

MY SELF DISCOVERY

INSERT 1

So here I am...

I am getting ready to start my new job, I am beyond excited. I am going to teach at an

independent private school in

Johannesburg. I am quite excited, and nervous, considering the

fact that I have been a public school

teacher in Soweto for the last three years.

People seem to

have a weird perception of teachers. They think we're in it for money (I'm still trying to figure

out where the money at), and all the

holidays... I must admit though that I love the holidays! I

don't even need a damn "leave" because I get to rest during school holidays...

Kumnandi

shame...

Unfortunately, people don't understand how intense and draining this profession is. Yes, I call it a profession, because I pride myself in it. Every doctor, lawyer, artist and every other

professional out there would be nothing without teachers. They got there because a bunch of

awesome superheroes facilitated their learning process. Powerful, I tell you... So anyway, like I

was saying, people don't understand how draining and intense it is to be a teacher.

Every day is unpredictable. We deal with children who come from various

backgrounds, who have shocking learning barriers. It is our responsibility to ensure

that every single child in the class feels loved, valued, and that they actually learn and are equipped with all the necessary skills to survive in this big bad world. It's not just about teaching them English, or Science. It's about instilling critical thinking skills, so that they are comfortable enough to deal with any challenges they face.

Anyway, today is my last day at Fundani Primary School, and I am going through the most. The

thought of leaving these kids is driving me insane. I have become their mother.

The love is so

deep, that it scares me. I teach Grade 4 English and Life Orientation. My grade 4s are the cutest

little things ever, and I am amazed at how much they have grown since I started teaching them

at the beginning of the year. It's October now, and 90% of them are now fluent English speakers, and confident little rascals. It warms my heart, really.

My dad was the one who encouraged me to apply to a different school. According to him, I am 25 years old, and this is the perfect time to experiment, and figure out what works for me. My dad and I are quite close. He gets me. He is a business owner. He sells slaughtered chickens, and makes his own plates (pap and chicken), and also sells homemade mageu. On paper, this sounds shady, but I will have you know that his business is successful, booming, flourishing.

Think of all those lovely synonyms that describe savagery. What I have learnt from him is that there is always a target market for anything. There are people out there who are not running after expensive food and drinks. My dad caters for those people. People who just want to spend less than 20 bucks to get a lovely (really lovely) plate of pap and fresh chicken. His target market grows daily, and I am very impressed. And people think uneducated people can't rebuild their lives? I could praise this man 24/7 but I will stick to that for now... Anyway, today. Last day. Love my babies. Sad day.

I am making my way to the staff room,
when I get stopped by my usual “teacher’s
pets.” Lol

who wouldn’t love to have kids who are
always excited (obsessed) to see you, and
literally fight

each other just so they can carry your bag
to the staff room? See, everyone knew
that wherever

Ms Dlamini was, best believe there would
be a mini-crowd surrounding her. Ms
Dlamini is me,
of course...

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

Me: Haike Lwazi, don’t be mean.

Lwazi looks at me innocently and blinks.

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

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

Me: You are ALL my children!

Lwazi grabs my hand and holds on to it. She is so possessive, and the other kids eventually got used to her. As much as I tried not to have favourites, she really made it difficult. We both walk to the staff room, hand in hand, and she puts my bag in my locker. She turns around and sighs.

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

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

She gets teary and wraps her arms around me.

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

She nods and we stand there for a while. "Ohhh savelelwa! You and that child of yours!" The other teachers say.

They laughed as Lwazi and I walked out and made our way to the playground.

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

We get to the playground and I am immediately surrounded by my boys. Lol I have a very deep connection with boys. I get along better with them. Mind you, Lwazi is still holding on to me.

She never fails to let people know that I am taken. Anyway, we stand there and I listen to their

crazy and random stories. 60% of the time I am really interested in these stories, but 40% of the

time I just pretend as if I'm interested.

Kids are the most honest beings in the world. I don't

know how many times I have been asked by the grade 1s and 2s why I am gaining weight, why I

am losing weight, and why I love wearing dresses, and why this and why that.

Honestly, you

can't work with kids if you have a low self-esteem; because it would be easy take all these raw

yet innocent questions personally. They don't have filters, and I love that. They know more

about my inconsistent weight than me. They tell me when I am dressed to kill, and when I look a hot mess.

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

It's now 2:30pm and the tears have been flowing since 12pm, when it hit me that I won't be

teaching these rascals. I have received hundreds of letters from kids that I don't even teach...

I'm with my grade 4s and they're busy delivering speeches about me: how much I have changed their lives, and how much they will miss me. The principal even organized a special assembly for me earlier... It was all so emotional... I was now in the staff room, and the teachers had given me my gifts and popped a bottle of cheap champagne for me. I was done packing my things and I was now ready to leave. I said my goodbyes, and walked out. The school was now empty. Lwazi was obviously waiting for me. We were going to walk together. She lived a few streets from me. She took my box of letters

and we began walking... The sun was scorching hot, but it wasn't something we were not used to.

She is a yellow cute child, and she always wears her heart on her sleeve with me.

Till this day, I am still shaken by our deep connection. If I could adopt her, I would.

Lwazi: Dad left again...

I sigh.

Me: How are you?

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

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

She shrugs.

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

She smiles and flashes her dimples.

Me: Nothing will ever come between us.

Lwazi: Okay mommy.

We both laugh.

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

I laugh and wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: You're too special.

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

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

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

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

I chuckled.

Dad: R1500!

Me: Geesh how is that even possible?

He laughed happily as he walked out and closed the door. Shame, I'm so happy for him. I

reached for my phone and saw that I have a missed call from Nikiwe, my best friend. I call her and she immediately answers.

Me: Niki

Niki: Be ready in 30 minutes.

Me: I'm so tired-

Niki: Sisi ayifuni mina leyo. Get ready.

Me: Hmkay.

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

I get up and get ready... What to wear?
Hmm... I pick a simple body hugging olive green dress,
and black pumps. I am so far deep into this pump movement, that no one can tell me anything.

I don't care if your feet get stinky occasionally... It's nothing a few secrets socks can't fix. I wash off my clay mask, and moisturize my face. Just then, my phone rings, and I answer without checking the caller id.

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

Person: This is not Nikiwe.

Me: Huh?

I check the caller id and roll my eyes.

Me: Hello Derek.

Derek: How are you?

Me: Good.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

I could literally die right now. I don't even remember this guy properly. All I know is that Niki,

Wendi, and I were out one night, and we ended up getting a lift from him. He took us home, and

I gave him my number. Now he is pestering me.

Me: Uhm listen, I have to go.

Derek: Any plans for tonight?

