat and stands by the door, scratching his head.

“Oh, sanibonani,” he says.

I'm ready to mock him, just waiting for Khosi's mother to snap at him and put him in his place. Khosi baby- to whose daughter?

The cup leaves her hand, spills the tea on her thighs and cracks on the floor.

Khosi screams as I scream; “Mah!”

Maqhinga is still standing by the door, confused AF. Who wouldn't be? A woman he doesn't know just fainted at the sight of him.

“Maqhinga help!” Khosi calls and only then, it registers to him, he rushes towards us.

“Get a jug of water, now!”

Snakho dashes out of the room and comes back with a bottle of icy water. All of it goes onto Khosi's mother's face and causes her to move her head and cough.

“I will leave, I don't want to scare her again,” Maqhinga says, slowly steps backwards and leaves the room.

She finally opens her eyes and slowly scans around the room. The frightened look is still plastered on her face.

“What's wrong, Ma?” Khosi asks.

We are all kneeling around her, shaking in our boots.

“Who is that boy?” she asks after a moment.

“Maqhingana?” I ask.

“The one who was standing by the door,” she says.

We all look at each other. What did Maqhingana do to her?

“Did he scare you?” Khosi asks.

“He looks like Msawenkosi, my late brother. So much like him, even the height and lean body. I thought my brother has come back. I thought..I thought..my brother!” She wails out.

None of us know what to do at this moment. Khosi holds her in her arms and we watch as she cries her eyeballs out.

Maybe Maqhingana should leave. This isn't good.

[03/14, 09:05] : Chapter 23

Bhekizitha “Ngonyama” Ngidi

Orphaned at 17. What do you do? First thing would be to hold your aunts and uncles up to the promises they made while the coffins were still lying next to the empty mattress, in front of the community. But it never takes much to feel parent-less, it crawls in when you're curled up on a thin sponge with a thin rug, as your empty stomach keeps rumbling and reminding you of its hunger.

Bheki as known prior his taxi rank status that gave him the "Ngonyama" name, was once there; left in three rondavels with nothing but a half kilogram of maize meal. His father wasn't a people's man, politics bore him enemies, some were at the front and some were behind the shadows, on his back. Back then, in the villages, supporting a certain political party that wasn't what the majority believed in deemed you as an enemy of progress. Ngidi Senior was there, as one in a crowd, dressing up in T-shirts of the opposing party and attending rallies with enemies. Even though the goal was one; fighting for justice and equality, political parties still



saw each other as “opposing” and “enemies.”

The political wars were rife, mostly when ward elections were to take place. It was just two weeks before the elections, Ngidi Senior was among those who were campaigning for the ward councilor. All Bheki heard was three gunshots and a woman’s short-lived painful scream. After that, long hours of palpable silence followed. He stayed awake, imagining the worst scenarios in his head and controlling his thudding heartbeat.

He wasn't too young, he was 17, he could've gotten out of his rondavel and went to check on his parents and his little sister. But he had no weapon, no back up. He knew how cruel people like his father were often killed in the political world. So he waited for the first ray of sunshine and crept out of his rondavel and went to see if, just in case, his mother and sister had survived. But it was one bullet for each. The three gunshots he heard took each soul of his family. He was left all alone, with nothing to hold on to.

He had an aunt, his mother's sister who had promised him a home and a warm meal during the big funeral that gathered politic big-shots, useless friends, distant family members and the community at large. His aunt- that's where all his hopes lied. But a few months at his aunt's place brought back that feeling he had initially felt while mopping the blood of his parents and 3year old sister; he was all alone, with nobody and nothing to hold on to.

His final decision was to leave Emanzimeleni village, there was nothing left for him there. If anything, he was a boy whose parents got shot that everyone wanted to see and give a pity face instead of food. His father did a lot of people favours, he left his mark in many lives, but nobody remembered that when he died. Nobody cared about the young boy he left behind.

Each for his own rise. He had to make something out of nothing. It wasn't easy. No, he had to start as

nobody, from nothing. Not even from scratch.

One would think getting a job in the taxi industry is easy, but it's not. You don't walk into the taxi rank and wave your licence in the air, "Is there any taxi that needs a driver?"

Yes, you don't type a CV and attach affidavit and certified copies of your documents. But you hunt down the job, just like you do in any industry.

Unfortunately, Bheki didn't have anything that could pique the interest of the taxi owners or drivers. He had to squeeze himself in and force it. He woke up every morning behind the empty MTN container that was orphaned at the mouth of Tongaat Plaza, and he would stand next to the taxis, much to the irritation of some. He'd start shouting taxis' destinations, without being asked, and help passengers with their luggage as they climbed in.

Sometimes he'd get leftovers from taxi drivers and sometimes fruits from generous passengers. When

you don't have anything a crump of bread can be enough. He grew fond of his job. Yes, he took it as his job even though he wasn't getting paid for it. Within a few months everyone knew him- umfana wamatekisi. He knew every taxi driver, their registration numbers and how they were scheduled to take stands in the rank.

One day Mthethwa, a man who owned several taxis that operated between Stanger and Tongaat, bought him a notebook and a pen. That day he started earning money for his job, each taxi that left the rank with a full load had to leave R5.00 for him. Twenty full-loaded taxis per day gave him R100. Towards month-ends when people travelled home, others to their friends and partners, he was able to make R150 or more per day.

He found a shack, he rented and bought himself a single bed. He was able to open a bank account and save every cent that he could sleep on.

As time went by, his position at the rank dignified. He was able to tell taxi drivers that- “ungangits heli ums unu, uzovala istende wena.” He needed to be harsh to keep them in order and Mthethwa was growing very fond of his abilities. Then came the name Ngonyama, the king of the beasts. His courage and strength constantly revealed itself to those who worked under him. Yes, the taxi drivers were now working under him even though he didn't own any taxi.

One day Mthethwa asked if he had any money saved. Any amount of it.

“I have R8 460,” he said hesitantly. He didn't keep track of his savings. He didn't have any amount goal, all he knew was that he wanted to be financial comfortable in the next five years of his life.

“I have a taxi and you have the money. 6pm sharp. You know where I live.” He tapped his shoulder, got inside his Cressida and drove off.

That was his first taxi. His first foot inside the taxi

industry. A few months after getting his taxi on the road he moved out of the shack and rented a two-room brick house.

One random morning he bumped into a girl curled up in the street corner. He just had his driver's licence but he still walked to work because driving a taxi wasn't a part of his plans. His taxi was okay with its driver and he was still comfortable in his rank-managing job.

Because he had been there before, he easily distinguished her from other random street people. He took steps back and called her out; "Yeyi wena, woza lana." That's how he talked to people, with little or no respect at all. It's a habit he needed to develop to earn respect in the rank. You give no respect to get respect.

That was the biggest mistake of his life. As wounded as she was, as helpless and broken as she was, she was still not "yeyi wena." She wasn't going to be addressed like that by a man who just

happened to have nicer clothes on and a can of Coke in his hand.

“Why don't you jog along and go bark far away from me?” You don't start a fight with a hungry woman who is on her periods!

“Why are you here?” he asked, unbothered by her fire-blazing eyes.

She chewed on her lower lip. She was pissed. Then she snapped her fingers, trying to gather words that could get the annoying man out of her sight.

“If you are still here by the end of today please stand by the STOP sign and I'll take you somewhere safe.”

She frowned. That was not going to happen. She was not going to allow another man to have his way with her. No! That's what she was running away from. She had left home by the crack of dawn, packed a few clothes and ran off. All she wanted was to be far away. Far away from Msawenkosi. She couldn't take it anymore. He was their brother, he was supposed to take care of them and protect

them. It never occurred to her that their mother's death would turn her into her own brother's sex slave. She didn't understand why he chose her. Phumzile was there too and she was older than her. Maybe she had a better understanding of what sex was. Was she even going to believe her if she told her what was going on behind closed doors? He was the breadwinner and the male figure they consulted for everything in the family.

“I'm Bheki Ngidi, some call me Ngonyama. I don't want you to get hurt.” His last words paved and got a place in her heart. But she wasn't going to put her life in the hands of a stranger. Her own brother abused her on daily basis, who was she to the strange man?

“Magcina Ngomane,” she said.

His face melted into a smile.

“I thought you said Ngonyama, I was going to ask you to say Magcina Ngidi. It sounds a bit perfect.”

She missed the joke and just stared at him. He knew that he wasn't dealing with just any girl, he



didn't even know why he was so worried about her that he stood more than a minute talking to her whereas she showed no interest in his help.

“You are the last born?” he asked.

A sigh! She was annoyed. Obviously she was the last born and her parents didn't even bother with creative names. Magcina was her birth name as she was born lastly. Nothing was interesting about her life, really. Not even her name.

He spent the whole day thinking about her. His biggest fear was losing her- not finding her where she was. And it came into reality as he found the street corner empty after work, without a single trace of her. He searched everywhere for her but she was no where to be found.

Months passed by and he forgot about her. Or rather pushed her at the back of his head and focused on work.

But you can't fight destiny, can you? Guess who came to the taxi rank on December 12? The one and

only Magcina Ngomane. She was working for an Indian grandmother, slaving in a titleless job. Sometimes she was the maid, sometimes a babysitter and some days a cook. Her wage remained the same regardless of how many hours and what job she did in that particular week.

She looked better than she was when he first saw her. But her attitude remained the same. She wanted nothing to do with anyone.

It was close to Christmas, people were returning to their homes to share their annual earnings with their families. One thing they had in common was that they both had no home to return to.

Maybe that's why she finally agreed to meet up with him and talk. She also longed for company on Christmas day.

They didn't click right away. She had a past and she wasn't letting him in. He didn't talk about his past either but it never stood in his way of communicating with other people. He buried it at

the back of his head.

But one day he laid his head on her lap, stared up at the roof and asked if she was ever going to share her past with her. He was hurting. They were staying together, she moved in with him. But they weren't emotionally together. She wasn't there and he wasn't sure how long it was going to take for her to let him in.

“I'd rather share my future with you than to share my past,” she said.

He turned his eyes to her face.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean that I love you Bheki. I don't want to go back, I want to leave the past where it is. I want a future with you.”

“Magcina...” He got up from her lap and pulled her for a steamy kiss. It wasn't their first kiss, they had kissed a few times before but it wasn't anything meaningful. When he attempted to lift up her skirt she screamed. He moved too fast, didn't he? He apologized and promised to respect her.

They still slept separately even after confessing their feelings to each other. Until one day when they both chose to get intoxicated. Really, life had dealt with them badly and they were both way over 21. They needed a break. That night Magcina came to his bed butt-naked and they made love for the first time. Ndlalifa was conceived on that day.

He wasn't ready to be a father, neither was she ready to be a mother. But Mthethwa was watching them like a hawk. In his mind Bheki was his son and he wasn't going to allow him to kill his own child. He was financial stable, even if he ran short of something Mthethwa was there, there was no excuse for him not to want a baby.

Unfortunately he passed on before Ndlalifa was born but he had ensured that nothing was done to terminate the pregnancy. And indeed, Ndlalifa was what Magcina and Bheki needed to bond. Their love sprung out. Bheki bought a bigger house and two more taxis. Magcina's days of worrying about money were over. She never made any friends and

that was okay with Bheki. It meant that she was always home and looking after their son. He had a family to go to everyday.

His son grew and started pre-school. He was a happy child and healthy. What more could a parent want?

“He needs a sibling to play with,” everyone said and eventually the idea planted in Bheki’s head. He wanted a second baby but as a black man, he had to pay for the damages first and meet Magcina’s family. However, that's not what she wanted. She wasn't going back home. Not then, not ever.

She presented the news of her second pregnancy just a day after Bheki turned 30. Him and her kids were all that mattered to her. He also wanted her to be happy, that was his goal everyday, but he still felt like he was committing a sin for keeping her in his house without her family consent. But once Magcina said she wasn't doing something, she was

really not going to do it. She wasn't going back home.

Bheki tried to dig into her past but nothing tangible came up.

Nine months flew very fast. They were preparing to welcome their second son home. The whole taxi rank was waiting for its second son. Ndlalifa was already everyone's son. Ngonyama had turned into everyone's big brother and his house accommodated taxi men every weekend.

Maqhingana came, he looked nothing like Ndlalifa and his father. But Bheki had no doubt that he was his son, he escaped everything but he couldn't escape Ngidi Senior's mole behind the ear. It was there; identifying him as a Ngidi.

They were supposed to be happy. It was their second child and they were financially stable. But Magcina couldn't even bear to look at Maqhingana. She took him off breast milk within two days and demanded that Bheki hires a nanny to look after

“this child.”

He ignored the signs. He thought it was the pressure that came with having two children. But as Maqhingwa grew he noticed that there was no connection at all. He chose to address the issue.

“How is Maqhingwa treating you?” That was his opening line. The bright smile that used to be there whenever Ndalifa was mentioned wasn't there.

“Why don't we give him up for adoption?” That's how she responded. It took everything in him not to pull her by hair and drag her out of the house.

“Why?” he asked, suppressing his anger.

“He looks like my brother, Msawenkosi. I don't know what kind of a curse he is. He's exactly what I was running away from. I hate this baby Bheki, let's give him up for adoption or just kill him. You kill people with those guns in the safe, right?”

He lost it. He loved her, all of her, everyday and over every woman under the sun. But not his CHILDREN.

Not his little son. A slap landed across her cheek and because she was Magcina and she had nothing to lose in life, she slapped him back. His mind didn't register what he did next, it was her against the wall and his foot.

Then...

“Baba! Mama!” That was Ndlalifa crying at the door. It was too late, he had seen them fight. He had seen his father kick his mother and throw her against the wall. He heard his mother asking for forgiveness and his father not stopping.

Everything changed from that day. They both loved each other, they really did. But Magcina wasn't going to bond with a child that chose to look exactly like her brother- the rapist. And Bheki wasn't going to let his son be punished for the sins he didn't commit. He wasn't giving a young Hlomuka up for adoption. Just thinking about what she said made his blood boil up.

Ndlalifa turned eight as Maqhinga turned two. He



was too young to notice the hatred from his mother. Ndlalifa must've been too young to notice either, he was the one being cuddled to sleep and given random cheek kisses. It became hard for Ngidi to play two roles to Maqhinga. He loved his sons more than anything. He wasn't going to fail them as his own father failed his little sister.

There was another baby on the way. He regretted that one more than anything, because they were not in a good space. But he was going to try with everything he had. Therapy or whatever monied people did when they had problems, he was going to pay for it.

He came back from work early and asked Maqhinga's nanny to take him out for a walk. Ndlalifa was doing grade 2 and rebellious more than ever.

“Magcina, what did my son do to you?” he asked over a romantic lunch for two table. He still loved her. He wasn't going to let another woman raise his children. He wanted a family with her. He wanted to marry her.

“He looks like Msawenkosi. I ran away from home because of him. He turned me into his sex slave and I got to the point where I couldn't handle it. We shared a mother and a father, my biggest fear was falling pregnant with my own brother's child. He'd threaten to stop supporting me and say he'll expose me to the family.”

There it was. She was finally letting him in and he just sat there, frozen on his chair with his heart pounding out of his heart.

“Why couldn't you give me a son that looked like you and Ndlalifa? I don't understand why he had to look like that monster. I'm sorry but I don't see my son in Maqhinga, I just see a rapist.”

“He is just a child.” His words died in his throat and gagged him. He was trying to put on a brave face. He was a man; he didn't cry over things. But seeing the cold face on the mother of his children killed him. There was no love. No glimpse of hope.

He grabbed his car keys and walked out.

He needed a moment..to process everything and

just..he parked at the side of the road in the middle of no where. He buried his head on the wheel and let all the pain flow out with his tears.

When he returned back home she wasn't there. All her clothes were in the wardrobe. Nothing was missing, except her black purse. She could've been in the shops but somehow he knew that she had left. She was running away again.

To this day, Ndlalifa is still asking for his mother. He wants to know what he did to her. He has tried to look for this Msawenkosi Ngomane with no success. Magcina never came back. He never got to meet his child that she was carrying and every year his first son puts him on the stand and asks him questions he can't answer.

How do you look at your son in the eyes and tell him that his mother was raped by her own brother and the reason she left is because she hated his little brother? He can't let them find out, especially Maqhingana. It will kill him.

[03/14, 09:06] : Chapter 24

## THALENTE

The only difference between working in the AfriTrans canteen and Sis Thandi's shelter is that here I slave under air-conditioners and speak English half of the day. Oh, and the working hours, here I work from 7am to 4pm. It's better than the taxi rank shelter where I had to wake up by the crack of dawn and return home after the sun has set down. My colleague here is an Indian middle-aged woman, Aarti. In her mind she thinks that I see her as a white boss- my superior. The woman tries so hard to accommodate my broken English and make me look stupid to the customers by translating everything they say to me. Can't she overdose biryani and die? Being here has made me realize just how much fun it was being at the taxi rank. I even miss the taxi horns and loud taxi drivers.

It's lunch time and the food is on the house. That's

another privilege of working here, you don't have to worry about cooking. Breakfast and lunch are provided. At the end of the day we collect leftovers and go home with them. So there's no need for me to cook when I get to my shack.

I squeeze myself in the backroom on a plastic chair and help myself with roasted chicken stripes and rolls. I'm going straight to size 40. I binge everyday; milkshakes, fries and cakes. Maybe they have to give me everything on credit, because I really can't limit myself when it comes to free food.

“Talent!” That's Aarti, she pronounces my name with her fake British accent.

I check the time on my phone; I still have ten minutes. Why is she calling me now? I should start having my lunch break outside the canteen because when I'm eating inside here it never genuinely a break.

“Someone is here to see you,” she yells.

Hopefully it's not another unsatisfied customer. I've been messing things up ever since I got here.

Serving taxi drivers and rich white oldies is not the same. Here orders come with lame instructions and demands. I chew the last piece and down it with a cold glass of Sprite.

I'm ready to defend myself with my Level 5 English, whoever I did their order wrong will suffer my misused pronouns and adjectives, I'll clap back and stand my grounds.

I adjust my cap and lift my head up, only to be welcomed by Ndlalifa in his grey pant and hoodie jacket. What is he doing here? I know that he has connections in this place but I didn't expect him to just show up during my lunch break and demand to see me. He's not even standing outside the window like everybody else. Aarti opened the burglar gate for him and located him on the leather chair. There's a glass of cold drink in front of him.

"I texted you earlier," he greets. How humble!

"I'm well too, how are you Hlomuka?" I say.

He smiles and scratches the back of his head. Unlike Hlelo, Aarti is minding her own business by

the ovens, probably checking on her banana cake.

“You know how I'm doing Thalente,” he says.

I've been using the famous line for over a week now; “I need time to think.” There's nothing to think about, really. I think about this man. I see him in my dreams and worry if he doesn't reach out. I don't know when these feelings sprung out into something so irresistible and strong.

“Why are you here? I'm at work, or is it because you got me this job?” I rent out as usual. It annoys him when I do this; turning his status against him. Unfortunately in my head I make sense everytime I speak.

“I came to ask you to come to the party with me later,” he says, calmly but sternly. He's pissed already, how much more when I open my mouth in that party?

“I don't drink,” I say.

“Nobody asked if you drink or not. I asked you to come with me to the party, you can easily say yes or no.”

“Whose party is it?” I ask.

“Some twins from Bantwana Holdings. They're Ndondo's friends.”

Am I supposed to guess who this Ndondo is and what is Bantwana Holdings?

“Are you even invited?” I ask. He doesn't even know these twins names, just that they're Ndondo's friends.

He's smiling again.

“I don't need an invite. 6pm, okay?” He drinks the remains in his glass and stands up to go. He came all the way to invite me to the party he isn't invited in?

He scans his eyes around. I don't know where Aarti has disappeared to. He stands next to me and stares into my eyes. I don't know if I'm still breathing or not. I'm silently praying for a customer to appear and save me.

“I have to pack the fridge.” Fuck, why am I whispering? The fridge is packed, what am I even saying?



His chest bumps on mine. I take steps back until I'm pressed against the counter. His hand goes around my neck, our forehead link and his eyes dig through my soul.

“I miss you Thalente.” In the blink of an eye my lips are captured by his. He's sucking my lower lip and sweeping his tongue inside me. His kiss is too good not to respond to.

He breaks the kiss and leaves me panting. Aarti is by the ovens and doing her thing. I've never met anyone who minds her own business like her. But I'm scared because I'm in the workplace and being kissed against the counter isn't exactly respecting your job. I also didn't expect our first kiss to happen like this.

“Tonight I want my answer Thalente Mbatha,” he says and walks away. He has a brief chat with Aarti before he walks out.

I'm quaking in my boots. Tonight? That means I have to be his girlfriend after the party, because obviously my answer is “yes.” I have been

rehearsing it for a week.

“If you break my heart I'll leave you. I won't tolerate lies, rather hurt me with the truth than to comfort me with lies. Ndlalifa I swear if you ever cheat on me bla bla bla.” I'll probably sound stupid. Tonight is too soon. How am I going to say it?

“How long have you been dating?” The voice snaps me out of my thoughts and I look up to find Aarti staring at me with a weak smile on her face. Did I say she minds her own business? Don't ever pay attention to the rubbish I spit, sometimes I rush into conclusions.

“Dating?” I frown.

“You and Ndhlalifa. How long you and him jolile?” In her head she's lowering down to my level whereas she's pressing the last buttons. If she keeps doing this I'm going to flip. Yes I cannot argue with Mbuyiseni Ndlozi in English but I know the basics. I know how to structure a sentence and I can hear English damn too well.

“Is that going to help us get more customers?” I ask.

“Huh? No, I'm just asking.” She chuckles and stirs the pot boiling on the stove.

“Mind your stew,” I don't say that loud, I murmur under my breath and return to the icing I was mixing before my lunch break.

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I don't have those long mirrors that give your full body reflection. But I don't need anyone to tell me that I look stunning. This was the last skater dress in stock at Mr Price. It's an off-shoulder, to complete the perfect look I put on my fake silver necklace. My coarse afro was combed and tied up. I have one of those big artificial afro-buns, I pinned it on and put on hoop earrings.

I'm still deciding between my All-Star takkies and Mary Jane shoes when the door shifts open. He's early, we agreed on 6pm and it's only 6:15pm. He should educate himself about women's time.

He didn't even knock. Where are his manners? This is my shack- my house.

“What if I was naked?” I ask.

“I would've thanked my ancestors.” He scans me from head to toe and smiles. I mentally give myself a high five; I'm beautiful.

“You look amazing. I'm not going to let you leave my side, I want no sleazeball touching you.”

Okay, chill Thacente. There's no need to blush like a high school teenager.

I pick my purse and house keys from the bed. When I turn around he's standing just one inch away from my face. My shack is too small, maybe he'd take five strides to reach to the end-side.

His right hand goes around my neck while his left arm wraps around my waist.

“Ndlalifa you cannot keep doing this. I haven't agreed to be your girlfriend.” Somehow my voice disappoints me and refuses to come out wholly and firm.

“I know that you'll agree.”

Whooah! Fishi, uphume nini ethinini?!

“I can say no,” I equip my voice with every substance that can make it believable. But he's smiling and staring down at my lips.

“We'll date even if you say no,” he says.

Is he mentally okay? Where has that ever happened? We can't date if I say..gosh, his lips taste so good. Mint waffled in nicotine. I have my hands over his cheeks and I'm taking in every bit of his taste.

“Let's go before Hlomuka gets over excited,” he says after breaking the kiss. My heart is racing at the realization of his words. My eyes sweep over his front and I get a glimpse of a baby arm poking out. We need to leave immediately.

“Let's go,” I say breathily and march towards the door.

He lets out a chuckle and follows me out.

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I really thought I nailed the looks. I thought I'd be outstanding and everyone would rush to me and

ask where I bought my dress. I mean, it was the last one in stock and its style is different. But what I walk into is not what I had in mind. I thought of a birthday party, in an open room or backyard, with balloons all over and a Shoprite chocolate cake surrounded by cold drinks, fruits and sweets. That's how they do birthday parties where I come from, and we always gush over how beautiful the set-up is. But this is a party of Tyra Banks. They look similar in bodycon dresses that look like they cost my annual earnings combined with my mother's pension money.

We are in a shaded patio area with seating. I saw Moses Mabhida opposite us and I'm silently wondering if there's any soccer match happening inside.

Compared to all the girls here, I look nothing more than an ordinary woman going out for ice-cream. They have glasses in their hands, those ones with umbrellas and slices of vegetables dipped inside them.

Ndabuko is here, next to him is a gorgeous woman in high heels. Everything about her screams M-O-N-E-Y. She has one of those bags that look like they were made of crocodile skin. You can't find this type at Mr Price and you certainly can't order it from Dolly Wezikhwama.

She doesn't have too much make-up on but she still looks like those perfect actresses on TV.

I swear her weave is straighter than my future.

“Bafo,” Ndabuko says and steps out of her arm that was coiled around his.

He walks to us and bumps shoulders with Ndlalifa. I get a warm smile and I can't help but smile back. The disrespectful one is no where in sight, I pray that he didn't come. However, I didn't imagine him as someone who'd miss a party.

The lady turns her head to us and I notice that she's actually pregnant.

“Ndlalifa,” she says in acknowledgment. There's isn't even a glimpse of a smile on her face.

“Ndondo, how are you?”

Oh, it's the one whose twin friends are having a party.

“Good. Who is that?” She's staring at me. I don't know if she's tired or bored.

“Thalente Mbatha. She's my woman,” Ndlalifa says.

I clear my throat and give him a look. We haven't concluded on that yet, why is he rushing into titles.

“Come, let's go and sit over there,” she tells me and strides to the end of the row before I can even say my first word to her.

“I'll grab a drink with Ndabuko,” Ndlalifa says and lets go of my hand.

I guess I have no choice but to follow Miss Hoity-Toity.

There's an empty seat next to her, I make myself comfortable on it. We are a bit far from the crowd and its noise. I guess that's what made tense; the crowd and noise. She lifts her right leg over her left knee and relaxes.



People in green uniforms are up and down with trays of drinks and snacks. She snaps her fingers once and the guy walks to us.

She grabs a glass of a weird-looking juice with a slice of lemon inside it. The guy looks at me in waiting. I also grab a glass with a normal-looking juice. It looks like an orange juice, hopefully it tastes as one too.

“You look good,” she says randomly and sips on her juice.

I don't know how genuine she is, I just flash a smile and take a sip from my glass. It's a juice with unnecessary ingredients, but it still tastes good.

“We should set a day and go burn their taxis. That's the only way to stop this taxi war.”

Okay, that's a very weird thing to say to a stranger.

“Your father-in-law needs to retire. This thing is affecting the whole community. Can you believe that half of my staff don't have transport? It needs to end,” she continues.

“Yeah,” that's all I manage to say. I have a car fetching me to work and bringing me back after. I don't know who is paying for it, I guess all AfriTrans employees have ones.

“Where do you live? You're never around, I didn't even think Ndlalifa had someone in his life.”

“I stay in Cannelands. I have a busy job, so I hardly get time to go out and see people.” I also don't have money to spend in order to meet people like her.

“You must tell him to buy a house near Ndabuko and Maqhingana so that we can see each other more often. They're like brothers, sometimes they join forces against you. We also need to equip ourselves for such moments,” she says.

I can't help but laugh at her rolled fist. It's not like we can join forces and physically handle them.

“They're about to cut the cake.” It's a tall woman with a round face and big beautiful eyes. I don't know if I've ever heard anyone speaks fast as her. She said all seven words in two seconds and then

folded her arms and stared at us.

“Is your mom not complaining?” Ndondo asks her.

“She wants to pray, bless them and leave,” she says with an eye roll. Ndondo bursts into laughter and gathers herself up.

I guess we all have to be around the twins on their royal chairs when they cut the cake.

A hand grabs me and pulls me behind the crowd. I have forgotten about my date for the night. He wraps his arm around my waist. I let him be, it's a party and I don't want to be dramatic.

A woman goes to the front, singing; UJ esu Lo Unobubele Nami.

This is a party for crying out loud! Guests have glasses of alcohol in their hands, there's a drunk DJ who keeps playing Nicki Minaj- Stupid Hoe. I understand that's she is happy for her daughters' birthday, or whoever they're to her, but singing about J esus in this place is out of order.

But they sing along. I heard people love God when they're drunk. They're singing on top of their voices.

This one next to me is not singing.

“Sing,” I push his arm.

“I don't know the song.”

Who doesn't know such a famous song? I'm not a churchgoer but I know this one word to word, lyric to lyric. I just happen to sing under my breath because I don't want to mess the song up for others. I can sing one verse in three different voices.

Finally, she cuts the song and stands with her hands balanced on the table in front of the party girls. Her head drops to her chest and one of them rushes to her and envelopes her in a hug.

She's crying. It starts softly and escalates into loud wails. Both of the twins are now standing with her and comforting her.

“These are tears of joy,” she says as she picks the microphone. She's smiling through glitters of tears.

“I can't believe my babies are so grown...” This is going to be one of those long speeches black relatives give on your big day.

“Thalente,” Ndlalifa says, bringing my attention to him. I shift my eyes from the woman at the front to him.

“Please free me. I want to be happy like everyone else and enjoy the party. But I can't, because I'm incomplete. Please give me the answer MaMbatha.”

Nobody is paying any attention to us. We are behind everyone. His arm is still wrapped around my waist, there's no running away from him.

“I have waited long enough. Please look at me, I love you Thalente.”

I lift my eyes up and meet his stare softly penetrating through me. Love is not in the air, it's there in his eyes and inviting me in. I don't know what lies behind them but I'm ready to give myself to him.

His eyes shift just as I'm about to voice out my feelings for the first time. My eyes follow his to the

front.

The woman is still on her long speech and Bible quotes. It must be something she said that grabbed his attention, or rather a name she called.

“I hope Magcina is able to see you from heaven. I feel like God robbed her the chance to witness the fruits of her womb. Maybe one day she'll come to us in our dreams and tell us her story. And I hope that one day God will lead us into your father. But until then, I shall remain a mother and father to both of you. I don't care whether you turn 27 or 50, any boy who wants to say something to you has to come to me first.”

They're rolling their eyes behind her. I'm tempted to laugh, she needs to accept that they're grown sexual active women and rest before her blood pressure shoots up.

Ndlalifa's arm deserts my waist. He pushes through crowded bodies and makes his way to the front, where the woman is. He grabs her arm and pulls her to the side. His forehead is furrowed into a huge

frown.

I have no idea what's going on. I was about to agree to his proposal. I need to find Ndondo, maybe she'll end up hiring me to carry her crocodile purse for the night.

[03/14, 09:06] : Chapter 25

NDLALIFA

He doesn't even ask, he just grabs her hand and pulls her aside. Right now he's not thinking straight. He doesn't see all the people watching him. Thalente's answer doesn't matter for a moment. The only thing that matters is his mother's name-Magcina. It could be a namesake or coincidence, but he won't rest until he knows.

“Who is Magcina?” he asks.

Phumzile is this thrown back by the level of disrespect. It's one of those boys who were smoking in Ndondo's house the other day. This one didn't even greet her or show any kind of remorse.

And now he just grabbed her hand like that? As if she's his age-mate.

“Do you know Magcina Ngomane? She was dark, maybe two shades lighter than me, with a stud nose and a scar behind her neck.” He sounds desperate. He's been looking since he was 16. This is the first time he's had two dots connecting; 27 years and the name, Magcina. The first time he's ever felt close to the truth. He needs her to agree- to say ‘yes she knows his mother.’ Then he'll take it from there. His mother loved him, she loved her kids, she wouldn't have left just like that. Something happened, he knows this because he remembers exactly what he witnessed the other day. He knows how cruel his father can be, he's seen it in his taxi rivalries. He was not named Ngonyama for massaging people's feet.

Phumzile is staring at him, capturing every part of his face silently.

“Ma, is everything alright?” It's Khosi. She's daring



Ndlalifa with her eyes; if he does anything to her mother he'll have her to deal with. She's always been protective of all those in her life. Being a big sister runs in her bones, that's why she didn't hesitate to befriend Ndondo and put her under her wings.

Surprisingly, Phumzile glances at her once and nods her head. Ndlalifa is still staring at Khosi. Really, who does she think she is? Mike Tyson? She's always threatening and glaring at people with those extra large eyes of hers. Mother Hen!

The hand grabbing his arm breaks his eyes from Khosi. He's being pulled by the woman that owes him answers, she's pulling him out of the venue. All eyes are on them. People are wondering what the secret conversations are all about. But it only takes one song to get them back to the party.

She lets go of his arm and steps back, to have a good look at him. They're standing by the rails

leading down to the parking area.

“Why are you asking about Magcina? Our mother didn't marry legally, so next time just say Magcina Nsele, not Ngomane.”

His chest bounces as he consumes a heavy breath. His armpits are moist and itching. Something about his mother, at last!

“She's my mother.” Pain and relief lace up his eyes as he says this. There's a lot going through his mind right now. Fear, joy, pain and mostly, relief.

“You're Magcina's son?!” Her hands are over her head. Is she going to cry again? No.

His head is pulled against a full-packed chest. The hug is too warm to resist and he loves hugs. His mother used to hug him exactly like this woman. She was an affectionate woman, kissing, hugging and cuddling. Every morning he'd wake up and dash to his parents' bedroom and snuggle himself on his mother. He was older and faster, Maqhingana would always sit on the floor and stare at them as they cuddled and played on bed. He'd only get a hugging

partner if their father was not at work. Maybe that's why he connected more to Ngidi, they have that strong bond, the one Ndlalifa broke years ago. Ngidi is his father because he raised him, they share blood and work together. But that's it. It ends with business discussions and a sour dinner together, forced by Maqhinga or Ndabuko, once in a full moon.

“She didn't say anything about you. Magcina disappeared for 10 years and came back with a huge stomach. We didn't reconnect, we didn't talk about anything, the sisterly bond wasn't there. It was never there but we were good before she left. A few days after her arrival she gave birth to the twins and died shortly after delivering.” She's crying again. Not because Magcina died, and not because Msawenkosi was found rotten in the bushes a month after Magcina's passing, but because they didn't get the chance to talk. There were things she wanted to confess to her, things she could only talk about to a sister. Now she has to raise the kids alone, with a heavy baggage in her heart.

“I’ve been looking for her, she left when I was eight.” That’s all he manages to say. He’s trying to swallow back the lump rising up in his throat. He’s 35, he can’t cry over his mother in a party.

“Was she hurt when she came home?” he asks what has been bothering him for years. Yes, he thought his father hurt his mother and buried her somewhere to hide the evidence.

Phumzile frowns in confusion.

“Not physically,” she says.

He’s relieved, but not wholly. His mother wouldn’t have left them just like that. His father knows something.

“I’m Phumzile, your aunt.” They hug again, tighter this time. Her sister had a son and he’s not just a boy, but a fully grown man. Maybe there’s a way; she can get something now. Where did Magcina live in that decade she was away from home? Who did she live with? The girls, who’s their father? Why did she leave and why did she come back?

But she can’t ask all these question to a child. He

looks clueless, there must be someone who have the information she needs.

“Who did she leave you with?” she asks with a soft stare glazing in Ndlalifa's pained eyes. Behind these upturned eyes is a thousand drops of tears held back.

“With dad,” he says.

“Is he still alive?”

Ndlalifa nods his head. He never imagined finding out about his mother this way. Dead, left behind twin daughters that have been under his nose for years. They work in the production department, in the company his father ran for years, wearing blue overalls and boots like everyone else, and sweating from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.

“They're my sisters?” He's mumbling to himself but he's audible enough to be heard by Phumzile.

“They're your mother's daughters. I'm not sure about the father, your mother and I didn't talk. It would be better if you take me to your father, I need to talk to him.” She's been looking forward to this

day for years. She won't be able to sleep before talking to someone who knew Magcina during the last years of her life.

“Is he around?” she asks.

Hesitantly, he nods his head. He wants to see the twins and talk to them. Not even in his wild dreams has he ever imagined himself having not just one, but two sisters. They look alike, he can't tell them apart, not that he's ever bothered to try. Their names confuse him as well.

“Please take me to your father,” she persists. Right now nothing matters more than cracking her sister's past. There are many possibilities but her instincts tell her that before this day ends she'll know the identity of her nieces.

Ndlalifa came with someone and he knows that she's going to be mad at him for this. But this is important, he'll have to make it up to her. He sends Ndabuko a text, asking that him and Ndondo take care of Thalente.

Phumzile makes a call and alerts Khosi that she is leaving.

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**BHEKI "NGONYAMA" NGIDI**

It's not everyday that his first son comes to his house. So, he's shocked when he sees Ndlalifa walking in. Not alone, but with an old woman behind him. Luckily his housekeeper has gone to her room. It would've been a disaster if they found her in the house, probably still in that lacy short thing she was wearing. He is not that man who sleeps with girls two years younger than his son, but she kept throwing herself at him and she didn't want anything more than what stays in his pants and wallet. She knows how to separate work and personal matters. The last thing he needs is for his sons to think that he replaced their mother, mostly Ndlalifa. He's the one who refuses to let go. The one that he fears one day might take a gun and pull the

trigger at him.

“Ngidi,” Ndlalifa says to him and points the woman on the couch.

Whatever this is about, it's not good. His mind quickly races to Maqhinga. He's a troublemaker, drama follows him everywhere, and he always let him get away with everything.

“What's going on?” he asks, eyeing the woman who's been staring at him since she walked in.

“This is Phumzile Nsele, my aunt.”

“Your aunt?” He lifts up his eyebrow in question.

“My mother's sister and she's here to ask about her sister. What happened to her?” That's his question. It comes from him and not from his aunt. It's accompanied by hatred. His bloodshot eyes are piercing through Ngidi and crushing every last piece of his heart.

He looks at the woman, the so-called aunt, and waits for her to speak.



“You had a child with Magcina, my sister?” she asks, calmer than he expected.

“Children. Two sons,” he says.

She frowns and turns her eyes to Ndlalifa. Did they not talk?

“He wasn't at the party. Ndondo asked him not to come because of what happened the other day,” Ndlalifa says.

She looks even more confused.

“What happened the other day?” she asks.

“You fainted when you saw him and said he looked like your late brother,” he says.

It clicks immediately in Ngidi's head. This is the sister he heard about once, if not twice. It confuses him how such an ordinary person can be so hard to find.

“Phumzile?” he asks.

“Yes. She talked about me?”

“A few times.”

There's a moment of silence as they stare at each other differently. Both of them have so much to say, so many questions to ask, but there's Ndlalifa in presence. Some things just can't be discussed in front of children, no matter how old they are.

“I hear she left here already pregnant. Why did she leave?” Phumzile breaks the short moment of silence.

Ngidi turns his eyes to Ndlalifa.

“Son, please go to the kitchen and make something for your aunt.”

Ndlalifa lets out a chuckle in disbelief and leans back on the couch. This man thinks he can keep him from the truth. At 35, really?

“Answer the question, Hlomuka,” he says, relaxed back on the couch. He's not going anywhere.

“Did you have a fight?” Phumzile asks as she realizes how hard it is for Ngidi to speak out.

“No, we didn't have a fight. The reason you fainted is the same reason why she left.” He keeps his eyes

away from Ndlalifa. He didn't want him to know. Not like this. Why is he so stubborn?

Phumzile fights back tears. She swallows the lump in her throat. She hides her trembling hands. But nothing works.

“That boy is your son?” she asks between the sobs.

She gets it. There's no need for explanations. It's the guilt that eats up her conscious more than anything.

“Yes, he's my son,” Ngidi says.

“And the girls?” she asks.

He frowns. Which girls now?

“Snakho and Snalo, the twins she was pregnant with when she left,” she explains when she reads the confusion on his face.

“Are those...” He turns his creased face to Ndlalifa.

“Identical girls from Bantwana Holdings?”

“They're not just identical girls from Bantwana Holdings, those are your daughters. You need to explain what's going on here? What has Maqhing

got do with mom's disappearance?" They better not lie to him. They both know something he doesn't know.

"I didn't kill your mother, she left because she didn't want to be here anymore. That's all you need to know," Ngidi says and looks at Phumzile, "Where is she?"

"She passed on just a few minutes after delivering the second girl."

He nods his head. This, he'll deal with it some other day, if he ever does. He pushes it to the pile at the back of his head. He's not going to break down in front of his son.

"Why didn't she want to be here, with us, her kids?" Ndlalifa persists with his questions. He's not letting go until he gets his answers.

"I'm not her, she's the only person who can answer your question."

His response gets Ndlalifa on his feet. Just in case he hasn't noticed, he's taller than him and he'd squash him on that couch with one foot.

“Bhekizitha!”

You can exchange insults, argue and defy your parent all you want. But in Zululand, or South Africa as whole, the biggest sin found on page 2600 in How To Be A Good Child book, is calling your parent by name. You just don't. It ends badly, unless if you're a Sandton child.

“Sit down wena nja. You want the truth, right? Get your black ass back on the couch and hear it. But if you dare my boy, if you dare tell Maqhinga this you'll see who Ngonyama is.”

Okay, they should calm down before Phumzile releases that pee she's pressing on the couch.

Ndlalifa sits down and looks at his father. He's just seconds away from the truth, something he's always wanted, but he's feeling uneasy. He wants to run away before he even hears it.

“Your brother looks like your uncle, your mother's brother. You heard that, right? That motherfu€ker was the reason why your mother ended up in the

streets of Tongaat. He raped her, from the age of 14 to the day when she decided to run away from home. I didn't know all that, we didn't talk about her past until Maqhinga was born. As you've heard, Maqhinga looks like your brother from head to toe, and for that reason your mother hated him. She wanted me to kill him. To kill my own son. I refused. She suggested adoption, I still refused. So, she took her purse and left.”

Ngidi has told him the truth he was protecting him from. He's 35 and taller than anyone in this family, that makes him a man enough to force people to talk, right?

Ndlalifa stares up at the ceiling, blinks back his tears and blows out. This is not what he expected to hear. His chest is dry and aching. He can't get a single word out. His childhood memories are still clear in his head.

It was treat. Their mother loved them, or rather him. He didn't notice anything, even though there were

strange things happening at their father's absence. The unreasonable scolding towards Maqhinga, the way she never touched him or lift him up when he cried. Those goodies he ate in his mother's bedroom while Maqhinga was left with the nanny in the lounge. He was seven and in his mind the thin baby was his competitor.

His head drops to his chest and the sniff escapes his nose. He gathers himself up, taking no single glance at his father and aunt, and leaves the room with tears running down his cheeks. He has a bedroom in every house that his father buys, he just never sleep in them. This one has his pictures lining the wall. He has never seen some of them, he doesn't even know when they were taken.

He throws himself on the bed and brings the pillow up against his face.

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Ngonyama is scared. He's quaking in his boots. He wants them to set another day, maybe the following

one. In his mind it was another boy, the doctor didn't tell them it was the twins. Was he even there? That was the pregnancy he regretted more than anything. There was a lot going on and he still wanted to give his attention to his neglected son. Finding out that he is a father to two girls. 27 years old, and he's known them for two years. He's threatened to fire one of them, he's not sure which one it was. It scares him.

But Phumzile is not going to sleep with these exciting news. She's going back to that party with the greatest gift ever, their father. Maybe Magcina will forgive her for not being able to protect her, she has united her daughters with their father. Her sons will come home and see her grave. That's something, right?

Her fear of men is at rest as she climbs inside Ngidi's car and fastens her seatbelt. All that matters is seeing the smile on her babies faces.

She can't wait. But Ngidi is not driving yet.

“When did she arrive home?” he asks.



“16 August,” she says.

That's confusing. Didn't she go straight home from Ngidi's house? Magcina never made any friends, not even with his friends' wives.

“She left here our house on 10th of August,” Ngidi says in deep thoughts.

“Maybe she started in Lamontville where Msawenkosi lived.”

He looks at her with a frown. Her face remains the same. One plus one equals two. Ngidi releases a sigh and starts the car.

It was bad, wasn't it? He failed Magcina dismally.

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The night is still young, it seems like more people came after Phumzile left. As she steps out of the car she bumps into Ndondo. Ngidi is standing behind her and popping his fingers. His biggest fear is that they'll reject him. They're 27 for crying out loud, they've made it this far with him present but without his help.

“Call Snakho and Snalo. I can't push through this crowd,” Phumzile says to Ndondo.

Ndondo clears her throat and looks away from her.

“Only Snakho is here,” she says.

Phumzile frowns. They were both here when she left. It's their fancy party and supposedly, all their drunkard friends are here.

“Where's Snalo?” she asks.

“She went somewhere. Don't worry about her Ma, she's safe,” Ndondo says.

“Where is somewhere? I need her, there's something I want to tell both of them.”

Ndondo glances at Ngidi and rubs her hands together. There's a thick annoyed girl coming their way, when she sees Ngidi she stops dead on her tracks with her eyes bulging out. Owkaaay.

“Ndondo!” Phumzile snaps.

“Snalo left, Maqhingga came to fetch her. Please Ma, she's 27 and it's her birthday today. Let her be.” Her words fall on deaf ears as both Ngidi and Phumzile

rush back to the parking area as if the world behind them is on fire.

[03/14, 09:06] : Chapter 26

You celebrate your birthday, you thank God and your ancestors, you reflect back on your journey; how far you've come and every battle that you've won. You try really hard to dwell on the positive side, the greener side of your being, but at the back of your head there's a soft voice whispering everything you're trying to adjust into. The absence of your parents that you never met, your diploma that's lying on the dust, the sickness that you can't tell anyone about because they'll overreact, and life as a whole. You're not where you thought you'd be, far from your destiny, with nothing to look forward to and barely a glimpse of hope.

Her grandmother's surname was Nsele. Because her grandparents didn't marry and all their children had to use their mother's surname, her own mother

that she never met decided to die and leave her in that surname. One-of-two, part-of-the-combo, the-other-half, twinnie, Snakho...you choose. She's been called all those names but her birth name is Snalolonke and Nsele is well, her surname. Turning 27 means you're just three years away from being 30. It means you should be at least quarter a mile to the life of your dreams. You should be content with yourself, you're TWENTY SEVEN! But not Snalo, she's spend the last 27 years of her life breathing, eating and waking up to see the next day. Life doesn't make any sense, it never has, so why not just go with the wind? It's not like anything good ever comes out of being a "good girl."

She swallows two shots and squeezes her face as the hot fluid washes down her throat. Her hand fishes out her cellphone and she scrolls down her chats. Her finger stops at Maqhinga, the trust-fund fuckboy that has made advances almost with every girl in KZN. Something about him draws her in. She can relate to him in some way. It could be the "screw you life" lifestyle that she might be living

soon. Life is fucked up so why not become a fucker and accommodate it.

“Half?” That's how he answers. She really doesn't mind. She's whatever you decide to call her. It doesn't matter, it's not like she has any identity.

“You didn't come to the party,” she says and grabs a half-drunk glass of wine that Snakho left on the table.

“I was uninvited,” he says with a chuckle. His mood and approach of life is exactly what Snalo wants to inherit.

“Really? How about I bring the party to you then?” She licks her lips and scans around the dance floor. Her aunt is gone and Khosi has calmed down, she's now having her first glass of wine.

“Don't play with me Snakho!” There's a movement in his background. It sounds like the shifting of mattress and something cracking on the floor.

She doesn't correct him, people do call her Snakho and vice-versa. She sends him the location and downs another shot.

Ndondo is pregnant and bored with a glass of juice in her hand. There's a thick lady next to her with a big afro. She doesn't look like someone who came to party. It's like she came to plan someone's murder instead; her lips keep twitching forward in anger.

Snalo knows that as much as Ndondo is protective, she is not dramatic as Khosi. So she makes her way to her and taps her shoulder to get her golden attention.

“Girl, I'm leaving,” she says.

Ndondo looks up with a frown on her face.

“To where?” she asks.

“Maqhinga's house.”

Her face drops. But she's not the one to judge people, especially on their birthdays.

“Condomise Nalo, you could be the fifth girl he sleeps with this week,” Ndondo says with worry lining her face.

“Don't worry, I'm a grown girl,” Snalo says and envelopes her in a hug before clutching her purse under her arm and walking out.

It doesn't take too long before a midnight-blue Porsche Cayenne pulls up and hoots for her. She's carefully to take a sight of her surroundings before waltzing to the car and opening the passenger door. This is it- Screw You Life!

“This is a surprise,” Maqhinganga says as she fastens the seatbelt and adjusts on her seat. It's today that she's ever sent him a text that's not work related. Maybe a year has passed since he met all of them, the Nsele girls, none of them has ever showed any interest in him. Probably because everyone knows who he is and what he is all about. He had concluded that they were the type that believes in fairytales; happy-ever-afters and all that shit. Something they know very well that he cannot give. “Well, let's just say “fuck life.” Where are we going?” she asks.

He captures her face with a few lines creased on his forehead. This is not the girl who has given him a cold shoulder everytime he tried to talk to her. Or is it the other one? He can't tell them apart.

“What happened?” he asks.

“Nothing, really. I just need to cool down and...” A sigh! She pulls down her dreadlocks and leans back on the seat.

“Just drive,” she says.

He doesn't ask any further questions he puts the engine into life and drives off.

Maqhinga has always been about fun and he doesn't mind paying for it. It's simple; he picks a girl, asks for a good time- no strings attached, and in return, he takes care of whatever they need him to take care of, financially. A new pair of shoes, weaves, booze, gadgets- they're never too expensive. But today is a bit different. He knows by the way she's pacing around his lounge with a bottle of Peroni that she keeps sipping straight from



its mouth. It's not money that she wants, nor any kind of financial support. What she seeks is an emotional stronghold; something he cannot give her.

He takes a deep breath before making his way back to the lounge. When he's a step closer to her she stops her pacing and looks at him.

“Do you want to chill, maybe? There's a spot by the pool.”

Her response is putting down the bottle in her hand and grabbing him by the jacket. Their lips smash and they both shut their eyes to take in and digest their exchanged taste. Maqhinga's jacket flies down to the floor, the buttons of his shirt crack open and his body slowly slides down on the couch.

Their breaths grow heavy as the kiss deepens. His fingers slide at the side of her thong and dip inside her warm folds. He rubs her clit until she releases soft moans.

“Twinnie,” he says as his finger pauses at her

opening. He's staring at her eyes, searching for any doubt. Her brown eyes just stare back at him emptily and she slowly nods her head for him to go ahead.

Instead of pushing his fingers in, he pulls his hand out and pushes his way up.

“This is not what you need. You're searching for comfort in a wrong place,” he says.

Her eyes pop out in shock. Did she just get rejected by a well-known skirt-chaser? Wow.

“Woza,” – He pulls her hand and takes the stairway with her. He doesn't have anything in mind. What he knows is that he cannot sleep with her if he's not going to be able to give her what she needs in return. He plays a fair game; a win for all.

His hand lets go of her and she quickly scans her eyes around the gigantic creamy-painted bedroom. She's right next to the bed, so she lowers herself on it and waits for the man who just disappeared in the bathroom without saying a word. This is not what

she came for, clearly Maqhingga is not what she thought. She came for a good time, not a lonely time in a gigantic bedroom.

There's a phone ringing somewhere in the pillows. It gets him out of the bathroom; he sprints out in a lightning speed.

She rolls her eyes as he dashes to grab it. She wasn't going to answer it, she's not here for his life.

He rejects the call and switches the phone off with a smug look on his face.

“This old man needs to sleep,” he says and throws himself on the bed.

It must've been his father, maybe they annoy each other with phone calls frequently. Daddy's boy!

“So twinnie, what is going on?” His mood has lightened. He pulls her hand and places it between his and gives it a slight squeeze.

“I'm not here to talk,” Snalo says.

“Come on, you're 27. Be nice. I'm all ears, uqliwa

yini?" He's not letting this go. Not when so much sadness still dwells in her eyes. He's no therapist, neither does he know how to comfort a sad person, but he's willing to listen.

His eyes gaze at her in demand, she releases a sigh and falls on her back. Her neck lies on his arm and they both stare up at the ceiling.

"I don't want to live." Her words turn his eyes to her. That's not a thing to say. You can't say you don't want to live. Life is a blessing.

"I'm not looking forward to anything. I'm doing this life thing for my sister. There's no purpose. I've wanted to end it so many times but the thought of leaving Snakho lost, all alone, always stops me. I don't want to be here. I'm tired." There's no sadness in her voice. No hint of remorse. It's just the plain truth that she makes sound so normal.

"You're drunk," Maqhingga says with a frown on his face. This is the strangest thing he's ever heard.

"I drank but I'm in my right senses. I have never

wanted to do it ever since I was 15,” she says.

“To do what?” he asks.

“Living. It's been draining and painful. I thought God would do me a favour and use his power to take me, but it seems like he still wants me to suffer. Maybe there's peace in the next world. Who knows, I might meet the woman who gave birth to me. I always hear that the dead are at peace.” She chuckles to lighten the mood but Maqhingá's face remains cold and his eyes bloodshot.

She pinches his arm and smiles. Why is he making a big deal out of it?

“Life is for people like you. People who don't care; who have it all. Homes, parents, happiness and all this.” She points around the glamorous bedroom.

“What do you need?” His voice breaks. Why would a beautiful girl like her want to end her own life? Life is not fair to everyone. Things won't always go the way we want but we have things, or rather people, to live for.

“Peace. I need peace,” she says.

He was hoping she'd say "money" so that he could help. But peace is not something he can give to someone. He doesn't know peace himself, it was never there in his family growing up. His father and brother fought almost everyday. It once got so bad that Ndlalifa had to move in with one of the drivers. His mother has always been the subject and cause of his family fights. He doesn't remember much about her, there's no single picture of them together. He sees her in pictures in his father's wall; pictures of her alone, with his father and some with Ndlalifa.

Snalo turns to him and smiles. Her smile is beautiful; her lower lip is thicker, there's a dimple on her chin and her teeth have a tiny perfect gap at the front. It's a smile that can brighten the next person's face, but Maqhingana knows how empty she is behind that smile. He just stares at her with nothing but pity.

"Right now I need an orgasm and a drink," she says.

"Which one do you need more?" he asks.

She snaps her fingers a several times with that smile of hers plastered on her face.

“Orgasm,” she says.

He grins and rolls off bed. He's not going to deny her this; something to make her feel better on her birthday. He pulls down his jean and briefs and crawls back on the bed.

Lifting up her dress is a job and half. He manages to get it past her hips and just pulls down her damp thong once and for all. While his hand strokes the length of her thigh, their lips are connected like two pieces of the puzzle in a steamy kiss.

The heat radiating from him to her forces low moans out of their mouths. His finger has reached the center of her core and her legs have involuntarily opened wider to allow him to have his way.

He pushes one finger inside her opening. She breaks the kiss to allow her moans to freely express her pleasure.

He softly bites the side of her neck and trails kisses all the way down to her chest. The dress blocks him from going further down. He grabs one boob out and plays with the nipple.

With his eyes half-lidded, lust threatening to burst his veins, he looks up at her.

“Twinnie, I may not be able to hold myself. I love the coochie,” he says.

“Who asked you to hold yourself?” she asks with a grin on her face.

Well, they're on the same page. He slides down and reaches the floor with his feet. He pulls her to the edge of the bed and separates her legs to get a better view of her paradise. Clean and dripping wet. Ready for Hlomuka!

He sticks his tongue inside the center of her core and takes a long lick from the top of her mound down to her butt hole. Her heart is racing, she wants to get up but he pins her down.



His finger is circling around her second hole and honestly, this is not something she'd consider to get pleasure. That's a no-go area, but daaamn!

“Maqinga..don't..” His lips nibble her clit and whatever complaints she had fly out of the window. She can't say one coherent sentence. The condom foil tears, she's never been so impatient and hungry for a man like she is today. She's helping him as he rolls the condom on his shaft.

“Relax Twinnie, I got you.” He rubs her clit and pushes down his erect shaft through her folds and enters her opening. As her warm flesh swallows him in, he curses out and bites his lip; “Fu€k, Mama!”

Her waist moves with his thrusts. His forehead is linked on hers; his sweat dropping down on her. He's breathing her and she's breathing him. He's tapping the depths of her core, rubbing corners that have never been touched before, her screams are filling up the room and her legs are wrapped around

his waist for dear life.

“What are you doing to me, Twinnie?” he asks in a trembling voice. This feels like sex with a different name. It's not like anything he's ever experienced in his whole fu€king life.

He moves his upper body and casts his eyes down to their connected parts. He's staring at his shaft thrusting in and out, exposing her inner pinkish flesh and her swollen clit.

He doesn't cry about his mother. She's not someone he remembers, but right now the pleasure is threatening to burst his veins. He can feel a hot rush surging through them and warming up his whole body.

“Mamaaaa! Oh My God!” He's calling all the people he shouldn't be calling during such deed.

The door swings open just as he balances on his toes and pulls up Snalo's waist; his shaft balancing inside her in its full length.

“Ma...qhi..nga,” -His father's faint voice comes from the door, freezing all the movements inside the

room.

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Bheki “Ngonyama” Ngidi

There's no word to describe what he's feeling right now. His son snuggled on his daughter, di€k in, balls out. This is not something he will forget anytime soon. He wants to scream, to punch someone and dismantle their jaws with his fists. But he can't. Snalo is yet to find out that she's his daughter. And Maqhingana is his boy, the apple of his eye. He can shout at him, insult him and threaten him at times. But he'd never lay his hand on his son. Never. Overcompensating or whatever you may call it, but he vowed to make this boy feel special, to never feel any gap in his heart and to never wish that he had more than the love he gives him.

He steps out of the door to allow them to dress up. He wants to slide and rest on the floor. His knees are failing to hold him, but instead of allowing the

weakness to control him, he holds on the wall for balance.

Phumzile is downstairs, hopefully she didn't hear all the sexually screams that were coming from his son's bedroom.

Maqhinganga opens the door and walks out. Snalo must've locked herself in the bathroom out of shame.

“Baba why are you invading my privacy?” He's pissed.

“Did you at least use a condom?”

Maqhinganga's eyebrows knit a frown. Is this a joke? Now he reports his sex to his father?

“Bophela...did you use a condom?” he asks again.

Now he realizes that something is wrong. His father would never address him on such matters and call him his clan name under the same breath. This isn't war, what he sees on his father's face is something he cannot describe.

“Yes, I did. What is going on?” he asks.

Ngidi exhales and stares at his son hopelessly. Why is this happening to him? Why Magcina? Why?!

“Do you have to stick yourself inside every girl? Even your...” He shuts his eyes and takes another breath.

“I’m 29 Baba, you can’t come to my house and interrogate me,” Maqhingana says.

“Can’t you zip up your pants for a moment and deal with life?”

“Look here son, I’m not going to be miserable because I’m waiting for a woman that might not even be alive,” he explains using his hands. That’s a shade to his father who’s waiting for a woman he doesn’t know whether she’s still alive or not. But Ngidi is not pissed off by that.

“I’m not your son, slima. Get your sister out of your bedroom and come with me. Now.” He unbuttons the last buttons of his shirt and drags himself away.

With a frown on his face, Maqhingana walks back

inside his bedroom to get Snalo.

“I don't know what's going on. Maybe petrol went to his head. My father wants to see us.”

[03/14, 09:07] : Chapter 27

Maqhingana Ngidi

That woman who fainted after seeing him is here, in his house. She really has a fainting wish, Maqhingana was asked to stay far away from her and he's been respecting that. He guesses this is about Twinnie being in his house- a dramatic aunt has come to fetch her.

He hears her gasping in shock as they walk into his father and her aunt standing like statues in the middle of his dining room.

“Go to the car with her,” Ngidi says without turning his eyes to them. His top buttons are undone so Maqhingana knows that he has fucked up. The woman looks like she's been crying for hours, her puffy eyes keep going from Twinnie to him. He has

to watch his steps because he doesn't know what she might do; some women are crazy out there.

He pulls Twinnie's hand and walks out of the door. Ngidi's car is parked behind his and Maqhingisa is not sure which car he wanted them to go to.

"I'm leaving," Twinnie whispers and pulls her hand off his. Is she running, really?

"Ngidi will find you if he wants you. Don't act stupid, I'll be a man and stand up for you." He pulls her back. He can see it in her eyes, she's really frightened. He's never been into this kind of situation before- interrupted during such a steamy session by parents! He has an urge to bend her down right here and carry on where they left off. Her tiny waist fitted perfectly in his arm. Hlomuka has never been accommodated so well and massaged that warmly. Thick lips, clean and shaved, gripping skills on point and the heating core that burst every knot in your body. His member is up, just from the friction of their skin contacting. How is this even

possible? They just got caught and all his di€k wants is to slide into her?

He grinds his teeth and releases a sharp breath. His eyes are still on her, he's craving for every inch of her body. And her nibbling on her lip like that is not helping his erection.

“Fu€k, you're so hot Twinnie.” He grabs her head and unexpectedly onslaught her with a kiss. His hands are all over her butt, grabbing and spanking, as he shoves his tongue down in her throat and moans at her taste.

Strong hands grab the back of his neck, Snalo jumps off with her eyes bulging out. A fist lands on Maqhinga's chin. He turns his head back in shock. Maybe he did disrespect his father and the aunt, but a whole punch! He's never been punched by his father in his whole life.

“What are you doing?” Ngidi roars with anger steaming from his eyes. He has seen enough. This bulls..he will never forget this day. His children!

“I love her,” Maqhinga says, wiping the blood



gushing out of his cracked lip with the back of his hand. He didn't think about it. It just came out of his mouth. Snalo is in shock as well. Love? That's a foreign language.

Maqhinganga looks at the aunt, a little bit ashamed of his actions but not regretful. He's going to stand up for Snalo, because this is not the last time they see each other. It won't end this day or next week, he doesn't know what's going to happen yet but he knows that this is not it.

“Ngiyaxolisa Ma but...” He exhales and turns his eyes to Snalo.

“I want to get to know her better and see where our thing goes. I'm not trying to mess with her. I'll be her peace,” he says.

“Maqhinganga!” Snalo exclaims.

“I mean it, Twinnie. I'll be your sanctuary, give us time to adjust into this...” Ngidi cannot listen to this any further.

He simply cannot take it.

“She's your blood sister, damnit!”

Silence. Furrowed brows. What the fu€k is he talking about?

“Son, you have committed an incest. This is my daughter. Your mother's child.” As low as his voice is kept, it still breaks. He watches as his son's face transforms from hopeful to painful. He still remembers how he'd get home and find him, one-year and eight-months old innocent baby, sitting on the floor with his milk bottle and staring at his mother with his big brother cuddling on the couch. His face would always brighten up when Ngidi walked in. He'd run into him, happy to finally get some love as well. That's how Ngidi learnt to hug randomly and give soft kisses.

“Ma, what is he talking about?” Snalo asks. This whole thing makes no sense. How is she Mr Ngidi's daughter? How did it happen? Maqhingana can't be her brother.

“This is your father. This is the man your mother left 27 years ago, with you and Snakho in her tummy.

And this boy is your brother, I'm so sorry baby.”

Now it gets through their skulls. This isn't a joke. Ngidi wouldn't just pick a random woman up and drive to Maqhing's house to lie.

They look at each other and freeze. Tears are gushing out of Maqhing's eyes, he doesn't sniff them back or move. He knew about the sibling- not siblings, and he didn't think it would be someone in his circle. Why didn't they find out about this sooner? Before the party.

Phumzile pulls Snalo into her arms and rubs her back. Snalo has always been a difficult child to raise, mostly because she doesn't talk much. Right now Phumzile doesn't know what's going to happen. How is she going to help her go through this. If it was Snakho it would've been easy; Snakho would've screamed, cried her eyeballs out and created a big scene. It would've been easy to walk beside her as she navigates this new reality. But Snalo is a mysterious child, you never know where her mind is.

You never know if she's really happy or sad. She keeps everything in.

Ngidi pulls Maqhinga's arm and hugs him on his chest. He's locking in his own tears. The last thing he wanted was his son to act anything close to that fu€ker, Msawenkosi. He thought they'd get here in time, before he slaughters from his own kraal. But they were late, the damage has been done and there's nothing he can do to reverse back the deed.

“Son, we will work this out. You didn't know anything,” he tells Maqhinga. He reaches down to his cracked lip with his thumb and wipes off the blood leaking from it. He's dealt with a lot of criticism for being a “mommy-dad” to Maqhinga. A father who hugs his son and texts him in the mornings- that have been questioned. The biggest taboo is telling him that he loves him. Fathers don't do that, not in this environment. But nobody understands what he's been through with this boy. Nobody understands how much love Maqhinga needs, only he does.

“How Baba? How? I just slept with my sister. Who sleeps with his own sister? Who does that?”

“You didn't know. That's the bottom line. I will make this right, both of you will be cleansed and I'll appease to the ancestors. I promise.”

This is too much for Maqhinga. No number of goats can ever make him forget what he's done. How is he ever going to look at Snalo in the eyes and not see her half-naked with her coochie laid out for him?

“Maqhinga let's go home and talk. You have to meet your other sister,” Ngidi's words fall on his back. He walks inside his house and shuts the door after him.

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Ngidi heaves a sigh and slowly turns his eyes to the one-of-two. Twenty seven years! Why didn't Magcina give birth and leave them behind, just like she left others?

“Thingolwenkosazane,” he says. Even though they have met under these distasteful circumstances, he's still happy to finally meet his daughter. It doesn't mean that there was no storm or that they

are not dealing with the aftermath. It simply means that a light has appeared in the midst of darkness. There is a rainbow- a symbol of hope and new beginnings. As our elders believed; a bridge between heaven and earth. Him and Magcina.

“My name is Snalolonke,” she tells him, thinking that maybe he's confusing her name with someone else. However his face says otherwise, the pain is evident in his eyes but there's warmth in them. That warmth she's been yearning for her whole life.

“I'm asking you to be my rainbow. An arc of light, the symbol of hope and a sign of the covenant that I'm about to make to your mother, in the other world, that I will love you and your siblings and die for you if I have to.”

Snalo looks at her aunt. She gave them their names, it would be ungrateful of her to switch to another one just because her newly- found father explains it so beautifully and makes it sound special.

“I'm not trying to change who you are. I love the name they're calling you,” Ngidi says and turns his

eyes to Phumzile with gratitude. “Thank you for everything. If it doesn't offend you, I'd like to call her Thingo and not what you all call her.”

Phumzile nods her head, and a deep breath follows. All that matters to her right now is, how are the kids going to get out of this situation? How are they going to forget what they did together? And that boy, Maqhingana, is she going to be able to be an aunt to him and treat him like others? How long can she stand the sight of him?

“Thingolwenkosazane,” Ngidi opens his arms and takes a few steps forward. Snalo releases the breath she's been holding and walks into her father's opened arms.

“I'm so sorry Nkosazane yami. I know I should've looked for you harder and made more efforts. It's so embarrassing to know that you've been right here under my nose all this time. I shouldn't have stayed that long with your mother not knowing where she came from, I should've forced the truth out of her. I'm really sorry.”

“It's okay. We should find Snakho,” Snalo says, untangling herself from Ngidi's arms. Maqhinganga's sweat still smells from her body and it's embarrassing knowing that both these people, who are parents to her, know that she just got laid.

“Go to the car and wait. I need to speak to your brother quickly,” Ngidi says.

Phumzile walks with Snalo to the car, silently praying that she'll open up about her feelings. She can't just say; “It's okay. We should find Snakho.” And that's it. How did her mother leave? Why did she leave? There are a lot of questions she needed to ask; things she needed to know.

Ngidi walks straight to Maqhinganga's bathroom and finds exactly where he thought he'd find him. Under the shower, attempting to peel off his skin and crying.

“Hlomuka,” he yells as he taps outside the glass. This should be his time with Snalo, talking and connecting, but he's here, keeping her waiting



outside because he cannot leave his son in this condition.

It takes a moment but he finally gets out of the shower. Ngidi grabs a towel and passes it to him.

They follow each other to his bedroom and walks over Snalo's thong lying on the floor. Ngidi clenches his jaws and tries to keep his eyes off the floor.

“We will go and visit your mother's grave. Then I'll pay for the damages and...” Maqhinganga turns around before he can finish. He's reeling anger.

“My mother? Baba let's go downstairs and have a drink.”

That's strange.

Ngidi watches as he puts his clothes on and picks his sister's thong from the floor. He disappears with it in the bathroom and walks back with that unfamiliar expression on his face.

“Let's go Ngonyama!” He walks past him to the door.

A trip down the stairs feels like Mandela's long walk

to freedom. Maqhinga disappears in the kitchen and walks out with two glasses and cans of Jack Daniels.

He empties one can into the glass and passes it to his father.

“Look, I'd like to hang out but your sister and aunt are waiting for me outside,” Ngidi says.

The glass he brought is no use, he opens the can and gulps it down.

“You said we'll go to my mother's grave, how can I visit someone that I don't even know? Was she even my mother? Why don't you give me something-anything that can remind me of her?”

“Maqhinga you were young and...” He doesn't let him finish. This is what his father always does; beating around the bush and trailing off topic.

“What is your best memory of her and I? I want it to be my memory too. When did she stop breastfeeding me? Was it easy? I want stories, just like Ndlalifa.”

“Maqhinga look, your mother loved you. Ndlalifa remembers her because he was older. I can't remember everything and I don't see why it matters so much?”

“I get that, Baba. Trust me, I get it. That's why I'm asking you to share memories of me and her that you still have.” His father's eyes are everywhere but not at him. When are these secrets going to end? What can be so hard that even when your son is 29 you cannot tell him?

“We'll talk about this some other time. If you need anything call me, I need to get the other girl. Be at my house in the morning,” Ngidi says, lifting his body off the couch and walking towards the door without looking at his son. Only if Maqhinga understood that he's doing all this to protect him!

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Ngidi's House

Phumzile and Snalo went to sleep in Ndondo's house and only came back this morning with

Snakho and Khosi. Ndabuko and Ndondo also came, but they're allowing the family to unite so they decided to have their breakfast out. Maqhinga hasn't arrived yet but when Ndlalifa called he said he was going to come.

Snalo is watching Mom on Netflix, for the third time, if not fifth. Snakho always calls her out on watching sad movies, but this one is different, maybe because of how it ends. Nothing is sweet as revenge. She's glued to the screen and inwardly gritting her teeth at some scenes. But she's not crying as Khosi and Snakho do everytime they watch it.

Things are a bit awkward. Ndlalifa is in the kitchen and preparing breakfast. It's always been his job as the older child, to cook and feed others. Khosi is still trying to process everything, her attention is on the photo album that Ngidi gave to them. Her Aunt Magcina that she can't remember well, looked so happy in these pictures, especially where she was with Ndlalifa. Surprisingly, Maqhinga is only with

Ngidi and Ndlalifa in the pictures, and not anywhere with his mother. Wasn't he two years old when Magcina left? Why does it not look like they ever met?

“Where is Maqhingana and Mamncane?” she finally asks.

“Go and help your brother in the kitchen,” Phumzile says, throwing a look at her. She knows the truth and honestly, she understands her sister. She could've done things differently but it's what it is.

“Brother? It sounds so strange.” Khosi rolls her eyes and makes her way to the kitchen.

She has never got along with Ngidi's son and Ndabuko. She's that person who judge others by their characters. Ndabuko is a liar, Maqhingana is a player and Ndlalifa looks mean AF.

“What are you doing?” she asks Ndlalifa with her arms folded. Making breakfast in a rich man's house wasn't in her morning plans.

“How do you manage to look so mean everyday and snap at people whenever you talk?” Ndlalifa asks

while forking out sausages from the pan.

“Me?” Her forehead furrows.

“Yes, you,” Ndlalifa says.

“Maybe it's a thing from your mother's side of the family because I don't remember how many times I have stopped myself from slapping the arrogance out of you everytime I see you.”

“Slap me? Have you seen how tall I am? You'd need a ladder to even reach my cheek.”

Khosi picks a slice of tomato and bites a piece.

“Whatever! I saw your special lady last night. How much did you pay to get her?”

The conversation sails off smoothly in the kitchen. It's easy for the birds of the same feather to fly together. Being the first child in the family comes with its own hardships and responsibilities. It's easy for them to relate to each other despite the judgements they've made of one another.

Sadly, things aren't the same in the lounge. Snalo is

focused on her movie, Phumzile's anxiety is at its peaks; Maqhingana could walk in anytime and she has to keep it together. She cannot pull a "Magcina" on the kids and run.

It doesn't make sense why he had to resemble Msawenkosi this much. When their mother died Msawenkosi was Maqhingana's height, around his age, and exactly like him from head to toe. It also doesn't make any sense why she is so scared to have him around her daughters. He is not Msawenkosi, it's not fair of her to think this way of her sister's child. What he did with Snalo was an innocent mistake. Both of them didn't know that they were blood related and Maqhingana didn't force Snalo into anything.

Snakho finally walks out of the bathroom with a white towel wrapped around her head. This is it; she's a rich man's daughter. Ndondo needs to be ready for a resignation letter.

"What are we eating?" she asks with her hands on

the hips.

“Ndlalifa is still preparing the food,” Ngidi says.

She frowns.

“Don't you have maids?”

Ngidi chuckles. This is the one who rolled her eyes at him in the hospital. She's surprisingly very happy to be here. She went through every room, chose her bedroom and put some of her things inside just to mark it.

“I gave her a day off,” he says.

“You are nice. But you need to start attending the gym. Is that my mother in the ugly dress? I'm glad I didn't take after her.” She's over the wall and taking down a picture frame.

This one is a shining morning star. Ikhwezilokusa. He walks towards her and explains where each picture was taken and why he looked so ugly in them.

“I don't understand why she left you because you're rich,” she says, staring at Magcina's picture



standing next to her first car that came as a gift from Ngidi.

“She didn't leave me, she was trying to leave the painful memories. But I have you and your sister, now I know her family and where she came from. I'll bring her back, legally.”

“Meaning?” Snakho frowns.

“I'm still going to marry your mother traditionally.”

“She's dead, sir,” she says.

“Not sir, but Baba,” he corrects her with a chuckle and Snakho waves him off with a hand.

She'll get used to it.

“It's possible Khwezi, your aunt and I talked about it. Your mother made me who I am today. She is Mrs Ngidi, the woman of this house. No matter who comes, her place will always be safe.”

“What caused her to leave?”

“Maybe one day I'll be able to tell you. It sounds like your brother is driving in, let's go.” He pulls her hand and they walk to the dining room where Ndlalifa

decided they'll be having their breakfast.

Maqhinga walks in just as they find their seats. You can tell that he had a bad night, it's easy to read his emotions and get a glimpse of what he might be going through. Snalo on the other hand, she's just stirring her coffee and looking completely okay.

As Maqhinga lowers himself on the empty chair beside Phumzile, she rises up and moves to another chair. A brief look is shared between Ndlalifa and Ngidi.

“Thank you all for coming. The reason I asked all of you to be here today is because I wanted us to officially meet as a family. Right there is your aunt, your mother's sister, Phumzile.” He's telling Ndlalifa and Maqhinga.

Phumzile cannot bring herself to look at Maqhinga's direction but when her eyes meet Ndlalifa's a smile cracks from her lips.

“Finally, I have an aunt!” Ndlalifa says, walking over her and hugging her. Happiness is overflowing; the family has finally united.

Maqhinga remains on his chair with his hand on the cheek, eye-witnessing the happiness.

“And those are your sisters...” His voice trails off again. He breathes in and out, and continues; “Thingolwenkosazane and Khwezilokusa.”

“New names? Oh, okay,” Khosi mocks and reaches for a jug of juice.

“Is there anything else?” Maqhinga asks. His voice brings awkward silence in the room.

“I still need to discuss some things with your aunt and then we'll let you know of our decisions. But if anyone has a question, they must feel free to ask,” Ngidi says.

“Am I included?” Maqhinga asks.

Ngidi swallowed and reaches for water. This is the hardest situation he's ever been into. It would've been better if there was a suitable lie he could tell, but the only answer he could give him would be the truth and he can't have that.

Maqhinga takes his silence response as no, he

pushes back his chair and rises up.

“I’ll let everyone be free and okay,” he says and walks out, followed by shocked pairs of eyes behind.

“What happened?” Khosi asks before Snakho could.

Nobody answers them. This isn’t how neither of them expected the first family breakfast to go.

Rich people have problems too?

“Wow!” Snakho exclaims.

[03/14, 09:07] : Chapter 28

THALENTE

“Talent, please take this bag to Raj’s car before you leave.”

Aarti thinks this is Mumbai and I’m the African transported-maid made just for her. Taking bags to her car isn’t anywhere on my job description, plus I’ve had one hell of a weekend, a samoosa-eating woman annoying me is the last thing I need. I had a man, a 100feet tall man with disconnected beard,

leaving me in a party, in some strange place I've never been to, with strangers.

Before I can give Aarti a piece of my mind she has disappeared in the backroom. I grind my teeth in anger and pick up the heavy bag on top of the counter and take it to her husband's car waiting in the parking lot.

I've never liked this man, I always feel like his eyes are undressing me and his secret compliments never sit well with me. My hips aren't all there is to me, I have beautiful eyes and nice set of ribs. He can find something else to compliment, just not my hips and butt.

Here he is; licking his lips with his eyes glued on my lower body. Somebody kill me now!

“Aarti said I must bring this,” I say, handing the bag over. Honestly, I just want to stab out both his eyes and sell them to the nearest nyanga.

As he takes the bag his hands brushes mine. The fool is smiling, he thinks this is funny.

“Next time you do that, I will slap you,” I say.

He keeps smiling like a retard.

“I mean it. Ngizokushaya.” I think now he gets it. The smile has disappeared. I had to use my native language for him to know that I mean business.

“Why are you so uptight? Do you need something to put you in a good mood?” His hand is brushing the front of his short.

“Yes, but not you and your 1 cm di€k.” I turn around and leave. Taking this to his wife wouldn't be such a bad idea but I don't want to be the reason an Indian couple divorces.

She is taking the money from the till. I walk past her to the backroom to fetch my bag. I'm sure the car is waiting for me outside the gate. Taxis are still not fully operating. It's so childish of me to wish the fight to go on just because I have an easy transport. A car fetching me outside the shacks and dropping me off in the afternoons. Its driver hardly ever talks to me, he only asks if I want to pass somewhere and then drives all the way to Cannelands in

complete silence.

“Talent come here for a minute.”

What now? My time is up. I've been on my feet the whole day and I need to go to my shack and rest.

She's standing in front of the four-plates stove with her purse under arm.

“This stove was electric-shocking earlier. Please test it for me, I need to know if I should call Raj's friend to check it tomorrow,” she's saying this like it's the most normal thing to ask from a person. For a minute I'm just dumbstruck. WTF!

“It was electric-shocking earlier and I must test if it still does?” I need to be sure if I heard correctly and it's not the hot biryani I ate earlier messing with my hearing.

“Yes, please,” she says, completely okay with her request.

“You think I don't value life, neh?” I ask on my way to the door. “Bye Aarti, see you tomorrow. Wear

your jersey, it will be cold.”

Indeed the car is waiting for me. It's never late, everytime I walk through the gate it's there, parked opposite the gate, and playing Jazz music softly. Yes, the driver is old, he listens to Jazz, the likes of Dorothy Masuka and Hugh Masekela. He must be somewhere around 50 and he has the fatherly welcoming aura around him. I'm always comfortable in his company.

“Are you passing somewhere today?” he asks after we've exchanged greetings.

As usual, I'm going straight to my shack. He keeps his music soft and drives off.

I haven't spoken to my mother in a while. Last night I tried to call but her phone was off. Mommy duties must be keeping her busy. I've made peace with it, I'm done being the 28 year-old sister who “can't” have children and then acts like Maria's bestfriend.



People have normalized teenage pregnancy to the point where if you're 40 and pregnant it looks like you're doing “underage” things. Once you reach 25 without a little rascal calling you “mom” and making your life a sweet hell, you quickly make it to the list of barrens and pregnancy terminating squad.

It's good for me to step back and let them do things their own way. I hope my mother's health won't take a knock from this second round of motherhood.

I'm here; getting curious eyes as usual. I'm sure it baffles everyone how I have a driver taking me to and from work in a Hundai Tucson everyday while I'm living in a shack that could collapse any summer if heavy rains attack. Well, my life has never had any balance. If it's not taxi drivers abandoning me in fancy parties, it's my pumps cracking just as I step out of the car.

“Thank you,” I say and bid him goodbye.

“See you tomorrow.” He rolls up the window and reverses.

I take the shoes off and walk barefooted to the shack. People just came back from work and there's a long queue at the water tap. I pray that my buckets have water, my feet won't be able to stand another hour in a water queue.

Stepping inside the shack after it's been locked the whole day is like walking into hell. I'm not that woman who wraps a towel above her breasts with sleeping knots on her head, looking like those Nigerian crazy women from movies. But today it's too freakin' hot for a dress and I need to do something about this hair.

I'm not one of those mental unstable women who plait their own hair and still look like fine as hell. It's not even a skill- how do you do your own hair? I fold a few knots. Yes I'm folding, not plaiting, that's for hairdressers to do.

I freshen up and wrap my body with a towel and throw myself on bed. I brought chicken stew and slices of bread from the canteen, so that stove is

going to stay shining like that on top of the table. I only cook on weekends.

I don't know how I dozed off. It's dark outside when I wake up, even my neighbour has switched the radio off. Mosquitoes are already humming a mosquito national anthem inside my room.

I check the time to see if the tuck-shop hasn't closed. Luckily I still have 5 minutes, I search my bag for coins and rush out to get mosquito coils.

Men from the shacks whistle at every girl and ask them out. It doesn't mean that you're special when they do. I always ignore them and use the famous line; "I don't have a cellphone," when they ask for my number. Some would go as far as offering to buy me one.

I buy what I came for and make my way back. Some tenants are already on beds and having those deep conversations with their partners. The lazy ones are still cooking. I pass one of the shacks and smell

onions burning in unheated oil. I want to knock and tell whoever it is that he or she must wait for the cooking oil to heat up first before throwing those big chunks of onions inside the pot but then I remember that Aarti complains about my cooking skills as well. I'm not the one to judge.

I walk into a man standing in front of my door. I wouldn't mistake him for anyone. I can see his eyes piercing through me in the dark and I suddenly have mixed feelings about seeing him. A part of me wants to have a moment with him and just give him a piece of my mind. But another part of me doesn't want to see him. He hasn't reached out since the party. He didn't even send a lousy text, apologizing and explaining why he left me like that. And now he just arrives here unannounced?

“Thalente you're wandering around the shacks naked?” He's half-yelling at me.

Naked, really? Some things are just beyond human's ability of understanding.

I walk inside and leave him grinding his teeth at the

door.

“Thalente!”

Oh, he's following me.

I put mosquito coils on the table, next to the box of pizza I don't know of. He's bringing things to my shack and putting them on my table. That's not all, his jacket is on top of my bed. Imihlola kaJ ames!

“You should've told me if you didn't have clothes. Why the fu€k would you go outside looking like this?” He's still at it.

Deep breath, Thalente!

I search for my scarf and wrap my head. I don't know when he's planning to leave, hopefully he'll remember to wake me up to close the door after him.

I move his jacket and get on bed.

--

It's impossible to get sleep with him sitting next to my legs and the light still on. He's not saying anything and that's so unlike him. I had so much to

say to him but he pissed me off by yelling at me. I couldn't bring myself to speak to him. He wronged me, I expected him to look remorseful and apologetic. But no, he's my dictator.

He's now going through my dishes. The door is still opened, other tenants must be long asleep now. I bet it's only me who still have her light on.

“Let's eat, please get up,” he says, sitting on the bed again.

“I'm not hungry.” Why am I even responding to him? I'm sleeping mos.

“Why are you not hungry?” Stupid question!

“My tummy is full.” Do I really need to respond though?

“Okay. Can I have space to rest as well?”

He wants to sleep here? Wait, I need to get up and see his face. This is a shack, my bed is tiny and I only have one blanket.

“Huh?” I snap my brows.

The plate Aarti gave to me is on the table with slices of pizza. There's a bottle of fruit juice looking all sweet next to it. I'm not hungry but now I regret my decision.

“Shift, I also want to sleep,” he says.

Okay, deep breath Thalente!

“Ndlalifa you went to abandon me in a party and never reached out after that night. And now you're here, asking to sleep on my bed?” I ask.

“I asked Ndondo to keep you company. If it wasn't important I wouldn't have left and if it would've made any sense for me to speak to you over the phone then I would've done it.”

“You told Ndondo to keep me company? I'm not Ndondo's girlfriend Ndlalifa. I was there with you and you just left me. No explanation. Nothing.”  
Sometimes I keep going and not regard how much pain I'm feeling. Talking about this is reducing me to tears and I'm not that girl who cries over petty things. Oh, I even called myself his girlfriend.

“Thalente I'm sorry. Things aren't going too well at

home. We have this new reality to adjust into. It's bad, mostly for my father and Maqhinga.” He sounds genuinely hurt.

A knock of guilt punches my conscience. Not even once did I think of reaching out to him and find out what was happening. I was just a queen waiting to be ran after. He got me a damn job, the least I could've done was to check on him.

He rubs his nose, sniffs back and moves his eyes away from me.

“I've abused my father for twenty years.” He looks up and blows out. I reach for his hand and squeeze it.

“Hlomuka please don't. I'm sure there's a way to fix things. Don't let this break you.” I'm trying to comfort him but it looks like I don't have any talent in doing so. I'm breaking him even further, the tears he was trying to hold back drop down to his cheeks. He lifts up his T-shirt and lies back on the bed. I shouldn't have said anything.

“Ndlalifa I'm sorry,” I say and lie next to him. I don't



know what to do.

“What kind of a son fails to see his own father’s pain? I failed to see everyone’s pain and held on to assumptions and made my father’s life a living hell. I have abused that man Tholente, I don’t even know where I’m going to start mending things.”

I hate that he’s hiding his face from me. I feel so useless and selfish. I also failed to think that he might be quiet because he’s in pain.

“Please look at me Ndlalifa. I love you and I’m sorry I haven’t been able to be there for you,” I say.

He pulls down the T-shirt and wipes his teary face. Our eyes meet, he wants assurance, he’s not convinced by my words.

“I love you.” I cup his face in my hands and plant a kiss on his lips. As I pull back he holds me and initiates another kiss. His lips taste a bit salty, I smooch them, hoping to take away half of his pain.

He rolls over me and slips his arm under my neck. I feel his chest pressing on my boobs and realize that the towel has unwrapped itself and I’m naked

beneath him. My heart is on some horse race.

“Wait...the tow...” He captures my lips before I finish. His member is up and poking my thighs.

When he starts moaning inside my mouth and grabbing my boobs I instantly regret my decision of “wandering around the shacks naked.”

I've never seen anyone taking off a T-shirt so quickly. I fail to keep my hands off his chest.

Now his lips are all over my body. The front of my panty is damp, I'm getting wet with every touch. His finger slips through the lace of my panty and my eyes quickly go to the door. I don't want to find myself on Pornhub.

“Please close the door,” I say.

He groans and rolls off bed. He closes the door and pushes down his jean and briefs before getting back on bed. Now I have a naked man on top of me, his shaft keeps swelling as our bodies grind against each other.

He pulls down my panty and leaves me completely

naked. When his hand brushes over my mound my memory flashes back. It's a jungle down there. Fu€k, I always made a mental note to get rid of all the hair but my stupid left brain would always prioritize other things. It would whisper to me; "It's not like anybody is going to see your shaved pu\$\$y. Chill, girl."

"Please relax," he whispers into my ear as his hand struggle to separate my thighs.

"Do you have any condom?" I ask.

His head falls beside my neck. He releases a sharp breath that answers my question before he even opens his mouth.

"I have the cheap one," I say.

It's not even cheap, it's free. I got them from the clinic while there for my injection, the nurse insisted on giving everyone a packet of Choice condoms. I kept them in my bag because kids turn them into balloons when they get their hands on them.

"Borrow me one," he says.

“It's inside my bag,” I say.

I lie there, like a chicken waiting to be seasoned and thrown inside the oven, while he finds the condom and inserts it on his shaft.

“Thalente, I really love you. I promise you, you won't regret this. I'll never let you down.” His words sound genuine, I meet his lips for a kiss.

“I love you too,” I say as he breaks the kiss.

His hand massages around my waist. He slips one finger between my folds and chuckles behind my ear.

“So, do you welcome Hlomuka in?” he asks.

“Yes, I do,” the w#ore whispers in response.

“Thank you.” His fingers play with my clit while he suffocates me in a deep kiss.

My knees goes up. My thigh balances on his arm. I wince as he pushes his tip in.

“It's this condom,” he says.

No, it's not! My hands find his shaft and I help him push in more gently.

“MaMbatha yini? Uuuhhh!” He's groaning next to my neck. His breaths are breaking short. None of his questions make sense.

“Sthandwa sami what is this? Oh, fuck.” He's shoving himself deep inside me, his name starts to slip out of my mouth.

“Babe?” He's calling me with every thrusts. My paranoid side feels his shaft going deep and reaching my stomach.

He pulls it out. It's still so long and thick, I wasn't imagining things this thing is reaching to my stomach. I shift, a bit too far, my bed isn't very big. My hip lands on the floor and I let out a scream.

“Babe are you okay?” He jumps off the bed and kneels next to me.

My hip hurts a little bit. The dwarfism of my bed really helped, I didn't fall that hard.

“Yes, I just need help to get up,” I say, holding on to

his arm for balance. I expect him to scoop me up and put me back on bed. But not the stupid him. He pins me down on the floor and lifts my legs over his shoulders.

“This is going to kill me,” he says, rubbing his thumb on my clit and releases a sharp breath through his teeth.

He has me pinned down on the floor, I can't even move my injured hips to help him, he's having his way with me. A few furious thrusts send my body into a violent wave.

“Argh! MaMbatha you're not going anywhere. Turn around,” his pleased voice brings me back to the room. Was he watching me the whole time? How I did I look?

There's a knock at the door. He is on his knees, looking unbothered.

“Makhi, are you okay?” That's my neighbour's boyfriend's voice. I must've alarmed them with that scream I let out when falling off bed.

“Turn around,” Ndlalifa says, brushing my thigh. My brain is working on the scale of 0.1.

“Makhi!” my neighbour bangs the door.

“She's alright, ndoda.” He's lifting my arms up. People are concerned and all he's thinking about is doggstyle.

“Makhi I want you to tell me that you are okay.” My neighbor is a concerned citizen. Domestic violence is...

“She's okay, we are just having sex. That's what you wanted to hear, now go.”

WTF!

“Ndlalifa,” I whisper with a frown on my face.

I'm not even sitting properly. He pushes me down on the floor, I lie on my side, he lifts my leg up and inserts himself while on his knees.

“Babe,” I let out a moan as he pushes himself to the depths of my core.

Footsteps descend from the door. I need a new place, I'm moving out. There's no way I can ever be

able to look at these people in the eyes.

[03/14, 09:08] : Chapter 29

Qondani Sibisi

It's not everyday that a woman of your dreams slides into your Facebook direct messages and initiates a conversation. Lord knows that he emptied all his English to her. He pressed all the right buttons. It was impossible for her not to fall for the Sibisi charm.

He unlocks his phone and stares at the nude pictures she sent him the previous night. His member is bouncing up at the sight of her bare curvy body. He wraps his hand around it and gives it a few strokes while scrolling down for her video.

3pm seems to be days away. He can hardly wait to have her in his arms.

He shuts his eyes and lets his imagination take him under her skirts. His shaft is swelling as his mind



draws a picture of her lying in front of him with her legs widely opened, displaying her cookie-jar in full view.

“Zamafuze!” he groans and quickens the pace of his hand around his hard shaft. Knots break in his body as he releases and creampie his own hand.

Well, damn. He's too old for this. What is this girl doing to him? He takes a walk of shame to the bathroom and stands under the cold shower.