Me: Not really hey. Just gonna stay in.

Derek: Oh okay. Would you lik-

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

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

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

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

Niki: The Uber is 3 minutes away. Phuma.

Me: K.

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

Me: Sthandwa.

Mom: Hello baby.

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

Mom: Okay. Just be safe.

Me: Of course.

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

Me: I'll see you.

Dad: Have fun.

Me: Bye.

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

Niki: Hiii!

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

Me: Sanibonani.

Niki: Heyii

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

The Uber driver chuckles and greets back.

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

receiving 2 stars tonight.

Niki: Ahh man Zizi kanti why unje?

The Uber driver laughs quietly and continues to drive.

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

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

I roll my eyes.

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

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

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

INSERT 2

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

Niki: I'm sure today was emotional.

Me: Too much.

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

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

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

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

Me: Is your work husband still bothering you?

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

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

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

Me: Kuyafana.

Niki: Gosh.

Our drinks come and she makes her way downstairs to the bathroom. My phone rings and I

answer after checking the caller id.

Me: Bongani?

Bongani: Hey, how are you?

Me: I'm well, thanks.

He laughs quietly. He always says I have my snobbish moments, especially when I say I'm

"well" instead of saying I'm "good."

Me: How are you?

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

Me: Love Revo.

Bongani: Is it?

Me: Mhm.

Bongani: I'm at Shakers.

Me: Is it?

Bongani: Got here about 30 minutes ago.

Me: Oh okay.

Bongani: I'll see you later.

Me: Sure.

Bongani: Bye.

Me: Bye.

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

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

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

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

She laughs happily and sits down.

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

I roll my eyes and she hisses.

Niki: I should find myself another bestie.

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

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

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

Niki: You're allowing yourself to age.

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

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

Nelly: Hey Zi.

Me: Hello.

I'm trying by all means to not show annoyed I am. Niki knows very well that I hate being

bombarded by random people. If I make plans with you, you have no right to drag all these other people into the situation without my consent.

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

Bongani: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Hey...

We share a hug and walk out.

Bongani: Are you still at Revo?

I nod grudgingly and he frowns.

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

Bongani: Any specific bed in mind?

Me: Today was my last at school.

Bongani: Hmm. How were your kids?

Me: Emotional, of course.

Bongani: Who are you with up there?

Me: Niki.

He nods and scratches his head.

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

Me: Don't even ask!

He laughs as I walk back to the restaurant and make my way up the stairs. I get to the table and

look at Niki and Nelly, who are busy planning their night.

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

Me: Go ahead. I'm going home.

She frowns.

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

She looks at me suspiciously.

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

I ignore her and look at Niki.

Me: I'll see you around neh?

Niki: Uzoba-right?

Me: I'm a big girl.

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

Me: Bye bye ke.

Niki: Bye, boo.

Me: Bye Nelly.

Nelly: Bye!

I roll my eyes as I walk and make my way to the ground area. Bongani is nowhere to be found. I

walk to Shakers, and see him at a table close by. He says goodbye to his people, and walks to

me, with another girl. They get to me and he smiles.

Bongani: Ready?

Me: Yep.

We then make our way to his car. I realise that this girl is those North types.

Snobbish and stuff.

She sits in the front and I gladly go to the back and sit comfortably. Once we settle in, Bongani

starts the car and off we go.

Bongani: By the way, Ziyanda, this is Melissa. Mel, this is Ziyanda. Ms Dlamini. He chuckles and glances at me from the rear view mirror.

I was not about to acknowledge her. She gave me cold vibes from the get go, so I don't have

any kindness to waste. I take out my phone, and play my usual Smurf game.

That's how dull my

life is. You will never find me chatting on Whatsapp, which I sincerely dislike. I'm legit that girl

that is so focused on developing her career, that she doesn't have time for any other

disturbances. I can't focus on multiple things at a time.

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

Melissa: Where do you live, Zinathi?

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

Bongani: Ziyanda vs. Zinathi. Come on now.

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

She turns and faces me, with a smile.

Melissa: Where do you live?

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

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Speaking.

Person: Hey, it's Derek.

Me: Really though? I'm busy.

Person: I ju-

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

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

Bongani: Everything okay?

Me: Yep.

I glance at him and nod.

Melissa: So you're from Soweto?

Me: Yes.

Melissa: B, are you dropping her off?

Bongani: No, I'm dropping you off.

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

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

problems out there, hey.

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

I get out and sit at the front.

Bongani: Melissa is a lot.

Me: You don't say...

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

We get inside, and I sit on the couch and text my mom, letting her know that I'm safe. I then

switch off my phone and focus on what's playing on TV. After a while, Bongani approaches me and gives me a drink.

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

He laughs.

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

Me: You idiot.

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

Me: Hmm...

I take another sip and look at him.

Me: Is there Oros in here?

He nods.

Bongani: So?

Me: I like it.

I take another sip and nod.

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

He smiles proudly as he stands up and gets himself a beer. He comes back and we watch TV. I

finish up my drink, and ask him for another one.

Me: Good job!

He makes me another one and sits down again.

He looks at me.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm okay hey. Same old same old.
He wants to say something, but he stops himself. I know he wants to ask me questions, so I can open up to him, but that will never happen.

Me: Are you well?

He laughs quietly.

Him: I am well.

Me: Good.

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

Me: I'll take a quick shower.

He nods absentmindedly as I stand up and walk to the bedroom. I get my towel and make my

way to the bathroom. I get in the shower, and reflect as usual.

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

t-shirt.

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

I laugh.

Me: Amazing. Quite inspiring, really.

I had gotten him to love watching ratchet shows like Bad Girls Club, Love and Hip Hop, Real

Housewives of ATL etc. At first he judged me, but after a month or so, he eventually warmed

up. Now, he is a proud ratchet TV show lover. He takes the fights so seriously, more than me, at times. I love it!

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

Me: I'd definitely enjoy that.

He walked to the bathroom and cleaned himself up. I switched on my dialled Niki's number. It

rang for a while, but she answered.

Niki: Hiiii!

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

Niki: Yaas! You're missing out!

Me: I was just checking on you.

Niki: I'm good, friend.

Me: Hmkay then. Bye.

Niki: Love you!

Me: Love you too.

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

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

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

Bongani: Not even your closest friend?

I smile.

Me: Nope.

He shakes his head in awe and finishes up.

Bongani and I have known each other for about 5 months now. We're friends. Yes, we're friends.

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

INSERT 3

When I wake up at around 7pm, I glance at Bongani, who was fast asleep. I stare at him,

analysing every part of him. I notice a birthmark just below his belly button, and I find myself touching. It's funny how I'm an observant person, but somehow, with Bongani, I've managed to distance myself. I didn't know I was capable of doing such till we found ourselves in this arrangement. It makes things easier. He opens his eyes and blinks a couple of times before looking at me.