He doesn't earn much but he affords to live and take care of his parents and kids. Two years ago he managed to get himself a second-hand Nissan van. It takes him everywhere he wants to go and that's what cars were made for.

He has a two-bedroom house in Township and he can afford a warm meal everyday. That's life, he's comfortable and grateful. The comparison between him and his uncle's children has never bothered him. Him and Ndondo were destined for different things. He's happy that he's made it this far in life.

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It's just half an hour away from 3pm and he needs to fetch Zamafuze from town. He tried to make the house look neat and comfortable. He bought new curtains and beddings. He has hidden all his ugly food containers and took out the new cutlery his mother forced him to take.

He slides into his Adidas tracksuit and makes his way out. He was transparent with her, hopefully nothing about him is going to surprise her. They had a strong connection right away. Well, her body may have been the first thing that attracted him to her, but as they continued to chat he fell in love with her as a person. She sounded like someone who has experienced enough shit in her life who is now ready to settle down.

Recognizing her wouldn't be hard. He drives to the Engen garage where she said she was standing. His eyes land on her before he even parks his van. She's wearing a beige dress and knee-length boots. Next to her is a large suitcase and two bags. His forehead furrows, they didn't talk about large bags,

he thought this was a weekend visit.

He finds a good spot and parks his van. He takes one glance at his reflection through the mirror and climbs out.

“Zamafuze?” he says behind her.

She turns around with a frown on her face. Her eyes scan him from head to toe, then she flashes a smile.

“Qondani, right?” She puts the purse on top of the suitcase and pulls him into a hug.

“Mntakwethu. I hope I didn't keep you here for too long. You look more beautiful in person.”

She blushes and looks away for a second. He picks the suitcase and one bag, she takes the remaining ones and they head to the van.

“This is Mshini. He's not fancy but he takes me wherever I want to go. Let me put your bags in the back.”

Zamafuze gets in the front and runs her eyes around the interior. Wow! This isn't even a

downgrade. It's a straight downfall!

Qondani closes the back door and rushes to the front. He's still in awe. All this beauty belongs to him!

“You're so beautiful,” he's staring at her in complete disbelief. He watches girls like this on TV, even if he bumps into one in town he never approaches them because they're out of his league.

“So you're not even going to greet your man?” he teases, deep down he wants to taste her red-painted lips and caress her soft-looking beautiful skin.

“I will greet you Sibisi. Thoroughly and properly.” Her eyes drop down to his chest and navigates down to his pant.

He holds his breath and prays that his thudding heartbeat isn't visible through his chest. Thoroughly and properly? What is that supposed to mean? This woman mustn't come all the way from Durban to turn his life upside down.

“I can't wait,” he says, his voice kept low and steady. His moistening hands turn on the engine and grip on the steering wheel.

“I didn't trust you. I thought you were bluffing when you said you'd visit me,” he says.

“Now you trust me?” she asks.

He chuckles, his nerves are back in place.

“I trust you mntakwethu,” he says.

“I hope it stays that way. I took risk by coming here, to a man I've never met, that should prove to you that I'm not here for anything else, but for your heart.”

“I appreciate that and I promise you won't regret this.”

“Ngiyabonga Mahlase, Zibisi zikaSishaka”

There's a smile he's refusing to let out. She goes on and chants his clan names; “Bhovungana..Nsuku kaMagawula.”

He brushes and lets his smile out.

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He has brought many girls over his house but none of them were on Zamafuze's level. He has to make sure that everything is perfect. He doesn't want her to regret this.

"Are you happy?" he asks, staring at her as she scans her eyes around the house.

"What are you going to do if I'm not happy?" she asks with a grin.

"Your happiness matters to me," he says.

She exhales and looks around one more time.

"Maybe we can do some renovations."

Oh! He wasn't referring to the house itself. He was talking about the curtains, pots and all those unimportant things that women care about.

"Well, I cannot renovate this house because I'm just sheltering my head here. I'm originally from Nyandeni, that's where my father's house is. If I want a bigger house I'd definitely build it there for

my kids.”

“Oh...I see.” She's nodding her head slowly with a specific look on her face.

“We should put the bags in the bedroom,” he says.

“Right? I hope your wardrobe is big enough to take my clothes,” she says.

“You brought a lot of them,” Qondani says with a fake chuckle. What is going on here? So many bags for a weekend!

“I don't know how long I'm going to be here. I just want to get to know you better and lucky me, your house needs a woman.”

Is it? He leads the way to the bedroom and puts the suitcase on the floor. He has to take out some of his clothes because this wardrobe is not going to be enough for both of them.

Arms wrap around his waist as he fishes his clothes out of the wardrobe. He looks at her with a slight frown- how did she take her dress off so

quickly? His eyes are on her swollen breasts popping out of her bra.

“As promised, I want to greet you properly.” Her hands are running down his chest and the heat is shamefully going straight down to Sibisi.

“Ngiyaphila,” he says before she even ask and Zamafuze breaks a short chuckle.

“I didn't ask Sibisi. I will check for myself. I'm not a nurse but...” She shoves her hand beneath his track pant and weighs his manhood. He just stands there like a statue, not sure how to react to this wildness.

Zamafuze swallows hard as the underwear contents fill up his hand. She's heard about extra-large men and they are said to come from Nigeria. Ndabuko is an average-dicked man who is gifted with action. That man introduced her to many things, and among them are orgasms and squirts. Qondani seems to be a complete different case. Yes he did brag and threatened to rip her apart over the phone. But it looks like he's one of those men who think that sex is the penis going through the



vagina and nothing else.

“MaFuze let me undress and...” She shuts him with a sloppy kiss. Really? Men have been shifting our panties aside and shoving themselves in, for decades.

She pushes down his trackpant and wraps her hand around his giant.

As his breaths pick a pace, she drops down on her knees and pulls his underwear down to his ankles with his pant.

“Zamafuze this is not a movie. Ngeke ukwazi ukukhotha ubudoda bami!” (You cannot lick my manhood!)

“You will have your chance to speak Sibisi,” Zamafuze says and tenderly massages his balls.

It's long, thick and black. He's not standing still. He's uncomfortable. Zamafuze presses her tongue on the tip before licking around the head.

“Zamafuze what are you doing?” A groan follows his question. The girl pulls his whole shaft inside

her mouth. It balances back in her throat and he lets out a sharp scream; “Hhayi bo!!”

She licks his shaft, sucks the tip, massages his balls and slips her finger through the crack of his firm buttocks.

He's literally screaming his lungs out. Neighbours have to forgive because, wow.

“I can't lick your manhood, right?” Zamafuze asks with his shaft below her lips.

He's trembling.

“Khotha baby!”

A man of his word, right? She chuckles and sweeps her tongue over his balls.

This man is going to faint! He needs to be in control of his breaths. His shaft is back inside her mouth.

He feels the wave building up and his hands grab her head and bring it closer to his waist.

“It's about to rain Zamafuze!” he warns on top of his

voice.

She needs to let him go because..No! It's coming.  
She needs to let go of him before something  
disgusting happens. It's coming!

“Zamafuze it's raining!” Well, it rains right through  
her mouth. He did warn her.

He floats in a moment before opening his eyes to  
look at the damage he did.

What...?

“Zamafuze where are my...?”

“Your sperms? I swallowed them Sibisi. You taste  
great.”

She gets off the floor, pecks his cheek and finds her  
way to the bathroom.

He falls on his back on the bed and shuts his eyes.  
His legs are still trembling. What is this woman  
doing to him?

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NDONDO

I'm in this house more often now. I don't know if he tricks me or I'm the one who just loves his attention.

Maybe it's because he cooks better than me and Andiswa. When I'm here I'm a well-fed woman, in every possible way.

He walks back from his phone call and climbs on bed.

“Guess what?” Is he the new Bahle now? I don't have time for guess games. We've had enough surprises this past week. Snakho and Snalo are Ngidi's daughters and on top of that, Maqhinga slept with Snalo. It's a mess! I thought my life had turmoils but it seems like the Ngidis surpass me.

“Ngonyama is retiring,” he says.

I guess he's talking about the taxi business, that's Ngidi's taxi rank name.

“Why?” I ask.

“He says he wants to focus on his family. He's letting go of the chairman position and leaving Ndlalifa in charge of all operations.”

That's a great thing. The taxi war was getting boring and it could've ended with one of them dead.

“You don't look happy for him,” I say.

“I'm happy. He's been in the industry for too long and he deserves a break. But honestly, I'm scared. This means we are on our own,” he says.

“You'll be fine sthandwa sami. You've been there for a couple of years and Ndlalifa will be there if you need anything,” I say.

He scratches the side of his face. What is it now? I narrow my eye at him.

“Talk,” I say.

“Things are about to go back to normal. Full taxi operations. There's something I need to discuss with Ndlalifa and Maqhinga urgently.”

Urgh, I should've known!

“How long will you be gone?” I ask.

“Thirty minutes. I promise,” he says and lowers his head to me and kisses my lips.

He picks up his jean from the floor and puts it on. Is it possible to crave for a man's presence during the pregnancy? I'm holding back tears, I don't want him to leave but I can't break down because that would be very childish of me.

“Don't fall asleep. Remember you owe me One,” he says.

I force a smile and watch as he slips in his T-shirt and grabs his phone from the bedside pedestal.

“I love you Hlasekazi.” He sucks my lower lip and playfully pokes my cheek before dashing to the door.

Now it's just me and the remaining smell of his cologne. If I was in my house I'd be on cuddled on the couch with Andiswa and watching her Korean series.

Oh snap! I haven't spoken to my problematic

brother in a while. With Bahle and Andiswa I'm always trying to correct wrong and right. In a nuts hell, I'm always trying to control them. But Qondani is fully grown, almost my age, with him I let my hair down and get crazy with him.

His phone rings unanswered. I try for the second time and he answers just as I'm about to give up.

“Brother,” I say.

Heavy breaths!

I hear him groaning and my heart starts racing.

“Qondani are you okay?” I ask.

Silence...

“Qondani?” -me.

A lady screams out his name. My forehead grows into a frown. What the hell is going on here?

“Ulibras ha kamnandi is ende mntakwethu...” WTF!

I end the call quickly and throw the phone away.

What the hell!

But why am I surprised? It's just like Qondani to

answer calls during sex.

I need a glass of warm milk. I can't believe my brother has traumatized me like this. I put on Ndabuko's gown, slide into my sleepers and make my way out of the bedroom.

I know Ndabuko won't take thirty minutes, there's a lot going on, Maqhinga is not in a good space, so him and Ndlalifa are investing a lot of time in making sure that he's okay. This urgent meeting may escalate into him having a few drinks with Maqhinga and coming back around midnight.

My heart is always heavy when I'm walking past Nhlanzeko's bedroom. I don't know why the door is always closed. Ndabuko doesn't care to turn the lights on, even for a few minutes.

I stop a few feet away from it. I know where the keys are and I have this urge to walk inside, just to turn the light on for a few minutes. I know that Ndabuko would lose his mind if he found me doing



this.

I unlock the door and push it. I reach up the wall and turn on the light. My heart eases as his room brightens up. His picture is staring at me from the wall. There's a lot of dust lying on it. I look around and my eyes land on a toilet paper roll. I roll a few sheets, pull down the picture frame and wipe it.

I wish Ndabuko can allow cleaners to come here and tidy up as well. There's dust all over the surfaces. Unfortunately I cannot do much about it. I put his picture back in its place and walk to his wardrobe.

The leather jacket is at the front, in a green hanger. I can't help a smile stretching from my face. This man had no style or whatsoever. Where did he buy this jacket and why did he love it so much?

There's a mirror on the wall but I can only see a shadow of myself behind that dust.

I try the jacket on, the sleeves are too big but I can wear it. I push my hands inside the pockets and try to peek at my reflection on the mirror.

Oh, there's a piece of paper. I take it out and curiously unfold it.

Eeeer! Is this how he wrote? He wrote his name like a 12 year old. Or maybe he wrote this when he was 12. It's a piece of those brownish jotter exercise books.

I check the other side and there are two drawn human figures with a soccer ball between them. Next to each figure is a name; Ndabuko and Nhlanzeko. So this man had a horrible handwriting, he couldn't draw like other boys and he loved ugly leather jackets? I laugh and shake my head. Love is a strange thing.

“Ndondo,” the voice comes from the door.

I jump up in fear. He's here? I thought he'd be with Maqhingana and Ndlalifa for a while. Gosh! I'm wearing Nhlanzeko's jacket. What am I even doing

here?

He walks in. When his brother is involved Ndabuko becomes a different person. It's a scary thing to watch. My heart is beating hard against my chest. My mouth has turned dry instantly.

“What are you doing here?” His cold eyes are fixed on me.

“I was..I thought..Ndabuko it's not what you think. I was just curious and I came here.”

“Curiosity got you in this thing?” He's asking about the jacket. He's disgusted!

I take it off quickly and hurry to the wardrobe to put it back. I really didn't mean to spoil our night. I have no intentions to fuel whatever hatred there's between him and his dead brother.

He's glaring at me as I shamefully walk back to him.

His eyes shift to something on the floor. The piece of paper!

“I found it in the pockets. I swear I didn't...”

“Pick it up!”

I don't need him to tell me twice. I bend down and pick it up. He grabs it from my hands and unfolds it.

“What is this?” Gosh, I refuse to think that he thinks I'm writing love letters to his brother in heaven!

“I don't know,” I say.

He turns the paper back and stares at the ugly drawings.

Is he going to stare at it for the whole hour? In grade 3 I drew better people than his brother.

He walks to the bed and sinks down on it. It's dirty! His people don't change this bed.

“I don't remember him playing soccer, ever,” he says.

Now we are talking?

“Maybe he wanted to but never got a chance. First-born responsibilities,” I say, tilting my head to the side.

He doesn't care. I don't think he even heard me. His

whole attention is on a piece of paper.

“He drew us on a piece of paper, playing soccer?!” It sounds like he's trying to let this sink in his head.

He lifts his eyes to me. Oh no, why is he like this now? Where are the flames of anger?

“There's a heart at the bottom,” he says.

Oh, I didn't see it.

Wait, is he shedding tears?

[03/14, 09:08] : Chapter 30

Maqhinga

He honestly didn't want to do this. But his father and Ndlalifa insisted, and he also needs this cleansing thing done, maybe it'll ease the guilt. But going to where his mother was born, to that aunt who hates grounds he walks on, is stressful. He tried to negotiate with his father, he was going to book into a hotel somewhere around Pietermaritzburg and only go there for the rituals.

But Ngidi said it was important that he went there and spent the night in the presence of his maternal ancestors.

There's a car hoot outside his house. He looks around the bedroom to see if he is not leaving anything behind. He'll be gone for two days only, so there's no need for him to drag big bags.

“Maqhinga!” That's his father yelling. He hurriedly opens the fridge and takes out a bottle of water and heads out.

It's only him and Snalo going to Emkhambathini; the sinful children. So he is not surprised when he finds her sitting in the backseat with her laptop. If it's not a sad movie with someone getting killed in the end, it's something with vampires or aliens. She's into heart-wrecking movies.

They haven't talked since the party night. Their relationship is cold and awkward.

“Sure,” he says, glancing at her once and positioning himself on the seat at the front.

“You look good, stranger,” Snalo says.

Ngidi clears his throat and glances back at her. She didn't move in with him but she picks up whenever he calls.

“What?” Snalo asks with her eyes widened. She does notice Maqhinga but she's trying hard to forget what they did and his words. It's very wrong of her to wish things were different. This is her brother.

“Are we going to listen to those people yelling at each other the whole journey?” Ngidi asks.

“Oh, the movie? I'll plug in the headsets,” she says and pulls her purse to search for her headsets.

Ngidi sighs and starts the car. He wants a normal relationship with both of them. It's been only a week and he already knows about Snakho's ex-boyfriends and celebrity crushes. It was very awkward sitting in a gown he was forced into wearing, with a bowl of popcorn on his lap and *The Real Housewives Of What-What* playing on the screen. Ndlalifa made it

clear that he was wearing no gowns and definitely not watching women he doesn't know living their lives. But Ngidi didn't have a choice, Snakho can talk the whole day, he wasn't going to hear the end of it. That's how it's like having a daughter, strange but fun.

But Snalo isn't anything close to that. She pops in randomly, stays on her laptop with her movies or just stare at everyone quietly. Phumzile said it's how she is but Ngidi still can't help, but worry. Magcina had moments like hers, where she'd just keep to herself. And that didn't end well, she was locking the pain inside her.

“Your mother loved nature. I remember having picnics in the bushes,” Ngidi says with a chuckle as they drive past the forest.

“I'm not interested in your romantic stories Baba. Have you heard anything from Ndlalifa?” Maqhinga says. Clearly nobody wants him to know anything about his mother, why should he listen to their love



stories? He's done with this "Magcina" topic.

"He drove past my house before going to the rank. Is he seeing someone?" Ngidi asks. They may not have a great relationship but he knows his son. Wearing an ironed shirt is not something he'd do randomly, unless if he's forced by someone or trying to charm. Lately he looks way too fresh, and he always has those random calls that take him far from everyone.

"Yes. Are you seeing someone? Anyone who is a housekeeper?" Maqhinganga asks. He knows that he's annoying, his lip is curved into a smile as he stares at his father.

Ngidi shoots a dead look at him and turns his eyes to focus on the road.

"You have to speak up son. You need guidance and mentorship, especially if it's someone who is younger than you."

Ngidi hates it when he calls him "son" but he does it anyway because he's Maqhinganga and he's the last-born. Oh, scratch that, he's no longer the last-born

in the family.

“How about I mentor you on how to mind your damn business? I'm not seeing anyone, even if I do, it's not something I'd discuss with you.”

“Then you won't mind hiring a new housekeeper and sending the one in your house to mine.” He's pushing it. It's too obvious that his father and that girl have something going on.

“I gave you a life. I'm not giving you a housekeeper. Fasten your seatbelt, this is not your taxi.”

Maqhinga cracks into laughter. He doesn't have a problem with his father smashing here and there, something has to strain the Ngonyama in him and what is better than sex? Unfortunately Ndlalifa doesn't share the same sentiments, his father needs to find someone his age. One of these days he's going to move in with his father and put an end to the madness going on in that house.

--

Khosi has done a lot to improve their home. By the time Snakho and Snalo started working she had

already renovated the four-room house, extended the kitchen, changed the doors and windows into aluminium and added two bedrooms. Snakho helped her pay off the furniture debt and the three of them rebuilt the two round houses.

It's a bittersweet moment for Maqhinga to finally set his foot on these premises. Legally, he's still a Nsele too.

Phumzile is standing on the veranda with a smile on her face. She's obviously happy to see Snalo and her brother-in-law. Maqhinga stands behind them as they exchange greetings. She's not looking at his direction, it stabs through his heart but he's going to get used to it. He doesn't remember any woman showing him affection, except the infatuated young girls who still confuse love with fun.

“Maqhinga,” she acknowledges him, her eyes are not on him. It's just formalities.

“Hey,” he says, brushing his neck. Booking into a hotel was a better idea. This is going to be awkward.

“You will use that rondavel with your father. You can go and leave the bags inside,” she says, pointing at the one below the main house.

He takes his bag and his father's and heads to the pointed rondavel. If it has a bed he's not going to come out of it until the goat is slaughtered and he's called to do whatever he's expected to do.

The floor is maroon and polished. It still has the paraffin smell and looks slippery. The bed will be big enough for him and his father. Hopefully they won't have their usual problems of sharing a bed.

He places the bags on bed and lies back on the pillows. He'll keep himself busy on his phone while they are having their little family bonding time.

Well, it doesn't seem so.

“Is it safe to come in?” That's Snalo at the door. She has changed into shorts and sandals. Her dreadlocks are let loose over her shoulders. Her

thighs are...okay, no!

No it's not safe for her to come in because...wow.

“Yes,” Maqhinga croaks out.

Hopefully he'll be able to shut out that picture of her. If it was up to him he'd cut ties with her and never see her again. But who is he kidding? They're family and Ngidi is obsessed with them uniting as a family more than ever. He even retired to focus on his family.

Lord! She's climbing on bed.

He wants to tell her to sit far from him. His skin gets goosebumps as her knee pokes his leg.

“You've been scarce,” she says.

“I've been busy.” His eyes are not on her. Why did Ngidi let her come to him?

“I thought maybe you were avoiding me because of what happened that day. I know it's embarrassing, that's why we are here to appease and cleanse, but we didn't know we were siblings back then. And honestly, I don't regret anything.”

His mouth drops open. He shifts his eyes to her and they stare at each other.

“I just have one question. Please be honest,” Snalo says.

He's sweating bullets. They shouldn't be in this position on bed! It triggers back memories he doesn't want.

“I will try,” he says and draws a breath.

“You said you loved me. Did you mean it at that time?”

She can ask him anything, but not this! He wishes to un-say those words more than he'd like to un-fu€k her.

“Did you lie?” she asks.

He cannot answer this...

“Maqhingá,” Snalo.

“I didn't lie...I don't know. I said what I felt and...” He shuts his eyes and sighs heavily.

“Snalo I really felt like we had a connection. We did

have it but I guess it was just blood connecting. I'm heartbroken that I did that to you as my sister and I'm sad that the first girl I felt connected to happened to be my sister. I struggle to connect with women- something always drives me or them away. And I'm almost 30.”

“There's no timeframe to fall in love. I believe that you'll be fine.”

“What about you?” He shifts up on the pillow and stares at her.

“I will be fine the day I know that you, Snakho and Khosi are settled and happy. Well, Ndlalifa is a grown man and I think he has everything figured out. Dad is strong, I doubt he's called Ngonyama for nothing. Mam'Phummy has closure now, she'll survive.”

Maqhinga is trying to study her face, but this one is always the same. You cannot tell what's going on in her head, you just have to believe what she tells you.

“You look calm. I hope you have dismissed those thoughts you once had,” he says with a narrow look

fixed on her.

“They come and go. One day I want to do it, I have a purpose in this life thing and I'm happy. And the next day I feel incomplete, like the world has shut down on me and there's no light,” she says.

“I feel like you have issues that you refuse to confront. I've been there, trying to recall my childhood and feeling like there's a world that's being kept from me. A huge part of me was missing. But Ngidi would see right through me and make sure that I was okay. He's a good man, a good father and he can be your best friend if you allow him to. Yes, sometimes he shouts and threatens to kill us because he grew up in the taxi rank and he's sleeping with young girls. Maybe they overwork Hlomuka down there.”

Giggles!

“Young girls?” Snalo asks, her eyes widely opened.

“You have met the housekeeper who wears a skimpy dress?”

“Nooo! Shut the front door!” Her hands are over her



mouth. What the fu€k is she hearing? Ngidi!

“I once saw cufflinks in his bedroom. I think that's when I started drinking vodka without dash,” Maqhinga says.

Laughter rises!

A knock disturbs their gossip session. It's Phumzile; her eyes are on Snalo.

“Go and make tea for the guests,” she instructs.

Snalo secretly rolls her eyes before jumping off the bed. Phumzile remains by the door until Snalo disappears.

Maqhinga is lying on the same position with his hand on the forehead.

A heavy sigh!

Phumzile walks in and lowers herself on the bed, just below his feet.

This is her nephew! Not Msawenkosi. She went to his grave earlier and it's not opened. He is dead.

“I don't hate you,” she says.

Is he supposed to say something?

“Your father tells me that you're a good singer. You took after your mother,” she says and turns her head to him.

She can do this!

Maqhinga releases a heavy breath.

“What did I do to you?” he asks.

“Nothing. I guess I've been having a hard time accepting that you look this way.” Her hand fishes something out of her jersey's pocket.

It's a photo.

She passes it to him. His eyes run over it and a frown grows on his face.

“I've never dressed up like this,” he says, confused and shocked. This person on this picture is insulting his good looks. What the hell?!

“That's not you. It's Msawenkosi, your late uncle,” she says.

His face drops. This explains why she fainted. He is a splitting image of this man.

Silence...

Phumzile clears her throat. She shouldn't be doing this but it's the only way she can give this boy closure. And she needs to talk about this to someone. Maybe it will offload something from his shoulders.

“That's Nomkhosi's father,” she says.

Maqhingana frowns. His ears may have played tricks on him.

“You said he was my uncle, which means he was your brother,” he says.

Heavy sigh!

“He was my brother and he was Nomkhosi's father.”

Jesus are you close? WTF!

“Mamkhulu! You dated your brother?” His eyes are about to drop out.

“Date???” Her brows are snapped. She's disgusted.

Owkaaay! Maqhinga frowns.

“I mean, how did Khosi happen? You must've...” No! He stops and jumps off bed. His mouth is hanging opened. That expression on his aunt's face says something else!

“Is that the real reason why you fainted when you saw me for the first time? Does Khosi know about this?”

“Sit down Maqhinga.”

Fu€k!!!

“He was the eldest, so when our parents died he became the breadwinner. I don't know who he started with between Magcina and I. I only found out that he was doing the same to her after she ran away from home. It escalated to...” She's said enough. This is a child, not her therapist.

Maqhinga is scratching his head and if he keeps going on like this he's going to peel his skin off. But who does that to his sisters on purpose? He was supposed to protect them.

“I had a hard time accepting that I was Nomkhosi’s mother. I resented her, for quite some time.” She sounds regretful. It must've been hard.

“I understand. It must've been hard,” Maqhinga says, nodding his head.

“You were two years old when she ran away, right?” Phumzile asks.

Maqhinga frowns...

“My mother? Yes.”

“Do you understand? On her case.”

It clicks. His hands start to tremble, he brushes them on his knees. Is this why his father refused to tell him anything about his mother? Is this why there's no picture of him and his mother?

“So she left because of me?” he asks, looking at Phumzile with bloodshot eyes.

“No. She left because of Msawenkosi. You had nothing to do with it. She had a baggage of pain that she wanted to forget and leave behind, but your

looks triggered back everything.”

He shakes his head. She's lying to him! His mother hated him. His guts were right all this time- something about their relationship was off.

“My father lied to me. I'm the one who cost Ndlalifa his mother. I broke his family.”

“Bhekizitha protected you. The same way I've been trying to protect Nomkhosi my whole life.”

He calms down and lowers himself on the bed. He needs a glass of water, or something strong.

“What did you tell her about her paternity?” he asks.

“That her father was a Zimbabwean man who worked in a construction site and went back to his country.”

“Mamkhulu that's not fair!” he exclaims.

“It's better that way,” she says.

Whooh! Someone should've told him to bring booze, weed and nyaope. This is way above him!

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NDONDO

I got a call from home- Nyandeni. Bab'Maqhawe is struggling to get hold of Qondani. He was supposed to send money for the kids. It's the end of the month, they need money for school transport money, pocket money and school lunch. This is the first time Qondani has failed to fulfil his duties and Bab'Maqhawe is worried sick.

He blue-ticked me on WhatsApp. I call him using Andiswa's phone and he answers.

“Why are you ignoring me? Baba has been trying to call and you're not answering your phone.”

“Ummm...yeah. The phone was not with me.” This is a blatant lie. What's up with him these days? If he's not answering calls during sex, he's completely ignoring them.

“It's month-end and you have three kids Qondani. Are you trying to send Baba to an early grave?” I ask.

“I..I..I'm going to call him back,” he says.

Why is he stuttering? For his own good, he better not play with that man's sanity. Things like this can land him in the hospital. I cannot have that, we just reconciled.

“What's going on Qondani?” I ask.

“Eish Ndondo! Things are tight. I had to use all the money to cover some things. But I will try to get the money and send it home,” he says.

“And when exactly are you going to see your kids? It's month-end, everyone has been paid, but you already have used all the money to cover things that are more important than your children.”

There's a woman's voice in the background.

“I have to go. Please don't worry, I'll make a plan.”

The call is dropped!

Mameshane! If it's a woman that driving him this crazy and milking his money I swear I'm going to



walk with my own feet to Esikhawini and drag her out.

I can't have Bab'Maqhawe stressed out. He's not young and little things like these can send his BP to the sky. I send Instant Money, covering their grocery and Qondani's kids' needs. He better get his shit together because I'm not going to support his kids while he's still alive.

[03/14, 09:09] : Chapter 31

Thalente

Today was definitely the worse day of my life. Raj came to the canteen with his mother, as the day went on more family members came. I'm not sure when I turned into their maid, all I remember is them throwing instructions at me.

“Talent wash this glass...Talent get my sandals from the car..Can you pass that to me Mehek?”

I swear I heard one of them calling me Mehek, or

was it in my head? I have to take this to Ndlalifa before he fetches one of them from the hospital and me from the prison cell.

I clutch my bag under arm and climb out of the car.

“Have a great afternoon ndodakazi,” says the driver.

I left my manners at the canteen! I'm embarrassed. He must be thinking that I'm a brat.

“Drive safely, sir. Thank you very much for the ride.” I plaster a fake smile on my face.

He nods and returns a genuine one.

I cross the road and head towards my block. Oh, there's a braai smell filling my lungs and dropping down my saliva. I thought we were all broke here in the shacks. I mean, we paid rent, sent money home and did groceries.

Music? Are these people partying on a random Thursday? I guess I'm the only broke one. I sent half of my salary home and did my usual vegetable

grocery, which I hardly cook.

I see the Nike cap before I see his face. He's taller than anyone in that crowd. My forehead furrows, because why is he here and doing braai with my neighbours whom I don't even know?

They are in front of my shack, laughing and over-talking one another.

It's a maskandi song that's about to send me to the earocean- an ear doctor.

The radio is so freakin loud and they're just few feet away from my door that's miraculously opened.

I think everyone gets intimidated by a large number of men. I try to walk past them quiet as a cat but one idiot sees me and nudges Ndlalifa with his elbow. I get a peek of the beer bottles lying on top of the wooden table as Ndlalifa shifts and turns to my direction.

“Yesss! Imanzi yami, madoda!” Father God, he's

screaming! What's wrong with him? And why is his shirt unbuttoned? Literally, his whole chest is out!

He walks to me. He's smiling..his eyes..no, this man! It's Thursday for crying out loud and he decided to come here to drink and throw a mother of all braais for my neighbours!

“Sbutubutu sami,” he says, that drunk smile still on his face.

Okay, I need to calm down!

“Woza uqabule indoda yakho,” he says. (Come and kiss your man.)

His friends are watching, it's a circus. He wraps his arm around my waist and leans close to me. SAB-South African Brewery fans my face. How much did he drink?

“Let's go inside,” I say in embarrassment and pull his arm.

I ask God for many things but a boyfriend who drinks mid-week is not one of them.

He doesn't let go of my waist. I'm trying my best to keep calm. I manage to throw my bag over the basket.

“Please kiss me,” he's lowering his face down on me.

Fake smile Thalente, fake smile!

“Let me close the door first, your friends are watching everything,” I say.

He slowly removes his arm from my waist and I charge towards the door and close.

Yebo yes!!!

“Is this Room 8? Men's hostel? Ndlalifa what's wrong with you?” My voice is kept low but it's sharp enough. I don't want to sound like a crazy woman who shouts at her boyfriend.

“Manje uyathetha yini?” (Are you shouting) He's smiling and attempting to pull me into his arms.

“Ndlalifa I'm not playing with you?” He better check my face carefully. My nose don't form sweat for

nothing!

“Uyathetha bo nawe! Look hey, I want...” He burps and swallows. Lord!

He sinks on the bed, lies on his back and lifts his feet on the bed with his shoes on.

“I want you to be mine. Like mine-mine. I want us to have beautiful kids together. Did anyone tell you how beautiful you look today?”

I don't answer because he's drunk. Drunk people don't use their brains, so whatever they say doesn't matter.

“They are jealous my love. You're beautiful, your eyes are beautiful, you have nice tits and a huge reverse system.”

Reverse system? What's that?

“Come here, I just want to spank it. Argh! Thalente, your man loves you.” His eyelids are shutting. My breath is held up- please sleep!

“Come here,” he says weakly. His arm is pulled out for me. If I want to freshen up and clean this shack

in peace, holding his hand will be my solution.

“Sleep babe,” I try to sound nice and convincing. I'm brushing his arm and looking into his almost-shut eyes.

“These people bangijwayela amasimba,” he mumbles.

And then???

“Yeyi mina angibhongelwa yinja engingayifuyile! Angithi bazothi besuka bethi ngiluhlaza?”

Oh no! He's lifting his head up. I can't have him waking up. It sounds like his friends have scattered outside.

“Yes babe, we'll beat them,” I say. I have no fuckin' clue why we are suddenly swearing and threatening people but I have to choose my words wisely. I don't want him jumping up and doing crazy things.

Alcohol! Pheeww.

“Kiss me then,” he says.

Sigh!

I lower my head and plant a kiss on his lips.

“I love you,” he says.

He's drunk and shit, but my heart still melts as he looks into my eyes weakly.

“I love you too Hlomuka. Sleep now,” I say.

“Okay, please wake me up when it's time for us to go,” he says.

Go where???

“Okay love,” I say.

He closes his eyes. I hear a soft snore. God is good all the time!

This is the second time he sleeps here. It's very humble of him to leave his comfy bed for my Noah's boat, but I don't want him to get used to it. It took me days to be able to face my neighbours after that eventful night. I don't want to be that girl who's always fu£king and screaming at night with her boyfriend. I need to keep the crumps of my dignity.



I freshen up and put on my tracksuit. He's drunk, I'm not taking any risks. That was the last time I bothered my neighbours with sexual sounds.

His long legs are spread on the bed. I use Aarti's bunny-chow energy and push him to one side.

He feels it when I sleep next to him and throws his arm around me. Khethile khethile!

--

I have no idea what time it is. I'm woken up by strong hands shaking me.

"Thalente we are being flooded," he says in panic.

I force my eyes to open. He's on his feet, looking sober and shit scared. It's raining outside, there are a few rain drops coming through the rusty roof. It's really not that deep, he's probably hung-over.

"Sleep, I will put a basin under the hole spots," I say, crawling off the bed.

And now who died? Why are his eyes bulging out like this? He needs to move aside so that I can

prevent the rain drops from wetting my floor.

“Thalente this thing is going to collapse on us,” he says.

Here we go, rich people and their fancy phobias! Only a few tears of Maria and all of a sudden the shack is going to collapse on us. Really?

“Nothing is collapsing here. Get back on bed,” I say.

I pull the basin and search for direct spots where the roof holes are. Oh, there's another one on the table. A lunchtin will do.

I push a rug behind the door to prevent water from coming in through it.

Gosh, was he staring at me like that this whole time?

“Ndlalifa nothing is going to happen,” I tell him. He looks really scared, I think he watches too much TV-collapsing shacks and all. Or he reads Daily Sun.

“I'm not sleeping here,” he says.

Nobody invited him to come and sleep here in the

first place.

“Okay, goodbye then,” I say.

He grabs my arm just as I'm about to climb on the bed.

“You're not sleeping here Thalente. Take your bag!”

“Ndlalifa don't try me!”

And that look? Why does it look like I'm “barking at him whereas I'm not his dog”?

“Thalente I'm hungry, I want meat. I'm horny and I need a drink. Please don't annoy me, it's only 00:30am. Pack your bag, I'm not leaving you here to die.”

I know that he's worried and his request comes from a good place. He grew up in double-storeys, surrounded by maids and money lying on bathroom floors. He's not used to this life and he's watched the worst on the news in his 16inch TV. But I don't like to be spoken to in this manner. I'm not his child and I didn't ask him to drink.

I pack everything I'm going to wear tomorrow at work. He's standing by the door so that he can run out and leave me to die on my own, just in case something happens.

Men!

I think he's the only person who can park his car in a distance, isolated, next to the road, and still find it in one piece.

I'm not sure if he's talking to me but I'm definitely not talking to him. We drive all the way to his house in silence.

--

It's midnight, normal people are asleep, but not him. He's defrosting a tray of steak and gulping down a can of beer.

“Don't you want to sleep?” he asks.

I'm sitting on the chair, watching him with my bag on the lap.

I don't say anything. He's standing by the stove, looking calmer than earlier.

“Did I do anything wrong?” he asks.

His memory is very short, I must say.

“If it's about going to your house I apologize. I had a terrible day and just needed to be somewhere warm. I respect your space, I guess it was just a moment of anger and stupidity,” he says.

“Is it okay if I go to sleep? I'm working tomorrow,” I ask.

“Of course, I will join you in a minute. Please take the tracksuits off. I want my cookie ready,” he says with a stupid grin on his face.

I just shake my head and leave.

This is not the boyfriend I spilled my bean curry and phuthu for.

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I slept in my tracksuits. I expected a man next to me when I wake up, but I'm struck by an empty side.

I jump off the bed and search for my bag. 06:37!!

My gosh, I need to move. Aarti will have me with her bunny-chow if I arrive late at work.

I dash to the bathroom with my bag in hand. It smells like him, I guess he bathed and disappeared somewhere, probably to drink again.

I don't know what's happening, time is just flying. It's already 07:06, this is a disaster!

“Ndlalifa!” I yell on my way to the door while trying to tie my afro.

No response.

He needs to crawl out of whatever hole and drive me to work.

“Ndlalifa!”

Wait..he cannot do this to me! It's impossible that he left for the rank and left me on bed.

My foot is angrily stomping on the floor as his phone rings.

“Sthandwa sami,” he answers.

“Where are you Ndlalifa? I need to go to work?” I ask.

“Oh shit!”

No no, he mustn't give me that!

“Where are you?” I ask firmly.

“I'm in Tongaat sthandwa sami. Look, I will send someone to come and take you to work.”

“And when will that be? I'm already late.”

“Fifteen minutes.”

Whaaat? I don't have fifteen minutes, Aarti will have my breasts for breakfast.

“I'm sorry, I forgot that it's Frid...”

I end the call!

Do they even have taxis in this place? I can't believe Ndlalifa is doing this to me.

I recite a small prayer and send Aarti a text. I have a stomach bug and I won't make it to work. I'm a liar- all thanks to Ndlalifa and his disconnected beard.

I'm angry. I hate him and I hate being in his house. But his food is delicious. I serve myself a large piece of his roasted steak, two bread rolls and fruit juice. After eating I go back to the couch and continue being angry.

It sounds like there's a car pulling up outside. I guess it's the one he sent, I expected it twenty minutes ago.

I thought I'll hear a knock, but no, the main door just shifts open and his scary father walks in. He's the same man I saw in town when I first came to Durban, threatening to kill a taxi driver, or was it another taxi owner, he had an axe in his hand and I could see the devil in him through his eyes.

I'm on my feet, eyes all popped out and the steak I had earlier turning in my stomach.

He has a protruding belly, huge beard and sharp, threatening eyes. He is in a crispy white shirt, but as clean and rich as he is this man still belongs to the



taxi rank, his sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, revealing the expensive wristwatch and goat-skin bangles. You can tell from a distance that this man has taken lives and if you annoy him you'll also meet your maker.

“Maqhinga sent me here. Are you ready?” he asks. It doesn't look like he's pleased about this.

Maqhinga is the stupid young brother. I bet he's the one Ndlalifa sent to take me to work and he decided to use his damaged left brain and send his father instead.

“No...yes...ummm..Sir, I have sent my boss a text, letting her know that I'm sick and I won't be at work today.”

He frowns. I'm about to wet my panty!

“What's wrong?” His hand is fishing out something from his pocket. A gun? No, it's a cellphone. He's dialing, the scary frown is still on his face.

He is calling someone, I guess my response isn't really that important, the call is.

“Yeyi wena! You left a sick girl in your house and went to Tongaat to fight with pathetic people?”

He went to fight? J es us Christ!

“You have twenty minutes...I don't care..Ndlalifa! Twenty minutes!” He drops the call.

Now he's angry and I'm a witness of it. I think I'll need therapy, this is such a traumatic situation to experience.

“You see what happens when you fall for an idiot. Get up, I'll take you to the doctor and your idiot will fetch you.”

It gets complicated! Why is he acting kind? He hasn't even asked for my name or interrogated me about being in his son's house. I was ready to defend myself from being after his son's money.

“Sir, I'm not really sick. I just made an excuse because I was going to be very late.”

His face goes “huh.” I know I'm a bad employee but I'd rather be absent than to have Aarti telling anyone who's willing to listen that I came to work late.

“So both of you and your boyfriend are liars who decide when they want to work and when they want to attack people?” he asks.

This is no longer about me. I'm Ndlalifa's Jesus Christ, I'm being crucified for his sins.

“I'm not sure what you're talking about. I don't attack people and I lied because I know how my boss treats me. It was better this way.”

He's staring at me. My heart is about to jump out of my throat.

“Do you have a father?” he asks.

Deep breath Thalente!

“No,” I say.

“Your mother? Any elder?”

“I do have a mother. She's home,” I say.

“Does she know about this? What are you and Ndlalifa doing?” he asks.

This is one hard question. Ndlalifa should've been here to answer it. I know that we are seeing each

other but this man wants a concrete answer, not that shit.

“I’m a single father, if anything happens I won’t be able to answer your mother. My door will be shut,” he says.

He’s talking about the pregnancy. I can’t believe he’s this worried over a 35 year old man. Yes if I fall pregnant my mother won’t deal with Ndlalifa, she’ll come for the parent, but he needs to relax.

He exhales deeply and pushes his phone back inside his pocket.

“Please lock the doors,” he says and turns to leave.

I’m so relieved to see his back. I follow after him, silently thanking God and my ancestors.

“Go well, Sir,” I say behind the door.

He nods his head and leaves. I lock the door and release a sigh of relief.

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There’s a car pulling up outside. I have changed back into my tracksuits, I’m pacing around the

kitchen while waiting for the rice to cook. It's almost 12pm and this man left before I even woke up.

“Thalente!”

I don't know which door he used to walk in. I had everything planned out, I wanted him to knock for hours.

I hate myself for checking if he's not hurt anywhere. Why do I care?

“I'm so sorry my love. I completely forgot that it's Friday today. I drove past the canteen and told Aarti it's my fault that you couldn't come to work.”

Whaaat?

“I already told her that I'm sick. Geez Ndlalifa, I'll have that Indian woman on my back the whole day on Monday. I cannot deal with her ridiculousness and her thirsty husband.” I throw the dishcloth on the counter and storm out of the kitchen.

He has ruined everything. I was going to handle Aarti on my own, but now he has painted me as a liar to her.

Footsteps!

A hand grabs my arm and turns me around.

He looks horn-mad.

“What is Raj doing?” he asks.

Oh, that!

“Don't grab me like this. He talks dirty to me and makes me uncomfortable.”

“Why am I only finding out about this today Thalente?” Seriously? He has the nerve to yell at me!

“Let go of my arm Ndlalifa,” I say firmly.

He releases a sharp breath and steps back. I walk on to the bedroom while he turns back to the kitchen.

I stand in the middle of the bedroom contemplating whether to sleep or pack my tiny bag and ask him to take me back to Cannelands.

He walks in before I can make my decision. He bends down and unties the laces of his shoes next

to the bed.

“I hate what you're doing to me Thacente. I don't like it one bit. That motherfu€ker could've raped you and you wouldn't have told me because I don't mean shit to you. As little as I may be to you, I don't want to lose you. Not in that way.” He lies on the bed and puts a pillow over his face.

I'm grounded on the same spot, confused as hell. How did his thoughts escalate so fast?

“I will get him, uzowukhomba umuzi onotshwala.” (He'll know what I'm made of.) He clicks his tongue and signals for me to get on bed. I have things to yell at him about, but right now is not the time. I get my huge reverse system on the bed.

He pulls my head to his chest and plants a kiss on my forehead.

“Nobody is going to touch you without consent MaMbatha. I swear! Not even me.”

<https://visionarywritings.com/author/11881>

[03/14, 09:09] : Chapter 32

NDONDO

My pregnancy has been smooth the last two months. I did have sicknesses here and there, but it was nothing like in the books. I ate almost everything, didn't have crazy cravings until the night I decided to have ice-cubes. Wow! I've never tasted anything like ice-cubes in my life. There's a taste they give when you chew them, it's out of this world. I wish Ndabuko could understand and stop biting my head off everytime I take out the ice-cube tray.

“Taste,” I said one day, giving him one delicious ice-cube and he just looked at me like I had lost all my marbles. In his mind they make the baby cold.

To keep peace in the relationship I steal them when he's out of sight.

He lifts his head as I walk in the bedroom and his eyes are stripping my stomach that's full of ices



open.

“What?” I ask, guiltily.

“Why can't you crave for normal things like other pregnant women? Ices, really Ndondo? Do we have to fight about this everyday? You're giving the baby pneumonia!”

“I don't decide what I want to eat, the baby does.” I crawl on the bed and rest my stubborn head on his arm.

“Why did I fall in love with you?” he teases, poking my cheek with his finger.

“You didn't have a choice, it was discussed in the ancestral world and approved in heavens.”

“Yeah, Nhlanzeko made sure of it.”

This is an intense joke. He doesn't mention Nhlanzeko's name randomly and so calm. I think my silence speaks volume- what has changed?

“I went to his room after the day you found a piece of drawing in his jacket. There was more; my pictures, letters and old school reports.” He

releases a deep breath and holds my hand tightly.

“There are a lot of things I didn't know about him. So many sacrifices he made for me. When I was 10, he was 16, we were both young but he made it his responsibility to “hustle” and give my father money to transfer me to a better school. Nhlanzeko never shared a desk with a white child, I did. He never carried a cheese sandwich, yoghurt and 100% fruit juice to school, I did. He never went to university, I did. He never had a girlfriend that he loved..I did.”

I don't know if I should jump in and tell him not to feel bad. His brother had a big heart..well, to those he loved. None of the things he's mentioning were his fault, he was just a child, and whatever Nhlanzeko did for him was out of the goodness of his heart.

“He's only asking for one thing Ndondo, a child! A child that he didn't make, because Ndabuko gets to do everything. And I will raise it for him, again, because I get everything in life- every damn opportunity. He's given me everything and I've spit on his grave every chance I get. I don't know if I'm

worth everything that..."

He needs to stop! The last thing I want to do so early in the morning is to cry over Nhlanzeko, yet again.

"He loved you Ndabuko. He still does, and he trusts you. Please stop overthinking, Nhlanzeko knew that you're a snob and..." His hand leaves mine.

"I'm a snob?" he asks.

I burst into laughter. Yesterday he went to the taxi rank in a maroon blazer, white T-shirt and tight jeans. Which other taxi owner does that? Only him, because he's a snob.

"What I'm trying to say is, Nhlanzeko knew the kind of a person you are and he loved you like that. Your parents too, they loved you."

Silence! We don't go there. Not to his parents. He loathes the memory of them.

"I want to ask you something," I say.

He takes a deep breath and holds my hand again.

I must go ahead and talk.

“Between here and Umlazi, where are you likely to find the police patrolling?” I ask.

“Umlazi, obviously,” he says.

“Why?” I ask.

“Well, because residents are handful there and there's always crime taking place.”

He got it all right!

“Is that all?” he asks.

“Yeap. Do the Maths. Your parents loved you but you were like Izinga Ridge and Nhlanzeko was like Umlazi B section,” I say and roll off bed to check my beeping phone.

It's Snakho, she says she's outside the gate.

Whatever it is must be important, this one is now a rich daughter who stays in her father's mansion, doing nails and taking pictures all day long.

“Snakho is here,” I tell Ndabuko and pick his shirt and put it on. He has taught me the culture of being naked inside the house. Maybe that's why I stay in

his house more, because I want to sit in underwear, or nothing, and eat good food without lifting a finger.

I slide into a legging and drag my sleepers.

“Shout if you need anything. We'll be in the lounge,” I say.

“Don't gossip about me,” he says.

I roll my eyes, if he becomes the subject there's nothing I can do, we'll discuss him like any other guy we discuss.

Long fur coat, skinny jean, knee-length boots and huge sunglasses. Everything is exaggerated. Her nails are longer than her fingers, they must've been inspired by Cardi B.

Snalo is still the twin we know. This one has turned into a slay-queen. For a long time people haven't been able to tell them apart, they did everything together and wore the same clothes. But ever since they found their father Snakho has become a different person. It's great, don't get me wrong, I

love seeing her happy. But I'm worried that there must be some disconnection between the two of them. For the first time they're staying in different houses and living separate lives.

“Rich daughter!” I say.

“Boss-lady.” She waltz around the couch and sits with one leg over her knee.

Finally, she takes the sunglasses off. A queen!

“Did you receive my VN?” she asks, putting her new Prada bag next to her.

“Maybe. I haven't checked my Whats App,” I say.

She looks surprised. How am I supposed to get time for Whats App while I'm busy with my handsome man? Khosi will let me know if there's something important.

“Oh well, I resigned with immediate effect,” she says.

“Over a voice note?” Jesus Christ! Is she being serious right now.

“Yeah, I don't have time to draft letters.”

Now she doesn't have time but when she needed the job she wrote a three-pages CV and attached a motivational letter.

“Snakho I'm not running a tuck-shop. You can't just resign without a valid reason. I can't afford to be short-staffed at this time,” I say.

“Babe, there are hundreds of people who need a job. You can replace me in a snap of your fingers. My father is Ngonyama, I don't need to work a day in my life.”

Clap once, clap twice!

“You should've warned us that you were going to change once you have money,” I say in defeat.

“Duh! Girl, this is the life I've always wanted.”

“So you are going to sit in that mansion your whole life, eating salads and doing make-up?” I ask.

“We are going on a vacation, to connect as a family and spend quality time together. I'll decide what I'm going to do when we come back. My top priority is shedding some load off Snalo's shoulders.” She's

Snakho right now, not the rich daughter, Khwezi.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“We are halves of each other. I've always been the one that takes all the happiness, even hers. And she takes all the pain, mine and hers. We are naturally that way.”

Okay, this is confusing. I know nothing about the twins and I pray to never have them. They are very complicated, and from what I've heard her and Snalo made Aunt Phumzile's life a living hell. Snakho would be sick and she'd take her to the doctor, when they get there Snakho would be bouncing and smiling. That very moment a call would come from home telling her that Snalo was dying back home.

“Do you remember Ma's boyfriend? That man we used to call Baba because we believed he was Khosi's father?” she asks.

He wasn't Khosi's biological father but he was a father figure in their lives. He was a street hawker and very kind. I wish Aunt Phumzile didn't push him



away, her lack of trust for men ended their beautiful relationship. Maybe they'd be married by now, or I believe too much in happy-ever-afters?

“He nearly raped me. Like, it was this close! His fingers were already deep inside me and he was pushing down his trouser when Snalo walked in.”

“Snakho!” I'm shaking. What is she telling me? That wasn't “close to rape,” he put his fingers in her! My girl was sexually violated and she's so relaxed about it.

“I focused on the positive side, that he didn't do the whole thing. While Snalo focused on the negative side, that he touched me and had an intention to rape me. It should've been in me on that side, I was the victim, but all the pain went to Snalo as usual. Some day it has to come to an end.”

“Did you tell Aunt Phumzile about this?” I ask.

“Nooo! Snalo just made sure that he disappeared.”

My forehead furrows. Now Snalo has the power to make sure that people disappear?

“How did she do that?” I ask.

“I don't know and I don't care. I'm glad we haven't heard from him since that day. And Ma is better off without him. I think my father and her will...” Bad timing, but I burst into laughter. Mr Ngidi and Khosi's mother? No way.

“I'm serious. He's going to pay lobola for my mother and do the whole marrying the dead thing. Who do you think is going to stand in for my mother? One thing will lead into another and soon my old lady will have an orgasm.”

She's laughing with me. I don't think anyone can talk about rape experience and laugh the next minute. Only her! Maybe this whole twin theory of hers is accurate.

“Maybe your father can't even hit it right,” I say.

“If that was the case then his slutty housekeeper would've resigned by now. I don't sleep early Ndondo, I see things that aren't meant for my eyes.”

“Shut the front door!” I shift from my seat and lean forward to get a clear look at her.

“Things are happening in that house, girl. Ziyakhipha! ‘Yes daddy, right there- fu€k me harder.’ And her daddy be groaning behind her tiny behind and hitting it from every corner.”

Yeses! I'm traumatized on behalf of South African rebellious youth. Mr Ngidi and doggstyle!

“No offence, but your father's stomach is kind of huge. How does he do it?” I ask.

She jumps off the couch, cramped in a fit of laughter, and holds the coffee-table.

“It's a buffalo behind the monkey. ‘Right there daddy..Oh, yeah yeah yeah..’”

I'm choking with laughter. Is she there to stalk her father or to enjoy his money?

“Ndondo!” The voice comes behind us and startles us.

Snakho jumps away from the coffee-table and sits on the couch, innocently.

My eyes are bulging out. The man we are laughing at is like a father to him, and I always convince him

that we are not a squad of gossipers.

“Babe?” I say after clearing my throat unnecessarily loud.

“Do you have a minute?” he asks and looks at Snakho. “How are you?” he asks her.

“I’m good.” She flashes a nervous smile and glances at me.

I give her a look- she needs to chill. She frowns slightly and squints her eyes. I get the message- I roll my eyes, shrug my shoulders and get off the couch.

Ndabuko is staring at us, probably trying to figure out the language.

“I’m coming back,” I tell Snakho before walking away with him.

“What are you two up to?” he asks.

“Meaning?” I feign confusion.

“You’re fu€king tables, what’s going on?” He makes it sound so horrible.

“Just catching up,” I bite my lip to stop myself from cracking up.

“How long are you going to catch up? I need my time too.”

Really now? Snakho hasn't been here even for thirty minutes and he already needs his “time,” whatever that means.

“Why did you call me?” I ask.

“I can't find my navy socks,” he says.

This got to be a joke! I don't even live in this house full time.

“Wear another pair,” I say.

“I don't know which one to wear.” He sounds like a confused primary school kid. I can't believe I came all this way to choose a pair of socks.

I grab the first one I see and throw it to him.

“You really need to move in,” he says.

“To help you look for socks?”

“No, to live with your man. Andiswa is ready to

move to town.”

She's moving to town and I don't know anything about it?

“Did she tell you that?” I ask.

“I helped her look for a flat but she's still going to discuss it with you. So I thought it wouldn't be an issue if you move in with me after lobola negotiations.”

That's the 15th of this month. Is he serious?

“Ndabuko I can't just leave my house!”

“Why not? You can rent it out.”

“No!”

“Okay.”

I frown and lift my eyes to him. Just- okay?

“Do you want anything? I'm going to the shops,” he asks.

“Nope,” I shrug my shoulders and watch as he puts his shoes on.

“Later we are going home...do you need anything?”  
he asks again, clarifying.

Talk about dropping a bombshell! We are going to  
the village because...?

“Later?” I ask, I need to be sure, we didn't discuss  
this.

“Yeah. I'll be back in an hour or so, please be ready.”  
He's fastening his belt and walking to the bathroom.

So, he says the word and I pack and leave with him?  
Just like that!

He comes out of the bathroom, takes his phone,  
kisses my cheek and rushes out of the door.

I walk down the stairs, exhausted in my bones. I get  
a pocket of crisps and join Snakho in the lounge.

“Why is he rushing out? Did something happen?”  
she asks.

“We are going to Mpumazi later,” I say with an eye-  
roll. I don't have any problem going to his home, but  
not out of the blue, unprepared and not given any

option.

“Do you wrap your head and do all the “makoti” tradition there?” she asks.

“No, I stay indoors, butt-naked,” I say.

She's laughing. She thinks I'm joking.

“Get yourself ready makoti. I'm taking dad out for dinner. Can you believe he's never eaten prawns in his life?”

Well, I believe it, he's Ngonyama Ngidi. Also, she can't take someone out with his own money.

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I took a nap as soon as we arrived here. I still don't know the purpose of our visit. But we are sleeping over and probably going back to Durban tomorrow afternoon. He did a small grocery that included colourful candles and herbs from the market.

I pass by the bathroom to splash cold water over my face. I'm tired, hopefully he didn't bring that man again, I want to have an early night.



“Babe, you're awake?”

Oh, I didn't even see him there. He's hanging pictures on the wall. His parents' that he took down the last time we were here.

“I thought we were here to slaughter chickens again. Why are we here?” I ask.

“No, we are here to open doors and turn the lights on. I don't like my family to be in the dark for too long.”

Oh, this is new!

“I asked all taxi drivers to bring taxis so that they can be here in my brother's presence, the whole night. The drivers will sleep in the rondavel, some in the backroom, so don't worry, you won't even notice that they're here.”

He keeps dropping bombs on me. Now we have 13 taxi drivers coming here?

“What are they going to eat?” I ask.

He frowns.

Sigh!

“Ndabuko you mean I have to cook for 13 people? 15 including you and I, at this time?” I ask.

He's shocked. He didn't think that far. Men are confusing species, for real.

“I'll order pizzas,” he says.

Pizzas for taxi drivers' dinner? Really?

“I'm sure when you invited them to Mpumazi they imagined goat's intestines and dumplings for dinner and a warm welcome. Not pizza slices served by a pregnant woman in the backroom. I don't want to be that woman to your employees. Marinate the meat and I'll cook pap and make salads.”

“Marinate the meat?” His eyes are all out. Is it going to marinate itself?

“Yes Ndabuko, you invited people here, not me,” I say with a sharp stare, he better not try me.

They drive in one by one. The noise in the yard is rising and I'm not sure what my first move should

be. Do I stay here and focus on my pots or go to them and greet? Ndabuko just disappeared, leaving me to everything.

“Sistera!” A man is standing at the door, wearing a vest and silver necklace over it. Yeah, ne!

“Hi,” I say, not sure how to ask him what he wants.

He lets himself inside the kitchen and stands across the counter.

Where the hell is Ndabuko?!

“I don't know if I should've taken this to Mngomezulu first, but it concerns you more than it concerns him. I'm Ntethelelo, Nhlanzeko and I go way back.”

Why am I getting uncomfortable about this?

“I'm listening,” I say, wiping my hands with a cloth.

“Your brother is going to pay for your sins,” he says.

My brother? My sins?

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“It's too late for you to do anything. He's already

fallen too deep and his hand will be the one to end it all.”

“Why are you talking in riddles? How do you know all this? Who are you?”

“I know Zamafuze.” That's all he says before walking out.

Zamafuze and my brother? Is it Qondani or Bahle? I don't understand one thing he said but I know that I need to hunt down a bit€h!

[03/14, 09:10] : Chapter 33

NDONDO

I wanted to do this on my own, but Ndabuko insisted on coming with me. He planned to book into a hotel since he cannot sleep in Nyandeni but I called Bab'Maqhawe and he said it won't be an issue if he comes home with me, as long as he knows his place; that he is isoka (boyfriend) and not a husband. That means he'll stay inside the room, not roam around the yard or join family dinner,

uzoqhetha.

Tomorrow morning we'll be heading to Township where Qondani is held hostage by Zamafuze. Well, figuratively, he's actually there by will. He's just not thinking with his head, but his di€k.

It didn't take Ndabuko very long to find out what Ntethelelo was talking about. But he was pissed that the matter was not brought to him in time. It turns out Ntethelelo had a thing with Zamafuze soon after Ndabuko ended things with her and they're still pretty close. I don't know if any brotherly-code was broken but Ndlalifa came to Mpumazi in the wee hours of morning the next day and had a meeting with the two of them. Ntethelelo is a long-serving taxi driver whom Nhlanzeko trusted and loved dearly, so firing him is not an option, they'll mend whatever it is that has been broken.

We decided to pass time in the shops, buying for Qondani's kids and doing a little grocery for Mam'J abu. It's almost dark when we park below the

homestead, but the kids have been waiting for us the whole day, they're in clean clothes and shining with Vaseline.

They're running around the car and screaming in joy. Why would Qondani want to miss out on this? Seeing the joy on their faces makes every cent I spent on their clothes, food and toys worth. They're fighting over shopping bags, pulling each other's hair and threatening to report one another to "aunty," but I'm right here and I saw who started first.

After taking everything inside the house I go back to Ndabuko in the car. Bab'Maqhawe is still sitting in the verandah, he's facing below the homestead. The outside light is on, he can see every movement on his yard. I think he's doing this on purpose, he wants Ndabuko to be stuck inside the car until Jesus comes back.

"How long is your father going to sit there? I'm tired, I want to rest," he asks.

I don't think he'll be able to handle all these

boyfriend restrictions of the rural areas. He's already complaining and pissed.

“I can't tell him to disappear, he's probably doing it on purpose, to test your patience,” I say.

He puts his hands behind his head and rests back on the seat. Why did Nhlanzeko send this person to private schools?

“I'll come and get you once everything is clear, okay?” I kiss his tightly-shut lips and climb out of the car.

Mam'J abu prepared one of the rondavels for us. There's a kettle and microwave, the bed has clean pillows and it looks very neat. She even brought her old fan here. May God bless her soul!

I thought Bab'Maqhawe would've gotten inside the house by the time I walk out of this rondavel. But no, he's still sitting there with his tobacco roll.

If I die, I die! This is too much for my aeronautic engineer baby-daddy.

“Dude, when are you sleeping?” I ask Bab’Maqhawe.

He breaks a chuckle and throws away the short piece left from his tobacco roll.

“This is my house. I’ll sleep when I want to,” he says.

I secretly roll my eyes and lower myself on the bench next to him.

“He doesn’t understand all these rules, you’re going to drive your son-in-law away. Anyway, I want to talk about Qondani,” I say.

He releases a sigh. I hate that Qondani is doing this to him. This man is raising his kids, the least he could do is to make sure that he doesn’t worry about money. Who lets a woman he met on Facebook move in with him and keep him away from his family? Is he that desperate for her pu\$\$y? I thought he was smarter than this.

“Baba I promise you, we’ll deal with that girl and she’ll stay away from him. I know that I’m the one she’s after, in her head I broke her relationship with Ndabuko. She just went after Qondani to hurt me,” I say.



“I don't know Ndondo. I've been having bad dreams, in most of them I'm attending a wedding. It's a bad sign, hopefully the Sibisis will protect the two of you from this dark cloud lingering above our home,” he says and I realize how broken he actually is.

This is getting scary. Zamafuze can't be that of a threat, I mean to the point of someone ending dead! That's insane. I didn't do anything to her, Ndabuko did. Why is she after me and not after him? He's the one who broke whatever promise he gave to her in the past.

“Be careful Ndondo, I'm not ready to bury either of you.” He holds onto my shoulder and gets off the bench. If it was any other time I would've mocked him, he always brags about being strong and unbreakable, where's his strength now?

“You need to have your joints checked out,” I tell him.

“Me? I'm okay, if I feel like my joints have a problem I'll get insizi from Khumalo,” he says.

Well, I rest my case. He checks his goats first and

then go to his bedroom. Finally!

I grab the extra blanket Mam'J abu feels like I'm going to need and fetch Ndabuko from the car.

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This is the most frustrating journey I've ever taken. I'm scared about Bab'Maqhawe's dreams- what if something bad happens? What if it ends in blood? I'm also angry at Qondani, how can he be so stupid and vulnerable? He grew up in Nyandeni, herded cows and partook in stick-fights. He should have a backbone, an element of control in his bones.

I know I should be angry at Ndabuko too, he's the root of all of this, but then again, he isn't much control of his life. Our lives were planned by a dead man, and I know him, I know his heart, he'd never intentionally hurt anyone.

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It's a tiny brick-house above a busy street, with neighbors just a fence away from each other. His

van is parked in his ten feet yard like it hasn't been moved in days.

The burglar-gate is closed and the door behind it slightly opened. I want to knock, just for formalities and respect for my brother, but Ndabuko has already kicked the burglar-gate and forcefully pushed the door.

We walk on to Qondani washing dishes on top of the table. The TV is playing loudly in the next room.

He has never met Ndabuko, his eyes are all out, jumping from him to me. He's looking for an explanation.

“Ndondo?” He's pushing the basin with a pile of dishes away and drying his hands with a cloth, his eyes are questioning me.

“Where's Fuze?” Ndabuko asks, walking past him and approaching the room where the TV sound is coming from.

“Who the hell is this Ndondo?”

“That's Ndabuko, the man Zamafuze and I are fighting over. You're just a bait she was using to get me, now I'm here!”

I was angry, but I didn't realize it was this much, I'm sweating just at the sound of her voice. She's arguing with Ndabuko and her voice is rising above the TV.

Back to this one...

“She told me the story when she saw your pictures in my phone. But honestly, you're not the reason why she's with me. We love each other,” he says.

Lord! What kind of nonsense is this?

“You've been with her only for a few weeks and you already know her. Qondani wake up! This whole thing was planned, it wasn't a coincidence.” Lord, why can't his brain cells do their job properly?

“Ndondo I hope you didn't leave your mansion to come here and tell me who to date and what not. Your past don't dictate who I date, your history with MaFuze has nothing to do with me. I love her and she has proven how much she loves me back.”

Jesu Krestu! Ntethelelo's words ring in my head; "he is already in, too deep." Zamafuze is chilling in front of the TV and he's washing dishes, pots are boiling on the stove and he's already convinced that this woman loves him to death. He sees nothing beyond this beautiful relationship that sprung from Facebook and burst into a Romeo and Juliet romance. I hope, in fact I pray, that she didn't do anything to him. Ntethelelo's words don't give me any comfort.

"What about your kids? Your parents? Are you just going to turn your back at your family?" I'm defeated. I thought he'd see things from a different perspective after this.

"Skoni!"

No, the bitch didn't! I'm going to pop this baby out right now and strangle her to death!

I don't know when and how Ndabuko got to me and pinned me to the wall so fast, before I can take the second step towards her.

She's smiling, her arm is linked on Qondani's. This

is just a game to her, how can Qondani not see this?

“Sthandwa sami please calm down,” Ndabuko.

“She's playing with my brother, making him wash dishes and cook for her. He's already giving all his money to her. What did you give to him?”

She laughs. Fatherfucker!

“Says someone who's always on bed while Ndabuko cook and serve her. Girl, be serious. You're not the only one who deserves to be treated like a queen.”

She mustn't dare compare me to herself, even Qondani to Ndabuko, because Ndabuko is naturally romantic and domestically skilled. No boy from Nyandeni believes in washing dishes for a woman, especially not a Sibisi man.

Ndabuko holds both my arms. Now I'm convinced that he came here to guard me. He knew that things were going to be hectic.

“If you love him as much as you claim then why are

you not letting him go to see his kids?” I ask the bitch.

“Sweetheart, we’ll fetch the kids and they’ll spend the holidays with us. Don’t sweat,” she says.

“Over my dead body!” She’s not going anywhere near those kids. Not for holidays, not for anything!

“Ndondo please, I don’t need all this noise. Please leave,” Qondani says.

I’m in disbelief!

“I’m taking care of your kids; that alone pisses me off. I’d gladly take care of your kids if I saw your coffin going down to the grave, not while you’re breathing, fucking women and thinking with your dick!”

He drops his eyes. A part of him is hurt by my words, but a huge part of him believes that his heart is here, that whatever crap he’s doing is okay.

“I love you Qondani. I hope whenever you decide to come back home it’ll be by your van, with you on the steering wheel. Not something else,” I turn my head

to Ndabuko, "Let's go babe." I'm hurt. I want to scream my lungs out but I don't want to give Zamafuze that satisfaction.

He's walking closely behind me, he's probably not sure if I'm going to turn back and jump on Zamafuze.

When we walk through the door he stops and looks back at them.

"It was nice meeting you sbari. Fuze, I'm sorry, I really am. I've hurt you once, unintentionally, and I don't want to do it again, because if I do, it'll be deliberately and you won't like it." It's a calm threat but because I know him, I know that he means it. Zamafuze may push him too far and lose whatever respect and debt she has over him.

I'm not sure what my next move is; how do you help someone who doesn't realize that he needs help? How do I prove to Qondani that he's being played? Even if I bring Ntethelelo here, he'll believe Zamafuze over him.



I lean back on the seat and wait for Ndabuko. He's having one of his stress-relieving smoke by the side of the road, and I'm here, thinking; where can one get ice-cubes in this place?

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SNAKHO

It's 4:36 in the morning, a few days before the family fly to Clarens. Khosi is coming and she's the one who's been helping Snakho plan everything. Maqhinga is down for anything; Spa dates, picnics and all other things Ndlalifa and Ngidi consider girlish and unnecessary. Ndlalifa is still gathering strength to ask Thalente to come with him. If he's flying to another province, to stare at the unmoving mountains and flowing river streams, which he never thought he'd do in his life, it would be an honour for him to have "his woman" by his side.

Ngidi is doing this for his kids, he retired so that he can be the father they have always dreamed of. And if that father wears white gowns, puts cucumber slices on his eyes and discusses who draws better eyebrows between Kylie Jenner and Mhlahi Ndamase, so be it. He'll be that father.

Snakho grunts as cold air flushes across her face. She puts her robe on, it's so damn cold and this huge room isn't doing any justice. But she loves her room, it's her dream bedroom. Finally, she has a walk-in closet, clothes from her favourite designers and all the expensive brands that she used to dream of. She owns everything she's ever wanted. A trip to Clarens is her last dream to come true. Maybe not last-last, the last one would be to take all her shitty load off Snalo's shoulders, to give back her individuality and help Ngidi restore whatever it is that has been broken inside her. That's her last dream- her last duty; to break the bond, to separate Snalo from Snakho, to un-divide the attention. Each to her own self!

She tiptoes all the way to Ngidi's room and knocks softly outside the door.

“Who is that?” His voice yells from inside.

“Meee...” She presses her lips together and her ear against the door. Is his di€k-keeper inside here? Hopefully not.

The door opens after a few minutes. He's dressed up and decent.

“What's wrong MaNgidi?” He frowns as his eyes land on her. Did anyone disturb his princess from her beauty sleep?

“No, I'm bored,” Snakho says.

He glances back inside the room, checking the watch on the wall. It's damn 4:41!

“You're bored at this time?” he asks.

Snakho pushes her way inside and walks to his bed. This one is bigger than any other bedroom in this house. The bed looks very..it is comfortable. She bumps her ass on it a few times before resting

down on the pillow.

“You're going to break my bed,” Ngidi says. He climbs on the bed, pushes her legs to one side and slides under covers.

“I can't break such a big bed and besides, you can buy a new one, just like this!” Snakho says and snaps her fingers.

“Money doesn't grow on trees MaNgidi,” he says.

“Money is made out of paper and paper is made out of trees. So it does,” she's pulling down her dreadlocks and rapidly blinking her cute eyes.

“Do you have a scissor around?” she asks.

“Check in the drawers Khwezilokusa. It's not even 5 o'clock for Christ's sake!”

She jumps out of bed. Ngidi releases a low grunt as the bed bounces with him.

She's opening the drawers, leaving some open and things lying on top.

“Got it! Do I need a chair? Or I can just sit on the floor and you on the bed,” she says. Sometimes she

doesn't explain herself, she thinks people live inside her head. And people wonder why Ngidi laughs alone at times; his kids are a special case.

“What are we doing MaNgidi omuhle?” He’s yawning. Really? Can't one be a father during the day and sleep at night?

“I want you to cut off my dreadlocks. Snalo..I mean, Thingo, can take them and extend hers to make them longer,” she says, pulls the cover off her father and wraps it around herself as she sits on the floor next to the bed.

The blue scissor is lying on the edge of the bed, waiting for Ngidi to pick it up and become a barber, by fire, by force.

[03/14, 09:10] : Chapter 34

Thalente

I shouldn't have agreed to this. The two Tyra Banks are here, looking drop-gorgeous as ever. The other one doesn't have dreadlocks anymore, she has cut

her hair short. Now it's easy to tell them apart; Snalo is the Lucky Dube and Snakho is the man of the pair. The elder sister, Nomkhosi, is the uptight type. She says what she says, when she says it, and then bores everyone with her big eyes.

Maqhingana on the other hand, he thinks every thought that comes into his head is worth being heard by everyone. He's sitting alone, at the back, with his feet up on the seat and yelling whatever it is that he's saying.

Ngidi, oh man! He's been staring at us and not saying a single word. He, more than all of them, makes me uncomfortable. His stare is piercing and delivering a message I cannot read.

We are heading to Mt Horeb Manor where we'll be squatting while we are here. Clarens is really a beautiful place, Snakho is definitely the girl you want in your corner, she has a good taste in everything.

I'm not sure why exactly I'm here, travelling to

hotels with them, this whole trip is for Ngidi and his children to bond. But Ndlalifa threatened not to come and Snakho had to get on the phone for 10 minutes, begging me to come.

He is here, next to me, with his arm around my shoulder, and looking bored. He keeps telling the driver how to drive and when to overtake other cars. Yes this is a taxi, we wouldn't have fitted in a cab, but it's not his taxi! He should let this man drive his taxi the way he wants. This is not KZN, he's not a taxi owner this side.

It's still early, around 1pm. Snakho had a thing planned out, something about climbing mountains, but nobody is interested. We are all tired, so a small lunch, which is big because they're the Ngidis, has been prepared.

I'm not sure how to dress up. Yes I'm not a makoti but the village girl in me doesn't allow me to walk in a vest and short in front of Ndlalifa's father. That's not how things are done where I come from.

I put two dresses aside, hoping that when Ndlalifa comes out of the bathroom he'll help me choose.

I stand in front of the mirror and apply lotion on every inch of my body. I don't need to look like the Tyra Banks or Khosi with her firm body and tiny waist. But I can glow, flaunt my curves and make my afro look presentable.

Ndlalifa finally walks out of the bathroom. He's already dressed. Being a man is not that hard; you jump into the shower for three and a half second, apply lotion only on your arms, legs and face, without drying your body and slide into your trousers. Chhh-chhh the body spray and ta-da, you're done!

“Which dress do you like between those two?” I ask, putting earrings on, in front of the mirror.

“I like them both,” he says.

This is definitely not the answer I'm looking for. And



why is he coming to me?

“I can't wear them both, I need to choose one,” I tell him.

He's breathing behind me. His arms are snaked around my waist.

“Forget about the dress. Why do you look so sexy?” His hands start caressing my bare thighs. Maybe I shouldn't have stood here only in underwear.

“Look at how excited Hlomuka is,” he says.

I don't bother turning my head. He decides to push my butt with his “excited Hlomuka.”

“Five minutes MaMbatha. Just stand like this...” He's pushing my legs apart with his knee.

“Ndlalifa!” I exclaim.

Our eyes meet through the reflection of a mirror. He's licking his lips and brushing my mound over the panty. I'm getting there, his touch makes me weak, but we can't. I mean, who does this before family lunch? I didn't come here to...

“Ndlalifa,” now I'm calling his name softly. His

finger has slide through the side of my panty, it's rubbing my nub tenderly. A soft moan escapes my lips.

He presses his head on my back and releases low groans that send me whoreland. His finger is working on bringing me to a brink of orgasm.

“Can you hold your knees for me baby?” He doesn't need to ask. I pull down my panty and step over it. My hands touch my knees and my behind sticks on his thighs.

He rubs all over my wet flesh with his shaft. I'm not a dictator, maybe because I'm not an expert and this relationship is still new, but today I need him inside me.

“Ndlalifa just do one thing,” that's what I say. It doesn't sound wrong this way.

“Relax baby, you'll get your thing. It's yours.” He's still teasing my clit with the tip and my lips are quivering in hunger.

“Hlomuka please,” I beg, almost in tears.

“Why baby?” Is this even a question he should be asking me right now? He's circling around my opening. I swear I'm about to reverse on this man!

“Because I miss you,” I say.

“You miss me or my di€k?” he asks.

Lord, this is torture! Do I need to put it like that?

“Both,” I say.

He stops, lifts me up and turns me around.

“I love the peach one with buttons at the front,” he says.

I'm lost. What is he talking about? Buttons at the front are not going to give me an orgasm. What the hell!

“The dress,” he says with a grin on his face.

I'm not doing this with him. I push him, of course he doesn't move an inch, so I walk past him and grab one dress on my way to the bathroom.

“Thalente I was just pulling your leg, please come back.” He's running behind me. I shut the door, but

he opens it because he is him.

“Sthandwa sami,” he's holding me and grinding his erect shaft against my behind.

I wipe my wet bottom and put my dress on. No panty and I don't care.

“Thalente come on,” his voice is breaking, he's trying to lift my dress up.

“You'll find me there,” I say, striding out of the bathroom and leaving him with his up-pointing shaft bursting with nerves.

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Okay, I didn't think this through. I'm going to join those people? Walking alone? They're already deep in a conversation, what am I going to say? I'm sure they're discussing serious things and I have nothing serious that I can contribute, except my shaky relationship with my employers.

Maybe I should lurk somewhere and wait for Ndlalifa. Gosh, this ruins all my anger plans.

“Thalente we are here!” Snakho yells with her

fingers snapping.

They all lift their heads and look at my direction. I don't have a choice but to join them.

The fake smile I've been putting on today! I deserve an award.

“Where's Ndlalifa?” Khosi asks.

“He's coming,” I say.

She nods and sips her drink. I've noticed that she's the one closer to him. They talk, nod at whatever one of them is saying and laugh briefly. They get each other more than anyone in this world can ever get them.

Snalo loves Maqhinga, I think they're a pair of gossipers. It can't be that whenever they break into laughter it's their goddamn business, obviously they laugh at other people. Snakho loves everyone. She talks a lot, I love that about her. I love people who talk, they're the happiest.

It doesn't take very long for Ndlalifa to join us. I

don't need to turn my head to know that he's angry. I can hear the pattern of his breaths, I don't think I'm brave enough to face him.

“So you're just going to bring a woman and not say anything about her?” That's his father. I'm not sure what he's trying to ask but I can tell that he's either pissed or disappointed. Coming here was a bad idea. I'm just an intruder.

“Baba you know Thallente,” Ndlalifa says. His arm is not around me, this is definitely raising a flag for everyone.

“I don't know anyone,” his father says.

I'm not sure if I should be insulted or just let it slide. This man knows me, we even talked!

Ndlalifa swings the glass in his hand that he just picked up and points at me.

“Okay, this is Thallente Mbatha from Khangelani in Ngudwini.” He's done and taking a gulp from his glass. But his father is not, his eyes are narrowed at Ndlalifa. He wants details.

“Talk khehla!” I thought he'd stay quiet for a moment. He's sitting next to his father and enjoying every second of torture his brother is getting.

“She says she loves me,” Ndlalifa says, referring to me, and shrugs his shoulders.

Now that brings all eyes on me. His brother has stopped mocking, his eyebrow is cocked up at me. I don't think they'd hesitate coming for me if I do anything to their brother.

“Why are you talking as if her words don't match her actions?” That's the uptight elder sister, she's staring at me like she's ready to send me to the nearest train station with my bags.

“Maybe it's me who doesn't understand women, or this whole love thing, I don't know. Maybe I expect too much from it.” He's blinking rapidly. I knew he was angry but not to this degree of questioning my love for him in front of his whole family.

“What happened MaMbatha?” Ngidi asks. The same man who denied knowing me just a few minutes ago.

I turn my eyes to Ndlalifa. He is ANGRY!

“What happened?” I pose the question to him. There's no way I'm telling his father the cause of our fight. And I know he won't tell him either. This should've remained between the two of us.

“I was just pulling her leg and she walked out on me,” he says.

This is wasting their time, they start passing things around and talking about other things. But not Maqhinga, he's still staring at us.

“What exactly were you pulling her leg about?” he asks.

“The possibility that I may shoot my stupid brother in the arse,” Ndlalifa says.

His father looks up with his brows snapped. Maqhinga is rolled in a fit of laughter.

“What do you know about shooting? You're still crying over MaMbatha walking out on you. Put him in his line MaMbatha, don't let his height intimidate you!” Ngidi.



This is a very strange family but okay. For a moment I thought everyone was against me.

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The brain behind this whole trip is on her feet and explaining tomorrow's activities. Snalo is exclusively booked into fishing with Ngidi, while all of us will be horse-riding. Later there's a massage thing happening and a family's walk around the mountain. As long as it makes sense to her, I'm not going to be a party-pooper.

“Awuphentile sisi,” (You're not wearing any panty, sis) That's Ndlalifa in my ear.

I keep my poker face on, I don't know what he intends to achieve by reminding me this, and I thought he is still angry with me.

Snakho pulls me aside and asks that we take a walk, just to see the place around. It's very refreshing to be here. I'm glad I had a chance to experience this, even if it's for once in a lifetime.

“So you and my brother? Do you think it'll last?” she asks. This is a very intruding and random question.

“I don't know Snakho. There are no guarantees in life. But I love him. He makes me happy. And honestly, I've never felt this way before,” I say.

She grabs my hand and squeezes it. Maybe this is the answer she wanted to hear.

“He's my brother, I don't know him that much but I know one thing; he'd appreciate it if you let him protect you..against anything, just let him know.”

I'm not sure what she means but I nod. Ndlalifa had an issue with me not reporting Raj to him, I guess this “need to protect” stems from a place they all know about.

My phone beeps two times. I have competitions that I'm always entering, so I have check if it's not a winning SMS asking me to collect my millions.

**\*\*Awuphentile!\*\*** That's the text. I can feel hot steam coming out of my nose, eyes and ears. What the fu€k is his problem? I know that I didn't wear any panty, and that's because he soaked me in the one I was wearing and then denied me his black pipe.

“Is everything okay babe?” Snakho asks.

That fake smile on! I nod and look away before she sees through me.

“I hope so. Let's Skype Ndondo,” she says.

I love Ndondo and I miss her rich, snobbish ass very much. She is Khosi-lite but very adorable. Her and Ndabuko make a cute couple and it's beautiful to watch them being lovey-dovey with each other. I hope the baby is fine. However, I don't have time to talk to her on the screen. I have someone to shut up.

“I'm coming back. Just grabbing something from my bag,” I tell Snakho and head back inside the building.

I'm sure I look like a crazy woman in this lift and scaring off these white people. I'm pissed off! Ndalalifa is not 12, why is this even a thing to him?

I unzip my bag and take out my underwear. He has to go and play merry-go-round if he feels like getting childish again, I won't be his victim.

“Do I have to remind you that I'm older than you?”  
His voice startles me. He's walking through the door with his hands tucked inside the pockets.

I'm frozen next to the bed. Where did he come from? I thought he was somewhere with his brother.

He's here, next to me and lifting up the dress I was trying to pull down.

His eyes drop to my waist. He grins with satisfaction.

“Shame!”

What is that supposed to mean?

He pulls my hand. “Come to your spot,” he says, leading me in front of the mirror.

He stands behind me and puts his hands on my shoulders. We are both staring at the mirror, on our reflection.

“This is us,” he says.

I know, I mean it's a mirror, that should be obvious.

“We are not leaving this room until you tell me what I did so wrong that you had to walk out on me, despite me running after you and telling you that I was just pulling your leg. The reason you had to embarrass me like that,” he says.

“You teased me Ndlalifa and I got frustrated,” I say. His hands slide down and hold my arms. He looks very calm, which is intimidating on its own.

“That answer is just silent. You haven't said anything Thalente.”

How is my answer silent?

“Speak or take off your panty and go lie on the bed.”

What?! Those are two ridiculous options.

“Why are you acting surprised? Were you not angry at me over my di€k?”

If he puts it that way, then no!

“Choose mazikhethela Sontshikazi,” he says and takes his hands off me.

He leaves me to my thoughts and disappears in the

bathroom.

The door is not locked. What if I..?

“I will find you Thakur and bring you back here. And if anyone tries to stop me, I'll tell them exactly what's going,” he yells from the bathroom.

Does he have his eyes inside my brain now?

He walks out of the bathroom, half naked. I did lie on the bed but I didn't take off my panty. I don't do well with instructions, that's why Aarti is always breathing down my neck.

He knows that I didn't take it off, he expected me not to do it, the first thing he does is to lift my legs up and pull it out.

He stands next to where my head is and starts stroking his shaft.

“Suck it,” he says.

“Suck what?” I ask.

“My di€k,” he says.

Hahaha! It's a joke, right? That was a good one.  
Trevor Noah must watch out!

“Get up,” he says.

He's dead serious. WTF!

“Ndlalifa I'm not sucking your manhood. It's not happening. You can call a family meeting, stand on top of the mountain with horn-speakers and tell the whole world our dirty laundry. I don't care!”

“Do I need to get someone else to suck it?”

What? Is that even legal?

“No, you're crazy!” I say.

“I'm not. If you're not going to...”

Gosh, do I need to talk to him in Portuguese?

“Ndlalifa I'm not doing it and you're not getting anyone to do it. If you're horny the cookie is here, always ready for you. That's it!”

He laughs, very loud. Did I say something funny?

“What if I want the other hole?” he asks.

There's another hole? I wasn't aware of that.

“Which one?” I ask.

“The one behind,” he says.

Am I still breathing? God knows if I run out of here I'll go missing because I'll run far away, far from the mountains and life.

“No,” I say.

“I love you Thalente.”

That's very random, I expected the dirty conversation to go on. His emotions always display in his eyes everytime he confesses his feelings. He doesn't say it for the sake of saying it. I love that about him.

“I love you too. Please forgive me for acting impulsive at times,” I say.

“We need time to fully grasp what this is. We'll work out sthandwa sami, we just need to be patient with one another.” He climbs on the bed and positions himself between my legs.

“Please kiss me,” I say.



He smiles. This is very comfortable of me.

He grabs my lips apart, down there, and sweeps his tongue between my flesh.

“Ndlalifa I didn't mean kiss...me ...there!”

He doesn't care. He's using his mouth in wrong places but it feels so damn good. He's making weird licking noises and that alone is enough to send me to heaven.

“Hlomuka I love you!” I scream.

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SNALO

Everyone has left, except her and Ngidi. They're not going to ride horses with others, the two of them were excluded. But she doesn't mind, she's always had that masculine side in her that enjoyed doing things that were considered to be men's. Fishing isn't such a bad idea.

“Are you excited about tomorrow?” Ngidi asks her, testing the waters.

“Yeah,” she says and goes back on her phone.

He clears his throat and leans forward on his seat. Being a father becomes difficult when it comes to this one. He doesn't see her frequently and even when he does, they don't talk that much.

“There are a few people that you can talk to around here. I don't know your story and I'm not going to force you to open up to me. But I went through this with your mother, I don't want to go through it again. If there's anything wrong, I don't care how light it may be, please allow me to get you help. I don't want to lose you.”

She's still on her phone but not fully occupied on it. She didn't expect him to talk like this. It's making her a bit uncomfortable.

“I have already lost 27 years of your life and I'm still losing more time. I'm begging you MaNgidi, you have a father now and he loves you very much. We can find a solution to whatever it is, in Zulu they say;

ayikho indlovu esindwa umboko wayo. No mountain is too high for me to climb for you,” he says.

She is...crying? Ngidi notices the tears and rushes around the table to her.

“Talk to your father. What happened mntanami?” he asks.

She buries her head on his chest and sobs openly. They're in that position for the next few minutes; she's crying on his chest and he's rubbing her back.

“I had an abortion in the streets. Baba I swear, I'm not a cruel person, I wasn't ready for a baby. I was very young and I couldn't add to Ma's financial stress by bringing another mouth to feed.” She sobs louder. Luckily, it's just the two of them here. It's public but they have the privacy.

“They want to remove my womb. It was damaged and there's no possibility of treatment,” she says.

He tightens his arms around her. This is a bombshell. He wasn't expecting anything like this. Not even once did he think that she might be sick.

“You're a Ngidi, uHlomuka, uMlalazi kaNoxhaka, uBophela. There's no battle you cannot win, I trust your strength. But you'll fight this one with me. I promise you, my child.”

Snakho has been watching from a distance. This is exactly why she brought them here. Finally, Snalo is handling her own shit, putting herself first and confronting issues that concern her as an individual. This is all she wanted. It's done.

She thought she'd be leaving tomorrow, after spending more quality time with them. But there's no need for her to stay now. They need to bond and spend time as **THEY WILL BE**.

She types a short text and forwards it to everyone:  
**\*\*FAM, I HAVE TO GO BACK TO KZN URGENTLY.\*\***

[03/14, 09:10] : Chapter 35

Even though Snakho left, she had everything organized very well and everyone had fun. There were bonding moments, loads of fun and arguments here and there. Ngidi got the chance to know Snalo better, they talked about everything, including what happened to Ngobese and the father of her baby, and they agreed on getting therapy. It's staying between the two of them until she's ready to tell the whole family, that's if she's ever going to tell them. Maqhinga is keeping a close eye on her. He checks on her randomly, because he doesn't get comfortable when he doesn't know where her thoughts are.

Thalente and Ndlalifa are good now. They sorted out whatever nonsense they were fighting over. He is not leaving her side. He can't seem to be able to put his hands on his own body, they're either on Thalente's waist or clasped in her hands. It's clear to everyone now that this girl is here to stay, something about her brings the light on Ndlalifa's face. He is a different person when she's around

and she isn't even trying so hard to fit in his life.

Khosi's relationship with Ngidi has grown. He's no longer just her ex-boss, he's now her uncle and these past few weeks have allowed her to get to know him for who he is behind the uptight businessman.

Ngidi is allowing Ndabuko to send his delegation and build a relationship with his in-laws, then he'll send his own delegation to the Nseles. Inhlawulo will be paid on that day and he'll lawfully take his children to his surname. When everything is done, when Magcina has been wedded to him, maybe, just maybe, he'll look for someone who'll sit on the mattress when he dies.

They decided to grab a snack before heading home. For a change Snalo chose which restaurant to go to, she's feeding them sea spiders and snails. She shares the same love of sea food with Snakho and Khosi. Thalente made it clear from the beginning

that she wasn't eating any of the things the waiter brought. So, Ndlalifa drove to a near food stall by the beach and got her a beef burger and fried chips.

“Khwezi will love this,” Ngidi says, eating only half of his food and leaving some to be packed by the waiter.

“Baba relax, she is probably spending your money on weaves as we speak. That's the only reason why she cut her dreadlocks; to wear weaves,” Snalo says with an eye-roll. She doesn't call him “Sir” now, he's upgraded to Baba. It all changed over the weekend.

“My taxis are on the road to pay for whatever that my kids want. If it's horse tails that they want, so be it,” Ngidi says.

This is great. He's doing an amazing job as a father but he's overdoing it and Khosi is a little bit averse about this whole new lifestyle.

“One day they have to run their own households and raise their own kids. It's okay to be rich but irresponsibility leads to poverty. Snakho shouldn't

have resigned. I don't think it was a wise decision,” she says and sips on her wine.

Ngidi shrugs his shoulders.

“All I want is for her to live her best life. If she feels like she's tired of working I'm not going to force her to do it,” he says.

“Mhhhh,” -Khosi.

Snakho has turned into a slay-queen and she doesn't like that one bit. The twins she helped her mother raise were responsible beauty queens with brains. Maybe she should sit down with Snakho and ask her about starting a small business, just so she can have something on her name.

“On a lighter note though, I think someone needs to donate a gym equipment to Ngidi,” Snalo says.

Everyone breaks into laughter.

“For what? I don't need to have six-pack, that's for Maqhingana and Ndlalifa,” Ngidi says in defense. He doesn't need a certain type of body, he has more serious things to worry about.



“But we need a stepmother,” Maqhingana says. Him and Snalo look at each other and share a brief laughter.

“Hopefully it won't be that jezebel you call a housekeeper,” Ndlalifa says.

Gasps! Thallente is giving him a look and he's making sure that he ignores her.

“No, seriously Baba, you have to fire that girl,” he says.

“Since when do you care about anything that's happening in my house? She will leave when I want her to leave and you'll stop making her uncomfortable Ndlalifa.”

“Okay okay! Everybody relax. We have a bottle of champagne coming,” Snalo announces on her feet, with her hands put up in surrender. She's been in a nutshell her whole life, minding her sorrows and planning murderers in her head, this chaotic life is new to her but there's an element of happiness in it. Having people who have your blood running in their veins, people who can do anything for you yet they

fight you like crazy, has to be the most fascinating in life.

She twists the cap of the bottle and the bubbles pop up. They all cheer around and bring their glasses forward. This is what family is all about, Snakho shouldn't have left, Ndondo would've handled whatever she needed to attend. She has missed out all the fun!