Me: Morning.

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

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

Me: I noticed a birthmark.

He yawns again and keeps quiet. I glance at him and realise that he fell asleep again. I get up,

and make my way to the bathroom to brush my teeth. Once I'm done, I walk to the balcony, and sit on the couch.

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

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

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

Derek: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Derek. How are you?

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

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

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: I'm here.

Derek: How are you?

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

I sigh.

Me: Can we meet?

There is silence for a while.

Me: Hello?

Him: I'm here.

Me: I'd like us to meet.

Him: When and where?

Me: I'm in Rosebank now.

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

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

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

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

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

Me: Haibo go back to sleep.

Him: You've disturbed my peace.

I frown and he chuckles.

Him: I'm gonna make us breakfast.

Me: Great.

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

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

Me: See you later alligator.

Bongani: Bye Ms Dlamini.

We shared a hug and I got my bag.

Bongani: As usual, the orgasms are highly appreciated.

Me: I've ghat you.

I get out of the car, and he drives off. I put on my shades and smile to myself. Ahh I am in such

a good space... No drama, no pettiness.

I have outpouring love from my family and friends, a career that completes me, and a few

orgasms here and there. Who wouldn't want such? I cherish this space.

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

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

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

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

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Derek.

He smiles warmly.

Him: Have a seat.

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

because my eyes are popping.

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

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

Him: Just okay?

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

Waiter: Anything to drink, ma'am?

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

Me: I'll have water, please.

She nods and then smiles at Derek.

Waiter: Are you good, sir?

Derek nods dismissively and looks back at me seriously. I shift uncomfortably,

because this

stare is a bit intense. He's looking at me like I'm some foreign object that he is trying to figure

out. The waiter is nowhere to be found at this point.

Derek: Do you mind taking off your sunglasses?

Me: My eyes.

He frowns.

Gosh he really likes to frown.

Derek: What about your eyes?

Me: They are sensitive.

Derek: Hmm.

I desperately need water right now.

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

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

I clear my throat and look at him.

Me: Uhm the reason I asked to meet-

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

The nerve!

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

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

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

Me: Do you mind bringing me a jug?

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

Derek: What are you going to eat?

Me: I've already eaten.

Him: Are you sure?

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

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

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

Me: Geesh.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Nothing.

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

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

Derek: You were saying?

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

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

Derek: Is it?

I nod.

Me: I would appreciate it if you would stop.

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

Derek: My calls make you uncomfortable?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Do you mind telling me why?

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

Derek: So you want me to call you less?

Me: Uhm no. Just stop calling me.

He is quiet for a few seconds.

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

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

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

Hehe imihlolo.

Me: Haike.

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

I stare at him in shock and confusion.

He keeps quiet and then sighs.

Him: However, I will respect your wishes.

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

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

Me: Uhm thanks...

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

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

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

Me: Yes.

Him: Why?

Me: I communicate better face to face.

Him: Is it?

I find myself nodding. Now I'm doubting myself. Do I really communicate better in person? I

could have easily sent him a text telling him to disappear, instead of doing all of this. I'm sure I

look and sound like a fool.

Him: Okay then. Your message has been received.

Me: Thanks.

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

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

Like I am the imbecile... Imagine.

Me: Uhm I have to go...

He nods lightly and smiles.

Him: Goodbye.

I stand up and get my bag.

Me: Bye.

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

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

INSERT 4

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

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

Me: What's up?

Bongani: I need to see you.

I could sense that he wasn't fine.

Me: Are you okay?

Him: Are you at home?

Me: Yes.

Him: Can I pick you up?

Me: Uhm...

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

Me: Okay.

Him: I'll be there in 5 minutes.

Me: 5 minutes? Kanti ukuphi?

He ends the call and I sit on my bed, wondering what the hell is wrong with him. I eventually get up, and get dressed. True to his word, he calls me in five minutes, telling me that he is outside. I

thank the good Lord that my parents are not here, because they would not approve.

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

Me: What's-

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

Me: Bongani?

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

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

Bongani: My mom passed away.

My eyes pop out and I keep quiet for a good minute, trying to process this. Why is he telling me

this? Yes, we're friends, but are we that close? Where are his other friends? His real friends?

My thoughts are interrupted, when I hear him sob. I shake my head, trying to erase my thoughts,

and then look at him. He has his head on the steering wheel. Do I comfort him? Do I say

something? I am so used to dealing with children, that I can be quite awkward

with adults. We

aren't wired like children.

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

Me: I'm sorry.

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

Him: I'm sorry for bothering you.

Me: No, it's ok-

Him: My people are MIA.

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

Me: It's fine.

He doesn't let go of my hand.

Him: Do you mind if we take a drive?

Me: Not at all.

I get out of the car to lock the gate and then we drive off. I keep glancing at him, and I can see

how miserable he is. In this moment, I'm busy thanking God that both my parents are still here. I

cannot even begin to imagine how it feels to lose a loved one.

We get to a park.

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

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

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

Me: What happened?

Him: She had a heart attack.

Me: Did she always have heart problems?

He nods lightly and looks at me.

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

Me: Where does she live?

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

Bongani: Are you okay?

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

Me: Ya, I'm just processing this.

He nods and we are quiet once again.

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

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

Me: When?

Him: I'll go tomorrow.

Me: Are you going to drive?

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

Is it here in

Soweto?

He frowns.

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

Me: Oh...

I keep quiet.

Me: You'll fly?

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

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

Him: What?

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

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

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

Men are trash.

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

He grunts.

Me: Everything okay?

Him: My siblings are just being annoying. I keep quiet. At this point, I have accepted that I do not know this man next to me.

For all I

know, I could have been sleeping with a serial killer...

Him: I have to go.

Me: Oh okay.

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

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

Me: You're welcome.

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

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

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

Him: I'll see you around.

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

Him: I know.

I smile and we share a hug.

Me: See you...

He nods and I get out of the car. To be honest, I am glad he brought me back home. That was very awkward, sad, and confusing. Thankfully, my parents are not back yet. They'll probably be back in the evening, because after-church gatherings tend to extend. I pour myself a glass of water, sit on the couch, and read Niki's message again. I snigger angrily as I think about this person who seems to be back in town... I call her and she answers almost immediately.

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

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

She keeps quiet. I'm sure if she was here, she'd be looking at me all intently, trying to figure

out if I mean what I am saying.

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

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

Me: Hmm everything seems to be obsessed with Maboneng.

Niki: Anyway, it asked me how you were... I keep quiet.

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

Me: Let it go.

Her: Hai suka.

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

She sighs.

Her: Wanna go to Bafokeng to chill?

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

She laughs and ends the call.

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

Hai shame ngifundile.

Relationships can miss me.

INSERT 5

It's now Monday, and I am still chilling at home, doing nothing. I only start my new job the

following week. My mom is at work, and my dad is busy outside, with his customers.

It is now around 11am. I have been calling Bongani, checking up on him. He seems better when

we talk, and he informed me that he was going to KZN this evening. I told him I'd call him again

later, just to wish him well.

I decided to take myself out... I had spent the whole night thinking about “the worm.” That one was a real problem in my life yazi. To be honest, I’m surprised I made it out alive nje... The heartbreak was too much! Anyway, I got dressed and made my way outside. The neighbourhood is chilled, people are at work. I understand why this Loxion Management lifestyle can seem appealing, but I guess people get tired of it after a while. I tell my dad I am getting some fresh air, and he couldn’t care less. He is too focused on his people. I get a taxi to town, and realise a bit later that I am subconsciously heading for

Maboneng, which I thought I despised... I guess the place is convenient for us Soweto folk, because transport is easily accessible, and distance is not an issue. Anyway, I get there after an hour, and walk to Chalkboard. I get a table outside, and place an order. I take out my reading book, and begin reading. This is actually one of my “me time” activities. I go to a restaurant by myself, read a book, write, or mark my scholars’ work. The waitress brings my drink, and tells me that my pizza will be ready in 10 minutes or so. I focus on my book again... A person clears their throat, and I look up. I try not to roll my eyes.

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

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

Me: Hello Siyabonga.

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

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

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

Me: Where would I be?

Him: I don't know...

I roll my eyes.

Him: How are you?

Me: I'm well.

Him: I'm also well.

He looks around and smiles.

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

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

He rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Me: You seem to flourish here...

He looks at me almost shyly.

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

Him: Yoh.

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

Me: Taking a lunch break?

He nods.

Me: Hmm.

I open my book and continue reading.

Him: Listen.

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

here.

Him: About what?

Me: The Four Agreements.

Him: Mind summarizing?

I look at him, and see his mischievous smile.

Me: No, actually...

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

Me: These agreements are said to make life easier.

Him: Is it?

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

He nods.

Me: Agreement 2- my personal favourite- Don't take anything personally. Nothing others do is

because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality.

Him: It's your favourite agreement?

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

Him: Geesh.

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

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

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

Me: Want some pizza?

He takes one and eats.

Me: I am now on the third agreement.

“Don’t make assumptions.”

I take a sip of my drink.

Me: I should always find the courage to ask questions and express what I really want.

Communicate clearly to avoid any misunderstandings.

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

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You’re a bad communicator.

Me: Mxm.

Him: Seriously, you struggle with opening up.

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

He sighs.

Me: Trust me, it has taken a lot of woosah to sit here, and not throw this drink on you. Trust me,

I'm communicating very well right now...

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

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

He chuckles and looks at me seriously.

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

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

Him: Bu-

Me: Uh-uh. I've been done with you.

You're a dog.

He rubs his chin again and nods.

Him: Okay.

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

He takes another slice of pizza, and stands up.

Him: You're so sour.

Me: Futsek!

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

I focus on my food and try to regain my reading mood, but I struggle. Now I'm thinking about

how annoying he is. He has never been one to take things seriously, which is one of the many

reasons why I left him...

After 2 hours or so, I decide to leave. I walk all the way up to buy some ice cream at Cocobel. I

marvel at how this whole place has been transformed. To think that this whole area was

shady... now it looks like a completely different, vibey and safe space.

I bump into Siya again.

Me: You work here?

He nods.

Him: We're renting offices around the corner.

Me: Bye.

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

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

Him: Lift?

Me: You know how cheap Uber is?

Him: Not really. I have my own car.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles.

Him: Come on.

Me: No.

Him: Are you being impeccable with your word?

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

Me: Leave me alone, you serial cheater.

Him: Low blow.

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

INSERT 6

It's now Wednesday, and I am still in my chill zone. I must admit that I was getting a bit

restless. I miss working, and being busy. Maybe I should go visit my babies? Yes, I will do just that...

I finish cleaning up the house, and take a bath. As I lotion myself, I get a call from some

unfamiliar number... I answer it hesitantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda Dlamini?

Me: Yes, this is she.

Person: Hi Ziyanda, how are you?

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

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

Me: Okay...

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

Me: Pre-service training?

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

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

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

Me: Hmm.

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

Lebo: Anyway, will you be available?

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

Lebo: No. We only have three new employees, and none of them were able to make it on

Monday and Tuesday, therefore, our principal has decided to kick start your training session

today. You will not start teaching till that other week. You will observe how our educators teach, and how we do things, before you can start teaching.

Me: Uhm okay.

Lebo: So will you make it today?

Me: Uhm sure. When should I get there?

Lebo: 11am.

Me: Okay. Thanks.

Lebo: See you soon.

Me: Okay, good bye.

Lebo: Bye.

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

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

I finish dressing up, in a simple yet professional navy dress, and put on a bit of makeup. Once

I'm done, I get everything I need, call my mom and tell her what just happened.

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

Me: Yes, traffic is probably intense.

Mom: You need a car yazi.

Me: Hmm.

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

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

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

There's no place in the world I hate more than Bree. That whole area nje gives me so much

anxiety. I was now in a queue, and my nerves were doing the most. I hate such crowded places,

I have anxiety problems...

Thankfully, I get to Randburg on time, and am able to walk casually to my destination. Part of

me regrets making this change, but I know it's all going to benefit me in the end... I just hate how far this place is... Maybe I should get an apartment close to the school? I'll dissect this issue when I get back home.

After a 15 minute walk, I finally get to the school, and it seems like some of the kids are on

break. I stop myself from laughing as I think about what my babies would do if they were in

such a space. They'd probably be overwhelmed by all this privilege.

I get in, and stand at the reception area.

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

Lebo: Hello there.

Me: Morning.

I walk closer to the desk, and she smiles.

But it's that coldish smile.

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

Lebo: Oh hi Ziyanda.

I smile.

Lebo: How are you?

Me: Great, thanks.

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

I don't respond.

Lebo: The other two teachers are not here yet.

Me: Okay.

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

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

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

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

Her: My name is Lwazi.

I smile, as I think about my baby.

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

We smile at each other as we make small talk. I like her. She seems chilled. Shortly after, we are

joined by another girl, and she is definitely lesbian. She is wearing a formal shirt, with chinos... I

mean, I'm not judging or anything... Well I hope my prediction is correct.