“Let's toast!”

They all raise their glasses.

“To fitness and healthy diet,” she says.

Ngidi and Ndlalifa only heard a joke; they're dead with laughter. Diet???

“Guys I'm serious,” Snalo says.

“Count me out,” Ndlalifa says.

Ngidi is still laughing. Thalente is feeling guilty about the burger she just murdered- is she even going to fit in this family? What about Aarti's bunny-chow?

“Okay, we are toasting to family, good health, unity and peace,” Khosi says. Now this is something they can toast to, they all click their glasses with smiles on their faces.

This is a new beginning, some are already two steps inside their beginnings, and the future looks promising.

They are not done. Ngidi wants all of them, Thalete included, to pass by his house, just for one last moment. At the beginning of this trip he was just doing this for Snakho but now he's into it, he wants more of these family trips, he wants to get crazy with his kids, climb mountains and pose for thousand pictures, he's down for it all.

“Is Half even here?” Maqhingana asks, walking at the front, Ngidi is behind him with Khosi next to him. They're in a deep Bantwana Holdings discussion, that's something you can't take away from them; talking about business at the wrong time.

“I can't believe I caught a fish and none of you did,”

that's Snalo, this topic is now cold, she's been repeating one thing since yesterday. Maqhinganga declared the fish sick, because there's no way a healthy fish could've been caught by her.

“Not all of us went fishing, so don't include us,” Ndlalifa says.

“Yes, if I was there I would've caught all the fishes there. I should teach my son some tricks,” Maqhinganga says, directing to Ngidi who didn't catch even an old shoe from the water.

The whole block was quiet before their arrival. One is yelling, another one is laughing loud like a hyena, in that very same minute there's an upcoming musician singing his heart out.

“Find Khwezi and tell her to come and get the food I brought for her,” Ngidi tells Snalo as she wheels her suitcase inside the house.

She leaves it on the floor and leaves.

Snakho's room is on her left, after the TV room, but

something feels different, like she's not allowed to enter inside her room. She stops outside the door and makes a U-turn. Her heart is beating beyond normal. Something is missing, it's been missing since they got to Clarens, surely this lightness doesn't come from the load she shared with her father, before the trip she had loads of heavy luggages. There was no glimpse of hope, she didn't have these high hopes she has now. She didn't remember the good parts of her childhood. She remembered nothing positive about herself. Her life was a deep sea and her soul just a sinking ship.

“Where is Khwezi?” Ngidi asks with a frown.

“In her bedroom. I didn't call her,” Snalo says, fiddling with her fingers and stamping her foot on the floor restlessly.

Ngidi takes the wrapped food container and heads up to Snakho's bedroom. With Ndlalifa here it would be hard for him to sneak into the cottage and hit one round. That's the only thing missing to put his

mood at 100.

“Khwezi!” he yells a few feet away from her door to give her the heads-up, just in case she's not decent.

“We are back MaNgidi,” he says and pushes the door.

The heat inside here!

“Are you steaming here? It's so damn hot. Here, I brought your ‘sea things’,” he says, letting himself inside.

Oh..she's not on bed. There's a heavy shadow behind him. He slowly turns his head around, his eyes go up to his daughter hanging from the ceiling lifelessly

“Khwezi!” His high-pitched voice alarms those who are gathered in the lounge downstairs.

Snalo remains with Thalente on the couch while Ndlalifa, Maqhingana and Khosi chase one another up the stairway.

Ngidi is still calling out Snakho; “Khwezi! Khwezi! Khwezi!” Now they're convinced that something is

wrong.

Khosi is the first one to walk in. She lets out a shrill scream as her eyes land on Snakho's body hanging from a rope. Ngidi is holding her floating legs and trying to pull her down. Nobody knows how long she's been here, but it needs no paramedic to know that she's no more.

“Snakho?!” Maqhinga exclaims at the door. His head is spinning, this can't be true! This is Snakho, not Snalo! This one couldn't have committed suicide; she didn't have it in her.

Ndlalifa walks in and pulls his father away. They need to call the police, there's nothing they can do or say to wake her up. She's gone and it was her decision.

“Maqhinga call the police,” he instructs.

Ngidi has to be taken out of the room because he won't stop trying to pull down Snakho's body. He's never felt so helpless and powerless in his life. How can Khwezi do this to him? Now, out of all time?

What could've been so bad that she couldn't even talk to her sisters and brothers about it?

The police arrive, Ndlalifa is the one who's answering all the questions because Ngidi is a mess. Thalente and Ndondo are attending Snalo and Khosi.

Couldn't she wait for them to come back? Was it her plan to send them to another province, leave them there to have fun while she comes back here to end her life? The biggest question is; why???

The police are done with their examinations, they have to unhook her from the rope and take her down. One of the taxi driver's wife who's close to Ngidi came here in the blink of an eye.

“Ngonyama you need to talk to her first and reprimand her,” she says and orders one of the boys from the crowd gathered in the passage to rush out and get a stick.



Ngidi is not going to be able to do it. This hasn't sunk in his head. He wants a chance to touch his daughter, to ask her to wake up and tell him what went wrong. He should've seen behind her happy smile, maybe he should've sat down both of them, her and Snalo, and got to know them in a deeper level. He shouldn't have just assumed that buying her everything she wanted was enough.

He failed Magcina and now he's failed their daughter too.

The boy is back with a thin stick. It's handed over to Ngidi, he needs to get off that chair and do what he needs to do. The police are on duty; they have other cases to attend. But Ngidi's hand is trembling, he cannot lift his hand on his daughter when she's dead. Phumzile could've done this on his behalf, because it has to be done, Snakho was a child, in God's eyes and in the eyes of the community, she needs to be reprimanded for taking such a harsh decision, for acting like God upon her own life.

Ndlalifa pushes through a few people and takes the stick from his father's trembling hands, he can't stand seeing his sister hanging on the rope like this anymore.

He can do this! He stops just a few inches away from her and takes a deep breath.

“Snakho Khwezi Ngidi, why did you have to do this? Why are you putting us through this knowing very well that we are still trying to go through other painful losses? Sna..kho..!” He buries his face and releases a heavy sigh. He removes his hands off his face, clenches his jaws tightly and gives her a weak beating. His father's words cut deeply through his heart; “Ndlalifa, my daughter!” A lump is rising up his throat but he swallows it back. He cannot break down, not him too!

It's done. She's taken down and put inside a body bag. Ndlalifa leaves the crowd and climbs down the stairs. His vision is blur, he's following his feet and his feet are following the quietness. He wants to be

alone, out of everyone's eyes that expect him to be strong. He is not even sure where he is heading.

“Ndlalifa!” Thalente's voice comes behind him.

It completely slipped out of his head that he brought someone home. She shouldn't have been here to witness this trauma.

“I will call one of the drivers and ask him to take you to Cannelands. If you're scared to be alone tonight you can go to Ndondo's house, I'll let her know,” he says, brushing her arm tenderly.

“Are you okay?” Thalente asks, staring up at him with sadness canopying her eyes.

“I just need a moment. There are so many things I have to do. Someone has to keep an eye on Ngidi and I don't even know who. Snalo and Maqhinga...” He's breathing heavily, struggling to get words out of his mouth but he's still standing tall.

Thalente wraps her arms around him. His chest tightens, Thalente's tight hug is also not making things easy.

“Please let me...” He removes her arms and slides down to the floor. He sits legs flat down on the floor and shuts his eyes firmly.

Thalente lowers herself next to him. Nobody could've predicted this trip ending this way.

“Why would she put us through this?” he asks in a low, trembling voice.

Unfortunately, Snakho didn't do the suicide traditions; writing letters and saying subtle goodbyes. She didn't have any low moments, there were no points where one could say “this was her breaking point.” She just ended it and left everyone with unanswered questions.

Snalo is a mess of tears. She felt this, for many years in her life, ending her life popped in her mind every now and then. There was nothing in particular, nothing she could've pointed out and said “I want to die because of one & two.” She just felt the drift, the heavy load over her shoulders and all the memories of bad things Snakho had gone through. Her illness

was just a convincing voice in her head; “Now you can't have children too!” and she'd feel the world shutting down on her.

They didn't have a telepathy like other identical twins. Their connection was twisted in its own way. Back in primary school Snakho would get in trouble and get the pipe punishment from the school principal, but it was Snalo who would bleed on her behalf. She was always there to spiritually take her pain and make it her own. It grew with them and people noticed. They told Phumzile to send one of them away, to grow in a different environment so that the extraordinary bond could be broken. But Phumzile wanted to raise both of them, she wasn't going to give either of them away. So it grew with them, concealing feelings and sometimes swapping thoughts of one another.

Dreadlocks lie on top of Snalo's bed. Snakho cut them out not so long ago. Why did she leave them here? Snalo picks up a single one stares at it. They've had them for five years, it should've raised

her eyes when she suddenly got rid of hers. They said their hair was their strength and Snakho cut off her “strength” before taking the trip. She left it for her and with her she took half of the luggage Snalo had over her shoulders.

[03/14, 09:11] : Chapter 36

NDONDO

I haven't had time to be in contact with my own emotions, I had to take care of Snalo and Khosi first. Unlike me, they didn't just lose a friend or colleague, they have lost a sister. Snalo is hurt but she's handling it better than Khosi. It's guilt more than anything, we all wish there was something we could've done. In our eyes Snakho was happy, even before meeting her father, she was always the cheerful one. What could've been so deep that she couldn't even confide in her twin sister? It doesn't make any sense, Snalo is the one who's always kept her feelings and thoughts in a shell. Even meeting her father, who is rich and could do anything for her,

did not move her. She's still staying in Cornubia with Khosi in their small flat. Snakho had the excitement, she was finally living the life she's always dreamed of. The last couple weeks were her happiest. She had everything, well, that's what we thought.

“Are we serving the drivers outside?” Thalente asks me. I don't know what I would've done if she wasn't here. Ndlalifa wanted her to leave, I think because they just started dating and he doesn't want to burden her with his family problems from the onset. But she insisted on staying, nobody is in their right minds at the moment, me included, her sane presence is helpful.

“They can eat where they are,” I say, standing next to the counter with a cup of cold tea I've been holding for nearly thirty minutes.

She gathers a few plates, puts them on the tray and disappears. I haven't done anything except telling her where to find things and who doesn't eat what.

“Hlasekazi,”- It’s the voice I haven't heard in hours. His focus has been on Ngidi since we got here. He didn't get close to Snakho, mainly because her and all the girls are still unhappy about the drama he brought into my life. But he’s hurting too, because Ngidi is like a father to him and right now he's broken beyond repairs.

“How are you doing?” He's taking the cup from my hands and leading me to the chair.

“Shattered, confused, regretful, betrayed and hurt,” I tell him.

He gives my hands a tight squeeze and lifts them to his lips for a soft peck.

“I'm so sorry sthandwa,” he says and continues holding my hands. I guess he's either not good at consoling or he's also lost for words. We cannot use the famous “God's timing is always perfect” line in this case, it was solely Snakho’s decision and timing, and it wasn't anything close to perfect.

Thalente walks in and freezes by the entrance.



She's still not familiar with many faces but the way her eyes run around and widen at people when they talk shows that she's just waiting to settle in before revealing her talkative side.

Ndlalifa stands behind her. She doesn't see him. He's the one who's been doing everything that needs to be done, running errands and fetching relatives. He is tired, you can tell from his eyes.

Thalente feels him and turns back her head. The kiss lands quickly on her lips, before she could turn her face away in embarrassment.

I think they're perfect. Ndlalifa is going to settle down with her. They will build something concrete together.

“Are you okay?” She holds his hand and stares into his eyes.

His silent response speaks volume. He is wounded.

“Are you hungry?” She lets go of his hand and walks in, to the cupboard and grabs two plates without waiting for his response. Ndlalifa follows in and sits next to us.

Maybe I should help her with the drinks. She can't serve her boyfriend and mine while I'm bottoming a chair.

I pour Coke for Ndlalifa and water with lemon slices for Ndabuko.

“He drinks that?” she asks in awe.

“Yes, I make him drink it,” I say.

She's still confused. I take the drinks to them on the table and join her against the counter. We stand side by side, like two confused souls, and watch them eat.

Maqhingwa walks in with his empty plate. I guess he was served outside, with a group of taxi drivers who have come to pass their condolences.

He looks at them, their ribs and at us. He could've made a big deal out of this, but today is not a great day for everyone and nobody needs his tantrums.

“Do you want something to drink?” Thalente asks

out of guilt.

“Do you have whisky?”

Earlier I did a little shopping for people who'll come to mourn with us. Alcohol wasn't a part of my grocery. The only alcohol we have in this house is his father's and I don't think we are allowed to touch those expensive bottles.

“I don't think you're allowed to drink. Not today,” I intervene to save Thacente.

He doesn't argue, he puts the plates inside the sink and leaves.

I wish he had someone who'll hold his hands too, someone who'll constantly ask if he's okay and be there for him.

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MAQHINGA

The house hasn't been this quiet since they got here

and discovered Snakho's dead body hanging from the rope. Every now and then there would be a piercing scream, either from Khosi or Phumzile. They took it the hardest. Snalo did cry, but not as much as people expected. She had a brave face on. Nevertheless, Maqhing's heart is not at rest, the Snalo he knows battles with internal battles and bottled emotions.

He knocks outside her bedroom while silently praying that she didn't do anything crazy, like hanging herself to death like her twin sister.

"Come in," her hoarse voice call him in. She's been crying and that gives Maqhing a little relief. At least she's expressing her pain.

He pushes the door and walks in.

She's sitting on the bed with her knees up.

"I thought I should come and check on you," he says and climbs on the bed next to her.

"How are you feeling?" he asks, digging out her

hand and squeezing it tightly.

“I don't know Maqhingana,” she says and heaves a sigh.

“I understand. But I'm here, we all are, you're not alone. You'll never be,” he says.

She sniffs and wipes her nose with the sleeve of her pyjama.

“I miss her already,” she says.

Maqhingana puts his arms around her shoulders and pulls her dreadlocks between his fingers.

“I feel like I could've done something. I could've fought those suicidal thoughts for her, but instead, I allowed myself to drown in them,” she's sobbing openly.

He doesn't understand, but the last thing Snalo needs right now is questions, so he just holds her and allows her to vent.

“I allowed it to happen Maqhingana. I discussed it with myself and concluded that death was going to be a solution. My soul agreed to it. This was going to be

my breakthrough; the peace that I always wanted.” She's crying painfully and Maqhinga cannot take it anymore. He grabs her face and wipes her cheeks with his hands.

“What are you talking about Twinnie?” he asks.

“Remember when I..I told you that..I wanted to end my life?” Her voice is breaking, she has hiccups, which makes it hard for him to understand what she's saying clearly. But he nods for her to go on.

“Those weren't my thoughts. I've been sensing her pain since birth. And now I've failed to do it at last. All I had to do was to fight those thoughts from possessing me.”

A tear escapes Maqhinga's eye. He links his forehead on hers and brushes her soft cheeks.

“Please Twinnie, you didn't do anything wrong,” he whispers, fighting back tears.

“I could've stopped her. I had a chance to...” He needs her to stop. It was never her battle!

“Shhhh!” He puts his finger over her lips.

She stops.

Their teary eyes meet and they stare at each other.

“I’m here for you,” he says in a low whisper.

“Thank you.”

He uses his thumb to wipe her flooding tears.

“Maqhinga what are you doing to my daughter?”

Ngidi roars from the door, causing both of them to lift their heads and look at him with their eyes bulging out.

“At this time?” he asks, charging towards them with his fists clenched.

He gets him before he can climb off Snalo's bed, he lifts him up by his throat.

“Baba, no!” Snalo cries out.

It's too late. Several punches have already landed across Maqhinga's jaw. He's pinned against the wall and slapped twice across his face.

“Not in my house Maqhinga. You're not going to do the Nsele nonsense here!”

“Baba I wasn't...” Another slap! He gasps for air and fights to break off his father's grip. Snalo is screaming for help.

Ndlalifa is running towards Snalo's room where the noise is coming from. Maqhinga is running out of the room with blood running out of his nose.

“What's going on?” Ndlalifa asks as Maqhinga runs past him.

He doesn't get the answer from him, so he runs to Snalo's bedroom, hoping that someone will explain.

The only thing Maqhinga takes is his jacket. For now he's not sure where he's heading, but he's leaving this Msawenkosi mess behind.

Maybe for good.

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Mbambo just alighted from the bus, he's never been



to Nyandeni before but Maqhawe gave him clear directions over the phone. He throws his Reebok bag over his shoulders and takes on a narrow one-way road.

He could've gone to the Ngidis to express his deepest condolences over the passing of the twin, but his newly found friend, Maqhawe, called and said he needed his help urgently.

There are little humans running his way. He stops under the tree shade and waits for them. Maqhawe did say he was going to send kids to fetch him from the bus stop.

They must be his son's kids; the boy in question. He's the reason why he had to leave everything in Durban and come here. And for that, he didn't leave his sjambok behind.

“Mkhulu said we must come and fetch you,” the two say, both talking at once and pushing each other out of the way.

To stop this breaking war, he unzips his bag and distributes small plastic bags amongst the three of

them.

They're chatting all the way to the Sibisi homestead. They're telling him about their father who's going to come and fetch them during the school holidays, and their aunt who buys them expensive sneakers and PlayStations.

As soon as Jabu sees him making his way inside the yard, she rushes out with an extra chair and a jug of juice.

She was against her husband calling a man she doesn't know to gang up against her son. But this time Maqhawe put his foot down, he's done treating Qondani like an egg, he's going to handle him like a man.

Two new, ageing friends shake hands happily as they meet for the second time.

“Maqhawe, what is this child doing to you?”

Mbambo asks, lowering himself on the empty chair.

“Mbambo this boy is trying to send me to grave. At this age I have to run after him and beg him to father his own kids. Slu£s have him by balls,” Maqhawe says.

“Have you talked to him about visiting someone who can help him throw up whatever they fed him?” Mbambo.

“Talk to him where? His phone has been off for ages, he's not coming or sending anything home,” Maqhawe.

Mbambo exclaims in shock. Kids of today! Maqhawe did this boy a huge favour, he took in his children to be raised by his wife, paid for the damages from his kraal and lawfully brought the kids to his surname. Is this how he thanks his father?

They have their dinner in the veranda, talking about sports and how awfully the world has changed from what they knew.

J abu is bonding with her orphaned grandchildren in

front of the TV. Ndondo upgraded their DSTV package, now they can play all the channels but they don't, because World War III breaks everytime they want to change the channel from the cartoons.

“You said this man has helped a lot of people?” Maqhawe asks, rolling his tobacco with a brown sheet of paper.

“Dlokovu is the best nyanga we have in the province. It's just that he doesn't appear on newspapers and TVs like these new nyangas who know nothing about respecting the ancestors,” Mbambo says and pours another glass of juice from the jug.

Maqhawe glances back at the door and leans forward on his chair.

“I think I need a mixture to boost my bedroom performance. Age is starting to affect me badly,” he says in a low voice.

Mbambo breaks a brief chuckle.

“Don't you detox?” he asks.

“I do but these past days I've been struggling to finish my race. I'm just a rooster,” Maqhawe says and they both break into laughter.

“You're stressed Sibisi, nothing much. If the problem persists after sorting out your boy's problems then you can look for help,” Mbambo says.

“I hope so, I don't want my wife to look elsewhere,” he sounds worried. Jabu has always been the happiest woman, she didn't lack anything, her husband could provide, their bedroom problems started after Qondani's escapades.

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Maqhawe spoke to Cebekhulu's son who owns a Tazz. They have to get to Qondani's house before he goes to work, that's if he's still working. The plan is to take him to Waterloo to Dlokovu, Mbambo's trusted nyanga who'll check if he was fed a love portion or not, and if he was, Dlokovu will help him. Yes he's a reckless boy, he loves girls a little bit too

much, that's why he has three kids from different mothers. But he's a good father to his kids, he loves his mother and he respects his father. The Qondani Ndondo explained to Maqhawe is not his son.

“That's his house, stop here,” Maqhawe says and the boy stops the car below a brick house.

Both Mbambo and Maqhawe climb out of the car. Mbambo is wearing a huge winter coat and black boots. There's something hidden behind his back, hopefully it won't get to the point where he has to use it.

It's just after 5am, they woke up by dawn so that they can make it here in time.

Maqhawe knocks at the door several times before a girl scolds him off from the inside; “J es us Christ! You're going to break the door!”

“Is that your daughter-in-law?” Mbambo mocks.

Maqhawe just shakes his head in dismay. Imihlola!

After what felt like forever, a girl wrapped in a towel

opens the door and scans them from head to toe with her eyes. She doesn't look pleased by their presence.

“Can I help you?” she asks with her arms folded.

“Open the door, we are coming in,” Maqhawe says.

“And you are?” she asks.

“Qondani's father.”

She gasps in shock and quickly unlocks the burglar-gate.

“Oh, I'm so sorry Baba,” she says, opening and stepping aside to allow them to pass.

Mbambo is following behind Maqhawe as he strides towards the bedroom.

Qondani is just taking a nap, Zamafuze gave him the most wonderful morning. Something shakes his body violently as he drifts to sleep.

“Get up!” his father orders and grabs him off the bed.

Hearing his father's voice snaps him out of sleep.

How did he get here? Who is this man standing next to him and looking annoyed?

“Baba,” he rubs his eyes and sheepishly picks his trouser from the floor and puts it on.

“What are your kids eating?” his father asks.

“Baba I was still trying to get the money.” He's pulling up his trouser, these men are staring at him as if they've never seen a naked person in their lives.

“Couldn't you send your kids the same money you used to buy these flowers and all the chocolates filling the dustbin outside?” It's the man he doesn't know. Was it necessary for him to notice all that?

He doesn't have the answer for his question.

“Pack your bag, we are leaving,” his father says.

No! He cannot leave Zamafuze alone.

“Can we take Zamafuze with us?” he asks.

The man chuckles. Is he here to ruin his life?

“I love her Baba,” he says, convincing his father.

“I'll decide after our trip if I believe you or not. For



now, pack your bag Qondani.”

He shakes his head and sits on the bed. Zamafuze loves him, he's never been loved by any woman like this. He's happy here, they'll extend this house and bring the kids to live with them.

“I'm not leaving Baba. Not without Zamafuze,” he says.

“You are not leaving?” Mbambo asks with his eyes narrowed. What is this boy telling them? That they woke up by dawn and came here for nothing? That he sacrificed his time for nothing?

The sjambok lands on his shoulder. Zamafuze has been lurking by the door, eavesdropping the conversation, when she sees the sjambok being pulled out she races out, screaming her lungs out.

Maqhawe rushes to close the door. Qondani is behind him and trying to push him aside.

Mbambo throws the sjambok to Maqhawe so that he can handle his son.

A 25year old is reduced to a 16year old and he called this upon himself.

He has asked his father to kill him, that's what all rebellious children say to their parents to trip them, but today it's not going to work.

He cannot fight his father back, nor the man next to him. The beating is getting intense and they're not going to stop until he agrees to what they want.

“Okay, I'll pack,” he says in a low voice, suppressing the pain.

The beating stops! He hasn't seen his father this angry in years.

“Pack, right now!”

[03/14, 09:11] : Chapter 37

MAQHINGA

He never thought he'd set his foot here, in a strange village he's only heard about in newspapers, to see a man he heard about in the taxi rank. His intention

of coming here isn't clear to him either, he doesn't know what he aims to achieve or what he'll ask from this man. All he knows is that he left home late at night and ran because he's searching for peace. He's running away from a dead man who chose to give him his exact looks. A man who's dead and rotten under ground, but his actions continue to affect Maqhinga. He is living with a label on his name; a man who's capable of raping his own sister.

There are four modern homesteads built just a few yards away from one another. He's not sure which one he's come to and the high fences keep him from seeing anyone he can ask behind the yards.

He assumes that his destination is the largest one built at the centre of others, so he walks towards the gate. It slides open as he steps closer to it.

A man with beard all over his face, wearing a striped T-shirt and long pant rolled up to his knees, appears with his hands tucked inside his pockets.

He's not walking out of the gate. He's standing there

and staring at Maqhinga.

These village people, really? What if he came here to kill?

He's waiting for Maqhinga to speak, his eyes are not on his face but his feet.

That's it! They wouldn't have made it in the city, they're too careless. It's a good thing that they all decided to run their businesses here and build their homes here.

“I'm looking for Ngcwethi Mthembu? Am I at the right place?” Maqhinga asks.

“No,” he says and keeps his eyes fixed on his feet.

“Oh, where can I find him?” Maqhinga asks.

“On your right,” the man says, lacking interest.

“Thank you,” Maqhinga says, before turning around to leave. This one looks like the main homestead, he assumes that the man he just met is the big brother of the Mthembus, the one who killed Madoda Mthembu, his own father. People talked about him a lot at the rank, the association wanted to hunt him

down because a man like him is an essential in their industry. But they heard that he wasn't a man of deals. He didn't fight or kill to get paid. He did it for his own intentions, according to his own rules and standards.

He should've known this one was the correct homestead, it has a rondavel that looks nothing like the built rondavels in this whole village. It has designs; African clay pots and stars on the walls. And there's something about it, the intense aura that humbles you a step away from the gate.

Here the gate is widely opened, there's a little boy playing a huge car toy on the veranda. He doesn't care about a strange man walking inside his home.

Oh, the mother is sitting on the chair and busy on her laptop. She lifts her head up for a second, frowns at Maqhing, then looks down at her laptop again.

People don't believe in criminals in this place, do

they?

“Mvelase!” Maqhinga puts his hands up, greeting the rural style.

“Baby go and call your father, he has a guest,” the wife says, snapping her fingers at the boy.

She lifts her face to Maqhinga with a broad smile.

“Good morning, Ngcwethi will see you in a minute. You can wait inside that rondavel.”

Oh, she just assumed that he is here to seek! He nods and turns to the pointed rondavel.

There's a carpet at the door, he pushes off his sneakers and walks inside barefooted. A reed-mat for guests is laid on the floor, ready for him to sit on. He's not used to people of this kind and their way of doing things.

After a short while a brown-eyed man walks in. He keeps popping his finger joints and sniffing.

He lays a goat-skin on the floor and sits on it. There's a thick yarn tied around his forehead and

skin bangles circling his wrists.

“Hey ndoda,” -those are the first words he says as he glues the burning candle down on the floor.

Maqhinganga thought this was going to be professional, in a traditional way; clapping hands, bowing heads and all that.

“You're not attending the funeral?” he asks, now with his head up and his brown eyes fixed on Maqhinganga.

“No,” Maqhinganga says.

He expects him to object but he doesn't say anything.

“Can you help me?” Maqhinganga asks.

“What do you want? Think carefully before you say anything because I only have one candle,” he says.

And what is that supposed to mean?

“Why are you here Maqhinganga Ngidi?” he asks, emphasising each word and allowing him to gather his thoughts by taking his eyes off him.

Maqhinga's heartbeat starts racing, he didn't want to be specific, this man was supposed to know what he needed.

The candle is burning...he needs to make up his mind and talk.

“Can you help me communicate to my mother?” he asks and mentally gives himself a huge punch. He wasn't supposed to run after a dead woman who didn't want him while she was still alive, chasing her to explain himself about things he has no knowledge of.

“I don't know how soon it can happen. You'll have to be patient. And you need to cleanse yourself and be pure, the industry you are in is bloody and dirty,” Ngcwethi says.

“I can wait, no matter how long it takes. I need to talk to her,” Maqhinga says.

“You may not be able to talk to her. The dream world works differently. She'll decide if she wants you to talk to her,” Ngcwethi says.

This doesn't settle well with Maqhinga. What if



she's still the same Magcina who wanted nothing to do with him?

“Isn't there any other way? Maybe you can give her my message- just let her know that I would've never hurt her.” Maybe that's all he wants to tell Magcina. He came all the way to this village because he cares about her opinions of him. Even when she's dead, he still wants her to see him as a good son, not a scary little Msawenkosi. He needs to have at least one parent that believes in his decency.

“You slaughtered from your own kraal?” Ngcwethi asks, ignoring Maqhinga's request.

Is he judging him? A person like him should know that it was an honest mistake.

“I'm nothing like my uncle. We had an agreement and we had no idea that we were related,” he defends himself. This man must not test him! He didn't come all this way to be judged by him.

“When are you planning to go back home?” Ngcwethi asks, ignoring his furrowed brows. He's dealt with far dangerous people.

“I’m not going back,” Maqhinga says.

“Do you think the family will survive? The twin?”

He shuts his eyes when Ngcwethi mentions Twinnie. Only if he could've left with her. He's scared for her, and if he ever decides to go back, it would be for her.

“Do you wish you weren't related to her?” Ngcwethi asks.

Now Maqhinga is pissed! Is this a picnic now?

“Is that still a part of my consultation?” he asks.

Ngcwethi lets out a chuckle.

“Just in case you haven't noticed, your candle has burned out,” he says.

Maqhinga's eyes widen as he looks at the candle.

“What does it mean by burning out?” he asks.

“It means that whether you're home or not, your family is sitting under the dark cloud, one of your own is lying cold in the mortuary. You are in the dark period Maqhinga, with the rest of your family, and it'll follow you wherever you go until you

cleanse with umswani,” Ngcwethi says.

Maqhingga heaves a sigh and drops his eyes on the floor.

Ngcwethi clears his throat and stands up. He rolls the goat-skin he was sitting on and throws it at the alter.

“We'll start working on purifying you tomorrow so that you can have clear visions in your sleep. My wife will give you a room,” he says.

Maqhingga dusts himself up and follows him to the door. His plan wasn't to stay here, but he's going to do it because he desperately needs to see his mother, even if it's in a dream.

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NDLALIFA

He's jumped into conclusions before and all it did

was to damage his relationship with his father. He's trying not to go back to that place of pointing fingers and blaming people, but it's been days! Maqhingana is not coming home, his phone has been off since that night, and he hasn't done any bank transactions that could lead to where he is.

Snalo said there was a small fight. Ngidi didn't say anything, he hasn't said anything even today.

People came in numbers for the funeral; old school mates, colleagues, taxi drivers, relatives and friends. The tent is filling up, Ndongdo's father is leading the service, he's been surprisingly very supporting to her during these hard times.

The grave has been dug next to Magcina's, as much as Ngidi wanted his daughter to be buried at the Ngidis, next to his parents, the damages and lobola process couldn't have been speed up in just a space of one week.

Ndlalifa who's been the eyes and ears of the family at the gravesite walks inside the yard and heads to

the tent where his father is.

There's a young girl crying at the front, she must be an old school friend. Nobody was supposed to cry today but tears are too hot to hold back. Khosi fainted earlier, when the coffin was taken out of the rondavel to the tent. Elder women are still keeping an eye on her.

Snalo is sitting next to the coffin, her shoulders covered with a blanket, just as Snakho's coffin is covered in one.

Ndlalifa taps his father's shoulder and asks for a minute. Snalo is staring at them as they follow each other out of the tent. She's worried about her sitting here, in a blanket, and not allowed to do anything. Her family, which she just found, is breaking apart. Maqhinga disappeared with no trace, Ngidi and Ndlalifa are distant more than ever. Ndabuko can't always be here to neutralize situations, he has his own life.

“Where is my brother?” Ndlalifa asks, sounding colder than he intended.

“I sent people to look for him and they still haven't given me anything solid,” Ngidi says. If Ndlalifa thinks Maqhingana's disappearance only worries him, then he has it all twisted. Ngidi hasn't slept the whole week, he's never gone a week without speaking to his son. He got scared when he found him and Thingolwenkosazane in that position on bed. At that moment all he thought about was not being able to save Thingolwenkosazane the same way he failed to save Magcina and Khwezilokusa.

“Look for him where? Baba what did you do to my brother?” Ndlalifa asks angrily.

“I hit him, it wasn't on purpose. I'll never hit my son like that.”

“Maqhingana wouldn't leave just because you hit him. We've taken bullets and knives.”

Silence...

“Ngonyama?” Ndlalifa's tone carries a warning.

Ngidi exhales in exhaustion.

“He was on bed with Snalo. They were close, too close. I acted out of fear and said some things I shouldn't have said,” he says.

Ndlalifa scratches his face angrily and blows out.

“You're the only parent that has ever loved him and seen a good son in him. He was happy regardless of how he looks and who he looks like, because he had you in his corner. You believed in him and that was one thing that kept him going.” He's defeated, Maqhinga has already missed the funeral, there are slim chances of him coming back to this family.

Ndlalifa has never said this, because there's never been a reason to say it, but he loves his brother. He cannot live without his annoying presence. They've already lost Snakho, and now Maqhinga too!

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Men fetch the coffin from the tent and carry it all the way to the gravesite. Phumzile was asked not to cry, but she fails to hold herself and breaks into a

hysterical cry as she sees the deep grave that her niece, whom she raised from birth, is going to be buried in.

Ngidi is keeping it together. He's trying not to think about his coming mornings where he'll wake up and pass Khwezi's empty bedroom. Nobody will tell him how ugly his clothes are everytime he dresses up in the morning. Nobody will force him into a gown and call strange people to come and touch his feet with their oily hands. Nobody will ask him if he's asleep "already" late at night and ask him if he's "still" asleep at the crack of dawn.

He also hates that he has no brothers, his son has taken over brotherly duties and doing everything that wasn't supposed to be done by him.

Ndlalifa kneels next to Snalo and talks to her. She's shaking her head and crying at everything he says.

Ndlalifa negotiates with her and begs until she nods and lies down on the blanket.



He wraps her with the blanket like a corpse. With the help of two other men, he lifts her and passes her to the men inside the grave. People know that she's not dead, she's just opening the way for her twin sister, but they still cry and scare her off.

Ngidi digs sand with the shovel and throws it inside the grave, over Snalo's body. Then they lift her up, Ndlalifa and men outside the grave take her and put her on the ground.

She's not moving!

Ndlalifa screams for water, a boy rushes to him with a jug and he throws it on Snalo's face. Her eyelids start moving, he sighs out in relief and lifts her out of the blanket.

He takes the blanket covering Snakho's coffin and wraps Snalo in it, and takes the one Snalo has been covered in the whole day and covers Snakho's coffin with it.

This is it! Snakho and Snalo are separated. One is taken back home, eyes blinded by Phumzile's hands so that she does not take a single glance back, and

another one is lowered down, inside the grave and buried.

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Bhekizitha “Ngonyama” Ngidi

He walks inside the dining room and finds Phumzile wrapped in misery on a couch. Everyone has gone to sleep, he's only up because of his secret visit to Magcina's grave.

“I thought everyone was on bed,” he says and lowers himself next to her on the couch.

“So did I. Where are you coming from?” Phumzile asks.

“I was just stretching my legs.”

He's lying and they both know it.

“Thank you Phumzile,” he says.

She knows what he's thanking her for, and honestly, it's not even necessary. She was raising her sister's kids, it was her duty.

“Bheki you've thanked me enough,” she says.

“I feel like I owe you.” He's staring at the twins picture hanging from the wall. They were still in Elangeni college, wearing same clothes and their hair done in the same style.

“You owe me being a good father to Snalo,” she says, lifting her eyes to him.

“And Nomkhosi,” Ngidi adds and narrows his eyes to challenge her.

“Well, I guess you can, but just know that there's no pressure from my side. I don't expect you to be my saviour.”

A moment of silence passes, they're both lost in their deep thoughts.

“Maqhingisa is missing,” he finally gathers the strength to tell Phumzile.

“What do you mean “he's missing”? I thought he left

on his own,” she asks.

“He did but I don't know where he went. He left everything behind; his cars, important documents and his clothes. I don't know how he's living, that's if he's still alive.” This man is broken. He's still standing because he has kids to be strong for.

“He's never left home and cut all communications like this,” he says. His hopes are dying. Magcina has to do something. He's asked her to welcome their daughter and take care of her in the other world, and asked her to keep Maqhinga safe wherever he is. But if she's still harbouring hatred, she'll lead him straight into danger. She wanted him dead while she was still alive.

“He's fine Bheki. We'll find him and bring him home,” Phumzile says and pulls out his hand to comfort him.

“What if we don't? I'll lose Ndlalifa and Thingolwenkosazane too. This is all my fault, I drove my son away.”

“Bhekizitha, no! I'm not going to allow you to do this

to yourself.” She's pulling both his hands and giving him a reprimanding look.

“I said Maqhinga is coming back home, okay?”

She's staring at him.

A heavy sigh!

“Alright,” Ngidi says, igniting his hopes again.

They're still staring at each other. Phumzile is looking for a confirmation and Ngidi is looking at this broken woman who builds others up. The woman who raised his kids from birth to 27. She's thick, a bit lighter than Magcina, with plum lips and upturned eyes like Ndlalifa's.

Ndlalifa's heavy footsteps break their stare. They both shift to their positions and stare at the door.

“I thought everyone was on bed,” Ndlalifa says.

“Same here,” they both say at once.

Okay, that was very weird of them!

Ndlalifa frowns and turns his eyes to Ngidi. Isn't this how Maqhinga and Snalo were when he attacked Maqhinga?

“Thank you for everything you did for me today,”  
Ngidi says.

He exhales and nods. Hopefully he's reading too much in the situation and jumping into conclusions like his father. Because, no!

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MAQHINGA

What's different between water from the bathroom and this freezing one from a running river? This is bloody harassment!

“A man who's gunned down hundreds of people is scared of water?” Ngcwethi mocks. He just jumped inside the water, threw it all over his body as cold as it was and got out to dry himself. No drama involved!

Maqhingga only has his feet inside the river and he's already complaining. They need to bath, here in the river, before the first sunray comes out.

“This is bullshit!” he murmurs as cold water

drenches his shivering skin.

“Well, do this ‘bullshit’ quickly, I left my wife on bed and the bullshit I could do with her is far better than this one,” Ngcwethi says, clearly offended by Maqhinganga's choice of words. He takes his job seriously and he's only doing this to help him.

“Are you allowed to do things with her while helping me? Hey ndoda, don't jeopardize my progress here,” Maqhinganga asks, finally getting out of the water, dripping wet.

“I'm married,” that's Ngcwethi's answer. This got to be the most frustrating person he's ever dealt with.

“Exactly! The woman is not running away, you paid cows for her. You can't be fucking someone at night and getting in the same river with me in the morning,” Maqhinganga says.

“Well, I trust you'll pass your complaints to her as well. Do not look back at the river, we are leaving everything behind,” Ngcwethi tells him.

He doesn't understand, he's learnt not to question any instruction Ngcwethi gives him because he

doesn't understand him even when he explains. He even talked to the water when they got to the river; he threw a silver coin inside and praised something he didn't see, the God of water. Apparently, they needed to pay respect to It before stepping inside its castle; the river.

They're heading back home in Ngcwethi's car and talking about sports. He's a human being outside, normal in his abnormal way, and sometimes very comfortable to talk to about general life and women.

Today Maqhingana will be left alone in their huge homestead, their lives won't stop because of his presence. The wife owns a spa, or is it a salon? She works with other wives, but from what he's heard, the brothers aren't comfortable with them being over-dedicated to their business and now they're trying to find a way to tie them down, whatever that means.

Ngcwethi and the brothers still run a farm and a few shops in the village and surroundings. The eldest



one has his private plumbing company and a crazy wife.

“I cooked last night and packed the food inside the fridge. There's a microwave in the kitchen and one in your room. If you need something from the shops call Ngcwethi, he'll send a driver to pick the list. If you experience any problems with water or electricity just take Mazwakhe's company number from that laminated certificate on the wall and his people will be here in the blink of an eye.” It's the wife, she's on her feet, with her purse under arm and car keys in her hand.

“Thank you,” Maqhinga says and nods. None of this will be necessary, he doesn't have a phone to make calls with and he won't need plumbers, even if water gives him problems. He knows his position in this family, he's here to get help, not to make their lives difficult.

“Take naps,” Ngcwethi says and leaves Maqhinga confused.

Their car drives out. Now Maqhingana is all alone, the only company he has is of his thoughts. He's been trying not to think about Snalo or Ngidi or Ndlalifa. He convinced himself that they'll be fine, but knowing how Ndlalifa is, Ngidi's house is turned upside down and Ndlalifa is threatening to wipe out the whole Durban.

Snalo? He doesn't think about her in any other way other than that he's his sister. He avoids thinking about how far he could've gone with her, because that would make him Msawenkosi; the man he's trying so hard to detach himself from.

He puts a cushion behind his head and lies down on the couch with his eyes closed. God knows how sorry he is. His father, as grown as he is, politics still scare him because they brought nothing but pain in his life. Ngidi avoids even sitting on the same table as politicians. And that's exactly what Maqhingana's existence brought to Magcina and

temporarily, to Phumzile as well.

~ “Maqhinga,” the voice calls him and he lifts his head up.

She's wearing a beret and a dark green blouse. He cannot see her face because she's sitting with her back turned to him.

“Msawenkosi took every piece of me. He ripped my soul out and left me breathing in a dead body.”

He frowns and tries to get off the sand he's lying on so that he can walk to her and see her face. But his body is too heavy, he cannot get up.

“Was I wrong? I wanted him to feel the pain I was feeling. But here I'm an outcast, my family is locking me out because I'm too sinful to be with them. I'm all alone.” For a moment it sounds as if she's going to break down and cry. But not her, she doesn't cry. Not in front of people!

“He was wrong. Msawenkosi owes me an apology, as much as I owe this family an apology for spilling

blood of my own.”

Maqhingana remembers the voice, not too well but his memory can pick it here and there.

Finally, his mother is here. She's talking to him. Everything feels so right. Maybe they can...where did she disappear to? She was sitting there just now.

“Mama!” he screams on top of his voice.

She cannot disappear on him like this. Not before he sees her face and tells her about his own struggles.

“Mama!” he repeats, close to tears. It can't be that she still despises a sight of him!~

Ngcwethi is standing over the couch and staring at him. He slowly opens his eyes and scans around the room.

His heart sinks. A lump is rising up his throat. Not this pain again! He was here to heal, not to go through another rejection.

“What did she say?” Ngcwethi asks.

He collects his breaths and swallows back the lump in his throat.

“She..she only talked about herself.” This is it! He hates this woman back.

“Maqhinga...” Ngcwethi walks around the couch and sits next to him. He doesn't know what he's going through because he's never lived a day in his shoes, but he knows that he needs to be strong for the journey he's started.

“You can do this. Your mother wouldn't have chosen you for this if she knew that you wouldn't be able to do it.”

Maqhinga lets out a chuckle. Chosen him? How do you fail to choose someone while you're still alive and only choose him when you're dead and helpless?

“I'm done Mthembu. Thank you for everything.” He's finally calling this whole thing off. He doesn't have a family, that's it! He'll go and start his life somewhere far from here.

“Well, the matter has been brought front and I don't

leave things hanging, ever. If this job is too heavy for you then find me your uncle's daughter and she'll apologize to the ancestors on her father's behalf," Ngcwethi says.

He can't be talking about Nomkhosi. That..never! She'll never find out about Msawenkosi. That would kill her and drive Phumzile to an early grave.

"Your mother and uncle are both outcasts from your family. They're not welcomed because of their imperfections and the sins they committed on earth. I think she told you that she wants an apology from your uncle before anything. That's our stepping stone, we unite them in the other world and bring peace to the Nsele alter."

"Why me? Why not her favourite son, Ndlalifa?"

"Because you're the one chosen to rewrite the wrongs. You don't look like Msawenkosi because he doesn't own this look. He got it from his mother's grandfather, and Dabulamanzi wasn't a rapist. Msawenkosi tarnished his memory, hence his looks were passed to you to live up to who your great-

grandfather was. You didn't turn this way by chance Maqhinga.”

This man knows a lot! Sometimes he talks nonsense that makes sense.

“What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to do it and when?” Maqhinga asks.

Ngcwethi releases a breath he's been secretly holding.

“I have to let my wife know that I'm leaving tonight,” he says.

Well, it's really happening. He's about to go and apologize on behalf of people he's never met.

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NDONDO

Andiswa walks out of the house and comes to the car as I park outside. Why am I getting a bad feeling about this? Andiswa never help anyone with their

bags, I mean, what kind of water I could've bathed with?

“Sister, you have a guest,” she says a few steps away from me.

I'm not that woman..no, who am I kidding? I'm that woman who hates people who just pop in my house to invade my space under the word ‘visiting.’

“Who?” I ask with an eye-roll.

“Zamafuze.”

What? I just buried my friend two days ago. The last thing I need is to argue with a girl over men.

“You shouldn't have let her in.” I can't believe she's this careless. Zamafuze is not someone you can let inside the house while you're alone, she can kill you, cut you into fine pieces and pack you inside the fridge. That's how unpredictable and dangerous she is.

I don't have the strength. I need her out of my house, right now.



“Ndondo!” She gets off the couch and walks towards me.

Is she wearing Qondani's tracksuits? Lord!

“Get out!” I say, throwing my bag over the couch.

“I need your help.”

What? Somebody pass me an earbud! She needs my what- help?

“I cannot get hold of Qondani. And before you assume the worst of me, I'm genuinely worried about him,” she says.

“Worried about him or worried about yourself? Leave my brother alone Zamafuze, it's me you were trying to hurt, and congratulations, you did exceptionally well. You put Bab'Maqhawe through hell, and because life is a web, the pain came straight to me.” I'm not even sure why I'm crying my heart out to this woman. This is what she came to see- me at my weakest.

“I miss him,” she says in a low voice and tears her eyes off me.

I want to laugh out loud but I don't have the strength.

“You miss his money and him slaving around for you,” I say and click my tongue. If it wasn't for Bab' Mbambo Qondani would've abandoned his kids and the family, forever.

“No, I miss us. Me and him, and the little things that made us happy. He appreciated every little effort I made, noticed every little thing I did and came home to me everyday. He didn't have much; he'd drive me to Spur in a van and order the cheapest meal for me. On Fridays when he got paid he'd order pizza, cuddle me on bed and force me to watch some stupid show called Ugubhu Lwami.” Is she about to fake tears right now?

“It wasn't natural. You, witch, made him do all that,” I remind her, it seems like she's forgotten how she got Qondani.

“That's because you made me feel like I wasn't enough- “I was chosen for Ndabuko by Nhlanzeko nywe nywe nywe,” she says, mimicking me. I wasn't aware that I talk like this; through my nose, with my

eyebrows twitching and all that. We learn till we die!

“And you think you're still going to be my future sister-in-law with this stinking attitude?” I ask, pulling out my phone. I want her to hear it from him; he DOESN'T want her anymore.

“You're not a saint...” she says more under her breath. I cannot hear her and I don't care, because she's a madwoman.

Mam'J abu picks up after the third ring.

“Ma, is Qondani around?” I ask.

“Yes, he's here next to me,” she says.

“Please give him the phone.”

I pass my phone to Zamafuze and wait with my arms folded. I'm patiently waiting to see her face when Qondani drops the call on her.

“Mahla...Qondani..hello? Sthandwa sami...” She checks the screen that just dimmed and swipes it.

“I have helped you, now get out!” I snatch my phone from her hand and show her the door.

“If he calls or communicate in any way, please tell him that I said I'm sorry. I really miss him.” She sounds genuine, and for a second I thought I'd see tears running down on her face. But I know Zamafuze, this is just one of her stunts.

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NDABUKO

He'd loved to stay with Ngidi and his family during this time of need. Not because he feels indebted to them for everything they've done for him over the years, but because he genuinely takes them as his family. He can feel their pain and he wants to be with them every step of the journey. But they left a business behind, he needed to attend the taxi association meeting on his and Ndlalifa's behalf.

The meeting is adjourned and they all head to their cars. He had a very long weekend and there was no

time to really check on his woman. He needs to properly check on Ndondo and hopefully get something to take his mind off things. They haven't touched over a week and he misses her like crazy. He misses seeing her naked, pregnant self walking up and down in his house. Maqhinga said it was some kind of pervert's disorder that he wants his woman to stay naked everytime she's around him. But Ndondo understands him and his crazy needs. She's adjusted to him and soon they'll be living their naked lives together. He'll have what he can call a home to go to everyday, not just a house.

He intends to drive past his house to drop his bags and then heads to Ndondo's house. As he drives out of the garage where he was fueling his car, he notices a white quantum with an orange sticker trying to overtake him. There's another car, a red Golf following closely behind it.

Something is not right! He presses the accelerator and drives past a red robot.

Guns go off!

He needs to lose them and that means taking every corner and following any road.

The Golf is on his tail and firing shots. Most have bore his car but no bullet has caught him yet. He needs to stay focused!

A man wearing black security guards' uniform is crossing the road, it's too late for Ndabuko to warn him and it's too late for him to clear off.

Ndabuko clenches his jaws as he hits on something hard and sees a human figure flying out of the road.

His hands are getting moist and trembling off the wheel. But he needs to move, it's a matter of his life or death.

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NDONDO

I don't know if I should give him a hug or a glass of water first. I've never seen him in this condition before. I don't know what happened yet, but it's bad, his car has bullet holes all over it.

“Babe...” Owk! He doesn't want me to touch him, not because he doesn't need my comfort but maybe because he still needs time to collect himself.

“I'll get a glass of sugar water,” I tell him.

He doesn't say anything. He buries his head in his hands and keeps his head between his knees.

I excuse myself and head to the kitchen.

He's in a very dangerous industry. A person like him, who owns so many taxis and do things they do with the Ngidis to control others, shouldn't have gone anywhere without bodyguards. I don't know what he was thinking, I nearly lost him the same way I lost Nhlanzeko. I don't know what could've become of me. I don't think I would've been strong enough to handle it. I've created so many beautiful memories with this one. He's my world.

Urgh! People have no timing, who's calling me now? I'm still dealing with a traumatized man who just escaped from a crocodile's mouth.

“Is this Ms Ndondo Sibisi?” the caller asks.

This sounds very formal.

“Yes, can I help you?” I'm ready to postpone whatever discussion or proposal he wants to make.

“It's about Mr Raphael Mbambo. He was involved in a car accident.”

No! No! No!

“Is he still alive?” My hands are shaking, I might even drop this cellphone.

“Unfortunately no, he was...” I don't hear what he says next. My head is spinning. My legs are wobbly and failing to carry me up. I need to sit.

Bab'Mbambo cannot do this to me. He cannot leave me. He knows how much he means to me!

[03/14, 09:12] : Chapter 39



## NDONDO

He talked a lot about his family, especially his late daughter, Nomandla. Maybe I was his comfort, in me he found a girl he could father and fill the gap in his heart. He played a significant role in my life, from the first day I stepped in Bantwana Holdings, he took me under his wing and treated me like his daughter.

I cannot believe that I'm standing here, in front of his wife, and trying to tell her that it was God's timing and that Bab'Mbambo has lived his life to the fullest. The truth is, I wasn't ready to lose him either. It hurts! I've never lost a parent before but now I know how painful it is.

It's surprising to see Ngidi here. He just lost his daughter, as much as Bab'Mbambo was his ex-employee, he should be focusing on his family and not trying to be there for everyone.

Ndlalifa and Ndabuko left with the police.

Everything happened in a short space of time, I don't even know how Ndabuko is feeling, he had to pull himself together and focus on me.

“Baba, did Ndabuko leave with the bodyguards?” I ask Mr Ngidi as I bump into him outside the door. We are in Waterloo, in Bab’Mbambo’s RDP house. He’ll be buried back at KwaMaphumulo, the family is here to collect his belongings and arrange for his body to be transferred to Stanger. Mr Ngidi availed himself to help the police with investigation.

“Nothing is going to happen to him MaSibisi,” he says, giving me the look of assurance. Not that I don't trust him, but Nhlanzeko was killed by a gun and if Ngidi really had the super powers nothing was going to happen to him either.

“Where did they go?” I ask.

No, he mustn't sigh like that! This is my man we're talking about here.

“They're coming back,” he says a bit annoyed.

“When? They've been gone for hours, what if something happened to Ndabuko? They were trying

to kill him not so long ago and now he's out there again!" I'm crying in bulk; for Bab'Mbambo and for how unsafe the life Ndabuko inherited from Nhlanzeko has become.

Ngidi has his phone against his ear, he looks very much annoyed but I don't care.

"Umfazi wakho uyakhala la!" (Your woman is crying here) He passes his phone to me after saying those words and walks inside the house.

"Ndondoyami?" He's in panic. The sound of the wheels on the road makes me uncomfortable. Why are they speeding?

"Where are you?" More tears break. Words are choking me. What if they're chasing him again?

"I'm on my way back. I'm okay, we have security cars with us on the road," he says.

I wipe the tears and pull myself together. At least they're guarded.

"What must I bring for you?" he asks, trying to soften me up.

“Bring Bab'Mbambo.” This is the only thing I want right now- I want Bab'Mbambo back.

“I'm really sorry Hlasekazi,” he says and stays on the line as I weep again.

A hand snatches the phone. Urgh! Mr Ngidi. I understand that this is his airtime we are listening to each other's weeping with, but he's rich, this shouldn't be a problem. We can even listen to each other's breathing, it wouldn't dent his balance.

“Don't cry,” he says and pulls me into a hug.

For a moment I'm in shock, this is Mr Ngidi, the CEO!

“The boy will drive you home. It's not healthy for a woman like you to be up and crying at this time. MaXulu has the whole family here, she'll be fine,” he says, with his hands over my shoulders.

I don't know which boy he's talking about until a man, almost my age, appears with the car keys in his hand.

I guess I have no say or whatsoever. I take my bag inside the house and follow “the boy” to the car.

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There's a line of taxis parked in front of the house; I was driven here without any consent. This doesn't sit well with me, if everything is okay then why did they bring his taxis here? They never come here.

There are people around the yard; the Hlomuka VIPs with their big guns. I didn't sign up for this life!

“Mngomezulu is almost here,” the guy who was driving me says. He must've noticed the panic in my eyes. I cannot live like this. He should've taken me to my house, I don't have to look over my shoulders when I'm there.

I nod my head and walk inside the house.

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“You cannot do this to me again!” I'm standing here, in front of an unmoving picture and crying my eyeballs out.

“You brought us together Nhlanzeko. The least you could do is to protect Ndabuko against your people.

They are YOUR PEOPLE, he wanted a different life and you forced him to continue your legacy and live this life. Then how do you stand there, wherever you are, and watch the dogs trying to kill him? What about my baby, OUR baby Nhlanzeko? I cannot raise this baby alone. I don't want to lose another piece of my heart again. What have I done to the Mngomezulus to deserve this life..." Strong hands grab my shoulders and turn me around. I don't know how I look, I've been a crying mess the whole day.

He bends down and lifts my legs up. He carries me all the way to our bedroom and puts me on our bed.

His forehead is linked onto mine, he's staring into my eyes while his right hand entwines with mine.

His eyes are bloodshot, as if he's been crying too. I move my face an inch up and meet his cold, shivering lips.

I feel his erection growing and break the kiss. Sex is not going to solve anything, instead, it'll take the

pain away for a little while.

“Where were you?” I ask.

He heaves a sigh. I've learnt that some of the things that happen in the taxi industry are kept from me. But I still question and annoy him because his life is important to me.

“I was at the police station, then at Tongaat,” he says and rolls to the side.

He takes one pillow and squashes it between his knees.

“Doing what in Tongaat?” I ask.

“Ndondo!” He gives me a look, sniffs back the tears I wasn't aware of and stares up at the ceiling.

“What is going on? Did anyone die?” I'm panicking. He wasn't like this when he left.

“Ndondo please don't leave me. I made a mistake, I didn't have any other choice, they were going to kill me.”

I'm lost! Tears are flooding out of his eyes, whatever it is bad!

“What happened Mngomezulu?” I'm crying, because he's crying, and trying to dig his hand from the pillow he's squeezing so that I can comfort him.

“I ran over Bab'Mbambo...” Whaaaaat? No, this can't be true! He is not the one who killed my Bab'Mbambo.

“I don't like your prank!” I'm on my feet, trying to step far from him as much as possible.

“They were chasing me and shooting my car. It was risky and too late for me to stop, I hit a man and ran.”

I land on the floor, flat with my butt. He's serious, I know this because every word is accompanied by a rain of tears.

“I wouldn't kill an innocent man on purpose, Ndondo you have to believe me.” He's kneeling in front of me and trying to capture my face.

“I know how much you loved him. I'd never put you in this pain on purpose, I love you Ndondo, more than you know. I'm willing to pay for my sins. I will tell the police the truth.”



Whoooooah! What the fu€k-ke?

“You'll tell them what truth?” My tongue unties instantly.

“That I ran over him. I was driving above the speed limit and...” J esus Christ! This man thinks he's going to kill a man who was my pillar of strength and then leave me and go to jail too?

“Whoever was chasing you and trying to kill you killed Bab'Mbambo, and I want justice Ndabuko,” I say.

“J ustice?” he asks.

Now he's clueless about “justice”?

“Don't you call it justice when you and the Ngidis make people pay for their sins? I want justice for Bab'Mbambo. Are you hungry?” I ask.

He nods his head hesitantly and watches as I struggle getting up from the floor.

“Ndondo,” he calls before I walk away.

I stop and look at him.

“I love you,” he says.

It calms me down when he looks at me like that; with so much love written in his eyes.

“I love you more,” I say.

Even though it doesn't reach his eyes, but he smiles genuinely.

“I'm not hungry for something that's in the kitchen. I'm hungry for something beneath that dress,” he says.

I stand still, in defeat.

“Come here,” he gets up from the floor and pulls out his arm for me.

I walk into his arm and rest my head on his shoulder. A wet kiss lands on my cheek, causing my lips to crack into a wide smile.

“Thank you for being my pillar Hlas ekazi. I couldn't have asked for a better woman,” he says.

I couldn't have asked for a better man either. I know he'd never kill an innocent man on purpose, especially a man who meant so much to me. But

now I have to face MaXulu, sit next to her and comfort her, knowing very well that Ndabuko had a hand in her husband's death.

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## MAQHINGA

Phumzile is sweeping the yard when the car she can't recognize pulls up. As the person climbs out of it she realizes that it's Maqhinga and lets go of the broom she had in her hand.

“Maqhinga is that you?” she asks as Maqhinga walks towards her. She is a bit emotional because in her heart she knows that she failed him as much as Magcina failed him.

“Sawubona Ma,” Maqhinga says and stops two feet away from her. They did talk things through but he's still the boy that looks like his rapist-uncle.

“You scared us,” Phumzile says and notices a man climbing out of the car and coming to them.

“I'm sorry to come announced like this. This is Ngcwethi Mthembu, I think it's clear what he does. Magcina wants an apology from me, on behalf of Msawenkosi,” Maqhinga says bitterly.

Phumzile is a bit shocked. She didn't expect things to get into this. This is doing more damage, they've both indirectly mistreated this boy for his remembrances of Msawenkosi, her and Magcina. And now Magcina wants him to apologize on behalf of Msawenkosi?

“You don't have to do it,” she tells him.

“I have to. I want her to love me, don't I?” Maqhinga says and shrugs his shoulders.

She wants to tell her that Magcina loves him but lying to him is no longer an option.

“I'm going to call your father and let him...” He lifts his hand up to stop her.

“Please don't. I'll go home when I'm ready, if you don't mind accommodating me here for a few days,” he says.

“Maqhinga this is your home, you're not being accommodated. Please make the guest comfortable,” she looks at Ngcwethi who's been scanning the whole yard with his eyes and sighing nonstop.

“Ndodana!” she greets.

Ngcwethi steps forward and shakes her hand.

“You can come inside the house, Maqhinga will follow with your bags,” Phumzile says.

“Thank you Mrs Ngidi,” Ngcwethi says, walking after her.

She stops with a frown on her face. Did he mistake her for someone?

“I'm her sister,” she says, referring to Magcina who could've been Mrs Ngidi.

“This is a very nice place but there's no space for livestock. My father had a friend around here...”

Owkaaay! He's not going to acknowledge his mistake, that's if he made any.

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## ZAMAFUZE

Ndabuko turned her into a desperate woman that begs and runs after men. But this time it's different, it has less to do with Ekhaya Bazothini Syndrome and more to do with her heart. This is the most risky decision she's ever took; going to a man's father's house to search for him. Qondani's father hates her, that's out of question. Ndondo also wants nothing to do with her and their issues go way back, they're deeper. The fact is, the whole Sibisi clan and relatives will never be fond of her, but the heart wants what it wants. And right now, it wants Qondani.

She asked a boy she found at the taxi stop and he gave her clear instructions. It's almost dark, the clock is just a few ticks away from 6pm.

Her heart is beating loud against her dry chest. She's recited every prayer there is and now it's up to

Qondani how he takes her.

A little girl playing on the veranda sees her and runs inside the house. When she comes back there's an elder with her, a woman wearing a red panifore and beret. She's staring at her as she walks towards the house. She is wearing a skirt that's just above her knees and stilettos that make it a bit difficult for her to walk on their yard.

“Hello Ma,” she says shyly. Her eyes are on the little girl she deprived the right to her father for a while. Maybe she did take this revenge thing way too far. All she wanted was to hurt Ndondo the same way she and Ndabuko hurt her.

“Yebo mntanami. Who must I say you are? This is my first time seeing you in this place,” Mam’J abu asks with her eyes squinted. She's trying to capture any feature of her that she could familiarize.

“I'm here to see Qondani,” she says, not too sure about telling this woman her name, she might chase her out before she even sees Qondani.

“And you are?” Mam’J abu is not about to let

someone she doesn't know inside her house. Yes the girl looks beautiful and innocent, but after what “a beautiful girl” did to her son she's threading carefully.

“I'm Nomkhosi Nsele,” Zamafuze says and pinches herself.

“Oh, Ndondo's friend? Come in, my child. Why didn't you tell her to call and tell us to expect you?”

They walk inside the house. The kids clear from the lounge when their grandmother walks in with a fancy guest. Qondani's Orlando Pirates T-shirt is lying on the couch, which means he's somewhere around.

“Please be comfortable, I'll get you something to drink. Hey oNdondo, ukusho nje!” She's shaking her head in embarrassment and rushing out to defrost the tray of chicken thighs. There's no way Ndondo's friend, Khosi from Durban, is going to eat potatoes and rice for dinner.

Qondani walks into his mother breaking plates in



the kitchen and frowns. She's cooking again?!

“Change of menu?” he asks, looking at the tray of chicken thighs sinking inside the bucket of water.

“Why didn't you tell me Ndondo has such beautiful friends? How embarrassing is it that she was about to walk on us having potatoes and rice for dinner? Do you know how important Ndondo's image is?”

“What are you talking about J abulile mfazi kababa?” Qondani asks with a fake sigh.

Mam'J abu clicks her tongue in annoyance.

“Go and greet wena hlongandlebe,” she says, waving him away with her hand.

Qondani is still laughing at his mother when he walks into his worst nightmare sitting on his mother's couch with its bag on its lap.

“Qondani,” - She's up on her feet and begging him not to leave with her eyes.

“What are you doing here?” Qondani asks in a low voice.

“You don't answer my calls,” she says.

He takes her bag that dropped from her lap when she stood up and pulls her hand.

“Qondani where are you taking Nomkhosi?”

Mam’J abu asks when she sees Qondani dragging her guest out. Are they fighting?

“This is Zamafuze,” that's all he says before dragging her out of the door.

She is crying and begging him to listen.

Maqhawe stops above his kraal and watches the scandal playing out in his premises.

“Don't ever come here again!” Qondani says and throws her bag to her chest. He's breathing fire!

Zamafuze falls down on her knees and sobs even louder.

“Where must I go Qondani at this time?” she asks between the sobs.

“I didn't ask you to come here, so don't include me

in your problems.”

“I know that you won't believe anything that I say but I love you Qondani. I want to correct my mistakes and be the woman you want me to be.”

Qondani breaks a chuckle. He's in disbelief.

“You bewitched me Zamafuze. You targeted me to get back to my sister,” he reminds her.

“I was desperate,” Zamafuze.

“Desperate for what?”

“I knew that you wouldn't fall in love with me unless if I did something to you.”

“How did you know that? Do you stay in my heart?”

“I don't need to stay in your heart. Right now, at this moment, proves that. You don't love me Qondani, nobody has ever loved me. Nobody! You would've been no exception either.”

Qondani sighs heavily and leans against the electricity pole.

“So you fetched umuthi and fed me so that I can

love you?” he asks.

“Yes...”

“Talk!”

“I grated my nails inside your food and dropped my tears inside your juice.”

Silence.....

“I swear I'm not that crazy Qondani. For four years I had a man who did everything for me and then all of a sudden things changed; there's a chosen girl in the picture, she's pregnant and getting married to the same man I took in and out of hospitals, bathing and feeding.”

“I'm innocent in all that Zamafuze. Why didn't you go and feed him your nails and tears?” Qondani asks.

“Because I was looking for revenge, not his love anymore,” she says.

He helps her up and picks her bag from the ground.

“Zamafuze we are not getting back together. I'll never trust you or any other woman again.”

She nods her head with tears running down on her face.

“Again, I'm sorry for involving you in all this. Thank you for showing me the true meaning of love. I'll hold on to those memories forever. Ngiyabonga Mahlase, even though you weren't in your rightful senses but you chose me over others a few times. Now I know how it feels like being someone's all. Have a goodnight.” She bends down, takes off her stilettos and walks away barefooted. She needs to hurry and catch the last taxi at the stop, hopefully there's one.

Qondani watches until she disappears. She has her shoes and bag in hand, and rushing up the road leading to the taxi stop. It's dark, there are no taxis on the road, this is a village.

“Where is she going to sleep?” Maqhawe asks from behind, startling him.

“Baba I didn't know you were behind me,” he says in embarrassment.

“You wouldn't have noticed, not while staring at her hips like that.”

Qondani chuckles and shakes his head. That's not the reason why he was staring at her.

“Is it crazy that I feel sorry for her?” he asks his father.

“Women cry Qondani. They have tears for days, that's why you always hear them advising each other- ‘drink a lot of water mngani.’ They're just filling their tanks of tears so that they can trap us,” Maqhawe says.

Qondani cracks into laughter.

“But you can give her another chance, maybe she'll be a proper woman this time and not bewitch you.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

Hopefully he's not going to regret this.

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Zamafuze has been standing here for almost 15

minutes now and not even a single taxi has passed. It's heavily dark, there are no streetlights, her only safety is that there's a homestead nearby. If anything happens she'll scream for help.

Oh finally, there are lights flashing around the corner. She picks her bag, holds it tightly on her chest and steps closer to the road.

It's a van. It pulls up next to her and the window rolls down.

“Get inside the car Zamafuze.”

Her thudding heart calms down as she hears his voice. She didn't think he was going to come, he was done, she saw it in his eyes.

She hurriedly opens the door and climbs in before he changes his mind.

“You can drop me in town, I'll look for a BnB to spend the night and leave tomorrow morning,” she says after settling on the seat.

He doesn't say anything, he reverses the car and

drives back to the direction of his home.

(NB: I'm aware of the delays from Paxi, those who ordered MaShenge earlier this month will receive their pins soon. Don't panic!!)

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QONDANI SIBISI

His mother is not pleased at all, but his father is there to tame his pumpkin. Qondani has to dish for Zamafuze himself because after finding out who she really is, Jabu chose to distance herself from everything.

“Ma, where is the beetroot?” Qondani asks as he sets the cutlery on the plate. No, he's not enjoying this either, him and Zamafuze still have a lot to talk about, but right now he needs to be welcoming and treat her like any other guest.

“Baba who is that aunty in your house?” his daughter asks, pulling his arm.



There's no way he's introducing Zamafuze to his kids. He was going to do it, but not anymore.

“That Baba’s old friend, go to your grandmother,” he hushes her away and his mother rolls her eyes.

“Don't finish my beetroot,” she says before leaving.

He takes out the bottle of beetroot and adds it at the side of the plate as a salad.

He takes out the cold drink and leaves with it and the tray of food. His father has gone to sleep. His friend passed on, this has shaken him and completely ruined his day. Ndondo called about an hour ago to deliver the message, Jabu wanted to tell her about Zamafuze but Maghawe said no. Qondani should be allowed to work on his relationship with no external forces, if it fails again, it fails. He doesn't need the pressure to choose between his sister and supposed-girlfriend. If Zamafuze can prove her love for Qondani, Ndondo will automatically forgive her for whatever she's done to make her life a living hell.

Zamafuze just finished bathing, she's changed into her sleeping short and loose T-shirt. Qondani puts the tray of food on top of the table and takes her bathwater out.

When he comes back she's already dug in her food. She must've been very hungry. He decides not to disturb her because when they talk he wants them to focus and lay their hearts out.

He goes to his parents' bedroom to pass time.

His mother is still watching TV with the kids, this doesn't disturb their privacy in anyway.

“You're still up?” he asks, walking through the door.

His father is up and puffing his tobacco.

“Is your wife going to be happy about you smoking inside the house?” he asks.

Maqhawe chuckles, he knows that Jabu is still watching Isibaya, the smell would be long gone when she comes to bed.

“Why are you worried about my wife and I?”

Shouldn't you be with your Dlis o?" he asks.

"Dlis o?" Qondani asks with a chuckle.

"She feeds you amadlis o, doesn't she? So what's chasing you away from your bedroom?" he asks.

Qondani releases a long sigh before lifting his face to his father.

"I don't know if I'll ever trust her again. Zamafuze gets bitter when she's hurting, who knows what she'd do to my kids if I ever happen to hurt her as well? I don't want to be with a psycho that I always have to look over my shoulders whenever I'm with," Qondani says.

"Are you planning on hurting her?" his father asks with his eyes narrowed.

"Baba you know how life is, sometimes we fall into temptations," he says.

"Temptations, you say. I think cheating is the door of all problems in marriage or should I say relationships. Lies, abuse, insecurities and lack of respect. All these are somehow tied to cheating. A

cheating man lies, he gets insecure because of fear that someone else might be doing what he's doing with his woman. And you know how insecure men are, they're abusive because physical strength becomes their only source of confidence. A man who stays true to one woman is unlikely to search for a reason to lie to her. So, if you feel like you're not ready to commit to her rather leave that psychopathic woman alone, you know how wounded she already is." He gets off bed and goes to the window to throw the piece of his tobacco.

"And why would you fall into temptations while spending your nights on bed with a woman like her?" he asks.

Qondani chuckles and drops his eyes shyly. His father better not check out his girlfriend!

"This thing is the same, only faces are different," Maqhawe continues as he lies back on the bed.

"Baba maybe you're too old or inexperienced. It's different nje!" Qondani.

"How so? The only thing that determines the

intensity of pleasure is spiritual connection.  
Otherwise, flesh is flesh.”

“Urgh! That's just theory, I'm talking from  
experience.”

“Well, go around searching the hotter one and see  
what Diso will do to you.”

Their not-so holy discussion is disturbed by Jabu.  
Qondani quickly drags himself out of the room  
before his mother restarts about Zamafuze.

He passes by his kids' bedroom before leaving. He  
needs to make sure that Zamafuze leaves early in  
the morning, before his mother causes a scene that  
will bring the whole village's attention to them.

He closes the door and takes only his T-shirt off  
before climbing on the bed.

“Are you asleep?” he asks.

Zamafuze shifts and removes the duvet from her  
face. She thought he wasn't coming back, as much  
as she understands where he's coming from,

rejection is still a bitter pill to swallow and a blanket of shame still hovers over her.

“No,” she says in a low, hoarse voice.

“You're aware that we are not just going to take off and forget about everything. You made a fool out of me Zama. You stripped me off my rights as a man and a father. I can't even look at my children without guilt skinning me. I vowed to love and support my kids, that's why I brought all of them here, to live with my parents. But you changed all that, ungenz' impatha,” he says.

“I was acting out of pain and I allowed it to control me,” she says.

“It's still not justifiable. What is our first from here? Where do we go Zama?”

“Please give me another chance. I won't let you down again.”

“What about my family? Do you realize that you didn't just hurt me, you hurt my parents, my kids and my sister. And all these people have not done anything wrong to you. Sbari broke your heart, not

us. Not even my sister. You owe all of us an apology.”

“If I do get a chance, I'll apologize.” She wipes the tear escaping her eye with her elbow and looks away.

“You're beautiful MaFuze, you shouldn't be stooping so low. Any guy would be lucky to have you, those that let you go are at loss. It'll take time for me to be comfortable with your food and to fully trust you, but I'm willing to give us another try. Stop being a baby now and come here.” He pulls her head to his chest and rubs her back.

“Why did you wear a short? You know what your thighs do to me,” he asks in a low voice, his hand caressing her thigh under the duvet.

“Come on Qondani.” She's blushing and licking her bottom lips, which always drives Qondani crazy.

“Give me that dance again...what do you call it?” He's trying to collect his memory and she's laughing her lungs off.

“Lap dance? I need music to do so and I need to be

in a happy mood,” she says.

“Mahlase can put you in a happy mood,” he says, his hand sliding under the waist of her short.

“Why is it so warm inside here?” he asks, pushing his finger between her folds and inhaling sharply between his teeth. She's the best Mahlase has ever had. His erection is hardening and threatening to burst his zipper.

“Do you know that you're a gold?” he asks.

Zamafuze smiles and shakes her head.

“You're a gold Zamafuze. Let's get naked and greet each other appropriately. I haven't seen you in a long time, I don't even remember its shape and colour,” he says.

He's naked within the drop of a hat and lying on the bed, watching her as she tries to squeeze her hips out of the short.

“Who hurt you behind your right thigh?” he asks.

It should've faded away by now, she paid the best dermatologist with Ndabuko's money and she used



to give her creams to remove this mark. Nobody ever notices it because really, it's not that big. It only makes her uncomfortable because she knows what went down between her and her mother the day she left this mark on her.

“Oh, I was playing with my friends. Still young and careless.” She lies on his arm and stares at his eyes. They're good now, it's his family she still needs to face and go through.

“Umuhle ukuthi uyahlanya nje.” (You're beautiful, it's just that you're crazy) He's pinching her nose playfully. Again, she's blushing and tripping over her feelings. This feels great, better than anything she's ever had.

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THALENTE

He just let himself inside my shack and made himself comfortable on my bed. I haven't seen him

since the day he left for his sister's funeral. We spoke over the phone a few times and he was just not in a good space.

“How are you?” I ask, standing against my fragile wooden table.

“I miss you,” -he's not answering me. I've been meaning to ask if they found Maqhingga but his face says it all right now. He's far from being okay.

“Are you staying?” I ask.

“I was hoping that we'll spend the night at my house,” he says.

I nod and pick my bag to start packing my overnight necessities.

“Have you seen Raj?” he asks.

This is a surprise question! We haven't discussed him since that day.

“Not close, he parks outside the gate now and doesn't set his foot inside the canteen. What did you say to him?” I ask.

“Say? I don't speak IsiNdiya mina,” he says.

Now he's being dramatic.

“Okay, what did you do to him? It's so unlike him not to say anything when he sees me passing by,” I ask.

“You don't want to know,” he says.

I give him a look. He cracks a brief chuckle that melts my heart. I hate seeing him looking like a sad cow.

“Pack sisi wakwa Mbatha and stop trying to threaten me with your sexy eyes,” he says.

Why am I suddenly blushing? I throw my lotions inside the bag and zip it.

“Why don't you move in with me?” he asks.

I stop blushing instantly. Moving in with him? Right now? This year?

“Huh?” I heard him the first time but I still need him to repeat.

“I need you close and this place is not safe for you. I have a big house, I live alone and...” Whooh! He must stop right there.

“I won't live with a man I'm not married to Ndlalifa,” I tell him.

“Then marry me,” he says.

I let out a sigh of defeat. He just moved from 50 to 180. Really now?

“Your brother is coming back Ndlalifa. I can never replace him or fill any gap you have in your heart.”

“I didn't ask you to replace Maqhinga. Just say no and end it there.”

Are we fighting now? I should be made aware if there's a fight going on and I'll cock all my guns.

“You can't meet me two months ago and ask me to marry you. It doesn't happen that way. I didn't leave home to search for a husband, I came here to work!” I say.

“Your answer could've been just ‘NO’ Thalente, not this whole garbage you're giving me now,” he says and gets up on his feet.

“Are you coming?” He's standing by the door, ready to leave.

I don't say anything. I just stand next to my bag and look at him.

He leaves. I don't follow him, instead I unpack my bag and sit on the bed. Why are we fighting? All I said was that I can't marry or move in with him, and that makes sense, I always make sense when I speak.

I was hoping that I'll get laid tonight, but life happened. I take my salty-ass to the door and lock it. He's not coming back, it's been over 10 minutes now.

I drag myself on the bed and pull up the covers.

“Thalente open the door!” It's him. WTF is he still doing here?

I don't respond. Was he waiting for me to close the door? Why is he even angry at me?

“Thalente I don't have time for your games. Open the door, I've been waiting for you for over 10

minutes in the car.”

He thinks this is a game? Hide-and-seek or something? No, I'm not playing here.

I hear him cursing; “Fuck!” and then it's quiet for a moment. Maybe he's leaving...or maybe not.

Something hits the door and breaks it into two pieces.

My door! I jump off the bed as it hits again.

He pushes the broken door to the floor and walks in. I'm beyond traumatized. My neighbour's lights just came on, I'm sure everyone has woken up and soon they'll be here to watch the drama unfolds.

“This is what you wanted, right? I have entered, I came back to get madam, now take your bag. Or you want me to carry you?” he asks.

Has he lost his mind? He broke my poor door!

There are voices outside. The landlord is here! I'm in deep shit.

“Who did this?” he asks. He's with his wife and other tenants.

“The bag!” Ndlalifa says to me. His back is against the doorway and the landlord is standing behind him.

“You broke the door,” I tell him. This should register in his head.

“Please take your violent boyfriend and leave. You are disturbing other tenants. We'll discuss my door in the morning.” Khumalo is a nice landlord but right now you can tell that he's pissed.

“Are they not going to steal her belongings here?” The nerve this man has! He broke the door and now he cares to ask about my belongings?

“I don't know,” the landlord says.

“Don't leave anything important here. We'll fit everything inside the boot,” he says to me.

Do I have a choice? He's turned me into a street-adult. I have no place to sleep, no safe place to keep my personal belongings!

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We only left the bed and the table. Everything else is here inside the car and going to his house. Me included, he's transporting me to his house.

“Thalente there's no need for you not to speak to me,” he's driving too slow in a quiet road.

Well, I'm not going to speak to him until he fixes this mess he created. He's not going to trick me into moving in with him like this.

He drives out of the road and stops the car. Not another stunt! I'm not ready.

“All I'm asking is for you to give me a home,” he says after switching the engine off. It's dark and quiet out here.

“You said you wanted love from me, not a home. That's something your parents could've given to you,” I tell him.

“My parents couldn't have given me kids and warmed my bed. I want that from you,” he says.



As if that's the only thing a woman can give a man; kids and vagina.

“What about my dreams?”

“What dreams?”

This is an insult! So I don't have dreams in his stupid eyes?

I'm getting out of this car.

“Thalente where are you going?” He's around the car instantly, before I can even take six steps away.

“Give me something MaMbatha, I'm not fighting with you, my head is just all over the place. That's why I need you next to me, life has turned on me, I don't have anyone who looks after me. Even if it's an empty promise Thalente, give me something to sleep on. Please!”

I don't know what's going on. He's a mess. I put my guard down and pull his face to me. He kisses me back and wraps his hands around my neck.

We move back, my tongue going down in his throat, until he's leaning against the car.

My door is not facing the road, I reverse and lie back on the seat. It's a bit windy and cold.

He doesn't ask questions, I feel his fingers lifting up the lace of my panty and shifting it aside.

He rubs his shaft on my clit and around my opening. As soon as he feels the moist he thrusts in.

He releases a moan and slams in harder.

I'm gritting my teeth and keeping my moans below my chest.

“My goodness, Thälente I love you!” His groans are getting louder. I have to push him off the edge so that he can reach his breaking point soon. I don't want to be caught having sex on the side of the road at night.

He pulls out and wraps his hand around his shaft and massages it.

“Please give me from behind. I swear I'll be fast,” he

says.

Gosh, I dug my own grave!

I climb out and hold on the seat with my behind out in the wind. Lord, my bums are freezing!

His trouser and briefs have slide down to his ankles. He holds onto my waist and inserts himself.

“Thalente this thing is so fuckin’ good. What do you do it?” His pace is increasing and his strokes are getting harder.

He pulls out and rubs it over my clit. I feel a bubble of air escaping and buzzing out like a fart. My chest dries up immediately. He mustn't dare think I farted. I don't know what the fu€k is wrong with it? Maybe he opened it too wide.

He inserts himself regardless of my discomfort and pulls out again.

“Queef my queen,” he says.

I don't know what that means, all I know is that this is embarrassing now and I want him to be done.

“Ndlalifa please finish,” I say.

He does the thrusting and pulling out nonsense again, and this time, I release air for the second time. A blanket of shame hovers over me.

A wet kiss lands on my butt-cheek.

“It's greeting Daddy,” he says with a chuckle and thrusts in a bit slower.

I want the earth to open up and swallow me. How can this organ embarrass me like this? Greeting him for what? He's enjoying this and finding it funny.

[03/14, 09:14] : Chapter 41

Bhekizitha “Ngonyama” Ngidi

It's been weeks since Snakho passed on. There are times when he sleeps in her bedroom and rely on the sleeping pills. Saying that he misses her would be an understatement, and that has affected his relationship with Snalo. He hasn't been there for her as much as he was supposed to. Ndlalifa doesn't come to his house very often; it's just him, Snalo

and his housekeeper, Thobile, most of the times. Khosi is back at work but she comes to check on them from time to time.

Unfortunately there's no retirement in the taxi industry, it's just a word he uses because he doesn't go to the taxi rank nor attend any of their meetings anymore. But he's still very much involved, you touch one of his boys, you touch the socket of his eye!

He told Ndlalifa to find the Ngemas, some stupid boys driving their father's crappy taxis locally. Ndlalifa doesn't waste time, he digs you out of whatever hole you are in and bring you to justice. Even Ngonyama wasn't ruthless as him when he was his age. But that's an element one needs to survive the industry they're in. Maqhinga wasn't exposed to much growing up, he only started holding a gun at 21.

Ngidi puts his best suit on and takes his briefcase and walks out of his bedroom looking like a

professional business man.

“You are leaving?” Thobile asks, standing behind a bucket of water. She's mopping the passage leading to his bedroom for the second time, if not third, today. He knows very well what she wants but he's going through a rough patch at the moment and sex won't be any solution.

“Thingolwenkosazane will tell you what she wants for dinner. I'll be back late, if you can, please keep her company until she goes to sleep,” he says.

Thobile secretly rolls her eyes. She was not employed to nanny a 27 year old twin with an underlying stinky attitude!

“That's overtime, what if I have plans?” she asks.

“Thobile don't be hard. I'll give you attention when I'm alright. Please look after my daughter,” he says.

Her lips crack into a smile, revealing a narrow gap between her Colgate-white teeth.

“Mommy duties?” It's always been clear that she wants to be more than just a fu€k-keeper.

“Call me if she needs anything,” Ngonyama says, ignoring her cheerful face. He'll never settle down with a girl two years younger than his son. It's her body he's gotten used to and her making sure that his house looks perfect, other than that she's nothing special. Even if she was his age, she's not someone he would've wanted a future with.

He walks on Snalo watching TV. She watches normal movies now. Slowly but surely, she's crawling out of her creepy shell.

“MaNgidi, I'm going to a meeting. I'll probably come back very late,” he tells her.

“I thought you retired. Why can't Ndlalifa attend this meeting on your behalf?” she asks, her face clouded with disappointment.

She thought moving here would bring them closer, but this time her father is the one keeping distance. It's very wrong of her to compare how he was with Snakho to how he is with her. She pushed him away, that's why he loves her more.

“Sitting here will drive me crazy. I need to go out and exercise my brain,” he says.

“I understand,” she nods and turns her head back to the screen in front of her.

“Are you busy tomorrow?” Ngidi asks before walking out of the door. He can feel the drift too and that's something he doesn't want.

“I'm going back to work,” she says.

“Okay, maybe we can have a small dinner here in the house. Thobile will organize everything,” he says.

“Alright, bye!”

“Don't chase me out of my house.”

She laughs. His heart melts, he shakes his head and leaves.

Maqhingana and Snakho should've been here as well. It's heart wrenching that his family dinner will only consist of two people. Just a week ago, he had a big family, they had a trip and everyone was having a



good time. If Snalo decides to go back to Khosi he'll be left all alone, with only memories of how happy his family once was.

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Ndlalifa roughed up the Ngema boys, two of them are under the intensity care in hospital and one was discharged early this morning. They're not Ngidi's concern, those are his sons' peers and he doesn't fight with kids. He's coming for the big fish, Nhlekelele Ngema. The man declared war between his sons and Ndabuko, all because he went against Nhlekelele's point in the association meeting.

Ndabuko is an intellect of the rank, he has a degree, so when he speaks he brings forward factual points and people listen to him. It's not anyone's fault that Nhlekelele didn't send his sons to school and their brains work with diesel that usually runs out.

“Ntusi yenkomo! I had to wear my best suit and carry my tools in my expensive briefcase. My daughter thinks I'm in a meeting, whereas I'm just here to arrange your meeting with the Maker. How hilarious is that?” He's taking off his wrist-watch.

Nhlekelele is tied on a steel chair and bandaged around his mouth.

“We have to do this quickly. I don't want you to be late for your first dinner in hell,” he says, emptying a stack of blank papers from his briefcase and taking out his gun.

“Wait, before you leave ndoda yamadoda help me here...” He unties the bondage around Nhlekelele's mouth and drags an empty chair and sits in front of him.

“I have this woman, very beautiful and kind. I loved her sister very much, I still do. If I had a chance to bring someone back to life, I'd bring her back. I have no doubt that she was the love of my life- someone I was made to be with. Is it wrong of me to wish to live the life I dreamed for her with her sister?” he asks and stares at Nhlekelele's bloodshot eyes.

“Ngonyama let me go,” he says in low, pained voice.

“A man doesn't cry Ngema, you're embarrassing yourself. So, do you think I should tell this woman or find someone else? I'm old now Nhlekelele, if I

die someone needs to sit on the mattress. Do you have someone who'll sit on the mattress for you later today?"

"Mngomezulu wasn't hurt. There's no need for this," Nhlekelele begs.

Ngonyama clicks his tongue and pushes back the chair. He wraps the bondage around his mouth again. He was going to kill him, but the fact that he refuses to advise him has granted him a scrotum surgery.

He pulls Nhlekelele's trouser down to his ankles and puts plastic gloves on.

"Wipe your arses, people. See now you're going to the morgue smelling feaces," he says before kicking Nhlekelele's chair. It turns upside down with him strapped on it.

He's making his job hard. He wanted this to be a successful surgery, he wanted to slice his scrotum into two halves before pepper-spraying the opened cut, but the idiot is fighting.

He puts a bullet between his eyes to silence his dramatic smelly-ass.

He's done and feeling better than earlier. At least he's still able to protect Ndabuko, something he promised Nhlanzeko to do. He's not a complete failure.

He calls his boys to clean up while he goes to the bathroom to clean himself.

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NDONDO

We bid farewell to Bab'Mbambo on a rainy Saturday. Bantwana Holdings took care of all the expenses, Ndabuko insisted on it. He couldn't bring himself to come to the funeral because he's drowning in guilt.

Bab'Maqhawe and Mam'J abu were driven here by

Qondani. I'm not sure if I want to be "bowed to" or just pathetic, because I have concluded that he didn't greet me on purpose.

My parents came too, they're very supportive lately. I'm back on their good books and getting the breadwinner treatment. The Mngomezulu delegation is going to Nyandeni in a week's time, I'm not sure if they're going to attend. My mother has some very personal issues with Bab'Maqhawe. She's a good example of a bitter ex, I mean why would anyone hate Mam'J abu? She left him for his brother but she didn't want anyone to have him after her.

I walk inside the tent and search for Qondani with my eyes. He was among the men who were filling up the grave. Most of them have come back from the river and receiving their refreshments.

There he is, sitting at the corner with a bottle in his hand.

I push through people and stand behind him.

“How long are you going to ignore me?” I ask.

He's startled. He puts down the icy bottle of beer he was drinking and lifts his eyes to me.

“I didn't see you with this huge stomach. You're not recognizable. Where's your Lazarus?” He's still an idiot!

I pull an empty chair and make myself comfortable next to him.

“My Lazarus is in Durban. How far did your love for Zamafuze go? Wasn't I right? Come on, thank me bro,” I say.

“Thank you Ndongoyamahlase, but I have something to tell you. I won't tell you here though, because I know that you'll be mad at me. On other news, today your mother hugged me. We met at the cemeteries and she was happy to see me.”

Well, that's really news. My mother hugging Maqhawe's son? It might rain even more.

“Did she say anything?” I ask in awe.

“No, she just said I look like my father and asked the nitty-gritty about my life,” he says.

This is interesting. Qondani gets a hug because he looks like Bab'Maqhawe!

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MAQHAWE SIBISI

He decides to stretch his legs and walks out of the yard. He never got the chance to say goodbye to his friend, just like that, death has crawled in and snatched him within the blink of an eye. In the short time that they spent together Mbambo was more of a brother to him than Dumisani has ever been.

He's also here, in his shiny suit and thick Bible. His wife, Maqhawe's first love, is everywhere with him. People bow to them, they have the stamp of holiness on their backs. People see God in them. Dumisani carries himself like one of Jesus'

disciplines and casts stones at everyone as if he's without a sin.

Maqhawe lights his cigarette and leans against Qondani's van and smokes. Mbambo did say that he came from a beautiful village and indeed, the mountains are green and people are friendly.

Someone clears a throat behind him. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he didn't even hear the footsteps.

Nomagugu? What is she doing here? She's nothing like the girl he was once head over heels in love with. She's a church queen now, wearing high heels and pantyhose, and those wide-brimmed hats that could shelter the whole village.

“So you and Jabu are playing a happy family with my daughter?” Not this again!

He's here for the funeral, not to fight over his daughter.

“Nomagugu I don't want to fight,” he says.



“That's my daughter. Not hers! And you're not going to take my daughter's lobola Maqhawe, you didn't even pay a chicken for her. Dumisani did.”

He throws the cigarette away. Fury is crashing through his veins. How dare she tries to turn this into a lobola battle?!

“Did you give me a chance to pay for the damages?” he asks.

“Pay with what Maqhawe? Your balls?” MaMfundisi has flown with the wind. This right here is the Nomagugu he shared a bed with in his young years.

“So you went to my brother Noma? You, your parents and my parents; all against me. How was that fair? You were supposed to believe in me and stand by my side. You didn't choose me Noma, you didn't choose our daughter either. You chose your reputation, don't you dare try to paint me as a bad person. You've hurt me more than anyone in this world.”

A moment of silence passes. He's glaring at her, hatred is written all over his face.

“It was either you or her life. I had to sacrifice you,” she says after taking a deep breath.

“Meaning?” he asks.

“Maqhawe just know that I wouldn't have married Dumisani if it wasn't for my daughter. I didn't have any reputation at stake, I was already in love with a rebel,” she says.

“I was not a rebel,” Maqhawe says, defensively. He did break a couple of rules, defy his father's rules, beat up people for no reason and skip school. But which boy didn't do all that? It was a part of growing up, he was a good man when he reached 28.

“But you weren't anyone's ideal of a son and I loved you. But I had to choose the one who was in my womb,” Nomagugu says.

“Is there anything you didn't tell me Noma?” Maqhawe asks.

“Does it matter now? All I want is for you to stop playing a happy family with your wife using my daughter,” she says.

“We were a happy family before Ndondo chose to come home. I cannot say the same about you. Did “it” grow?” he asks and Nomagugu’s eyes drop to the ground.

“We are happy in the village Nomagugu. If you want Ndondo's bride prize you can gladly come and take it.” He leaves her grounded on one spot and walks through the maze of cars to return back to the yard.

It's good to finally take her off her high-horse but the gap is still there in his heart. Dumisani did him wrong, he only needs two words from him; “I'm sorry.” And then the Sibisi will unite and become family again. Mbambo’s death has hit him hard. If he doesn't wake up one day, all these unresolved issues will be Qondani's to solve.

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NOMAGUGU SIBISI

If these walls could talk they'd tell a story that nobody would believe. If anyone was to lift up her skirt and see the scars on her thighs, they'd ask themselves- how is she still alive? If anyone was to fly, invisibly, into her bedroom at night and see what she goes through everyday, they'd probably call the police on her husband.

She couldn't wait to get rid of Andiswa, and fortunately Ndondo grew financially independent quicker than anyone had expected and she took her sister in. Now she's just waiting for Bahle to complete high school and go out to the world, then she'll put an end to this.

He hasn't said a word throughout dinner, so Nomagugu decided to engage her nerdy son on his boring theories about the "new world." She knows that this silence has roots, she's done something again and she's not aware of it.

Bahle helps her clear the dining table. Ndondo brought a dish-washing machine but she always

pass time by washing dishes herself.

“Come to bed,” his voice comes from the doorway, filled with authority as usual.

She doesn't argue, she leaves the dishes inside the sink and follows him.

He shuts the door after her and points her to the bed. She has the urge to roll her eyes but fights against it.

“What were you saying to Maqhawe?” Oh, it's that! She didn't even know that he saw them.

“We were talking about Ndondo's lobola,” she says.

“He's her father now? Those things couldn't have been discussed with me?” he asks.

“You are starting Dumisani!” She heaves a sigh and mentally prepares herself for the worst.

“Do you want him back?” The insecurities!!!

“No, Dumisani!” she says.

“I raised Ndondo up, fed her and took her to school.

Don't you dare test me Nomagugu! I married your cave pu\$\$y and saved her from your father. You don't know me very well!" That's the line; "you don't know me very well." She knows what happens next.

He never goes for her face, it's always her thighs and it used to make her feel lucky because nobody saw it. She was perfect in everyone's eyes.

He takes the electricity wire and lifts up her skirt. Even though he always keeps her face safe, she still hides it with her arms.

By the time his anger subsides her skin has peeled off. He pulls down her tight and panty and stretches her legs apart.

His penis must've stopped growing when he was 5. He pulls down his trouser and briefs, his thumb-di€k springs out and he lowers his waist between her thighs.

She's not feeling anything and he knows it. She makes him feel useless, he tried cheating to boost his ego but it didn't end well.

There's a bag of pegs that stays inside their wardrobe. It's not for the washing line or anything.

She strips her naked and gets three pegs. Two for her nipples and one for her clit. She'll deliver that orgasm and scream his name whether she likes it or not.

He spreads her folds and inserts the oval-shaped TV remote. She starts moaning as he moves it in and out of her opening.

He clenches his jaws at the sight of blood on her thighs. But this is the only way he knows how to run his bedroom and the intense orgasm is the only way he can please her. If he doesn't kill her one day, it'll be the other way around.

[03/14, 09:14] : Chapter 42

THALENTE

I returned to my shack and got kicked out, so I'm here in his house because I have nowhere else to go now. I don't blame the landlord, who knows what

he could do next? Burn down the whole block of shacks?

The mood is sour. He hasn't apologized or showed any kind of remorse. Now I feel like someone else is in control of my life, he's doing as he pleases.

Today I'm off from work and I'm expected to sit in this gigantic house all by myself and do the house chores. That's what a woman does in a man's house, right? She cooks, cleans and does laundry.

Well, I did clean because I cannot stay in a dirty house. But his dirty clothes are still in the basket and the pots are empty. I ate bread, bread and bread. I'll eat bread again for dinner.

He's been gone since morning, all I keep getting is lousy texts messages. My mother would probably faint and wake up in Mbongolwane if she found out that I'm now cohabiting.

It's exactly 19:13 when he walks in, wearing his black cap and white T-shirt with a grey stretchpant.



I'm on the couch, watching wild animals; that's the only interesting thing I could find throughout his channels.

He stands behind the couch, for a moment he's not saying anything, then leans over my shoulders and plants a kiss on my cheek.

“Are you well?” he asks.

“Mmm,” I nod.

He walks around the couch and sits next to me, heaving a sigh. It looks like he had a long day at work, he needs a warm bath and a plate of delicious home-cooked meal.

“I've been texting the whole day,” he says.

His eyes are on me, I can feel his stare on my skin, but I keep my eyes glued on the TV screen.

“I talked to your landlord, the door was fixed. He said you can come back. I'll take a shower first, you can start packing.” Oh, he realized his mistake! This should be a relief. I've been sulking the whole day because I was kicked out of my shack. I want my

own space and independence. But all this doesn't come from a good heart. Ndlalifa is used to having his own way, and he already had these ideas of us living together and tying the knot overnight.

I watch him leave and disappear in the passage leading to his bedroom with his head hung up in disappointment. I feel a knock of guilt in my heart, maybe I should fix something for him to eat before I leave. Sometimes his head works with diesel but he's still my boyfriend.

My bags are still packed. I only took out a few things and it won't even take five minutes for me to pack them again.

I start in the kitchen. He'll eat the egg sandwich. To make it look like dinner I'll put fork and knife on the plate.

When he comes out of the bedroom his food is ready. I cover his plate and leave it on top of the coffee-table. He says a low "thank you" and

changes the channel.

I leave him to his dinner and fetch my bags. This is going to be a bitter goodbye.

“With a goat? We don't know anything about that,”- he's talking to someone over the phone. He's only took one bite of his sandwich. I stop with my bags in the middle of the lounge and wait for him to finish his call. It's not a good one; his cap is off, his hand is on top of his head and wiping invisible sweat.

“I don't want Ngidi to panic. I'll go by myself,” he tells the person before ending the call with a sigh.

He puts the plate of sandwich back on the coffee-table and stands up. His eyes are holding back something, I don't know what it is but it breaks me.

“Let's go,” he says to me and takes the larger bag.

I take a few steps behind him and stop.

“Ndlalifa what's wrong?” I ask.

He stops and looks back. He's a bit taken back; all of a sudden, I'm speaking to him again.

“They found Maqhinga,” he says.

Oh, that's great news! Why is he not calling his father and letting him know?

“Is he alright though?” I ask.

“Physically, yeah. They say he looked fine,” he says.

“So why do you look so worried?” I ask.

“Because my brother has disowned me Thacente. That's why. Can we go now?”

No, we can't.

“I can go with you,” I say.

“You don't have to. I'll manage alone. Let's go.” He exhales and walks towards the door.

Why would Maqhinga disown him? I mean, it's been the two of them since childhood. Couldn't he talk about whatever it was that bothered him? Surely his brother would've helped. Ndlalifa always gets things done his way.

“I love you Ndlalifa,” I tell him, still standing where I was. I'm going back to my shack, but not today. I'm

not leaving him looking like this.

He's standing behind the door. Slowly, he turns around and looks at me.

“I really love you. Can we please communicate better and talk about things like normal people? I hate it when we are like this,” I say.

He exhales and drops the bag on the floor. I drop mine too and walk into his arms. It's like in BEFORE THE 90 DAYS; a couple meeting for the first time at the airport.

Well, until he pushes me back and grins stupidly.

“Thank you Sphongo. It's like I'm breathing under the water everytime I feel like I don't have you anymore,” he says.

“I'm not Sphongo. When are you going to Maqhingana?” I ask.

“Early in the morning. Were you serious about coming with me?” He looks so damn handsome! I'm not going to remind him of his cap, he looks better in his chiskop.

“Yes, that's if you need company,” I say.

“I don't need company. I need you by my side. Just your presence alone, it gives me strength.” He lifts my hand to his lips and plants a soft kiss at the back of it.

My facial muscles are aching from all the blushing.

“I'm sorry Thallente.” He's suddenly serious and staring into my eyes.

I didn't see this apology coming.

“But I do wish to build a home with you. Please don't make me wait for too long, I'm already 35 Thallente,” he says.

Now this is the proposal I can sleep on. He still needs more classes of How To Be A Human though.

“If you behave you won't wait very long,” I say and kiss his cheek.

He lets out a chuckle.

“There's something I want to give you. It's in the car.”

I hope this will be a good surprise. I take the bags back to the bedroom while he goes out to the car.

I was hoping for a pair of shoes or a bag that looks like Ndondo's. She invited me to her lobola negotiations. It would've been nice to arrive with a bag that's in her standard. But no, this man is carrying a plastic bag. A fancy bag doesn't come in a plastic bag like that.

“Here,” he says and throws it on the bed next to me and walks out.

Perfumes? They're about 10. I check the brand and it's Arthur Ford. I know that I smell cheap, but for him to bring me 10 perfumes is disrespectful.

He comes back with his sandwich and sits next to me.

“This is something you got for me?” I ask, calmly.

“Yes. Do they smell nice?” He doesn't eat like a taxi man. He has an order of biting bread slices, he bites

according to shape and I find it very unnecessary. It's not like there's an award of chowing bread, I usually fold a slice in my palm until it looks like a penis and then eat it.

“I don't know,” I say.

“What are you going to do with them?” he asks.

What else can I do with perfumes? Spray them on the windows?

“Thank you for the gift, I'll smell nice,” I say and pack the bottles back inside the plastic bag.

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NDLALIFA

He didn't wake up early as he wanted to. He had to wait for Thalente while she decided how to tie her hair. She took good five minutes deciding which shoes to wear between a pair of sandals and another pair of sandals.



The sun is already up when they get to Pietermaritzburg and she wants food. They stop at Spur and order breakfast. It's getting closer and real, Ndlalifa's appetite is very slim. He keeps thinking about how imperfect he's been as a brother. There are so many things he never questioned about Maqhinga. He's been focused on his own wounds of growing up without a mother and didn't even realize that there was no single picture of his mother and Maqhinga in the house. He could've thought back and remembered what used to happen in the house when their father had left for work. He failed Maqhinga dismally. And maybe that's why he's cut communication with all of them. He wants nothing to do with them.

“Why are you not eating?” Thalente asks, worry canopying her face.

“I'm not hungry sthandwa sami,” he says.

She wrinkles her nose up with a grin on her face.

“Must I finish your food for you?” she asks.

He can't help but smile. She loves food and she's

not apologetic about it. He pushes his plate to her and leans back on the chair and watches her helping herself with his food. They'd make beautiful children. He can already see her in his kitchen, pushing a huge stomach and biting his head off over nonsense.

“Are you still on the injection?” he asks.

“Yes,” she says with a frown.

He nods and swallows the remains in his glass. Waiting is going to be harder than he thought.

“Why do you ask?” Thalente asks. If he tells her it'll start another fight and he's not looking forward to that.

“Nothing. I was just asking because sometimes we don't use a condom,” he says.

Her eyes pop out. It's not just two or three incidents, the statement should be; “sometimes we use a condom.”

“Why do you look frightened? You are on an injection, aren't you?” Ndlalifa asks with his

eyebrow lifted.

She nods and drops her eyes. She could be careful than this, bringing a soul to this unstable life is not an option.

“Eat up, we need to go,” he says.

She exhales loudly and pushes away the half eaten plate.

“I'm full, let's go,” she says.

He doesn't say anything. Whatever she's praying for, he's not praying it with her. May God answer his prayers first!

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He walks in to a guy with iziphandla and thick yarns around his head. He knows him from somewhere but he can't remember correctly where he knows him from. His bags are packed, it looks like he's leaving.

“Hlomuka!” the guy says to him before he can put his finger on where he knows him from.

“Hi,” Ndlalifa says a bit reserved.

Phumzile appears with a wrapped lunchbox. Her eyes stay on Thamente for a brief moment, then she looks at the guy with a smile on her face.

“Travel safely ndodana. Thank you for everything, hopefully everything will be well from now onwards,” she says and hands the wrapped lunch to him.

“We hope so,” he says and turns his eyes to Maqhinga who's been awkwardly silent since Ndlalifa and Thamente arrived. “Stay patient, your mother is proud of you.”

Maqhinga rises from his chair and walks the guy out.

Ndlalifa's eyes turn to his aunt. There's a fresh goat skin outside, the inside of the house smells of traditional beer and impepho.

“Ma what's going on here? Am I no longer part of this family?” he asks.

“Ndlalifa welcome home, please take the guest to the lounge and offer her something to drink,” Phumzile says and turns around to walk away.

Ndlalifa grits his teeth. He inhales sharply and turns his head to Thalente.

“This way!” He leads her from the dining room to the lounge.

Why are they being excluded from the Nsele ceremonies? Him and Khosi are the eldest, yet they weren't even given a single word about this.

“I'm coming back,” he tells Thalente.

She is still on her feet by the couch. She knows how Ndlalifa can be, he saw his interaction with his father in the trip.

“Don't disrespect your elders Ndlalifa. There's a way of passing your opinions to them without sounding like you're addressing Maqhingana,” she says before

sitting on the couch. She doesn't look up to see his reaction, she takes out her phone and checks her texts.

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“Maqhinga wanted to do this on his own. It was his duty and I had no say in who he wanted around and what's not,” Phumzile explains.

“Why the fu€k would it become his duty to apologize for a rapist?” Ndlalifa asks.

“That was your mother's request. Do not stand like this in the middle of my house,” she scolds him, sending a threatening look his way.

Maqhinga walks in the middle of a heated moment and looks at both of them.

“Is everything alright?” he asks.

“Baba is worried sick about you. We have looked for you everywhere Maqhinga. I understand that you're going through a rough patch, but aren't we all

broken? We had to bury Snakho without you,”  
Ndlalifa.

“He thinks I'm Msawenkosi. Magcina hasn't forgiven me despite everything I've done for her dead ass. She still can't stomach my face. Don't tell me what I should and not do Ndlalifa, you've never been hated by your own parent. You've always been a blessing. Even after pointing a gun at your own father's head, he didn't consider you a murderer. But I lie next to my sister, trying to comfort her for a moment and Ngonyama doesn't think twice before labelling me the same way his bit€h did.”

Ndlalifa brushes his face, release a long breath and finally walks to the chair and sits.

“Hlomuka is not perfect, neither am I. But I cooked for you Maqhinga. I got you ready for school, prepared your lunch and washed your clothes. Ubaba has never treated you as if you were something else other than his son. He went through lengths to protect you and even chose you over mom. If he didn't love you he would've killed you as she...” He's said too much. All he was trying to tell

him was that he's loved. They love him as a family.

Maqhing's brows are snapped together. WTF!

“She wanted him to kill me?” he asks.

“Bafo...” No, Maqhing wants the truth! This is the part Ngidi didn't want him to know.

“Okay, the bitch can stay in hell. I didn't ask anyone to rape her. I'm done with this bullshit. I swear I'm going to shoot her if she ever bring her cruel ass in my dreams.” He crosses his fingers and storms out of the room angrily.

“Maqhing!” Phumzile is trying to talk to him and calm him down, but he's disappeared in the bathroom and slammed the door behind him.

“See what you just did Ndlalifa! What is wrong with you? You just had to come and make things worse.” She clicks her tongue and inhales a sharp breath to collect herself.

“Is that Magcina's daughter-in-law you came with? And why didn't you call to say you're bringing her?”



she asks.

“I only decided last night that I was coming,”  
Ndlalifa says, shrugging his shoulders.

“Is she just a woman?” She is staring at him as if  
challenging him to say yes.

“No, she is the wife,” Ndlalifa says.

“Great! Hopefully she'll do some difference.”

Difference on...? She leaves him with his frown and  
goes to the lounge to officially greet Thamente.

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MAQHINGA

He went to bed earlier than anyone. It's a good thing  
that Phumzile is still hovering over her future  
daughter-in-law and not on his back as she's been  
the last couple of days. He's always yearned for a  
motherly love, he imagined it being the most  
comfortable feeling ever. Always having someone

who's looking out for you everyday. But Phumzile has proven to be different from the imaginary mother figure he had. Phumzile forces everyone to pray before dinner, she doesn't like people who eat and don't finish their plates, she doesn't care about anyone's height; she tells you what to do and threatens to sleep and never wake up if you don't do it.

Tonight he's not expecting anyone to come in his dreams. In fact, he doesn't want any stupid dream. He's done with Magcina and her brother. He's done everything Ngcwethi asked him to do, and hopefully, they'll find peace in the other world. As for him, peace will find him if it does. Even if it doesn't, he'll still wake up and manage his father's business. Peace is not something he's ever going to bend his back for.

His phone beeps under the pillow. He half-opens his eyes and pulls it out.

It's Ndlalifa's text message: I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER BUT DAD, SNALO AND I LOVE YOU. GOODNIGHT BROTHER.

He reads the text over and over again. They don't do the "good morning" and "goodnight texts." They're too Zulu as brothers to do that. Maybe this anger he has towards everyone is not worth it.

He'll wake up and go back to his life. Whether Ngidi apologizes or not, life will move on. He loves Snalo- that he's not going to be apologetic for. Not to his father, not to anyone else!

In fact... \*\*TWINNIE! I'M COMING HOME TOMORROW. PIZZA DATE???\*

She doesn't reply immediately. It must be this new number confusing her.

He's about to close his eyes again, her text beeps in; I HATE YOU, MORON. IT'SSS A DATE!!!

He lets out a weak chuckle before shutting his eyes and drifting to the land of dreams.

~ “Maqhinga!” She's yelling from the kitchen. They're inside the kitchen, Maqhinga is sitting on the floor with his legs crossed, Magcina is making amagwinya. She keeps asking him to give him things, even the spoon just a finger away from her.

“Do you want one?” she asks, slicing one cooked gwinya into two halves.

He's on his feet quickly and standing in front of her. He receives his half and goes back to the floor.

“We are going to keep them in a warm place and eat when your father and brother come back from the taxi rank. Woza nethawula lakho uzoteta,” she says.

He quickly takes the towel next to his feet and gives it to her. She scans his face and heaves a sigh. She grabs a cloth, wets it with water and wipes his greasy cheeks. Then she picks him up and puts him on her back. She straps a towel around him and starts packing amagwinya inside a 5L bucket.

“Maqhinga?” she calls his name. He was just about to fall asleep, but when he hears his name he lifts his head up.

Magcina lets out a chuckle and paces around the veranda.

“Lullaby Lullaby

Do not wake and weep

Soft in the cradle lie

Sleep, oh sleep

Soft in the cradle lie

Sleep my darling, sleep

Do not weep, Daddy will come back in the morning.

Mommy will not come back

She'll sit here, in a distance, and watch over you.

For she is too broken to hold you. But in her heart you shall forever be held.

Sleep, oh sleep, dearest son...” Her hand is softly drawing a map on his back. He's comforted. He feels protected and cared for.

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## MAQHINGA

He didn't ride with Ndlalifa and Thalente. Thalente already had something to get from the shops and Ndlalifa had someone to pass by in Durban. He decided to use taxis, instead of following them around and becoming an extra wing.

When he got to Durban he called one of the drivers to fetch him.

He's been trying to forget about last night's dream but it keeps coming back like a fly to the sewage. He is done, he doesn't need to look at things from Magcina's perspective. He shouldn't be feeling sorry for her because he looks this way. He shouldn't be understanding where she came from. It is what it is. However, anger keeps subsiding bit by bit. He finds himself excusing and whispering apologies to himself on behalf of his mother.

The car drops him outside his father's house. He didn't think he'd be here anytime soon but after having that conversation with Ndlalifa he realized that his father maybe flawed here and there, but he's always loved him regardless of his looks and how he chased the love of his life away. Ngidi just needs to swallow his fears concerning Snalo and him because he's done serving Msawenkosi's sentence.

“Twinnie!” he yells from the door.

Thobile is in the kitchen, for a change she's wearing the uniform that's over her knees and her head is wrapped.

She stops stirring whatever she's cooking on the stove and turns to Maqhinga with her hands on the hips.

“And then you? Where are you coming from? Do you know how worried your father and I were?” Bathong, is she thinking of hitting him with that wooden spoon in her hand? This could turn out better than

Kung Fu movies.

“Where is Snalo?” Maqhinga asks, opening the cupboard and grabbing a packet of crackers.

“Don't ever do something like this again because you'll have me to deal with.” Thobile clicks her tongue and turns to her pot.

Maqhinga may have only heard half of what she was saying, his focus is on the packet of crackers. He might need a glass of milk with this. Because his father's and Ndlalifa's neat-freaky asses are not around, he sits on top of the counter and enjoys his snack.

“So Thobi, who drives the Maserati better between my father and brother?” he asks between the chews.

She's breathing heavily next to the stove. It must be the heat!

“If I wanted lessons in that department, who would you recommend for me between them? You have experienced both, right?” he asks with a smirk on his face.



Thobile is about to throw that boiling thing on his face.

“I’m not going to stand your disrespect Maqhinga. I will take this straight to your father and this time you’ll get more than just a punch,” she says, sending a threatening look his way.

“Sorry Mom,” Maqhinga says and jumps off the counter.

He sneaks the dirty glass inside the sink and walks out of the kitchen.

Snalo looks up from her laptop and sees Maqhinga. Her face breaks into colourful stars, her smile is brimming widely.

“I heard voices and thought it was Thobile and her loud calls. My gosh, you look so dark! Were you living in the sun?” She walks to him and embraces him in a tight hug.

“And you're living like a madam here. Where is your father?” Maqhinga asks, holding her hand and

sitting with her on the couch.

“Bhekizitha went to Ndabuko's house. I think he's on his way back now,” Snalo says.

“Bhekz loves people's houses. It's not even 12pm and he's already gone to people's houses!”

“Bhekz is bored. You all left him. Snakho is gone and you disappeared. Ndlalifa had to take care of business and family. He also had to look for you and make time for Thalente. He's not someone you can depend on emotionally because there's always duty calling his name.”

Maqhinga sighs heavily and plays with her fingers. He's deeply lost in his thoughts.

“Are you still angry at him?” Snalo asks.

“No. I'm not angry at anyone. I want to move on,” he says and lifts his eyes to her. “I'm sorry I missed the funeral. How have you been?”

“Some wounds can never heal, you just learn to live with them. She's at peace, that's what I'm sure of.”

“But you are not at peace?” He searches in her eyes

for the truth.

“Dad has the best doctors recommended to him and we are starting therapy next week. I think I'll be fine,” she says.

Maqhinga frowns.

“You and him?”

“Yeah, he's coming to support.”

“That's very nice of him.”

“Do you want to come?”

Maqhinga cracks into laughter. He'd rather go to Mpozana and have Ngcwethi counselling him traditionally.

“No, but I'll move back home for a while. If you need me for anything I will be here,” he says.

She rests her head on his shoulder. He wraps his arm around her and brushes her.

“Regardless of everything that has happened, I'm happy that we found you guys. I'm happy to have you as my sister. But let's talk about Phumz, the girl

has rules for centuries!”

“Shut up! You've never been forced to go to the food stokvel and lifted 25kgs of maize meal with her friends shouting at you. Do you know when she threatens to sleep and never wake up?”

“The best one is; ‘Do not stand in the middle of the doorway, you're blocking lucks,’ I didn't know luck walks through the door,” Maqhinga says and they both break into a fit of laughter.

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Ngidi walks in and finds Thobile up and down in the kitchen. Yes he loves her work and he enjoys their sexual entanglement. But sometimes he needs his space; he wants them to be employer and employee, nothing more. That's something Thobile doesn't seem to understand, she thinks his alone time is her time.

“You're back?” Her face brightens up. She glances around; checking the coast, and then walks to him. She wraps her arms around his waist and stands on

her toes to kiss his lips.

“Thobile there's a child here,” he says, pulling away.

“Which child? Snalo is 27 and Maqhingana is 30.”

“Maqhingana is 29 and he's not here.”

“He is here, disrespectful more than ever.”

He pushes her arms off with a shocked look on his face. He was about to give up and accept that he's lost his son the same way he lost Magcina.

“When did he arrive and why didn't you call to tell me Thobile?” He's rushing out of the kitchen and following the giggles coming from the lounge.

They're cuddling on the couch. His heart starts racing at the possibilities of the Nsele curse coming out on his children. He cannot have that in his house, between his children.

They're giggling and talking about someone called Bhekz.

He takes a deep breath and walks in.

“Hlomuka you're home?” He stands behind them. He's not sure of the reaction he's going to get.

Their heads turn around. There's shock and fear written in their eyes.

Snalo clears her throat.

“When did you arrive?” she asks.

“Now,” he says with his eyes fixed on Maqhinga. He's trying to read his emotions.

“I'm happy to see you,” he tells him.

Maqhinga doesn't say anything. Ngidi walks around and sits on the couch next to them.

“I'm sorry, son,” he says.

“Not son, ‘Dad,’” Maqhinga corrects him.

“Okay Dad. I shouldn't have said those things to you. I'm not going to blame grief or anything, I was out of line. Please accept my apology.”

Maqhinga sits up straight and rubs his hands together. The question has been burning him; “Did you, at any point, regretted your decision of

choosing to keep me?” he asks.

Ngidi is thrown back. He never wanted him to find out about Magcina's request of killing him because he knows that it was just pain talking, not his Magcina.

“No. I'll always choose my children above anything, even my own life,” he says and shifts his eyes to Snalo. They're confirming exactly what he's saying; he loves his family.

“So you don't mind us taking the Continental baby and going out for pizza?” Snalo asks.

Maybe she doesn't know this, but nobody is allowed to drive the Bentley except its owner.

“You're pushing it. Maqhinga's car is in the garage, it will get you wherever you want to go,” he says and stands up to leave before they take this any further.

“So much for choosing us over anything,” Snalo mumbles under her breath.

“I didn't say over my cars,” he says and leaves them to their mocking.

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## THALENTE

I shouldn't have taken all the perfumes to work. I was just testing the market. When Aarti sent me to deliver Dawn's food in her office I decided to take one bottle of perfume with me.

“Do you know how heaven smells like?” I asked her.

She shook her head with a confused look on her face. I always confuse them when I say things, it doesn't bother me anymore. So I just sprayed her arm with the perfume.

Before I knew it I was surrounded by her two colleagues and I sprayed all of them.

“Where do you get them and how much?” Dawn asked.

After giving it a deep thought I told her I was the



supplier and the seller of perfumes. Calls were made, bank transfers beeped in and I started imagining myself dining with Patrice Motsepe.

Well, that's basically how I made 1000 out of 10 perfumes today. I asked the driver to take me to the pharmacy before heading to Ndlalifa's house. I'm not only scared about the outcome of my pregnancy test, there's a gift of perfumes I sold. What if Ndlalifa wants to see them? And I also need to know how he got them so that I can order more using the money I made today.

I make a silent prayer before dropping my urine inside the test tube. I'm not ready to be anyone's mother. I'm sure Ndlalifa would use that opportunity to ground me and turn me into a housewife. I have responsibilities and a family to take care of. I'm not planning on having a brood of taxi rank off-springs who'll turn my life upside down and behave like their unstable father.

Five minutes have passed now. I wipe my moist

hands on my dress and pick the test tube.

One line! A delightful scream escapes my lips. I dash out of the bathroom to the kitchen and pour a full glass of cold drink.

Cheers to us, the virgins!

I need to celebrate this. God is really great. I find a tray of boerwors inside the fridge and another one of steak. I'm hosting a braai, that's it!

Honestly, this man needs to buy normal music. How am I supposed to dance to Khuzani?

“Hhayi bo!” The voice says behind me and I almost fall over my two dancing left feet. Why is he creeping up on rich people?

“Did I miss your birthday?” he asks.

Sigh!

“No, Ndlalifa. Welcome home, food will be ready in a few minutes.”

He frowns. I keep my eyes narrowed at him. The

problem is...?

“You are scaring me Thacente,” he says.

I roll my eyes to my brains. I think he needs a kiss. I stand on my toes and smooch his sexy lips. He wraps his hands around my neck and deepens the kiss. He's pushing me against the counter and moaning inside my mouth. When his knee separates my legs and a hard rod starts poking me I know that I have to break the kiss.

He wants more. I shift my face and his kiss lands on my cheek.

“Hurry and bath! You might get yourself a meaty dessert later,” I say.

Thank God I shopped enough condoms! He won't have any excuse to go raw.

His long legs are out of my sight with a second. Is it normal to love sex like this?

My pap looks and tastes normal. I tried with the meat as well. Hot chutney is the only salad that

makes sense, I have a full bowl of it and two bottles of sauce.

I set the table and patiently wait for him with music softly playing in the background.

He finally comes out of the bedroom in a Nike short and white vest. He didn't forget his cap, I find it confusing that his father is a Zulu traditional man but he didn't teach them not to wear hats inside the house.

He's watching me quietly as I dish up and serve him. My mama raised a queen!

“Thalente what are we celebrating?” he asks.

I learnt about toasting in his family trip. I lift my glass up and click it on his.

“I'm not pregnant,” I tell him.

He just looks at me like I'm crazy and doesn't say a single word.

“I took the test this afternoon because I wasn't very sure,” I explain.

He exhales and picks the knife and cuts his meat.

“Thank you for the food,” he says.

This devil was trying to impregnate me, wasn't he? My ancestors must have more connections in heaven than his. I can't believe he's not even faking happiness for my stupid sake.

“I bought you condoms. A lot of them. I don't want us to have a reason to go raw, ever again,” I say.

“Which brand?” he asks, lacking excitement and gratitude.

“Trust,” I say and lift my eyebrow in anticipation. The look on his face is worrying.

“I don't use that shit. I want Durex,” he says.

I think my ears went deaf for a moment. Durex condoms are close to R200. He doesn't cum diamond sperms, why the hell would I buy him such expensive condoms?

“You used a Choice one when we slept together for the first time,” I serve his short memory. He must've forgotten where we come from.

“I was desperate and horny.”

Yuu! Why am I getting offended? My head wants me to say something but my heart fights against it.

Going back and forth like this will only lead us into another fight and I don't want that.

“I wanted to ask you something,” I say.

I'm becoming a nuisance! He exhales and looks at me.

“I'm listening,” he says.

“Where did you buy the perfumes that you gave me?” I ask. Hopefully he's not going to ask a reason for my question.

“Why?” he asks.

Loud sigh! Did he need to ask though?

“I smelled nice and people wanted to know where I bought my perfume,” I say.

“You don't have to tell them. They must continue with the ones they're using,” he says.

This man doesn't want to see my business growing!

“I kind of sold all the perfumes you gave me,” I say after clearing my throat. Hopefully he won't think I'm ungrateful or anything. I didn't need 10 perfumes, my Exclamation one is still full.

“Really?” His face transforms from sour grapes to stars. He's even smiling.

“Yes,” I say.

“Wow! I'm impressed. So where is my share?”

Now he's lost me. What share? What does ‘share’ even mean?

“You don't have any share,” I say.

“I gave you the perfumes, of course I have a share,” he says.

Talk about scammers! Always trying to benefit from black businesses.

“As a gift. Selling them was my idea,” I say.

“Alright Miss-Ideas. Where are you going to get stock? I mean, customers must be waiting to place their orders?”

Oops! I ran my mouth too soon. I still need help from this man.

“Give me the supplier details and I'll give you a blow job.” I'm desperate and out of options. I cannot give him a share of my money, I started this perfume business from the ground.

“Thalente I swear I'm going cut your hair if you don't keep the end of your promise,” he says, taking his phone from the table.

My phone beeps. He just forwarded the contact details to me. Now I owe him a blow job? Life is unfair.

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Extras

THALENTE (18+ SNVL)

I have to keep my promises. He just got out of the bathroom. To make things worse, he decides not to wear anything. He lies on the bed, naked, with his laptop and pocket of peanuts. I keep stealing



glances at the big di€k that's about to go inside my mouth. Maybe it tastes like half-cooked steak, or boiled wors, however that tastes like. My biggest worry is failing to give him the pleasure he's hoping for. He forgave and forgot everything, even the “cheap condoms.” He's way too excited about this. I don't know what his expectations are but I'm shaking in my boots.

Google has a million ways of how to suck a di€k. I don't know which is which and this man will be done anytime on that laptop.

I cannot call my mother and ask for her advice. That's MaNgobese, she's only sucked lollipop and ice-cream in her whole existence. And I don't have any older sister or sexual-wise friends. My only option right now is Ndondo. I have no doubt that she does these things. The cheeseboy's di€k probably looks better than Ndlalifa's. Here I'm about to deal with a charcoal monster with balls weighing 2kg.

He doesn't even notice me tiptoeing out of the room. I press the call button and leans against the wall in the passage.

“Hello Thalente, how are you doing?” Gosh, she can be so formal!

“Hi, are you free to talk?” I ask.

“Babe please give me a sec,” she must be talking to Ndabuko. Hopefully I didn't disturb a cosy moment.

I hold on for a moment. I'm only wearing a gown, there's nothing beneath it.

“I'm good now. Is everything okay?” she asks. There's a shifting movement, she must be sitting on the chair or something.

“Yes, ummm I just need help..advice on something.” Lord, I already sound like a mentally disturbed woman.

“Okay, I'm all ears,” she says.

“Blow job,” I say.

Silence...

“Can you advice me on how to do it and what are the do’s and don’s. I made a promise to someone and I need to know these things. At least the basics,” I babble out. I'm sure she's wondering how a grown woman like me doesn't know these things.

“I'm not going to lie. I'm still learning too, Ndabuko is the one teaching me all those things,” she says.

Didn't she graduate from university with Masters Degree? How come she's not an expert of everything?

“All I can tell you is that sucking is sucking. You don't leave your saliva on someone's di€k. Also, make sure you don't hurt him with your teeth, that's a very sensitive organ, keep your teeth in your mouth. Use the tongue, lips and hands. And keep the eye contact.”

This girl is very matured. If it was me I would've started off by laughing and mocking the stupidity out of me.

“Ndlalifa is an experienced man. Don't panic, he'll

help you,” she says.

Experienced man, hey! I want to hunt down all his exes and chop their boobs off. I was going to be the first woman to give him a BJ !

“Poke his tight as\$hole with your finger and spank that firm ass anytime you get a chance.” Now she’s a normal person; playful and giggling. I think this is going to be my favorite snob in the whole world.

I don't think Ndlalifa will like me poking my finger inside his as\$hole but I'm a risk-taker.

We chat briefly about our trip to Nyandeni before ending the call. It's just two days away now and I cannot wait to eat the meat.

I bump into him at the door as I walk back to the bedroom. His face relaxes when he sees me.

“I thought you've ran away,” he says, wrapping his arms below my butt and attempting to lift me up. Oh, he actually does. He carries me to bed and stands over me with a huge grin on his face.

“We don't sleep in gowns here.” He's untying it and exposing my naked body.

“What are you hiding because I know deep inside you?” he asks, lowering his head to my thighs and planting soft kisses on each.

He cups my boob and rubs his thumb on my nipple. My body is warming at the touch of his hand.

“Do you even believe me when I say I love you?” he asks, rolling my nipple between his fingers.

“I do,” I say and somehow my voice comes out in almost whisper.

“I'm not having fun here Thalente. I wish to thank the hands that raised you and honour your father's house. As much as there's a billion of us, men and women, not everybody finds love. I consider myself lucky to have found you because I know that I have indlu yami yokugugela (my forever) I love you MaMbatha,” he says.

I have chills! I feel warm liquid rushing up to my eyes and quickly wipe it before it escapes the corners of my eyes.

“Please trust me. Ngiyacela Thalente ungithembe nje,” he says, his eyes fixed on me and clouded with all the emotions.

“I trust you Ndlalifa, but I have responsibilities that are beyond this relationship,” I tell him.

“But we can make it work. You have the charisma and good business approach. Nothing can stop you from running your own business, even if it's selling perfumes and shoes. You can always find ways of supporting your family, even under this roof. I'll help whenever you need me to. Trust me I understand where you come from, but you have to live your life as well. I need you to be mine, not the half of you.”

I release a deep sigh. Tears find their way out. I don't want to lose him and I don't want my family to die of hunger either. I'm the eldest, my mother is a pensioner, we don't have a father and my sister makes babies. Of course they need me. I have to be there for them before I'm there for myself.

“Don't punish yourself like this. Allow me to love you the way you deserve. I want the best for you too

and I care Thälente.” His fingers entwine with mine. His face is lowered to mine, he's staring closely into my eyes.

“Look into my eyes Thälente. If you can look up in the sky and see the moon shining behind the clouds, surely you can see the love in my eyes too. I don't even remember who I was before you. My past is blank and so is my future. There's nothing written there; nothing to hold on to.”

Deep breath!

“Not the baby though,” I say.

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“We can take it to the next step and the following one. But we can't have a baby yet,” I say.

He shuts his eyes and releases a sigh of relief.

“I'm going to put a ring on your finger!” he says before cupping my face and crashing his lips on mine and kisses me like he's never kissed me before.

I'm lost in his lips. His hands are on either sides of my face and squeezing my cheeks. I feel something penetrating my moist vaginal lips. He forces his tongue inside my mouth to shut me up.

I let out a moan right inside his mouth as I feel a thick rod sliding inside me.

He breaks the kiss and pulls my legs on his arms. I see it as he pulls out for another long stroke.

There's no condom, it's hard and lengthier. It fills my cunt before I even breathe a word. My clit is hardening and throbbing.

"Please rub it on my clit," I say in a low voice.

He attempts to pull out, I quickly move my waist up. It's back inside me and touching my soft walls.

"Don't pull it out," I say and inhale sharply through my teeth.

He's confused.

I rub the clit myself while he thrusts in. His lower lip is folded between his teeth, his half-lidded eyes are fixed on my face. I don't care about the facial



expressions I'm making right now, I even become cross-eyed when he taps around my G-spot.

“Ndlalifa I love your di€k!” I scream as he moves around in circles. “Please don't do this to anyone else. Pleaseeee!”

He deepens his thrusts. I feel the wave building up from my spine and arch my back upwards.

“Whose pu\$\$y belongs to me Thalente?” My legs start to tremble. His thumb is now rubbing my clit exactly how I want.

“Mine!” I scream out.

“And whose wife are you going to be?” he asks.

“Ndla..li..fa's. I'm your..” Lights out! My body is floating on a wave, there's a warm liquid flowing between my thighs.

I open my eyes to him standing tall next to me. His hand is wrapped around his vein-popping di€k. He's giving it weak strokes with his hand.

He pulls me off the bed and forces me down on my

knees.

The promise! I put my hands over his thighs, he quickly removes one and places it on his hard di€k.

I swallow nothingness and start stroking it. He throws his head backwards and puts one hand on top of my head.

“Suck it, baby,” he says.

I press my tongue on the tip and taste his salty pre-cum. I pause and look up at him. His lower lip is folded again. I cannot disappoint him now.

I can do this. If Ndondo can do it, so can I. I lift it up and lick around the whole thing. I'm careful not to leave saliva on him. I lick it clean and then pull it inside my mouth and imagine it as a lollipop.

“There you go baby!” he says and grabs my head. He's pushing it deep in my throat.

“Suck your man baby!” He's now in the world of his own. I brush his balls tenderly and slide my finger down to his as\$hole.

His body tenses up before I even push it in.

“Suck the di€k Thalente, when you're tired give me my pu\$\$y.”

Well, I tried.

He lifts me up and turns me around. I hold on to the bed and push my butt up.

He spanks me before separating my buttocks and pounding me like a madman.

When he starts crying like a sick puppy I always know that he's close to his big break.

He turns me around again and pushes me down on bed. He separates my thighs with his knee and strokes his di€k with his hand. His hand pace is quick. His face is transforming into chimpanzee-mode.

He lets out a groan and spreads his cum all over my cookie. There's really no point in doing this except messing me up.

“It looks so good baby,” he says, rubbing his cum all over me.

“Can I take a picture?” he asks.

My head is still hanging up in the blue skies. I nod my head and keep my legs widely opened while he reaches under his pillow for the phone.

Is he shooting a movie now? I close my legs while he's still taking more pictures and lie on my stomach.

The bed feels his weight as he throws himself next to me. His lips come in contact with the side of my neck. That's my soft spot, I lift my head up and look at him.

“That was a full course meal. Hlomuka is well fed and happy,” he says.

I think I should be proud of myself. B-J Queen! I need to teach Ndondo a thing or two.

We'll have 44 in the morning

[03/14, 09:15] : Chapter 44

## NDONDO

The day is finally here. My parents didn't directly give us their blessing but the fact that they're here means a lot to me. We may not see eye to eye but every girl needs her mother on a day like this.

Dumisani raised me up, regardless of his issues with Bab'Maqhawe, in my heart he holds a very special place. He never treated me any differently, he's strict to all of us. A bad brother doesn't necessarily mean a bad father. Hopefully after negotiations the family will sit down and talk things through. Everyone is in a better place now. My mother is happily married- that woman is living like a queen. Just like Mam'Jabu and Bab'Maqhawe, those two are now living their happy-ever-after. Aunt Vumile shouldn't have picked sides between her brothers, this could've been solved easily by her but she has played a huge part in the rivalry too.

We are all in the kitchen, discussing the menu and

arrangements for the day going forward.

“So I asked Bab'Ngidi and he said all of them are fine with steak. Thalente you can prepare gorgonzola sauce to go with it and all the salads. I'm handling the meat and steamed bread,” Khosi.

Thalente is leaning by the counter with her arms crossed.

“What is gorgonzola?” she asks.

I keep getting negative kitchen vibes from her.

“Can you cook Thalente?” I ask.

“Rice and curry, yes. But gogo-what-what, I honestly need culinary school from its lowest class,” she says.

Everyone laughs, including me; the world's bad cook.

“But you work in a canteen moghel,” Snalo says, laughing. Being a rich man's daughter has gotten into her head too. She is on her phone more than she's in this kitchen. She's always been the twin with a bad attitude, now she's worse.

“Abakhongi don't come from Mumbai, I work for an Indian woman and cook Indian food most of the time,” Thalente says.

I don't understand why Ndlalifa is not getting her a better job. He can put her anywhere on the map. This thing of slaving for an Indian woman who probably pays her peanuts doesn't sit well with me.

She blinks rapidly and looks at all of us as if she just remembered something.

“Before I forget, PERFUMES guys! I'm selling perfumes.”

Owkaaay! She's leaving us in the kitchen and rushing to the bedroom where they put their bags.

“Perfumes?” Andiswa asks.

We all shrug our shoulders. I did say there was more to this girl's personality than what she was putting on the front.

She comes back a plastic bag. It has bottles of perfumes inside.

“You are an Arthur Ford agent?” Andiswa asks, mesmerized.

“Yes,” she says and looks at me.

I've never used Arthur Ford before and I'm not the kind of a person who likes switching brands.

“You can buy two; one for the office and one for home use. I'll give you a discount of R10,” she says and puts two bottles on the table, in front of me.

“I have never used Arthur...” No, she's done with me! She's looking at Khosi now. Where did Ndlalifa get her?

“You can take two as well. Andiswa you'll buy one because you're a student. Snalo you will buy three, I'm putting up with your arrogant brother everyday.”

She leaves bottles in front of each and leaves the kitchen with the remaining ones.

“We are forced to buy perfumes now? Ndlalifa can give her money if she needs money,” Snalo says with an eye roll.

“I don't think she's that type. There is a difference



between a man spoiling you and a man practically taking care of you. Thalente wouldn't be taken care of by a man because that leads to submission," I say.

Snalo gives me a look. I know what it means; I'm talking from a privileged point.

"Ndabuko doesn't give me money," I say defensively.

"His brother gave you a company, duh!" Snalo mumbles.

I hate it when people say this. I was going to run a company one day, with or without Nhlanzeko's help.

"It doesn't mean I don't wake up everyday and burst my ass off making it successful."

Khosi sighs and lifts her hands up.

"You two stop. Who has cash? We have perfumes to pay for," she asks.

"Baba will pay for me," Snalo.

I'm just crossing my fingers that she won't stop working as Snakho did. Ngidi seems to be overcompensating.

“I don't have cash either. I'll ask Ndabuko,” I say.

Why are they looking at me like that? Ndabuko is here, parked a few yards away from the homestead.

“Didn't you say a woman must provide for herself just a moment ago?” Snalo asks.

Now she's twisting my words. I was only emphasizing on the importance of having your own money as a woman. Dependence makes men think they have the right to control you.

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The cooking begins. People are starting to arrive, the cow has been slaughtered. I've been holding my breath that nobody fights and so far, so good.

Mam'J abu and my mother are avoiding each other at all costs. Aunt Vumile is rather quiet, or must I say embarrassed? The demonic brother welcomed her with warm hands. She was meeting Qondani's children for the first time today. The neighbors have been asking her all kind of questions, the most-asked one being- when did she get married. In the village you don't rock up with a ring around your

finger, they want to see cows first.

“Ndondo,” Qondani calls me, standing at the door.

I expected him to be all over ladies, he calls himself a charmer. But he hasn't made a single move on anyone. I wanted him to try Snalo.

“Can we talk for a minute?” he asks.

I was about to go and dress up, but this sounds urgent. I dry my hands and follow him out.

We stand outside in the veranda. He's rubbing his hands and staring at me with a strange grin on his face.

“What?” I ask.

“Don't panic. I brought someone, she's in my room and she wants to help in the kitchen,” he says.

He's unbelievable!

“Are you allowed to bring random women during a family gathering?” I ask.

“She's been here before.”

Oh, this sounds good. I didn't think he'd move on so quickly.

“If the parents are okay with it then I have no problem,” I say.

He exhales and brushes his face. Why is he acting weirdly now?

“Was that all?” I ask with my eye narrowed.

“It's Zamafuze. We are back together,” he says.

For a moment I'm just frozen. Zamafuze is here? She brought her back into our lives? The same woman who fed him muthi and kept him away from his kids.

“You are joking, right?” I ask.

“Unfortunately, no. MaSibisi I love that woman, so bad that when she explained herself I understood her pain. I just hope she's genuine and she won't let her past come between us.” He lets out another sigh. Sadness clouds his eyes. I'm getting more confused. He really loves her, after everything she did to him!

“I’m not rich, I’m pushing through life and hustling. A man like me will never be accepted in her family. They’re used to people like your babydaddy. We already don’t have her family’s approval, her mother has cut all communication with her. The last thing I need is to have my family hating on us too. You don’t have to be her friend, just don’t make her feel uncomfortable. I’m begging you, dadewethu.”

I let out a sigh. This is the last thing I expected from him. I don’t trust Zamafuze one bit and there’s no way I’m letting her touch anything in the kitchen.

“It’s early for you to ask me this. I don’t want her in the kitchen, no hard feelings!”

“At least come and say hi. Ndondo you’re my blood sister.”

Jesus Christ! Now I have to say hi to her. I thought I wouldn’t have to see her face at least for the next two months of my life.

She’s sitting on bed. I have the urge to roll my eyes from the door. She has a scarf wrapped around her

head and those cute sishwes hwe dresses newly-wedded wives wear. She looks good but...

I clear my throat and stand by the wall.

An elbow nudge. Really Qondani?!

“Hi Zamafuze,” I say.

She looks at me and smiles. I don't trust anything about her, even that smile.

“Hey, you are still not dressed? Pregnancy is treating you good, you're beautiful.” She takes a gift bag behind her and passes it to me.

“What is this?” I ask.

“Open it,” she says.

Deep sigh! I won't be bribed with gifts. I open the thing and find a beaded bracelet inside.

“Qondani bought the beads,” she says and looks at him with a warm smile.

“You sell beaded bracelets?” I ask.

“Yes, I make necklaces and bracelets. But it's all Qondani's hard work, he buys the beads and get

customers,” she says.

I don't like her but she's doing a great job. I love the bracelet she made for me, it has a mixture of white and blue beads.

“Not really. You're the one who sit on the couch and thread these things the whole day,” Qondani chirps in.

Zamafuze stares at him. He stares back. Now it's a staring battle, neither of them wants to take credit.

“You're beautiful,” he tells her. The staring battle ends! She lost it. She's now blushing.

“Okay! Qondani you're needed outside. Zamafuze you can come to the kitchen, you're already dressed like a makoti.” I can't believe I'm doing this. It may be fake but it looks so genuine and pure. The way she blushes and smiles at him as if she's the luckiest girl in the world. Or it's just that I love hustling women? She's building herself again.

Khosi is the first one to put her hands on the waist

and lift her eyebrows.

“Guys, this is Zamafuze, my brother’s girlfriend,” I say.

Andiswa breaks into a fit of laughter. Snalo pours wine into a glass and gulps it down. Khosi is about to jump on her neck.

“Hi Zamafuze,” Thalente says. She’s the clueless one. She’s smiling at Zamafuze warmly and now all eyes are glaring at her like she’s a backstabber or sell-out.

“What?” she whispers, looking at me with a frown.

I shrug my shoulders. She needs to relax and not inherit any fights.

“I think we can all work together for today. I don’t want anyone or anything to spoil my day, please,” I say and fix my eyes on Khosi.

She rolls her eyes and turns to the pot on the stove.

“Wine?” Snalo asks Zamafuze. There’s mockery all over her eyes. It would’ve been worse if Snakho was here.



“No, thanks,” Zamafuze says.

Andiswa laughs again. I'm going to kill this child!

“Washintsha uDludla usewaba wuDladla,” Snalo says. Her and Andiswa bump fists and laugh.

I feel sorry for her. Unfortunately my friends don't forgive easily, even today they're still frying Ndabuko in a small pan.

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NOMAGUGU

There are neighbours and old friends who haven't seen her in years. Not only is she a mother to the most successful girl in Nyandeni, her daughter is marrying to the Mngomezulus and Ngonyama is leading the lobola negotiations. Isn't her womb the highly favoured one?

She has to translate everytime her son, Bahle, says something because none of these people can hear his A-class English.

J abu is an average-looking village wife and Nomagugu is about to make sure that she realizes that they're on different standards. She's up there, two steps away from the top, and J abu is still on the ground.

She's now changing from the velvet formal dress that had most village women wiggling their tongues out, and wearing her tiered floral-print midi dress. This one was R630; half of these women's pension.

The bedroom door shifts just as she puts the dress over her head. J abu walks in, unaware that she's invading a person's privacy. She's about to step back and leave her to her expensive dresses when she notices something that almost gives her a heart attack.

“Nomagugu!” she exclaims on top of her voice.

It's too late for Nomagugu to hide her thighs. J abu's hands are over her mouth. She's never seen anyone with so many scars on her thighs. Some look new and swollen. It's like she borrowed someone else's

thighs. Nomagugu is fair in skin tone but her thighs are darker than the man negotiating lobola with Maqhawe in the rondavel.

“Who did this to you?” J abu asks, she's beyond shock. She wouldn't wish anything like this on anyone, not even her worse enemy, which is none other than Nomagugu.

“Get out!” Nomagugu grunts her teeth and glares at her. She's never exposed her body in front of anyone, not even Ndondo. It's not because she's the pastor's wife and she's expected to dress a certain way- it's because she has scars that nobody can find out about. And now J abulile, out of all people, has seen her hidden scars!

“Is Dumisani doing this to you?” J abu is still standing by the door, staring at her.

“It's none of your business, get out of my face!”

“I'm calling Ndondo.” J abu turns the door handle and heads out.

“Hey wena mfazi!” Nomagugu runs after her. Ndondo cannot find out about this! It will kill her

and destroy all the happy-home memories she has. They grew up in a warm home with two loving parents- she doesn't want that to ever change in their minds.

J abu grabs Ndondo aside, bringing the whole room into a standstill.

“Ma, is everything alright?” Ndondo asks.

Before J abu can answer, Nomagugu appears behind them and slaps J abu across her face.

Ndondo screams out in shock!

“Ma what is wrong with you? Why are you slapping Mam'J abu like that?”

Oh, no! They're pushing each other and grabbing each other's throats.

“Stay out of my business!” Nomagugu keeps saying. J abu wants to say something to Ndondo but Nomagugu isn't giving her any space to breathe.

Khosi finally manages to stand between them. Fortunately, most village women are outside the

yard to collect their meat. Otherwise these would've been Nyandeni's top gossip. Two grown women fighting over God knows what. A whole MaMfundisi started the whole thing!

Jabu was calm at first, for Ndondo's sake and that she can't disturb peace during a ceremony. But now she's fuming, this woman always insults her and today she's finally put her filthy hands on her!

"Only if you fought your abusive husband the same way you fight me," she says, glaring at Nomagugu. If Khosi wasn't standing between them she would've hurt this woman.

"Whoooah! What is going on here?" Ndondo asks.

"Ask her to show you her thighs," Jabu says.

Nomagugu is gasping for air. Ndondo is looking at her with a frown.

"Ma, what is wrong with your thighs?" she asks and turns to Khosi and all the ladies. "Please excuse us for a moment."

They all leave the room, Andiswa bring the reluctant one behind.

Ndondo closes the door and walks back between her mothers.

“One of you needs to explain this nonsense to me. I asked both of you to be civil for my sake and now you're on each other's face like kids.”

J abu releases a sigh and drops her eyes in embarrassment. Nomagugu is grounded next to the bed with a fearful look on her face. She's holding a silent prayer that Ndondo doesn't dig this further.

“Ma what is wrong? Mam’J abu said something about your thighs,” Ndondo asks.

“There's nothing wrong with me. I have to go,” she walks to the door but J abu gets to it first and blocks her way.

“Lift your dress up!” she says firmly.

This is getting awkward! They're fighting over each other's thighs!

“Ma you cannot order someone to strip naked. Her

body, her rules,” Ndondo says to J abu.

“I will take this to Maqhawe then,” J abu tells Nomagugu, her eyes narrowed to challenge her.

“What is going on?” Now Ndondo is even more confused. What is being taken up to Maqhawe and why is her mother so scared?

It looks like she's left with no choice but to do as J abu says.

“Please don't freak out,” Nomagugu says to Ndondo. God knows how much she tried to protect her children from this!

She lifts her dress up, her daughter is staring at her scarred thighs for the first time. For 24 years, she's always bathed privately and wore leggings beneath her skirts to make sure that her thighs don't get exposed even by mistake.

“Why are you like this?” Ndondo asks. She's still in denial, this can't be her mother's thighs! Her mother has a flawless skin. Her legs don't have a single scar, not even a stretch mark!

Nomagugu takes a deep breath and casts her eyes on the floor.

“Ma!!!” Ndondo.

“Your father.”

There's some silence. There are no emotions portrayed on Ndondo's face.

“Why would he do this to anyone?” Ndondo asks.

Silence...

“Ma?” Her voice rises.

Jabu gives her a sharp glare.

“It started just a year after you were born. Your father has a low self-esteem, he's not what you think he is,” Nomagugu says.

“But why would he hurt anyone like this? Do you see your thighs, Ma? Why would anyone hurt someone like this, repeatedly?” Ndondo.

She's not taking it wild as they thought she would. She's calm and asking questions that Nomagugu can't answer.



“Why are you still with him?” she asks.

“Because you all deserve a warm home,”  
Nomagugu says.

“And we don’t deserve a mother? We deserve a mother that sleeps with a man that's going to wake up one day and kill her inside their bedroom?”

Nomagugu only heaves a sigh and keeps quiet. She can't tell her daughter how she plans to execute her husband's death after Bahle leaves home, because the plans she’s made mirrors every murderer there's out there. Soon she'll be no different from all those cold-blooded killers in prison cells she always visit to pray for.

“Thanks Ma, I will take care of it,” Ndondo says to Jabu before walking out, leaving both of them in one room.

[03/14, 09:16] : Chapter 45

NDONDO

I know gender-based violence because I watch the

news and I have met people from all walks of life. Coming from a holy family like mine that prays every evening and goes into fasting every now and then, I never thought it would be something that would happen under my roof. My father is a pastor, he's buried many women who died in the hands of their loved ones. Him and my mother host counselling sessions for traumatized individuals in church and help them pick up their pieces. I'm cracking my head trying to think how Dumisani is able to stand on the podium every Sunday and preach the word of God while there's a woman bleeding, internally and externally, because of him.

Ndabuko wants to see me. My whole day has been ruined, I didn't even care to ask Bab'Maqhawe how everything went. I left when Snalo and Andiswa started serving men in the kraal. I don't know exactly where Ndabuko is parked, I'm too tired to walk but taking the car would be showing-off. Luckily Mam'J abu gave me her flat shoes, they're a little oversize but comfortable.

I expected to see his car but as I turn around the corner, I find the Hlomuka white quantum parked. Ndlalifa, Maqhinga and the man I don't know are sitting on the camp chairs, under the tree shade and chatting at the top of their voices. There's a coolerbox in front of them, I don't need to guess what's stocked inside. They're having a little party here.

“Mrs Fierce!” Maqhinga yells as I'm just a few feet away from them. They're giving me taxi rank vibes, you know how drivers stare and yell at you if you're passing at the taxi rank.

He whistles and I almost trip over my toes. What is wrong with him? To think I was praying for him to return home safely!

“Sanibona,” I greet.

Ndlalifa's stare can be intense. I'm sure Thalente doesn't know that he's here.

“Is it heavy? Ndabuko should buy you a wheelchair,” Maqhinga again.

I don't know if I should be offended or sharing the

joke with him. Wheelchair? For real now? Women get pregnant all the time and none has ever used a wheelchair.

The quantum front door opens, Ndabuko climbs out and stands against it.

“Is my wife okay?” Ndlalifa asks.

Find me, I'm lost! He's married?

“Wife?” I ask.

“She said “yes.” Didn't she tell you?” He's beaming with joy. I don't know a single joke of Ndlalifa. This is serious as my heartburn in the mornings.

“My gosh! She didn't tell us. When is it happening?” This makes me happy. At least now I know that she's staying and we are approaching the same stage of life.

“After Baba's wedding,” he says.

Mr Ngidi is getting married too? Okay, I need to go, before that man burns me with his stare.

I congratulate Ndlalifa and walks to the quantum.

He has me pinned against the quantum door and sucking the life out of me. He's been smoking so I know that he's stressed out, probably about the negotiations.

His lips slide down to the side of my neck. He bites my flesh softly, I moan and grab his neck to deepen the kiss.

“Hey hey hey!” Maqhinga yells from the tree.

That agent of Satan!

We break the kiss and catch our breaths. He wants more, so do I. But we can't, because we have an audience sitting under the tree.

“Let's get inside,” he says.

We hop inside the back of the quantum. He leads me straight to the last seat. I hope he's not hoping for some hanky-panky because I'm not planning to give Maqhinga another live sex show.

“Your father doesn't want me,” he says.

“Which father?” I ask with my eyebrows lifted.

“The pastor,” he says.

Well, I can't say I'm surprised. He doesn't want his wife either, he abuses her every night and leaves her with a thousand scars.

“But it went well, they agreed on most of things. You are coming to the Mngomezulus,” he says, hoping to see relief on my face.

I just shrug my shoulders and release a loud exhalation.

“Is everything okay?” he asks, lifting my face up with his finger.

“He's abusing my mother,” I tell him.

“Who? The pastor?” he asks, squinting his eyes, already disbelieving me.

“Yes Ndabuko. She has scars all over her thighs, her skin is severely damaged. Some scars are 24 years old, they're skin-deep to the point that her thighs have completely changed complexion.” I have to bite my lip to stop myself from breaking down. Nobody deserves what my mother has been

through. 24 years of sleeping with a monster and still pretend to be happy to your kids and stand in front of the congregation and act like a superwoman.

“Babe,” he cups my face and stares into my tearing eyes.

“I’m sending him to jail. I swear he’s going to spend the rest of his life there!” Tears make their way down on my cheeks. I can’t believe my mother is one of those women called “strong women.”

“I’m going to plant cameras in their bedroom. It will record everything he’s doing to her and I’ll set a projector in front of the church and play everything for them. After exposing him to all those feet-lickers of his, I’m going to call the police and hire the best lawyer there is in this country. If I have to reach out to the president for...” Cold lips capture mine and smooch me slowly. I respond to the kiss, tears are still running on my face but his lips seem to be calming me down.

“Ndondoyami.” He wipes my cheeks with his T-shirt.

I pull myself together and look at him.

“Your mother needs you now more than ever. Do not make her feel useless and please don't embarrass her. You can collect evidence but it must be her decision to send your father to jail. Right now focus on helping her rebuild her confidence and see her worth without him.”

“But....” He shakes his head. I swallow back my defensive words.

“There's no ‘but’ Ndondo. Focus on opening your mother's eyes, do not further destroy her confidence and take decisions on her behalf,” he says.

Deep sigh!

“Okay,” I say, nodding.

He pecks my lips and smiles proudly.

“By the way you look beautiful Mama Mngomezulu. How is the little Nhlanzeko here?” He lifts my dress up and massages my tummy.

“Behaving. No ices today.”



He narrows his eye. Why doesn't he believe me? I haven't eaten any ices today, true to God!

“Why are you wearing a full panty?” He was checking on the baby, his hands weren't supposed to go below my waist.

Before I answer, his hand slides under my panty and touches my mound.

“Ndabuko we are in a quantum, your friends are sitting under the tree, not very far from us,” I say and gasp as his finger rolls over my clit.

“Sit on my lap,” he says.

I'm hesitant. What if one of his friends come to the quantum to get something? I also sneaked out, the elders have no idea that I'm here.

I stand in the passage between the seats, he sits back and unbuckles his belt. This is so risky!

His hands slide under my dress and shift my panty aside. The whole Bantwana Holdings CEO is being fingered in the backseat of a quantum. Moments like this humble me.

He's breathing behind my neck. His other hand has gone up to my boobs. They're now very sensitive but he has a way of playing with my nipples that sends me di€k-hunting.

“Don't make noise,” he says.

How the hell am I supposed to keep to myself? His finger is stirring inside me.

“Ndabuko please,” I moan.

“Please what?” His finger is rolling on my clit, I can feel my nana sweating and demanding its real tool.

“Fu€k me,” I say in almost whisper.

“Relax first. Don't squeeze your butt,” he says.

I exhale deeply and relax my body. He separates my legs further apart. He applies more force to the fingers, playing with my clit like a string of guitar.

“Shhh! Cum for daddy... Spread that cum on my fingers... Oh, shit baby!”

I bite my lip and suppress my moan. He inserts two fingers and stir my cookie. I feel the heat building up from my toes and shooting up my legs. It

spreads throughout my body and I go blank for a moment.

I hear him cursing lowly before removing his hand from my leaking bottom.

“Let me get a paper towel,” he says.

I shift to the second seat and lean back with my eyes firmly shut. My body needed this. It wasn't an intense orgasm but it was enough to release some tension.

My panty is soaking wet. He has to take it off before wiping me.

“We need a “shaving” date,” he says.

I roll my eyes at him. My stomach is huge, I cannot see below my waist, so it mustn't surprise him if he finds a bush down there. It's his job to shave me, he made me pregnant.

“Must I keep it for you?” He's asking about the soaked panty. Obviously, I cannot go home with a soaked panty in my hand.

“Yes, and please walk me home now. I don't want my mothers to send out an enemy,” I say.

He lowers his head to me and onslaughts me with another sensual kiss. His manhood has rolled a fist behind his jean. God knows how much I want to help him, but we are in a wrong place, at the wrong time.

He puts his belt on and follows me out of the vehicle. The conversation is loud under the tree. Ndlalifa seems to be a bit drunk and I wonder what would Thalente say if she saw him like this. They're not even supposed to be here.

“You guys are done?” Maqhinga asks.

“Done doing what?” Ndabuko firmly holds my hand as we walk past them.

“Tell my wife that I'm waiting for her here,” Ndlalifa says.

Thalente is leaving tomorrow, with the rest of us. Why would he wait for her?

“I'm not sleeping alone today,” I hear him say to his

friends behind us.

“Is he drunk already?” I ask Ndabuko.

“Yes, and he wants his woman. Bafo is tired of sleeping alone like isishimane,” he says with a chuckle.

Thalente is going to murder someone!

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NOMAGUGU

Maqhawe stands in the middle of the empty room with his hands tucked in his pockets. His siblings and their kids are home. He is happy, but that doesn't mean he wants things to be swept under the carpet. The person he wants to talk to the most is Vumile, his sister. He understands the hatred between him and Dumisani. There is a woman involved and their parents played a huge role in their rivalry. It's his sister he doesn't understand. What made Vumile despise him so much? He

wasn't the best brother growing up but he used to stand up for her. He used to fight those who tried to bully her. He'd lie to the parents to cover her dirty deeds that she did outside church. Why was it so easy for her to pick Dumisani's side?

Footsteps stops behind him. He turns his head to the devastated Nomagugu.

"Sorry, I didn't think anyone was inside here," she says and wipes her bloodshot eyes.

"Have you, by any chance, seen Ndondo?" she asks.

No, he hasn't seen Ndondo. Why is it a big deal?

"Is she not with the other girls?" he asks.

"No. It's been over an hour, I don't know where my child went." And then tears? Nomagugu is not this weak. The last thing she'd ever do is to cry in front of her ex.

"This is a village, nothing happened to her, she could be out for a walk," Maqhawe says.

"She was angry Maqhawe This is exactly what I

didn't want. I knew this was going to break her.”  
She's now crying openly.

Maqhawe takes a few steps closer to her but fights against it. He has no reason to comfort her, this woman left him for his brother. He was depressed for years because of her. A few sheds of tears and he's already feeling sorry for her?

Dumisani walks in, also unaware of the situation he's walking into. He frowns as he sees both Nomagugu and Maqhawe in one room.

“What is going on here?” he asks.

Nomagugu quickly wipes her tears and clears her throat. There's a specific look he's giving her. Her eyes quickly drop to the floor.

He looks at Maqhawe who boldly holds his stare.

“I will send Qondani to go and look for her,”  
Maqhawe says and eventually takes his eyes off his brother.

He walks past them and exits through the door. A few steps away he remembers that he left his

lighter on the stand inside the room and walks back. He walks on Nomagugu pinned against the wall and flinching out in pain. Dumisani has his hands under her dress. Whatever he's doing to her is painful and forced.

“What is going on here?” Maqhawe asks.

Dumisani quickly lets go of her and pulls down her dress. She looks frightened and embarrassed.

“I came for the lighter,” Maqhawe says, walking to the stand and grabbing his lighter.

He glances at Nomagugu one last time, he cannot shake off the feeling that something awful is happening between the two of them. But it's none of his business. They came for Ndondo's lobola negotiations and soon they're going back to their lives.

He spots Ndondo coming around the rondavel with the corners of her dress lifted up.

He frowns and makes his way to her.



“Ndondo!” he calls.

She lifts her eyes and stops dead on her tracks. Her eyes are bulging out as if she's been caught sneaking in to steal.

“Where were you? Your mother has been worried sick,” he asks.

“Oh, I was..seeing a friend off,” she says and widens her eyes.

Maqhawe sighs out and shakes his head in dismay.

“Does he know that I can keep his uncles here and fine them?” he asks.

Her eyes are about to pop out.

“Baba!” she exclaims.

“She is in the kids' room with her husband. Go and tell her that you're okay,” Maqhawe says.

“With her husband? Baba you left the two of them in one room? He's going to kill her.” She's hurrying off with a frightened look on her face.

Maqhawe is confused. Why would Dumisani kill his

beloved wife who was handed to him on a silver tray?

He follows after Ndondo. It's not safe for her to be running on that speed in her state.

He bumps into Dumisani walking out of the room. The door is left open, he stands by it and watches the scene inside.

“Ma, did he hurt you?” Ndondo is asking Nomagugu. Her hands are tucked on Nomagugu’s cheeks.

“No,” Nomagugu shakes her head.

“You are coming to stay with me and Andiswa,” Ndondo says.

Nomagugu yanks her hands off and glares at her. Now this is the Noma everyone knows.

“I’m not your child Ndondo. You are not going to babysit me. I’ve been married to this man for 27 years. He didn’t start yesterday, I’ve been living like this since you were one year old. I know how I’m going to get out of this situation, please stay out of

it.”

“Why did you marry him in the first place? Weren't you in love with my father? Why didn't you take me and go back to him when he started abusing you?”

Nomagugu exhales deeply and puts her hands on Ndondo's shoulders.

“Life is not black and white. It's complicated than you think and I'm not about to sit down with you and tell you every detail of my past. You know what's important, your father is Maqhawe Sibisi and he's loved you from the day he tucked you inside my womb.”

Maqhawe shuts his eyes and releases a low breath. His heart is breaking. This takes him back to the day he found out that he was going to be a father and to the day it was all taken away from him.

He's not looking where he's going, he's heading out to have a smoke. Jabu blocks his way and stares up at him.

He looks down and exhales.

“Mama,” he says.

“What is going on with you?” J abu asks.

“I’m just overwhelmed, that’s all. Please prepare water, I want to wash my feet,” he says and walks past her.

She understands. Their presence must be overwhelming to her husband. They’re here and they don’t even look sorry.

She fills the kettle with water and plugs it. Ndondo did a great job by bringing Thalente and Khosi here. Not only did they cook food enough for everyone, they have left her kitchen spotless. They are now drinking their ciders and she doesn’t mind at all.

“Knock-knock!”

She turns her head to the door. There is a boy, taller than any boy she’s ever seen. He takes his cap off and lets himself inside.

“Hello Ma,” he says.

She's never seen him around but he's respectful, so she pushes a chair to him.

“How are you?” she asks.

“I'm fine, thank you.” He puts his cap over his knee and brushes his shaved head.

“My name is Ndlalifa. A boy showed me here. I'm looking for Thalente Mbatha,” he says.

“Oh, she is in the bedroom with other girls. Does she know that you are here?” she asks while attending to the boiling kettle.

“Not really. It's an urgent situation,” he says.

“Alright, I will call her for you.” She takes out a bottle of cold drink and a glass.

“Yehlis a izintuli, I will call her,” she says, putting the drink in front of Ndlalifa.

Thalente walks to the kitchen wearing a gown. They're having a little party in the bedroom. She's not drinking but she is having fun with the girls.

Her face transforms into shock when she sees Ndlalifa sitting on the chair.

“Ndlalifa!”

He sees her and stands up, staggering a little bit.

“MaMbatha I have come to fetch you.” He's dragging his words and his eyes are half-lidded. He's drunk!

“What brought you here? In this place,” Thalente asks.

“My heart. I want my woman.” He licks his lips and smiles weakly. “You're not even going to give your man a kiss?”

Thalente exhales. She left him in Durban, earlier today they talked over the phone and he didn't say anything about coming to Nyandeni.

“I will carry the bag for you. Go and say goodbye to your friends,” he says and bites his lower lip.

“I'm not going anywhere Ndlalifa. You knew that I was going to be here for two days,” Thalente says.

His face drops. He sits on the chair again and cocks

his head to the side.

No, he mustn't sleep here!

“Ndlalifa leave!” Thalente hisses.

“I will sleep with you here,” he says with his eyes closed.

Khosi appears and looks at Ndlalifa with a frown.

“What are you doing here?” she asks.

“Who are you?” He lifts his head up and slowly opens his eyes. When he sees Khosi he clicks his tongue and closes his eyes again.

“Ndlalifa aren't you supposed to be home?” Khosi asks.

“Leave me alone. I'm here to fetch my woman, but she doesn't want us to leave. We are going to sleep here, both of us,” he says.

Now it's Khosi's turn to click her tongue.

“You're mad. You have every day to see her and be with her. Only today she's spending time with other

girls and you're here to make demands? You are annoying.”

“Thalente loves me. You don't know anything,” Ndlalifa says and buries his face on his arms.

“Yet you are harassing her. Do you want me to call Ngidi?”

“I'm not scared of Ngidi,” he says.

Thalente exhales and looks at Khosi.

“I don't want to create a scene, I will leave,” she says and walks out of the kitchen to fetch her bag.

“Really Ndlalifa?” Khosi is fuming. If he wasn't her brother it would've been safe to say she hates him. But we don't choose family.

[03/14, 09:16] : Chapter 46

MAM' J ABU

As usual, she was the last one to go to bed. She had to make sure that the grandchildren were safely tucked on beds, make sure that every guest had



enough blankets and that all the windows were closed.

She walks inside the bedroom and finds Maqhawe smoking by the window. He knows how much she hates him smoking inside the house, but today she can make an exception and let him be. It's been a very hectic day. Nomagugu and Dumisani are located in the rondavel below the yard. Vumile was given a room in the main house.

She doesn't say anything. She undresses and climbs on the bed wearing only her petticoat and bra.

“Are you going to come to bed?” she asks as Maqhawe continues to stand by the window after his tobacco roll finishes.

He sighs and walks to the bed. He pulls down his pant and gets on bed in his short.

“Are you okay Maqhawe?” asks Jabu, concern clouding her eyes.

“I don't know, mkami.” He exhales again and puts his arm around her shoulders, bringing her head on

his chest.

“I have no business with those two but I think Dumi is mistreating Nomagugu. I walked on to the situation I still can't wrap my head around. She was in pain J abu. So much pain!” he shuts his eyes and swallows what seems to be a huge lump.

“I know,” J abu says.

He turns his eyes to her with his forehead furrowed.

“You know?” he asks.

“I saw her. I had to call Ndondo before she confessed the truth. Dumisani doesn't deserve to be called a pastor, he's a monster hiding behind the Bible.”

“What exactly is he doing to her? I overheard her conversation with Ndondo and my soul has been haunted ever since.”

J abu lets out a low chuckle and adjusts to have a better view at his face.

“You're genuinely worried about her?” she asks.

He exhales and brushes her hand. She knows him

like the back of her hand, even if he wanted to, he'd never be able to lie to her.

“She's the mother of my child J abu,” he says.

“I know that, but Nomagugu has put you through a lot. She hasn't even apologized for all the pain she put you through,” J abu says.

“It doesn't mean I want her to suffer. You know my heart, I don't hold grudges.”

“And that's why I love you Maqhawe, you're a good man.”

He's blushing for a moment and fiddling with her fingers.

“Your first child is getting married. How do you feel about that?” she asks while brushing and pulling her beard playfully.

“My son-in-law is not a struggling man. All I want is for her to be happy and well taken care of,” he says.

“Do you think you raised a son who could do all that to someone's daughter?” she asks.

He chuckles at her question. They both know how

Qondani is, but this time around he looks focused and smitten by his Dli so.

“I don't trust him as a husband but no man is perfect. If she loves him right he'll be what she wants him to be. I mean, look at me!”

“Did you turn out right? Come on Maqhawe, if Nomagugu crawled here and asked for your love back you wouldn't think twice before double-crossing me.”

“That's not true,” Maqhawe says defensively.

“Remember how the first year in our relationship was like?” She said she was over this! They moved on from those dark memories. He wasn't himself; he was going through rejection from his family and Nomagugu.

“You said you forgive me Jabu. I have rewritten all my wrongdoings, how long are you going to keep reminding me about the past?”

“I'm just saying. You're already stressed about her marriage.”

“No, you're emotionally bullying me. I cannot be immune to people's pain because of my imperfect past. I have never lied to you. Not even in those years!” He's getting off bed and picking his clothes from the floor. He's still calm, and that's the thing about Maqhawe, he could be angry and breathing flames but still remain collected. It's only when he walks out on you that you realize that he's really fed up.

“Maqhawe it's cold outside,” J abu calls behind him. He gives her his back and walks out, shutting the door behind him.

It was really a long time ago. She shouldn't have brought this up because they talked and Maqhawe admitted and rewrote his wrongs. But who'd forget how her husband used to call her by his ex-lover's name on bed? It started as a mere tongue-slip; he'd call Nomagugu's name whenever he was reaching his breaking point. Then it turned into a habit. He'd randomly call her Nomagugu and get angry if she didn't respond. When she got pregnant he

convinced everyone that he was having a baby girl and that her name was going to be Ndongoyamahlase. And then Qondani came, a little boy who looked like his father from head to toe. When Maghawe heard that it was a boy he didn't bother going to see Jabu and the baby. He was mad at her- she wasn't Nomagugu and she had failed to give him a daughter that was taken away from him. He came to see Qondani for the first time when he turned 5 months old and it was love at first sight. He instantly became his new world. He asked forgiveness from Jabu and promised to be a better man. He's kept that promise for over two decades.

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Nomagugu sneaks out of their designated rondavel as soon as Dumisani dozes off. He's done feeding her his tooth-pick dick and forcing her to swallow her cum. He's now exhausted and snoring like a cat with his legs spread out on the bed. She's been

tempted to chop off his little di€k with a nail-clip a number of times and fought against it.

She needs a walk to clear her head and recollect herself. She was once a normal girl in this village, she had big dreams and a colourful future planned out with her first love.

She wasn't ready when Maqhawe asked her to be intimate with him, but he promised her the world, and maybe he would've given her that world if he was given a chance. He was a rebel, the kind of a boy every parent told their sons to stay away from. But with her he was a sweetheart. Their first day was nothing short of amazing. It was a bit painful but he was gentle with her. He'd bite her neck softly and tell her to calm down.

“Noma I got you!” he'd say on repeat while staring deeply in her eyes with pure love. When he was done he'd lie next to her and brush her hand. They'd talk about their future and how they planned to grow old together.

Of course, it was a far-fetched dream. As soon as

Nomagugu's mother suspected that she was pregnant, she called a family meeting and strangled the truth out of her.

Her father then gave her two choices; either to marry Dumisani Sibisi whose parent were already looking a wife for or visit Gog' Makhabela for a few weeks. Not everybody knew what Gog' Makhabela did, people thought she was a healer and specialized in female illnesses. But it was more than that, she had mixtures that she gave to women to get rid of unwanted pregnancies.

Marrying Dumisani was a better option because she wanted to keep her child and Dumisani was not just any Sibisi, he was Maqhawe's blood brother. Her child wasn't going to grow with a wrong identity. It was easy for the families to reach common grounds and marry the two of them. It was never about love; that they were going to develop through their marriage.

He was trying to be a good husband, his father was



coaching him on everything. But after Ndondo's arrival things changed. He started reminding her that she was leftovers from his brother and that he had done her a huge favour by marrying her. It got worse when he couldn't perform on bed and found ways to blame everything on her. One day she summed up courage and told him his manhood was too small. That's the day he started putting his hands on her. It has never stopped till today.

“Where do you think you're going?” The voice stops her dead on her tracks. It's heavily dark outside and everyone has gone to sleep. She didn't expect to bump into anyone, especially outside the yard.

“Did you see the time?” Now the person is nearer and she quickly recognizes his aura.

“Maqhawe what are you doing here?” she asks, a bit shaken.

“I'm getting fresh air, and you?”

“Me too,” she says.

The next two minutes are filled with silence. She can feel his piercing stare through the dark and her wish right now is to disappear into space.

“You said it started a year after Ndondo was born?” he asks.

Nomagugu is a bit shocked. She didn't see Maghawe when she had that conversation with Ndondo.

“Why did you stay? Was it love?” he asks.

Silence...

“Noma why didn't you come back?” he asks what he's sure Jabu would slice his balls if she heard him saying.

“I was already married to your brother. He had a position in church and everyone looked up to us. I couldn't let all those people and my parents down.”

“But you let me down?” he asks.

“Maghawe, please!” she gasps for air and blinks back tears. At least he cannot see her.

“You're not even sorry Noma. How can you not see

what you've done? How did you sleep at night, with MY daughter and my blood brother on one bed? How did it feel to see me being rejected by everyone, including you ithemba lami, leaving me licking my bleeding wounds like a dog? How were you..how were you okay Noma?” His voice breaks. He gasps for air and releases a low groan. It hurts deep down in his heart. She left him with unhealing wounds. This woman hurt him!

“My daughter. Inkosazane yami Nomagugu. I could die any day from now and you took away my chance of being a father to her. How do you even open a Bible and preach?”

“They were going to kill her. They killed Vumile’s first child.” She breaks down and cries. She steps back until she standing against the tree and slides down to the ground. She leans against the tree trunk and lets out a flood of tears.

“Who was going to kill my daughter? Which first child of Vumile was killed?”

“She was 16. You wouldn't know because you were

never there. Our parents were cruel Maqhawe.”

He lowers himself to the ground next to her and listens to her sobs until they're substituted by hiccups.

“Please don't hate me Maqhawe. J abu gave you the life I couldn't give to you. At least you are happy. You found love and happiness. I've never gone a month without getting a beating and being forced into sexual intercourse. I've endured objects of different sizes being inserted inside my womanhood to give me pleasure. I've endured insults, degradation and abuse in all forms. Be happy I was not happy after leaving you. Be proud I'm this broken. I have scars all over my thighs, that's a compensation to all the pain I've put you through,” Nomagugu says.

Maqhawe releases a fake chuckle and brushes his wrist that is circled by iziphandla.

“I'm not him Noma,” he says.

“I was just saying. Karma has dealt with me. I've paid for my sins, I'm still breathing but it doesn't

mean that I'm not drowning," Nomagugu says.

"How are you going to get out?" Maqhawe asks after a brief moment of silence.

"I will kill him," she says, jokingly.

But Maqhawe knows a joke when he hears one and this isn't any joke.

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MAQHAWE

He was sure that his steps were quiet as a cat's. The side-lamp brightens up as he bends to take his shoes off. Jabu is sitting on the bed, wide awake with her arms folded before her chest.

"Mama you're still up?" His eyes are running everywhere in the house but not to her. It's close to 23h00 and she's been waiting for over two hours.

"You were with her, right?" Jabu asks. Her voice is hoarse and filled with pain.

He nods and releases a heavy sigh.

“I just bumped into her and we talked.” He's standing next to the bed because he's not sure if he's allowed on it or not.

“For two hours?” J abu asks.

“No. Maybe 30 minutes.”

“30 minutes Maqhawe? 30 minutes!”

He exhales and puts his knee on the bed to test waters. She doesn't comment on that, so he climbs on and slides under the duvet.

“So what were you talking about all this time?” she asks.

“The past and how everything went down. We also talked about her marriage,” he says.

“While I'm waiting for you here?” she asks.

He knows that he's not supposed to answer this one.

“J abulile I'm begging you. It's not what you think, we are too old now. We have children and

grandchildren. I'm not a boy, you're my life partner and I'll always remain truthful to you. Nomagugu and I talked about the past and everything that we needed to talk about. Stop acting like a girl, your husband is freezing.” His eyes soften at her. He only makes this face for her. It reminds her of a broken young man she fell in love with two decades ago.

“Why didn't you ask her to warm you up?” She turns and sleeps on the other side.

He shifts closer to her and puts his cold hand over her hip.

“Only my wife warms me up,” he says, brushing her hip and pressing his bottom front behind her.

“Tell that wife to warm you up then.” She's playing hide-and-seek. She likes it when he begs.

His hand moves from her hip to her waist. He's massaging her all around her waist and she knows his next destination.

“Thonono! Swidi lami, please turn around. You know which face I want to see before falling asleep.” His

tone is softer. She feels his beard massaging the back of her neck before his cold lips crash on her flesh.

She turns around with a fake annoyed expression on.

“Again, I'm sorry for everything I put you through. I didn't know how to deal with pain and rejection. I don't deserve you Jabu.” He brushes her eyebrow with a thumb and stares at her.

“I'm sorry I brought that up,” she says, regretfully.

“If it still hurts I guess I deserve to be reminded every hour. I'm also sorry about tonight, I should've called her here and had that conversation in front of you,” he says.

“Maqhawe!” she exhales and puts her arms around his neck.

“I love you Maka Qondani, with every piece of my heart.”

She smiles and looks at his lips. She lifts her head to meet his kiss. It starts as a baby kiss and leads



into a passionate one. Maqhawe has lifted up her petticoat, he's squeezing her butt and deepening the kiss.

His finger slides between her buttocks to her wet castle.

“Did you drink your meds for joints pain?” he asks.

“But Maqhawe you saw how busy it was today. Where was I supposed to find time for medication?”

He chuckles and pecks her lips.

“Turn your back to Sibisi then.”

She turns and sleeps on her side again. He lifts up her leg and holds his manhood. Mbambo was right, his performance was affected by stress. He's okay now but drinking imbiza to stay even more strong.

He holds his manhood and balances it in her opening. His erection is not strong enough yet, he rubs it around her cookie while tapping on her lengthy clit.

“I'm sorry Mama Sibisi,” he says one more time,

before directing his now fully erect manhood inside her opening.

Sometimes Jabu gets too tired from all the chores she does in the house during the day and looking after her grandchildren. She just gives him his favorite organ and lets him have his way with her. Sometimes he asks her to move her hips and sometimes he lets her be and does all the work.

They're both moaning like hospital patients as their organs exchange indescribable pleasure.

“Awungidudule phela Jabu,” he asks her to at least push back her butt to meet his thrusts.

She pushes backwards but you can tell that she's tired. Maghawe turns her around, separates her legs and kneels between them.

Now Sibisi is popping veins and stretched to his maximum size. It used to throw Jabu off because she imagined it leaving her opening opened to its size. But that organ can push out a baby's head and still collect its muscles back into place.

He inserts it inside her. She gasps for air as her

castle swallows all of it. He lies on her chest and squeezes his butt. It pokes her soft inner flesh, again they're both moaning like sick patients.

“Open it mama,” he whispers.

Jabu knows that his end is nearer, so she forces him to pull out and personally grabs the hard rod and rubs it on her clit.

“These wings hug Sibisi so good!” He's spreading her labia minora lips with his tip and gritting his teeth. Hers is different, it's an outie vagina, and to make her childhood more traumatic, she had a set of two dark, lengthy labia minora lips. She didn't lose her virginity at 24 because she was an angel or something, she had a very low self esteem. She didn't imagine herself getting naked in front of a guy, dealing with her friends' mockery of her vagina was enough.

But Maqhawe changed all of that. He appreciates these “wings” and makes her feel confident about every part of her body.

“Free me, mkami,” he begs. He's deep inside her

and swallowing back his deep groans. It kills his confidence when he reaches his orgasm before her. But sometimes it becomes too irresistible not to explode first.

Like today, he just shook and laid motionless on top of her.

“I’m---so---rry,” -It's a low whisper. His head is buried on her chest in shame.

[03/14, 09:17] : Chapter 47

NDLALIFA

All he wanted when he woke up was to bury himself inside her. He did touch her, as he usual does when he wants a morning panky, but today she pushed him away. He touched her again, moving his hand up to her breasts and rubbing her nipples. It does the trick, well, most of the times.

“Ndlalifa leave me alone!” Today she said while slapping his hands away.

“I’ll be fast sthandwa sami,” he said, pushing his

hard shaft between her thighs. He was shaking, he had no doubt that he was going to explode as soon as she let him in. Of which she never did, instead she rolled off bed and left the room.

A cold shower would've calmed his member down, but he was willing to beg. He walked out of the room, naked, his hand wrapped around his hard shaft and followed her to the lounge where she had wrapped herself on the couch.

“Babe look..I'm in pain,” he said, trying to get between her legs.

He lifted his eyes to her face while stroking his shaft with his hand. Only when their eyes met he realized that something was awfully wrong.

“What did I do?” he asked.

“You have the nerve yazi! You went to Nyandeni and forced me to come with you. I can't even spend time with other girls because of you. I had to leave everyone because you threatened to disrespect someone's house.”

He couldn't remember but for her to be angry like

that meant he really crossed the line.

“I was drunk Thalente,” he said, hoping it would calm her down a little bit.

“Were you drunk as well in Cannelands when you broke the door after I refused to leave with you?” she asked.

He didn't think she'd bring that up. They talked about it, didn't they?

“Thalente ngibhebhis a ngihambe ngiye emsebenzini,” he said, losing his patience. (Thalente let me fuck and go to work.)

“You're still drunk! When you come back from that work please take me to my place.” Thalente rose from the couch and left him standing with his hand wrapped around his shaft.

He disappeared in the bathroom where he locked himself inside for five minutes. After his hand had done him justice he shamefully walked out and went to the bedroom.

He tried to talk to her but it was all futile because

she was then completely not speaking to him.

He needed to be in the taxi rank at least before 5am, so he went to take a shower and dressed up to go. His day had already started on a bad note, he wasn't looking forward to anything.

Maybe he's crazy or obsessed. He's asked her many times if she understands the depths of his love. It does scare him at times, sometimes he panics when he can't get hold of her. It reminds him of the day she packed her bags and went home without telling him. That day he was sure he was losing his mind. Maybe it took him back to his childhood; having someone who means the world to you pack her bags and leave without saying a word.

Before leaving he lowered his head to her and planted a kiss on her cheek with his eyes firmly shut.

“Thalente please don't leave me. I really love you,”

he said, still leaning over her.

She only released a sigh and kept her face on the wall.

“I will come back around 12. Must I bring you anything?” he asked.

She shook her head. His heart sank down to his feet. He took his phone and car keys and left with his head hung down in disappointment.

That was eight hours ago. When the clock ticked closer to 12pm he left Ndabuko and Maqhingana in the middle of a deep conversation with some of their colleagues and went to Debonnairs. They had a tray of inhloko, pap and hot chutney in front of them. Only Ndabuko was having a different meal for his lunch. He said it was a spaghetti bolognese. He always worries his colleagues with his weird behaviour. Lately he brings a bottle of blended fruit juice that Ndondo prepares for him, instead of drinking a 2L of Coke like everyone.



Reality kicks in as he parks the car in front of his house. The closed front door is furtherly frustrating him. Thallente is not just dramatic, she's crazy. His biggest fear is her leaving him and never coming back. He's never kept any woman before, this is his first attempt in a serious relationship and his constant craving of attention is already putting his relationship on the line.

“Thallente!” He releases a sigh as he walks into her watching a movie.

She turns her head around, glances at him once and shifts her eyes back to the TV screen. She is still angry.

“I brought you lunch. Should I leave it in the kitchen?” Ndlalifa asks.

“I don't know, I'm not hungry, I ate bread,” she says, shrugging her shoulders.

He walks to the kitchen with his tail tucked between his legs. He leaves the pizza on top of the counter and goes back to her.

He sits next to her and exhales deeply. His eyes are

on her face- he loves this woman.

“I don't like it when we fight. I can't even work, my mind is here with you. I'm sorry I embarrassed you,” he says.

Thalente inhales deeply and searches for the remote. When she finds it she increases the TV volume.

“Thalente?”

Silence...

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Khosi didn't pick his calls, so he called Snalo and she said they just arrived in Durban and they're all in Ndondo's house.

The gate slides open, he drives in and leaves his car behind Ndondo's Benz G-wagon. He wishes to do for Thalente at least half of what Nhlanzeko did for Ndondo. He was crazy about her, the same way Ndlalifa is crazy about Thalente. But maybe they wouldn't have worked out, Ndabuko is more

compatible with Ndondo than he was. The way he didn't consult Ndondo before taking decisions that concerned her entire existence would've been the same way he conducted their relationship. She wouldn't have stayed with him that long.

They're laughing in the kitchen. There are scanned pictures spread around the table that they're staring at. It must be the baby's ultrasound pictures.

Ndlalifa walks in and greets. Khosi is giving him an intense look that makes him a bit uncomfortable.

“What did I do yesterday?” he asks, turning his eyes to Ndondo.

“Nothing,” she says with a frown.

Khosi breaks a chuckle.

“Nothing? He came to your father's house and harassed Thalente. He forced the poor girl to take her bags and leave with him at night,” Khosi says.

Ndlalifa releases a loud exhalation. Thalente has every right to be mad at him.

“Please pass my apologies to your father, mother, brother and everyone that I must've disrespected. I was drunk, I wouldn't embarrass Ndabuko like that,” he says

“It's not a big deal, don't worry about it,” Ndondo says.

“No, it is a big deal. You cannot treat a woman like property. We had a girls' night and she missed out because she fell in love with a bully,” Khosi.

Snalo laughs. She's a bit drunk. She keeps sipping from a mug.

“That's why I'm here, she's angry,” Ndlalifa says.

They're staring at him, waiting for him to elaborate.

“I need a favour.” His eyes go to Khosi. You'd swear she's not his sister, she was supposed to be on his side but she's the one biting his head more than anyone.