She comes to us and shakes our hands.

Her: Gee. That's my name.

Me: Ziyanda.

Lwazi: Lwazi.

She smiles, and sits down next to us.

Gee: Were you guys also called this morning?

Lwazi: Yep.

Gee: How fucked up and unprofessional.

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

comes to shady people.

Lwazi: I had my interview in Pretoria, and they asked me which school I want to go to and I said

this one, because it's closer to where I live. So I was very confused when I got a call from Lebo

telling me that she only found this morning that I'm supposed to be here.

Gee: Doesn't make sense.

Me: Crazy...

Lwazi: Anyway, we're here now.

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

to us, smiling warmly.

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

She is short, petite, and very pretty. You can tell she comes from a wealthy family- probably

those coloureds who were spies during the apartheid era.

We all greet back.

Camille: I would like to apologise for today's misunderstanding. Our head support office is

responsible for placing employees in all our branches. We had no idea that they had filled our

posts here. They only informed us today. I apologise.

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

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

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

Me: We were quite baffled when we got that call this morning, because it seemed too sudden.

However, we appreciate the apology, thank you.

She smiles and then laughs.

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

We introduce ourselves and shake hands.

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

Lwazi: Great.

We stand up and follow her.

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

basically the face of the campus.

I try not to roll my eyes.

Camille then leads us around the school, explaining the vision and mission of the school. I love

every moment of it. I am definitely going to fit in here. All the teachers are young, and the kids seem kind.

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

Camille: Lebo, do you know where Ngidi is?

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

Camille nodded and led us to the computer lab.

Camille: Oh, sorry for skipping this space. This is our Grade 5's computer lab. Like I explained, each grade has its own computer lab. We believe that our students (hehe I was shocked to discover that these kids are called students, not kids or children) need as much as exposure to online spaces as possible, because of the current internet buzz around the world. We're grooming them to be functional citizens who will have all the necessary skills to make it. She smiles as she leads us into the lab. I look around, and see every student sitting quietly, focusing on their computer screens. Others have small whiteboards next to them, and they

seem to be working on maths, online.

Camille: Hmm where is this man?

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

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

What the actual hell?

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

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

Njani guys? How did I not know this?

INSERT 7

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

Lwazi: Yes.

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

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

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

Gee: Is it?

Derek: Yes.

He then went on to explain, and I just zoned out again. I just can't believe that this is happening.

How is Derek a principal? How did I not know this? Clearly I didn't do enough research.

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

Lwazi: Girl, what's wrong with you?

Where are Derek, Gee, and Camille?

Me: Nothing.

She giggles and looks at me suspiciously.

Lwazi: Derek is cute.

Me: Hmm not my type.

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

I try not to roll my eyes.

Lwazi: Let's go before they fetch us.

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

Student: Good morning.

Me: Hi dear.

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

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

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

Dlamini, your English teacher.

Rori: That's nice.

She smiles brightly.

Rori: See you soon!

She walks off and we chuckle.

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

Me: Yep. Thank God.

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

Gee.

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

Me: I want to start teaching.

Lwazi: Tell me about it.

Gee: And these people seem very serious about training.

We all laugh as we walk out...

It's now around 14:00 and we did some classroom observations. This school really is different,

it will take some getting used to, but I am very excited.

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

Camille: Thank you for your enthusiasm and cooperation. I will see you tomorrow. We say goodbye and as we're about to walk out, Derek walks in.

Derek: You're leaving?

Gee: Yes.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

Lwazi: Yes, I love it here!

Derek: That's good to hear.

He then glances at me.

Derek: Do you also love it?

I clear my throat.

Me: Yes.

He nods lightly.

Derek: Goodbye then.

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

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

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

Lwazi: Konje you're from Soweto. I nod grudgingly.

Gee: Why don't you move?

Me: I think it's about time hey.

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

Gee: Why don't you invite me?

We all laugh.

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

Gee: I'll get you one day.

She says goodbye and leaves.

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

I nod.

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

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

I sigh.

Me: I'll call you later.

Lwazi: Shap.

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

Me: Hello?

Person: Miss Dlamini.

Me: What, Siya?

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

I groan.

Siya: Ukuphi?

Me: Randburg.

Siya: Ufunani e-Randburg?

Me: I work here now.

Siya: Is it?

Me: Mmm.

Siya: Manje uhamba ngani?

Me: Taxis.

Him: Did you just knock off now?

Me: Yes.

Him: Let me get you an Uber.

Me: Hmkay.

Him: Wait, you're not saying no?

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

He laughs.

Him: Send me your location.

Me: I don't have your number.

Him: Wow.

Me: Angijoli nawe.

Him: Mxm. Just send it to this number.

Me: Hmkay. Bye.

I end the call and find a spot with some shade. I didn't feel this long walk in the morning,

probably because I was so nervous and excited. Hayi liyashisa ilanga. I am being burnt straight,

kuphele ukuphapha. I send the worm my location, and he tells me my Uber driver's details, and

that the Uber will be here in 3 minutes. I wait, and sure enough, a white Merc comes through. I

laugh as I get in.

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

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

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

He walks out and comes to me.

Siya: Hello.

Me: Hey.

Siya: You look drained.

Me: I am exhausted.

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

Him: So you changed schools?

Me: Ya.

Him: You want that private school money, huh?

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

He laughs and we make our way inside.

He leads me to his office, and I look around.

Me: Still an OCD freak, I see.

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

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

Him: Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

He nods as he goes and sits on his desk, and dials a number on his phone. I hear him ordering food, and then he ends the call. He focuses on his work, while I take a nap on his comfortable couch. A small part of me is wondering what the hell I am doing here, but the other part of me is chilled. I am over this man. Really, I am. Anyway, the food is delivered after an hour or so, and he brings it to me. He then sits next to me and watches me eat.

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

Me: I just felt like it.

Him: Very unlike you.

Me: You don't know me.

He chuckles and I eat in peace.

Me: You're not hungry?

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

and give him the empty food container.

Me: Thanks.

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

I see a frame with a picture of his younger sister, who is 20 years old. We were very close, but

after the breakup I distanced myself. I wasn't comfortable with being around her because she was a constant reminder of him. I needed to deal with the breakup in peace. Part of me still feels guilty for shutting her out like that, but I just had to, for my own sake.

Me: How is she?

He looks up from his laptop.

Him: She's fine, I guess.

Me: You guess?

Him: She hates me.

I frown.

Him: Angithi you disappeared because of me.

Me: She's still mad?

Him: Definitely.

Me: Yoh.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Is she doing well in school?

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

I chuckle.