“What favour?” Snalo asks.

“Please come to my house. Wear your gowns and come do whatever it is that she was supposed to do

with you last night. I know you're all tired, but I'm desperate," he says.

They wait for him to say he's joking. They wore gowns, had a few snacks and drinks to catch up as ladies and congratulate Ndondo. It wouldn't make any sense for them to wear gowns and redo the whole thing for Thalente.

"I'll do whatever you guys want. Even if I have to pay people to come and massage your feet," he says.

Now he's talking! Snalo puts the mug down and jumps off the chair.

"We need a bottle of champagne and sea food platter from Ocean Basket," she says.

He nods, he doesn't have much of a choice, even if they wanted a whale's lung he'd dive into the oceans and get it. He turns to Khosi. She is the hardest to deal with.

"Please sisi, I don't want to lose Thalente. I'm not perfect but I love her," he says.

Khosi sighs. This is her aunt's son, she can soften her heart for him.

“Do you promise me that you'll never mistreat her again. Men like you make me...” There she goes again!

“I promise Nomkhosi!” he cuts her speech short.

“Fine then. Ndondo are you coming?” She turns to Ndondo.

“Why not? He's going to book our spa treatment next weekend,” Ndondo says.

It's too early for him to be relieved, but at least they'll manage to cheer her up for him. Being in love is really a strange thing, now he's trying to bring back the yesterday that he fucked up.

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THALENTE

I hate that he keeps leaving. I wanted him to be here

and experience my silent treatment throughout the day. It makes me even more mad that he's not serving his whole sentence; when he goes out people talk to him. Nobody was supposed to speak to him today.

My phone beeps.

It's Ndondo.

**\*\*WE ARE COMING LATER\*\***

They're coming here? Do people even come to this house? Ndjalifa has never hosted any guest while I'm here. Even his brother never spend more than 15 minutes here. This house is his little world and only I'm allowed to come and go as I please.

As much as I want this silent treatment to drag longer, I still respect his house and its rules.

His phone rings thrice before he picks up.

“Hey, where are you?” I ask.

“I'm driving towards Tongaat.”

How the hell am I supposed to not speak to him when he's miles away? I want to tell him to come back to the house so that I can not speak to him, but he already thinks that I'm a crazy woman. And that's not why I called.

“Ndondo says they're coming here later. I don't know what to say to her,” I say.

“Say about what?” he asks.

“About them coming to your house,” I say.

“I've never said I don't want your friends in the house,” he says, sounding a bit offended.

“Okay, I just wanted to make sure that I don't overstep boundaries.”

“Are we okay now?”

He's pushing it! He wasn't even here to serve his whole sentence. If we keep going like this he's going to do more than just tricking me into going wherever he wants.

“I have to go. Drive safely,” I say and hang up.



I'm still typing a text to Ndondo when I hear a car pulling up outside. Didn't she say "later"? Or later means now if you're rich?

Snalo is loudly chatting to someone. I slide into my flip-flops and rush to the door.

Ndondo, Nomkhosi and Snalo! They're all here, except Andiswa. And they're carrying food and a bottle of champagne?

The bag? Are they sleeping over?

"Mogheel!" Snalo is kak drunk.

I find myself giggling as they make their way towards the door, already halfway through the conversation that we could've easily engaged on when we are sitting down.

"Are you that bored?" Ndondo is asking about my failed attempt of bantu knots. I only did the left side and got tired. I didn't expect anyone to come, Ndlalifa doesn't deserve my beauty so I didn't care about him.

"You need to buy a wig because honestly, you can't

be traumatizing my brother by looking like Gog'Florence," says Khosi. She looks a bit chilled today. I mean, she's even wearing leggings and sneakers. Nomkhosi is a 40 year-old aunt trapped in a young body.

They're still laughing at my looks. I lead them to the lounge and fetch the requested champagne glasses and plates. I want to ask why they're here, looking all cheerful and excited, but then it doesn't look like there's a reason. Maybe they just decided to pay a visit to their brother's girlfriend.

"And Ndlalifa popped the question, you said yes and didn't tell us," Ndondo says out of the blue.

Snalo and Khosi look at me, eyes-widened.

"It's not like we are getting married tomorrow," I say.

"But it's happening," Ndondo says.

She's excited about this and pushing the topic. I don't want to deal with everyone telling me how too soon it is.

“Ndlalifa doesn't want to wait. He wants a family,” I say, lowly defending myself against Khosi’s intense stare.

“What about you? What do you want?” she asks, being the aunt everybody knows.

“I want to support my family. I'm the first child at home and the situation is not really pleasant.” I can't believe I'm opening up to them. I don't like talking about my background because I always feel like nobody understands me.

“Getting married doesn't mean you're going to stop working and chasing your dreams. Ndlalifa wants lifetime commitment, not to change you,” Ndondo says.

“Are you trying to create a married women's club or something?” Khosi asks.

We are laughing for a second. Then she's serious again.

“You need to get a better job and grow your perfume business. You can even stock other cosmetics, create a blog on Facebook and use

couriers to deliver to your clients.”

She just made it sound so easy. Not the job though, where am I going to find a better one?

“I can speak to the HR manager but I think Ndlalifa would be more happy to help. He really loves you.” I'm starting to think Ndongdo is Ndlalifa's secret agent.

“He already got me a job at the canteen,” I say.

“Did you ask him or he did it on his own? One day act like his woman and ask him things,” Ndongdo again.

“Do you ask Ndabuko things?” Snalo asks her.

“Not everyday but when I do he walks like a peacock the whole day,” she says.

We are all laughing. She's not bad at all. I retract my statement; she's not a light version of Khosi. I think she tends to be formal and uptight most of the times.

“When are you getting laid?” The question comes from Snalo. It's directed to Khosi and we are all

holding in bubbles of laughter. She's really drunk.

“Khosi needs to get clay and mould her own man. What she's looking for in a man doesn't exist,” Snalo goes on and takes another sip from her glass.

“And who said I'm looking for a man?” Khosi asks with an eye roll.

“Are you a lesbian?”

Snalo though, she also needs to get laid.

“I'm asexual,” Khosi says.

Ndondo is laughing and not saying anything. Maybe she knows something that we don't know.

“Back to MaMbatha, what is driving my brother crazy? I think you're not innocent as you look.” Bathong, this Bob Marley! She mustn't come for me. I am innocent and I'm not driving her brother crazy, the alcohol is.

“Thalente is innocent, just like me,” Ndondo comes to my defence. One of these days I must go to this girl's house and mop her yard. Such a bae!

“Innocent? You, the girl who was fingered inside the

quantum in the middle of her lobola negotiations.”

Shut the front door! Say what?

“Ndondo!” I look at her in shock.

“What? It’s not a big deal, everyone knows that I have a man. I walk around with the evidence of his sperm that was inserted in my vagina by his penis.”

Okay, stop! Did she drink too? Is she allowed to drink while pregnant? What she's saying is not sober at all.

“It's a big deal. Like, were you inside the quantum getting fingered like a school girl who's dating a taxi driver?” I ask.

“Yes and your man was sitting under the tree not so far.”

My poor Ndlalifa! I can imagine the trauma. That's why he drank yesterday.

Snalo doesn't get full when she's drunk. She's now chowing the pizza Ndlalifa bought earlier. Her father keeps calling to check if she's okay. Perks of being

a long lost daughter!

We have a spa date coming up, I have no doubt that Miss CEO is paying for it.

Snalo is drunk, Khosi is still tipsy, but Ndondo is acting more drunk than them. I think they left Andiswa behind on purpose, the topics we are discussing here are not for a 21 year old.

They came prepared with gowns, we are gathered in front of the TV watching a late night movie. We didn't hear him walking in because we were busy arguing about characters.

“Brother!” Snalo screams and we all become aware of the extra company.

“Your house is homely but you don't have extra rooms for us. Ladies we need to go,” Ndondo says.

It's like they were waiting for him to arrive before leaving. Khosi takes the bag and clears the coffee-table. We have come to the end of our ladies night. I walk them out to the car and we all hug goodbye.

“I’m going out with the girls next Saturday,” I say, a little bit too excited and loud, as I walk to him standing in front of the TV.

“Did you have a good time?” he asks.

“The best!” I stand on my toes and steal a kiss on his lips.

“Are you hungry?” I pick the empty bottle Khosi missed on the floor and approach the kitchen.

“Thalente,” his arms grab my waist. I turn to him and wrap my free arm around his neck.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

He doesn't answer, he just stares at me. It clicks, damn, I wasn't speaking to him!

“It hurts when you don't speak to me. I'd rather have you chopping my head off and bursting my eardrums than to have you completely shutting me out.”

“You asked for it,” I say.

“But I said I'm sorry. Don't you have a heart?” he asks.



“No, I don't. You took it and made it yours,” I say.

There's a ghost of a smile. My lines can be really good, I'm natural. Thälente the poet!

“You've been missed dearly.” He cups my face and lowers his face to kiss me. His tongue slips inside my mouth, gently but it's demanding. I can feel his breaths growing heavy.

I break the kiss but I keep my face linked against his. He nudges his nose on mine and exhales.

“Let me put the bottle inside the bin,” I say in a very low whisper.

“Give it to me, I'll throw it in the bin. You go and get ready for Hlomuka,” he says and snatches the bottle from my hand.

“Wait a little bit, I want to ask you something,” I say, holding his arm back.

He's looking at me, waiting for me to talk. I've never asked a man for things, I always get everything done by myself.

“I need money. Lot of it. I'll pay it back when I start

making profit,” I say.

His face is somehow relieved.

“How much is “lot of money”?” he asks.

“R3000,” I say.

He laughs, really loud.

“For a moment I thought I needed to go to the bank.”

He leaves the bottle on the kitchen counter and pulls me to the bedroom. Ndondo was right, he's pleased and happy that I asked.

“This drawer has this old wallet and this old wallet has cash kept for urgent situations. Your man has a cellphone, you call or text whenever you need something. And if you were really a caring one in this relationship you wouldn't need money because my pants always have notes in their pockets. But you never check because you don't care whether I go with bombs in my pockets or not.” Is he done now? He turns to me with the old, fat wallet. His drama shocks me at times. Bombs in his pockets?!

I count out the R100s I need and give back the wallet.

He has a stupid grin on his face.

“Umgezankomo awuwufuni?” he asks. (Don't you want pu\$\$y fee.)

This is why Khosi hates men, they only have three brain cells.

I give him a middle finger and walk out, leaving him laughing like a fool. I will thank him properly when he's less stupid.

[03/14, 09:17] : Chapter 48

NDONDO

This was a bad idea. She just took off her tight and Ndabuko is here, right next to me and watching.

This is the invasion of privacy at its worse. But I can't bring myself to switch the screen off, I want to watch until the monster walks in. I want to see the first thing he does when he enters their bedroom. Earlier, when I was dropping mom's detergents off, I

felt like something wasn't right between the two of them. He was sitting on his chair with Isolezwe, his cup of tea turning cold in front of him and the scones drying up. He had the most coldest look on his face, the one I used to mistake for strictness.

“Ndondo I want to sleep,” Ndabuko says. He was against this from the onset. I already had a person on planting the cameras in their bedroom, so I went ahead and did the whole set up against his word.

“Sleep, I'll lower the volume,” I say and get a sharp eye in response. He's so exhausting!

“Alright, I'm going to charge the laptop in the study and come back.” I climb off the bed and leave. Even if I don't catch Dumisani today, soon I will and I'll keep the recording as evidence. My mother will open her eyes soon and we'll present everything to the police. He will go down!

Before switching off the laptop I take one last look and notice that he's now in the room. Ndabuko is going to bite my head off; I pull the chair and sit

with my eyes glued on the laptop screen. He's still taking his clothes off, my mom is lying on bed with a book, or is it a Bible, I don't know.

“This thing of you and Hadebe is still going on? Didn't I say stop clinging on men when hugging them?” Here it is! He was cold because my mother gave Hadebe a hug. Hadebe is the branch's archbishop. He's close to both of them and he's married. I don't think it's a problem if my mom hugs him. He also hugs Hadebe's wife when they meet.

I cannot hear my mother's response, I just see him walking around to her side and grabbing her up. I swear all my private parts are itching and sweating. He pulls my mother like that! Who does he think he is?

He pushes her to the wardrobe and pins her against it. I want to grab my car keys and drive there right now, but I need to stay calm, tonight is all about collecting evidence for this dog's last day.

His hand is smacking her left hip, the sound of his hand against her flesh is audible but my mother is

not letting out a single sound. He grabs her headscarf out and pulls her by hair to the bed. He shoves her down on her stomach and puts his knee over her back.

He's stripping her naked? No, I shouldn't have watched this. He's taking his clothes off too! He turns around, his naked front is on my screen. He has a belly, at least I don't see his manhood. Maybe I would've thrown up. The only di€k I love to see is of Ndabuko's.

Are those nipple-clamps? He's clamping her nipples with something, her legs are widely spread apart. I can't believe I'm watching my mother in that position.

He goes to the wardrobe again. My mother has the chance to run out; she's not tied anywhere. But I guess she'll endure for Bahle's sake, the same way she did for Andiswa and me.

He takes a body towel and wraps it around his waist.

Before walking out, he flips her around and kisses her. How twisted is this man? He has things clamping her nipples, the most sensitive parts of breasts, and he has the nerve to kiss her as if he has any affection for her!

As the door closes behind him my mother pulls a pillow and presses it over her mouth. She's crying!

“Why don't you leave?” I'm whispering with tears rolling down my face. He didn't lock the door, why is she not freeing herself?

He comes back with a bowl and puts it on the bedside pedestal. Is he eating while my mother is in pain? He doesn't even care that she's crying.

No, he's not eating. They have a guava tree on the yard, I think those two small green balls in his hand are guavas.

He grabs the pillow off her face and pulls her to sit up.

“You'll brush this wet mouth of yours today,” he

says.

What is that supposed to mean? Yes I know that my mother talks a bit too much, but not to him. She's a "yebo baba" wife to this man.

"You don't get tired of embarrassing me to Hadebe, huh? Have I ever told anyone how wide your cunt is? Have I? But you go around talking about me to Hadebe."

I can't believe this is him. He actually used that word- "cunt," yet growing up we weren't even allowed to say "booty." We had to find a more respectful word to call it.

"Dumi you can't! What if this thing doesn't get out?" my mother cries out.

I don't know what thing she's talking about but he's supposed to stop. He pushes her backwards and inserts a pillow under her waist. My hands are shaking, her sobs are audible, she knows that whatever he's about to do is going to hurt her. And he's going ahead, disregarding her tears, bloody monster!



The guavas? No! What kind of cruelty is this?

“You'll push them out the same way you pushed those kids out,” he says.

I can't believe he's calling us “those kids.” Where is the father we see during the day? He pours something over the guavas, the lubricant I guess, and he massages them. Then he spreads her thighs apart and inserts the first one inside her opening. My own thighs are firmly shut, even though it is through imagination but I can feel her pain.

He pushes the second one in. She's trying to close her legs but he's slapping them. He's forcing it inside, you can tell by the way his elbow is bent.

He takes the same scarf she had around her head and ties it around her stomach. Why is she so powerless? She can do something. Push him and punch his face! It's not like he's Big Show or anything close to that. Somehow she's allowing all this to happen, maybe it's a psychological effect of abuse, I don't know.

He lies on his back while she's on her knees below him.

“Brush that wet mouth Noma,” he instructs.

She bends her head over his front, his hands forcefully grab her head down. Goshhh! I didn't think they knew blowjobs at this age. I'm not watching this.

“Lick those balls and push that shit in your pu\$\$y out.”

Holy crap! What did I just see? Her popping the guava out and squirting? How does this happen?

I have my hands over my ears. My eyes are blinded by tears. I can hear my mother's groans as she tries to accommodate him in her mouth and also push the other guava out like she's in labour. To further confuse me, her scream is mixed with pain and pleasure. It's impossible for someone to enjoy something like this, no matter how familiar it is to your body.

I bump into someone's chest and step back, nearly tripping over my heel.

“Ndondo!” His hands grab my arms and pull me into position.

“You said you're coming to charge the laptop,” he says angrily, before paying attention to my teary eyes.

“What is wrong?” he asks, lifting my chin up with a frown on his face.

“He's a sadist,” I tell him before pushing my way out of his arms back to the bedroom. 24 years! How do you stay with someone like that for that long? I don't think I'll be having sex anytime soon. Guavas? I don't think I'll ever eat them again.

“I told you not to watch this!” Ndabuko says, annoyed, as he walks through the door. Now I'm crying openly while hugging a pillow to my chest.

“You have the recording, now what are you going to do with it?” He's standing next to the bed and

glaring at me. Doesn't he have a heart? I don't need him to be shouting at me right now.

He sighs and climbs on the bed next to me. He envelopes me in a hug and pecks my cheek.

“You're traumatizing yourself. Only your mother can change her situation,” he says.

“I'm going to expose him at church,” I say.

“Ndondo!” his tone is firm. He pushes me off his arms and glares at me.

“I swear on my grandmother's grave, tomorrow he'll be watching his evil doings with his congregation.”

“You're doing no such thing!”

Like hell I won't! I'm going to church and exposing his evil-doings. I'd rather save my mother's life than to save her reputation.

“Are you coming tomorrow? I'll take out the suit you're going to wear,” I ask, climbing out of bed and heading to the closet.

“Tomorrow we are going home Ndondo. Nobody is going to church,” he says.

I don't want to fight with him. Tomorrow I'm going to church and exposing Pastor Dumisani Sibisi, with or without him.

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I called my mother earlier and she's excited that I'm coming to church. She asked me to come with Andiswa but instead, I suggested that Bahle goes with Andiswa to Getaway. I don't want neither of them to be there when the bedroom scene plays out.

I'm struggling to put my shoes on and this man is not even helping. He's lying on bed in his shorts and doing whatever he's doing on his phone. His suit is ironed and ready, just in case he changes his mind.

Okay, I'm done! I put my coat on and grab my purse.

“I'm leaving,” I announce.

He shifts his eyes from the phone to me.

“You're going above my word Ndondo?”

Not the African man side of him! We talked about this and I made it clear that I was going ahead with

this. This concerns my parents and I'm going to make the decision I believe is best for my mother.

“I'll be home until tomorrow. I don't want you to ever tell me anything regarding this situation. Do as you please,” he says and goes back to his phone.

Deep breath! I hold my head up and leave. It's today or never!

The church is as I remember it. Flashy cars of those who make fatter donations lined up in their designed parking spaces. The likes of Khumalo's bakkie and Zuma's old 4×4 parked outside the gate. I drive in and park behind a BMW x5 that I assume belongs to Xolani. Such a dramatic service it's going to be! At least now I'm pregnant, he won't bother me much.

I'm a little bit late, I'm getting judgmental looks for both being late and being pregnant out of wedlock. I have disappointed everyone; I was this good example in the community that everyone advised their daughters to be like me when they grow up. I

was a role model.

I sit at the back where I now belong. I'll have my moment before he delivers the sermon. He's sitting at the front in a shiny suit that was washed and ironed by his sex slave. Even those Master and Puppet erotica stories never go that extreme and painful. He's a sadist, that's it.

Before he goes to the podium the choir performs and he walks up like a president. I make my way to the front as they go up to the stage to sing. Xolani is staring at me and I'm trying my best to ignore him.

“Baby you made it!” my mother.

I pause and hug her back. Her smile is warm and bright, she can fool the whole Africa!

“Your father is about to deliver his sermon, sit at the front,” she instructs.

Baby-blue skirtsuit, black heels and suit-matching fascinator hat. A very smart looking woman. I'm about to strip all this out and leave her naked to her

brokenness.

“I have a few words to say to the church,” I tell her.

She frowns with a slight smile on her face.

“But you know that we have a programme and your father has a fixed time,” she says in a low whisper.

“I’m sorry but I’ll go up there and speak. It’s for your own good.”

“Ndondo what are you talking about?”

I hug her again and push my way through dancing bodies to the podium. He thinks I’m coming to him, he is sending Lady Z to me. His relationship with her is a bit weird, they’re too close. I understand that she’s the administrator and very old in this church, but there should be some boundaries.

“Hey baby, your father will talk to you later, he’s about to deliver a sermon and can’t chit-chat right now,” she says before I step up.

“Hey Lady Z, nice to see you. I’m actually here to tell church members something. Unfortunately it cannot wait, please ask your technical directors to



play this for me on the screen.” I hand over the USB and walk over the microphone.

The choir members settle on their seats, everyone has sat except my mother. I think she suspects what I'm here to do and it frightens her. I can see the bullets of sweats she keeps wiping off with a face cloth.

I really want to be formal and greet everyone according to their seats. Even greet Bab'Ndlela who didn't make it to church today, but I'm too pissed for those formalities.

“Someone is here to hide behind God. Most of you know me, I'm Ndondo and here is my father Dumisani Sibisi and there is my mother Nomagugu Sibisi. Well, I'm a bit of a shame for falling pregnant before marriage. I was raised by the so-called man of God.”

There are gasps!

“The so-called man of God is nothing other than a woman abuser. Don't worry, you'll watch what I'm talking about and conclude on your own. Can I ask

the kids to step out for a few minutes? The under 16,” I say.

My mother is about to faint. I try my best not to divert my energy to her. She had 24 years to expose this man but she didn't. Not because she didn't have a chance, she just chose to find “valid reasons” to stay.

I check the technical team, it looks like everything is set.

“This is what Dumisani does to his wife behind closed doors,” I announce before turning to the guy and telling him to press “play.” The nonsense ends today!

“Ndondo, no!” my mother's voice yells.

It's too late, the screen just came live.

And then? What is this?

Ndabuko, Maqhingana and Ndlalifa playing cards? People are confused, so am I. Why would my new USB have a video of Ndabuko and his friends

playing cards? I checked before coming here, the recording was there. I don't know where this video is coming from.

“This is the only thing in your media files Ndondo,” the guy says.

There are loud voices screaming at me. Some are already on their feet and waving me out. This is not happening! I know what I saw and my mother knows the truth.

“He abuses my mother!” I'm so broken right now. And he's just sitting there, calm and collected as if I'm the crazy one here.

“Ma?”

She's not even looking at me. Lady Z grabs the microphone from my hands and starts a song. They're not even going to question him. I'm a crazy, pregnant daughter who comes to the church to play videos of her boyfriend!

Cold wind is fanning my face and forcing out held

tears. I dial his number once I'm settled inside the car and call him.

“I'm busy, what do you want?” he asks.

“Did you delete or swap my USB that had mom's recording?”

“I thought I made it clear that I'm never going to talk about anything regarding that matter. Don't ask me shit.”

He's unbelievable!

“Ndabuko I made a fool out of myself in front of the whole church. Who knows what he's going to do to me? To my mother?”

“Is there anything else?”

He's so cold! I can't believe this is what I'm marrying.

“I need that recording, please,” now I'm begging for my own thing.

“I don't know what you're talking about,” he says.

Sigh!

“Are you trying to protect him?” I ask.

“No, let me handle this and stop thinking with your pu\$\$y. I won't give you any recording unless if you need it for court requests. I'm waiting for you here at the Mngomezulu, there's no food, I'm hungry.”

“Since when do you...” Call dropped!

Fu€k!!!

[03/14, 09:17] : Chapter 49

NDONDO

He's shirtless, sipping on his Hansa and staring at me calmly as I bite his head off. I had two long essays prepared for him, that's why I drove from Durban to here straight from church.

“So you're not even going to explain yourself? You're just going to look at me as if I'm crazy. I was trying to save my mother Ndabuko, if it wasn't for you Dumisani would be in a holding cell as we speak.” I'm sweating, pacing up and down in front of him barefooted.

“He can go to jail without you exposing your

mother's nakedness to the world.” This is the first time he's said something solid since I started shouting at him twenty minutes ago.

“You're worried about her nakedness, I'm worried about her soul,” I snap at him.

“Ndondo a soul is not the most important thing in the world. Why you people always exaggerate this breathing thing?” He's now furious. “We are talking about a broken woman here. Your mother, Ndondo! Your father can go to jail, open a church inside and get out for good behaviour after five years. But your mother will forever have a label and whispers behind her. ‘That woman who was bored with guavas and abused.’ They will call her to events and ask her to talk about her misfortunes to motivate the world. Do you think is that what your mother needs?”

Oh..I didn't look at it that way. He makes sense, how do I reverse this bulk of anger now?

“Is that what you think she needs after everything she's been through?” He's staring at me, his eyes

fiercely demanding answers.

“No,” I say, buried in a bubble of shame. I always think things through, this time I let emotions take over my mind.

“Then go to the kitchen and make me food Ndondo, you're standing heavily on my shoulders.”

With a tail tucked between my legs, I walk out and head to the kitchen. Now I hate that he's addressing me like a mere wife whose duty is to make him food. He's always the one cooking or ordering food if we are here. I've never cooked before, I'm always naked, waiting to be served warm food and orgasms.

I open the cupboards and stare at the packed grocery. He did the village-kind of grocery; rice, maize meal, sugar beans, vegetables and red meat. I don't think I can cook such solid meals.

I sink on the chair and let out a flood of tears. I was wrong and he was right, and now I have to cook for hours while he's mad at me. I deserve some sympathy!

I keep crying and he's not walking in. So, I raise the volume of my sobs for him to hear from the lounge. It doesn't take long before I hear his footsteps approaching.

“And now? What's wrong?” he asks as he walks in.

I keep my head tucked between my arms and cry louder.

“Babe?” His hand touches the back of my neck tenderly. Slowly, I lift my messy face to him.

“Babe are you okay?” he asks. He's panicking, his eyes are searching all over me.

“My head is aching.” Oh well, I never said I was a saint. He touches my temple with his hand, luckily my body is a bit warm. He buys the story and lifts me up.

“Are you allowed to drink painkillers?” he asks, wiping my cheeks with the back of his hands.

I shake my head, “No, I just want to lie down.”

He pulls me to the bedroom, sets the pillow and



helps me up on the bed. He gets a fleece blanket from the wardrobe and covers me with it.

“Don’t worry about cooking, I will go and get something from Shisanyama.” He's sitting next to me and rubbing my shoulder.

“You're going to be okay, sthandwa sami.” He sounds really worried, now guilt is softly knocking on my conscience.

I shut my eyes and pretend to be falling asleep. He rubs my back for a few minutes before silently leaving the room.

It's been a while since he's been gone. Maybe he's gone to the Shisanyama to get us food. Nhlanzeko must be disappointed, this is the woman he loved dearly and trusted with his brother's heart, but now I'm buying sympathy with crocodile tears. I climb off bed and make my way out of the bedroom.

I spotted a packet of crisps in the cupboard, I want

to snack and watch whatever is repeating on channel 164.

A text from Andiswa beeps in just as I position myself on the couch; \*Bab'omdala is here with his bags.\*

Why is Bab'Maqhawe in Durban? He didn't say anything when I called a few days ago. And he brought 'bags' which means he'll be staying for a while. The Maqhawe I know wouldn't pack bags and leave his livestock unguarded in Nyandeni.

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NDABUKO

Headaches are common, people get them every other day and treat themselves with painkillers. But for Ndondo to get a headache so soon after he shouted at her and forced her to go to the kitchen must have a certain meaning. And that meaning would be nothing other than his late brother,

Nhlanzeko. The controlling hasn't stopped, Mam'J abu said maybe it'll stop when Ndondo has married and given birth to his son.

Ndabuko sits behind the ancestors' rondavel with his head hung down and tucked on his hands. Maqhawe doesn't want to speed up the wedding process, even with the bride price he said he'll accept it in two halves because his daughter is not an item from the market that one can just pay for, once, and pick home. Obviously the wedding is now going to take place after Ndondo has given birth and that means he's still going to be in Nhlanzeko's chains for some time.

The vein on his temple is throbbing visibly, his eyes have turned blood-shot. He lifts his head and heaves a long sigh. They need to talk, man to man, ancestor to living!

He strides back to the main house and goes to the kitchen. The TV is playing softly from the lounge.

His forehead furrows, he leaves four eggs boiling and goes to check if Ndondo is up.

She has a large packet of crisps on her lap, there are chocolate wraps lying next to her and she's watching TV.

“Are you feeling better?” Ndabuko asks.

Her eyes widen, she didn't realize that he was in the room.

“The headache?” Ndabuko.

“Oh, yes. I'm better. Where were you?” she asks.

“Outside.” He brushes his face and exhales. That was indeed Nhlanzeko trying to prove a point.

“I thought you went to buy food,” she says with a disappointed look on her face.

“I will call and ask them to deliver, there's something I need to be busy with,” Ndabuko says.

“They do deliveries here in the village?” Ndondo asks, shocked.

“I'm Mngomezulu,” he brags.

Ndondo rolls her eyes and chuckles. He lifts her chin and pecks her lips.

“I'll be in the rondavel, when I come back we'll eat food and eat Hlasekazi. I'm sure she's developed spiderwebs now.” He winks and walks away, leaving her grinning from ear-to-ear.

He's back to his depressed state as he takes out boiled eggs and peels them. Maybe he would've followed Ngidi's words and took a wife of his choice after honouring Nhlanzeko's demands, but he's fallen in love with Ndondo, now on his own accord. He cannot imagine his life with anyone else, she's his soulmate because she completes all areas of his life. In her, he sees his beginning and end.

He puts eggs in a plastic bowl and takes a bottle of Glenfiddich single malt that Ngidi gifted him with, after his lobola negotiations.

He makes his way to the rondavel where he puts it all at the altar. He lays a reed-mat on the floor and lights a candle. He strikes a match and burns a bunch of impepho before putting it down on the lid.

He recites the Mngomezulu praise names and greets all his ancestors by their names as he remembers them. Today he doesn't skip his father, he mentions his name too.

Lastly, he calls Nhlanzeko Mngomezulu, his brother, the man of the moment.

“I brought you eggs, I made them exactly how you liked them, and brought you the most expensive whisky I have in the house.” He pauses and uses a teaspoon to arrange impepho on the lid.

“I'm not going to discuss my age with you because I see that in your eyes I'm still a little boy who cannot make his own decisions. I appreciate you Mngomezulu, I really do. I wish I could've gotten a chance to tell you some things in person, but it's what it is.” Again, he exhales and takes a long pause.

“Bafo, our wife is in pain. She's emotionally pained and I have no idea how I'm going to meddle in this matter. I cannot get Ngidi involved either, these are the Sibisi affairs and we are still in the process of building a relationship with these people. I want to give them a chance to solve this on their own. I believe they can. But my problem is that it is cutting deeply on Ndondo and she's carrying your baby.”

He clears his throat and stares at the burning lid for a good while. He's not this person, he's felt Nhlanzeko's wrath and he wouldn't wish it on someone else. But he's left with no choice, he has to ask for his intervention because his own hands are tied. He couldn't let Ndondo be the one who “destroys” her mother's excuse of a marriage. He doesn't want the church, siblings or anyone to put the blame on her. He doesn't want anything go back to Ndondo.

“Nhlanzeko Mngomezulu. Here are your eggs, eat and be full. I trust you, nkaba yenkosi. When you've eaten your favourite eggs, have this whisky. Drink

as much as you can. I know that you weren't a heavy drinker, but today I need you to get drunk and go out there, fight and kill for our wife's peace of mind. Then come home, you'll find us in your bedroom. Mhlanti weNdlunkulu!”

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## DUMISANI SIBISI

The chemistry was always there between him and Zanele, the church's administrator famously known as Lady Z. She is younger than him, in her late thirties and still unmarried.

As usual, he spent this afternoon with her, going through church's paperwork and drawing plans for the upcoming events. The atmosphere was a bit different today, in an awkward way. She kept stealing glances at him and he couldn't escape the cloud of shame that was hovering over him.

Ndondo has something against him. She knows



how he treats her mother. His instincts told him that someone else got involved and interfered with Ndondo's plans.

“Dumi,” Zanele said after a long moment of silence. He lifted his eyes to her with a sigh.

“Do you abuse Nomagugu?” she asked, her eyes desperate for the truth, yet not judging him.

“I don't abuse her,” he responded in a low voice, his eyes running away from Zanele.

“I want the truth and I want to know why. I've known you for a long time Dumi and I'll never judge you before hearing your side of the story,” she said, taking his hands and squeezing them.

“We have problems in the bedroom,” he said and grimaced.

“Who has a problem? You or her? And how does it lead to you being a ‘monster’ that your daughter says you are?” she asked.

He exhaled, pulled his hands away and rubbed his eyes.

“I was signed up to this life. I never had a chance to fall in love, to enjoy my life and make mistakes. I was a settlement of my parents’ debts. The vulnerable one. I cleaned Maghawe's mess, he was the rebellious one but still the one who got away with everything. I had to keep his child and marry his girlfriend. It was easy for Sibisi to put me on the line everytime someone needed to be sacrificed to save their reputation. And it was easy for my mother to agree because I was her dirty secret.”

“What do you mean you were her dirty secret?”  
Zanele frowned.

“I'm not a Sibisi, I don't know who I am. But her husband accepted me into the family because he had infidelities of his own. I was raised a Sibisi but I'm not. Zanele, I swore on my life and to God that I was not going to raise Ndondo the same way I was raised. Yes, I wanted her to marry someone who has a relationship with God and I was angry when she chose a taxi owner. But I only want what's best for her, in my house she's never going to clean after Andiswa or be sacrificed for Bahle's sins.” He lifted

his head to the ceiling and blinked back tears.

“Vumile knows what I've been through. I've had her support from day one. I can't say the same about the one I was sacrificed for. In his mind this is all about him, I left home because I hate him and his beliefs. I don't care Zanele, he can slaughter cows and buffalos for his beloved parents. Vumile and I know them for who they were, we didn't jump fences and carry knives in our pockets, we lived with them day in and out. I'll never take money out of my pocket and buy a goat, or even a chicken, for people who never loved me. The ancestors that never appreciated or protected me.”

Zanele grabbed his hands and squeezed them again. She didn't realize he was this broken, all these years.

“I know that Nomagugu will kill me one day. I always take my frustrations out on her. Also, I'm not in her heart, I never was.” He chuckles and shakes his head.

“If Andiswa didn't come and Maghawe didn't find

someone else, she would've killed me and went back to Maqhawe long time ago.”

“So how exactly do you abuse her?” Zanele asked.

Heavy sigh!

“Physically and sexually. It's an addiction, I don't know, it gives me control,” he said, shrugging his shoulders.

“I don't understand Dumi.”

“I needed love Zanele, not the kind of love that depended on whether you make mistakes or not, whether you're going to abide with certain rules or not. She took something from us, me and Vumile. With her it was the baby, her first pregnancy, and with me it was my freedom. Maqhawe had everything, he may not realize it but he still has everything. Jabu, Qondani, Nomagugu and Ndondo. And if anything happens to me, he'll have Andiswa and Bahle as well. Yet he wants me to go and ask for an apology from him. Not even once has he asked himself why I left home. If his parents were such good parents to us why did Vumile leave with

me.”

It all got too much for Zanele, she walked around the desk and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. One thing about Dumi is that he always smells good and looks smart. She found herself lingering on the hug longer than expected.

“I’m so sorry Dumi,” her voice came out in whisper, above his ear.

He turned his chair around and rose up.

Unfortunately their faces got too close, Zanele stared at him and he tried to keep his eyes from her. He wasn't in a good position and he needed to be alone.

“I’m flawed Zanele. The hatred nested in my heart cannot be compared to anything. I would've been normal, a weird woman in a taxi once told me, but only my biological father could've helped me. My mother couldn't do that for me, she couldn't take me to my blood father because Sibisi made conditions before accepting me and my mother couldn't breach the agreements they had. That is something

that set me apart, it made me vulnerable and Maqhawe has used it to insult me for the decisions I never took, or let alone approved of. Even if I had a chance to find love, it would've been reciprocated only for a short time. Nobody can love me.” Zanele’s cold lips crashed on his. He felt a rush of electricity in his veins, without fully grasping what was happening, he responded to the kiss and held Zanele’s waist.

The kiss deepened, so did their emotions. He pinned her against the desk and smooched every taste of her.

“Zanele!” he gasped for air.

Her skirt was pushed up, her thighs half on display. Not that he didn't want to run his hands on them and give them a few spanks. He was tempted to, but he had to think ahead.

“Zanele there are things you don't know about me. I have to go home,” he said before pulling away and fixing his shirt.

“Dumi we were not done working!”

He collected his briefcase and made his way out of the office. Her pleas fell on deaf ears, he didn't even turn his head. He couldn't stand the disappointment he was going to find in her eyes.

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It's a bit dark outside. Bahle will ask questions and Nomagugu will cover up for him as usual. Sooner or later he'll have to face Ndondo and give her explanations. The church senior members are yet to call him into a meeting and drill him with questions. He doesn't care that much about positions in church, but he cares about his image to his daughter.

He fastens the seatbelt and takes a moment to collect himself. He will push what happened between Zanele and him to the back of his head as he's always pushed back her image. It cannot happen!

He notices a gentleman wearing a leather jacket

approaching the car. He waits with a frown on his face. Who could this be? Zanele didn't tell him that she invited someone.

He stops next to the window, too tall for Dumisani to see his face. He rolls down the window to hear what he wants, feeling a little jealous about him going to Zanele while she's alone in the office.

“Hey, who are you?” he asks, hostilely.

One blink and the gentleman is gone!

He opens the door and climbs out. How can someone disappear so fast?

There's a hoot.

He frowns and turns to all directions before he realizes that it's coming from his car.

He rushes back inside the car and finds everything in place. His hands are getting moist, there can't be ghosts in the church's premises. That's impossible!

[03/14, 09:18] : Chapter 50

NOMAGUGU



It's getting very late, Bahle has gone to sleep after drilling her with a couple of questions regarding his father's whereabouts. As much as she fears what will happen once Dumisani gets home, she's still worried that he might've encountered problems wherever he is. It's so unlike him to be not home at this time. When she called Zanele she said it had been a while since Dumisani left the office. Their tight relationship has never bothered her, even his secret relationship with that young lady from Dundee didn't bother her. She didn't interfere, because sooner or later she was going to leave him, and she did. She couldn't stand his ways of sexually satisfying a woman. Maybe it's only Nomagugu who can stand him, only because she has built a family and a church with him, and her body has learnt to respond to the pain pleasantly.

Her heart thuds heavily as the knock comes through the door. She gets off the chair with a short-lived relief. Before she turns the door handle it dawns to

her that her husband would never knock at his own house.

She's welcomed by a face she didn't expect to see at her door. The face none other than her first love's, Maqhawe Sibisi.

“What are you doing here?” She's hostile to him as she's always been. It helps, being angry at him, it buries every other emotions she has regarding how his life is. He's happy without her. She was shipped to his brother who've been nothing but pain in her life, and Maqhawe replaced her with that dull-looking woman.

“I want to see Dumisani,” Maqhawe says, his eyes directly fixed on her face. They're burning her skin, evoking resting feelings that neither of them can ever revisit.

“He's not home. Leave!”

Maqhawe exhales and lets himself inside the house. They've done well for themselves, their house is two times bigger than his brick-house and the interior is out of this world. He ignores his mother's voice in

his head; “We have decided to marry her to a better brother.” Maybe they knew, they had a vision or something, that Dumisani was going to turn better than him, financially, and give Nomagugu this flashy life.

“I’m here to settle this out with him, tonight!” he says, standing in the middle of the room and inhaling a sharp breath.

“Does Jabu know that you’re here?” Nomagugu asks.

“My wife knows everything. I tell her everything,” he says.

“Oh, great!” Her hands are on her hips. Why is this leaving a bitter taste in her mouth?

“You didn’t tell me everything though, when we were together.” Honestly, she didn’t mean to say this aloud. Had she kept her thoughts to herself, she wouldn’t be getting this look from him.

“You were not Jabu,” he says.

His words stab like a sword. Is he trying to say Jabu

is better than her? He loves her more than he loved her?

“Meaning?” she asks.

“She deserves better,” he says.

Her heart drenches in agony. As hard as it is, she swallows the bitter truth and stomach it.

“I see,” she tears her eyes away from him. “You can have a seat, I’ll get you something to drink.”

“Don’t worry about it. I only want to see Dumisani,” Maqhawe says, pulling the chair and lounging himself on it. He looks around the room, more carefully this time, appreciating every part of it.

“You have a beautiful house. I see why you’d rather die and leave your kids than to leave this beauty,” he says, pointing around the room.

Not him! She can be judged by everyone else, Ndondo and anyone else, but not Maqhawe the man whose sperm got her here.

“Don’t start Maqhawe. You don’t know half of the things I’ve been through. You’ve never been

threatened by your own parents, forced to marry a man you didn't love and had your body become a daily punching bag and a sperm dish. I'm not here for the house, my daughter has a house and she can buy me any house if I want it.”

Maqhawe didn't mean to offend her this way. He knows her side of the story, it's just that sometimes anger gets in the way.

“I'm sorry,” he says in a lowly, the regret chewing his voice.

“For what? That you let me go and forgot about me? You let them marry me to him! Your criminal friends could've stopped the wedding and killed all of them!”

She's not in her right senses. Right now she's talking nothing, but pure rubbish.

“You didn't even tell me Noma! You made it seem like you had a choice and it was him. I don't owe you any apology for that. Nothing! I'm just here to hear his reasons, I want to move on- why did he take you away from me knowing very well how

much I loved you? My parents weren't even there anymore, but you still denied me access to my daughter, together with your husband. You turned me into a monster.”

“You were a monster way before I dated you.”

One..two strides, and he's in front of her with her arm in his grip.

“Do not lie! I loved you more than anything in life. I've never hurt you the way I've hurt J abu because you. Not even once. I thought you'd choose me. I gave you everything J abu. Everything that I had!”

Tears break down on her face. What's so hard for him to understand that she chose Ndondo? She's always choosing her children, she didn't choose Dumisani over him.

“If he finds you here he'll be angry, please leave,” she whispers, wiping tears off with her hand.

“He can be angry all he wants. I'm here to get answers. And Noma, nobody is going to touch you ever again.”

The stare! It's deep and penetrating. His eyes are like burning coals, heating up every part of her body and provoking out a dam of tears.

“Your nose is bleeding,” Nomagugu says in an alarmed voice. They were staring at each other, silently exchanging all their emotions and unsettled feelings that they have, undiluted, against each other, and all of a sudden she saw blood dropping from his nose.

Maqhawe sends his hand over his nose, indeed there's something gushing out. It's blood, his forehead furrows into a frown. Nomagugu rushes to the bathroom and comes back with a damp towel.

She hands it to him and he presses it steadily over his nose.

“Call Dumisani,” he says before going to the chair and sitting with his head lowered to the towel.

Her hands are trembling, fear is stripping down her nerves. What if Maqhawe dies on her? Is he in pain? Dumisani's phone keeps ringing unanswered. He needs to come home immediately, his brother is

here and dying!

“No, Maqhawe we need to go to the hospital,” she says, running around the table to check how bad it is.

“I’m not sick. You need to get hold of Dumisani and Vumile, one of them is in danger,” Maqhawe says.

“Huh?”

“Call them!”

Vumile picks up after the third ring and she's perfectly fine. Nomagugu doesn't tell her anything about Maqhawe or the reason behind her surprise call.

It's Dumisani they can't get hold of. She makes another call to Zanele and she confirms that Dumisani left and he was fine. He should've arrived half an hour ago, or so, this is strange.

“Any luck?” Maqhawe asks, coming from the bathroom. The blood has stopped but he still has a towel pressed below his nose.

“No,” she says. “Maybe she found another mistress,



and who knows what danger she put him in.  
Anything to drink?”

“Something terrible has happened, Nomagugu.  
Please call Ndondo,” he says.

“Maqhawe! You'll talk to him when he decides to  
come home, do not bore me, please.” She puts her  
hand up to dismiss him and disappears to the  
kitchen.

Maqhawe heaves a sigh and takes out his old Nokia  
phone. With his eyes squinted, he searches for  
Ndondo's number and calls. It rings unanswered  
and eventually goes to voicemail.

He cannot shake off the feeling that something is  
terribly wrong with someone of his blood. He only  
came here to talk with Dumisani, about everything  
that happened between them, because the anger is  
not good for him anymore. He discussed it with  
Jabu and they both agreed that him and Dumisani  
have to talk. Even about Nomagugu, they talked and  
laid their honest feelings on the table.

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NDONDO

The show ends, I'm the only one who was watching, he was occupied on his phone the whole time because the thing I was watching bored him.

“Let's go to bed,” I say while stretching my arms. It's late now, almost 22h00, but I know he will want Mngomezulu to be taken care of before we sleep. My stomach is huge, I'm lazy and less spontaneous. All I do now is lie like a marinated full chicken and scream like a pornstar.

“We are going to sleep in the extended bedroom outside. I took all our stuff there,” he says.

If I remember correctly that bedroom belongs to Nhlanzeko. Just like the one in Durban, he hardly opens it. It's always shut and gloomy.

“Nhlanzeko's bedroom?” I enquire, just to be sure.

“Yes. Don't forget to take your snacks, I don't want to be woken up at night to fetch chips,” he says, like

what he just announced is not a big deal at all.

“Why are we going to his bedroom?” I ask.

“It's a bedroom in the yard and I want us to sleep there. Is it a problem?”

Yes, I mean, no. But it's very surprising. I've never been to his bedroom here, maybe it has his picture too. What if I can't keep my eyes off it and I end up offending Ndabuko? I don't want us to fight, we have come too far to be where we are today.

“Are you sure?” I ask him.

“Stop worrying, let's go,” he says.

Well, I guess he's reached common grounds with Nhlanzeko and they have both accepted fate and forgave each other.

I'm not going to say it's gloomy because Ndabuko has candles lit and roses on the bed. But it's still heavy, like the long dark-green curtains are hiding something behind them. I sit on the bed, his hand is entwined on mine. I look around, there are no

pictures of him on the wall or anything that brings Nhlanzeko to the room. But he's still here, like he is in his bedroom back in Durban.

“You're a wife here,” he says.

“Not yet,” I say, rolling my eyes.

He chuckles and brushes his lips on my shoulder.

“But it's happening soon. You're not a girlfriend here, so there's no reason for you to sleep with your clothes on. The sun has set and I deserve a full access to my castle.”

My eyes widen. I know that he's in the taxi industry and their language is blunt. But my Ndabuko is a romantic gentleman.

“Your castle?” I ask with my eyebrow cocked up.

“Yes, my castle.” He brushes my chin and stares at me. “Do you know how beautiful you are? You're a trophy, MaSibisi.”

Everything he said before subsides, I melt into his stare and lift my face to him. He captures my lips in a slow, affectionate sloppy kiss.

The smell of alcohol! I didn't see him drink, he's so sneaky. His forehead pushes mine until I'm lying on my back.

“Are you comfortable like that?” he asks, breaking the kiss and pulling a pillow above his head.

He pulls me up and puts the pillow under my head.

“I'm okay now,” I say.

He smiles, strokes my cheek and slides his head down to my belly.

“Hey Mngomezulu,” he says to the little Nhlanzeko. His weight between my legs makes my body warm. God, we both should be bonding with the baby and all I'm thinking about is his tongue against my nub!

“Baba loves you more than you can ever know, son. You, your mother and bafo mean everything to me.”

I brush his head, the little traitor who never respond to me even when I speak to him in Ariana Grande's voice, kicks in response.

He lifts his head to me with his mouth loosely opened, his hand is touching my belly again. His

eyes are strangely dark, the twinkle my Ndabuko usually has when we are together is not there. He's strange, maybe because the bedroom brings us closer to Nhlanzeko.

“He kicked Ndongo,” he says in a deep low voice.

“Because he loves you,” I tell him.

He drops his forehead on my chest and lets out a heavy exhalation.

“And I love you too. I'm going to spend the rest of my life with you,” I say.

“Princess!” he looks up, his eyes are penetrating my soul.

“You never call me by that name,” I say and crack a low chuckle. Now that we are in Nhlanzeko's room he is opening the “second names” file. I'm going to call him Edgar as well.

“Can I see you, please?” he asks, running his hand to the arm of my dress.

I help him take the dress off. He asks me to stand on my feet and then takes off my panty. He's

staring at me like he hasn't seen me in years, while his hands meet behind my back to unhook the bra.

I stand in front of him in my birthday suit. I'm pregnant and shapeless, however, I've never felt ashamed to be in front of him until today.

“Don't stare at me like that,” I whisper and attempt to sit back on the bed.

His hand pulls me back. He wants me to stand in front of him, in my hippo shape, and he wants to stare at me until Jesus comes back.

“Princess,” he says.

I take a low breath and hold his stare.

“I did everything that I did because I love you. I'm sorry if I offended you in anyway. I know your capabilities and strengths. You're a beautiful, powerful and level-headed woman. I'm sorry I interfered in your life and took decisions on your behalf, without consulting you. I was driven by love, all I ever wanted was for you to live your best life,” he says.

I think he's talking about the USB saga. I didn't think I'll get an apology. I appreciate his words, so very much that my hand is on his cheek.

“I'm proud of you and thank you for being here,” he says.

I pull his face to me and kiss his lips. He responds to the kiss, his hand goes behind my neck, the other one grabs my head.

As he places me back against the pillow and separating my legs to position himself, both candles blow out and leave us in the immense dark.

He doesn't bother lighting them again or turning the light-bulb on. I feel his lips crashing against mine and entwine my hands behind his neck.

The kiss is sensual slow and sloppy, like he wants to leave his taste with me forever. My body is screaming for him. I want his hand to touch me all over and rub my sensitive spots.

His lips move down to the side of my neck. His



heavy breaths give my skin tingles.

“Babe!” A moan follows. I can't hold back anymore, I want him inside me. But he's still kissing my skin, every inch of my body.

Gosh, Ndabuko knows that I'm not a fan of ear kisses. But today he nibbles my earlobe and licks inside my ear until a soft moan escapes my lips.

He traces kisses all over my upper body, except on my boobs. Ndabuko is a big baby, he loves sucking the nipples, sometimes I even worry that he'll want to compete with the baby. My nipples are hard, I want his tongue against them, but he's shying away from them.

Okay, he'll make up for it down there. My clit is already dancing as his head slides between my thighs. I shut my eyes and ready myself for the tickles his hairy chin gives me when he's mouth-deep in my cookie.

But no, he's only kissing my thighs and going down to my legs.

“Ndabuko damnit!” My body feels like a volcano waiting to explode.

He doesn't respond, he's holding my feet in his hands.

“I love you Princess,” he says in a low, pained voice that's trembling with emotions.

“Every inch of you...” He kisses my right foot, toe-to-toe. “You're my trophy,” he says and kisses the next foot. Then he squeezes both of them and stands still.

“Can I be with you?” he asks.

I'm horny, all I want is the organ between his legs inside me. I scream; “Yes, be with me. Don't leave me!”

His finger rubs between my folds. I separate my legs further apart to allow him to fit in perfectly.

It's dark but my hands find a way to his shaft. I

bring it to my wet flesh and rub myself with it.

He moves my hands up and presses them above me. His tip knocks at my opening, my moans are exaggerated and infuriating him.

He pushes it all inside and pauses to kiss my belly. I wrap my legs around him, he pulls it out and presses it over my clit.

I swear I'm going to explode before he even does a thing to me.

He thrusts in again, circles his shaft all around my flesh and pushes it further inside that I feel like his balls are going to slide in as well. He doesn't pull out, he moves his waist around, rubbing against my softer spots.

He presses his two fingers against my clit. I feel it building from my back and rushing throughout my body. He pulls out slowly, my toes curl up, my body trembles as the wave finally takes over me.

It's not a normal orgasm, I splash pee all over the bed. He curses and calls God simultaneously.

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I slowly open my eyes and scan around the room. Memories flash back and I remember last night's steamy sessions and that I'm actually in Nhlanzeko's room.

Ndabuko is not next to me. I wasn't hoping for a morning glory or anything, but it would've been nice to wake up in his arms.

Luckily, there's a bathroom connected to this room. I drag myself to it and rest on the toilet seat for a moment. I know that I'm about to release a hot morning pee through my aching nana. Ndabuko was on his wildest mode yesterday.

I endure the pain and silently swear to never have sex again. I wash my face, brush my teeth and nurse my nana for a while. And then I head back to the bedroom and put my robe on. Today we are going back to Durban, I'll go to my house and give my nana a few days off.

He's standing on the veranda and speaking to someone over the phone. It's not a friendly conversation. I stand in front of him and wait for my kiss.

“Do not fu€k with me! Ubuchopho uzobuphatha ngesandla, mfana wami.” (I will crack your skull, my boy)

My forehead furrows into a frown. He speaks like this? Cracking people's skulls and raising his voice like this?

“I don't care how you're going to get it from Bloemfontein, I want that taxi at the rank before 2pm, ungangihlafuneli ushidi Sphamandla!” he says to the person. It must be one of the drivers, I don't know what he did but it could've been settled in a calm manner.

He drops the calls and clicks his tongue. I step closer to him, he pulls me into his arms, I rest my head on his chest. Something on his waist pokes me.

“Ndabuko what is this?” I ask, alarmed. I know it's a gun, he owns it and I understand. But it doesn't come out to decorate his waist while he's with me. It stays in the safe, he always makes sure that the taxi-owner side of him stays out of our home.

“This is Machusha. I will put him away. Are you okay?” He pulls me inside the house, whistling as if nothing abnormal is happening with him today.

[03/14, 09:18] : Chapter 51

The meeting didn't go well. Ndondo was snapping at everyone, zoning out in the middle of a discussion and taking bathroom breaks every now and then. It's time Khosi discusses her maternity leave because if things continue like this, the company is going down the drain.

“I think you should appoint someone to hold the ropes and rest home until the baby comes,” she goes straight to the point and then waits for her to argue. She always does.

Ndondo has her head resting over a stack of

documents on the desk. The documents they are supposed to be working on.

“Yeah, you’re right,” she says.

Khosi is a bit surprised by her response. She didn't expect her to agree this easily.

“Great! Discuss it with Ndabuko and make an announcement,” she says.

The door opens. They both turn to it, a bit shocked. This is the CEO’s office, you either call to announce your visit or at least knock before entering.

But it's none other than Ndabuko in his red quarter pant and white sneakers. He's wearing a cap. Earphones are wrapped around his neck.

“Babe, I didn't know you were coming,” Ndondo says, lifting her head up.

Khosi remains still on her seat. She's not impressed with this intrusion at all. She liked him at first because he was smart and humble, but finding out that he was bringing the dead brother nonsense to her friend's life destroyed everything.

“Is it wrong if I miss my woman?” He lifts her chin up and pecks her lips. Then he stands behind her, his hands massaging her shoulders, and he looks at Khosi opposite them.

“Hi there,” he says.

It takes everything in Khosi for her not to roll her eyes. She returns the greeting and collects her belongings on the desk.

“Call if you need anything,” she tells Ndondo and leaves.

Ndabuko stares at her with a mocking grin, then he shakes his head and kisses Ndondo's shoulder.

“Your friend needs a di€k,” he says.

Ndondo yanks his hands off her shoulders and turns her head to him with a frown.

“What?” She wants him to repeat his words before she gives him a piece of her mind.

“Maybe she'll glow and stop being bitter like undiluted lemon juice.”

“You cannot speak like that about my friend. How



do you even..no, you need to leave!”

He frowns and then breaks a chuckle. Ndondo is fuming, she's on her feet with her arms folded before her chest.

“I ordered food for us. They're setting the table at the basement,” he says and walks around the desk and makes himself comfortable where Khosi was sitting.

“Lunch? At the basement? What about workers?”

“I told them to leave. You're Mrs Mngomezulu, you can't eat while there are di€k-heads staring at you.” He pulls the document in front of him and looks at it.

“It's upside down,” Ndondo says.

He turns it up, his eyes run over it for a few seconds then he puts it back on the desk.

“You should hire someone to read this shit and summarize it for you,” he says, referring to the documents scattered in front of Ndondo.

“That's Nomkhosi's job,” Ndondo says.

“Your horny friend?”

Silence.

“Today you are coming to my house, right?”

“No,” Ndondo says.

“Then I'm coming to yours. I think they're done now, come, let's go.” He stands up and walks to her.

Ndondo's biggest fear is that her crazy imagination is slowly turning into a reality. Something changed as soon as they entered Nhlanzeko's bedroom. That was the last time she interacted with the normal Ndabuko. Something is definitely up with his character.

Everyone is staring at them as they get out of the lift arm-to-arm. Most of them know who he is now, but he never throws his weight around or gives them any instruction as their boss. He rarely comes here and this is the first time he's come looking like this.

The table is set in the middle of an empty basement with two chairs and a bunch of flowers on it. It's laid

with different dishes, from creamy samp, sliced steamed bread, beef curry to fried chicken strips. There's a shining silver cutlery and serviettes designed with Ndondo's name and red hearts.

This is overwhelmingly above the top. Ndabuko is a man who slides in dungarees, leaves his millions in his account and begs for a job as a yardner. He's a man who buys you an expensive pair of shoes, sends them to you and then helps you look for the sender. He doesn't order hundred dishes of food and hire people to set the table at the most uncomfortable place. No, he takes his clothes off and cooks you food in his kitchen, and then asks you to have a naked dinner with him in a cozy place.

“I'm the last one on the stand today. 19h00 I'll take the last load, do you want to come and keep me company?” he asks.

“Come to the taxi?” She is stunned. A whole loaded taxi? Everybody knows that she's a snob and she likes to be private as much as possible. In the taxi she'll have to greet people, and probably even talk to them.

“I’ll fetch you. Don’t wear heels. Must I refill your glass?” He has this thing of asking her questions and then doesn’t wait for her answer before making a decision. It grinds her teeth. This whole weird behavior frustrates her!

“What happened to you in that bedroom? You are annoying,” she asks.

His eyebrow cocks up. He doesn’t scratch his chin, cheek or forehead. Today he scratches his earlobe, violently.

“Count your words MaSibisi.”

“Huh?” Ndondo has never been threatened in her life.

“Eat your food,” he says.

Now this lunch is turning sour. Well, only for Ndondo. As far as Ndabuko is concerned everything is good, they just needed to get bad attitude out of the way.

He takes his cap off and puts it on Ndondo’s head. Then he looks at her with his hands over his cheeks,

his lips curved into a smile. Love written all over his eyes.

“Are you angry at me?” he asks, clearly amused by her angry face. “I love your fierceness, but more than everything, I love your eyebrows. Why do you remove them if you're going to draw them again?”

This is a stupid question, however this is the kind of conversation they needed to lighten up the atmosphere on the table.

“Because I want them to be in the shape that I want,” Ndondo says.

“So you girls, if you had the power, you'd actually kill yourselves and mold yourselves into the way you want to look,” he says.

It's another stupid thought, but she's laughing.

“Definitely. But we wouldn't need to kill ourselves, there are many surgeons who specialize in rearranging people's faces and bodies. Do you know Khanyi Mbau?” Ndondo.

“Is that a surname? Mbau?” him.

Really? That's all he's interested in?

“She looks totally different from what she was before. She even changed her skin colour,” Ndondo says.

He's shocked. His eyes are bulging out.

“Isn't that defying God?” he asks.

Ndondo rolls her eyes. A taxi owner asking you about defying God? No judgement, but they curse from morning to midnight, surely that's defying God too.

“You can keep your skin colour, stay with your flat ass and be original from head to toe. If your heart is not clean there's no space for God in you,” she says.

“Amen!” he says.

He's mocking her and she's rolling her eyes again.

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He said he'll fetch her at 18h30 and they'll fetch the last load from town, which will be mostly late

factory workers. Andiswa is not making things easy with her stupid giggles. She is trying to fit in a tracksuit, she can't wear a dress because she was instructed not to wear heels and her dresses don't complement sneakers.

“Why don't you just join me and Bab'omdala for a movie? This won't work out, I'm telling you.”

“Fu€k off Andiswa!”

She leaves the room laughing. Ndondo struggles until the tracksuit fit in, now she she needs to put these sneakers on! She can't even bend for a few minutes, she runs out of breath and gets backache.

She lies back on the bed and catches her breath.

“Hard time?” Maqhawe asks, coming through the door.

Ndondo lifts her head up and sighs.

“I'm trying to put my sneakers on,” she says.

Maqhawe chuckles and picks them from the floor. He sits on the bed and asks her to give him her foot.

“Baba can you massage my heel for a few

minutes?”

“Hey! Push your foot in,” Maqhawe says, pulling her ankle and pushing her foot inside the sneaker.

He helps her with both sneakers and ties the laces.

“There's still no trace of your father,” he tells her.

“How? You are here, aren't you?” Ndondo asks.

“You know who I'm talking about,” he says.

“I don't care about Dumisani. You're fine, my siblings are fine, Mam’J abu, mom and aunty are fine. Everyone I care about is fine.”

It's been two days. Nomagugu says he once disappeared for a week and she doesn't give a rat-ass about it. Ndondo is clearly fed up, the only person he can talk to now is Vumile and that's another mountain to climb.

“Where is Mngomezulu taking you so late at night?” he asks.

“We are fetching passengers from town,” she says.

Maqhawe frowns.



“You?” he asks.

“Yes, me.” She exhales and gets off the bed.

“Ndabuko is acting strange. I tried to ignore it but it's getting worse.”

“How so?” Maqhawe.

“We spent a night in Nhlanzeko's bedroom, you know his late brother, and he hasn't been the Ndabuko I know ever since,” she says.

“That's strange. Have you talked to him about it?”

“Baba, I don't even have a time to talk to him about anything. He is weird. I fear that...” She stops. This will make her look stupid.

“What do you fear?” Maqhawe asks, if it concerns his daughter's safety then it concerns him directly.

“That maybe he's possessed by his spirit. I mean Baba, everything about him is strange. He came to my work in a quantum and set a huge unnecessary lunch in a working space. He talks differently and does everything strangely.”

Okay now Maqhawe is frightened as well. Dead

spirits do possess the living, some people do unimaginable things when they're possessed.

“Why did you sleep in his brother's bedroom?” he asks.

“I don't know,” Ndondo shrugs her shoulders.

“I have to see Ngidi first thing in the morning.”

As they make their downstairs Andiswa is running up to them.

“Mngomezulu is here,” she says, clearly excited.

Ndondo glances at Maqhawe before walking on. It's going to be awkward spending time with him knowing very well that he may not be himself.

Already he's let himself inside the house, knowing very well that Maqhawe is present.

He's sitting on the couch, very comfortably with his head resting back. He's wearing a jean, leather ankle-boots and black Nike jacket.

“Baba!” He sits straight up and rubs his forehead.

“Mngomezulu when are you bringing back my daughter?” Maqhawe asks. He's not comfortable with this but he can't really keep them apart.

“Oh, I have a surprise for her tonight.” He looks at Ndondo- they talked about this and she made it clear that she wasn't going to his house- her eyes are widened at him.

“She'll come back in the morning,” he says.

“In the morning?” Maqhawe asks, turning his eyes to Ndondo.

She can't run away from neither Nhlanzeko nor Ndabuko. She was chosen to this family and she promised to stand with Ndabuko through thick and thin. If he's possessed by Nhlanzeko's spirit she'll have to do everything in her power to get him back.

“Yes, I'll come back in the morning,” Ndondo says.

“Are you sure?” Maqhawe asks.

“Yebo baba, please don't forget to go and see the person you said you will see in the morning. Andiswa will organize transport.” She turns to

Ndabuko and nods her head. He takes her hand and they walk out holding hands. Maqhawe is staring at them, scared for his daughter and sad for his son-in-law. Neither of them deserve this.

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Two girls climb in the taxi and go to the backseat, whispering and giggling. Now they're short of only two people. If it was up to Ndondo they'd be leaving, it's already half past seven and greeting back people is getting tiring.

To make this even more awkward for her, Ndabuko is standing under the shelter with two dodgy looking men. The rank is almost empty, whatever they're discussing could've been discussed some other time.

She inhales sharply, unfastens a seatbelt that Ndabuko found hilarious when she put it on, and climbs out. She makes her way to him and his dodgy friends.

He takes a few steps away from them and attends

to her.

“Is everything okay?” he asks.

“Why did you bring me here if you had a dodgy meeting scheduled under shelters at night?”

Ndondo asks.

He scratches his earlobe and turns to his friends.

“Tomorrow, majita,” he says. They walk away and get in their dodgy Polo and leave.

“Why are you rude now?” he asks Ndondo.

“Oh, you're going to take Machusha from your waist and crack my skull?”

He sighs and holds her hand. Without responding to her question, he pulls her and they walk back to the taxi.

Two people are still short but he starts the taxi anyway.

“Do we have anyone going to 2?” he asks, looking at the passengers through the rearview mirror.

“Yes, one Ezimbalini,” one says.

“Alright. Please pass the offering, makoti will sort out your change,” he says.

19h45 is usually Ndondo's snacking time, that's why she has a packet of Lays on her lap that she aims to finish within minutes.

“Three R13s and one R17,” -R100 is passed to her. She moves aside the packet of chips, keeps the lady's voice playing in her head. R13 multiply by three and...

“Give them R44, it's R56,” Ndabuko says with his eyes fixed on the road. That was fast! Ndondo counts aside R30 notes and...

“R13, R17, R19.” This one is forced into her hand. Can't they give her time to count? She can't even remember the last change she was supposed to give.

“I'm not an accountant,” she tells Ndabuko and hands all the money to him.

Shocked gasps!

“Count the money sis, we don't want accidents,” one

yells.

Ndabuko chuckles, “Don't worry, you'll get home safe. Has everybody paid?”

More money is passed to the front, in odd numbers, and he's giving back change within minutes.

“This is your man's source of income,” he tells her after a while. “If it wasn't for taxis I wouldn't be where I am today.”

“I know,” Ndondo says.

“I'm glad you are here and helping me by eating snacks while I drive,” he says.

Ndondo breaks into laughter.

“This is my snack time,” she says.

“When is my snack time?” he asks.

Ndondo gasps and glances back at the passengers. Luckily most of them are on their phones.

“We are taking days off,” she says, also feeling a little naughty.

“Who said a vagina needs a holiday?”

She punches his thigh, her eyes popped out in shock- what if these people heard?

“I want to snack too. Under that tracksuit.”

“You will, but we'll keep the lights on.”

He doesn't say anything except smiling and stealing glances at her.

She forgot him saying there's a surprise for her because she thought it was just a way of getting Maqhawe off his back. But arriving to a decorated house proves his words right. The balloons are baby blue, there are flowers, star ribbons and every unnecessary decoration you find in different events. Oh, there's even a cake!

“What's going on?”

“It's a baby's birthday.”

She frowns.

“A baby birthday?”

“Yes. Your friends hate me so I couldn't invite



them.” He leads her to the chair and puts a belt over her neck. MOTHER-TO-BE.

“This is a baby shower?” she asks.

He remembers the term.

“Yes, it’s your baby shower,” he says.

This! Which man has ever thrown a baby shower singlehandedly and became the only guest at it?  
Sigh!

“It's beautiful, thank you,” she says.

Can tomorrow come already? Ngidi will know what to do about this. If this is a character of Nhlanzeko's living through Ndabuko, then him and her wouldn't have worked out.

[03/14, 09:18] : Chapter 52

BHEKIZITHA “NGONYAMA” NGIDI

Ndlalifa is here to have breakfast, which is a pleasant surprise, all his kids are present at the table.

“How is the therapy going?” Maqhinga asks Snalo. He has attended all sessions with her. His people are searching for Mondli, her babydaddy who helped her with the murder. He has nothing against him but he'd love for him to be present for the baby's rituals. It's important, he doesn't want anything to hold back his daughter.

“It's fine, Dad attends with me,” Snalo says and turns to Ndlalifa. “Why didn't you bring Thalente?”

“She's working,” Ndlalifa says.

“Did she move in with you?” Maqhinga asks.

“In her head she still has her own place- the shack she's renting in Cannelands. But she stays with me, seven days a week.” Ndlalifa always finds a way of getting everything that he wants, either by tricks or force. Maybe he should've been the one named Maqhinga. Ngidi's biggest fear is having women knocking at his door to report the pregnancy. Village women will bite his head off, he doesn't have a woman who'd take care of such situations in the house. At this age, he doesn't have a permanent

woman in his life. For a black man it's unacceptable. He has to do something he should've done years ago, when he finally accepted that Magcina was never coming back, and that's to ask someone else out. He's found her, but laying his heart out to her will be hard, she'll have her doubts and fears.

“I want to meet Thalente's family before the lobola negotiations start,” he says to Ndlalifa.

Everyone on the table is shocked.

“Why?” Ndlalifa asks.

“Because you want to marry their daughter and I want to know what kind of family she's coming from.”

“I don't think it would be possible. Thalente is scared of her mother, asking her to put her life on hold and come here to meet you would be impossible.”

“I will clear everything for next Saturday.” Ngidi picks his cup of tea and stirs.

“But Baba...”

“Who has spoken to Ndabuko? He's surprisingly very active at the rank. I hear that he was driving the ‘red queen’ himself yesterday,” Ngidi asks, at no one in particular. He's just done with the Thalente conversation. Ndlalifa is a man, that's how he always portrays himself, so he'll find a way to make this happen. Saturday he wants to meet the mother of a girl Ndlalifa is bringing to his family and that's it.

“He has finally accepted that he's umageza,” Maqhinga says with a chuckle.

“He did a long time ago, he just didn't want to lose his character to the taxi rank,” Ngidi says.

The conversation continues to flow on the table, it's only Ndlalifa who is puffed up as if he was smacked on the face. Thalente's parents don't know anything about him. She comes from a traditional family, this thing of meeting a man and moving in with him within months will be like an insult to them.

Knowing how Ngidi is, he'd probably tell everything and leave no stone unturned. He's doing this, purposely, to put him in an uncomfortable position- Ndlalifa thinks.

Thobile walks in, rubbing her palms with a frightened look on her face. Her relationship with Ndlalifa is really awkward, she keeps away from everyone anytime he's home and Ndlalifa makes it his goal to make her uncomfortable.

“Is everything okay?” Ngidi asks, staring up at her.

It's only a matter of time before Maqhinga and Snalo start whispering.

“There's a guest, Mr Sibisi. Should I send him in?” Thobile asks.

“Mr Sibisi? Yeah, send him in.” He's expecting the pastor, even though it confuses him why he's come to his house.

He's surprised by the village Sibisi, Maqhawe. He stands on his feet, his forehead furrowed into a frown. This doesn't look good. He's only met this man once, he was the most stubborn one during Ndondo's lobola negotiations. Hopefully he's not

here to say he's calling off the wedding.

“Mahlase,” he says, pulling his hand out for a firm handshake.

“Ngonyama!”

Ngidi pulls a chair for him before lowering himself back on his seat.

“You are in Durban? This is a surprise, I must say,” he says to Maqhawe and sends a meaningful look to his children.

Ndlalifa is the first one to leave the table, Snalo and Maqhinga take their plates and cups before exiting.

“Your kids are grown. All adults,” Maqhawe says.

His calmness gives Ngidi a pinch of relief.

“The eldest is 35 and the youngest 27,” he says proudly.

“Grandkids?” Maqhawe asks.

Ngidi chuckles, “Not yet, but the eldest is taking a wife soon.” He looks around for Thobile and she emerges before receiving a blasting text.

She adds the cutlery for Maqhawe and pours more hot water into a teapot.

“Let me know if you need anything, Hlomuka,” she says, flashing a smile at Ngidi.

He clenches his jaws, breathes in for control and nods at her. Thanks to Ndlalifa's presence, at least she's dressed up decently today.

“Your daughter-in-law is beautiful,” compliments Maqhawe as Thobile walks away, swaying her hips to the sides.

“Oh, that's not MaMbatha. That is Thobile, my helper,” he says and quickly realizes how awful this term sounds. It's collective; she could be helping him with laundry, food, cleaning, nannying Snalo- Thobile hates that part of her job- or she could be a ‘helper’ because she helps with his sexual needs. It's just a sheltering term, not descriptive at all.

“She's the maid,” he clarifies.

Maqhawe isn't very much interesting as Ngidi thinks he is. He's never had a helper in his life, he's just stunned by everything he's seeing with no

judgement involved.

“I’m here about Mngomezulu,” he says.

“Oh!” Ngidi frowns and puts down his cup. “Is everything alright between him and MaSibisi?”

“Yes, between them all is good. However, Ndondo is worried about his spiritual being. Something happened when they went to the village.”

Ngidi leans forward, attentively looking at him.

“What happened?” he asks.

“I’m here so that you can be aware and maybe find out what really happened to him. He suggested that they spend the night in his late brother’s bedroom, Ndondo says the last time he was his normal self was before stepping inside that bedroom. Have you noticed any change in his character?”

Ngidi is leaning back on his chair again, his fist rolled over his mouth as thoughts trace down in his head.

“I think I saw him scratching his ear and saying something about..damnit, Nhlanzeko!”



“Do you remember something?” Maqhawe asks.

“Oh Lord, what did this boy do?!” Ngidi is on his feet. He should've suspected something, Ndabuko hardly drives the taxis or randomly carries his gun publicly. He calls him Baba, Ngidi or Hlomuka. He doesn't call him Ngonyama, Nhlanzeko did. But how he was to know? Ndabuko and everyone who's witnessed Nhlanzeko's ancestral conduct knows that he's not the one to be provoked.

“His late brother was fond of your daughter. Him shifting her to Ndabuko was because he knew that he may not live long enough to meet and love her. As dead as he is, he's scandalous, uncontrollably and hot-headed. They shouldn't have went to his bedroom, unless if instructed to do so by a traditional seer,” he explains, sitting back on his chair with anger blazing in his eyes.

“I don't think it's safe for my daughter to be around a possessed man. He needs to clear off his brother's spirit, for good,”Maqhawe says.

Ngidi exhales heavily and picks his cold cup of tea.

Urgh, it tastes horribly!

“Thanks for bringing this to my attention. I don't know where I'm going to start but I'm going to get him back,” he promises Maqhawe. He knows for a fact that Ndabuko's uncle won't even bother himself with this, it's his duty and his alone. He loved Nhlanzeko, more than he's ever loved any boy who didn't bloom from his sperm. He owes him loyalty, he made promises to him way before he died, and he's kept all of them. One of those promises was to take care of Ndabuko and protect him. That's exactly what he's going to do, even if it means protecting him against Nhlanzeko himself. He's not letting him back at Ndabuko's expense!

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NDONDO

I'm trying to see beyond this character and act normal with him. He's loving and funny in his own way, but he's not Ndabuko. There's chemistry, just

like between the real Ndabuko and I, but his personality sets him apart. He's authoritative, a bit rough with everything in general and blunt when he speaks.

Anyway, I'm cuddled in his arms, that's how we've been the last two hours. He's been quiet for some time, just playing with my fingers and heaving sighs here and there.

“Are you not hungry?” he asks.

Well, I'm always hungry.

“I am,” I say.

“I know a good Shisanyama.”

Urgh, I thought he'd cook something for me.

“Where you and your taxi drivers hang out?” I ask, just to show him my lack of interest. But he's not Ndabuko, he doesn't read between the lines or consider my feelings.

“Put a jacket on, we'll get take-aways and come back,” he says.

I let out a huge sigh, “Can't we order a pizza or

something?”

“We can, if you want pizza.”

He agrees? This is the first in two days. Is he automatically transforming back into Ndabuko?

I pick my phone and place the order then lie back in his arms again.

“Are you not fetching the last load today?” I ask.

“No, I want to spend time with you,” he says and kisses the side of my face.

I think he's back!

“Spending time with me and giving me lot of oral sex?” I ask, to test waters and to check if it's really Ndabuko.

He chuckles and pushes his hand under my top. He massages my breasts and kisses my cheek.

“They belong to my son,” he says, referring to the breasts. I guess this is his excuse.

“But the cookie is yours,” I say. He can't have any

excuse there, that's if he's back as Ndabuko.

“You're turning me on,” he says with a chuckle. His fingers are rolling my nipple and my body has already reacted to his touch.

He slowly moves me to the side and grabs my face to kiss my lips. My hands rush down to his zip, I pull it down and grab Mngomezulu. Indeed he's provoked and standing tall.

I wrap my hand around him and give him slow strokes. His lips part, he keeps drawing sharp breaths through his teeth. His eyelids are growing closer, making him the most handsome dark-eyed creature I've ever seen.

“Babe,” he calls in a hoarse voice.

“Yes babe?” I look straight in his eyes and lick my lower lip. He groans and moves his waist beneath my hand.

“Can I have the cookie?”

“Well, you'll have to lick it first.”

He grabs my face and kisses me again, deeper this

time. His tongue is swaying inside my mouth. He's sucking my lip like his life depends on it and groaning inside my mouth.

I feel his hand pushing its way between my thighs. His finger slides at the side of my panty and rubs my clit.

I don't know if we have a deal or not. The kiss is sparking fire in all my erogenous zones. His finger slides down to my opening, he shoves it inside and drills me with his finger.

He breaks the kiss, lifts his head and stares down at me. My face is stretching into all different kinds of expressions. As lazy as I am, the pleasure his finger could give me has me moving up my waist and fu€king his finger.

Oh, it's two fingers inside now. But still I want something bigger and harder. Fingers don't pop veins and they're not warm.

“Do you want it?” he asks.

I nod, "Yes, please."

He stands over me, yanks my panty aside and lowers his waist to me. His eyes are glued on me as he pushes it all in.

"Ndabuko!" I scream out in pleasure.

"Princess," he exhales heavily and links his forehead onto mine. "Tell me if you want me to stop."

My eyes widen. What is it that he has in mind? But I nod, because he's given me the power to allow or not allow whatever he plans to do.

He pulls out and drags my panty down to my ankles and takes it out. There's action coming! He puts a cushion on the floor and makes me sleep on it. The tiles are cold, but who died from cold tiles? Exactly, nobody!

He spreads my thighs apart and firmly presses them down. He's slow at first, then the gentleness flies out of the room, he's pumping me and

slamming his balls against my wet bottom.

My thighs are on fire, so is my outer labia, but I can't tell him to stop because my orgasm is building up.

“Please do this with me Princess,” he begs and slows down his pace. He thrusts in, wholly, and pauses to kiss my lips.

“Come with me, princess.” He begins his slow, circling waist moves while pressing his fingers over my clit.

“I'm cumming babe,” I scream.

“With me, please. Let it...” He presses his shaft somewhere, my toes curl up. “Out, princess. All out,” he says.

He increases his pace again. There's this spot he touches, this time it takes me out, I explode and scream out his name- Ndabuko.

Seconds later he's the one calling my name and groaning like a bull.

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Now we are cuddling on the bed. Thanks to the



crappy service from Debonnairs, our pizza arrived long after our floor session had ended. Again, I'm suffering from fu€k-over. My nana is on fire, rough sex isn't for softies like me.

“We won't do anything tonight,” he says.

As if that's supposed to heal me!

“She deserves a paid holiday,” I tell him.

He smiles, his usual cute smile, and pecks my cheek.

“The only thing she deserves is this,” he lowers his head to point at the front of his pant.

The not-so innocent moment is disturbed by the door opening. Our bedroom door, who does that?!

Well, Ngidi does. He's not alone, there's Ndlalifa and another man with him.

“Boy, we have to go somewhere. Pack your bag,” Ngidi says to Ndabuko and turns his eyes to the stunned me.

“MaSibisi are you okay?” he asks.

I quickly put two and two together. Bab'Maqhawe told him and maybe he's here to take Ndabuko to a traditional healer.

“I'm not going anywhere with you Ngonyama, close the door on your way out,” Ndabuko says.

“I'm here to help you,” Ngidi says.

“I don't need your help!”

This is awkward. I'm in a robe, looking helpless on the bed with a stubborn man next to me in shorts.

“Well, I'm not begging or asking. Pack your shit, you're coming with me to get help,” Ngidi loses his temper and walks in, probably to pull him out of bed and force him to pack his clothes.

But Ndabuko has something to stop him where he is. A gun. Yeap, he just pulled it behind the pillow and placed it on his lap.

Ngidi's chest bounces, he steps backwards and calls him by Nhlanzeko's name.

This is deeper and scarier than I thought. I want to jump off bed and run away from this man. But he has a gun on his lap and by the look of things, he wouldn't think twice before cracking someone's skull, right here, right now.

“Okay, let Ndondo leave the room then we can talk to you,” Ndlalifa suggests.

“Udakiwe-ke wena. Get out of my bedroom, all of you. I'm trying to spend some quality time with the love of my life.”

“Nhlanzeko!” Ngidi says in a warning tone.

I cannot be next to him. It's Ndabuko, he's just not himself, but for them to call him Nhlanzeko makes it feel like I'm sitting next to a ghost.

“Sthandwa sami,” he turns his head to me. I stop, two feet away from the bed, with my eyes bulging out.

“Don't be scared, I'll never hurt you,” he says in an agonized voice. He's hurt because I'm scared of him. I don't know whether I should run to the bathroom and go back to him.

In that moment, Ndlalifa dashes to him before he moves his eyes from me. The gun falls on the floor, the man rushes to collect it.

He's fighting Ndlalifa and cursing. When I see blood gushing out of his lip, Ndlalifa just punched him, I step away. I'm trembling with fear, it always gets bloody when men fight and I hate blood.

Ndlalifa finally manages to pin him down. He puts his knee on his back and asks the man to pass him a rope.

Tears troll down on my face. They are tying him up. I understand because he's fighting and not cooperating. But it doesn't change that in flesh he's Ndabuko.

“Please don't hurt him,” I beg while standing against the wall with my hands covering my mouth.

His hands are tied behind his back, Ndlalifa lifts him up and pulls him. Our eyes meet, he's crying, his

lower lip is bleeding. He looks so powerless and pained!

“Please don't let them take me,” he says to me.

“Please tell them stop, I want to be with you.”

He's helpless and crying. Ndlalifa doesn't care, he's one heartless human being. He's pulling him towards the door.

“Baba can I please say goodbye to her, ngiyakucela,” he begs Ngidi.

Ngidi turns the other way and shuts his eyes.

“Ndondo!” he screams before Ndlalifa pulls him out of the door.

The man follows out. I slide down the wall and sink on the floor. I catch a glimpse of Ngidi wiping his eyes before leaving the bedroom.

I wanted this. I told Bab'Maqhawe to tell them, I knew that they'd intervene and find a solution to this dilemma.

But it hurts, so so bad. I wasn't there when he died, today just gave me that experience, that feeling of

losing someone who meant something to you.

It feels like he's dying again.

[03/14, 10:42] : Chapter 53

MAQHAWWE SIBISI

It's been days since Dumisani went missing. But for a few days he had to push that to the back of his head and focus on his daughter. She's not coping at all, the recent update they got from Ngidi was not good and that has made things worse. Getting him back into himself may take time. Another call that Ngidi gave to Maqhawe secretly, carried the news that Ndabuko had lost his sanity. Ndondo cannot see him in that state, he doesn't remember most details of his life and rumbles things that nobody can make sense of. Inyanga that's taking care of him says it will blow over, then he'll be able to go home and lock Nhlanzeko out of the Mngomezulu ancestry.

Ndondo has to toughen up and stay strong for his recovery. Everyone is hoping for the best.

He wasn't supposed to stay in Durban this long, it's already causing tension between him and J abu.

He stands in the balcony, puffing his cigarette and pressing the buttons of his phone. He has three Call Me Back messages, he didn't hear them beeping in and he's about to get his head bitten off.

“Mama,” he says in a softened voice, silently praying for a less bitter response.

“Now you call me?” J abu asks, harshly.

Well, he expected this.

“Things are not good here J abu. I'm not neglecting you,” he says.

Silence.

“Ndondo is not well.”

That gets her attention!

“What's wrong with Ndondo?” she asks.

It's so unlike him to use his child as a shield, but the last thing he needs right now is to be on bad terms

with his wife, his pillar of strength.

“Mngomezulu was taken to inyanga, he's not mentally well." At least he's telling the truth, even though it's for the wrong reasons.

“Maybe you should bring Ndondo home. I'm sure that woman doesn't even check on her. Has Dumisani made any contact?”

Maqhawe's lips curve into a victorious smile. They're good now!

“No. I think it's time I go see Vumile and plan a way forward. Andiswa has opened a case of missing person, but I don't think that would help. His car cannot be tracked. This needs umhlahlo,” Maqhawe says.

“You know they'll never agree to that,” J abu says with a sigh.

“I just want to talk to him and move on. I miss your food, I don't even know names of the things Andiswa is feeding me here.”

J abu cracks into laughter. It's a relief to hear that, at



least Nomagugu is not trying any food advances on her man. She is the only one who knows how to make his liver and how he likes his tea.

“Seriously, I miss you my wife. I'm counting days before I sleep next to you again,” he says.

“I miss you as well, sokhaya. Please keep an eye on Ndondo, stress is not good for her. Maybe try to convince her to come home,” she says.

“Okay, I will.” He won't, because she's closer to the doctors when she's here, it would be a different story if she goes to Nyandeni.

He ends the call as he hears footsteps behind him. He knows before he even turns his head. It's his brother's daughter, she always has interesting questions to ask. Sometimes she even talk to him about her boyfriend. The audacity!

“Was that your wife?” she asks.

She's urban, but he tries to teach her manners and how to behave like a Sibisi as much as he can.

“It's your mother, you call her Ma. Yes it was her,” he says as he pushes his phone back in his pocket.

She wanted to give him her old phone, those thin, flat ones with long screens. But Maqhawe refused, he's loyal to his Nokia.

“I need to go and see your aunt,” he tells her.

“About Dad?”

“Yes,” he nods.

Dumisani's disappearance has affected her more than anyone. Ndondo doesn't care at all. She hasn't done anything to help or even bothered to ask how the investigation is going. She's worried about her own turmoil that is her life.

“Baba do you know something that I don't?”

Andiswa asks.

Maqhawe frowns a little and then clears his throat.

“I mean, everyone is chilled. All of a sudden nobody cares about dad. Is this a family fight or what?”

Today he cannot answer her questions. Ndondo or Nomagugu must tell her the truth about “dad” when

the time is right.

“I think everyone is dealing with the situation differently. It's not that they don't care,” he says.

Andiswa exhales, “I guess you're right. Do you want me to drive you? We'll take Ndondo's G-Wagon.”

Maqhawe lifts up his eyebrow and chuckles briefly.

“We? Didn't she say you must stick to that small one she gave you?”

“Urgh! I can't even take nice pictures in that car. I'm about to become an influencer on Instagram, what are my followers going to think?”

Maqhawe can only sympathize with a sad look. For real, what kind of a job is the influencer and where's Instagram located?

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They head to Vumile's house, it'll be Maqhawe's first time setting a foot there and meeting his brother-in-law. He wasn't even invited to their wedding. That, Vumile's part in his and Dumisani's

rivalry, hurts him more than anything. She's his only sister, she wasn't supposed to take sides.

“Baba do you know Cardi B?” Andiswa asks.

He was lost in his deep thoughts, but Andiswa doesn't like silence, not from a man who wasn't in her life for a decade and years.

“No, am I related to her?” he asks.

She rolls her eyes. He silently prays that she won't be too generous to share details on who that is.

“She was on Love & Hip Hop. Now she's married to Offset and she's one of the most successful female rappers. You know Migos, right? I'm not sure who I like more between Offset and Quavo.”

He nods, what else could he do? These are the people she always talks about; people who are not related to the Sibisis and don't impact her life with anything.

“Gosh! You should see your sister's husband. He has curves and a huge booty.”

He cracks up. He never met any of Vumile's

boyfriend when they were young but he expected her to have taste. The way Andiswa describes him paints another picture.

The car parks in front a brick ranch house. It's not big as most houses in the neighbourhood, but its most features are modern and the yard is kept neat. There's a man on the veranda, without seeing his curves Maqhawe quickly assumes that he's the husband. How nice it must be? He just met a woman and married her. He didn't even bother to check where she came from.

He was reading a newspaper, but when he saw them pulling up he folded the newspaper and stared at them.

“Malume!” Andiswa greets ecstatically and goes to give him a hug.

“Is Aunt home? Her brother is here,” she asks and doesn't wait for his answer. She walks inside the house, yelling for her aunt to come out.

“Maqhawe?” The man gets up from his chair, adjusts his glasses and looks at him from head to toe.

“I hear you are married to my sister,” Maqhawe says, trying not to sound as annoyed as he really is.

“Oh yes, Vumile is my wife. I'm Jonathan.” He pulls out his hand for a shake.

“Nice to meet you. I have come to talk to her,” Maqhawe.

He grants him the permission to walk in and slowly follows after him.

Vumile is shocked to see Maqhawe in her house. She did hear that he was in Durban and trying to look for Dumisani who suddenly disappeared. But they haven't had a conversation, like sitting down as people who came from the same womb and talked about their past.

Greetings are exchanged, then everyone clears to give them space. Well, except for the brother-in-law.

Vumile shoots a look at him, a scolding meaningful one, and he quickly takes his curves out of the room.

Their wedding pictures are hanging on the wall. It was a beautiful wedding, Dumisani gave her away and Andiswa was a flower girl.

Maqhawe takes his eyes off the pictures and look at Vumile. She's also staring at him. She wants him to go first.

“I'm here to talk about Dumisani,”- that's the first thing he says and it throws Vumile off.

“Now you care?” she asks. “Or you're just here to celebrate and worm your way back to Nomagugu?”

“I have a wife at home Vumile. And just because you two abandoned me, it doesn't mean that I don't care. Dumisani did me wrong but he's still my blood.”

“Your parents did you wrong Maqhawe, not Dumi. You don't know the things he went through as a boy because of your father. You protected us from the outsiders, but never from your beloved parents. You were the eldest Maqhawe, the most loved one but

you just chose not to be there. And now you think we owe you something?” She's getting warmed up. There's so much inside her chest and she's waited for this time to come for very long. The day she'd look at Maqhawe in the eyes and tell him how much he failed them as his siblings.

“The most loved one?” Maqhawe lets out a chuckle in disbelief.

“You did as you pleased. Stayed away and got away with everything. Do you know how many times Dumisani was sacrificed by your mother to save you? Do you know how your father never really loved Dumisani but only accepted him for the sake of keeping his marriage? While you were out there, hunting for his blood and making fun of his manhood, he was being denied the right to know his father and being tied to a girl who was three years older than him because he had save the family from Goqo.”

“Who was Goqo?” Maqhawe asks.

“Oh, you knew him as Pastor Masuku? You've



always been self-centered Maqhawe!”

She despises him. It's not about his rivalry with Dumisani. No, it's deeper than that and he's hell confused.

“You know the only time we were treated fairly was when you were home? Because they had to paint a good picture of themselves in your eyes. Do you know the injuries I suffered during my last teenage years because your beloved parents had dragged me to a grandmother who ruthlessly terminated my first child?”

He brushes his head and exhales. This..it's a lot to take in.

“I heard that from Nomagugu. You never told me anything Vumile.”

“Where were you Maqhawe?” Tears are trolling down on her face. His cluelessness makes her so mad!

“Do you have any idea who Dumisani's father was?” she asks.

“I don't,” he says, swallowing back hard. True to God, he didn't know that Dumisani was only his half brother.

“You don't know anything at all? Why didn't you stay at home?” Vumile asks, wiping her tears with her sleeve.

“I just didn't want to be there,” Maghawe.

“Why? They loved you,” Vumile asks.

“Did they? Nomagugu made me happy, I loved her and you all knew that. I had my own issues but she calmed me down and gave me purpose in life. Why was it so easy for them to take that away from me if they loved me? I expected more from Dumisani.”

“And he expected more from you as well. I expected a lot from you too,” Vumile says.

“I also expected a lot from you. You're the only sister that I have but you just cut me off.”

Deep sighs!

Some silence.

“I want to find him. We need to talk, man to man,”

Maqhawe says.

“I guess Nomagugu is finally done,” Vumile says to herself and heaves a heavy sigh.

Maqhawe raises his eyebrows.

“You know how treats her?” he asks.

“Trust me I have prayed for them,” she says.

He clenches his jaws. TF!

“And what difference has your lousy prayers made? He's an animal hiding behind God.”

“Help him find his right family and stop blaming him for the things he had no control over.”

A minute of silence passes. Some weight has been shed off their shoulders.

“How did you meet J abu?” Vumile asks.

A smile creeps out of his face. It was a long time ago but he still remembers the day like it was yesterday. He wishes he could've done things differently. Maybe love her better and be there at the birth of his son.

“That's hectic. I can't believe she forgave you,” -  
Vumile.

“She did, but she hasn't forgotten. She is a great mother, a good wife and she could be a good sister-in-law. She gave me a reason to live again.” He's in love and it's so good to watch.

“And you. That's your husband? That man?”  
Maqhawe asks.

Vumile cracks into laughter. Well, she has her reasons.

“He's a good husband,” she says, still laughing.

“That's all?” Maqhawe.

“And stable. I'm not J abu who chose a man who'd keep her in the village with goats her whole life.”

“At least I look good, I don't give her nightmares.”

They laugh. For now it's about them, as brother and sister. After this little moment of reuniting and laughter they'll worry about Dumisani.

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## THALENTE

He's been staring at me for a while. The last couple of days have been hard, I knew that he cared about Ndabuko but I didn't know this much. He's worried more than he was when Maqhinga went missing.

He smokes a lot, that's what he does when he's stressed. Now he doesn't care where he smokes; bedroom, kitchen, lounge, on my face or anywhere. I've been thinking about moving back to my shack, I'm scared for my lungs, but I can't leave him in this state. Also, where am I going to watch DSTV if I go back to Cannelands?

“Do you want to cuddle?” I ask him. He's been weird for too long.

“No,” he says.

I'm offended, I cuddle his black ass like a teddbear, why is he refusing?

“Are you being cuddled by someone else?” I ask.

He laughs, out of the blue and really hard. I wasn't trying to be a comedian, he really offended me.

He stops laughing and pulls me into his arms. Because I'm petty, I fold my arms and glare at him icily.

“There is a family lunch on Saturday,” he says.

“Oh, okay,” I say, not sure if he’s giving an invite or what.

“Your family is invited,” he says.

Okay! This one is funny. We eat lunch; a meal during the day. But we don't dress up and go to other people's houses to eat lunch. If you don't have food you ask from the neighbours and cook in your own house. There's no way my mother is going to come all the way from Khangelani to eat food in Durban.

And isn't this a short notice?

“Baba requested it and he's made preparations. He wants to meet your family before lobola negotiations start,” he says.

“Ndlalifa!” I'm shocked. He can't throw this bombshell on me two days away from the proposed date.

“We'll fetch them,” he says.

That's not even the challenging part. Telling MaNgobese is a huge problem. She doesn't even know that I'm seeing someone.

“I haven't told my mom about us,” I say.

“That's your problem. Maybe you should let her know before resting that big forehead of yours on my arms,” he says.

The honeymoon phase is really over, from kisses on the forehead to “resting that big forehead of yours on my arms.”

“What if I don't?” I ask, just to dare the devil.

“Then she'll find out when I park outside your home to pick her up,” he says.

I know he could do that, the other half of his brain stays in the taxi rank.

I take my phone and step out of the bedroom. My chest is dry as his buttocks. I dial my mom's number and call all the Mbatha ancestors to surround me during this call.

“MaMbatha,” she answers.

What a jolly mood she's in!

“Ma, how is everyone?” I ask.

“We are good. Sandiso is visiting us.” Oh, this explains her mood. Sandiso is her late brother's son, he's a little terrorist who can do no wrong because his father died when he was still an infant.

“That's great! I can't wait to see him on Saturday,” I blurt out.

“You're coming home Saturday?”

No, you're coming to Durban woman!

“I have to tell you something,” I say.

I can't believe I'm this old and scared to talk to her about boyfriends. I wish I was white, Talent De Clerk.

“I met someone, here, in Durban and we get along.”



The last part is a lie, I don't get along with that tall gumtree but I love him to death.

“A man?” Gosh, her tone!

“Yes,” I say.

A heavy sigh!

“Thalente you can't trust urban men so easily,” she says.

I didn't expect this response. I thought she'd just bite my head off.

“He's a good guy and his family want you and everyone to come over for lunch,” I say.

“For lunch? You told them I don't have food?”

Phewww!

“It's a formal thing, more like a gathering over lunch with family and friends,” I explain.

“Anginayo imali yeqhaga,” she says. (I don't have money for a gift)

I don't see this lunch thing being successful!

“You don't have to bring iqhaga, it's lunch, not a ceremony,” I say.

“Oh, okay. When is it?”

“Saturday,” I say.

“Fine. I will come but you'll have to send money for the taxi,” she says.

Relief washes all over me.

“Don't worry about that, worry about what you're going to wear,” I say.

“I will be wearing the dress your aunt gave me in 2006 for Christmas.”

TF! That's not happening. Not that dress that looks like a sari of a confused Indian woman!

[03/14, 10:42] : Chapter 54

NDONDO

I put a robe on and drag my sleepers to the door. It's Ndlalifa, one look at his face and I know that things are still bad. I wish they can let me go see him.

“Ndondo,” This is his way of greeting me. He'll have to excuse me for looking this messy. I don't remember the last time I sat down, combed my hair and did my eyebrows.

“How are you?” I ask, stepping out of the room.

“I'm good, what can I say? Baba is downstairs, he wants to see you,” he says.

Oh, this is a surprise. I thought Ngidi was coming back tomorrow morning for the family lunch with Thalente's family.

“What's going on?” I ask. I have a knot below my stomach. I can't take more heartache of losing the Mngomezulu men. I lost Nhlanzeko the first time and lost him again for the second time. Now Ndabuko wants to leave me too?

“He'll tell you everything. Let's go,” he says.

My breath is held up in my throat. I'm trying to wrap my head around all the possibilities. I don't see myself being able to live without Ndabuko. My EDD is around the corner, he's supposed to be there when I give birth. He said he'd be holding my hand,

and I know that he would have been there physically and emotionally. That's why I needed Nhlanzeko's spirit out. That's why I needed Ndabuko back.

I nod at Ngidi and lower myself on the couch. He doesn't look like someone who's had enough sleep or eaten healthily in days.

He goes straight to the point. Ndlalifa disappeared in the kitchen. I still don't know what I was trying to achieve by coming to sleep here. The house feels empty without him.

“You are not going to give birth the normal way,” he says.

The normal way? That means I won't pop the baby out through my vagina!

“I will have a C-section?” I'm yet to ask when he started to be a mid-wife.

“You will have a water birth, at the Mngomezulus. Ndabuko won't be there but a medical team and Ndabuko's uncle will be there to ensure that you're

protected at all costs.”

Water birth? Trust me I've seen such things on YouTube, yes, everything is abnormal with it.

“Who said that?” I ask. This is the most ridiculous instruction a stressed pregnant women can ever get.

“Nxumalo,” he says.

Nxumalo is the nyanga that's treating Ndabuko. I've never met him, or even spoke to him over the phone. He has his assistants who communicate with the outside world for him.

“Why? Is it going to make Ndabuko better?” I ask.

“No, it's for you and that baby. It's not out of fashion or trend, for you it's all about birthing a pure soul and cleansing.”

“Is Nhlanzeko threatening to come for the baby?” I ask. That soul has proven to be the opposite of what I had in mind. All the wonders I had about him in my head have been answered. I know exactly how we would've turned out.

“He'd never do that.” He's defensive and offended. I

understand because Nhlanzeko was like a son to him. He wants to keep the perfect picture in his head.

“He did come for Ndabuko,” I say.

“Because he.....” He clears his throat, as if to control his tongue. “Nhlanzeko was not a bad person. He communicates differently from the other side. He loved Ndabuko more than anything.”

“Is there anything you're not telling me Mr Ngidi?” I ask.

A sigh! He's definitely hiding something.

Ndlalifa's footsteps cut the conversation. He's carrying a plate of food. He's made full breakfast for me.

“I know you are starving the baby,” he says, putting the plate in front of me and leaving again.

This is nice of him. I was starving; feeding a body in an empty soul doesn't seem like a priority for me lately.

“What did Ndabuko do?” I haven't forgotten, I'm

asking between the chews and staring at Ngidi.

“Ndabuko took you to Nhlanzeko’s bedroom on purpose. He didn't know things would turn out this way. It's like teasing a dog with a piece of meat. But he was in a difficult position.”

It sounds like I've been kept in the dark from so many things. What's the deal here?

“We'll leave tomorrow afternoon. It's important that you wait at the Mngomezulu premises,” he says.

“Is that an order? I just have to up and leave? Who am I going to stay with there?”

“If his aunt doesn't come then we'll hire a housekeeper.”

The aunt I've never met? I'd rather take Hloni with me. This is getting more complicated. I hardly have a voice in any decision that's being taken. I have to flow with everything, because the last thing Ngidi needs right now, is my stubbornness.

“Are you coming to lunch tomorrow?” Ndlalifa asks.

I didn't notice that he was standing there, by the

bookshelf and going through some documents.

“No, I'll go home and check on my mother,” I say.

“Your father is still missing?” Ngidi.

Phone rings. It's my mother.

“Not yet,” I say to him before answering and stepping out of the room.

There are sniffs in her background. I frown as my heart starts to race.

“Mom, is everything okay?” I ask.

“They found him. Catherine Booth hospital. He was knocked by a car or something.”

I wasn't hoping for his happy return, but hearing this and realizing that it's Bahle sniffing behind her crushes me.

“Is he still alive?” I ask.

“Yes. He was in ICU but now he's out. They say his spinal cord cracked, so that means he'll be in a wheelchair.”



God! That's a bit too much.

“How are you feeling? When are you going to see him?” I ask.

“Maybe tomorrow. Vumile and Maqhawe went there. I have to make sure that your brother is okay, and I still need to call and break the news to Andiswa. Oh, and the church too.”

It makes sense. But my first question wasn't answered.

“How are you feeling?” I repeat the question.

“I'm still trying to wrap my head around it.”

I guess that's all she's going to say. It's still going to get tough, he'll require extra attention and someone who'll be by his side 24/7.

“Okay, I'll be there in an hour,” I say and drop the call.

I have to deal with all this now? When I'm heavily pregnant and fighting the Mngomezulu ghost battles!

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## BHEKIZITHA “NGONYAMA” NGIDI

It's the night before lunch with the Mbathas. He didn't think things would be this complicated. The night before he left the nyanga's homestead where Ndabuko is kept, he had wet his bed and he was rumbling more than ever. They've been through this before, Zamafuze was there and taking care of him. He was in and out of hospitals. But this time around it's different and Ngidi doesn't want Ndondo to ever see him like that. So helpless and sick!

He wants to take sides, to blame Nhlanzeko and call him a devil or angry ghost. But he can't bring himself to do it. Life wasn't fair to Nhlanzeko, it never was, and deep down Ngidi knows how much he cared about Ndabuko. It's his way of communicating that's distasteful, which is why locking him out of the ancestry sounded like a good plan until they explained to him what it means. He'll be among a million lost souls, he won't be able to

communicate with his family even when he's in need. There won't be any ceremonies performed for him. All this break his heart.

There are soft steps coming behind. They stop and he's already felt who it is. They're all here, the kids and her. Maqhinga fetched her, to gather with them in tomorrow's lunch with the Mbathas. This was supposed to be a good night to spend and have a good dinner as family. But he's here, standing behind the balcony door with a glass of whisky in his hand, lost in his own misery.

“Are you okay?” she asks, standing behind him.

He's not used to this question. Nobody asks him if he's okay or not. It's nobody's job. He's the father, not the way around.

He swallows a sip and slowly turns to look at her. She's wearing a simple navy dress, black pumps and for a change, she doesn't have a doek on her head. Her silky hair is plainly combed to the back. She looks a bit younger like this.

“Are they asleep?” he asks her.

“Yeah, they’ve all gone to their rooms,” she says. “I asked if you're okay?”

He was hoping that she'd let this one go.

“I just a little stressed out. But that's part of life, we can't be happy all the time,” he says with a shrug and fake grin.

She steps forward. He's staring at her, capturing all her facial features and storing them in his head.

“Maybe you should share whatever little thing that's stressing you out because you look awful,” she says.

He pushes aside the Mngomezulu battles and all his sorrows. He sips on his drink, his eyes glued on her and making her a bit uncomfortable. She wants him to share, right?

“I need somebody to love and share my life with,” he says.

Phumzile is stunned. That's not what she thought this was all about. She thought maybe he was

thinking about Snakho or worried about work stuff.

“I think we can both agree on how hard it is to keep the family intact single-handedly, to listen to your own heartbeat throughout the night and have nobody to lean on to. To have no one but yourself!”

She clears her throat; why did she come here again? This thing of always trying to be Mother Hen!

“Yeah, I know,” she nods.

He looks around, as if scanning all corners of his spacious house.

“Your sister’s house is cold and empty. I’ve never been comfortable bringing a woman in the house, around my kids. But I’ve forgiven now. I’m at peace with her being gone.”

“That’s....good!” She’s not sure where this is heading, she wasn’t here to discuss heart matters with him, she just wanted to see if he was okay. He just left in the middle of dinner.

“No, it’s not, because I’m lonely,” he says.

She chuckles, looks around for something to sit on

but finds none. Okay, this will be awkward! Even more awkward if she leaves him in the middle of a conversation.

“KaLinda Mkhonto, please let me know if what I'm about to say offends you in any way.” He's stepping closer! Why? What is he about to say? At this age, when they're both about to have grandkids and.....

“Can you come and revive the fire your sister left burning at the Ngidis? I don't want to be alone anymore. And you're the only woman I can trust and be able to turn this house into a home with.”

She shuts her eyes and exhales!

“I'm not Magcina, Bheki,” she says.

“I'm aware of that. You are Phumzile and I'm asking to share my life with you. Please be with me.”

No, no, no! He's getting close to her.

“Bheki I'm too old for...”

Face grabbed! Before she can even blink, his lips have crashed on hers. He sucks her lower lip, smoothly but quickly, and then links his forehead

onto hers.

Her chest is about to burst into halves. Her heart is thudding. A kiss? From him?

“We also have needs. Emotionally, physically and sexually. The only reason I will take for your rejection is if you're not attracted to me or if you're not comfortable with the fact that I was in a relationship with your late sister. But I'm not taking this age nonsense from you.” He's staring at her. After that stolen kiss she cannot bring herself to hold his stare.

“Our kids are grown Bheki. What are they going to say? What is Ndlalifa going to think if I go for my sister's man?”

“I told you which reasons I'm going to understand and make peace with. Right now you're telling me about other people's problems. Ndlalifa doesn't stay here, he doesn't know when I'm hungry or cold. He doesn't hug me, he doesn't ask how I'm feeling or blush for me like this,” he says.

She blushes even more. This is wrong in so many

ways!

“Try something else,” he says.

She exhales deeply and battles with her inner thoughts. She can't deny the attraction because it's obviously there. Maybe it's because he's everything that she thought no man could ever be. He makes her see this species called men differently.

“I have a life back home,” she says.

This sounds good enough. Imagine two old people in a long distance relationship?

“What life? Looking after houses and graves? You deserve more in life Phumzile,” he says.

“What if I'm okay with my life like that? If I don't want more?” she asks.

“Then I'll let you go,” he says.

That was surprisingly easy for him to say!

“But you have to see the other side of the coin first.”

Oh, there is a condition?

She raises her eyebrow.



“Meaning?” she asks.

He doesn't explain, he grabs her neck, this time he doesn't steal the kiss nor surprise her. No, she sees it coming. His eyes growing soft and his lips quivering as he brings his face closer. She hears his heavy breaths and sees the desperation in his eyes.

He kisses her and she was ready for it. His hands are wrapped around her neck. As soon as she kisses him back, he removes one hand. It slides down her back and balances over her butt.

It's a little bit uncomfortable. She steps back, trying to break whatever it is that they're doing, but he's following her and initiating the kiss over and over again, until her back is stuck against the wall.

“You're beautiful,” he says, brushing his lips down her neck.

His hand is massaging her hips. There's a nest of butterflies in her stomach, her body is reacting ungodlily to the touch of her late sister's man.

“I won't hurt you,” he says in almost whisper. His hand is resting over her front, running up and down

as if to feel her cookie beneath the dress.

“I’ll never force you to do anything you’re not comfortable with,” he whispers in her ear.

He knows exactly what to say to get her nerves settled down.

“Make me a man your sister once made me, please!”

There’s a sound coming from the kitchen. Her heart starts racing out of fear.

“I don’t want to be seen here, let’s go to your bedroom,” she says.

Ngidi smiles and nods. He lets her lead the way and follow behind her, his eyes are burning her behind and making her uncomfortable.

She stops just a few steps away from the door of his bedroom and turns around swiftly.

“Or we can talk about this some other time?” she suggests while fiddling with her fingers.

Ngidi lets out a chuckle and turns the door handle.

“I don't bite Phumzile, get in,” he says.

His hand lands on her back, without force, he pushes her inside, walks in after her and shuts the door behind.

She sits on the bed and looks around. This room is ridiculously big. Magcina is on the wall, she was younger and happy- according to the smile on the picture.

“She was pregnant with Ndlalifa,” he says, following her eyes and linking his arm around her.

She's quiet, just staring at the picture.

“People cannot be replaced. That's not what I'm doing,” he says.

She looks at him.

“Then what are you doing?”

“I'm falling in love again.”

Silence.

“Phumzile?”

A sigh! She looks at him again.

“We need you. All of us. Your presence in this house can change a lot of things. They need a mother and a happy father,” he says.

“Bheki I'm too old for...” He shuts her with a kiss before she finishes that nonsense. He pushes her dress up, slides his hand up to her thighs.

She lets loose and allows his hand to separate her thighs and go further up.

He pushes her down on bed. Her head lands on the pillow. Her body wants this but her insecure side is starting to dominate. It's been years since she was last in a position like this.

“I won't hurt you,” he says, dropping his forehead on hers.

“What if we don't enjoy this?” she asks.

She's capable of asking a man to pull out and stop in the middle of the deed. And, maybe, he's used to

more. Beautiful women with perfect bodies and flawless skin.

“Then you'll let me know,” he says in a wounded voice.

She exhales and nods.

It's a yes!

His body wants to get better of him but this is not Thobile, or any other women he's cross sexual paths with, he cannot rush this one. He has to be patient, to make sure that she's ready and hungry for this and then he has to give her the night she'll never forget.

(I'LL DROP ANOTHER INSERT A BIT LATER, FOR SINGLE PEOPLE)

[03/14, 10:43] : Chapter 54

ADDED SCENES

(CONTAINS ADULT SEX)

The door is shut. He's in his birthday suit. Hairy chest, potbelly looking round and sexy. His buttocks - well, not that sexy. His wrists have weird bangles and goat skins around them, giving him more dignity as a black Zulu man.

Down to his firm thighs and hairy legs, there's a monstrous shaft that's popping veins and looking ready to destroy someone.

Maybe she should've stood her weak grounds and told him no. It's getting real. He's coming back to bed with a bottle. Is it oil? He puts it on the bedside pedestal and crawls next to her.

She's scared, but not scared as she was when Msawenkosi took her virginity. She's scared of being exposed to something she won't be able to resist in future.

He wants her to get naked. It makes sense, they're about to have sex.

But....

“Can't I keep my clothes on?” she asks.

There's this thing of shifting the underwear to the side, Msawenkosi used to do it when he was in a hurry. At least that way Bhekizitha won't see her scars, stretch marks and cellulite.

“It's not about our private parts only. I need to feel you Phumzile, to have your flesh against mine and to sweat with you,” he says.

He says things that tame her, almost everytime he opens his mouth. Is it his charm or that he tells her things that her ears have never heard but longed for?

“I want you nude,” he says, lifting her dress up while staring into her eyes for any sign of discomfort.

She helps him take her dress off, leaving her in bra and her tight only. It's uncomfortable, he's staring at her.

“I gave birth through C-section,” she says quickly.

“Some came from fights.”

She's explaining her scars, which Ngidi doesn't give a fu€k about. He cares about taking her bra out and

scooping her melons. And that tight, it's hiding something he's dying to see.

“You're a fighter?” he asks with a smile while sending his hands to her back and unhooking her bra.

“When provoked,” she says.

Provoked, right? He presses his hard shaft against her covered thighs. Instead of fighting him, she's fighting her breaths.

“Are you going to fight Hlomuka too?” he asks, still teasing her thighs with his hard shaft.

She's blushing, words are stuck below her throat.

“Your silence is gold,” he says, dropping his forehead on hers.

“Bheki,” she calls softly, tearing her eyes away from him.

Lord, this is too much for her soul!

“Let's uncover Pum-pum,” he says.

Phewww! The moment has come. His finger slides



in the waist of her tight. She shifts up to enable him to pull it down.

Well, there her zebra-thighs are! Fully exposed to a man. He gets the panty off and leaves her completely naked.

He throws everything on the floor, pulls up her knees and slides in between her thighs.

He lies on top of her and cups her breasts. They're too big for his hands. Funnily, she doesn't feel his weight, the only thing she feels is the hard shaft resting over her waist.

“Hello,” he says with a smile.

This is the side of him they don't know at the rank. He's like a boy, his smile is gorgeous and his bedroom eyes are sexy as hell.

“Are you trying to kill me?” he asks with a grin.

Oops, her thighs! They're squeezing him. She loosens up and that grants him the chance to pull her thighs further apart.

“Relax, will you?” He holds her face and brushes his

lips against hers. Then tenderly, he captures her lower lip and sucks it slowly. She follows his lead, flowing with the kiss without letting her fears stand in the way. It's sensual and unlocking the feelings she had put at bay. His fingers are trailing down to her neck, each touch leaves her feeling warmer, with tingles all over Pum-pum.

He stops, his eyes are growing smaller.

“Do I need a handwritten permission from Nomkhosi?” He's weighing her breasts.

The point is in Pretoria and Phumzile is wandering in Joburg. Permission for what now?

He chuckles; her cluelessness stuns him. He lowers his head to her chest and scoops one boob to his mouth. He sucks the nipple.

Oh, he meant this, sucking her nipples!

As his tongue circles around the nipple, giving Pum-pum a warmer feeling that leaves her drenching in sexual readiness, a moan escapes her throat.

Her moans fuel Ngidi's energy, he snatches both

her breasts, pushes them against each other while sucking from nipple to nipple.

He puts his face between them and runs his tongue over her skin all the way down to her navel.

No, no, no! He can't go down any further. That's disgusting!

Ngidi senses her discomfort and looks up at her.

He smiles, just to put her at ease.

“I don't have toothpicks, what are we going to do?” he asks.

Her brain is working on the scale of two, that's if it's working at all. Toothpicks? For what? Who's eating the meat here?

Whoooah!

She jumps up and almost knocks his jaws with her knee. TF!

“You can't do that?” Did he even see how wet she is down there? Imagine him throwing up the salads

they had for dinner all over her vagina because he was sucking things that aren't meant for the mouth.

“Phumzile, come on. I want to do this more than I want to do anything tonight.” He's begging and slowly getting her on her back again. He really frightened her. Her discomfort is obvious but he's determined to give her this experience.

He plants a kiss on her forehead before going down on her again.

He pushes her legs up and leaves Pum-pum on his face.

His tongue slides from below, just above the cleft of her buttocks, following her wet entryway to the clit. He nibbles it with his lips before sucking it.

“Yuuu! Yuuu! Hlomuka!” Screams are filling up the bedroom. All her intentions of keeping her Sweet Mary side go down the drain. She's grabbing the poor man's head and grinding her ripe fruit against his mouth.

Her legs start to tremble. She closes her thighs over his face. He licks, sucks and fingers the wet Pumpum to the point where her body undergoes a moment of stillness. It takes a minute for her senses to crawl back. She feels lighter, more wet and thirsty for the monstrous shaft that's been teasing her thighs since they got in this room.

Oh, shucks! His beard has drops of her cum. How embarrassing is that?

It looks like a mucus. Can the roof collapse and bury them?

“Can I wipe you?” she asks, buried in embarrassment.

“You can open your thighs a bit wider,” he says.

That's not what she asked, but she does as told.

“We won't need this.” He's referring to the tiny bottle on the pedestal. His fingers are sliding between her labias and stroking her hard clit.

“Phumzile, can't I live like this for the rest of my life?” He's between her thighs, rubbing his beard

between her breasts. It feels good, like everything he's been doing to her in this room.

“I love you,” he says. His tip is knocking on her entrance.

She wants to say something but words are failing her. She wants to tell him it feels okay, this thing they're doing, she likes it.

It slides in, slowly, like a snake going in a hole after a long day of biting people and poisoning them. It fits in, all of it, and fills up Pum-pum. It didn't hurt as she expected, she was ready enough to accommodate it.

His hands slide under the fat rolls on her tummy. He starts moving his waist, thrusting in and out of her.

It feels good, more than anything her body has ever felt before. She's vocal about it;

“There Hlomuka...shuuuuu...please don't stop!”

Sweat is running down his face. He's about to twist his waist while trying to hit every corner there is.

“Phumzile you're going to kill me!” he cries out, squeezing his face and fighting back the urge to explode before delivering another orgasm.

This means she's doing something right? She opens her thighs even wider.

“Woza Bheki!” she says, bucking up her hips.

He groans loudly, tightens his jaws and pulls out immediately.

“Phewww! Cool..down..cool down Hlomuka!” He's massaging his shaft and pacing around, near the bed.

He talks to it? That doesn't even matter, she wants him inside her and she wants to see that expression on his face again.

“Please come back Hlomuka,” she begs it, not him, the di€k.

“You're choking it Phumzile,” he says in defeat as he crawls back on the bed.

“Have mercy on him,” he begs, dropping his forehead on her and pushing it back inside her.

Every thrust is welcomed by a scream. He's groaning over her shoulders. It's coming again and this time he won't be able to hold back.

“This sperm is burning my di€k, Phumzile!” His grip is tightening around her neck. His pace is rapid and fast.

“Let it burn me now. Spread it inside me, Hlomuka!”

The following thrusts are aggressive, deep and clit-bursting. His eyes roll back to his brain, his mouth opens widely but no words come out, only a long “ohhhhhh” that drags from deep from his throat.

His body rests on top of her. He's out of it! He's finished. Done and dusted. Game over!

She starts feeling his weight and pushes him to the side. He rolls to his side and catches his breath.

It feels good to be in this position. This man looks this weak all because of her. It doesn't leave her feeling used or anything. She feels super proud of



her old vulva, job well done.

“Are you okay?” she asks, placing her hand over his shoulder.

Heavy breaths!

“Yes,” he says and turns to face her.

A smile curves from her lips. She can't help it. He's drenched in sweat, his eyes are sunken and his lips are still parted. She did a number one on him!

“Do you need water?” she asks.

“No, I need a kiss,” he says.

Some of his answers!

She gives a quick one. He frowns, and then chuckles.

“Am I Khwezi or Thingo to you?” he asks and pulls her.

He kisses her the adult way; deep, with a tongue play.

They're both running out of breath, Phumzile breaks the kiss and inhales deeply.

His hand is still on the side of her neck. He's staring at her, his eyes are widely open and digging out her soul.

She smiles at him. He smiles back, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

Something is bothering him.

“You mean to tell me this could be the last time we spend time together Phumzile?” he asks.

She drops her eyes and exhales. No answer!

“I know it's a hard decision to make. But please consider what we feel, the connection that we have and the happiness we bring out of each other. We have raised our kids and paid our debts for birthing their souls. Now we deserve us to ourselves,” he says.

“I know, but what are people going to say?” she asks.

“What are they saying now?”

“Trust me, I've been a subject of rumours in the past. From not clarifying who the father of my child was

to failed relationships and not getting married. I know how it feels like.”

“And which part of your body did you lose? An ear or toe?”

She gives him a look. He chuckles and kisses her nose.

“Hlomuka and Pum-pum still owe one another. We'll talk about this some other time, because there will be some other time. Do you need any refreshment?” he asks.

“Just something to drink,” she says.

He kisses her cheek and gets off bed. He walks to the bathroom and comes back with a towel.

He cleans himself and her, then wraps another towel around his waist and leaves the room.

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He pours the granadilla juice and empties a packet

of cookies on the plate. This takes him back to the early days of his and Magcina's relationship. He's trying too hard to impress, wiping even the tiniest crumbs on the tray and making sure the cookies are in order.

There are footsteps approaching the kitchen. He lifts his head up and looks at the passage.

Maqhinganga's U-turn is delayed, Ngidi has already seen him.

"Hey wena, come back here!" he calls.

Maqhinganga stops and curses softly. Slowly, he turns around and walks back. He's carrying plates, two of them, and they have left overs and meat bones.

Wait, are those from his Jenna Clifford set? He didn't know they were special and expensive to have until Ndondo told him so. He got them as a Christmas gift from one of Bantwana Holdings associate.

"Baba what are you doing here?" he asks.

Baba? He's guilty of something and it's more than just stealing two precious plates in the middle of

the night!

“I'm preparing a snack, can't you see? What the fu€k are you using my plates for? Who are you serving?”

Maqhinganga scratches his head. Old people are supposed to be asleep at this time. Why this father out of all fathers in the world?!

“Ummm..Snalo and I, we were hungry,” he says. He knows that Snalo will cover up for him in the morning.

“She doesn't eat tomato sauce, neither do you. Who did you bring to my house Maqhinganga?” He's forgotten about the snack he was preparing. Even Phumzile is not being served in these plates.

“Jeez, son! Calm down, you're looking like an old thwasa wrapped in towels and making snacks at night. You don't eat cookies, who is this for?”

He doesn't eat cookies? Yes, he doesn't but it's none of Maqhinganga's business.

“I don't report to you, this is my house,” he says.

Maqhinganga puts the plates inside the sink and

ignores his father's piercing stare.

“Go to sleep and make sure that your bitch washes my plates before she leaves at 4am,” Ngidi says.

“4am?!” Maqhingana.

That look! If he keeps going on he'll punch his face and force his booty-call to leave this moment.

“Okay, fine.” He puts his hands up and passes next to the counter. In the blink of an eye he has scooped half of the cookies and stuffed some in his mouth.

“Motherfucker!” His arm passes Ngidi's hand by an inch. He runs out of the kitchen, leaving his father cursing and reopening the cupboard to take out another packet.

[03/14, 10:43] : Chapter 55

FAMILY LUNCH PART I

THALENTE

Waking up to a man with a blissful smile staring at

me has me raising my eyebrows. Ndlalifa doesn't smile this brightly in the morning, at least not until he gets a morning glory. It is until I remember what day it is. The big Saturday!

I feel a tight knot sitting below my stomach. He came late yesterday because he had a pre-dinner with his family. Apparently his aunt came to Durban for this.

It's big, everyone is looking forward to it, except me.

I groan and roll off bed. The driver is arranged to pick me up at 8am, I'll go with him and direct him to Khangelani. So I have to wake up and get ready.

“I don't even get a baby kiss?” he asks.

Luckily for me, now I know all the tricks in his books. I just blow him a kiss and take off to the bathroom.

My periods are around the corner, I know because of the skin breakouts on my face. After lotioning I put on a gown and head to the kitchen to mix an

egg mask. I don't know where I heard about it but I remember the ingredients and instructions. It must've been somewhere on Facebook, those people are everything; dermatologists, lawyers, doctors, comedians and English professors.

Oh, he's up as well. He's making his way to the kitchen, also wearing a gown and sleepers. It was made for him, I've never seen a gown suiting someone so perfectly. He's a gown-man.

“Hey love,” I say, a bit impressed by his height, nose and ears.

“You left me on bed,” he says.

Gosh, he's still sulking!

I roll my eyes and take the bowl out of the cupboard.

“Even yesterday, you pretended to be asleep when I came to bed. It doesn't feed on biryani Thalente,” he says, pointing at his manhood.

“You mean if I put biryani inside my vagina you wouldn't want it?” I ask.



He just sighs and sits on the chair.

It's a stupid question, I know. I just don't understand why he feels like his penis is entitled to my vagina.

“Please don't scramble mine,” he says.

He's talking about eggs?

“Oh, no, this is for my face,” I tell him and crack one more egg into a bowl.

I think they said you need the white part only, but I'm clumsy as hell, it has all mixed up. I don't think it makes so much difference anyway, it's just a matter of colours.

I beat it until it turns into a foam, then add lemon and honey. He's watching me wasting his food. I don't like the way he's staring at me, as if I've lost all my marbles.

I clear the counter and throw dirt inside the bin. Then I apply my mask and go sit next to him.

“It won't work,” says the greatest dermatologist of all times.

“Thank you for being positive,” I say.

His finger is coming to my face. I block it before it makes contact with my skin. Out of all men I chose this one!

“All this childishness because I didn't give you sex?”  
I ask.

“Yes,” he says.

Well, he must suit himself then.

“I won't be able to touch you the whole day. Why don't you just take a gun and shoot me?”

I wonder if all men are like this. This one has special needs.

I roll my eyes, they almost touch my brains.

“I'm not a taxi driver. I don't shoot people,” I say.

Fuck, this thing drops down to my eye! Did I apply too much? Is it even supposed to be watery like this?

“Are you okay?” he asks in panic.

I have lemon, honey and egg in my eye! Of course I'm not okay. I push back the chair and rush to the

bathroom with my hand over the eye.

He's on my heel and asking if I'm in pain. I cannot answer, not while my eye is burning like this.

I open the tap and lower my face to the running water. As I splash it over my face, the pain is subsiding bit by bit.

I feel cold air hitting my butt. There are hands holding my gown up to my waist. My eyes are closed, I'm trying to rinse my face while protecting my eyes.

He's behind and taking advantage of me. His shaft is rubbing my cleft and teasing my opening. I didn't wear a panty? Really!

“Ndlalifa I'm trying to get lemon out of my eye.” Lord, why has my voice softened? I should be stern and not bending my ass like this.

“I'm also trying to get the sperm out of my scrotum.” He can be so pompous!

My body has already betrayed me, it's warm and

wet for him to just slide in and feed the non-biryani-eating di€k of his.

He's slamming against my behind. I'm holding onto the sink, temporary blind but dishing the cookie out.

My optometrist would be so disappointed in me. Oh, I don't have one!

Nevertheless, I should be taking care of my eyes.

“Sthandwa sami!” He's now pushing me, his shaft is buried deep inside me.

I better let go of the sink and face another direction, before he cuts my big forehead into half by slamming it against the sink.

He doesn't stop, his arms are wrapped around my waist, he's pushing me around the bathroom. Or I'm running? He's actually not pushing me, I'm trying to escape and he's cornering me.

I fall down on my knees. He kneels behind me. At this moment I'm screaming my lungs off. His strokes are consistent, so is the pleasure he

provides.

“Baby, please!” I'm not begging him to stop. He knows what I want; his fingers over my clit.

But he doesn't do it, he just increases his pace and slams inside me harder.

“Oh, fuck!” He groans and pushes me down to the floor on my stomach. I feel his jissoms splashing warmly inside me and filling me up.

He's done. Are you kidding me? What about my orgasm?

“Ndlalifa!” My voice is stern. Imhlola kaJ ames le!

He rolls off me and lies on the floor, flatly on his stomach. This man!

He finally gains his senses and turns around. I'm on my feet with my hands on the hips, waiting for him to see the disappointment on my face. He should see the agony his failure of a penis has left me with.

His cum is flowing down my thighs, yet my clit is still throbbing. I'm taking his lazy penis to Men's

Clinic!

“You should stick to calamine. These artificial mask things aren't yours,” he says.

That's the first thing that comes to his mind? Really? I have problems deeper than skin. For example, a man who doesn't give me an orgasm.

“Ndlalifa we just had sex and you didn't...”

He rises up, his di€k is resting like a banana between his thighs. There's no hope. How big is my sin on earth?

“No, I just fucked you. And why do you care? It's not like you're still interested in intimacy.”

Like hell I'm not!

“If you were, I wouldn't be running behind you and stealing moments from your cookie like this. But I enjoyed it, umnandi girl,” he says, winks and leaves the bathroom.

What the hell just happened here? I know I've been giving him a hard time lately, but it's not on purpose

nor because I've had enough orgasms to last me a lifetime. I'm always tired and sleepy. I'm not faking it.

Now I have to clean myself after the sex I wasn't a part of?

“Ndlalifa Ngidi come back here!” I yell, exiting the bathroom and heading to the kitchen where I'm certain he's disappeared to.

“What do you want Thalente Mbatha?” he yells back.

“A penis, duh!”

His face welcomes me, there's a grin spread from ear to ear. But there's a message he's relaying with eyes. I'm slow, that's why my Grade 9 teacher made me sit at the front next to a class genius, I step in regardless of the warning in his eyes. Boom, his brother is standing next to him!

I want to die!!!

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I haven't recovered from today's morning

embarrassment. I ran and locked myself in the bedroom until his brother left. Somewhere in his head the whole situation was funny. What's funny about screaming at someone's brother and demanding his penis that he was gifted by God? I'm sure his brother thinks I'm a sex freak wherever he is.

My reputation was ruined!

But being here brings my smile back. The air smells differently here. Stepping on the grounds alone makes me feel like a queen returning to her home land.

I hope these people are ready. The lunch is set for 2:30pm and the Ngidis are rich people. They say time is money, which obviously doesn't apply here, to us. Time is time and money is money around here.

The car parks just below the yard. I thank the driver, it's the same man who drives me to work, today he's driving Ngidi's Hundai. He's humble, always. I



should get him something to drink before we leave.

He stays in the car while I go inside. I did call my mother when we crossed Enembe bridge and let her know that we'll be here in an hour. They should be ready and waiting.

Sandiso is the first person I see. He's not even a person, he's a little agent of Satan. Don't get me wrong, I love him to death but handling this one needs at least three sachets of Grandpa.

“Bandile!” he yells to someone behind him and runs to me.

Bandile is MaMgenge's grandson, he also emerges from the house and runs to me.

These little chipmunks! Are they competing in a Vaseline contest or what? And who buys an innocent child green sneakers?

“Gogo said we are coming with you to Durban,” - Sandiso.

They're both wrapped around my legs. These little

humans can be cute. But coming with me to Durban?

“Hhayi-bo! Which Gogo said that?” I ask.

Sandiso points at the car, the other one's eyes widen.

“I'll drive,” he says

“I'll count the change,” the other one.

They're running to the car. My question is left hanging like that. I hope what they're saying is not true. Not only are they shining like Vaseline influencers, together they make a very toxic pair. This whole lunch would be a mess.

I walk inside the house where voices come from. Indeed MaNgobese is dressed up. We discussed the sari dress issue and I convinced her to go with the peach dress and her matching head scarf. Now my problem is MaMgenge. I don't remember inviting her. Where's she going with the colour-blocking dress and wide-brimmed hat? Is it Ponds that's making them look like they woke up from the

mortuary?

“Sanibonani,” I greet and pull a chair by the wall and sit.

They're staring at me. Have they not seen a rich man's girlfriend before?

“Since when are you a yellow-bone?” MaNgobese asks.

“And this fat?” her friend, MaMgenge, adds.

I don't remember signing any sort of contract to stay the same complexion, or not to gain any weight, with neither of them. I'm shocked by their questions; I didn't promise anyone not to get fat or turn lighter.

“The car is outside,” I say, ignoring their questions.

MaMgenge turns her eyes to her friend; “The dog has eaten your eggs ntombi kaNgobese.”

MaNgobese is still staring at me. I wish they can fight all the time, their friendship is toxic, bad friends!

“Are you pregnant?” MaNgobese asks.

Shock me again! In fact, kill me and cremate me, and turn me into holy ash.

“No, Ma! I'm not pregnant, jeez. I said I met someone, it doesn't mean I'm having babies with him.” They're making me so angry. How dare they accuse me of pregnancy? I took a pregnancy test two months ago and I wasn't pregnant.

Two months ago...? Holy shit!

I need a glass of water. No, make it three litres.

“Are you okay?” MaMgenge asks with a grin on her face. She'd enjoy me being pregnant, wouldn't she?

PART II at 21h00

[03/14, 10:43] : Chapter 55 (continues)

FAMILY LUNCH PART II

THALENTE

Sandiso and Bandile being on this trip with us, MaMgenge's colourful dress and my sister's

absence are the last thing on my mind. I could be pregnant; the village walking-pregnancy tests are already suspecting me and I have the symptoms. I'm always tired, sleepy and choosy when it comes to food.

It's only when the car drives in that it clicks to my mind. We are here, the parents are about to meet for the first time!

“Khehla your skin has dried,” that's my mother referring to her nephew. She's unzipping her bag and taking something out. A bottle of Vaseline? This child is already shining like a vetkoek coming out of a hot oil.

“He looks fine, Ma,” I say.

I can imagine Snalo and Maqhinga sharing looks at the table over this.

“This is my nephew and I know him better. You live here, in these big houses, you know nothing.” She puts Vaseline on her palm, rubs it and pulls Sandiso's face and massages it all over.

MaMgenge thinks it's cute, she pulls her grandson and does the same to his face.

These kids are officially the walking vetkoeks of South Africa.

“Open the last button of your shirt Bandile,” I say.

The child looks like a Jehovah Witness who forgot his tie.

“For what? He looks handsome, he just needs to tuck the shirt inside the trouser,” MaNgobese chirps in.

Between me and her, MaMgenge trusts her fashion advice better. Having both of them here and the kids is the worst thing that's ever happened in my life.

We are led inside the house by Nomkhosi. She has one of those African designed wrap-dresses, black stilettos with a touch of gold and a huge head wrap. She looks like a queen. I love her big sisterism.

We are not late, that's a relief. The table is set

outside, in the balcony. I didn't expect the setting to be this fancy. If I didn't know the team of Andiswa, Snalo and Nomkhosi I would've said they had a decorating company hired, but I know they could've just put all this together by themselves.

“We didn't know you're getting married,” MaMgenge in a low whisper.

Phewww!

Nomkhosi helps the kids on their seats and rearranges the center-piece that had my mother thinking this is a wedding.

“Do I say Mthiya ngenkomo abanye bethiya ngehlahla?” Nomkhosi asks, standing with her hands on the table and a welcoming smile on her face.

“If you want to go on, say; Shandu kaNdaba, Sontshikazi, Gumbi lamagwala,” MaNgobese says.

Nomkhosi knew exactly what to say to tickle her fancy.

“Oh thank you, Shandu kaNdaba. Everyone will be

here in a moment, they just wanted you to settle in first and wash down the dust. Anyway, we are pleased to have you here today. We've been looking forward to this day. Thamente only says great things about Khangelani.”

What great things do I say about Khangelani?

“Thobile please bring the ice!” she yells, flashes another smile at us and walks back inside the house.

Thobile walks out with a bucket of ices and glasses. Her make-up is on point. She's not in the uniform today. She's wearing a tight dress and a curly wig, looking like an ordinary family member. However, she doesn't look happy in her job.

She leaves everything on the table, chews her gum and walks back inside the house without saying a word.

Maqhingana and Snalo are the first to arrive. I cannot



bring myself to look at Maqhinga in the eyes. I can imagine what he thinks of me.

He shakes everyone's hand before sitting next to Snalo. I don't like their eye-conversations at all.

Luckily, the aunt comes out. She's a beautiful, humble-looking woman. They sit still when they see her coming.

Formal greetings are exchanged. Her and the women on the table share some similarities, within a second there's laughter surrendering the table.

Thobile walks out with a stack of napkins and an annoyed look on her face.

“Can you please get appropriate cutlery for the kids?” Mam'Phumzile asks her.

Did she just roll her eyes or it was my imagination? Her nerve is made out of steel!

The father-in-law steps out of the house in a black tuxedo. He's the fire, he's the smoke, he's the charcoal and the ashes! Mam'Phumzile is staring,

so are the two women on the table. He is the Duduzane Zuma of their age.

He even cut his beard. Wow, this day must be really important.

Nomkhosi follows out, after him, and leads him to his chair at the far end of the table.

“Well, these are your guests Ngidi,” she tells him and walks around the table, coming to me.

“The table is like a garden of flowers. MaMbatha, thank you for accepting and passing my invite to your family.” He turns to my mother and MaMgenge. My mom is staring at him. MaMgenge is not, she’s blushing and messaging her fingers like a high school girl meeting a Hip Hop artist for the first time.

“Thank you for coming, zindlovukazi. But I didn't see your bags?” he says, frowning.

“Bags?” MaNgobese.

“You're not sleeping over?”

I know he's just teasing them, but deep down MaMgenge wishes she could've brought her bag,

extra panties and cinnamon.

“Well, even if it's for few hours, we are happy to gather with you. They'll tell us why we are all here, I'm also clueless.”

Isn't he the one who called for this lunch? I'm confused by his statement.

Khosi leans over me and whispers; “You need to fetch him.”

He's the only one who's not here. I've been wondering what's keeping him.

I get off the chair, eyes follow and burn my back as I walk inside the house.

His bedroom here is tiny compared to the one in his house. This one has his pictures on the wall. He was a little boy in most of them. There's a suitcase of his old clothes on top of the wardrobe. His father kept everything. Even the bicycle he bought him when he was a teenager is in the garage. He is a man of memories.

I don't have clothes from my childhood, those that were still in good condition were passed to my sister or given to relatives. The only memories I have are pictures and constant reminders of how bad I was as a child from MaNgobese.

He's staring at the mirror, fixedly and motionlessly. I stand behind him and put my arm around his waist to announce my presence.

“They're waiting for you,” I say.

He inhales deeply and nods.

He's scared? The whole Ndlalifa Ngidi!

I stand in front of him and put my hands over his suit. He looks handsome more than ever. I thought he'd be in his jeans, tank T-shirt and famous cap. But he's made an effort for this day.

He lifts my hands and holds them to his chest. His eyes are haunted with fear and restlessness.

“Are you okay?” I ask him.

He exhales, “I'm scared.”

“Scared of what?” I ask.

“What if your mother thinks I'm a criminal?”

“Why would she think that?” I frown.

“Because of the industry we are in. You also think I'm a criminal, right?”

Well, I do say that at times. But he's the last person to take me seriously. I say some things to get under his skin, the same way he does to me.

“Have you ever seen a criminal that looks this handsome? I know how the taxi industry works, you do what you have to do, when you have to do it. I'll never judge you and I won't allow anyone to judge you. You are a good man, you take care of me, make sure that I step out of my comfort zone and chase a better life for myself. You support me in everything I do. You accept me for who I am. Well, not all the times. But I know that your intentions are always pure. You're not exactly what I imagined for a husband and a father of my children, but I wouldn't have you any other way Hlomuka.”

“Oh, what did you imagine?”

I knew he'd ask. I said that on purpose.

“A man who'll make sure that I cum before him,” I say.

No, I didn't get over it.

“If your mother wasn't outside I would've torn this dress and got you pregnant,” he says.

“If I wasn't pregnant already. Let's go.” I pull his hand.

“What do you mean Thacente?”

He should be preparing his speech instead of asking me obvious questions. His father has spun the whole story, now it's like we called the families together to announce our relationship.

“KK Mulaudzi! Romeo and Juliet! My Perfect Wedding! Jack and Rose! Titanic!” He only stops when Ngidi throws a dagger at him. He should've been excluded from this lunch, period! He just brought all the attention to us.

We sit on our chairs. Ndlalifa hasn't looked at

MaNgobese and MaMgenge's direction. I put my hand over his knee under the table.

He's really scared. It's so unlike him.

"Well, this is the person who gathered all of us here," Ngidi throws him straight inside a lion's den.

Can't he see how nervous he is?

"At least it rains frequently that side," he says to MaMgenge. I guess it's the continuation of a conversation we weren't a part of.

"Not frequently, sometimes we use watering buckets and fetch water from the river," MaMgenge says.

My mother's eyes have been on Ndlalifa from the second he sat down. His eyes are the glass of water in front of him, he's not lifting them up and I think Snalo is taking a video of him across the table.

"The sun is setting down," MaNgobese says, still staring at Ndlalifa.

This is her way of telling him to speak up. Why is

Ngidi doing this? What is my poor Ndlalifa going to say?

“Sanibona,” he greets while rubbing his forehead. He's sweating.

No answer!

My heart is racing too. Why are they not returning his greeting?

“Tell them what Thalente is doing here,” Ngidi says.

Right now I don't care about their eyes. I grab his hand on the table and hold it.

MaNgobese and MaMgenge share a look. Didn't I tell them I was seeing someone?

“Can I be with Thalente? I love her,” he asks. I've never seen this nervous, yet sweetest side of him.

“Oh, now you're asking for permission? I thought you were already together and doing “things” as lovers,” MaNgobese says.

She's not supposed to be giving him a hard time.

Maqhinga's eyes sparks a twinkle. He's loving this!



“I’m asking for a permission to build a family with her,” he says.

“Is she not pregnant already?” MaMgenge asks.

Gasps!!!

Ndlalifa turns his eyes to me. He's confused.

“We'll confirm,” I say in a low whisper.

“So what are your intentions about Thalente?” MaNgobese asks.

“I want to marry her,” he says. He was born ready for this question.

They look at Ngidi and Mam'Phumzile.

“Well, that's why we are here, the kids want to get married,” Ngidi says.

MaNgobese turns to me, fear is written all over her eyes.

“You want to get married?” she asks.

Ndlalifa's hand squeezes mine. I don't know what sign he's trying to give me.

“Yes, I want to get married to him,” I say without any doubt or fear.

“We'll talk,” she says.

Not bad at all. She'll probably tell me how bad marriage is and reference to her friends' ill marriages, and I'll just convince her that I'm ready to face it all.

I guess the awkward moments are over, people are back to their plates and low conversations. Ngidi seems to be interested in the rural life, mostly cropping. He is asking a thousand questions and MaMgence is gladly answering all of them.

“Thank you babe,” Ndlalifa says, squeezing my knee under the table.

I look at him.

“For everything,” he says. His eyes lower to my tummy, then he looks up with a warm smile on his face.

Am I really pregnant? I will look like Ndondo? I hope

God and my ancestors come through for me again.  
That crew has my back, they understand me.

“I don't see spoons,” -MaNgobese.

Nomkhosi rises from her chair and unwraps her fork and knife. She does the same for MaMgenge. They're staring at her the whole time.

I'm not sure when Sandiso and his partner in crime started eating. Didn't they see forks in front of them? They're stuffing meat inside their mouths and messing their shirts. At least they're kids, nobody is paying attention to them.

“I'm not going to stab food ndodakazi, please get me a spoon,” MaNgobese says.

I need water! I grab a glass and gulp down a huge sip.

“Kahle MaNgobese, this kind of food cannot be eaten with a spoon. Have you never been to a restaurant?” MaMgenge.

I can't believe she's trying to shine at my mother's expense!

“It's fine Ma, I'll get the spoons,” Nomkhosi says and walks inside the house.

This is awkward. Or am I the only one feeling that way?

“Mmm I love cucumber and cabbage. I don't go a week without it,” MaMgenge says, forking the salad and forcing it in her mouth.

I want to punch her on the face and tell her it's lettuce, not cabbage. And since when she likes salad? Where has she ever eaten green salad?

Thank God, the spoons are here! My mother grabs one and starts eating.

“Don't you know cucumber MaNgobese?”  
MaMgenge again.

She's trying too hard! Snalo's eyes keep going to them. She's suppressing a laugh.

“I'm only eating what I'm familiar with, MaMgenge. Don't eat too much you two,” MaNgobese says to the two chipmunks who are murdering chicken

thighs.

“Let them be. Ndlalifa was also like this as a child,” Ngidi says.

He only chuckles next to me. I've never seen him so humble before.

Snalo is pouring champagne in her glass.

MaMgenge pushes aside the Coke my mother and her were having and asks Snalo to pour for her as well.

“Trust me Ma, you'll love this,” Snalo says.

MaMgenge smiles, “This is exactly the one that I like.”

She sips. Her facial expression doesn't show that she's having ‘exactly the champagne that she likes.’ Her face looks foreign to this thing.

“Who wants a drumstick? R2!” Sandiso.

Not a food sale on someone's table! Most kids do this where I come from, putting their left-overs up for sale, but we are not home. He's embarrassing me.

“Khehla, no!” his aunt says, giving him a look.

Maqhingana bursts into laughter; “He's going to be a wealthy businessman one day. I also started like this.”

“You are not a business man,” Ngidi says.

Mam'Phumzile gives him a look. She's probably not used to the way they treat one another. Ngidi smiles and picks his fork.

They're weird!

I cast my eyes to the other side of the table and notice that MaMgenge hasn't eaten much of her food. It's scattered all over the plate. The knife is on her left hand, she's struggling to cut the meat.

Our eyes meet. I give her a signal- “right hand damnit!”

And she better stop pretending to know and like champagne. She's a well-known Coke gang member.

“More salad?” Nomkhosi asks her.

Fake smile!

She nods, “Of course, my girl.”

“I love your hat,” Nomkhosi says.

“Oh, really. My daughter bought it for me. She works in a hospital.”

Why is she giving them the impression that Nondumiso is a nurse? Nondumiso and I both didn't go to university, we don't have professions.

“The food is nice, whoever cooked here should teach Thalente a thing or two,” -MaNgobese.

Ndlalifa laughs. The same guy I've been defending and supporting. He's now laughing at me with these people.

“Her man will hire a chef. He's been driving taxis since he was a boy. I'm sure he has money now. He dropped out of school and joined the family business,” Ngidi.

I feel him tensing up next to me.

“Oh, he dropped out of school?” MaNgobese asks.

Ngidi must've said that to see her reaction. I just hope she doesn't judge them.

“Yes he did, but he's a hard worker,” Ngidi says.

“I hope so. It would be a pity for my grandchildren to have parents who don't believe in education,” she says.

“I'll take them to best schools and make sure they don't turn out like me,” Ndlalifa says.

“And how did you turn out?” Ngidi asks, glaring at him.

He just shrugs his shoulders and swallows his drink.

“You're successful, intelligent and brave. You turned out well and I know you'll be a good man to MaMbatha and a great father to your kids,” Ngidi says.

For a moment they're staring at each other. Ndlalifa is the first one to drop his eyes. I don't know but I think he's grateful to his father. He needed to hear those words from him.

“I love you Ndlalifa,” -I just needed to tell him this now. He looks up, his lower lip trembling. I grab his hand quickly and squeeze it.



And now? Why are they all staring at us? Their food is turning cold.

“Thalente where can I find a bathroom?” MaMgenge asks.

She's on her feet and holding her stomach.

“Is everything alright Ma?” I ask.

“J ust show me the bathroom!”

Is it that her stomach is rejecting her favourite salad and champagne already? This is embarrassing.

I rush with her inside the house and lead her to the bathroom. I stand outside the door just to confirm that she's alright inside.

Is that a balloon bursting inside? A groan!

Lord, I cannot listen to this.

As if hearing MaMgenge's fart and runny poop wasn't enough, here I am bumping into a crying maid.

“Thobile are you okay?” I ask.

“He's not even looking at me. Why is he treating me like this? Am I not attractive enough? What did I do wrong?”

I'm not Sis'Dolly but I can rub her back and tell her that men are trash. She'll find someone else. She must know her worthy.

“Look sisi, I have to go. Please don't give him the satisfaction, he doesn't deserve your tears,” I say making my way to the door.

I hope she'll be fine. I really do.

[03/14, 10:44] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 56

MAQHAWWE SIBISI

He cannot feel nor move his lower body. His church members have been in and out of his room, delivering prayers and quoting scriptures to strengthen him. Vumile has gone out to get them something to drink. The kids, Andiswa and Bahle, have gone back home with the church minister. Bahle is taking it

harder, to him his father was a hero, seeing him like this breaks his heart. Nobody understands him the way his father did. How are they going to go to their father-and-son games if he can't walk on his own? How are they going to race their bicycles if he can't move his feet?

Andiswa prayed to find him alive and he is. She's thankful for that, anything else will be taken care of with money. She's already drawn up a poster looking for a nurse who can stay with him once he's been discharged, all funds will come from Ndondo's account. It's their father, she's sure that she won't mind.

Maqhawe hasn't said anything, he's sitting on the chair, staring at him lying on bed helplessly. Yes they had their differences, he took a lot from his life, or he'd like to believe so, but seeing him like this breaks his heart. He cannot imagine being a man and not being able to take care of yourself.

Now it's just the two of them, Dumisani is not

looking at him even though he can move his head and talk. It's either he's ashamed or hating Maqhawe's presence as usual.

"Mahlase," Maqhawe says after clearing his throat.

"Please don't call me that," Dumisani responds without turning his head to look at him.

"I didn't know until a few days ago," Maqhawe says.

"How would you have known? Where were you?" Dumisani asks.

"This matter was between you and mom. It wouldn't have mattered whether I was there or not," he says.

Slowly, Dumisani turns his head. He's empty, death would've been better than living like this.

Nomagugu hasn't come to see him. They said she'd come but it's been days and there's no message from her.

"Maybe you could've protected us Maqhawe," he says.

"Your expectations were very high, I must say. I'm only five years older than you. I wasn't a superman,"

Maqhawe says.

There's some silence.

Then Dumisani lifts his eyes.

“I have never lived my dream, you know. Marriage, Nomagugu and leadership. It was all forced on me. Call me spineless, selfish or weak. It's within your right because you never knew your parents for who they were. The only person who knows how deep my scars are and how damaged I am, is Nomagugu. The only person who knows how scarred Vumile is, it's her husband.”

“And it's you who knows how much my parents hurt me. You Dumisani, the brother who used to edit love letters for me. You knew how much she meant to me back then, yet you married her.”

“It was that or Ndondo was going to be killed,” Dumisani says, somehow annoyed that Maqhawe still doesn't get how unfair life was to him.

“After they passed on, why didn't you come back to me with the truth? Why did you keep Ndondo away from me if keeping her for me was the only reason

you agreed to marry Nomagugu?” Maqhawe.

Silence.....

“You were angry at me for not being a superman that you and Vumile wanted me to be?”

Deep breath and more silence.

“You owe me answers Dumisani!”

He sighs, “I couldn’t let Nomagugu go, she had already accepted me and I knew that no woman was ever going to accept me as I was, except her. Letting Ndondo come and see you would’ve led into you and her reuniting and I couldn’t have handled that.”

“So you kept my daughter away from me because you were insecure?” Maqhawe asks.

“Yes,” he nods.

“Are you proud of yourself? If you look closely at yourself in the mirror, don’t you see Dad?” Maqhawe asks.

“No, I don’t. I’m nothing like that monster,” Dumisani says.

“You’re right, you are nothing like him. He never hit nor raped our mother. You have no match when it comes to cruelty. Yet you say you are scared of losing Nomagugu.”

“I am scared of losing her,” Dumisani insists. “And I’ve always known that the day you come back to our lives her and I would end. Where is she as we speak?” His voice is breaking.

“Don’t make any mistake Dumisani. I didn’t heal from how her and I broke up, because it was forced and she left with my child. It’s nothing more than that, I have a wife at home.”

“You mean if I die you won’t...”

“If you die Dumisani I will come to your funeral as a guest and go back home to my wife.” He opens a bottle of water and gulps it down. It’s too late for brotherhood. Maybe if their parents were still alive it would’ve been easy to fill the gaps and knit back their relationship. But now so much damage has been done, the only thing that ties them together is blood, nothing else.

“Can you do one thing for me, please?” Dumisani. Maqhawe just looks at him and says nothing. But he’s listening and that’s enough for Dumisani to go on.

“Make sure I’m buried at the right place when I die,” he says.

Maqhawe didn’t expect him to talk like this. The doctors said he’ll live, his chances of survival and living a long life are good.

“You are not dying,” he says.

“Life is unpredictable Maqhawe. There are no guarantees.”

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NDLALIFA

He must’ve been 17 when his father stood in the middle of the road and pointed the Mchunu taxi he was driving to the side of the road and ordered him



to get out. It'd been months since he dropped out of school and left home. He was staying with friends, some days sleeping in town, under the bridge and waking up to wander around the rank. When he decided that he wanted to drive taxis he didn't approach his father, he went to Mchunu and asked him for a job. He did that solely to annoy his father. Ngidi used to beg him to come home every time he bumped into him looking like a streetkid. Sometimes he'd take a taxi and look for him all over the streets.

He'd stay home for a few days before stealing money and returning back to the streets. He was sure that one day he was going to be brave enough to put a bullet through his father's head and kill him. But everytime his plans started to assemble he'd think of Maqhingana. Him and Ngidi were very close, he was a good father to him and Ndlalifa couldn't afford to be the one to take that away from his brother.

The day his father ordered him out of the Mchunu taxi was the day he showed him why he was called

Ngonyama. He didn't reprimand him, no, he fought him as if he was fighting another man. With a gun cocked and placed on the bed, he punched him, threw him against the walls and strangled him with his knee pressed on Ndlifa's chest.

It was a near-death experience, he spent the next few days in an old house next to Groutville, locked inside with food and painkillers.

He has never told anyone about that day. Even Nhlanzeko didn't know. When he came back home he pretended as if nothing happened. He apologized to Maqhingana for being absent and promised to be around more often. He rekindled his relationship with Maqhingana, but not with his father, and both of them were okay with it being broken.

He officially started driving his father's taxis like any driver that was employed to do so. There was no special treatment or extra payment, if there was anything, he was slaved more than anyone. His father was still angry at him for dropping out of

school.

He randomly owned a gun one day. He had no enemies and didn't need a gun because his father was then a big shot at the rank, everyone feared him. He had the unit of bodyguards employed to look after him, which automatically put everyone related to him under protection. But Ndlalifa went and got an unlicensed gun without anyone knowing.

One day he decided that him and Ngidi needed to have an exclusive dinner. So, he had one of his friends fetching Maqhinga to have a study night with his young brother. That granted him a chance to cook, prepare a special drink for his father and wait with a gun hidden behind his waist.

It was 8:35pm when Ngidi walked in. All the lights were turned off, the house was dark but he was able to notice his son standing in the middle of the kitchen.

“Is everything alright?” he asked, reaching up to the wall and turning the kitchen light on.

“You are very late Baba,” Ndlalifa said, inhaled sharply and walked to the table that was set for two people.

“Wash your hands and join me for dinner. Maqhinga went to Sihle’s house to study with Menzi,” he said.

“Oh, I didn’t know,” Ngidi said while washing his hands and getting ready for dinner. It was unlike Maqhinga to go anywhere without telling him, but he mentally excused that one time and embraced the fact that his eldest son had prepared dinner. He was coming around; there was a light at the end of the tunnel.

What he didn’t know was that Magcina’s picture was one of the decorations on the table. His heart sunk as soon as he saw it.

“Since she can’t physically join us, I thought I should invite her picture instead,” Ndlalifa said with a fake grin and a shrug.

It was just three minutes through dinner when Ndlalifa popped the question. It wasn’t the first time

he asked, the answers he had got in the past did not satisfy him.

“Where is my mother?” he asked.

Ngidi choked and reached for a glass of drink that was in front of him and gulped half of it down.

“We talked about this Ndlalifa. Your mother left,” he said when he was finally composed.

“Left or killed by you?” Ndlalifa asked, glaring at his father icily.

“I didn’t kill her. I loved her.” He took another sip from his glass. The subject of Magcina made him uncomfortable and that, for Ndlalifa, was a flag. He strongly believed that his father had a hand in his mother’s disappearance and he was ready for revenge.

“I will raise my brother,” he said.

Ngidi was feeling a bit dizzy and suddenly too weak.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

A gun came out of his son’s waist and pointed between his eyes.

“Son?” He was too weak to do anything, all he could do was lean back on the chair and stare at his son.

“I want my mother Bhekizitha,” – Ndlalifa.

“I...loved...her...please...son...please...Maqhinga cannot...become...an...orphan.” He was getting weaker with each word that he spitted. The gun was on his brow-ridge, it was just a matter of time before Ndlalifa pulled the trigger.

“It’s fine...if you no longer need...me...but he...he needs me.” A tear rolled down his cheek before he totally passed out on the chair. It was Ndlalifa’s chance, he had to pull that trigger and end him. It had been his wish for a very long time. But he didn’t, instead he took Ngidi’s arms and dragged him to his bedroom. He left him on bed and broke his promise to Maqhinga. He disappeared again!

Ngidi went to the rank the next morning and didn’t tell anyone about the previous night’s incident.

Ndlalifa went back to Mchunu and drove his taxis.

They’d bump into each other at times, but neither of them said anything. They were total strangers.

Ndlalifa would go to Maqhinga's school, camp outside the gate and take him for a swing. They'd talk about girls, soccer and money. Never about home. Maqhinga was instructed to let him be and Ndlalifa was okay with their relationship ending on the streets. It was healthy that way, without Ngidi in the picture.

But one day he came home, with his bags and everything. He didn't apologize nor explain himself. He just went to his room and woke up in the morning to shadow one of his father's taxi drivers.

It was a few weeks after his return that Mchunu and his brothers banged Ngidi's door. They were with Mchunu's brother's fiance who was in her mid-thirties back then. Ndlalifa was in his early twenties. They were looking for him, armed and ready to spill blood.

"What did you do?" Ngidi asked.

He didn't say anything. He just stood by the wall with his eyes bulging out. The fiance was crying

next to the Mchunu brothers. It looked like she had her face rearranged a bit, but she wore her scarf tightly around her neck.

“I took you from the streets, cleaned you and fed you. But you have the nerve to sleep with my brother’s fiance. Not once, not twice, but every fuckin’ day!” Mchunu roared.

“What?!” Ngidi.

He looked at Ndlalifa and saw that he was shaking in his boots. As much as he had done wrong in the past, nobody was going to come armed and threaten his son, inside his own house.

“It was a mistake Baba,” Ndlalifa said.

Both of them knew that it wasn’t a mistake. Mistakes only happen once, not every day with someone’s fiance.

“Didn’t I tell you not to let my son drive your taxis, Mchunu? Didn’t I ask you to let him stay wherever he was? You decided it was better to take him in and sell him to your unsatisfied wives?” Ngidi asked.



“Ngonyama don’t even start! This boy begged me for a job and then paid himself with my brother’s fiancée on top of the salary I was giving him.”

“No, you used my son!”

Guns were cocked and pointed at different directions.

“Get out of my house and make sure that your slut of a fiancée never touches my son ever again!”

It took a moment for the Mchunus to lower their guns and leave. If it was anyone else’s blood would’ve been spilt, but it was Ngonyama and they knew better than to start a war with him.

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Ngidi chuckles and shakes his head. He’s never seen Ndlalifa so scared and yet excited. He just drove in like a maniac and threw a white tube at him.

“I’m going to be a father!” he said in disbelief. His eyes over his face and breaths vibrating out of his

chest.

MaMgenge already broke the news, it was just a matter of confirming.

“I never thought I’d see this day. I really thought you shoot blank, I mean from Mchunu’s fiancée to all the nameless girls you’ve played hide & seek with, this was long overdue,” Ngidi says. He cannot hide his happiness either, he’s about to become a grandfather!

Ndlalifa laughs and lowers himself on the couch. They haven’t talked about Mchunu’s fiancée since that morning when they came over with her.

“You’ve never punished me for my sins, except that day in Groutville,” he questions with a chuckle. “I’ve always felt like one day you’ll drag me to that house again and make me pay for everything that I’ve done to you.”

“I wish I was more open with you and Maqhinga, a lot of things could’ve been avoided. I let fear overpower me.”

“What were you scared of?” Ndlalifa asks.

“That you’ll hate her,” he says.

“So it was better if we hated you?”

“I thought so, until dinner. That night I knew my dishonesty had cost me a relationship with my son. That night I understood the gap your mother left in your heart. I understood that a father will always be a father and a mother will always be a mother. You cannot play both, no matter how much you try. I understood your pain.”

Ndlalifa drops his eyes and exhales heavily.

“I know the pain of losing a parent. I lost both of mine in one night,” Ngidi says. “You carry the pain with you everywhere you go. Nobody can fill that gap.”

“I’m sorry,” Ndlalifa says.

“No, I’m old now and counting years before I’m reunited with them again,” Ngidi says with a chuckle.

“Not about your parents, but about everything that I did to you in the past. You had to deal with the pain of losing your parents, being left by the love of your

life and me making your life a living hell. I don't deserve to be called your son."

"Your mother and I worked very hard, sweating throughout the night, creating you. Don't tell me not to call you my son, do you know how many rounds it took to...?"

"Jeez! Stop already. I don't even want to imagine it. You're too old for that," Ndlalifa says with his hand up.

"Old for what? Now that you're still in this good mood, listen up," Ngidi says and adjusts on the couch.

Ndlalifa is staring at him with a frown.

"I'm seeing someone and I'm marrying her soon."

"No ways! Baba she's here for money, nothing else. I wouldn't be surprised if she has slept with Maqhingana too. It looks like she wants a piece from all the Ngidis."

"What are you talking about?"

"That slut you want to marry, she doesn't love you."

“Don’t you dare call your mother a slu£!”

“TF! That slu£ is not my mother. She didn’t even make it to my sheets. I’m not having a mother who twerks behind taxis.”

“You slept with Thobile? What’s wrong with you?”

“Before you,” Ndlalifa says and shifts to open a distance just in case Ngidi decides to do something.

“She was my employee. That’s the bottom line, you don’t fuck with my employees!”

“She’s not your employee after 5pm.”

“Oh, then I’m having a word with MaMbatha. She needs to tie her dog.”

Ndlalifa’s eyes pop out.

“What? It was a long time ago.”

“I don’t care. Anyway Thobile is not becoming your mother, your aunt is,” Ngidi says.

“My aunt?”

“Yes, Phumzile.”

“What? She’s my aunt. You don’t fuck with my aunt, that’s the bottom line!”

“She’s not your aunt upstairs, in my bedroom.”

[03/14, 10:44] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 57

SNALO NGIDI

He still looks the same way he looked the last time she saw him nine years ago. Fine yellow boy with big ears and sharp nose. They used to be the same height but now he’s way too taller than her. How Ngidi found him is the story of another day, they are here now and they need to have the conversation they swore they were never going to have. Ngidi got him into some hotel in Pietermaritzburg, he’ll be here until all the rituals are done. It’s all on Ngidi; accommodation, food and his transport.

He’s said to have had dropped out of college on his final year. He failed all his modules and the bursary

that was funding him withdrew. Coming from an unstable household like his, furthering his studies from his own pocket was impossible, so he dropped out and looked for piece jobs. He's surviving because he can afford to rent a backroom in Soweto and sleep with something in his stomach.

His old Nike bag is lying on the floor. He's still not organized. They used to fight about it when Snalo went for sleep-overs, she'd find his bedroom looking like a mess, with clothes scattered on the bed and his shoes everywhere.

He's lying on bed with his knees up and facing the ceiling. He hasn't looked at Snalo who's standing by the door in expensive stilettos, tight leather pant and Louis Vuitton purse under her arm. Even though he's thought about her, he never imagined the day they finally meet again being like this. In a hotel that's booked by the father who's come out of nowhere, his wallet containing only his ID and R300

notes.

He thought it would be different, that his situation would've improved and maybe, just maybe, she would've seen him and been proud of the man he turned out to be.

They were young and stupid in love with each other. Yes, they did horrific things together and hurt each other, but they always spoke positively about their future. He was supposed to have a bright future, he had a shot at it, but he ruined it. God knows how dedicated he was to his studies. To this day, he doesn't know what went wrong. What became so hard that he couldn't achieve 50% even on one module?

He's ashamed of himself. He's ashamed of his cheap Mr Price T-shirt and baggy jeans. He's ashamed of his no-name sneakers lying on the floor near his bag. He cannot bring himself to look at her. His first love. The mother of his child. His partner in



crime.

“Mondli,” she calls.

Her voice still sounds the same. She wasn't a sweet person, she had a weird energy and a very bad attitude. But he loved her, with her darkness, weirdness and everything.

He still can't look at her. His attempt to respond ends with him clearing his throat a numerous times.

“He could've gotten you a better hotel,” she says, her stilettos clicking nearer and nearer. “Or arranged a guest house, or something. But I'm glad you came. They said it's important that we do this for her.”

They had an agreement. Nobody was going to find out about the pregnancy or the murder of the man her aunt dated.

“Why did you tell people?” he asks, opening his mouth for the first. His eyes are still on the ceiling.

“I needed to heal,” she says and sits on the bed, putting her expensive purse next to her.

Mondli sighs and sits up.

“He is your father?”

“Yeah, it’s a long story. But I have a father now and two brothers.”

“He looks rich,” he says.

Snalo laughs, she’s different. Her energy is light, penetrable and friendly. A total different from the Snalo he knew.

“Oh yes, he owns taxis and a logistic company,” she says.

He nods, holds onto his knees and exhales.

“I hear you dropped out of college. How is life?”  
Snalo asks.

“Hard,” he says. He’d tell her that his parents and sister died, but he doesn’t want to whine or to buy her pity.

“Your father said a chicken is needed.” He’s been praying that it won’t cost him more than R100.

“And newborn clothes, but he’ll take care of it. You

just need to be present and be a part of everything.”

“I am the father Nalo, not him!” he says, suppressing the pain in his voice. This makes him feel even more worthless. He wanted everything to happen in his father’s house, but they told him he needed to pay for the damages and bring the child’s spirit to his surname first. Obviously, he couldn’t, with what money? He can’t even afford a hotel room and a decent meal for himself.

“It’s not about who the father is. It’s about ensuring that the baby’s spirit is resting in peace,” Snalo says.

“I know. I know.” He pulls up his T-shirt and buries his face.

“I’m sorry about everything that I put you through. I was the worse girlfriend, ever. I forced you to agree into decisions that had a potential of ruining our whole lives. I’ve always thought about this day, when we finally meet in adult life. I don’t know why you loved me because I didn’t give you a reason to. But thank you for every sacrifice you made for me.”

He doesn’t say anything nor lift up his head. He’s

paid for everything that they did together. He's paid for drugging her uncle and helping her put him in the middle of a freeway at night. He's paid dearly for paying a woman on the street R60 to kill their baby, brutally, in her stomach. He's paid a price for all his wrongs!

"I want to be alone," he says, his face still hidden behind the t-shirt.

Even though Snalo wanted them to lay things out and clear the past, she respects his request and leaves his hotel room.

Her heart is heavy. She didn't want to show him but she pities him. She didn't want him to turn out like this. Mondli was a bright boy. He had a promising future.

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THE FOLLOWING DAY

She's been staring at the cup of cold tea in front of

her and lost in her thoughts. At times like these she misses Snakho. She would've found a way to make this day fun and less depressing. In two weeks she'll be going to the hospital to finally have a hysterectomy. It's for the best, health-wise, and her father will make sure that she receives the best medical attention. But the reality is, she'll never have children of her own. All because she didn't want the first one. How is that fair? She didn't have what it takes to raise a child in South Africa back then. Was it better for her to bring an innocent to suffer?

“Hello, earth to Snalo!” Maqhingana says, waving his hand in front of her face. He came late at night, nobody was expecting him and he found that funny because there's no way in hell he was not going to be by Snalo's side through this.

“I saw your high school sweetheart, he just arrived. I thought it was that Skeem Saam dude, Leeto,” he says. It could be a compliment and it could be a shade. With Maqhingana you never know.

Mondli is an addition to her internal tears. He used

to tell her to keep her head up high and wear her crown with pride even when she feels like the castle is falling down on her. But he's the same guy who's crawled to misery and lost all his confidence to poverty.

"I thought he was somewhere in the world, living his best life. But it seems like his life fell apart. I feel so bad, Maqhingana. I know his heart, he's good more than he's bad," she says with a sigh.

"Whatever, it is not your fault. You need to focus on yourself, you have a lot to deal with. Don't burden yourself with your ex's problems," Maqhingana says.

"I was a toxic girlfriend, okay. A traumatizing one to be with for three years. Mondli was an A student, his name should be something big out there. But he's living in the backroom, somewhere in Soweto, and fixing people's electricity for a living."

Maqhingana sighs, exhaustedly.

"Okay Twinnie, let me get you a roll of tissue and a pillow. Cry your eyeballs out because your ex's life didn't come with a manual. Cry and choke yourself

to death if you want.”

She rolls her eyes at his drama.

“I’m a human Maqhingana, I have something called conscience.”

“Well, I don’t have it. Get up and go get ready. Are we going to eat those chickens?” He’s grabbing someone’s left-overs from the fridge and digging in with no questions asked.

“That’s Ma’s food!” Snalo says, laughing.

“We’ll both say we don’t know. I have your back and you have mine!”

Snalo shakes her head and leaves to get ready for the rituals. She was hoping that her and Mondli would’ve talked before starting this. But clearly, there’s a lot to be ironed out between them and not enough time.

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Phumzile takes her outside the yard with a dish of cold water and bile sprinkled inside it. She’s

standing and watching as she bathes. The water is cold but there's no way she can cheat this. She pours it over her shoulders and cringe as it drenches in her skin.

She's told not to dry herself, she just dresses up as wet as she is and head back home without taking a single glance back.

"We'll go to the rondavel and do the naming ritual. To mourn for your baby you'll abstain from any sexual activity for a month," Phumzile says. She's still angry at Snalo for not telling her about the pregnancy. Yes she would've been angry and disappointed like any other parent, but she would've been there for her. Ngidi has been pressing the right buttons and toning her down.

"Sexual activities?" Snalo asks.

"Yes, you know what I'm talking about. You're not allowed to do those things."

"Even HSS?"

"What is that?"



Maqhinga bursts into laughter and earns an icy stare from his aunt.

“Hand Self Services,” Snalo says.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. But make your Hand Self Services useful by making food for Mondli,” Phumzile says before leaving them to their stupid giggles.

Since it’s already late, she decides to dish up for everyone. With Maqhinga’s little help, she roasted turkey and vegetables, baked bread and made a fruit salad with yogurt. She leaves everyone’s food on the table in the kitchen and takes her’s and Mondli’s to the guest room.

“Hey,” she says and hands him one plate.

She sits on bed with hers and exhales. It’s so weird being in the same room as him. There’s a lot that’s unsaid, she can feel it.

“Hi,” he finally says after inhaling sharply.

“It’s weird seeing you as an adult.”

He chuckles. Their eyes lock for the first time, only for a brief moment. He quickly drops his eyes to the plate on his lap.

“I didn’t live happily. It was hard for me too. Snakho passed on shortly after we met our father. I’ve had more downs than ups. I’ve been having health complications since I was 23. I’m still attending therapy to lift the burdens off my shoulders. Thanks to my father, he supports me in every possible way,” Snalo says. It sounds like she’s justifying herself but she’s not. She didn’t have it easy either, only if Mondli knew what she’s been through these past years.

“I don’t blame you Nalo. Yes I wish I could’ve done things better in the past, but we were young and we are here now, paying for that.” He lifts his head up. He’s empty, but not hating on anybody. “I have never hated you, and I never will. I just didn’t want you to see me like this.”

“See you like what?” Snalo asks.

“Like I haven’t been trying. Angiyena uskhotheni

Nalo,” his voice breaks. He could see it in her father’s eyes, he’s assumed the worst of him. Like he’s where he is because he’s a drunk or drug addict. Like he doesn’t wake up everyday, queue for tap water and travel all around Joburg fixing people’s electricity on calls. Like he doesn’t print CVs and beg impatient managers to keep them in their offices just in case something comes up and forever wait for their calls.

“I don’t judge you. I don’t know what you’ve been through, your life is not mine to inspect,” Snalo says.

He puts the plate aside and takes out his wallet. He takes a R100 note and passes it to her.

“It’s for the chicken,” he says.

Snalo exhales and folds the note in her palm. He’s trying to prove his worthy and if she denies him this, he’ll take it the wrong way.

“Please eat, we have to decide on the name,” she says.

“I thought of Tema, but then I remembered you don’t like foreign words,” he says.

“It sounds nice, but maybe we should stick to Zulu,” she says.

He chuckles, he expected that and he’s already made peace with it.

“What do you have in mind?” he asks.

“I thought of Thandolwethu,” she says.

“Sounds great.”

“Okay, then we are Thando Nsele’s parents.”

He nods uneasily and keeps his stare glued on her. The surname thing is still a bitter pill to swallow. He wanted his child to be a Mazibuko.

“I never thought I’d acknowledge that I’m someone’s mother,” Snalo says.

He exhales and forces a spoon in his mouth. He only stomachs three and puts the spoon down.

“I know I’m not a great cook but...”

He shakes his head, “It’s the great I’ve had in a long time, I’m just not hungry at the moment.”

Her eyes drop in disappointment.

“You’re still beautiful,” he says.

She rolls her eyes with a smile on her face. “It’s make-up,” she says.

“Make-up without your face wouldn’t look beautiful.”

She’s blushing. But unfortunately Ngidi is in the room and his eyes are already skinning Mondli.

“This is a long dinner! Or you guys are having hawk’s meat instead of turkey’s?” he asks, sarcastically.

“Ngidi!” Snalo says, secretly rolling her eyes.

“MaNgidi,” he’s looking at her with his brow cocked up.

Snalo sighs, takes Mondli’s plate and leaves the room.

He stands with his hands tucked inside his pockets. Mondli’s head is bowed, something about Ngidi doesn’t make him feel good about himself. There’s something in the way he looks at him, as if he amounts to nothing in life. He noticed it when he

picked him up in Durban and felt it when he dropped him at the hotel.

“Thank you,” Ngidi says.

It’s random and unexpected.

Mondli lifts his head up, his eyes run over him for a second.

He clears his throat, “For what?”

“For everything. Every sacrifice that you made, every promise that you kept and for coming here today.”

Not that he was given much of a choice, but he didn’t expect this man to thank him. He has no reason to, especially after taking care of all the expenses leading to this day.

“So, tomorrow you’re leaving the province?” Ngidi asks.

“Yes,” he nods.

“You’re going there to do what? What are you returning to?”

“My life,” he says.

“Mmmmm.”

That long mmmm doesn't sit well with Mondli.

“It's not a good life, you cannot relate to it, but it's what I can live on at the moment,” he says.

“I can relate to it. But that's not the point, the point is I owe you Mondli. You killed for my daughter and you were only 17. Had I been there, nothing would've happened to her. You wouldn't have gone through all that. So when you're ready to relocate and try something else, don't hesitate to give me a call.” Ngidi makes his way to the door, leaving him with a confused look on his face.

“Just don't try that something with my daughter, you still owe me,” Ngidi says before walking out.

Well, he didn't expect that. None of it.

Snalo walks in shortly after her father has left. She's carrying a little dress and a pair of shoes smaller than his hand.

“This is for Thando,” she tells him.

Unfortunately, he cannot go to the rondavel and partake in the naming ritual. He takes the dress, squeezes it and brings it up to his nose.

“I’m so sorry!” A tear escapes his eye.

“Mondli, please.”

He folds his fist over his mouth and sobs. Even now, he still can’t step up and be Thando’s father.

Snalo’s arms wrap around his shoulders, she rests her head on top of his and exhales.

[03/14, 10:45] : SEASON FINALE

## Chapter 58

Ngidi received a call early in the morning, calling him to Ndwedwe. He wasn’t given any details, except that it was urgent that he came as soon as possible.

He cannot even wait for the breakfast Thobile has prepared for him and Phumzile. It’s not his wish to



leave her in the company of Thobile, but he has to leave. He's trying not to think negatively, if anything had happened to Ndabuko they would've told him, right? Hopefully Snalo will be home soon. He doesn't trust Thobile that much, she's proven to be obsessed and jealous. It baffles him; why would she assume that they had a future? He was honest with her from the onset, it was never going to amount to anything other than sex. Had he not met Phumzile, he would've looked for someone else or died single. Thobile has a whole future ahead of her. She deserves a boy her age, someone who'll take her to dates and parties.

In a few years he'll be letting go of this urban life and taking Phumzile back to the village where his parents were laid. That's not the life Thobile would've wanted, even if they were compatible. She's too young for him, and if he needs to sit her down for the zillionth time and explain to her, he will. He doesn't want to be unfair and fire her as Ndlalifa wishes.

Phumzile frowns when she sees him walking in and buttoning his sleeves. She thought they'd have breakfast first and she was looking forward to it.

"I will grab something on the way," he says, guiltily.

"When are you coming back?" This is their last day together. Tomorrow morning she has to go back home, to her life. She was hoping the last moments would be memorable and fun.

"As soon as I can," Ngidi says. He's not in a good space, his mind is roaming to Ndabuko and back to Ndondo who's awaiting delivery at the Mngomezulus, but he manages to flash a smile. It's good to see her needy and desperate for his company.

"That could be any day. I might as well leave today," Phumzile says with a sigh. She cannot hide her disappointment.

Ngidi pats her back, she lifts her head and their eyes lock.

"You're not leaving before I come back," he tells her.

“But what am I supposed to...” A bank card is dropped in front of her.

She frowns.

“Go shopping. Go to spa. Do whatever thing you, women, do. I just want to find you here when I come back,” he says.

She laughs, what else can she do? It was just a matter of time before the monied side of him played a role in their relationship.

“Bheki I’m not...”

“My sons birth dates, 23-09. That’s the pin.” Is he not going to let her speak? Really?

“I love you Phumzile,” he says and plants a kiss on her cheek.

A glass drops on the floor and breaks their little goodbye moment.

Their heads turn to a puffed up Thobile staring at them.

“Are you okay?” Phumzile asks in panic.

“She’s fine.” Ngidi pushes her down to the chair as she attempts to stand up to go check on Thobile.

“But Bheki a glass broke in her hand,” Phumzile says in great sympathy. Yes the girl doesn’t like her, maybe because she’s never worked with a female figure who dictated things around the house, but she’s a mother before she’s everything else.

Ngidi clears his throat, Thobile is picking up broken pieces on the floor.

“You’re right, I think she’s hurt. I will give her a day off,” he says, his eyes giving Thobile a specific message.

“Noooo! I don’t want a day off..I didn’t get hurt, I promise,” she says.

“I won’t cut your payment. Clean that mess and go home.”

“No, I don’t want to go home,” Thobile insists.

Ngidi’s hand grips hard on Phumzile’s shoulder. He clenches his jaws and releases a sharp breath. He doesn’t need Thobile to create drama while he’s not

here to defend himself. And he can't confess to Phumzile now. There's no time.

"You heard her, she's fine. Let me walk you out," Phumzile says.

Another sigh!

"I'll get the bag."

Phumzile walks back inside the house after bidding goodbye to Ngidi and staring at the car until it drove out of sight. They haven't told Nomkhosi and Snalo yet. Ngidi wants to, he's tired of sneaking around in his own house because she's scared of a child. But Phumzile is still nervous about this whole situation, it will bring a lot of judgement and criticism.

Oh, breakfast! Ngidi has left with her appetite.

"You can clear the table. I'm going to take a nap," she tells Thobile.

Thobile rolls her eyes and lets out a chuckle.

“Didn’t you hear that I’ve been given a day off? You clear that table yourself.”

Whoah! She can dislike her all she wants, but Phumzile won’t stand the disrespect.

“You said you didn’t want a day off, that means you’re on duty,” she says, trying to stay calm as much as she can.

“Look here, you may be sleeping with him because you’re a lonely-salty magogo whose cause of death will be “too much sex”, but you’re not my boss. I don’t take orders from you. I take orders from Bheki.”

“If that’s how you speak to adults, then you better leave that attitude there on the streets, ngoba mina ngizokus haya ukhumbule umshado kanyoko mntanami!”

Thobile rolls her eyes, “The adults I know don’t spread their legs for their dead sister’s men.”

It’s quicker than the drop of a hat, Phumzile pins her against the wall and slaps her twice. Thobile didn’t imagine her weighing this much, all her efforts of

breaking free go in vain. Phumzile takes her shoe out and disciplines her like an old school mom.

“Stay out of my business,” she tells her before letting her go.

Thobile is still in disbelief and shaking like a leaf.

“Decide if you’re working or taking Bheki’s offer. And clear the table while you decide, I’m going to take a nap,” Phumzile says before leaving her to her tremor and confusion. The last thing she’d ever accept is disrespect from a child. Any child.

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NDABUKO

He remembered a woman, she was beautiful and classy. He didn’t remember much about her, not her exact physique and voice. But he knows that whatever she gave him was warm, and he wants it back. He wants his life back. He misses her warmth. Nxumalo is abusive and he keeps feeding him bitter

-tasting things that mess with his head.

Nxumalo walked inside the rondavel carrying an ash-tray. Ndabuko sat up. He hadn't wet his bed and he had a few flashbacks in his head that linked him to his past.

"Mkhulu I remember someone," he said.

Nxumalo frowned. His hand trembled, he knelt on the floor and stared at Ndabuko.

"What do you know?" he asked.

"Her name is Ndondo. Can you ask Baba to bring her the next time he comes here?" He's been referring to Ngidi as baba, that's what they taught him here and he finds it comfortable.

"How did you sleep?" Nxumalo asked.

"Good, I guess. No nightmares, no headache, and my bed is dry."

Nxumalo took a deep breath and poured black powder in the ash-tray. Ndabuko's heart sank, he knew that he was about to burn izinyamazane that



always make him nauseous.

“I will give you a medicine to drink. It will help you,” Nxumalo.

“But your medicine makes me dizzy and confused. Maybe you should let me heal on my own. And that thing you put in my food gives me headache,” Ndabuko said.

“That’s how medicine works,” Nxumalo said, paying no regard to his concerns.

“I don’t want any medicine,” Ndabuko said, shaking his head.

“UNgonyama ukhokha itshe lemali ngoba ngikusiza nje, ungenzi umsbenzi wami ubenzima.”

(Ngonyama is paying me a fortune to help you, do not make my job hard.)

“And I’m telling you I’m fuckin’ okay today. Get me the person I want to see and fuçk off with your witchcraft,” Ndabuko said.

He was losing it again. So, Nxumalo called two of his apprentices and asked them to help him tie

Ndabuko up. Against his will, they forced medicine down his throat, slit his flesh and inserted black powders.

Ngidi was called shortly and told to hurry because it didn't look good.

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Ngidi downs a bottle of water before taking a seat. He hasn't been told what's going on, but the fact that Nxumalo can't keep the eye contact raises a flag.

"Is he alive?" he asks.

Nxumalo nods, "Yes."

He releases a sigh of relief.

But it's too soon, bad news await him.

"I sedated him. He's danger to everyone now. I don't know how long I can keep him around my family Ngonyama," Nxumalo says.

Ngidi shakes his head. No, they cannot give up on him. He has a baby to raise. He gave Ndondo his word; that he was going to bring him back to her.

“Nxumalo you said you can do it. You said you can help him.”

“I can, but he won’t allow me to help him. It’s impossible for me to help him.”

Ngidi exhales heavily.

“Please, if I have to pay more money so be it. I’ll do anything for him to be okay,” he says.

“I won’t lie to you Ngonyama, it’s hard, but if you’re willing to pay extra and hire two of my apprentices to guard him 24/7, we can do it. I need extra hands, and at times I have to abandon my other patients to attend to him.”

“Money is not a problem, just make sure that my son is okay,” Ngidi says.

There’s a ghost of a smile that Nxumalo suppresses. His wife walks in with a jug of amahewu and leaves it in front of them.

“Wash down the dust,” he says, handing a jug over to Ngidi.

He shakes his head and stands up.

“I want to see him,” he says.

Nxumalo frowns but stands up. He has his fingers crossed for the unknown. They leave the brick house and head to the rondavel where Ndabuko is kept.

His wrists are tied with a rope. His chest has dry dark blood. He’s half naked. He doesn’t look okay, even in his sleep. Something is haunting him, you can hear from the way he snores that he is in immense pain.

“Did he say anything? Did he eat?” Ngidi asks, swallowing back a lump forming in his throat.

“He said he owns horses and he wants to return back home to them,” Nxumalo says in a hopeless voice.