Him: Can't be wasting my money.

Me: You still keep tabs on her?

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

Me: Hmm.

He focuses on his work again and I go back to the couch and sit down. I take out my diary and

begin reflecting on my day. I absolutely love journal writing. It's the only way I can fully express myself, and keep sane.

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

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

Him: Yoh.

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

He nods.

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

Me: Well at least you do it.

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

Me: I'm ready to go now.

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

Me: Hmkay.

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

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

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

Him: Hmm let's go then.

We get in the car and drive off...

I take another nap...

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

INSERT 8

It is now Friday, and we are knocking off. I can't believe I have been so overworked, that time I

haven't even started teaching. Lwazi and I decided I'd sleepover at her place tonight, so I could

see it, and make a decision. I had spoken to my mom and she was okay with me moving, but

my dad is the one who is giving me problems. He just refuses to let me go, poor man.

I have met all the kids I'm going to teach, and I must say we're getting along. As we say our

goodbyes, Camille calls me aside, and we go to her office.

Me: Is everything okay?

She nods and smiles.

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

I frown. Okay? Random much?

Camille: I can see that you work hard, and I want you to continue being like this. We have a lot

of professional opportunities, and if you carry on like this, you will grow tremendously.

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

She smiles sweetly.

Me: You just made my day. Thank you!

She gives me a hug.

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

Me: Yay!

Derek walks in.

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

“D” smiles. My heart. My heart, Lord Jesus of Nazareth.

Derek: We look forward to seeing you grow.

I look at him, and smile lightly.

Me: Thank you.

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

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

Me: You do?

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

He looks at me amusingly, and I realise that Camille is no longer in the office.

Where did she

go? Why did she leave me alone with this man? This sexy beast.

Derek: Ziyanda?

I snap of it and clear my throat.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Yes, I'm just tired.

Him: Get some rest on the weekend.

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

Me: Derek.

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

Him: Yes, Ziyanda?

I exhale.

Me: I feel-

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

Him: I'm listening.

Me: I feel very awkward about all of this.

Him: Don't.

Me: So you don't feel awkward?

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

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

I keep quiet.

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

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

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

Me: Is it too late to quit?

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

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

Me: Shit.

He chuckles again.

Him: And she curses...

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Him: I thought you were perfect.

Me: Uh-

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

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

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

He walks out of the office, and I stand there, trying to stabilize my breathing.

How the hell am I

supposed to see this person every single day? I can't do this! This is not right!

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

Lwazi: I have been waiting!

Me: Camille wanted me to resign my contract.

She nods and we walk out of the school. I want to tell her everything about Derek. I need to tell

someone. However, I know that this is risky. It could get me fired. I'll tell Niki, because she is not involved and she will tell me the truth.

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

Me: This is amazing.

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

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

Lwazi: We can split rent.

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

Her: Shap.

Me: Let me take a shower.

Her: Okay.

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

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

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

Bongani: Zi.

Me: Hey there, unjani?

Him: I'm okay, just tired.

I sigh.

Me: Ubuya nini?

He laughs and I smile.

Him: Tomorrow night.

Me: So soon?

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

Me: Are you sure?

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

Me: Okay.

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

Me: Time?

Him: Probably around 8pm.

Me: Cool.

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

Him: Ukuphi manje?

Me: I'm with my future roommate.

Him: So you're serious about moving out?

Me: Ya, the transport thing is tiring.

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

Me: Yeah yeah whatever.

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

We go on and talk about random things for about 2 hours. We say good night and I go to the

lounge, and find Lwazi sitting on the couch, crying. Gosh is this what I'm going to be dealing with when I live here? I am already dealing with exhaustion from work, now I have to comfort a lovesick person? Hai hai hai.

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

Lwazi: How dare he come here and tell me I'm too busy for him? What am I supposed to do?

Quit my job so I can cater to him?

I sigh and keep quiet.

There's nothing I hate more than comforting people who are going through relationship

problems. I just can't deal with the melodrama. The constant crying and fighting. I'm not in a relationship because I want to live a peaceful life.

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

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

I watch an episode of Real Housewives of ATL. I'm so used to watching it with Bongani. I know

he'll want to catch up when he gets back, and I look forward to that. He is so drama free, and he

gives me phenomenal orgasms.

My brain immediately flashes an image of "D."

Maybe I need his D in my life...

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

Me: Friend.

Niki: Hey boo.

Me: You sound like you were sleeping.

Her: I'm chilling at home.

Me: Wow! Wow!

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

Derek. Her reaction angers me.

She legit laughs at me.

For a good 5 minutes.

Me: This is serious!

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

Me: No!

She laughs.

Her: I kid, I kid.

I sigh dramatically.

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

Me: How unprofessional.

Her: How come I don't remember him?

Me: You were drunk, you idiot!

She laughs.

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

Me: Okay.

Her: Find another dick to distract you.

Me: Hmm.

She doesn't know much about Bongani.

He's my best kept secret.

And he will remain that.

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

She laughs again.

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

Me: Mxm!

I end the call and make my way inside.

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

INSERT 9

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

We decided to go out and have brunch with white people. We dressed up, and made our way to

Mike's Kitchen in Parktown.

We get there, and order our food.

Me: So you think we'll survive?

She laughs.

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

Me: True.

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

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

Well... Argh you know what I mean.

Lwazi: I wonder if he's seeing someone.

Me: Uyam'funa?

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

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

Me: Strong?

Lwazi: Ya, he seems a bit intense.

Me: So you like them timid?

We both laugh.

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

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

Her: Wena what's your type?

Me: Hmm I'm not sure yazi.

Her: I think you want the strong type.

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

We laugh.

Her: Then Derek is definitely your type.

Me: No, he's too perfect.

Her: You think?

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

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

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

Her: Or fuck buddy.

I groan. I need to change this topic, and I do... I'd rather listen to her whine about her man than

imagine all these crazy things about Derek.

It was now around 7pm, and I had packed my things. I was ready to see Bongani now. I told him

I'd get an Uber to his place, as usual, and he reluctantly agreed.

I say goodbye to Lwazi, and make my way to my Uber. Boy am I glad I'm leaving this place. I

need to reconsider this moving thing. I am very big on personal space, so I don't know how I will

survive with leaving with my colleague, whom I work with closely.

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

We get out and share a hug.

Me: Unjani?

He doesn't say anything, instead he hugs me tighter. We stand there for a while and then make

our way inside. We get to his place, and I switch on the lights.

Him: I need to take a shower.

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

I smile shamefully, and he laughs quietly.

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

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

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

lotion. I begin lotioning him.

Me: It will get better, Bongani.

Him: I hope so...

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

Me: Done.