Ngidi shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath.

“Taxis. He meant taxis,” he says.

“Well, he insisted that it’s horses and fought when I told him otherwise,” Nxumalo says.

Ngidi walks to the bed and lowers himself next to Ndabuko’s feet. Nxumalo excuses himself and leaves.

He touches his toes, stares at him and runs his hand on his feet. It cannot release him from the pain he’s in, and he probably won’t even know that he was here and rubbing his feet. But he’s here for him. Always.

“Nkaba yeNkosi please, I’m begging you. You’re stronger than this, you have fought this before and triumphed. I have never met anyone intelligent as you are. You don’t know how proud I am of you. And I know your parents are proud too. You’ve always made knowledge and humanity a priority over anything, and trust me, I have learnt a lot from you. Your light shines on everyone, even on those who are in the shadows. Your son needs you. Ndlalifa is

having a child too, and that child needs you. They need the educated uncle who speaks big English. Every child has the right to have that kind of an uncle. You owe the next generation that. You are a role model that everyone wants for their child. Do not give up on us, please mfana wami.”

His feet move. Ngidi looks up in awe. Slowly, Ndabuko opens his eyes and tiredly looks at him.

“Baba they’re killing me...” His eyelids shut. He’s too tired, mentally, physically and spiritually.

His words stab through Ngidi’s heart. He’d never put his life in danger. He wishes Ndabuko could remember that; he’d lose his life to protect him.

They’re trying to help him. That’s all.

His phone rings.

He takes it out with the intention to reject whoever is calling, but when he sees that it’s his daughter, the apple of his eye, he doesn’t hesitate to answer.

“Dad you have to come home. They’re arresting

Ma.” She’s crying, there’s so much noise in the background that it’s almost difficult to hear her well. He can hear Nomkhosi screaming at someone.

Phumzile can’t be arrested? What on earth could she be arrested for? Killing a fly?

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NDONDO

Ndabuko’s aunt made a nice excuse for not being able to come and live here with me during this time. I ended up taking Hloni with me. I have my doctor’s number on speed dial, anything could happen now. There’s also a weird-looking woman who pops in frequently to check on me. She’ll be here when I give birth. It’s one of Nxumalo’s people, I guess.

“I can bring you ices,” Hloni says.

She thinks me, my pregnancy and cravings are a huge joke.

I roll my eyes, “I don’t need ices Hloni. I need my

man.”

“This is not you being strong for him. Your mood...”

“Affects the baby bla bla bla. You’re my nanny, what if something happens to me while you’re drunk?”

“I’ve had like two, or three glasses. And it’s after 8pm.” She shrugs and takes another sip from her wine.

Well, she’s right. It’s her time to relax and do whatever she wants to do with her life. We’ve gone from employer-employee to friends. She’s been a great supporting system. Andiswa knows how to choose them. The yardner she hired turned out to be the love of my life. Now Hloni is more than just a cook, she’s a friend.

“I’m going to bed. I will call you if I need anything,” I say.

I wasn’t comfortable at first. I mean, this is a huge homestead, there are graves not so far from the fence, and that emptiness you feel when you enter, it’s still here. But Hloni doesn’t mind, she opens all the houses and cleans them, even Nhlanzeko’s. I’m



only comfortable here, in the big house and its six rooms. I don't know if I'll ever attempt to go to Nhlanzeko's room again, not even the one in Durban.

Ngidi's silence is starting to worry me. He hasn't updated me about anything today. But right now I need to rest, I'll call him in the morning and find out what's going on. Also, I need a car sent here. Hloni does have a driver's license, so it makes sense for us to have a car here.

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“Princess,”

Not this man again! Why is he here? After everything he's done to me and Ndabuko?

The nerve!

“I love you,” he says.

I keep my eyes on the trees. I have so much to say, yet nothing to say to him. Does he even know what love means?

“I know that you think I don’t. But I do, way too much. Are you ready to become a mom?”

I’m not doing small talks with him. Those who care and truly love me know that I’m ready to become a mom.

“Say what you want to say and leave me alone Nhlanzeko,” I say with an eye roll. It annoys him when I do this. He thinks it’s disrespectful more than a black child calling an elder by name.

“We need help,” he says.

“You and who?” I will help the other person, not him.

“They locked me out. I cannot get inside there. That motherfu...” I give him a sharp look, he pauses and exhales. What am I now? His taxi rank friend he speaks to anyhow he wants.

“I’m sorry,” he says.

He’s very humble today. Or is it desperation?

“Please fetch him and take care of him. They’re hurting my brother and I cannot help him. They want to separate me from my family.” His voice

breaks. He turns his back to me, right now I'm not sure if he's crying or what.

“Love him and nurse him back to life. He needs you.”

“Nhlanzeko you caused all of this!” I scream. Why is he acting like a concerned brother? He created this mess.

“Princess.....”

“No! You made our life a living hell. If you ever loved me you would've let me be happy.”

1st voice: Ndondo wake up!

2nd voice: Please help us.

1st voice: Ndondo...Ndondo...

2nd voice: We need you.

Something cold runs over my face. A blanket of drowsiness piles out. I'm in bed. Hloni is standing over me with a jug of water. It was her voice and...a dream.

“Who were you fighting with in your dreams ? Lord, do you need water?”

“No, I just need a moment.”

What the hell was that all about? Nhlanzeko in my dreams, again? Why is my love life so complicated?

[03/14, 10:45] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 59

NDONDO

I’ve been getting a lot of bank notifications lately. I know and trust Andiswa’s management of finances, but it just baffles me why she would keep transferring so much money to these accounts I don’t know.

And now she’s not picking up the phone? This child! I call her one last time, and luckily she picks up.

“Sis,” she says.

“What’s going on?”

“With what?” she asks.

“With money. Who are you paying?” I say.

“Oh, I was paying for dad’s wheelchair and the nurse’s outstanding amount.”

What the heck? Didn’t this Dad come out of the hospital with a wheelchair?

“What nurse Andiswa? What wheelchair?” I ask.

“It’s a motorized wheelchair for outdoor activities. I hired a nurse who’ll help mom look after him,” she says.

This child is not testing my sanity so early in the morning. She’s not!

“With my money Andiswa? You bought him a fancy wheelchair and hired a nurse?”

“Ummm...I didn’t think it would be a problem. He’s our dad and...”

Jesus Christ!

“He’s not my dad. You will return that wheelchair back and get me my money. If you want to keep the

nurse for him you'll pay her from your own pocket. Are you kidding me right now?"

"That's not fair!" she says.

"Ask him if he knows anything about fairness. Do not spend my money on that man." I drop the call and grab a bottle of water. I cannot believe this.

I wonder how my mother is coping with him being in the house and demanding her attention. Lord, I hope she's not sharing a bed with him.

"Ndondo you need to come and see this," Hloni says behind me.

I let out a sigh, "Not now Hloni, please."

"It's a green snake," she says so blithely. Maybe in her head a snake is a fish. Why would a sane person be this ecstatic about seeing a snake?

"Where?" I ask with a drumbeat in my chest.

"It's in your bedroom and coiled around the bed leg," she says.

I swear I'm going to pee on myself. Was it there the whole night?

“We are leaving. Grab your things, we are taking a taxi and leaving.”

She frowns and then breaks into laughter. What's funny about this? If snakes go in and out of the rooms as they please, then it's not safe for us to stay here.

“It's an elder of this family,” she says, holding back her laugh.

“No, it's a snake.” TF! There are no elders here, a snake is a snake.

“It's harmless,” she says.

I give up on this girl. Maybe she was a witch in her previous life.

“I'm serious. It's a harmless snake, just find out what message it's here to deliver,” she says.

Oh no, it's getting worse!

“It talks?” I ask.

She rolls her eyes, “No, I mean you have to consult a seer.”

“I’m not a Mngomezulu yet and I’ve never been to a seer before.”

“The snake is inside your bedroom, that’s not a mistake, whatever it is directed to you.”

No, I’m not doing this with the Mngomezulus. It’s too much!

“Maybe It’s linked to the dreams you’ve been having,” she says.

“Nhlanzeko cannot come in a snake form,” I say hesitantly, with a frown on my face. This is confusing. All of it.

“Can’t he? You know him better than anyone.”

I look at her and she shrugs her shoulders. Maybe I’m trying to be in denial, Nhlanzeko could even come in a lion form. I know him very well now. I don’t know how they’re dealing with him that side.

“So we are leaving?” she asks.

“I cannot live with a snake and I need to go home



and check how my mother is,” I say.

“And Ngidi?” she asks.

I don’t know why she fears Ngidi so much.

“He’ll come and remove the snake before we come back. The baby won’t survive if I get bitten by a snake.”

“It doesn’t bite,” she says.

I roll my eyes. Now she’s the snake’s best friend? We are not sharing a house with a snake, that’s it.

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Hloni heads to her friend’s house and I take a cab to Ngidi’s house. I don’t want it to look as if I’m ungrateful or rude. I’ll let them know that I’m back in Durban for a few days. I want to see my mother. Also, they need to ensure my safety. If Ngidi needs to beg Ndabuko’s uncle to go consult with him, so be it. I cannot live with snakes, harmless or not.

Cabs are supposed to be faster than taxis. But this one still needs to be taken to the garage and have

the tyres pumped. I should've called Andiswa and asked her to send a car. This thing of traveling in people's cars is tiring.

What is this driver doing with a petrol attendant now? His service sucks.

As I drop my eyes to the phone I see an object flying to the car. Did someone throw a...no, it's a bird. A dead one. It hit against the screen, died and rolled down. What the heck?!

The driver saw it. He's running towards the cab. I'm not sure whether to remain inside or get out to check what's happening. But maybe I should just stay inside and let him deal with it. The screen has a crack, that's how hard the bird hit it. It doesn't make any sense, really. Out of all cars here, it has to come to this one.

He gets inside the car. He doesn't apologize for the delays, he just asks about the bird.

“I just saw it dropping dead,” I tell him.

“Is everything alright at home?”

I’m not sure whether he’s being nice or intrusive. The dead bird got nothing to do with...shit! What am I going to do with you Nhlanzeko Mngomezulu?

“It’s my dead husband. Drive.”

A minute passes and he hasn’t started the car. I look up and find him staring at me with his eyes bulging out. What now?

“I paid for the cab, you need to get me to my destination,” I say.

“But Miss Sibisi...” Oh, he knows who I am. Even great, he needs to drive. I’m not sure what Nhlanzeko might do next. Ngidi needs to do something and do it fast.

It looks like everyone is here. Maqhinga’s car is parked behind Ndlalifa’s. As united as they may be, they don’t spend much time together at home. Maqhinga has moved back to his house, which

means Snalo is now scarce here. Her and Maqhinga are inseparable. And Ndlalifa lives his life away from everyone. He's always been like that. He started this adulating thing earlier than anyone.

Khosi is also here? Something has happened. They all look ready to skin someone alive.

I search around the room with my eyes and I don't see Ngidi.

“What is going on?” I ask in panic. With Ndabuko gone, my mind is always imagining the worst out of every situation.

“What makes me angry is that I told Baba to get rid of this girl. But nobody ever listens to me around here. Now we have to deal with this drama?”

I'm not sure how Ndlalifa is answering my question. Who is “this girl”? And what has she done?

“Khosi?” I raise my eyebrow. She is the level headed one here. I need an explanation.

“Thobile has arrested mom,” she says with a sigh.

Ngidi's dick-slash-house keeper? What the hell!

"Why?" I ask.

This doesn't make any sense. Mam'Phumzile is not a jail material.

Khosi sighs, "It's about Bab' Ngidi."

I'm lost and wandering in the jungles. How is Ngidi the center of all this?

"Apparently Ma is with Baba now. Dating, as in a couple; boyfriend and girlfriend," Snalo explains. Snakho did predict this, I'm not surprised at all.

"And Thobile is obviously being a bitter ex. We don't know how it started but Ma has an assault case opened against her."

My word, this is bad!

"Bitter ex? She shouldn't have mixed business with pleasure, it ends in tears," Maqhingana says. There's a car driving in, the garage door is sliding open.

"I hope this is their boyfriend. He needs to sort this out, my aunt can't spend a night in a cell," he says.

We all wait with our eyes glued to the door. This is the drama I left the Mngomezulu snakes for? I don't know who was wrong but Ngidi needs to get Mam'Phumzile out and deal with his dick-keeper before Khosi intervenes. More people could go to jail while someone goes to the hospital. It won't end well.

He walks in, holding his jacket in his hand. You can tell that he's not ready, or he's scared, of what's about to go down.

He greets but nobody returns his greeting. We are all glaring at him as if he's the one who sent Thobile to the police station.

“What happened?” he asks.

“Mom was arrested by Thobile. You two are dating?” Khosi.

“Your mother was waiting for the right time to tell you. And no, we are not dating. We are in love and

planning a future together. I will go change and go to the police station.”

Khosi nods. I don't know if she accepts this relationship or not. She's way too protective and averse when it comes to people entering lives of those she loves.

“We'll wait for her then,” Ndlalifa says. He's not giving Ngidi a choice; it's either he brings Mam'Phumzile home or he'll have all of them to deal with.

His eyes land on me. He frowns. Didn't he see me this whole time?

“What are you doing here?” he asks.

“I came to talk to you. You are not reachable on your phone,” I say.

“No, you're supposed to be in Mpumazi and waiting to give birth.” He's shouting at me? I didn't ask him to sleep with Thobile and choose someone else to plan his future with.

“There was a snake in my bedroom,” I tell him.

“So what? You mean to tell me that people leave their homes everytime they see snakes? Ndabuko is fighting for his life and all you’re asked to do is stay there and deliver a healthy baby. Is that too much to ask?”

I cannot speak to him when he’s like this. I’ve seen him frustrated like this many times before. I worked with this man for years. We’ll talk once he’s cooled down.

He disappears up the stairs and we all scatter around in relief. I know he’ll sort it out. I’m heading to the kitchen to grab a snack before leaving. Ndlalifa is also making his way to the kitchen.

“Why did you come back?” he asks.

I hope he’s not thinking about shouting at me as well.

“There was a snake,” I say.

“That’s not good enough,” he says.

“And I’ve been having dreams where I speak to



Nhlanzeko.”

He stops and looks at me with his eyebrow raised.

“He wants me to fetch Ndabuko. I don’t even know what it means. While I was in a cab on my way here a bird dropped on the cab and died.”

“That’s strange. Why would he want you to fetch Ndabuko. I mean, he’s there because he’s getting treated.”

“That’s not how he sees it. He says they’re hurting him and he can’t get there to help him. Have you seen him? Ndabuko?”

“Yeah, a couple weeks back. He didn’t look good.”

Yes they’re protecting me from whatever, but it’s been so long, I also need to see him, even if it’s for a few minutes.

“You think Nhlanzeko is wrong?” I ask him.

I get no answer. He’s chewing his bottom lip and popping his finger joints. I don’t think he still remembers what he came to the kitchen for.

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Maqhinga drives me home. I'm not sure how I feel about seeing Dumisani for the first time after the accident. If my mother wasn't here I wouldn't have come, I don't know if I'll ever forget what he did to my mother. He's a sadist. I don't know how one reaches that level of cruelty. And it made him happy when she cried out in pain.

"Are you alright?" Maqhinga asks.

I'm far from being alright, but I nod to put him at ease.

"Thank you for the lift," I say before getting out of the car.

Now being in these premises feels like entering a devil zone. The pain my mom has gone through behind these walls cannot be compared to anything.

I walk in to Bahle pushing him inside the lounge. I know that he has an experiment to run, or a research to make, this is not how he spends his afternoons. And he's too young. Maybe it was selfish of me to tell Andiswa to fire the nurse, my

mom and Bahle will suffer the consequences.

“Ndondo,” Dumisani says, his face brightening up.

The last time I saw him was in church when I was trying to expose him.

“I’m happy to see you, my baby,” he says.

Bahle is standing like a statue behind him.

“Go to your room,” I tell him.

He disappears within a minute.

Now it’s just me and this man. I don’t know where in the house my mother is.

“When are you due? I cannot wait to meet my grandchild.”

“He won’t be your grandchild. You and I are not related.”

His eyes drop. He looks so thin and pale. Karma really doesn’t forget anyone’s address.

“I know we are not. But I’m your half uncle, that could count for something,” he says.

He's my half uncle? What is that supposed to mean?

"You are my half uncle?" I ask.

"I'm not a Sibisi. Who I am still remains a mystery. But that's not important right now, can we talk? I know that you hate me, and you should, there's no excuse for how I treated your mother. I just want us to talk," he says.

"Talk about what? You want to talk now because you cannot walk. What is there to talk about Dumisani?"

"Please tell me what I need to do for you to call me "dad" again," he says in a breaking voice.

This man can act!

"Die," I tell him.

I need to find my mother. She's the reason why I came here.

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BHEKIZITHA "NGONYAMA" NGIDI

It's 10am in the morning. He slept at the hotel because there was no way he was going home without Phumzile. He switched his phone off, they kept calling and asking where their mother was and he couldn't tell them the truth. Thobile took her precious time. He had to personally go and beg her to come to the police station and withdraw the case. Not to mention the money he had to offer her and the expensive drink he bought for the police.

Phumzile is leaving today. They were supposed to spend quality time together. He wanted that more than he's ever wanted anything, but there's so much that's happening.

They've been sitting in the car, in silence, for a moment now. She's either waiting for him to explain Thobile or she's mad at him. Whichever it is, he's scared.

"I'm sorry I couldn't get you out in time," he says.

Silence.

“It’s not what you think between Thobile and I. I don’t know what she told you but her and I never had any relationship,” he says.

“What did you have?” she asks.

This question...how to answer it.

“We had an arrangement. I’m a man Phumzile, I have needs and she was there and okay with it,” he says.

“She is a child, younger than your first child. What kind of a man are you Bhekizitha? What example are you setting for Ndlalifa and Maqhingana? That they must hire vulnerable young girls and take advantage of them?”

“I was NOT taking advantage of her. We had an arrangement and I have never forced myself into her. She was okay with what she got out of it and so was I.”

“What did she get out of it? False hope from a man old enough to be her father?”

He inhales deeply and starts the car.

“Are you hungry?” he asks.

Phumzile folds her arms and stares outside the window. He didn't think she'd become a mother about this whole situation. It's difficult to reason with a mother side of her, she'll never understand because to her Thobile is a vulnerable, innocent young girl. She doesn't know that the “vulnerable young girl” wore short skirts and fishnets to seduce him. She doesn't know how she'd let herself inside his bedroom while he was dressing up and play with her boobs. It wasn't vulnerability, she wanted something and she got it.

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Ndlalifa is cleaning the kitchen while the other two watch TV. Khosi must've left for work. When Snalo sees her aunt walking in she runs to her and gives her a rib-crushing hug.

“I can't believe you spent a night there. Did they give you any blanket?”

“Are you okay?” Maqhinga.

“Are you hungry?” Ndlalifa.

Phumzile smiles weakly. She’s tired, hungry and sleepy. But right now she needs to pack her bags and go back home. Her time here is up.

“I’m fine, children. Who is driving me home? I have a friend’s function to attend later,” she asks.

“Ndlalifa. He’s the less busy one,” – Maqhingana.

“And you’re busy with what?”

“With busy people things.”

Phumzile smiles and shakes her head.

“Or just get me a driver, as long as I get home. Snalo come and help me pack my bags,” she says.

Snalo follows after her. Ndlalifa returns to the kitchen to fix something quick for her.

“Are you okay?” Maqhingana asks.

Ngidi frowns.

“Yes I’m asking you.”

“I just need a nap and then I’ll go see Ndondo,” he



says.

“That’s all?” Maqhinga asks.

He gives him a look- to let it go.

But not Maqhinga.

“What if she leaves you?” he asks.

“Your mother left me. Loneliness doesn’t scare me anymore,” Ngidi says.

“You do look scared to me. She’s been your place of comfort for a short while. You’ve been glowing in the mornings and eager to come home every afternoon. You were lonely for years and hugging yourself every night. Surely you’re used to it, but it doesn’t mean you are okay. You need her. Deep down in your heart you don’t want her to leave. When you come back from Ndabuko, or Ndondo’s pregnancy drama, or Ndlalifa’s stubbornness, or Snalo’s bratty tantrums and my innocence, you need somebody to lean on.”

“Maqhinga I’m not going to apologize for the things that happened in the past.”

“If they affect her, maybe you should. Thobile is/was your sperm-dish and right now you’re not the one dealing with her rejection aftermath. Aunt is too old for this, you know what she’s been through and you were supposed to be different.”

It’s up to his son to decide, Maqhinga has told him the truth, he’s done his father duties.

Ngidi sighs and climbs the stairs.

He walks in the guest bedroom and finds her and Snalo packing clothes.

“MaNgidi can you give us a moment?” he asks.

Snalo puts the dress on bed and leaves the room.

He takes the bag from Phumzile’s hand and puts it away. Then they stand and stare at each other.

“I understand where you’re coming from- I look bad from your position. I’m a typical man who took advantage of a young girl.”

“Bheki I don’t want to do this. I think we are too old to fight.”

He exhales, takes her hands and squeezes them on his chest.

“Do not let the past cloud your judgment. Not every young girl who sleeps with an older man is forced or taken advantage of. Do not let what happened to you mirror everyone’s life. I’m being honest with you, Thobile and I had a sexual-consented relationship. Maybe she expected more from it, I don’t know, but I never gave her any hope. It was just sex, money and nothing else.”

“Couldn’t you find an older woman for your sexual desires though?” Phumzile asks.

Ngidi smiles and lowers his forehead to hers.

“Would you have been okay if it was an older woman?”

“No, but...”

“Then let it go and unpack your bags. I don’t want to be alone. Not at this time.”

“Bheki I promised Gladys that...”

His hands grab her butt. Her eyes pop out in shock.

His huge front presses against her. Okay, he's doing this on purpose, to cut her short.

"Is it Gladys or me?" he asks.

Gosh, Gladys is a good friend. They are in two stokvels together. And last week, just last week, she helped her find a cheap chicken food supplier.

And the one who's supplying her with orgasms is staring at her and waiting for an answer.

"Okay I'll stay a few more days."

[03/14, 10:45] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 60

NDABUKO

He felt the wetness as soon as he opened his eyes. He didn't need to touch his pant to know that again he'd wet the bed. He fell asleep around 3:30pm the previous day, Nxumalo always makes sure that he overdoses him. He just woke up now, eighteen hours later. His body feels like it was ran over by a

truck. His throat is sore, they forced 2L of medicine down his throat.

He scans his eyes around the room. There's a bowl of cold porridge, two lemons and a sugar container on the table. One of the apprentices must be around, waiting for him to wake up. He was hoping to see Ngidi, or Ndondo. Why did they bring him here? Why is Ngidi not saving him from these people? Even if he wanted to escape, his body would fail him before he makes it out of the yard.

“Can I have water, please?” he asks, his voice croaking out and hurting his throat. He's hoping that someone would hear him and come.

And well, Nxumalo is in the room.

“Ndabuko,” – He's carrying a clay-pot, there's a hot steaming medicine inside. Its unsettling smell has filled Ndabuko's nostrils and he's about to puke his intestines out.

“Can I have water?” he asks, covering his mouth with his hand.

Nxumalo picks a jug and goes to the water bucket leaning by the wall. Ndabuko’s eyes are on him, he’s watching as he pours a drop of strange liquid from a tiny bottle that came out of his pocket.

“Drink and eat your breakfast, we have a long day ahead,” he says, handing the jug to Ndabuko.

Ndabuko puts his mouth on the jug and pretends to be drinking. Nxumalo is stirring the hot clay-pot and mumbling to his external head voices.

“When is Baba coming to see me? Did you tell him about Ndondo- that I want to see her?”

He exhales loudly and pours medicine into a cup.

“His life doesn’t revolve around you. And he’s not your father. You don’t have a family, that’s why you are here. That’s why I’m treating you like my own son. I know your pain, I know how it feels like to have nobody looking after you.” He gets up from his knees, picks the bowl of porridge and mixes it with brown sugar. Then he slices the lemon and

squeezes it inside the bowl.

“Ndondo, or whoever it was, is probably out there and gallivanting with other men. You’ve been here for weeks and not even once has she come to check on you,” he says.

Fear strips down Ndabuko’s nerves. He knows Ndondo. He remembers most of their memories together and now he knows exactly who he is. But why Ndondo hasn’t come to check on him? How true is this?

“Does she know that I’m here?” he asks.

Nxumalo chuckles, “You’re not a celebrity but your name is widely out there, you are Ndabuko Mngomezulu. A boy who owns more than ten taxis and a successful company. Everyone who knows you knows about your disappearance.”

“Did you tell Baba that I asked to see her? She was pregnant with my child.” His voice is trembling. There’s a lump rising up to his throat. Ndondo was his family.

“I did. But I don’t think he made it a priority.

Ngonyama is all about money, if you weren't who you are I doubt he would've gotten close to you. Your absence benefits him, business-wise. Were you not all in one route?"

"We were," Ndabuko says with a frown.

He sighs, hopelessly.

"I will make sure that you get well and return back home to make sure that your taxis are given a fair operation at the rank," he says.

"Is there anything you're not telling me Mkhulu?" Ndabuko asks.

"I don't like saying things that I'm not sure of. I'm a spiritual person and I carry my ancestors on my back. I pay attention to what I let in my ears and spit out of my mouth," he says.

"What did you hear Mkhulu?" Ndabuko asks, impatiently. The porridge on his lap is getting cold.

"That all the Mngomezulu taxis were evicted from the rank by the management and chairperson."

Ndabuko inhales sharply and clenches his jaws.



Nxumalo is observing his face through the corners of his eyes. Ngidi has everything in the world. Two sons, both rooted in the taxi business and wealthy. A logistic company and luxurious houses all over Durban. He doesn't deserve the benefits of the Mngomezulu taxis.

"I will make sure that you heal and go back home to fight for your legacy," he says, tapping Ndabuko's shoulder as he digs in his porridge.

"Thank you Mkhulu. I don't know what I would've done without you. It sucks that I had to find out this way, but they were never a family to me by blood, at some point they were going to cast me out."

Nxumalo shakes his head and brushes his shoulder.

"Don't speak like that. This is your home, you can leave the past and start over. Maybe around here, I can speak to the chief about the land and Mashimane, our rank chairperson, about how to get you on the route this side," he says.

"That's so generous of you Mkhulu. I'd appreciate it. Even though I did wet the bed, but I think your

medicine is working. You were right, it will take time but I'm definitely in the right hands," Ndabuko says.

Nxumalo nods with a smile on his face. Mkhulu Gqabaza is opening doors and making sure that the Nxumalo legacy lives on. This is a start of a new journey. Ndabuko's testimony and presence will make so much difference.

"They'll bring warm bathwater and change your bed," he tells Ndabuko before walking out with the whole world sitting on his palm.

Ndabuko puts the bowl away, rests back on the pillow and releases a heavy sigh. All that matters right now is his life. He has to push everything back and stay focused.

The door opens, Magadlela walks in. He's one of Nxumalo's trusted apprentices. He was 22 when he came here to practice to become a sangoma. His future was promising, he had a strong ancestor stronger than any ancestor Nxumalo had ever encountered in his life. His power just depleted and

depleted over the years. It's been over 25 years and he's still here and training to become a sangoma.

He puts a basin of water on the floor and asks Ndabuko to get out of bed. Ndabuko takes off his clothes and shyly goes to the other side of the room, where the bathwater is put. It's just water, a green bar soap and a piece of old cloth as a towel.

He freshens up while Magadlela changes the bed.

"Gadla can you find me a pen and a piece of paper?" he asks.

"For what?" Magadlela raises his brows.

"Mkhulu is treating me and I'll be better soon. A lot of things are about to change, I have a lot of planning to do and I'm the type that put thoughts on the paper," he says.

There's a smile on Magadlela's face.

"This is what I want to hear. You are so positive and full of hope," he says.

Ndabuko smiles, weakly.

"I trust Mkhulu, you guys have become more than

healers to me. You should've given up on me a long time ago. I mean, at times I wanted to kill anyone who came near me. I'm sure I'm the most difficult patient you have ever met.”

“Not really, we've had worst cases to deal with in the past,” Magadlela says with a chuckle and walks out.

Ndabuko wraps a sarong around his waist. It's the only thing he can cover up with because his clothes are wet and stinking. He takes the cup of medicine waiting for him on top of the table and mixes it with his dirty bathwater.

Magadlela walks in shortly after he lied on bed. He's carrying a pen and a piece of paper. Ndabuko nods gratefully and flashes a brief smile as Magadlela collects a jug of water and the medicine cup.

He scribbles down a few words, tears out a small piece of paper and squashes it behind his waist. Then he lies on his stomach and writes down his plans. He's moving to Ndwedwe, building a house

next to the Nxumalo homestead and if it'd possible, sell a few taxis and bring the rest this side.

“What are you writing?” Someone roars from the door.

He lifts his eyes to Nxumalo. He smiles and turns to lie on his back.

“I was noting down my plans before the medicine kicks in,” he says.

“What plans? This is not school, we don't write here. Give that paper to me!” He grabs the paper from his hand aggressively and runs his eyes over it.

A few seconds pass, his face is melting and breaking into a cheerful smile.

“Oh, I forget that you're the educated type. Let me leave you to your thing, Ngonyama called, he said he's on his way here.”

Ndabuko's face transforms into hostility.

“To do what here?” he asks.

“To check on you, I guess.” Nxumalo shrugs his shoulders.

Ndabuko breathes in and out to collect himself.

“Okay, let him come,” he says.

Nxumalo widens his eyes, staring at him.

“You sound a bit worked up, yet calm?” he enquires.

“Mkhulu please stay out of it. This one is between him and I. And I will draw the line today. After today please make sure that he never sets his foot here again, unless if it’s not about me,” Ndabuko says.

“I’ll always respect your decisions.”

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**BHEKIZITHA “NGONYAMA” NGIDI**

A black Hyundai Creta with Durban registration parks below the Nxumalo yard. Ngonyama steps out in his scotch shirt, formal black pant and shiny monk strap shoes. Today it’s not Magadlela who

welcomes him inside the homestead, Nxumalo personally walks him in.

“It’s good that you are here to see for yourself,” he says while shaking Ngidi’s hand.

“Did something happen?” Ngidi asks. He’s always expecting something regarding Ndabuko’s situation.

“Yes. He’s been co-operating the last couple of days and it’s working in his favour. Your boy is recovering Ngonyama,” he says.

It’s disbelief mixed with relief that wash over Ngidi.

“Is he awake?” he asks.

“You’re welcome to go and check for yourself,” Nxumalo says with a grin spreading out on his face.

Ngidi doesn’t even bother to greet the people queued outside one of the rondavel, he heads to the one that’s keeping Ndabuko with Nxumalo on his heel.

He’s on his feet as if he was expecting a guest. He still looks thin and pale, but today he looks like he

has some strength in him. And he looks sane.

“Ndabuko!” Ngidi walks to him, grabs his arms and looks all over him. Then he pulls him to his chest and tightens his arms around him.

“You are okay? My boy, finally!”

Ndabuko’s hand grabs his shirt and then pushes him back.

“What do you want?” he asks.

“Ndabuko, it’s me. I’m so happy to see you looking better. You don’t know how worried I’ve been.”

“You’re not my father. You’re not my family. You’re nothing to me. Tell why are you here. What do you want?” Ndabuko asks.

This is all confusing for Ngidi. Nxumalo said he was okay.

“I know that I didn’t birth you, but that doesn’t change that you’re a son to me. Blood or no blood, you’re my third son,” he says.

“I’m not your third son, I’m my parents’ second son and they’re dead. I have no family. Don’t pretend to



care because I know you don't. The only thing you care about is my money, right? Look Ngonyama, I'm grateful that in your head you raised me up and helped me become who I am now. But it ends now, I don't want my taxis under your management and I don't want you anywhere near Bantwana Holdings. Just stay out of my business."

"Okay I understand that most things don't make sense to you at the moment. We'll work it out. Focus on getting better for now. I'm proud of you, I really am."

Ndabuko sighs, puts his hands over his head and turns around in frustration.

"I'm better, Mkhulu is making sure of that. I need you to fuçk off, go to those you share blood with and be a father to them. Maybe attend a few parenting classes and learn how to become a good father. I'm not your son, I never was. You don't have a son who went to university and obtained a degree, do you? Get out of my face." He lifts his eyes to Nxumalo who's standing by the door with a shocked face.

“Mkhulu get this dog out of here and make sure he never comes near me again. Had he not come and ruined my good life I wouldn’t be here today. It’s all because of him,” he says.

Ngidi turns to Nxumalo with shock, hurt and disappointment clouding his face.

“I’m sorry Hlomuka but you have to leave if that’s what he wants,” Nxumalo says.

No, no, no! This can’t be happening.

“Ndabuko you don’t mean all these things,” Ngidi says, looking at him, his eyes begging for mercy. What breaks him even more is that the Ndabuko who’s speaking is the one he knows. It’s the sane Ndabuko.

Ndabuko’s lip curls up in disgust.

“Don’t I? Leave Bhekizitha Ngidi.”

Nxumalo taps on Ngidi’s shoulder and points him to the door.

“Leave, please respect him,” he says.

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It's after dinner, Snalo left with Maqhinga. They said they're going to a late night prayer- Maqhinga's words, but they left in fancy clothes and talked about 'sloshing', so Phumzile knows that they are out and partying. Bheki is still not home, so she is all alone in this house. It's big and uncomfortable to be in alone, given that there's nothing called a neighbor in these kinds of places, everyone is living their lives in isolation.

She decides to do ironing while waiting for Bheki to come home. Thobile hasn't come to work since the day of a fight and Phumzile hasn't bothered to ask whether she still works here or not. As much as she doesn't want to be jealous because of her age- she's too old, but there's a feeling deep inside her heart that doesn't want Thobile anywhere near Bheki or this house.

It's getting late. She folds all the clothes and leaves

them to be packed in the morning. She's been hesitant about calling to find out where Bheki is and when he'll be home because she knows how much he has on his plate. Staying was the best decision she's ever made.

Bheki needs him here.

She calls and the phone rings not so far away. She opens the bedroom door and she is surprised by a man lying in bed with his shoes and everything on.

"I didn't hear you driving in," she says, walking in and closing the door behind her.

She takes her shoes off and climbs on bed to lie next to him.

"How was your journey?" she asks.

He doesn't say anything. His hand is still over his face. He keeps releasing heavy breaths.

"Bheki you're scaring me. What is going on?"

"I also don't know Phumzile. I don't know what is going on."

Okay, this is confusing and scary. The last time Bheki was like this was when Snakho passed on.

Does this mean...? No.

“Is Ndabuko alive?” she asks.

“He’s alive. But he hates me.”

That’s... unexpected. Ndabuko and Ngidi and the hate word between them?

“Why do you say that?” she asks.

“Because he told me. He said I’m not his father,” he says.

She sighs and takes his hand. It’s trembling, that’s how emotional he is.

“Ndabuko is not well, you know that very well. He’s not in a good mental space, why are you believing him?”

“He meant it, Phumzile. The way he looked at me when he talked, and the things he said to me. I know that I’m not perfect as a parent, I’m a human and I’m bound to make mistakes. But I love Ndabuko like I love my own sons. I promised

Nhlanzeko and he knows this in his grave, I'll always look out for Ndabuko.”

“He was not in his senses. He didn't mean it Bheki.”

He shakes his head. There's a vein throbbing across his forehead.

“He said I'm nothing to him, that I don't have a son who has a degree and I never meant anything to him.”

Phumzile sighs, “You know him better than me, yet I know that he'll never flaunt his education or status to anyone. He's never done that before. You know how humble and respectful that boy is. Go and take a bath, I'll warm your food.” She brushes the side of his face and climbs out of bed and leaves the bedroom. He has to get over this. Yes, his words may have hurt him, but more than anyone, he knows Ndabuko better. As long as he says things that don't match up to the Ndabuko they all know, he's still not okay.

She warms his food and puts a plate on the tray.

Because he's stressed out, it's fair to get him one beer to go with his food.

She returns back to the bedroom with his food. He left his shirt on bed and shoes scattered on the floor. Men!

She removes socks out of the shoes and takes them to the closet. She doesn't want to disturb him, she'll put clothes in the basket once he's done in the bathroom.

She folds the shirt and feels something in the pocket. It's a squashed piece of paper. She can't crucify him because she also keeps slips in her pockets and used airtimes. But this is none of those, it's a handwritten paper.

**\*\*I'M SCARED BABA! PLEASE COME AND SAVE ME AS SOON AS YOU CAN.\*\***

She rushes to the bathroom with the paper in her hand. It could've been any of the kids and maybe Bheki didn't even read what it said.

He's just stepping out of the shower, dripping wet in his birthday suit.

"What is this?" Phumzile asks.

Ngidi frowns and takes a towel to wipe his hand.

"It was in your shirt, inside the pocket," Phumzile says.

"I don't put things in my shirt pockets." He takes the paper with a frown on his face and reads. The frown grows.

"This is Ndabuko's handwriting," he says.

Now this is confusing. He said all those things to him and then slipped a note in his pocket?

"He wants to be saved from what?" Phumzile asks.

Silence.

He's reading the note over and over again.

His face is turning even darker.

"Bheki what's going on?" Phumzile asks.

She's now panicking.



“Get me my clothes and my jacket,” he says.

“Bheki? Where are you going? What is happening?”

“I don’t know if it’s Magadlela or Nxumalo or his wife, but someone’s ass is getting kicked tonight, there in Ndwedwe.”

Okay...someone needs calm down here.

“My clothes Phumzile,” he says.

[03/14, 10:46] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 61

It’s after midnight, everyone has gone to sleep except for Magadlela who’s up for his own spiritual reasons and singing in the yard. A white quantum pulls up below the yard. Several voices are heard talking and whatever they’re saying is clearly not good. It’s about guns, bullets and knives. They’re planning something.

Magadlela’s first instinct tells him to run because clearly these people are here to attack. But then

again he remembers that Mkhulu's life is more important than his. He picks a machete and walks towards the voices, slowly, without making a sound.

“Magadlela why are you walking as if you have sores under your feet? Is everything okay?”

Wait, he knows this voice! What the hell is Ngidi doing here with a quantum full of people who talk about guns and all that stuff?

“Ngonyama visitors are not allowed here at this time,” he says, turning around and standing up straight with some relief.

“Who said I'm visiting? And I'm not Ngonyama to you, angiqanjwanga unyoko.” (I wasn't named by your mother)

“What is going on?” He's now confused. Why does it sound like Ngidi is here for war?

“You'll tell me Magadlela,” Ngidi says and turns to men smoking next to the quantum. “Take this one Dladla and make sure he doesn't go anywhere before we come back.”

Take him for what? Why are they...no, no, no!

“Don’t hold me like this,” he says to the man who just grabbed his arms and pulled him as if he’s pulling a stubborn goat to the altar.

The man doesn’t say anything, he just pushes him inside the quantum by force and gets in after him.

“What did I do?” he asks, fear riding down his nerves. He hasn’t done anything wrong to anyone. He hardly goes anywhere, he stays here and does chores throughout his days. Even to his home, he hasn’t been there in over two decades. He was 22 when he came here, a year ago Nxumalo’s wife said he was turning 49.

Apprentices are not allowed to return home before they have finished their practicing course. His mother died two years after he came here, he wasn’t allowed to go to the funeral but he mourned for her. Over the years his brothers have stopped coming to check on him. He doesn’t know if they have children, or anything about their lives. He had a girlfriend before coming here, Nonhlanhla

Ngobese. They had something good going on, but sadly he couldn't give her his all, he had to divide himself between two worlds.

She had asked to see him, she said it was important. He knew why she wanted to see him, or he suspected. She was going to cut things off, it was long overdue and he'd seen it coming. Nobody understood him, himself included, he also didn't understand himself. There were times when he didn't want anyone around him, not even Nonhlanhla.

His calling came at night, the day before he was going to see Nonhlanhla. He walked a 3-day journey by foot, coming here to Nxumalo, the man who'd been called to train him become what his ancestors wanted.

His brother told him that Nonhlanhla got married a year after he left. She married someone from Khangelani, her village. It's either she was with that

Mbatha man during their relationship or she moved on too fast. One thing that bothers him is that his brother said Nonhlanhla had a child, eight months after he left, and her husband paid lobola for that child to make her his by tradition.

His brother said, with no doubt, that the child was his because she looked exactly like their mother.

He looks forward to the day he finally finish his course and go out to find Nonhlanhla. She doesn't owe him much and he has no entitlements, but he deserves to know his child. He wasn't the best boyfriend and his family blamed her for everything wrong that happened in his life, but he deserves to know his offspring.

The man is eating an apple, he's cutting it with a pocket knife and that alone is delivering a message to Magadlela. He's dying today. He won't ever see his child with his eyes. He could pray and call his ancestors, especially Gog' Ngoneni, she was his

strongest ancestor and she looked out for him. But over the years he's lost connection with them, that's why he's here, Nxumalo is still trying to revive his gift.

"I didn't do anything wrong," he tells the man. It's like talking to a brick wall. Or maybe it's his first time eating an apple, his focus on it is too much.

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\*\*\*INSIDE THE NXUMALO HOMESTEAD\*\*\*

Nxumalo opens the door to Ngidi standing with several men behind him. He rubs his eyes annoyed, his wife is sitting up on bed with her eyes glued to the door. She's waiting to hear who is disturbing their sleep at this time.

"Ngonyama?" Nxumalo says with a frown. After what happened, he didn't expect to see Ngidi anytime soon.

"Ngaqanjwa unyoko?" Ngidi asks. (Was I named by

your mother)

Ngidi and everybody knows that you don't disrespect inyanga like this.

“Are you crazy like your son now? You're here to get treatment?” he asks, anger getting the better of him.

“You're not shaped nicely Nxumalo, get dressed and take me to my son. One of them will keep your wife company while you're gone,” Ngidi says.

Now it dawns to Nxumalo that something is up. This Ngonyama is not the trustful, desperate man who's been willing to do anything and everything to have his rank-son saved. He brought his unruly taxi rank persona.

“Whatever it is that you want to discuss you can come back in the morning. And you know that you can't see Ndabuko, he told you that he never wants to see you again,” he says.

Ngidi is getting annoyed; he keeps rubbing his nose and sniffing.

“Maybe your wife doesn't tell you, you're not shaped

nicely Mkhathwa. And these boys I'm with are too young to be traumatized by your thin thighs. Get dressed, be decent, and then come talk to me like a man.”

The men behind him are stepping closer. Their silence is gruesome and loud. Nxumalo can sense the dark aura surrounding them. He's dealt with people like them before. They don't come at night to attack him, they come to be cleansed and strengthened.

He walks back inside the house with his thudding heart kept in check. His wife is sitting in a petticoat and staring at him, awaiting an explanation.

“What does he want?” she asks.

Nxumalo grabs his trouser and puts it on. Clearly Ngidi didn't take Ndabuko's rejection well, he's now here to fight. He wasn't ready for this, it's such a desperate move from Ngidi. But he knows that he has Ndabuko in his corner. He'll tell him, in front of his thugs this time, that he's not his son.



“I will deal with it. Just stay here, I’ll tell Magadlela to come and guard you,” he tells his wife and breaks a dry root he pulls behind the bed and puts the piece under his tongue.

“Baba, mustn’t I scream for help?” the wife asks. She’s about to release this hot pee right here on bed.

“And wake up my ancestors? Break this and slip it under your tongue. Nothing is going to happen,” he says, making his way to the door while zipping up his jacket.

He walks out and finds that there’s an additional presence. It’s Mamba, his apprentice. One of Ngidi’s men is holding him by neck.

“What should we be aware of?” he asks.

Mamba mustn’t dare open his mouth! The outside light isn’t bright enough but surely Mamba sees his dead glare and he gets the message.

But it’s a dead glare vs a gun massage on his back. Mamba has to choose which one he fears the most.

“Open his mouth, he has something under his tongue,” he blurts out.

He just sold him out? This man eats his food, stays in his house and take instructions from him for a living.

“Yeyi wena mfazi..” Before he can hurl insults at Mamba, a man has pushed him to the wall and grabbed his throat.

“Say Aaah,” the man instructs.

He keeps his mouth shut. There’s a reason why he slipped a piece of root under his tongue. It’s for his protection, Mamba The Idiot wasn’t supposed to say anything.

Ngidi steps closer. He turns on the flashlight in his phone and directs it to Nxumalo’s face.

“You’re not a child Nxumalo, we are not going to beg you to open your mouth. Say Aaah, damnit!” Ngidi says impatiently.

Nxumalo keeps his mouth shut. Well, until a slide of

the gun massages his cheek. He opens his mouth widely as if he's opening up for a dentist.

Ngidi pulls the piece under his tongue and throws it down on the ground and presses it with his shoe.

"Anything else?" They ask Mamba, still pressing Nxumalo against the wall.

"The band around his arm, that's all, I swear," Mamba says.

Nxumalo is stripped out of everything that makes him untouchable, all because of Mamba's betrayal. Has he forgotten what Nxumalo does to those who betray him?

They pull both him and Mamba to Ndabuko's rondavel. Hopefully the medicine didn't make him lose his consciousness, he needs to wake up and tell these people that he has put his trust in Mkhulu, he's safe here in his new family.

It's locked outside. Ngidi turns his head to Nxumalo.

"You lock him inside?" he asks.

“Yes,” Nxumalo says.

A fist lands on his cheek. This could've been the reason why he wet the bed. He's sick, there's no bathroom inside and they lock him inside throughout the night.

“Wena awungazi, ungizwa ngendaba njebuntombi bomfazi wakho,” Ngidi says. (You don't know me, you only hear about me like you hear about your wife's virginity) He aggressively pushes Nxumalo to the front so that he unlocks the door.

They walk in and turn the light on. Ndabuko is fast asleep in bed. There's a plate of dry samp that only a chicken could find appetizing, and a big jug of strong medicine next to it.

Ngidi walks to the bed and shakes his body.

“Ndabuko, wake up,” he says.

It takes a moment for Ndabuko to move. Ngidi keeps shaking him and calling his name until he finally opens his eyes.

“It’s me,” Ngidi says.

Ndabuko seems to be confused. He’s looking around, at everyone with a frown on his face.

Nxumalo could use a bowl of popcorn right now. Just to watch it all going down again.

“Son, he forced his way in. I tried to stop him but he didn’t listen,” he explains to Ndabuko and intentionally sniffs out blood to show him that Ngidi really forced his way in.

“I didn’t think you’d come,” Ndabuko says to Ngidi.

“Neither did I,” Nxumalo says with a sigh. Ngidi is exhausting, he’s acting like a teenage boy who got dumped before Valentine’s day.

“Do you think you’d be able to walk to the end of the yard?” Ngidi asks.

“I’m not sure I can make it that far,” Ndabuko says.

Now Nxumalo is a bit confused. Why are they talking like this? Why is Ndabuko even talking to this man?

“Sizwe take that one and go find Ndabuko’s

clothes,” Ngidi instructs and one of his men walks out pulling Mamba behind him.

He helps Ndabuko up.

“There’s a quantum outside, I’ll be with you shortly.” He turns to his men and asks one of them to carry Ndabuko to the car.

“Ndabuko you can’t leave. We have...you have plans. And you still need to get better,” Nxumalo says with his eyes widened. This can’t be happening!

“Put him in the back seat,” Ngidi instructs.

Nxumalo is not going to stand and watch them kidnapping his Ndabuko. He turns to follow them but Ngidi blocks his way with his foot, causing him to trip and fall.

He yells; “Ndabuko think this through. He’s going to kill you!”

The door closes, they have taken him away. He wants to run after them but Ngidi’s heavy foot is

pressed behind his neck.

Mamba is brought back, accompanied by the same Sizwe man. Nxumalo is still fighting to escape Ngidi's foot with no success. His breath is running out, so is his crying voice.

“What's your name?” Ngidi asks Mamba.

“Mamba,” he says.

“Your mother carried you for 9 months and went through labor pains only to name you after a snake?”

Sizwe breaks into an ear-breaking laughter. He's loving this.

“Listen Mamba, I don't have much time. Get every medicine that was used to treat Ndabuko and any medicine that's ready for use. I don't care what it's for, you have 5 minutes to do so. Sizwe will go with you to make sure that you don't leave anything behind. Don't forget razors,” Ngidi says.

Sizwe doesn't waste a second, he pulls Mamba out

of the door.

Nxumalo stops breathing and shuts his eyes. Ngidi doesn't remove his foot. Nxumalo's toes curl up, his body shakes and his eyes roll back.

Still, Ngidi doesn't remove his foot.

“You're not a good actor Nxumalo. When you want me to remove my foot you'll say 'tshilo tshilo sengivuthiwe' and I'll help you to bed,” he says.

Nxumalo breathes out enormously and opens his eyes. He mumbles something under his breath.

“I'm old Nxumalo, I cannot hear you if you speak like a horny woman,” Ngidi says.

“I said tshilo tshilo sengivuthiwe,” Nxumalo says a bit louder.

The man sitting on top of the table chokes down a laugh. Only then Ngidi removes his foot and lifts him up and pulls him to bed.

“You're not a co-operative patient so I'll tie you up,” Ngidi says and takes the rope they used to tie Ndabuko with and ties him up.



Mamba and Sizwe are bringing different buckets and tied black plastic bags. They are coming in and out, collecting everything. The last parcel to be brought is Nxumalo's wife.

He regains strength within a second; he's fighting to break the ropes and gets to his wife.

"Behave. Your wife and Mamba there will mix all the medicines for you," Ngidi says and takes a packet of razors.

He doesn't care where he's slitting Nxumalo's flesh, it's anywhere he can insert his razor on.

"Don't do it on my face, people will think I'm a Mpondo," Nxumalo begs.

Ngidi goes straight to face.

"Do you know how smart those people are? Why would anyone mistake you for them? You and your quarter brain!"

He opens one muthi packet that Sizwe hands to him.

"Not that one!" Nxumalo's wife screams out in panic.

Ngidi stops, “Why?”

“It’s for attracting women,” she says.

“Did you tell him not to give my son medicines that made him sick or you’re only being opinionated today?” Ngidi asks.

Silence.

He inserts muthi in Nxumalo’s bleeding cuts. The wife has her hands over her head, she’s wailing out as Ngidi continues to insert muthi all over her husband.

“God, they’ll take my husband!”

Sizwe is about to burst his stomach with laughter. He’s enjoying each and every moment.

Different powders are put in Nxumalo’s body regardless of what they’re used for.

“May him who heals be healed too,” Sizwe says as he passes a mixture of all medicines to Ngidi.

“Say Aaah,” Ngidi instructs.

Nxumalo presses his lips tightly together. He needs

a little motivation and Sizwe is more than willing to remind him why he should obey.

His wife screams at the sight of a gun. It turns to her face and she quickly pulls herself together.

“Tell your husband to open his mouth,” he tells the wife.

She walks towards the bed with a soaked petticoat.

“Please Mkhathwa say Aaah,” she begs.

Again, Sizwe is rolling on the floor with laughter.

Eventually Nxumalo opens his mouth, Ngidi pours the medicine down his throat.

“We can pay back all your money, please. My husband may not recover from this, some of these things are only used under certain instructions,” the wife begs.

“Don’t you have a muthi to attract bad spirits? Attract, not chase,” Sizwe asks.

“Huh?” Ngidi is confused as well.

It looks like Nxumalo has passed out. His muthis

must be powerful.

“Nyokanyoka?” Sizwe turns to Mamba.

“No,” Mamba says.

“Don’t lie to me, I can motivate you to speak the truth.”

Deep sigh!

“I swear, son. We don’t have that kind of medicine, it has never been requested before.”

“Then give me woza-woza for women. I think Nxumalo’s wife here deserves some attention on the streets.”

The wife’s eyes bulge out.

“I’m married,” she says.

Sizwe chuckles, “And bored. You can’t be eating the same meat everyday.”

“I’m happy with my husband,” she insists.

“Come on, give my brothers a chance to this thickness.”

Ngidi gives him a warning glare. They're not here to lust over old women's thickness.

Time is ticking and they have to put Ndabuko's health first. Nxumalo is still unconscious in bed. They throw away the remaining medicine and leave the wife crying on the floor.

"I'm coming back for my money in a few days," Ngidi says. "If he doesn't have it, he'll pay with your life. I cannot kill a nyanga, but I can kill you. And him, and everyone else in this yard." He's pointing at Mamba.

"You don't dare me! You do a little background check before scamming me at the expense of my son's health."

He's done, for now. They're taking Magadlela with them, he'll say everything they did to Ndabuko and only comes back once he has fully recovered.

He is sitting behind the driver, sweating and silently praying to his ancestors for rescue.

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\*\*\*THE NEXT MORNING\*\*\*

Maqhingá's car drives in just after Ndlalifa's. They both don't know what's going on. Why is Ngidi even here? They grew up here, in Waterways, but they haven't been here in years. Ngidi refused to sell or rent out the house. It stores all their childhood memories and those of their mother.

"Do you have any idea why we are here so early in the morning?" Maqhingá asks.

"No, he only said it's urgent," Ndlalifa says.

They make their way inside the house. It's quiet and empty as it's always been after their mother's disappearance.

"Hlomuka, we are here," Ndlalifa yells.

He opens the fridge, hoping to find a beer or something, but there's only a bottle of water and leftovers.

Ngidi appears, he's in creased shirt as if he spent a night in a prison cell. Did he even sleep?

"What's going on?" Ndlalifa asks.

"Ndabuko is here. I fetched him."

"He has recovered?" Maqhingana asks.

They didn't expect this at all.

"No, that's why you are both here. I need to find a traditional healer who can undo everything that Nxumalo did to him. But you'll have to make sure it's someone legit."

Ndlalifa frowns, "So Nhlanzeko was right?"

"I'm afraid so. He's never stopped looking out for him, even though he does things in his strange ways."

"Did you kill Nxumalo?" Ndlalifa.

"No, I cannot kill a nyanga, but I'll make sure that his life is like a living hell," Ngidi says. "Also, there's a man here, one of his ass-lickers. I brought him here

to make sure that the new healer will know what he's dealing with.”

“What if he gives us the wrong information?”

Ndlalifa asks.

“He has a daughter and he's never met her. I'll find her first, he'll give me Ndabuko and I'll give him his daughter. If Ndabuko dies, so will his daughter.”

[03/14, 10:47] : SEASON FINALE

## Chapter 62

Ndabuko has woken up. He doesn't look like he was fed at all. He's two sizes down, with dry lips and sunken eyes. Self-blame won't take them anywhere now, they have to find a healer and they have to find him fast.

“I need to make a phone call,” Maqhingana says. He gets off bed and walks out of the bedroom.

He shouldn't have trusted Nxumalo. He should've made this call from the onset. Ndabuko would've been better by now, that's without any doubt.



“I thought you’d call earlier. I even woke up to charge my phone at my brother’s house. I don’t know what happened to our electricity here, my brother is yet to come and fix it,” he says before Maqhinga even greet.

But he’s learnt that everything is random and strange with this man. He’s beyond human understanding.

“Good morning Mthembu,” he says.

“Hi Maqhinga. You’re still in Durban?”

“Ummm...yes,” Maqhinga.

“Alright, I’ll go to the office, something needs my attention urgently. I’ll be back by the time you all get here.”

Okay...he knows. Why is Maqhinga even surprised? He was also expecting him when he went there.

“Just so you know, there’s someone else. He wasn’t brought here on his will, it’s complicated but I’ll explain when we get there,” he says.

“The other one needs me more than the other one.

See you when you get here.”

Call ended...

Which other one and which other one? As far as Maqhinga knows only Ndabuko needs help here.

He walks back inside the bedroom and all eyes go to him. At this point everyone is desperate.

Ndabuko asked them not to let Ndongdo see him in the condition he's in. Like any man, he doesn't wish to be seen by his woman looking this weak. And more than anyone, Ngidi is drowning in guilt. He just put all his trust on Nxumalo, he never questioned him even when he saw Ndabuko getting worse by day.

He never spent a day or two with him because he put business before his life. He focused on making sure that the business didn't slack in Ndabuko's absence. Even when Nxumalo indirectly demanded more money, he paid it with no eyebrows raised. He depended on money to solve everything, a mistake most people make when they have lot of money.

“We have to go to Mpofana. Ngcwethi is expecting us,” Maqhingana announces.

“You talked to Ngcwethi Mthembu?” Ndlalifa asks.

“I have his number, he helped me, remember? We don’t have much time, let’s get going.” He dashes to the bathroom to pack toiletries for Ndabuko while Ndlalifa helps him get out of bed.

“What are we going to do with him?” Ndlalifa asks Ngidi, pointing at Magadlela curled up at the corner of the room. Is it possible for a man to keep crying like this? They had to keep promising him a bullet in his testicle before he shut up. But it wouldn’t take time before he start crying again.

“He’s coming with us,” Maqhingana says, walking in and grabbing the Nike bag on bed.

“Ngcwethi’s instruction,” he tells them before they even ask.

“I’m not staying behind. Not this time, Ndlalifa has to go back and take care of things at home,” Ngidi says.

“There’s no need Baba, if Ngcwethi was a scam he wouldn’t have let me in his home. I had no money, no clothes, no food, nothing. But he welcomed me and gave me the help I needed. He won’t harm Ndabuko in anyway, I promise you,” Maqhinganga says.

It will take a lot for Ngidi to let Ndabuko out of his sight and trust a stranger with his life. What if it happens again? He won’t make it the second time.

“Baba we are talking about Ngcwethi Mthembu here, not just a random person. Go back home, Aunt must be wondering where you are,” Ndlalifa says.

“Ndlalifa I made that mistake once, I’m not...”

Maqhinganga sighs, “I will be there Baba, I’ll stay with him until he recovers. I promise, I will bring him home alive.”

“If anything happens Maqhinganga, I swear I’m going to blow out that Mthembu’s brain and feed it to you.”

“As long as you don’t boil it, I like my brain fried,” Maqhinganga says.

Ngidi clicks his tongue and takes his phone and car

keys from the bed.

“Why are you sitting there wena? Must we wait for you while you cry?” he asks Magadlela.

He quickly gets up and ties the rope that’s fastening his trouser on behalf of a belt.

“Look at you, looking like a nyaope man but you say you have a gift. Wait here, I’ll get you decent clothes,” Ngidi says, shaking his head.

He had a suitcase of old clothes stashed somewhere here. He hates this man, yes, but he can’t let him go all the way to Mpofana looking like this.

Ndlalifa has taken Ndabuko and left. Ngidi disappeared to the garage to find clothes for Magadlela.

For now it’s just the two of them.

“So, were you allowed to have girlfriends there?” Maqhinga asks Magadlela.

“No,” his response is quick and accompanied by a

head shake.

“You were there for 25 years. You mean in those years you’ve never had num-num? Or you had alternatives?” Maqhinga.

“What is num-num? If you mean sexual intercourse, then no.”

Maqhinga exclaims in shock. It sounds really interesting, like a prison life. Or maybe not, they fuck each other in prisons, and sometimes guards.

“You mean your sac is full of 2010 sperms and beyond?”

Magadlela doesn’t say anything. How do you answer such question? And this boy is half his age.

“So your master had the right to sex and you didn’t? It just baffles me, how do you even go a year without having sex? People do that?”

Ngidi is walking in with shirts and trousers stacked over his arm.

“Voets ek wena, take the bags to the car and stop asking rubbish.”

Maqhinga almost jump up in shock. He quickly takes the bag and rushes out.

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NDONDO

I don't know why I have a bad feeling about Ngidi's last call. I mean, if something bad had happened he would've told me right away. But he just said he's on his way and I should expect him around 11h00.

“Andiswa can you get me a packet of chips, I'm feeling a bit stressed.”

I can see her rolling her eyes. Our relationship is not where it used to be, we had a fallout after the wheelchair argument. I'm still not buying Dumisani an expensive wheelchair, but I'm paying all his medical expenses and that includes a nurse. I had to hire her for my mother's and brother's sake.

“Why are you rolling your eyes?” I ask her.

“Because you're slaving me around and I didn't

make you pregnant,” she says.

“Asking you to get me a packet of chips from the kitchen is slaving you?” I ask.

She drags her sandals and walks away singing. Mom always talks to her about this, singing loud in the middle of a serious argument is pure disrespect.

I get off the couch and follow after her.

“I’m going to break your sticky legs if you give me an attitude, wena nopopi.” I’m beside myself with anger.

She looks at me, puts her hands on her hips and raises her eyebrows.

“I’m sure you can, hippopotamus.”

Did she just call me a hippopotamus? She manages to escape the apple I throw at her. I don’t know when Hloni ran in, I just see her getting between us and pulling Andiswa back.

“Seriously, have you seen a pregnant woman fighting before? Are you trying to kill this baby?”



She's staring at me with anger and disappointment written all over her.

Andiswa folds her arms, "Yeah, ask her. I was also surprised, I just saw a balloon jumping at me."

Now she's calling me a balloon? I cannot stop the tears. I've never been so disrespected and ashamed by a person before.

"Geez, Andiswa go to your room," Hloni says and asks me to go sit on the couch while she prepares me a snack.

I want a fighting match with Andiswa after I've given birth. I'm not going to be a matured one about this!

I'm feeling a little better after eating the burger and chips. I go to the bathroom and wash my face. I don't want to look like a cry baby to Ngidi. I'm strong, I don't let emotions get the better of me. I apply some red lipstick and wear my curly hair.

"Wow, boss-lady, you look hot," Hloni says from the

door.

“I’m shaming the devil,” I say and we both laugh.

“By the way, a car just pulled up. I think it’s him,” she says.

Lord, this girl!

“And you’re here to hide? Couldn’t you let him in first? Ngidi doesn’t bite, Hloniphile.” This girl is unbelievable! You’d swear Ngidi once pointed a gun at her and asked her to raise Nelson Mandela from the grave.

I let her be and leave to attend to my guest.

I don’t buy beer. Ndabuko used to bring his own when coming here. I don’t know what to offer this man. I’m very certain that he won’t drink Andiswa’s red wine. I remember that he drank Glen tea, hopefully I have a packet.

I have to do everything by myself. Rinsing cups, filling sugar container, boiling water and everything. My breath is running out, my back is starting to

ache.

I put the tray on the coffee-table and sit on the opposite couch and release a huge breath.

“I thought you had a helper.”

Yes I do, she’s hiding in my bedroom because she’s scared of you.

“She’s busy, the other one had an emergency at home,” I say.

“I see. And you, how are you doing?” he asks.

“I don’t know, it’s like living in fear and expecting anything to happen.”

He nods and sips his tea until it finishes. I don’t know if he’s scared to tell me whatever he came to say or it’s just not that important.

He finally puts down the cup and clears his throat.

“I came here to update you about Ndabuko’s condition,” he says.

My heart beat is accelerating. I wait as he adjusts

his wrist-watch.

“We have taken him to a healer in Mpofana,” he says.

“Why? What happened to Nxumalo?” I’m confused.

He exhales loudly, “The dream you had was a warning. I wish I had taken Nhlanzeko seriously. Nxumalo was only making money. He made him sick intentionally, so that I could keep paying him. He’s not good but we got there in time.”

I’m on my feet. I want to yell and punch someone.

“Didn’t you know this Nxumalo person?” I ask.

“I did. He took advantage of the situation and I’m going to make him pay,” he says.

“So where is he now? How well do you know this new healer?”

“Maqhinga knows him. He’s good.”

TF! He trusts Maqhinga out of all people.

“I need to go there and be by his side.”

“MaSibisi you cannot go there. It’s too risky for you

to...”

Gosh, he knows me, we worked together for years. I’m not going to back down.

“Baba whether you approve or not, I’m going there. I was kept away from him, and look where we are today. I’m not taking that risk, I’m not putting my trust on your healers again.”

“He doesn’t want you to see him like that,” he says.

“I love him unconditionally. The last thing I care about right now is how he looks, I just want to be by his side, that’s all.” Is that too much to ask? They’ve been keeping me away from him all this time. I couldn’t even speak to him over the phone.

How is that fair? Where do they think I get my strength from?

“How is your father?” he asks.

I wipe the tears, “I don’t know..I’m going to pack my bags and call someone who’ll drive me there.”

He’s feeling sorry for me, not because he understands how I feel, he’s just reacting as a man

towards a woman's tears.

“Who's going there with you? You know that it's not safe for you to travel alone,” he asks.

“Who could come with me? Khosi is busy at work, Snalo went to...” Tears choke me, I can't speak. I feel strong arms wrapping around me and I break down on his chest.

“I'll organize someone who can come with you and call Maqhinga to let him know that you're coming there,” he says.

I can tell from his voice that this wasn't an option. He has no choice but to make the impossible possible.

“Thank you. I'll pack my bags.”

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A car hoots outside the gate. Busikhaya and Mazwakhe are standing in the yard, while Ngcwethi is attending to his new patient inside the rondavel. They don't get involved in his work at home, but this

one is different because it involves Maqhingana- the only patient who had dinner in every house and got introduced to the kids. They are not friends, but they wouldn't shut their doors on his face at any hour. Their kids know him, he knows all of them and their wives, and he's been to the Jama farm.

The sick guy is his brother, not by blood, and the other one is connected to them in some way.

Ngcwethi has answers to everything. According to him, everything happens for a reason and everyone that comes into our lives is a part of our journey to our destinies.

Ndabuko could've been brought to him sooner but Magadlela needed to be rescued. And because Ngidi is going to need him in the near future, he had to be the one who meets and rescues him.

"Open the gate!" A woman screams outside the gate.

"And then?" Busikhaya asks.

They're grown now, they still argue but they don't fight.

“I don’t know. Go and open the gate before she breaks it down,” Mazwakhe says.

Busikhaya eventually accepted that Mazwakhe is older than him, he does as instructed. He goes and opens the gate. He finds a car with Durban registration parked. Next to it is a fancy pregnant woman in a long brown coat, big curly hair and sunglasses.

“Can I help you, madam?” Busikhaya asks.

She walks closer to the gate. Has she ever been out, in the sun? She doesn’t look like someone who even uses a toilet. Surely, she’s not from anywhere around Mpofana. She looks different, like she breathes flavored oxygen.

“Where is my fiancée?” she asks and takes off her sunglasses.

Okay, she’s a human being. A normal one. And she goes through things like anybody else. You can tell from her eyes that she’s been through a lot and she’s been crying the whole day, if not a week.

“Who is your fiancée?” Busikhaya asks.



“Ndabuko Mngomezulu, he was brought here by Maqhinga.”

He could ask her questions but she’s not in a position to answer questions right now.

“You can tell him to drive in,” he says and leaves the gate opened widely.

The car drives in. There’s another woman with her. She hops out of the car and looks at Busikhaya who’s standing with Mazwakhe and watching.

“Where is he?” she asks.

“I’m not sure if you can go to him right now. You can follow me to that house, Mazwakhe will let them know that you’re here and...”

“No, I want to see him and I want to see him now!” she screams.

Busikhaya is not familiar with being screamed at by a woman. He stands still, in shock, and frowns.

“Ndabuko! Maqhinga!”

Why is he here again? Nontobeko was cooking a dumpling for him. He could've just stayed there and watched her cook instead of coming to this drama.

The other woman gets out of the car and tries to calm her down. Zanamuhla is peeking through the curtain, she was told that there is a woman coming but nobody told her it would be a crazy one.

Maqhinga emerges from the rondavel and rushes towards her. She cries even louder when she sees him.

“Hey, Ndondo?” Maqhinga says, pulling her into his arms.

She's not calming down. She wants to see Ndabuko, not later, not tomorrow, but now!

Ngcwethi steps out of the rondavel and signals for Maqhinga to come with her. Busikhaya and Mazwakhe are still watching. She's pulled inside the rondavel while the other woman stays back with the driver.

Another scream. What now? She's seen him.

"I'm out of here," Busikhaya says.

"So am I," Mazwakhe says.

Ndondo fell down as soon as she saw Ndabuko lying on a reed-mat. It wasn't because he looked horrible and thin, seeing him alive overwhelmed her and the cramps she's been having lately came back heavily.

"Ndondo are you okay?" Maqhinga asks.

She's still lying on the floor and crying painfully.

"Ndondoyami I'm fine," Ndabuko says weakly. He wants to get up and go hug her, but his body is too weak.

"Maqhinga, she's in labor!" Ngcwethi.

"Whaaaat?" It didn't register in Maqhinga's head. In labor as in- about to push the baby out? That's an emergency he's never been a part of.

"I cannot help her, you need to take her to the

hospital and you need to do it fast,” Ngcwethi says.

“Wait a minute, Ndondo you’re giving birth?” he asks, just to be sure.

“My water just broke..please get a belt and tie my waist..I want to pee..Maqhinga I want to hot water.”

This is serious. He needs to move. If he doesn’t get help on time Ndabuko will never forgive him.

[03/14, 10:47] : SEASON FINALE

## Chapter 63

There haven’t been any update from Maqhinga in the last two hours. He said he’ll call if the doctors tell him something, his quietness means that Ndondo’s cervix is still not dilating. It’s a thing that the western doctors can deal with. Ngcwethi knows that she’ll be okay, but with Ndabuko it’s a different story. He hasn’t eaten, he’s just lying on his back and staring up at the roof like he’s lost his world.

Ngcwethi walks in with a pill on his palm and a glass of water in another hand. Zanamuhla

suggested that he gives him Vitamins to boost his appetite. He can't just go on a hunger strike, not in his condition.

“Drink this, you have to eat,” Ngcwethi says, handing him the pill and water.

“I don't want pills, I will eat once I have an update from Maqhinga,” he says.

Ngcwethi sighs and sits next to him. Ndabuko is stressed out and he understands his position. It must be even more hard on Ndabuko because he cannot be there for her and he won't be there to welcome his son.

“She'll be fine, I promise you.” Ngcwethi puts his hand over his shoulder and looks at his sunken eyes. He has no strength in him. Restlessness, overthinking and hopelessness, all take a huge toll on him.

“I cannot imagine what you've been through. Not just for the couple of previous weeks, but from the day you were chosen to carry your brother's legacy and give up your dreams. It must've been hard.”

He's met people with all kinds of callings and destinies, but Ndabuko's story is different. As much as he understands the ancestors and their twisted ways, he cannot disregard how they have, or just how his brother has, inconvenienced his life.

"You must have felt like you were living in the shadows," he says. His hand is still on Ndabuko's shoulder as if he's trying to pass him some strength. Ndabuko hasn't shifted his eyes, they're glued on the roof like it has a solution to his problems written on it.

"My whole life," he says, inhaling a sharp breath. Seeing Ndongdo breaking down on the floor and crying out in pain while he just laid on the mat helplessly, broke him furtherly. He couldn't even get up and go hug her. She needed him, she still does in the hospital, and he cannot be there for her. He was supposed to be there, holding her hand throughout the delivery process.

Now Maqhinga is there...not that he's not grateful, but it was supposed to be him. He wasn't supposed to be useless and getting everything done for him

by others.

“Your whole life?” Ngcwethi asks.

“That’s what I said. It didn’t start after Nhlanzeko died. He always mattered more than me. His needs were met first. Everything was about him. I was just a boy with a cute room and expensive tracksuits,” he says. Maybe he’s angry at himself for not being able to be there for Ndondo and trying to find someone else to blame. But still, this is the honest truth.

“Who bought you expensive tracksuits?”

“Nhlanzeko. He bought everything in the house,” he says.

“Why do you think he did that? Building you a cute room and buying you expensive tracksuits?”

Ndabuko exhales breathily, “Because he could,” he says.

“And he wanted to,” Ngcwethi adds. He’s not a shrink but he has brothers, people he talks to and forces to talk when he feels like they are drifting

away. His shoulder can be someone's to cry on.

Ndabuko lifts his eyes, with a few lines furrowed on his forehead. He's a likeable guy, just like Maqhingana. Or is it because Ngcwethi has a soft spot for Maqhingana?

He chuckles, "Don't look at me like that. He could've not done all those things if he didn't want to."

"I'm not being ungrateful," Ndabuko says in defense. Him and Nhlanzeko were in a better place before...before that night. He tries not to think about it; how Ndondo must've dealt with the situation and how everything went in his absence.

"Then how do you describe your feelings?"  
Ngcwethi asks.

Well, he wasn't told that he came here to see a shrink, either way, he doesn't mind talking and answering all his questions.

"I'm over the past. I know that Nhlanzeko loved me and I really wish we had a close relationship as brothers. I can't say anything about my parents because they're not here to answer the questions



that I have. Right now I just want to belong...to have a family of my own- by blood. Ndondo is my new start, if anything happens to her or the baby..." He exhales loudly and rubs his face with his hand.

Ngcwethi gets it; he's scared.

"You want us to go to the hospital?" he asks.

Ndabuko's eyes pop out. It's not what he wants, but he's surprised that Ngcwethi would've considered it.

"I would've loved to, but I don't want her to see me like this," he says.

"They're good at 'through thick and thin', most of them. It's us, men, who don't stay around when shit hits the fan," -Ngcwethi. He gets up from the reedmat, goes back to his side and sits on the chair.

"How do you deal with her? I thought my wife was crazy but after what I saw today, I think Zolwandle is just an angel."

Ndabuko cracks a smile. His first smile in a long time. For a moment his mind is not dominated by fear and misery.

“Ndondo is not crazy, she’s actually very level-headed. She’s the CEO in one of the most successful companies in Durban. She’s used to being a bigger and last voice, but I know how to pin the boss lady down,” he says.

Ngcwethi chuckles and shakes his head.

“I don’t think I’d be able to handle that. Our wives once made R250k profit from their business this other December and disappeared the whole week, leaving us with kids. They switched their phones off, only popped in to post their pictures in bikinis and read our texts. That was the most traumatic week of our lives.”

This isn’t a joke. You can tell that it’s something he doesn’t wish to go through again, but...the heck!

“What did they say when they came back?”

Ndabuko asks. He shouldn’t be laughing so hard in his condition. He’ll crack his aching ribs.

“Nothing. That’s how I knew if my wife ever became a millionaire I’d be doomed.” His phone vibrates in the packet. It shouldn’t be switched on inside here,

but there's an important call they've been waiting for.

"It's Maqhinga," he says before walking out of the rondavel with his head bowed.

He answers it once he's out of the door.

"Any news?" he asks.

"He's finally here. I have never seen such a brave baby. All kids cry when they are born, especially when they're born in South Africa where their mothers eat their Sassa grant. But this one didn't make a sound, he just opened his eyes and sucked his fist."

"Wait, what???" Ngcwethi is in shock, which baffles Maqhinga. The baby is brave, he's ready to kick some ass and choose who he laughs with. He's ready for traffic cops and rude passengers. This is a son of a taxi owner after all. Why is it a problem to Ngcwethi?

"Maqhinga did you say the baby didn't cry?" he asks.

"Yes, but it's big and healthy."

“That’s...awesome. How is the mother?” His awesome doesn’t sound awesome at all.

“She’s okay, just tired,” Maqhinga says.

He inhales sharply, “Okay, contact her family and let them know as soon as possible. They need to come.”

He pushes the phone back inside the pocket and spends the next few minutes staring into space like he’s trying to put a million pieces together.

He’s worked very hard to cheer Ndabuko up and make him feel a bit positive. And now he has to tell him this? He’s very certain that this has got nothing to do with Ndabuko and his ancestors. These are knots and unresolved issues from the Sibisi side.

He has to give him an update. He swallows nothingness and walks back inside. Ndabuko has sat up and leaned by the wall. He heard that something isn’t right.

“What did he say?” he asks anxiously.

“Your boy has arrived. They’re both fine,” Ngcwethi says. His face doesn’t tell the great news he’s breaking.

“And?” Ndabuko asks, sensing that there’s more than what he’s letting on.

“The baby hasn’t cried, but it’s not something you must worry yourself about. If the baby was surrounded by hostility, arguments and fights, it’s very common for it not to cry. It’s not a big deal..” He clears his throat; it could be a big deal. “He will cry, the family just need to talk and put aside their differences. These things happen everyday.”

It’s the first time he’s ever explained something so fast and still didn’t make any sense. Ndabuko is staring at him and his eyes are failing to hold up the stare. He made a promise.

“I asked Maqhinga to call the mother’s family, I’ll have a word with everyone once they’re this side. I don’t blow my own horn, you just have to trust me, nothing will happen to you and your family while I’m

here, unless if it's God's will.”

Ndabuko sighs and nods uneasily.

“Does your offer still stands?” he asks.

Ngcwethi frowns. He cannot remember the offer, something else needs him urgently.

“I'd like to go to the hospital tomorrow. I want to see them,” Ndabuko says.

“Okay, we'll go. I have to see that man you came with. We'll talk later.” He rushes out of the door and leaves his sandals behind as if something is pulling him to Magadlela.

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He sits on the floor, Magadlela is on the bed and staring at him. He's still scared of anything and anyone that comes around him.

“Magadlela,” Ngcwethi says.

Silence...

“You look a bit shocked. Aren't you Magadlela?”

Ngcwethi asks.

He can't pin how he knows this boy but he's seen him before, whether in real life or in a dream.

"I am," he says after clearing his throat.

"You are not happy, I sense," Ngcwethi says and blows out a huge sigh that shakes his shoulders.

"Is this the end of me? You're working with them to kill me?" Magadlela asks. These questions have been burning him since he was abducted from the Nxumalos but he couldn't ask Ngidi and his men.

"Nobody is going to kill you," Ngcwethi says and heaves another sigh. He draws circles on the floor with his finger, they're invisible to everyone's eye except his.

"So, 16 July 1992 you left home and took a journey of the ancestors?" He doesn't wait for Magadlela's answer. His finger has moved to another circle. "I see you walking all the way to Ndwedwe in a space of three days."

Now Magadlela frowns, "Yes."

Ngcwethi didn't need his answer. He was telling him.

“There's no timeframe. It depends on one's ancestor. And your journey was very short. Two years and you were out and back home.”

“That's not true, I lost...” Ngcwethi looks up before he finishes.

“I'm reading, it's not coming from my head. I'm not lying. Your journey only took two years and you were out and back home,” he insists.

Magadlela is not a man of many words. He lets him believe his own lies.

“As soon as you were done you killed your mother.  
1995 September 11.”

Magadlela stands up on his feet. He may be soft spoken but he's not going to allow this boy to throw accusations at him.

“You're out of line, young boy,” he points his shaking finger at Ngcwethi who's still drawing his circles and frowning.

“With your assistance, your grandmother, Ngoneni



Gina, was transferred and captured at the Nxumalos. Two days later, 13 September, you got a report that your mother was no more and you were told to cut your hair to mourn for her. Am I lying?”

“You’re not lying, but I didn’t transfer my grandmother to Nxumalo and I didn’t kill my mother.”

“But you did. Why do you think your family hates you?”

No, this can’t be possible!

“Maybe you were tricked but that doesn’t change the fact that you’re responsible. I hate to break it to you but you’ll never gain your powers back. All that is left for you is to go back home and make things right for your grands on.”

“Huh? Grands on? What are you talking about? Nxumalo will get my power back.”

Ngcwethi sighs. This is getting exhausting.

“The same power he’s using to his advantage?” He chuckles and shakes his head.

It's all too much for Magadlela to take in. He's still in denial.

“Where were you in 2005 to 2006?” Ngcwethi asks. 2005 to 2006? That was such a long time ago, obviously he cannot remember.

“I must've been at the Nxumalos. That's where I've been the past 25 years,” he says.

“Didn't you agree with me that you left home in 1992 July 16?”

“I did,” he says with a frown.

“Then where were you in 2005 and 2006?”

He sits, scratches his head, stands and paces around. Why can't he remember? There must be something he could remember and give to this boy as proof.

“The answer is in your hands Mswati,” Ngcwethi says.

He stops, his confusion is growing. He opens his palms and stares at his hands. There's no answer, except...scars.

“What happened to your hands?” Ngcwethi asks.

Again, he’s cracking his skull. He’s had these scars for a long time. Nxumalo’s wife said he was attacked by a goat.

“I was attacked by a goat,” he says.

Ngcwethi shakes his head, “You were told so, you don’t know anything about yourself. You’re a nyanga’s servant, that’s what you’ve been the last 25 years. 2005 to 2006 you were in Nxumalo’s night army, that’s why you have scars that you can’t remember how you got and two years that went above your head.”

“I don’t understand,” he sits on bed and buries his face in his hands. Why are the dots connecting? Why is this boy making sense? Nxumalo couldn’t have done that!

“You see when a teacher teaches a student, his biggest wish is that the student reaches higher heights in life, just so he can point at her one day and say; ‘That accountant was my student..I taught that engineer Mathematics.’ But with us it’s

different, it's like we are in politics, those who are in higher positions want to stay there forever. It doesn't matter how much they train you or like you, if you're a threat to their position they eliminate you. It's dog eats dog world."

"Noooo," – that's all Magadlela could say right now. Just no, this isn't happening to him. He's been patient this long because he thought Nxumalo was honest.

"Anyway, I was brought here by the issue of your grandson. I know you haven't met your daughter, hopefully you'll search for her when you leave. Your grandson will be taking over, in 18 years to come. It's important that you fix the issue of her mother's surname. Not that she was hijacked from your ancestors. No, her mother and stepfather did everything according to the book. It's your grandson who complicates everything. His dominating ancestor won't be a Mbatha or Ngobese or Ngidi. It will be a Gina."

He's not born yet, that's all he could grasp, everything else confuses him.

“Ngidi? How does it connect to this?” he asks.

“You’re not far away from your daughter. Everything happens for a reason, you’re not here by chance, God and the ancestors plan everything.”

Is that supposed to simplify everything?

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NDONDO

This should be the happiest moment of my life. I should be hugging my son and kissing him all over his little face. It’s his moment, he’s finally here, with his pink cheeks and big hands. They’re still running tests on him, they suspect that something is wrong because he hasn’t cried and it’s been eight hours since he was born. I’m not putting it in my head. He’ll cry when he has a reason to. My focus is on pumping my breasts, I still have no milk. I really want to breastfeed him. I have gone through unimaginable pain delivering this big-handed little

man, it won't be fair to rob myself the experience of having him pulling my breasts at night. And this is my only chance, I'm not having another child. I still don't know what's going to happen when I need to release myself. Peeing alone is a problem, I pray all the way to the bathroom, one pee drop on the stitches- my life is over.

Maqhingwa walks in with amahewu and a bag of fruits.

"I joined a New Mommies group on Facebook and saw a post saying amahewu gives energy after giving birth."

Joiner mommy's group? Why am I even surprised, this is just like him.

His company has been the best. I didn't trust him, I thought he'd pull a Zulu man stunt and keep his distance from a birthing-woman. But he's been here, together with the woman Ngidi hired to look after me.

"Your mother is here," he says.

“Really?” I didn’t think anyone would come. I’m miles away from home, everything happened unexpected.

“Yeap, her and everyone. Can I take Sandla Semfene with me?” he asks.

“Maqhinga you’ll not give my son your taxi rank nicknames. His name is Nhlanzeko and you cannot take him. He’s still under the doctor’s watch,” I say.

“I just want to drive to Spar, down the road, and buy him nice things.”

I roll my eyes, “What nice things for a newborn baby?”

“Danone, purity and polony.”

I really don’t know what the future holds for my son. He’ll be forced to eat dumpling and usu before he even turns 1.

“He can’t eat that before he turns 6 months old.”

“Why not?”

I’m glad my mother is here. He quickly leaves the room after exchanging greetings with her.

“Such a big boy! I’m surprised you didn’t give birth through C-section. Hello boy-boy.”

Really this woman? I’m here, happy to see her and she doesn’t even acknowledge me.

“My husband ndzena,” she’s nodding and smiling at the sleeping baby.

“Mom, I’m here, hello!” I say.

“Oh, hey you. I can’t believe I’m a grandmother, am I not too young?”

These people want my vagina to crack apart. I’m not supposed to be laughing.

“Mom you’re going to your 50s. There are 32 year old grandmothers out there,” I say.

“That doesn’t change that you made me older than I am. But I love this cute boy..mfana kagogozi ndzena.”

Gosh, this is a start of a new chaotic journey.

I’m about to tell her about my struggles with



breastmilk and other complications when Andiswa walks in. She's not alone, she's pushing someone in a wheelchair.

My mood drops from 100 to 0. I look at my mother and she just gives me a shrug.

"My word, he's so tiny," Andiswa squirms and leaves the man in a wheelchair next to my bed.

"This baby is big, most babies are tinier than him," mom says.

She looks at me, "Are you okay? How was it?"

Deep breath, Ndondo.

"Andiswa what is he doing here?" I ask her.

She frowns, "He's here to meet his grandson. I can't believe you two are grandparents now."

This child doesn't listen when I speak. Or she's plainly disrespecting me.

"This is not my father and I don't want him to touch my baby."

"Ndondo!" she exclaims.

“Get him out,” I say.

He pushes the wheelchair forward. This is a test!

“Please, my child. I’ll never harm my own grandchild.”

Oh, really?!

“Yet you harmed your own wi...” Mom coughs before I finish. Andiswa is staring at us.

So is the man at the door, Ngcwethi Mthembu. How long has he been standing there?

[03/14, 10:47] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 64

NDONDO

I didn’t think my parents would listen to someone like him. But I guess a lot have changed since the family reunited. Or must I say since I discovered that they’re not perfect as they claimed. My mother is obedient enough to pass baby Nhla to the man with animal skins and yarns all around his arms.

Dumisani seems to have lost his touch, maybe it's because of a wheelchair, he has to obey everyone now.

He pinches Nhla below the neck, he doesn't let out a sound. Trust me, nurses have done everything to provoke him, even when they poured cold water over him, he didn't cry.

"What is going on Baba?" he asks Dumisani.

He doesn't understand the question. I feel like Andiswa brought him here to spite me and now I can't chase him out because there's another guest.

"Why is the baby not crying?" He turns his eyes to me, then back to Dumisani.

"You two need to talk. You cannot have so much hatred against your grandfather."

Grandfather? What on earth is he talking about?

"He's not my grandfather," I say.

If he is, in any manner, here to justify and stand up for this man then him and I will have a problem.

“Put your differences aside and release all this anger and hate you’re harboring against him,” he says.

I lift my head up, ready to give him a piece of my mind.

He stops me by cocking up his eyebrow. I can’t explain him as a person, something about him is just rare. His facial expressions tell their own message. His brown eyes, when fixed on you, gives goosebumps.

“Before your anger harms the baby, forever,” he says.

I don’t think he’s bluffing. Nhla is still in his arm, he keeps massaging his tiny head with his hand.

“You’re a mother now, there’s a human being you should put first, before everything. Ndabuko wants to come, you saw how bad he is, you and this baby are his strength. If not for your son, then do it for him.”

I look at my mother. She’s an elder, she should be showing me a way forward. And this is her husband.

Her and I know why I hate him so much.

She pulls down her skirt, stands up and puts her hand over my shoulder.

“Protect your child, at all costs.” She casts her eyes to Andiswa standing across the room and glued on her phone.

“Let’s give them a moment,” she says.

What does it mean to protect your child at all costs? Does it mean spend 25 years in an abusive marriage for the sake of a warm home for your children? What about you as a mother? Who protects you?

Andiswa takes Nhla from Ngcwethi and follows after my mother.

“I’ll leave you to it.” Ngcwethi says and takes two steps towards the exit, then looks back at Dumisani.

“You’re not lost, you never were.” He walks out.

Why does he speak in riddles?

I turn my head to Dumisani, “What is he talking about?” I ask.

“I hope Maqha...your father can answer that for me,” he says and swallows hard. I never thought I’d see the day he calls Maqhawe my father. It comes with a lot of pain out of his mouth.

Now we are both quiet. I’m not sure if I’m expected to go first and say ‘hey, I forgive you for abusing my mother. Do you want a new wheelchair? Ice cream?’ It’s weird because I’m doing this for my son. I wasn’t ready to speak to this man, or even to be in the same room as him.

“Maqhawe...your father, he was the first person who held you after you were born. He named you Ndongoyamahlase, your first name.” He clears his throat and looks at me. I cannot look at him in the eye. All I see is a monster, not the strict father who raised me up.

“And I named you Princess,” he says.

I’m not sure where this is heading, or what this little

talk is supposed to justify.

He takes my hand, I allow him to, and he wraps my hand around his finger.

“You’d do this. Wrap your hand around my finger like this while staring into my eyes and kicking your legs. You’re going to have those moments with Nhla, they’re priceless. Makes you feel worthy, like there’s someone who sees the whole world in your eyes and loves you unconditionally.”

I don’t say anything. All those sweet memories are at the back of my head, packed in hope that one day they’ll disappear.

“Not my parents. Not my siblings. Not your mother. Nobody had ever made me felt like I was loved, worthy or special. You were the first person who made me feel that way,” he says.

I’m still holding his hand and listening attentively.

“I’m a bad person, I’ve always been that way. I projected my fears, insecurities and worthlessness on others. Especially on those who were weaker than me. But when you came to my life you

changed a half of me. With you in my life, I wasn't completely bad, I had a good side in me. A side that could sit in a table surrounded by hundreds, motivate and give hope to others. Despite of everything that was done to me, I looked forward to holding you and shushing you to sleep at night. You were my baby and in your eyes, I was a hero."

Sigh! I pull my hand and push back my hair. I don't know where the Brazilian wig is. Maqhinga probably packed it in the bag. There is no time for it, I have milk to pump out. Motherhood is already pulling me by tits.

"What was done to you? Was it done by my mother?" I ask.

"No," he says.

I stare at him. His answer is not good enough. He needs to explain, I've been forced to give him this chance.

"I realized a year after you were born that the happy family was just a front. Your mother loved Maqhawe, she never stopped and mostly, she never



loved me. She was no different from any person that was in my life.” He inhales sharply and stares up, blinking rapidly to fight back tears.

“There is no happy family. Your mother was unhappy from day one, from the day she was arranged to break up with Maqhawwe and marry me. And I’ve been broken since childhood. I paid for my mother’s infidelity with everything that I had. My heart, my peace, my body and mental well-being. Marrying your mother was one of the prices I had to pay.”

This is surprising because he’s always told me best stories about my grandparents. He’d never made it look like there were any kind of hardships.

And they have never been in love- that’s another bitter pill I have to swallow.

“If you say grandma’s infidelity, what are you talking about?” I ask.

A vein is throbbing across his forehead. He’s clenching his jaws and locking in thousand tear drops.

Process this slowly Ndondo.

The old woman cheated, got pregnant and got caught. Because the image was important to the Sibisis, she was forgiven and her illegitimate child was taken in to be a Sibisi. Maybe under certain terms and conditions, we all know men don't forgive cheating that easily.

"Were you abused?" I ask him. My voice is laced with concern that surprises me. I still care for this monster, it raised me up and treated me like its child. This monster is my father, whether I like it or not.

His silence and bloodshot eyes give me the answer I needed.

He was abused.

"In what way?" I ask.

He shakes his head, "I can tell you everything, but not that. I'm sorry."

"But we are supposed to talk," I say.

“You’re not angry because I was abused. We are in this situation because I treated your mother badly,” he says.

“Yes, but you’re my father, so I deserve to know what made you a monster,” I say.

“I’m not your father. I have told you, my own insecurities, fears and worthlessness drive me to violence.”

This is not going anywhere. There’s something he’s keeping to himself. I don’t know if my mother, or anyone, knows about it.

“Why are you not letting my mother go?” I ask.

He shuts his eyes and swallows back.

“Your mother understands Sibisi, the man of God, she understands Baba kaNdondo, the father of her children, and also understands Dumisani who’s behind closed doors.”

Three in one? Wonders shall never end.

“And who is Dumisani behind closed doors?” I ask.

“A good-for-nothing, angry, insecure and wounded

little boy.” That took a lot for him to admit. He has his hand over his eyes. His chest is bouncing as if he’s controlling his escalating breaths.

I’m stunned. The silence that follows gives both of us a chance to chew on everything we just talked about.

Forgiveness doesn’t come easily, it’s a long progress that’s going to require LOTS of changes and tests. You cannot abuse and have a side of the story. You cannot kill and have a side of the story. You cannot rape and have a side of the story. There’s abuse’ story and the victims story. Those are two sides of the story. The rest are justifications and excuses.

Right now, I have to put abuse aside, it’s for my mother to deal with. I have to deal with reality; I have two broken parents. One was broken from childhood and he decided to break the other one. And because of this discovery, I have been broken too. Does that mean I have to break Ndabuko as

well? No, I have to fix the situation and heal from it, then move on.

“What happened to you that Sunday? How did you get an accident?” I ask, breaking a long moment of heavy silence.

He exhales, “I remember leaving the office, I was in the car and ready to drive out. There was a person, or a shadow, I don’t know. He was tall, wearing a leather jacket, I couldn’t see his whole body. But he came to the car, stood by the window and disappeared. I reversed and drove out, it felt like he was sitting at the back and controlling me.” He pauses, I think my dilating pupils tell him I don’t believe his story.

“I know it sounds stupid. But that’s how it happened, I kept driving and driving. I don’t remember much about that night or how I ended up in the hospital.” He sounds desperate for me to believe him.

I nod, just to stop him from explaining further. No matter how he puts it, I won’t believe him.

“And how are you coping?” I ask, looking at his

wheelchair. It must be hard adjusting to dependency. He relies on others to do things for him now.

He doesn't answer that. I release a sigh and ask, "You and mom?"

"I don't know where we are. She hasn't spoken about divorce or sending me away."

"Away? Where?" I ask.

"Wherever disabled people are kept." This answers my initial question. He's taking it hard.

I cannot speak on my mother's behalf, but I don't think she'd send him to shelters. That would be too scandalous, my mother is a woman of image.

"Andiswa and I had a fight before I came here," I tell him just to drive the conversation to a different direction. We've discussed enough depressing issues for the day. I feel a bit light knowing that the confrontation is done and over. What left is, how do we move on from this.

"She told me. Did you hit her?"

Hit her? That little liar!

“No, I’m yet to hit her. I’m five years older than her and she has the nerve to call me names and give an attitude,” I say.

He chuckles, “You cannot hit her. Find another way of punishing her, you know better than to use violence to solve problems. You, Andiswa and Bahle, have a good relationship as siblings.”

“But she’s disrespectful,” I say.

“Because you’ve never drawn the line, you’re the queen and she’s the princess in line,” he says.

“Do you think I must take the car and cut her allowance this month? Urgh! But how is she going to go to school?”

He doesn’t say anything. He’s just staring at me with his eyebrow raised.

“Don’t look at me like that. I had the worst time of my life waiting for the bus to go to campus. What if she gets mugged while waiting for it? Or even worse get kidnapped and...” His look tells me to stop, I’m

crazy.

“I cannot do that. There has to be something else,” I say in defeat.

He chuckles, looking like the happy father I once knew and believed in.

“How are you going to discipline Nhla?” he asks.

Gosh, Nhla is not even one, I can't be thinking about that now.

I shrug my shoulders, “Take his favorite toy. I don't know, I'll cross that bridge when I get there.”

“He won't care about toys when he's 15, then what?”

I roll my eyes. Really, there's no need to push this.

“I don't know. I'll figure it out,” I say.

“Only if I'd be there to witness it,” he says with a chuckle.

“Don't worry, you'll be...” And now? Where is the 5 year old crying from? The whole ward is literally buzzing from that hoarse voice.



Andiswa walks in, she doesn't have Nhla with her. Before I could ask, Ndabuko walks in with him in his arms. His clothes don't fit, he had to use the last hole to fasten the belt around his waist. He doesn't look like he's been fed in weeks, his eyes are deeply sunken and pale. His cheekbones are poking out, making him look a dying patient that refuses medication. Seeing him like this breaks my heart, I know that if it was me in his position he would've done something sooner.

But the most surprising and attention-grabbing thing about this whole scenario is that Nhla is the baby with an ugly cry. It's him who is crying!

I don't know if I should take him and try to feed him or let him cry for a moment.

He sits on the chair facing my bed, rests Nhla on his arm and lifts up his hand, their fingers entwine. It's cute to watch, son and father bonding for the first time. But he hasn't looked at me, and that doesn't settle well with me.

“Hey babe, I didn’t know you’d come today,” I say.

He glances at my father, whom I’d long forgotten he was in the house.

“I got permission to come,” he says.

I don’t recognize my man in him. Yes he’s not loud and chatty, especially around my father, but he doesn’t sound this shy and weak.

“Andiswa can you excuse us for a moment,” I say.

She’s on her phone. I have to repeat myself before she hears. She plugs her earphones and pushes Dad out of the room.

“Is he light-skinned?” he asks, now sounding like the Ndabuko I know.

It’s a silly question, babies are rarely born in their skin tone.

“I don’t think so, his knuckles are dark,” I say.

He nods.

Then silence.

He’s staring at Nhla and kissing his rolled fist every

now and then.

“He’s asleep,” he says after a moment. I’m new to motherhood but I know that the baby closing his eyes doesn’t mean he’s asleep.

He puts him next to me and returns back to his chair.

Again, we are sitting like strangers, in total silence with no eye contact.

Eventually he exhales and lifts up his head.

He goes first; “Ndondo I’m sorry, for everything that has happened. About your father, leaving you alone while you were pregnant and stressing you out. I’m sorry I wasn’t here when Nhla came. I made bad decisions and provoked...” He stops and recollects himself.

“We shouldn’t be here. You don’t deserve a man who looks like this. Nhla’s room should’ve been set up by me. This is the time where you need me the most but I’m no help. I’m just useless.”

I don't understand why he'd feel this way. None of this is his fault. I'm the one who let him down.

“Ndabuko if there's anyone who should be embarrassed here, it's me. I should've been cautious and made sure that you were getting the help you were supposed to get. I don't blame you for anything. If anything, I appreciate that you fought to be with me again. You're not only Nhla's hero, you are my hero too. I love you so much.”

He looks relieved, just a little bit. Memories still haunt him.

“I'm glad you stayed away. That place was hell, they would've probably held you too and killed our son,” he says.

“I'm happy you survived. I have depressing family issues to resolve, but your presence and this little man's here, is all I need to strive forward. By the way, he doesn't have a second name.”

His eyes widen. What did he expect? I haven't had time to think of names. It's been hell. Good grace, we had his first name before everything happened.

(Below is Melissa Goliath's book, a fresh voice on the streets. If you'd like to have a copy please do contact her and place your pre-order.)

[03/14, 10:48] : SEASON FINALE

Chapter 65

THALENTE

This has been a crazy week. Ndlalifa has been spending a lot of time with his father and sometimes sleeping over and only passing by in the morning to give me a baby kiss and go to the rank. But highlighting my week was a fight with Aarti yesterday. I cooked a whole pot of stew and didn't taste it because chicken stew tastes like boiled mushrooms in my mouth. Orders were returned and Aarti acted as if I had set the whole Indian continent, or country, on fire. She came gunblazing at me and threatened to fire me right on the spot. Because now I'm pregnant and I have what they call 'pregnancy mood swings and cravings', I used that

to my advantage and told her everything I've always wished to tell her. From her broken English that she thinks could qualify her to have a conversation with EFF leaders, to her hair that drops everywhere in the canteen because she is the boss and doesn't wear caps. What she wasn't ready for was being told that her famous scones actually taste like vetkoeks that lack yeast. I stood with my hands on the hips and told her news before storming to the backroom and crying collectively for a bad stew and my man that I hadn't spent time with in days.

Tears bought me everyone's forgiveness, including unsatisfied customers. They didn't ask for refunds, instead they asked to be given anything they could have for their lunch. But that didn't get me off the hook, not after telling Aarti her news, people don't like truth, she had something in store for me.

Payment cut. How unfair is that? But I'm a businesswoman, I have a perfume company. Oh well, not really company, but I have my own money.

Sadly money doesn't buy happiness. Trust me you, I have R5000 in my account and I'm still unhappy. Being rich doesn't mean we are happy. No, we still have to sleep alone in huge queen's bed surrounded by air conditioners.

It's such a sad reality. I didn't expect things to get real so fast, I'm still adjusting to pregnancy and need him more than ever. But now that I'm here, living in his house, he has more important family matters and commitments to attend to. It didn't dawn to me that I was dating, not only a taxi owner, but a businessman who travels around the province and goes back to back in meetings.

Opening my eyes, not because there's stupid alarm cracking my eardrums, but because I've had enough sleep, is one thing I'm thankful for today. It's a cold Saturday morning..and I have a pair of eyes staring down at me?

He's not under the blankets, which means he just came in the morning. And judging by the cap and

strong cologne smell, he's gone to the rank, had his full-meal breakfast and then came here. It's probably around 9am or so.

He leans over, kisses my forehead and shifts nearer to have his arms wrapped around me. This is a good way of waking up!

"How are you and my little one?" he asks, planting another soft kiss on my forehead.

"We are good," I say. "When did you get here?"

"Early," he says.

When was early? According to my watch it's still early even now.

"I'm cold," he says.

I don't know if that's his way of asking for permission...

"Get in bed," I tell him.

He takes his cap off and slides in bed. His body is cold, I grind my warm body against him. He tightens



the embrace and exhales a warm breath, giving me chills down my neck.

“Ndondo gave birth,” he says.

I can tell that he’s happy and all, but there’s something else that’s eating his soul.

“That’s nice, probably why Snalo called late last night,” I say.

“Yeah, it’s a boy. There were some complications. The baby didn’t cry, but it was sorted out.”

I don’t know what that means, but if it was sorted out then I guess details are not necessary for now.

“How is work?” I ask.

“Hectic,” he says.

It doesn’t look like he’s willing to elaborate further. And well, I don’t own taxis, I cannot relate to his kind of ‘hectic’ anyway.

“And family?” I ask.

His finger taps on my arm, he’s not looking at me but he’s very much present to this conversation.

“Ndabuko is in safe hands now. Ndondo has delivered safely, Aunt and Baba are fine, and the kids are behaving,” he says.

I don’t think Snalo and Nomkhosi would appreciate being called kids.

“The family is okay,” he says.

I’ve asked enough questions now. I snuggle myself and rest my head on his chest.

“Do you miss me?” he asks.

“Yes, I miss you. When is all of this blowing over?”  
As much as I understand that family comes first and how demanding his industry is, I still crave for his attention and presence.

The tight squeeze he gives me tells me that he understands how I feel.

“When Ndabuko is back on his feet I’m going to let him and Maqhingana hold the ropes for a while. I don’t want us to live like this. You are important to me, I hate to sacrifice our time and make you feel like you are not my first priority. I’m not neglecting you

s thandwa sami.”

“I’m not angry Ndlalifa,” I tell him.

His shifts his eyes to me. I can tell that he’s still not okay. Maybe it’s guilty or the burden of having all these responsibilities facing him.

“You’re carrying my child. You’re here, warming my house and I’m not here with you. You don’t know grateful I am to have you in my life. I don’t take you for granted.”

He’s not a sweeter-talker, let alone a genuine apology-maker. This is so different and warm to hear.

“I love you more than you think. You are my life Thalente.” His hand lowers to my butt, he squeezes me and presses his front to me. It’s been a while, just feeling his shaft hardened behind his pant is enough to have me all steamed up and wet.

I want to kiss him but I haven’t brushed my teeth. I hate my morning breath, I can’t force it on someone else.

His hand lifts up the loose Tee I slept in and travels around my lacy underwear to sneak in my wet folds.

“I missed you Ndlalifa.” My voice is wobbly. I’m that horny. I want his touch, I’m craving for his taste and silly sex whispers.

“Thalente you’re wet,” he says, pleasantly shocked as his finger digs deep in my flesh.

“Because I have missed you so much. I can’t believe you are here, I love you Hlomuka.”

He drops his head over my shoulder and releases a low sigh, “Oh, sthandwa sami.”

He pushes down his pant and briefs to be just above his knees. I shove my underwear down and kick it out of my ankles.

He taps his thick erect on my clit, sending tingles all over my body. He pushes my legs up, not too high, just enough to have my womanhood clear at his disposal. And then he enters, slowly, while staring into my eyes.

Once he's fully in, he lets go of my legs and comes up to my face. He grabs my head and onslaughts me with a deep kiss despite my two seconds of disapproval. His thrusts are calculated, with medium pressure applied and low groans vibrating out of his chest now and then.

"Please hold me baby," he begs, husky, in my ear.

I wrap my arms around him.

"With your thighs," he whispers.

Oh, my bad! I trap him in with my thighs, it restricts the length of his movements. But I guess he likes it this way, he's breathing heavily, the web of his veins are pulsating around his arms.

Every thrust penetrates deep in my inner flesh, giving my body tickling pleasure and warmth. I love the smell of his cologne combined with sweat and our sexual scents.

His waist is moving smoothly, our bodies fitted together like a perfect puzzle.

“Babe please untangle me,” his voice is low and shaky. He’s now uncomfortable in the position that he requested. He cannot apply any more force to his thrusts, not with my big thighs wrapped around him this tightly.

“Thale..shuuu!” I tighten my legs firmer. He grabs my hair and tightens his jaws to fight back whatever is trying to flood him out.

“MaMbatha please, I don’t want to finish yet,” he begs, trying to escape and pull out.

I push my waist up and hold down his head. There’s a groan that escapes his mouth as his shaft dips in the depths of my cookie once again.

His ear is just a few inches away from my face. I nibble on the lobe and circle the tip of my tongue around it. He releases a cry, a sharp-toned girlish one.

His whole body has tensed up. It looks like he’s about to meet his maker, well for about a minute. Then he groans again as he releases the last of his load inside me.

He rolls to the side and shuts his eyes. His body is still recovering, his fingers are still shaking. Now it's my turn to stare at him.

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He steps into the bathtub and wraps his arms around my waist, putting me between his legs. He fell into a nap and I decided to come take a quick bath while he slept. But it seems like he was sleeping with one eye open.

“Why did you do that to me?” I can tell from his voice that he liked it.

I just tilt my head backwards and hand him the loofah. He washes my boobs with his chin over my neck.

“Who taught you to trap a man's dick inside you? You know that's illegal.”

He has a lawyer, he's NOT a lawyer. That's definitely not illegal, I can bet my life on it. Even the judge would ask; ‘What was your penis doing inside her vagina?’

“I can trap whatever I like,” I tell him.

“Oh, so you like it?” He’s mocking me now. His member is erecting behind my butt. I’m not having a second round now. I’ll have it after breakfast and he better make sure that it’s ‘ladies first.’ The first one was just a treat. A ‘thank you for surprising me.’

“Maybe, maybe not,” I say.

He kisses the side of my neck and cups my boobs up. This is not a part of giving someone a bath.

“Are you okay?” I use the cozy moment to ask.

He exhales and lifts his head up.

“Babies are complicated. What happened with Sandla was an eye-opener. As parents we need to be ready; mentally, financially and spiritually. I don’t want to put my child in danger of any sort.”

Okay, we’ll discuss the baby’s name later. Sandla? What the heck? Babies have nice names these days, names that start with vowels (AEIOU.)

Parenting is what’s been bothering him. It’s too late for him to get cold feet, his seed is already growing



inside me.

“You are scared?” I ask.

“No, I’m not. I just want everything to be how it’s supposed to be. I don’t want any mistakes. I don’t want any complications,” he says.

I don’t know what happened to Sandl...gosh, I need to call Ndondo and find out what’s the baby’s real name. But whatever happened to that baby scared the shit out of this man.

He exhales heavily, “MaMbatha can I ask you something?”

Sounds serious.

“Yeah,” I say, shallowly. His tone is suddenly thick and heavy.

“How well do you know yourself?” he asks.

This is a rather confusing question. I wouldn’t mistake myself for anyone. No matter how big the crowd is, I’ll always know that I’m the one with a big forehead and fat ass.

“I know myself very well. Do you know yourself?” I

ask.

“Thalente,” he heaves a sigh. He probably needs me to be more serious than I am.

“Your roots. Are you sure of your roots? I don’t want our child to have any complications regarding his identity,” he says.

I nod, he has a point, but I don’t think this got anything to do with Ndondo’s baby.

“I know my roots,” I say, my tone sharper than intended.

“Things happen babe. Sometimes our parents keep things from us and they come back to haunt us in the long run,” he says.

I know exactly what’s going on here. I know him enough. I move out of his embrace and step out of the bathtub, grabbing the towel and storming out of the bathroom.

I’m angry, hurt and violated. He’s been MIA, not because of his family matters, but because he’s been digging his claws into my family. I’m not his

taxi rivalries, I don't want to be investigated like I'm some criminal.

"Thalente," he's making his way inside the bedroom.

I don't turn my head. I lift my foot to the bed and lotion it.

He stands behind me, silent for a brief moment, then he clears his throat.

"I was just making sure that you are who I thought you were," he says.

He's unbelievable!

"Like an undercover? Or a spy?" I ask, throwing my hands up in the air.

"Not like that. It was an investigation and your name popped up," he says.

I put my hands on the waist and stare at this award-winning detective.

"I didn't know you were a cop," I say.

He drops his eyes.

“What investigation was that, detective?” I ask.

“Can we sit?” He holds my arm. I pull it back and hold my waist.

He sighs, “It was about a man that helped a man that was supposed to help Ndabuko.”

A nyanga? How the hell am I connected to those fake nyangas?

“So you know that you are not a Mbatha?” he asks.

Like his balls I’m not!

“I am a Mbatha.”

“Not by blood.”

He’s getting out of line!

“Look sthandwa sami, I wasn’t trying to invade your privacy. It’s just that...”

“Just what?” I ask. More like bite his head off.

“It was a win-win or lose-lose situation. The man had to make sure that Ndabuko recovers and in return we wouldn’t harm his child.” He pauses and exhales. His hand is on the forehead, he’s wiping

invisible sweat.

“I’m listening.” I fold my arms and keep my stare burning at him.

“He’s never met his child. He’s been working, or ‘training’ at the Nxumalos since he was 22. He’s 49 now. His family neglected him years ago, now the only thing he’s looking forward to is finally meeting his child. So our plan was to get his child first, to make sure that he co-operates.”

It sounds like something Jack from Generations would do. It’s twisted, and to think that I’m in love with a man who goes to such twisted lengths!

“Thalente where is your father?” he asks.

My father has always been Msizi Mbatha. I’ve never had a problem answering this question, even after discovering the truth, I was okay with who I was.

“He passed away,” I tell him.

“Thalente please work with me here. My father is waiting, he wants answers. Do you know where your biological father might be? Do you know who

he is?” he asks desperately.

“The man who donated a sperm left, if that’s what you want to know. He left!”

“Was he a Gina?” he asks.

“I heard so,” I say.

“You’re the child we are looking for, in exchange of Ndabuko’s life,” he says.

I laugh out loud. Now what am I supposed to do? Tie my wrists and hand myself over?

“Shouldn’t you be taping my mouth and pointing a gun at me?” I ask, taking a comb and combing my hair right in front of him. I don’t care if he gets T.B and dies for a few hours.

He lies back on bed and leans against the headboard. I go on with my business; combing my hair and dressing up. I’m starving, I need to get full before the kidnapping happens. At least I’m going to be kidnapped by the father of my unborn child, he’s granting me a chance to look beautiful and get

everything done.

“Breakfast?” I ask him.

He shakes his head, “No.”

Well, he’ll suit himself. I grab my phone and go to the kitchen.

I fry four eggs and two Russians, spread six slices of bread with margarine and fill a tall glass with icy juice. I swallow a slice of cheese, and another one, and another one, then I put three on my plate. I’m eating for now and for the bad days ahead.

I’m tempted to call my mother but I don’t know what I’ll say to her, and I don’t want to worry her. I haven’t wrapped my head around my biological father being alive and practicing witchcraft somewhere. And that he’s looking forward to meet me. Didn’t he leave a pregnant young girl and never looked back? If he knew about me why he never reached out?

There’s a car driving in. Ndlalifa is dragging himself

to the door to welcome whoever. I throw dishes inside the sink and take a tub of ice-cream out of the fridge and a spoon.

That sounds like his father. They're making their way inside the house. All I want to do right now is to finish the vanilla flavour. I'll deal with reality later.

They're staring at me. I can feel piercing stares after their abrupt pause by the door.

"Ndlalifa you said..."

"I said I have Magadlela's daughter? Yes, and you are staring at her."

"MaMbatha?" -his father.

"Yebo baba," Ndlalifa says.

There's a low curse and a tongue click. I understand their frustrations, but Ndlalifa has much bigger problems.

Vanilla flavour portion just finished and I don't like the chocolate one.

"So what are you going to do?" I ask, turning my head around and staring at Ndlalifa.



He glances at his father and scratches his head.

“It’s your call, if you want us to let him go, we will. If you want to meet him and talk, we’ll arrange it. He’s currently in Mpofana with Ndabuko and his healer,” he says.

“I’m not talking about healers. I’m talking about ice-cream. Where are you going to get the vanilla flavored one?” I ask.

He looks like he’s just been slapped by ghosts. Surely he can investigate and find out where he could find vanilla ice-cream around here, fast. He’s an FBI, remember.

“Oh, I guess I will go and buy it,” he says hesitantly.

“You guess?” I ask.

His father hands him his car keys. I don’t think he’s fully aware of what’s going on, but he’s obeying. He walks out of the door speedily.

Now it’s just me and his father.

“Sawubona baba,” I greet.

He closes the door and walks in. Enough sex is treating him good, he has a glow.

“Malukazana,” he says.

I smile. He’s my father-in-law, what else can I do when he speaks, smile like a retard.

“Can I offer you something to eat?” I ask.

“No, sit down and relax. Is Ndlalifa taking care of you?”

“He does,” I say.

He nods with a proud smile on his face. But it disappears within a few seconds.

“I need to talk to your mother MaMbatha.”

I knew this day would come but I didn’t think it would be now. I don’t think my mother is ready either.

Why did Ndabuko has to go, specifically, to that nyanga? It just unfolded deeper issues. Issues that were better left untouched, for the sake of everyone’s peace.

[03/14, 10:49] : SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 66

NDONDO

Leaving Ndabuko in Mpofana was hard but I had no choice. Ngcwethi has proven to be an expert in what he does and his promises were that, in a week or two Ndabuko will come back home. Then we'll traditionally introduce the baby to Nhlanzeko and the ancestors and do all the necessary rituals.

I still don't have milk, I tried everything; pills, black tea and juices, still nothing. The doctor said I must keep trying, but in the meantime, I have to feed him formula milk. He has a very big appetite, I'm not sure if I'll cope, I need to rest but every hour I have to make bottles. Breastfeeding would've made my life easier. Maybe I should ask Andiswa to look for a nanny who can help me, even though it's still way too soon.

We are set to leave for Nyandeni later today. All of us. It's time for the family to have a real talk.

There's a new baby, Dumisani is in a wheelchair and Andiswa is starting to behave like a brat. If elders fail to put their differences aside and confront their past this is going to affect us, the next generation, badly.

But before we leave, there's a welcome thing that was organized by Snalo for me and baby Nhla. They haven't met him yet, so I'm expecting a lot of privacy invasion, interview about labor, dramatic gifts and zero peace.

I'm getting Nhla ready. He's a man of the moment. I put him in a fluffy navy romper, mittens and bear beanie. That's it. As much as I'd want him to dress up in suits like Valdo and wear caps like uncle Ndlalifa, he's still way too little to fit in any. And my mom is on my back about keeping him in warm warm clothes and wrapped in blankets.

"Are you done with him?" Andiswa.

She's peeking from the door, looking like a model going for a magazine cover shoot.

“Ummm yeah,” I say.

We are still awkward around each other. I’m no longer angry, even though I feel like she’s still angry at me for some reasons, I just wore my big sister boots and looked at things from her perspective. As much as it’s Dumisani on the wheelchair and not us, it still affects us, or should I just say her and Bahle, mentally. In her eyes I have the power to make her father normal, I can buy this expensive wheelchair and he’d be able to go to parks and restaurants with her. She doesn’t know that his problems go beyond legs movement.

She walks in with a cheerful smile spreading on her face. She goes to Nhla and lifts him up.

It’s Instagram time! That’s where her aunt-hood starts and ends. She takes him when he’s fed and clothed, snaps pictures with him and returns him back when he starts crying.

“We are going downstairs,” she tells me after snapping a dozen pictures.

“Wrap him in a blanket, he’ll catch cold,” I say.

“Alright. Dress up fast, I’ll bring him back if he starts crying.” It’s a warning. I know she’s not bluffing, she won’t even try to calm him down.

“I just need to change the T-shirt,” I say, standing in front of the mirror and running my fingers through my hair.

She wears a huge frown, scanning me with her eyes.

“What do you mean? You need to take a shower, dress up and put make-up on,” she says.

It’s the glamorous aunt speaking, she’s not putting herself in my shoes.

“I don’t have time for make-up Andiswa and I just took a shower an hour ago,” I say.

“My gosh, you are going to look like those ‘new moms’,” she says, rolling her eyes and walking out.

How do ‘new moms’ look like? I change into another loose T-shirt and tie a lazy bun on top of my head.

Walking is still a problem but I’m trying. My stitches are slowly healing and less painful. I slide into flip-flops, grab Nhla’s bottles and follow them out.

Thalente and Ndlalifa arrived first. He was dropping her off, then grabbed the opportunity and walked in to greet Nhla. Yes, greet. He took him to the balcony to talk to him. I don't think this baby will be normal. He's loudly talking to someone over the phone right now and telling him about the baby.

“Do you think he'll work in the taxi industry?”  
Thalente asks.

“Who? Baby Nhla?” I ask.

She nods. She's gaining a lot of weight, even more on her cheeks.

“No, Ndabuko won't allow that to happen. He had big dreams of his own that were never achieved because of family business. He won't put his son through the same thing.”

We obviously want what's best for our son and we won't stand on in his way if he decides to join the taxi industry, but that would never be how we raise him. I want my son to travel the world, obtain qualifications and mostly live a safe life.

“You know there’s a ceremony planned to celebrate his birth and Ndabuko’s recovery?”

“What ceremony?” I ask with my eyebrow raised.

“Taxi rank kind of thing. Slaughtering a sheep, drinking beers and maybe spinning the taxi with a baby inside.”

No, that’s not happening! Nobody is spinning a taxi with my son inside.

She chokes down a laugh.

“I’m kidding, but there’s a sheep thing and a celebration as soon as Ndabuko comes back,” she says.

We move to the lounge and join Andiswa on the couch. There’s a car driving in, it must be Khosi and Snalo.

“So, is it scary as they say?” Thalente asks.

“Labor pains? Absolutely fuckin’ painful. Giving birth is like a huge relief from them,” I say.

“What about the...” she side-eyes Andiswa and rubs her lips together. I know what she’s asking, it’s not



bad as she thinks.

“You’ll survive,” I tell her.

“But do they cut with a scissor and sew it back together like a piece of cloth?” she asks.

“Yeah,” I say.

Her eyes widen. Andiswa’s head is up, she’s staring at me with the same expression as Thalente’s. I hope this is enough to make her condomise everytime she opens her legs for a boy.

“Yoooh, what if it doesn’t...you know...what will happen?” Thalente.

“People get stabbed and stitched everyday. Flesh...”

“Stabbed?” both of them say in shock.

I think it sounds scary if I put it that way. Nurses are not crazy, they don’t stab your vagina, that was just an example.

“I just mean that it heals and goes back to normal,” I say.

“Oh my gosh, what if stitches burst?” Andiswa just

had to mention my worst nightmare. I walk ten minutes on the staircase because I'm avoiding that. I don't want to lose a step and burst my stitches.

"Then it will be east and west," I say.

She laughs. Thalente has her hands over her cheeks. It's funny seeing her this freaked out. Seven months to go, then she'll have her own experience.

Ndlalifa walks back in with Nhla. I'm surprised he hasn't cried in over ten minutes. This one suckles, sleeps and cries for a living. Maybe what they say is true; if you scream loud during sex you give birth to a loud crying baby. Remind me to moan quietly from now onwards, that's if I ever engage in sexual intercourse again.

Andiswa takes Nhla first. She could be a great aunt, only if the baby didn't cry and shit on itself.

Ndlalifa leans over and kisses Thalente's cheek. I guess he's leaving us to our girly thing, Khosi and Snalo are at the door.

“Ndlalifa I don’t want to give birth,” Thalente says.

Ndlalifa is just shocked as anyone would be. I mean, what would you say if your pregnant girlfriend told you she doesn’t want to give birth out of nowhere?

“You want to stay pregnant forever?” he asks what anyone would’ve asked. But he’s pissing Thalente off.

She snaps her brows, “No to staying pregnant forever. No to giving birth.”

She’s crazier than I thought.

Ndlalifa glances at me for clues. I can’t tell him that I’m responsible for this sudden fear, I just shrug my shoulders and keep a straight face.

“So what are you going to do?” he asks Thalente.

“I don’t know. You’ll see how you get your baby out of my stomach,” she says.

He smiles and kisses her again.

“Okay, I’ll make a plan. Do you want a birthday cake?”

“It’s her birthday?” Andiswa asks.

Thalente rolls her eyes, “Black forest.” She turns to Ndlalifa and tells him not to forget her ice-cream. Cravings are already in control. He kisses her again, a bit longer and deeper this time. Gosh, I can’t believe I’m staring at people kissing. Am I that lonely?

Khosi and Snalo enter as Ndlalifa leaves. As I expected, they have a couple of bags in their hands. A huge box of whatever is left on the floor. They both rush to Nhla. Snalo is the fastest, she picks him first and peels the blanket off him. My mother would call the police on me. Even if I let him cry for a minute while doing my things, she asks if I’m trying to kill him. Not covering him with a blanket is a first degree murder according to her.

“Cover him up,” I preach like my mother and get side looks.

“He’s only 5 days old guys,” I say.

“But still, you sound and look like a granny,” Snalo.

Andiswa bursts into laughter.

“To me she looks tired,” Khosi says before taking a seat. She looks at me with worry and asks if I’m okay. Okay is just a word to put her at ease. I need my man and a functional family. Nhla also needs his father. I can’t even call him and hear his voice. I’m far from being okay.

“Does he sleep?” she asks.

“Two hours and wakes up. He cries Khosi, it’s like he’s compensating for all those hours he didn’t cry. I think I need a nanny to at least get a break during the day.”

“I was 22 when I gave birth to you and I didn’t need a nanny,” – that’s my mother’s voice coming from the kitchen. I don’t know when she got here and why she’s comparing me to herself.

“You couldn’t afford a nanny,” I yell.

“Whatever!”

They’re laughing behind their hands. Whatever? Whose mother is that? Dishes are colliding in the

kitchen, I guess she's here to cook 'real food' as she defines it.

"Anyway, how was it like?" Khosi says, opening the first bag. I don't know what kind of jacket is this but it looks cute. I don't think Nhla will be wearing it anytime soon because of a puzzle of zippers.

"It was ass-bursting," I say. That's a simple way of putting it. Again, Thalente is flinching.

"But it didn't look that bad when Khloe was giving birth on Keeping Up With The Kardashians," Snalo says.

"Do I look like Khloe Kardashian? I have seven stitches."

Gasps! They thought I was exaggerating? Labor ward is not a spa, arses burst in there.

"At least you won't experience this, Ndlalifa will make a plan for you," I say, looking at Thalente with a suppressed laugh.

She rolls her eyes. Snalo and Khosi are staring at her with curiosity splashed over their faces.

“What plan is he going to make?” Khosi asks.

“He’ll get the baby out of her stomach. She won’t go into labor nor give birth,” I say.

“That’s what he promised you?” Snalo asks.

“Guys stop stressing me out. I have enough problems in my life,” Thalente says with a sigh.

Problems? We know that she lost or left her job, and that’s not a problem because she’s well-connected now. All she needs to do is submit her documents and show up for work, she knows that.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

She pulls a slab of chocolate out of her pocket and unwraps it. I miss having an excuse to eat everything under the sun.

“I was adopted, traditionally.”

Oh..that’s shocking.

“And the father I thought abandoned us, me and my mom, turns out to be alive and kicking. He had a calling, or whatever, and left for initiation before finding out about the pregnancy. I don’t know what

happened there but he's said to have been there the past two decades and seven years."

Jesus Christ! What do we even say to her? She wraps the chocolate and puts it back in her pocket.

"He wishes to meet me one day, he found out about me through his brothers and I've been his motivation to soldier on. I really don't know how to feel, a part of me wishes to see him but then again I don't want the Mbathas to feel like I'm ungrateful."

Khosi reaches out to her and rubs her shoulders. I can only imagine the conflict within herself.

"How does your mother feel about it?" I ask.

"Their relationship was not good. He's a chapter she thought she has buried. She said it's up to me but I know that I'll be reviving back painful memories," she says.

"Have you told Ndlalifa about it?" Khosi asks.

She rolls her eyes, "He's the private investigator who revealed the whole thing to me."

Am I surprised? Ndabuko hunted me down,



pretended to be a poor yardner and stalked me for months. They're not just taxi owners, they investigate people until they know all colors of their underwear.

“They don't know anything about privacy, trust me,” I say.

“They do,” Snalo.

We both look at her. She mustn't dare defend them!

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It's pretty intense. Greetings were formally exchanged shortly before silence fell into the room. Making this meeting even more awkward is Andiswa's presence. I still don't think it's a good idea to involve her in such critical family matters. But mom insisted. Only Bahle was excused, he's with Fuze in the rondavel. I haven't checked up on her and Qondani in a long time. But they're still living together, this time she's not keeping him away from his kids. If anything, she's tied him down and turned him into a one-woman man.

Aunt Vumile sips a drop of water and clears her throat.

“I guess I’ll go first, as most of you know, I had my own unresolved issues with our parents. I don’t have beautiful memories of this place, which is why I chose to stay away. It had nothing to do with you Maqhawe in particular. This place, home and all that surround it represent pain to me. The woman who was my place of comfort hurt me the most.” She takes another sip and looks at Bab’ Maqhawe.

“You didn’t feel what we felt. You had a place of comfort- a home, and we didn’t. I held that against you, in my head you were a better child. You had a better version of who they were. They protected you from the dark side that only Dumi and I knew. Hence you are here, burning impepho and slaughtering goats for them. You are proud of them.” She leans back on the couch and releases a huge breath. Of relief, maybe. She’s said everything that was in her heart, and I’m glad everyone listened attentively without disturbing her.

“I’ll start by thanking you all for coming. I know that you, brother, shouldn’t be traveling long distances. And the kids, thank you for teaching them unity. Something that we never had.”

I glance at Andiswa as she turns her eyes to me. We are united but we are still siblings, so we have our moments.

“Vumile, I don’t know if what I’m about to say will answer you but I hope you’ll be enlightened on who Maqhawe is. Had one of you died years ago, I would’ve sold a cow and arranged a decent funeral. Mourned for three months and performed the cleansing ritual. A year later I would’ve slaughtered a cow for your first ceremonies. I would’ve lit white candles and called seers to predict how you are in the other world. And if you had any requests, I would’ve honored them. You know why? Because we can change our addresses but we can never change the blood running in our veins and who it connects us with. You are still a family to me, whether you love me or not.”

I think Aunt Vumile was answered. The room falls

into another long moment of silence.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t a brother you both wished I was. The truth is, there was no better child. I had my own issues with them. I can also say that neither of you were there for me too. I’m sorry to put you into this Nomagugu, but you know how hard I had it in the streets. But the blame game is long overdue now, I just want all of us to move forward. Dumisani and I are grandpas now. Our kids are popping babies left right and centre.”

Qondani and I exchange looks. I only have one child, he’s the one who’s popping babies. And Andiswa shouldn’t be looking so entertained, she’s sexual active, that could be a nice addition to this discussion.

“We don’t have to be friends. But we have to make sure that we raise our children and grandchildren with love.”

I can’t believe it took them decades to realize that they are not enemies, they only had a common source of pain. Everyone is on board, it’s a fresh

start...until Dumisani reveals something that sends all of us in a wave of shock.

“Your father raped me,” he says.

There’s a moment of stillness. Nobody moves nor says a word. Only heavy breaths slice through the heavy silence and bear life into the room.

My mother turns to him with a frown.

“Dad! What?” Andiswa.

I knew it wasn’t a good idea to involve her in this. How am I going to make her forget this?

“While our mother was chained and physically tortured throughout the night for her infidelity, I was holding the fort for her in bed. And I was only 7 years old.”

Andiswa lets out a sharp cry. Mam’ Jabu quickly attends to her and pulls her into a hug.

“Don’t cry Andiswa, I’m just as bad. I did the same to your mother,” Dumisani says.

I’ve never seen anyone cut a cry so abruptly like she was crying for a movie.

“What???” Andiswa.

“Yes. That’s why I’m sitting on this chair, unable to walk. I’m being punished for my sins and my mother’s,” he says.

Why am I feeling sorry for him? Tears are burning their trip down to my cheeks.

“I just want to know who my father was, so that you and Bahle can know your true identities. Then you can see what to do with me for abusing your mother.” His eyes jump from Andiswa to me, then he looks at Bab’ Maqhawe. “Punish me the way you see fit for taking your family.” Lastly, he looks at my mother.

“Don’t mourn for me, instead, have a celebration when I’m gone. Just do me one favor when you’re moving on, leave Andiswa and Bahle with Ndondo. I know she’ll take care of them, I don’t want what happened to me to happen to my kids.”

My mother’s face remains cold. Meanwhile, me and Aunt Vumile are sobbing like widows. Andiswa is angry as I was when I found out for the first time.

“Andiswa and Bahle are the Sibisis. Just like you,” says Bab’Maqhawe.

Huh? He needs to explain. The most important thing to Dumisani right now is finding out who he is.

“What do you mean? I know that I’m not your father’s son,” he asks.

“Yes, you are my grandfather’s son, which makes you my father, in a way.”

Damn, my grandmother had an affair with her father-in-law. She slept with both father and son!

“That’s just fucked up,” Qondani says.

“Bro!” I shake my head. My father has turned out to be my half-grandfather and half-uncle. And my uncle is now my father.

Bahle knocks and stands at the door, looking at me. I quickly get up and go to him before he heads any of this conversation.

“Your baby is crying,” he says.

I hear his wails all the way from the veranda. He must've cried for a while now. Pity I cannot run to the rondavel, even though my heart is breaking with each wail.

I thought he'd sleep for a while.

I find Fuze on her feet with him in her arms.

“What happened baby?” I take him from her and carefully sit on the bed.

“He has anger issues, no baby cries like this,” she says.

“You haven't heard him cry during a bath. He bursts the ceiling.” I put him on my chest and rub his back in circles. It calms him down. My eyes go up to Zamafuze who's standing with her hands on the hips and watching us.

Did she gain weight? The Fuze I know is shaped like the Kardashians; tiny waist and curvy bottom.

“Where is your figure?” I ask.

She clears her throat and turns to arrange nothing in the wardrobe.



Hell, no!

“Qondani did you too?” I ask in shock. No wonder Bab’Maqhawe accused us of popping babies.

“It wasn’t planned. It just happened,” she says.

“My brother never plans anything in life.” Wow, I don’t know if it’s accurate to say congratulations. This is a fourth child from a different woman.

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 67

THALENTE

I thought by now I would’ve come to my decision. But I’m still trapped between a rock and a hard place. I’m a Mbatha, I was introduced to them as their child and raised as one. Even though their blood doesn’t run in my veins, their doings and traditions shaped me to be who I am today. I made peace with my biological father being somewhere in the world, walking his path that I was never going to come across. But now he’s crossed paths with

Ndabuko, leading to a gruesome encounter with Ndlalifa. His son-in-law. It couldn't just sail off smoothly, without pasts being dug. No, not with the Ngidis. They had to stalk, sniff like dogs and dig out things. And now I'm here, caught between staying loyal to the Mbathas and finally facing the man who created me.

A hand rests on my hip, bringing me back from a train of thoughts. I didn't realize that he has woken up. He found me taking a nap and joined me. He randomly pops in during the day to check on me. Some days he doesn't go to work at all. I haven't been okay since the day he broke the news to me, pregnancy emotions don't make things easy either. I have more down moments than ups.

“What are you thinking of?” he asks.

I let out a sigh and turn to face him. He's letting his beard grow, which makes him look a bit older. But it's none of my business, the uglier he looks, the firmer my position of being the beautiful one in a

relationship becomes. Everyone will look at me when we go out together- the cuter one.

“You know what I’m thinking about,” I say.

There’s a flash of guilt in his eyes, but it quickly sweeps away as he brings his face closer to mine for a light peck.

“Don’t overthink, you know stress is not good for you and the baby. You are not under any pressure, you’ll go meet him when you’re ready.”

Funny how he always makes it sound as if I don’t have the option not to meet him.

“I might never go and meet him,” I say.

He narrows his eye. I give him a shrug.

“It’s an option, I could live my life as it was and forget about him. It’s not like I need him,” I say.

“Thalente, he’s your father. Of course you need him,” he says.

“Need him for what?” I ask, narrowing my eyes back at him.

“This is life baby. You don’t know what the future holds. Your mother left the ball in your hands, it may look useless for now, but one day you’ll wish you could’ve used it. You’ll forever ask yourself “what if” and nobody will be there to answer you,” he says.

Sigh! This is exactly what makes this whole situation frustrating. I need closure, because now he’s found and he’s willing to meet me. I have questions for him, I think my mother does too, even though she may never explore that option because of her ties to the Mbathas.

“Does he look like me?” I ask him. I don’t look like my mother or anyone that I know. So it has to be him, I didn’t drop from a tree.

“No, he’s ugly,” he says.

I lift my head and look at him with my eyebrow raised.

“And you are handsome?” I ask.

“You let me fuck you without a condom, you’re willing to bear a little me- to let these looks multiply. So I am handsome, or you are stupid.”

He's not handsome and I'm not stupid.

"Call it a favor. Do you want to scratch my head?" I ask.

"No," he says quickly.

I roll my eyes. I need to wash my hair today.

"Maybe tomorrow you can take me to him. That's if I don't change my mind. Do we need to make an appointment with the healer?" I ask.

"No, he's no longer in Mpofana. He is finishing his treatment home," he says.

"Home?" I ask.

"My father has a house in Waterways. Because nobody lives there I decided to take him and keep him there," he says like it's just another small issue that doesn't concern me that much.

"You did what?" I ask, up on my ass and glaring at him.

"He needed a peaceful place. He's been through a lot and..." Jesus Christ!

“He’s not your father Ndlalifa. You cannot make such decisions without consulting me. What if I didn’t want him in my life?” I’m beside myself with anger. I feel like my veins are about to burst open. What am I to him? A baby that can’t make her own decisions. My mother let me handle this on my own because she trusts my judgement.

“It’s not like I brought him here. I just gave him a place to stay while he waits for you to make your decision.”

Jeez, he doesn’t get it.

“It wasn’t your place. Just because you are your father’s first son and he puts you above everything and everyone, it doesn’t mean you dictate my life as well. You are not in a relationship with a baby, you found me with 32 teeth. I make my OWN decisions, you don’t have to meddle in my life.” I shake his arm off and storm out of the bedroom. At this point I don’t know if food can calm me down, but I will try. I make my way to the kitchen and snack on a large packet of chips while waiting for my food to warm up.

I'm lost in my thoughts and reviewing my anger towards Ndlalifa. I didn't overreact, right? He should've communicated with me before rescuing and playing son to my father. His hand slides inside the packet and picks a few chips. I don't care it's his money, I close the packet and shift it to the far end of the table.

He lets out a chuckle and occupies a seat next to me.

“Where is the comb?” he asks.

He's not going to bribe me by scratching my head, he refused when I asked.

“Leave me alone Ndlalifa,” I say.

He gives back the chips he took, without any hesitation I grab them and throw them in my mouth.

“He had nowhere else to go. His family hates him and he can't go back to Nxumalo. He'll figure it out when he's back on his feet and in his senses, I was just trying to help the grandfather of my child.”

“Have you ever admitted when you are wrong?” I

ask.

“I’m not saying I was right,” he says.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying please forgive me.”

“You have a funny way of saying it.” I roll my eyes and put the packet of chips back in front of us.

He just stares at it and I continue eating silently.

“Sthandwa sami...”

“I will go Ndlalifa. But I need to call my mother first.”

He sighs out in relief and gives me a light peck on the cheek.

“I love you, do you know that?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” I say.

His eyes widen.

“You’ve never bought me flowers like other men do for their girlfriends.” I don’t know where this is coming from. I don’t even like flowers.

He doesn’t say anything. I guess that cut deeply. I



take my food out of the microwave and two spoons and get back on the table.

“You’re hungry, china?” I ask.

He frowns. I pass one spoon to him and dig in. I’m scared of the call I’m about to make. I’m taking my mother ten steps back.

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SNALO

This was a random meet-up. She had wanted to make a call for days, but was hesitant because things still remain strange between her and Mondli. But eventually she dialed his number and asked for them to meet up in town. He’s here on a business adventure- according to Ngidi. Snalo didn’t question the nature of their business collaboration, deep down she was just happy that Ngidi was helping him with whatever.

They have a cozy table at Ataska, while waiting for

their food Snalo is indulging in the icy bottle of Corona Extra. Mondli is watching her quietly.

“Are you sure you don’t want a single cider?” she asks.

“Yeah, I’m good,” he says.

She puts down her beer, folds her arms and stares at him. She feels a bit light and bubbly today.

“So what’s been cooking? You are suddenly back in Durban and look this good,” she asks.

His eyes run away. He’s grown shy even to her. She keeps her eyes on him, biting her lip to suppress her smile.

“I’m trying to get on my feet,” he says, almost inaudible.

“I thought since you don’t have any friends around, I must become your friend and show you around. Friends, with or without benefits.” She sips her beer and cracks a low laugh. Is she already drunk?

Luckily the waiter comes with their food, he has an excuse not to respond to her and keep busy with his

plate.

“I’m not boring, I promise,” she keeps going, sending him to a few burps.

“We are not enemies, are we?”

He looks up, shakes his head and says, “no, we are not.”

She smiles, broadly and brightly. She’s not wearing any wig today, just her dreadlocks let loose above her shoulders. She’s wearing very minimal make up; light pink lipstick and eyeliner. Her eyebrows are left to their natural shape. To a certain extent, she looks like the Snalo he knew and loved.

“Good. I have plans for the night. These are my streets. We need jackets, full tank, cooler-box...” she looks at him, there’s something sneaky going through her mind. “Maybe weed and a packet of condoms too,” she says with her pupils dilating. She knows this is very extra of her, they’re not even in that comfortable position with each other.

“I thought you’ve changed,” Mondli says with a hint of irritation.

“It’s you who have changed. You’re in the shell, more like you are breathing but not living. Maybe I can help you remember who Mondli was,” she says.

He pulls his face, in awe of her suggestions.

“I’ve never been a wild person. I did everything I did in the past to accommodate you. Maybe this is the real me, you just don’t know me,” he says.

“I’m just trying to make you feel good,” she says with a stance of regret. She thought if they did things that used to make them happy in their childhood the Mondli she knew would come back. Mostly because she blames herself for everything that happened.

“Smoking weed and having sex with you is not going to make me feel good,” he says.

“What can I do?”

“You cannot bring my family back. You cannot undo my past. The only thing you can do is let me be. I don’t want that toxic relationship back.”

She raises her fork but he quickly stops her from

lashing out.

“You are in a good place. I want that too, for myself. Please allow me to have it.”

She picks her beer and gulps it all down her throat. He watches her quietly as she pushes back her chair and strides to the bar to order more beer. She’s in a good place, that’s what he said, but now watching her drowning herself in alcohol gives him a different perspective.

The surgery went well. She’s fully recovered and now attending therapy with her father. Normal again. She’s really privileged, everything runs smoothly in her life.

“So who do you think is going to date me?” This question catches him off guard. He looks up and finds her stare burning him.

“What do you mean?” he asks.

“I mean just that. Who do you think is going to accept me and my past and the fact that I’ll never be able to produce kids?”

“You can have kids, there are egg donors and surrogates. It’s not like you are poor to afford other means.”

“You don’t get it, do you? I want to smoke, drink and do whatever the hell I want. Life hasn’t been kind to me too. You can still shape up your life and have children. I can’t. And you have the nerve to tell me that I’m in a good place.”

People’s eyes have started to wander to their table. Her voice isn’t really low.

“Why are we here Nalo?” he asks, his voice firm but kept low.

She rests back on the chair and releases a sigh. Only then he sees tears shedding from the corners of her eyes.

“I just feel left out, by my friends and life. Everyday I see baby Nhla or Ndlalifa gushing over his pregnant Thalente. It plants and waters that seed of worthlessness as a woman in my head.”

“Okay, I’m sorry. What do you want us to do?”

She shrugs her shoulders, “I’m not sure.”

“Maybe a cuddle or a good movie?” he asks, forcing a friendly smile.

“And beers. We are going to your hotel room or wherever you are staying. If you left any girl there, better text her and tell her to disappear from earth. I don’t want to stab anyone,” she says.

He shakes his head with his lip curving up. She’s still Snalo. Some of his friends used to call her Miss Bipolar. She hasn’t really changed that much.

“We are not an item,” he says.

“I’m just playing my baby mama role, I will never get a chance to give any man headache and cause unnecessary drama. You are my one and only chance,” she says.

That hurts. Maybe she’s doing it on purpose, just to make him feel guilty.

“I’m sorry Nalo,” he says again.

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## THALENTE

He opens the door for me and I step out like a royal queen, with huge sunglasses and a jacket over my shoulder. In my mind I had an image of an old orphaned house, not this well kept mansion. I swear it looks like someone lives here. It has a touch of a woman. There's a warm thing about it.

He leads the way and I follow behind with my thudding heart. My palms are sweating. It feels like I'm in some kind of Khumbul' Ekhaya episode. I'm not sure what kind of a man I'm about to meet.

I thought I had a minute or so after walking through the door, but the man is waiting for us just a few steps away from the main door. He looks like he's been living in a jungle for the past two decades. Even though he looks clean and dressed up decently, you can tell by his unruly hair and missing teeth that life has dealt with him.

I'm grounded a few steps away from him. My eyes



are traveling all over him, while his are glued specifically to my face. Ndlalifa is standing aside, allowing us to do whatever we think of doing.

“You look like your grandmother,” he finally says.

I’m not sure if that’s a compliment, I don’t know if my grandmother was ugly or beautiful.

“My child!” He steps forward and extends his hand to me.

Handshake? I guess...

My eyes widen as our hands come in contact. Even the plumber’s hands don’t feel this rough. I turn his hand up and look at it. He quickly pulls it away but he’s too late, I’ve seen his scars.

Ndlalifa clears his throat, “Love, this is Magadlela. Your mother told you about him. Baba, this is Thalente, your daughter. I will be in the kitchen.”

He walks and turns onto the passage and disappears. Now it’s just me and this man.

“I thought we looked alike,” I say. This isn’t something I planned to say first, but it seems to

have toned down the heavy mood.

“No, I’m ugly,” he says.

At least they had mirrors where he was. I walk behind him to the lounge. I have so many questions for him. Why is he accused of killing his mother? And why didn’t he send even a letter to my mother?

I sit on a single couch while he curls up on the floor. I don’t know what it means, it’s just uncomfortable to look.

“So, we finally meet,” I say.

“It feels like a dream. My forefathers didn’t completely abandon me. All these years they kept you alive and protected you.”

I believe I was protected by the Mbatha, but I’m not going to burst his bubble.

“Can you take me back to the first day you met my mother?” I ask.

“I was not a normal boy,” he begins with a sigh. I sit back on the couch and listen with my hand on the cheek. There are many loopholes in his story. He

remembers my mother and how he'd neglected her as her boyfriend, and how his family disliked her because they believed his weird behavior was her fault. He describes his journey to Nxumalo as the longest walk to 'freedom.' His brothers were supportive at first, but after three years they stopped visiting him. Then Nxumalo and his wife became all that he had. There's a period of two years that he doesn't remember living. He has scars he can't explain and sins he doesn't remember committing. The saddest thing is that he could've killed his mother, chances are very high but his memory is low. Or it was hindered on purpose.

As much as he was a bad boyfriend, he's admitted that more than once, but I believe my mother was a bad girlfriend too. She moved on a month after his disappearance. She never bothered to search where he was or tried to find out if he was okay. I mean, if Ndlalifa disappears out of the blue, I'll erect boards on the streets, put his face in train stations and taxi ranks, and probably lose my left foot before giving up on him.

Ndlalifa has prepared lunch and drinks. Bless his soul. He's awkward around Magadlela, so we indulge in our lunch in silence. I have a duty to set up a meeting for Magadlela and MaNgobese. I think he just wants to apologize, nothing else. But knowing my mother, she'll blow everything out of proportion and drag the poor man. He's still mentally fragile, he understands very little about the outside world and life. Maybe I'm developing a soft spot for him because I've heard his side of the story. And he has no one. When Ngidi wants his house back he'll be homeless. Now I realize I'm not that rich, I can only afford to rent a shack for him.

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“Are you okay?” Ndlalifa asks as we head back to his house. I've been overwhelmed with different emotions. I don't understand how ancestors work, why couldn't they protect him. I mean their son, their own blood, last lived his life at 22. They

watched him being misused and exploited by a stranger for 27 years and didn't do a single thing to rescue him. But he still glorifies them and think they're shit.

"I'm just hungry," I say to Ndlalifa.

"Girl, you just ate an hour ago."

I turn my head to him, he glances at me once and fixes his eyes on the road with a smile cracking out.

"If you can't afford me Ndlalifa say it," I say.

He laughs out loud. Sometimes I think he says these silly things for me to bite his head off.

We are in the driveway and there are flower petals scattered at the sides, leading to the front door.

"And now? Who's getting married?" I ask.

"I don't know," he says.

I hope this isn't some kind of prank. I'm not in the mood for games.

He holds my hand as we make our way inside the

house. Lord, what is going on here? Did a florist move in or something? The whole house look like a flower garden.

“Ndlalifa what is this?” I ask in shock.

“Flowers,” he says and turns to the kitchen. Leaving me looking around the house like an idiot.

He comes back with a bunch of flowers. My Gracious Lord. I swear there’s a nest of butterflies in my tummy. This is not Bonang or Pearl Thusi, it’s me- Thalente Mbatha. It’s my life, not a movie.

“Beautiful lady for beautiful flowers.” And he ruins it just like that!

“You should watch romantic movies instead of soccer. It’s ‘beautiful flowers for a beautiful lady,’” I say with an eye roll.

He smiles, “I don’t have matric. Either way, these are your flowers and I love you.”

“Impregnate me already.” I stand on my toes and kiss his lips.

“I already did,” he says and winks.

(I'm sorry about yesterday... )

SEASON FINALE

CHAPTER 68

NDONDO

We can have different beliefs and still respect one another. It's not easy, especially if you live under one roof, but respect is a key to any door. Bahle has been inspecting my wrist and consulting his sources to find out if wearing a dead goat's skin won't damage my skin. Even though Dumisani and my mother are against cruelty against animals, they did join the ceremony and gave me their blessing. I'm officially Maqhawe's daughter.

Ndabuko's uncle called a few days ago and asked me to bring the baby to him. Maybe he thinks the world revolves around him. I've never met him. He distanced himself from Ndabuko when he needed

him the most. And now, all of a sudden, he wants to meet my son.

Anyway, baby Nhla's umbilical cord detached. Mam' Jabu suggested that we keep it until Ndabuko comes back, then both of us will decide how and where we bury it. I've been expecting a call from Ngidi or Maqhinga. The wait is killing me. I want to know when my man is coming back home. I've been taking cooking lessons from Mam' Jabu. I want to spoil him rotten, personally do his laundry and do whatever duty a woman does for her man.

I take baby Nhla to bed and go to the veranda to join Qondani. Zamafuze is still a girlfriend, and in a traditional home like mine, a girlfriend is not expected to do any chores until abakhongi have been sent to her home.

"Have you served madam? Pregnant women get hungry every minute," I ask, lounging myself on the bench next to him.

"She has a whole goodie shop inside the room," he



says with a chuckle.

“I’m glad you’re taking care of her. But the question is, for how long? I mean, you have three other baby mamas. It can’t be that all three of them were wrong, you are just a wrong man for any woman.”

“Thanks for having faith in me, tsheketshe.”

“Am I lying? You impregnate and leave women.”

“Zamafuze is different. She’s the one I’m going to have a future with.”

Oh, this sounds interesting.

“You have gave plans for the future?” I ask.

“I’m going to marry Zamafuze. Baba has given me a plot, I’m moving out and getting married,” he says.

“You’re lying!”

“If the business picks up in the next two years we’ll be financially stable. I just pray nothing goes wrong, I want to make that woman happy. I know she loves glamorous things and soft life.” His face brightens up. My goodness, the boy has grown. He has good intentions and big dreams. I’m very proud of him.

“You don’t need two years. You need a good marketing strategy and if you don’t mind, I can hook you up with someone. You can work with good African designers.”

“You can do that?” he asks, his eyes widened.

“Anything to help a badass brother out,” I say.

“I’m not that bad. I was just irresponsible here and there. Anyway I saw your friend, Khosi, with a married man. You know Mthonga Holdings? She was with a married brother who is the CEO.”

My chest dries up. I thought they were discreet. Why would they be seen together in public? Thakasa Manqele comes from a very strict Nazareth family. I don’t know why he’s with Khosi and why she allows him to torture her like he does, all I know is that he’s married and he is not leaving his wife anytime soon.

“I don’t know him,” I say, silently praying that he doesn’t take the topic any further.

“They don’t LOVE BEYOND THE TEMPLE. She must be careful.”

I raise my eyebrow, “How well do you know them?”

“Thakasa is the eldest, there’s Nkonzo after him and Bandlalethu. I don’t know their sisters, but one of them is a twin with the youngest brother, Sqalo. I know how well respected they are and how deeply religious that family is. Nomkhosi is a beautiful woman, I don’t know what deal she has with Thakasa, but that man will never do anything to defy his family and what it stands for. She’ll get hurt.”

Well, she’s been hurt already, a number of times. It only takes one phone call for her to forgive and go back to his arms. You’d expect a fierce woman like Khosi to put herself first and protect her heart. In Zulu they say indlu yegagu iyanetha, the self-worth activist has fallen deeply in love with a married man who’s made it clear that he’ll never leave his wife or marry someone outside the temple.

“I have to check on my son. You know he sleeps like a security guard on duty, one minute he’s asleep and next he’s up.” I’m just running away from the Thakasa topic, I’ve discussed it many times with

Khosi and unfortunately the heart wants what it wants.

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Phone rings. Maqhinga's name flashes on the screen and my heart takes a leap to my throat.

"Maqhinga," I answer with trembling hands.

"Ndondoyami."

My head replays his voice two times. Hot liquid rushes out of my eyes.

"Are you there?" he asks.

I'm in disbelief. I've been waiting for this day to come. To finally hear his voice when he's back in his body, mind and spirit.

"Mngomezulu," I say in a breaking whisper.

"The other side of the bed is empty. They say indondoyami went back to the village. I don't know if the village boys have taken my place in her heart."

Gosh, my cheeks are on fire. I'm blushing like a

newlywed.

“You are in Durban?” I ask, suppressing a loud scream that threatens to escape my throat.

“No, I’m home, in Mpumazi.”

“Give me a few hours.”

I check Nhla and find him sleeping peacefully. This gives me enough time to pack our bags and boil his water. I know Andiswa is going to give me a hard time before she agrees to drive me to Mpumazi. But it’s not like she has any plans, she doesn’t know anyone around here.

“Why are your bags packed?” Mom asks, walking in with a frown.

“Ndabuko called. He’s back.”

“So what? You are just going to pack and leave without telling anyone,” she asks.

Sigh!

“Obviously I was going to tell you,” I say.

“When? When you are in the car and driving out? Ndondo you are not a CEO here, you are a child.”

This is a point where I shut up and do my thing. I prepare Nhla’s bottles and pack them in his bag.

By the time I finish there’s a group of angry adults waiting for me in the lounge. I don’t know if the family is really united or we are just playing a happy family for once. Either way it’s good to see them together; Dumisani, Aunt Vumile and Bab’ Maqhawe, all sharing a room and laughing together. Mam J abu and my mother are not the best of friends but they’re civil towards each other.

Nhla is awake and resting on Dumisani’s arms. I gave Andiswa permission to order a new wheelchair, I hope it’ll be delivered soon.

“Sit,” Bab’ Maqhawe says.

I don’t roll my eyes, I sit and look at them with zero patience.

“You are leaving?” he asks.

“Yes,” I say.

“At this time, with a little baby?”

I don’t say anything.

“You cannot travel with the baby at night Ndondo. It’s not safe for him,” he says.

With my eyebrows raised, I ask; “What do you suggest I do? I’m not sleeping without seeing Ndabuko.”

He looks at my mother, she shrugs her shoulders in response to his silent question.

“We are not trying to keep you away from him. We understand how hard it’s been. But Nhlanzeko’s safety must come first. Qondani can bring him in the morning, he’ll stay behind with his grandmothers.”

“But Baba I cannot leave my baby behind.” I cannot be separated from my son. Ndabuko must be dying to spend time with him as well.

“Ndondo!” Dumisani the pastor emerges. I look at him and find the strict father glaring at me. I know

he doesn't negotiate with a child.

Leaving Nhla behind feels like I'm choosing a man over him. This is the first time he sleeps without me. I know he doesn't know me yet, but what if he senses that I'm not around and cries to death.

"Seriously? What's going to happen when your maternity leave ends? You're going to cry the whole day in the office," Andiswa asks. She's so insensitive. I don't bother responding to her, I'm going to cry as much as I want.

I don't comment on her speed either. I just pray that we don't bump into traffic cops.

It's 22h28 when we arrive in Mpumazi. I call Maqhinga to come and open the gate. My heart swells in ecstasy as I see a shadow crossing behind the bedroom curtain.

"Andiswa you're so grown," Maqhinga says, eyeing Andiswa with thirst.



“Really?” This one blushes.

I look at both of them. Maqhinga must not test me!  
This is a child.

“She could be your daughter,” I say.

He breaks into laughter, “I’m only 29 for fuck sake!”

“Still, you shouldn’t be commenting like that. She’s a baby,” I say.

Andiswa rolls her eyes and walks to the door, leaving us behind.

“You’re sleeping in the rondavel. I don’t want you anywhere around Andiswa,” I say to Maqhinga.

“What if I have good intentions?” he asks.

“I don’t care. Take your good intentions to your thousand fuck buddies,” I say.

He laughs. I’m not joking with him. Andiswa is off limits. I know how he treats women- like sperm dishes.

As uncomfortable as it is to leave Andiswa with Maqhinga, I have to find my man.

“If he does anything to you scream,” I tell Andiswa.

Maqhingana laughs from the kitchen. Andiswa is very comfortable around him. She shouldn't be. He's older than her.

I knock softly outside the door. I hope he's not asleep.

Footsteps come towards the door.

The handle turns and the door opens. Here is the cute smile I have missed for so long. He's gained back some of his weight. His head is shaved and bald. He smells heavenly and looks handsome in ripped jeans and unbuttoned shirt.

“Hey,” he says.

Earth to Ndondo!

I clear my throat, “Hi.”

My voice just croaks out. My legs feel like jelly. I'm literally just drooling over him.

“Are you coming in?” he asks.

Damn it. I step inside. He closes the door behind me.

“I was hoping that you’ll come with my boy but I understand that...” I grab his head and smooch his lips. His chuckle disappears between our locked lips. He tastes the same, his body reacts to mine warmly. Six weeks rule, damn it!

We are piled on bed, our lips are locked, our breaths escalating and steaming up the room.

I push him aside when I feel his excited organ poking out of his jean. It still works. With everything that went down, nothing was guaranteed.

“I have missed you so much,” he says, brushing his lips against my neck.

I touch his face, running my fingers on his jawline just to feel that he’s real.

“I can’t believe you are back,” I say in a low whisper.

“I wasn’t going to leave my son fatherless,” he says.

“And me, right?” I ask.

He smiles, “Yes, and my trophy.”

We kiss again. Briefly this time. I don't want it to lead me to temptations. My stitches recently healed, my cervix is still getting back into place.

“What really happened babe?” I ask.

His face changes instantly. He holds my hand and plays with my fingers.

“Is it important for you to know? I mean, we are okay now, we survived the storms. You got closure and I got a deeper understanding of everything. My parents, Nhlanzeko and my childhood. All we have to do now is start over, on a clean slate. Nhlanzeko is resting peacefully, you gave him an heir—someone who carries his name.”

It makes sense when he puts it that way. I don't need to know what happened in details. The most important thing is that we survived. Not without scars and bruises, but we are here, in each other's arms again.

“Okay, let's just move on. While we are still on that, your uncle called. He wants to see Nhla,” I say.

“That one is full of shit. Ngidi is the only paternal

grandfather of Nhla that I know. How is your father?"

Sigh! Where do I even start?

"He went back to Nyandeni. I left all of them there. I can say he's fine because he's breathing and I don't know what I can do to help him."

"Is it that bad?" he asks.

"Bad is not even a word. But I'm praying for the best. If not God, the ancestors will intervene."

He wraps me in his arms and plants a kiss on my forehead.

"It's going to be okay sthandwa sami," he says.

That's what I'm hoping for as well.

"I wish my son was here but I understand your father's concerns. How big is he now?" His voice is sore. This reminds me to call my mother. I haven't checked on them in the last hour.

"I will show you his videos, let me call my mother first." I scroll down my contacts and call her number. It rings a couple of times before she picks

up.

“I’m going to switch this phone off now,” she warns in annoyance.

“I just wanted to check if he’s not crying,” I say.

“And if he’s crying what are you going to do?”

I roll my eyes, “Mom, is he okay or not?”

“He’s okay Ndondo. Can I sleep now?” She’s irritated.

“Okay, goodnight. I love you.”

Call dropped...

I let out a heavy sigh and open the gallery to show him Nhla’s videos. When I lift my eyes I find a pair of amused eyes staring at me.

“What’s funny?” I ask.

“You are a beautiful mom. My son is blessed to have you. So am I, you are the reason why I fought to come back. You’re not just a pretty face, there’s a strong woman behind this beauty.”

“Babe!” I’m blushing.

“I want to hold you in my arms throughout the night. I want to feel your heart beating against mine.” He pulls me closer to his chest and gives me a light peck on the cheek.

I click on the first video...he’s not doing anything, just sleeping in his cot, but we watch and laugh like we are watching the most interesting movie of the century.

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MAQHINGA

She’s sitting on top of the table with her legs crossed and staring at him as if she’s calculating every move he makes.

“Do you want some fruit salad?” he asks with his back turned.

“Don’t you have Savanna?” she asks.

Maqhinga turns around with his eyes widened. She’s only 21. Ndondo will eat him alive if he dares

to offer her baby sister alcohol.

“I have milk and juice,” he says.

Throwing her head backwards, she laughs out in mockery.

“Dude I’m over 18,” she says, still laughing.

“But you know that Ndondo will kill you if she finds out,” he says.

She glances at the passage and looks back at him.

“Ndondo is sleeping now. She won’t ruin her first night with Mngomezulu by nannying me. But if you’re scared we can take it and go drink in your room.” She jumps off the table and straightens her dress.

“You’re making me look bad yazi.” He complains while taking a six pack of Savanna out of the fridge. She helps him by taking the bowl of fruit salad he prepared. They make their way out of the house and head to the rondavel, closing the door behind them.

It’s a fancy rondavel compared to the ones in



Nyandeni. It's furnished modernly, with gigantic windows and art decorations on the walls.

She doesn't wait to be told, she makes herself comfortable on the bed and takes one Savanna. Maqhingwa is still pulling down the curtains and clearing his shoes from the floor. When he turns around Andiswa is on her second Savanna.

"Damn, are you drinking to drown sorrows?" he asks in awe.

"Maybe," she says, shrugging her shoulders.

"You are 21, what sorrows do you have? Missing a class?"

"I have bigger problems Maqhingwa. Are you not going to sit and drink?"

He chuckles and sits next to her.

"I will have my salad first," he says.

"I didn't see you as someone who eats salads. You are the dumpling type," she says.

His eyes widen, then he breaks into laughter. He's not a salad person but that doesn't mean he hates it.

And it's close to midnight, he can't eat a dumpling at this time.

"You are judgmental," he says.

"No, I'm not. I just know taxi drivers very well," she says.

He's not a taxi driver but he doesn't correct her. Instead he stares at her and asks what experience she has with taxi drivers to know them that well.

"My first boyfriend's brother was a taxi driver," she says, giving him a shrug and sipping her Savanna.

"First boyfriend?" He didn't expect her to have history in the dating department. He thought the boyfriend Ndondo wanted to burn alive was her first.

"The one who took my virginity," she says.

He laughs. That's all he can do. If it was his sister he would've been angry, that's for sure. But as a guy he understands how it works. He was 16 when he first broke someone's virginity and she was only 15.

"What's troubling you?" he asks, shaking off the virginity talk.

She sighs and puts down her drink.

“My parents’ marriage is over. Dad is an ass#ole.”

That’s not something he expected. He thought it was school related or something to do with boys.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” he says.

“Yazi I never thought the things I read about in newspapers could happen in my home, to my mother. It hits differently when someone close to you is a victim and you didn’t do anything to save her.”

He reaches out to her hand and holds it.

“Andiswa you are young. There’s nothing you could’ve done. You have no fault in this,” he says.

“I still feel like I failed both of them. My father has never been normal. Signs were there, their bedroom door was always shut and we were not allowed inside, under any circumstances. I’m her daughter but I’ve never seen her take a shower. A normal mother would call you to bring her a shampoo or a towel while in the bathroom. But I’ve never seen my

mother naked, like never.” She covers her eyes and sniffs back.

“How did I fail to pick this up? What kind of a daughter am I?” Maqhinga pulls her into his arms and embraces her in a tight, warm hug.

“Please don’t cry, it’s gonna be okay, trust me.”

“It hurts. My mother had to swallow back tears and wear a smile for our sake. She sacrificed her...” He presses her head against his chest and draws a map on her back.

“Please Andiswa,” he whispers.

For a moment she’s sobbing on his chest and he’s rubbing her back, trying to calm her down.

Then she lifts her messy face to him.

“Can I spend the night with you?”

His eyes widen. Ndondo gave a warning. Them spending a night in one room, on one bed, will surely paint a different picture.

“You can’t. Ndondo will have my lungs for breakfast,” he says.

“I don’t care what Ndondo thinks. I’m 21, I can make my own decisions,” she says.

He’s thrown back and muted.

“But I can leave before she wakes up if you’re scared,” she says.

“Hhayi Andiswa, what if I get tempted to do things to you? I’m a man and you’re a girl. Unless if you’re willing to sleep on the floor.”

“I’m sleeping with you.” With that said she throws her leg over him and steals a kiss from his lips.

She’s throwing stones at the sleeping bulldog.

“Your lips are soft,” he says, licking his lips and sending his eye down to her exposed thigh.

“All my lips are soft,” she says.

His eyes widen.

“Really?” he asks.

She kisses his chin. He lets out a soft chuckle.

“You can taste both and feel them,” she winks.

He grabs her neck and sucks her lower lip. His hand travels down and lifts up her dress, clearing its path to her cookie jar. He pulls aside the G-string and feels the so-called soft lips.

Indeed they're soft. A groan escapes his throat. Stolen sex has always been the best and this is a good temptation.

"I don't have condoms yazi," he whispers.

"So what's going to happen? We are postponing this?" She licks the side of his face. The tricks she has in her sleeves are shocking for a 21 year old.

"Are you not scared of me?" he asks.

"You don't look stupid and I know my way to the pharmacy," she says.

He ignores the soft voice in his conscience and strips her naked. She puts her on her back on bed and takes off his shirt and kisses her. He has to make it worth her while. Passionate, slow and fulfilling.

"Andis wa I don't want anyone to think I took

advantage of you. If your sister finds out about this I'll be dead.”

“It’s my body. Please stop panicking, it’s turning me off.”

He chuckles and drops his head on hers and kisses her again.

It’s just this one time. Nobody is ever going to find out. He’s eight years older her and she’s his brother’s sister-in-law.

EPILOGUE

NDONDO

We have come too far to be where we are today. It wasn’t a bed of roses, we had more downs than ups. We survived storms and hurricanes. With scars and bruises shaping us up for this day, and challenges making us stronger than we were.

I didn’t get to meet him in person but I have a clear picture of who and how he was. We could have worked, they say love paves the way, but I can say it

with my head held up high that; Nhlanzeko and I were just too different. I'm glad he planned my life and arranged a good man for me. Yes, my life was planned by a dead man, but he had my best interests at heart and for that, I'll always be grateful.

Our son just turned three months old. He looks exactly like the man of a leather jacket in pictures. I swear I'm marrying into the most weird family. But he's a fresh start for Ndabuko, more like he's getting to live with the old Nhlanzeko all over again.

Speaking of that innocent soul, his hoarse cry welcomes me from the door. I should be dressing up, we only have forty minutes left, but I can't focus if I've been away from him for too long.

"Why is he crying?" I ask in panic.

He's in Thacente's arms and crying his lungs out.

"Lord, Ndongdo! Did you see the time?" she asks.

"I just needed to see him before we go to the venue."



“He just wants his milk. It’s still hot. Now go back and dress up before Ndabuko sends an army here.”

I lean over, wipe his tears and kiss his tiny forehead.

“Mommy loves you, okay?” He’s just so cute and innocent. I can’t stay away from him. He’s my everything.

Andiswa walks in with the bottle. She refused to be a bridesmaid. She backed out on the last minute, I had to ask a colleague to stand in for her and beg the designer to adjust the dress. I haven’t asked what’s going on with her, lately she’s been hiding herself in her room and not talking to anyone. I understand the changes, it’s hard to accept that our parents separated. Dumisani is now living in Nyandeni, mom is here in Durban. We know they’re no longer together even though they haven’t filed for divorce. But I don’t think that’s something eating Andiswa, something else is bothering her.

Thalente takes the bottle and feeds Nhla. He calms down and suckle his milk.

“You can leave now. Or you want me to call your

mothers?” she says.

She knows how dramatic those two women can be. I was okay with them being cat and mouse, now that they have formed this new friendship they've become a pair of ungovernable adults.

I go back to the bedroom and endure piercing stares from the glamorous Snalo and Khosi who can hardly wait for the actual ceremony.

“Who's going to put me in a dress? I already know who's going to take it out,” I ask.

The make-up girls giggle. I must be the most annoying bride they've ever worked with.

I haven't lost all the pregnancy weight, which is why I chose a ball gown. It's not too tight, it hugs my upper body perfectly and cups up my breasts.

Dumisani gave me a diamond bracelet. It's not just any bracelet, it was custom-made for me. His gift of good luck and last gift to me as a Sibisi. Both of them, him and Bab'Maqhawe, will walk me down the aisle.

Two girls help me in the dress and do the last touches on my face. I have four bridesmaids wearing long dusky pink dresses. Three of them have the same hairdo, only Snalo is rocking her dyed dreadlocks. Nomkhosi is obviously my maid of honor. I couldn't have chosen a better person other than my best friend. I haven't heard anything about Thakasa in the last couple of weeks, I hope this time their break up is for good.

I really don't know where the time went, we are almost fifteen minutes late. Nomkhosi was already accepting a thousand calls by the time we left the house.

We kept it small, with close relatives, colleagues and friends only. We'll invite more guests for the traditional wedding. I wanted this one to be romantic and private in Highfield House.

The bridesmaids have entered. Now it's time for Qondani's princess to open the way for me. Bab'Maqhawe's hand grows tight around mine. I

wish Bab'Mlambo was here, to rejoice with me on this day. I know that he would've been proud of me. He would've gave me his wise advices and blessings. I hope he forgave us for what happened to him.

"I wish you all the best Ndongoyamahlase," Bab'Maqhawe says.

"Always remember that you have a family that loves you. If you encounter problems and they're too heavy for you, don't be scared to come back," Dumisani says.

I'm not going to start crying now. I fight back tears and hug both of them. They're not perfect but I know they'll lose their souls before they allow anyone to treat me badly.

"It's time for you to go to your husband," Bab'Maqhawe says.

Dumisani holds my free hand, Bab'Maqhawe pushes his wheelchair behind and we approach the entrance. My insides are frozen. When my eyes set on him standing nervously in a dark-grey tuxedo,

my knees get wobbly. His eyes are fixed on me as if it's the first time he's ever seen me.

He shakes Dumisani's hand, then Bab'Maqhawe's.

"I will treat her like a queen," he says before they can say anything.

"I'll hold you to it," Bab'Maqhawe says with a smile.

Dumisani hands me over but before letting go of my hand he says; "I love you mntanami."

I glance back at him and smile with tears burning my eyes. I love him too, I don't know what he's going to do to get my mother's forgiveness but I want both of them to be okay. They have children together.

"You're beautiful Maka Nhla," Ndabuko whispers and gives my hand a squeeze.

I make it to the front with burning cheeks. This whole snack of a man is about to be officially mine.

“My Yardner..we made it!” I didn’t realize I was saying that loud before the applause erupted.

“Ndondoyami,” he says in a voice laced with emotions.

We are about to kiss when the pastor clears his throat.

Oh, snap!

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THALENTE

I’m five months pregnant but you’d swear I’m about to give birth or carrying twins. The wedding is beautiful, I loved their vows and how deeply in love they are. Their story deserves to be televised. From a yardner to a rich chosen husband. It’s such a beautiful story. I wish mine was like theirs, but I found love at the taxi rank. We were enemies before we became lovers. Ours was very dramatic, not some prince charming and princess kind of story.

The fights in Cannelands shack, potatoes and beans scandal, taxi races and pregnancy. It all happened in a short space of time. But I don't have any regrets, I love that tall man in a black tuxedo. He keeps stealing glances at me. I know he thinks I'm hungry or sleepy. But none of that is the case here, I'm only craving a kiss.

My phone vibrates. The pastor is still quoting from the Bible and giving them advices. I quietly excuse myself and walk out.

It's my mother. She couldn't make it to the wedding because of other commitments.

"Thalente they know," she says.

I can hear the panic in her voice.

"What are you talking about Ma?" I ask.

"Your father. His brothers know that he's out and they want him dead."

What the hell? Magadlela has been through a lot, he doesn't need this chaos.

“Don’t worry, he’s safe where he is. I will tell Ndlalifa to upgrade the security as well.”

“Please mntanami, he’s not innocent but whatever happened was not his intention and he had no idea what he was doing.” She’s grown very protective of him. It’s either out of guilt or because ‘old flames die hard.’ I managed to arrange their meeting without the Mbathas finding out. He told her his story and she understood him. Now what’s left is for me to be transferred back to my rightful surname, Gina. Ndlalifa wants it to happen before I give birth, so he’s doing his utmost best to help Magadlela get back on his feet. This is not something the Mbathas expected but they’ve always had my best interest at heart. This is for the baby that I’m carrying, it’s important for him to be introduced to the Gina ancestors.

Doesn’t it freak me out? Well, it does. Even when it kicks or moves in my tummy I always wonder if it’s not taking my bones and opening isigodlo inside me. I swear I’ve heard it sigh like Ngcwethi a couple of times. But Ndlalifa thinks I’m paranoid and making



it seem as if his beloved son won't be normal. He won't be normal, I've made peace with that, but I love him more than anything in this world, before he's even born. I would've loved him even if he was born a vampire.

There's an ululation, did I miss a romantic kissing scene? I rush in and find them wrapped in a tight hug in front of the smiling pastor.

"They have kissed?" I ask the lady sitting by the entrance. She's one of those glamorous ladies I see when there are board meetings in Bantwana Holdings.

"Yes," she says with a smile.

"Shit, I missed out." I tiptoe back to my seat. She's silently laughing behind me. I used my connections to get a new job. If you're well connected like me you don't go around printing CVs and begging born-irritated managers to take them. People like me just submit their CVs, documents and banking information, and then show up for work the next day.

I got permanent within two weeks and I'm about to have a paid maternity leave.

Now we have Mr Ndabuko and Mrs Ndondo Mngomezulu. I have strong arms holding my waist as we rejoice and celebrate the newlyweds.

“Shouldn't you be dancing with one of the bridesmaids?” I ask him.

“I can't dance,” he says.

That's just an excuse. Maqhingana can't dance either, but he's there, jumping up and down, kicking his legs and twerking to his partner.

“I can't dance either, so we are just going to move like Zion members to a sad hymn?” I ask.

He chuckles behind my ear, “Maybe we should take classes. In a few months it will be us at the altar, making our love official before God and vowing to love each other through thick and thin.”

“I thought you said you only want a Zulu traditional wedding?”

“I want all weddings. Zulu, white, Indian and

Japanese. As long as it's about you and I tying the knot.”

I turn around and kiss him. We've been arguing about the white wedding since forever. He didn't want it and I wanted the glam, the beauty, to look like a mermaid and become the center of attention for once in my life.

“I love you Hlomuka,” I say.

“Not as much as I love you. We are spending the rest of this lifetime together sthandwa sami.”

This is not luck, I'm abundantly blessed. We are just a perfect match made from heaven.

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She was one of the bridesmaids and she couldn't wait for her sister's wedding. Well, until a week back when she finally went to consult the doctor about fatigue and random sicknesses. Her world came crushing when the doctor told her she was two

months pregnant. Kanjani? She's only 21 years old and now single. Everyone has told her to walk in Ndondo's shoes; to focus on her studies and make a name for herself before giving boys a chance. Her parents are already at odds, how is she going to face them? Such embarrassment to the family. Ndondo got pregnant by a guy who loved her, and now he's married her. What about her? The father of her child is not only eight years older than her, he's a well-known fuck-boy. It was that night only, when she gave herself to him. She was supposed to buy morning-after pills the next day, but she didn't. Her mother called early in the morning and asked her to fetch her from Nyandeni. There were a lot of things happening. Her father moving out of their Durban house. She had to drive to Nyandeni, delivering his belongings, two days in a row. And there was Bahle who wanted to move to Nyandeni with his father. Ndondo had just reunited with Ndabuko, she was still living in a bubble in Mpumazi. Andiswa inherited all the responsibilities, her raw sexual encounter with Maqhingana was just the last thing on her mind.

She makes her third trip to the bathrooms. One of the things she struggles with is nausea. After throwing up almost everything including her intestines, she sits on the floor and leans against the bathroom door. Why her? What if Maqhinganga denies the baby? What then? Ndondo is going to financially sustain the baby, but she cannot father it.

She scrolls down her contacts. Her finger stops on Maqhinganga's number. She stole it from Ndondo's phone. They haven't talked or met after that night in Mpumazi. It was just a one-night thing and it ended there as they had promised each other. He gave her R300 for the pills and asked her to go back to the main house at 4:15 am.

He trusted her as much as she trusted him. Maybe because she's a young, intelligent, city girl. He thought she'd make it a top priority to stay on the safe side. But life happened, she got wrapped in family problems and forgot to prevent nature from taking its place.

**\*\*Hi Maqhingwa, this is Andiswa. We need to talk, today!\*\***

She thought it will take time for him to see it but within five minutes there are two blue ticks. They are heading back home for lunch and cake-cutting. Mam' Jabu has been giving her stares that send shivers down her spine. Maybe she should've worn a jacket, even though Ndondo would've taken it as an insult.

Mam' Jabu is making her way towards her as people scatter around the yard.

This old woman! She'll make things obvious if she runs, so she waits with her arms wrapped over her swelling tummy.

"Andiswa," she calls a few steps away from her.

"Ma?" Jesus Christ, make her go away!

She looks at her from head to toe, her eyebrows furrowed a little.

“You don’t look okay. Yini inkinga? Weqe umlilo washa?” (You jumped the fire and got burnt)

The most irritating mother of the year award goes to her, she has no competitors.

“I’m okay,” Andiswa says in a foggy voice.

“Mmmm I really hope so. Please fetch Nhla’s extra diapers and a blanket,” she says before turning and walking away.

A huge sigh of relief. Damn, these village gynecologists!

There’s a message coming through as she searches for Nhla’s bag. It’s Maqhinga, he wants them to meet outside the gate, in a certain white quantum. He’s Ndabuko’s best man, they’ll be looking for him soon, she has to make it snappy. She rushes out of the house and walks around the marquee without attaching any unnecessary attention to herself and sneaks out of the gate.

She spots the quantum and rushes to it. He opens

the door and closes it after her. He's been dancing close to Ngobile, the bridesmaid who stood in for Andiswa. Maybe there's something happening or waiting to happen between the two of them. But she's not jealous, is she?

"Why did it take you this long to get back to me?" she snaps.

"Hey, hold your horses. I was busy. What's this about? You know your sister is going to kill me if she even sees me sitting like this with you."

Deep breath! Here it goes...

"I forgot to go to the pharmacy that day. My father decided to move out, my mother was throwing out his belongings and I had to drive to Nyandeni two days in a row."

This is not something he expected. His palms start sweating. He adjusts the bow-tie and looks at her with his eyes bulging out.

"What do you mean Andiswa?" he asks.

"I haven't got my periods since that day," she says.



“Kanjani manje? You...Andiswa you are Ndondo’s sister..this cannot happen. It just can’t!” He buries his head on the steering wheel and chants a thousand no’s.

Tears make their way down on her cheeks. She didn’t do this purpose. She’s not even ready to be someone’s mother. Being an aunt to baby Nhla is a job on its own, how much more when she has her own baby? The one that’s going to need her attention 24/7.

“I wanted to tell you that, I have to go before Mam’ Jabu suspects something.” She opens the door and leaves him buried on the wheel and sobbing silently.

His head is aching. Eyes bloodshot as if he just murdered someone. He fixes his bow-tie and makes his way to the marquee. He’s Ndabuko’s best man, he trusts him as a brother and around his family. But it’s all about to come to end when he finds out that he made his 21 year old sister-in-law pregnant. All this because he couldn’t say no. He couldn’t

keep his pant zipped up.

“Bafo are you okay?” Ndlalifa asks.

He nods, “Yeah, ngisharp.”

Ndlalifa pats his back as they make their way to the front table. They have to congratulate Ndabuko and reveal the gift they got for him and his little family....

NDABUKO HER YARDNER

THE END

A loud knock bangs on the door in the wee hours of morning. Ngidi is fast asleep, he had a long day yesterday and Phumzile doesn't want him to be disturbed. She quietly slides out of bed, puts her gown on and makes her way to the door.

“Snalo what is your problem?” she asks in irritation.

“Ma, there are people here. You have to wake Dad up, they are not here to play games.”

She frowns, “Who are those people?”

“Ndondo's parents.”

She starts panicking. Ndabuko and Ndondo were supposed to come back from their honeymoon yesterday. Maybe something happened on their way home.

She rushes back inside the bedroom and shakes Ngidi.

“Bheki wake up!” She dashes to the closet and grabs his trouser and T-shirt.

“What’s going on?” Ngidi asks, rubbing his eyes.

“Ndondo’s parents are here.” She throws his clothes to him and takes off her gown and puts on a decent dress as well.

They follow each other out of the bedroom and rush down the stairs.

Welcoming them in the lounge is Nomagugu’s red face, the pacing Jabu and Ndondo’s young sister curled up on the couch.

“Good morning,” Phumzile says while trying to read their faces.

Snalo is lurking by the kitchen and whispering on the phone.

“Good morning? There’s something good about this morning? Actually you, the Ngidis, don’t have any respect for my family,” Nomagugu blows up.

Ngidi stands behind Phumzile confused. Phumzile forces a smile, turns back her head and asks him to sit.

“Can we all calm down and sit? Snalo will make us tea, then maybe we can get to the bottom of whatever it is without killing each other,” Phumzile suggests humbly.

Nomagugu slaps Andiswa’s arm, “Yeyi! Yeyi! Does he stay here?”

Phumzile and Ngidi share a look. They’re confused. These are Ndabukos in-laws, they expect some respect from them.

“I don’t know,” Andiswa says, almost whispering.

An evil chuckle comes from her mother who’s put her hands on the waist.

“J abu are you listening with me? She doesn’t know where he stays. Ngonyama I need to see your boys. I want to know who made my daughter pregnant.”

“Whaaat?” Phumzile and Ngidi both say in shock. This is Ndondo’s young sister, why would any of their sons see a woman in her?

Ngidi steps out of the house, scrolling down his phone with bullets of sweat running down his face.

The first call goes to Ndlalifa.

“Get your ass in my house, now!” He doesn’t wait for his answer, he drops the call and calls the next one.

“Your ass in my house, right now!”

He’s pacing up and down outside the door. His eyes are fixed on the driveway, he’s ready to kill one of them. Inside the house Phumzile is enduring all the backlash directed to her family. Deep down she knows the culprit, it’s just that she didn’t expect him to chow so close to the family. Ndabuko is a brother

to them, his sister-in-law is like theirs, he should've protected this young girl from boys.

Twenty minutes later Ndlalifa's car drives in, both of them are inside. Maqhingana is wearing a hoodie jacket and covering half of his forehead.

"What's going on?" Ndlalifa asks as they reach to their angry father.

"Get inside," Ngidi says.

They walk in, he follows behind them. Snalo is preparing tea in the kitchen, when she sees Maqhingana she clenches her teeth and points her head to the lounge. Maqhingana pulls the hoodie over his eyes and puts his trembling hands inside the pockets.

"Stand there, don't move," Ngidi instructs.

Ndlalifa frowns and stands next to Maqhingana behind the couch.

"Which one between the two?" Ngidi asks Andiswa.

She clears her throat and looks up. Her eyes lock

with Maqhingá's below the hoodie for a second and she realizes how nervous he is.

“Speak!” her mother roars.

“It's...it's Maqhingá,” she stutters and points at him.

Phumzile gets up quickly as a lightning and stands in front of Maqhingá.

“Bheki calm down, please.”

Ngidi is blocked by her, he would've grabbed him and gave him a few punches.

“Is it burning behind your underwear wena? This is a child, a fuckin' child Maqhingá!”

“Baba I'm sorry, it was a mistake.”

“Mistake yamasimba? I'm woken up at this time because of you. Is this not Ndondo's sister? Huh?”

Phumzile raises her hands, “Please Bheki, sit down.”

He clicks his tongue before returning back to his seat. Everyone is sat and calm now.

“Maqhingá do you know anything about this?”

Phumzile asks.

Maqhingwa nods uneasily.

“Didn’t you know who she was?”

Deep breath, “I knew. It happened only once. I’m sorry.”

Phumzile sighs and shakes her head. She turns to Andiswa.

“How far are you?”

“15 weeks.”

She looks at Maqhingwa, “Have you taken her to the doctor?”

Silence...

“Did he take you to the doctor?” she asks Andiswa.

Silence...

All three women start shouting at once, to both Andiswa and Maqhingwa.

“Hhayi bo, what’s going on here? Ma, Mam’ J abu, Andiswa, why are you all here?” Ndongdo asks. The



room falls into sudden silence. She's standing with Ndabuko behind her. They came here because Snalo said there's something huge happening and they needed to hurry.

"Your sister is pregnant," her mother says.

Ndabuko quickly snatches Nhla from her arms.

"She is what?" Her eyes go to Andiswa. She's shaking with anger. She's been taking this child to therapists and begging her to open up about their parents' break up, whereas she's been sour because she's pregnant.

"And the baby's father is Maqhinga," Ngidi adds.

She shakes her head and laughs.

"No, no, no. That's a lie. Maqhinga you wouldn't do such a thing, right?" she asks.

He's not looking at her. He's not giving her the confirmation she's desperately in need of.

"Maqhinga come on!" Her body is failing her. Not her little sister. Maqhinga out of all people!

**THE END!!!**