He stares at me and my stomach churns. The vibe has definitely changed since his mom's passing. He's a sad person, and all I want to do is hold him until he feels better. I know we have a casual relationship, but I can't help but want to support him. He wraps his arms around me and buries his head in my neck. We're hugging. We stand there for a long time, while he sobs silently. Eventually, he lifts his head and I wipe his tears.

Me: I'm sorry.

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

Him: Thank you.

I nod.

Him: I appreciate your support.

Me: You're welcome.

He bites my lower lip and we kiss. A very tender and slow kiss. I wrap my arms around his neck and he lifts me up. I had come to realize that men really are strong. Despite my weight, they always seem to manage to lift me here and there. Well I've only been with three men (excluding Bongani) so I'm sure there are men out there who would run at the thought of lifting me, not that they're my target market anyway. He places me carefully on the bed, and we continue kissing. I reposition so I'm on top. I'm going to be as "loving" as I can in this moment, and hope that it will make him feel better...

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

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

I laugh.

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

Him: By who?

We both laugh.

Him: How many men have you been with?

Me: Three serious relationships.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Limited experience, I see.

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

encountered throughout my life.

He laughs loudly.

Him: Random men?

Me: Yep!

He settles down again.

Him: Are you taking a break from relationships?

Me: Yep. The feelings are just too much.

Him: True.

Me: So how many relationships have you been in?

Him: A lot.

Me: Of course.

He laughs.

Him: Am I sensing judgement?

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

Him: Double standards.

I grunt.

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

individual thing.

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

Him: True.

He glances at me.

Him: But you seem confident.

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

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

Him: Oh but this left boob? Miraculous.

Me: You idiot.

We laugh and continue chatting about relationships.

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

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

Him: Definitely.

Me: Imagine coming back from work, tired as hell, and having to deal with another human who

deserves your attention? Nope.

Relationships can miss me.

He chuckles.

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

Me: Why?

Him: Because you were constantly checking up on me.

I sigh.

Me: With you it's different.

Him: How so?

Me: We're friends.

He nods and closes his eyes.

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

Me: You fool.

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

I'm glad he's feeling better.

INSERT 10

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

Bongani is now driving me home.

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

Bongani: It must be the air...

Me: Hmm.

Him: You should get some rest.

Me: That's my plan.

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

Me: Yep.

We continue chatting till we get to my house.

Me: Argh my dad...

Why isn't he at church though?

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

Me: As soon as I get off, drive off, okay?
He laughs and I roll my eyes. He stops by my gate.

Me: See you... Bye.

Him: Bye.

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

Me: Sanibonani.

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

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

Me: It's affordable.

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

Me: Well at least it's safe.

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

Me: Let me get it in. See you.

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

Me: Hello?

Siya: Hey, unjani?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Him: I'm good.

He chuckles.

Him: I know you're rolling your eyes.

Me: Mxm.

Him: Ukuphi?

Me: At home.

Him: Can I see you?

Me: I'm tired.

Him: Okay.

Me: Ukuphi?

Him: I'm around Soweto.

Me: So you decide to call me, because?

Him: Don't be like this.

Me: Hai suka.

Him: Bye bye ke.

Me: Bye.

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

I laugh lightly.

Me: Mxm bye.

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

It's now Monday and I am on my way to work. I'm so tired. Like, I don't understand why I have to

work. Can't I just stay in bed forever?
Argh I know I'm going to have a bad day.
I get to work and go straight to my class. I
guess I'm going to start teaching today
because

Camille told me that I was ready.

The kids are playing outside while I am in
the classroom prepping my resources for
the day. I

have to redecorate this class because
right now, it's not motivating me at all. I
know it is

October, and the year is about to end, but
I really hate dull classrooms.

Lwazi walks in and smiles.

Lwazi: Morning.

Me: Hey you.

We hug each other.

Me: I was busy sorting out some
resources.

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

We walk to the playground and the kids run to hug us. Honestly, children are amazing. They can be from wealthy or poor backgrounds, but they are still children, and they love unconditionally.

Especially in primary school because they haven't been influenced by the world that much.

Their strongest emotion at this age is love, and teachers play an important role in ensuring that they continue to love everyone and everything around them.

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

Gosh I almost forgot about my work dilemma.

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

Derek: If you can hear me, clap once.

Everyone claps once.

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

Everyone claps three times.

He smiles warmly.

Derek: Good morning scholars.

Everyone: Good morning, Mr N!

Derek: And how are we feeling this Monday morning?

Everyone: Marvellous and how are you?

Derek: I am motivated, thank you.

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

Derek: Now as you know, we have new teachers, Ms Khoza will be teaching Grade 4 and 5

Maths, Ms Mbasu will be teaching Grade 3 Maths, and Ms Dlamini will be teaching Grade 4 and 5 English.

He looks over at us and smiles.

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

Everyone: Yes!

Derek: Excellent.

After 10 minutes we are done.

Derek: Have yourselves a Marvellous Monday.

I must say that I am enjoying myself here. Everyone is helpful and they take their jobs seriously.

The passion for teaching is evident!

It's 2:30pm and the kids are packing up and getting ready to go home. Lwazi walks in my class

and I can tell that she is annoyed.

Me: What's up?

She walks to my desk and rolls her eyes.

Lwazi: That Lebo chick is driving me crazy.

Me: Wenzeni manje?

Her: She's so annoying.

Me: Don't take it personally.

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

The day is finally over. The kids are gone, others are playing sports, but they are not my

responsibility anymore. I walk back to my class and sort out my things. As I prepare for the

following day, there's a knock on my door.

Derek walks in.

Derek: Hello.

Me: Hi.

Him: How was your first day of teaching?

Me: It was good.

He nods lightly and looks around.

Him: You're changing the classroom?

Me: Yes.

He nods again and then looks at me more seriously.

Him: Are you sure you're okay?

Me: Yes, I am.

I look at him emotionlessly, I think.

Him: Okay then. I will see you tomorrow.

Me: Okay. Bye.

He nods and walks out of the class.

I stand there and re-evaluate my life.

His cologne has filled this entire space.

Mxm.

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

I am going home.

Lwazi: I'll see you tomorrow, friend.

Me: Shap.

We hug each other and I leave with Zama, the IsiZulu teacher, who also stays in Soweto. At

least I have a travel buddy now.

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

Me: Wait! You're pregnant?

Zama: Yes! I thought I was showing?

Me: No!

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

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

Me: Aww.

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

Me: That's what he wants to do?

She nods.

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

She rubs her belly again and I smile.

Me: How sweet.

We continue chatting...

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

INSERT 11

My first month here is done and dusted. It's Friday, and I am exhausted. I have decided that this weekend I am going to switch off my phone and shut out the world, while I work on regrouping my mental state. Being tired makes me grumpy and short-tempered. I don't want to be in such state of mind because it really does affect my interactions with people. I don't want my learners to suffer because my mood fluctuations. Therefore, this weekend will be used to recuperate. I have been such a bitch lately. Lwazi left early because she had to go to Pretoria to see her family. I haven't seen Bongani in three weeks. I've been very busy and he also seems busy. I'm honestly

okay with that. Although I think the foundation of my grumpiness is lack of sex.

I finish cleaning up my class and as I walk out, I realise that everyone has left. Konje it's pay

day. Everyone is out drinking, and I kindly declined all invitations. When I walk out, I say

goodbye to the ladies who clean the school, and I hear Derek saying goodbye seconds later.

We end up walking out together.

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

Me: No thanks.

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

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Ziyanda, relax.

I grit my teeth.

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

I look up and realise that he's right.

Me: Okay.

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

Derek: You okay?

Me: Ya.

Him: You've been very snappy.

Me: I'm tired.

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

Me: I'm just adjusting to everything.

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

I keep quiet.

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

Me: It's not that extreme.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: Why do you like asking me that?

Him: What?

Me: "Are you sure?"

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

Me: You do that with all the teachers?

He nods.

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

Me: How sweet.

Him: The sarcasm is unnecessary.

Me: I'm sorry.

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

I look down shamefully.

Him: They don't deserve that.

Me: I'm sorry.

He glances at me and smiles lightly.

Him: I know you won't be in a good mood every day, but I need you to be honest with me and

Camille, so we can support you. Maybe you're not used to such, but this is how we do it here.

We care for our staff. Parents trust us with those children so we have to give them the best at all times.

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

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

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

I look at him confused.

Him: I'm driving you home.

Me: You don't have to.

Him: But I'm choosing to.

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

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

Me: Are you investing in property?

Him: Yes, here in Maboneng.

Me: Oh.

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

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

He looks at me and laughs softly.

Me: What?

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

Him: I'll be back just now.

Me: Okay.

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

Niki: Babe.

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

She squeals in excitement.

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

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

Me: Mxm.

Her: Where is he now?

I chuckle.

Me: I'll call you later...

Her: Shap.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and watch as Derek runs to the car. He gets in and he is dripping wet.

I have to

keep a straight face at this point because his shirt is all up in his skin, and his tight arms are

just...

I clear my throat.

Derek: Shit. This rain is really intense.

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

Me: Got what you need?

Him: Yes.

He starts the car and drives off.

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

Him: I know.

He focuses on the road and I keep quiet.

Him: I'm really wet.

I look at him.

Me: Where do you live?

Him: I have a place here.

Me: Where?

Him: Maboneng.

I look at him, confused.

Me: Don't you live in Randburg?

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

Me: Oh okay.

Him: Maboneng is an investment pool.

Me: I can see...

He laughs to himself.

Two minutes later, we're parking.

Him: Woza.

Me: I'm fine here.

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

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

modern way. Like, imikhukhu.

Me: Well this is interesting.

Him: Nice hey?

Me: Hmm.

I look around and he nods for me to explore a bit. It's weird, in a nice way. I just can't get over how they used amaze... White people stay making money from our struggles... He disappears for a long time and then comes back, with fresh clothes.

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

Me: It's okay.

The rain even stopped.

I walk to the balcony. The view isn't all that great to be honest. All I see is the shadiness of

Jozi... It's obviously going to take a while for this Jonathan guy to fully develop this CBD area,

but he is doing a good job. I'm certain he is filthy rich.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yes.

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

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

Me: Really?

Him: What?

Me: Angel of Mine? You listen to this?

I continue laughing and he joins.

Him: I love this song!

Me: How weird.

I sigh as I listen... It's one of those childhood songs that we wrote in our "Lyrics Books" and I

haven't heard in years. I smile as I reminisce about my childhood days.

Him: I see you're enjoying it.

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

Him: This is one of my favourite songs.

Me: Hmkay.

I giggle and he smiles. I ignore that smile.

I ignore it and look out the window...

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

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

Me: You still remember where I live?

He nods and focuses on the road. We get to my house, and I'm grateful that my dad's tent is

not up. It's drizzling.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome.

Silence.

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

Him: I guess so.

I take my bag from the back.

Me: Have a good weekend.

Him: You too and please get some rest.

Me: Okay.

He stares at me and I fidget
uncomfortably.

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

I am flabbergasted.

Me: My wishes?

Him: You told me to leave you alone.

My heart rate starts doing the most.

Him: Right?

I nod absentmindedly.

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

Me: Bye.

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

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

INSERT 12

It's now Monday.

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

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

Lwazi calls and tells me that she is running late because she's stuck in traffic.

Zama knocks and comes in my class.

Zama: Hello sthandwa.

Me: Hey, unjani?

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

Zama: Are you okay?

Me: Flu.

She laughs and steps away from me.

Zama: These kids are disease sponges!

Damit!

We both laugh.

Me: I haven't been taking my vitamins.

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

I sigh and take one packet of Med Lemon.

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

She rushes out of my class and I also walk out and make my way to the staff kitchen.

I get a

mug and as I pour some hot water, I immediately tense up.

Derek's cologne has filled the space.

Derek: Good morning, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Morning.

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

Him: You're drinking coffee?

Me: Huh?

He looks at my mug.

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

Me: Oh, no.

I show him a packet of Med Lemon.

Him: Are you sick?

Me: Yep.

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

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

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

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

him, and he's smiling back.

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

Me: I woke up feeling fluey on Saturday.

Him: Did you go out on Friday?

Me: Not at all.

Him: Do you have meds?

Me: Yes.

Him: Why did you come to work?

Me: I'm not dying, hey.

He chuckles and nods.

Him: Glad to know you're dedicated.

Me: Hmm.

I stir my Med Lemon and take a sip.

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

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

Him: Your poor tongue...

Me: My poor tongue...

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

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

Me: I'll see...

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

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

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

They all raise their hands.

Me: Rori.

Rori: We plan!

Me: Why is it important to plan?

They all raise their hands again.

Me: Yes, Amy.

Amy: Because we-

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

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

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

They raise their hands.

Me: Yes, Lwande.

Lwande: The writing process consists of different stages that we go through when writing

stories, essays or any other pieces.

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

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

Me: Hmm Thembi.

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

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

Thembi: Uhm... We have prewriting...
I nod.

Me: And what is prewriting?

Thembi: Planning?

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Thembi: And then w-
I shake my head.

Thembi: Sorry. Firstly, we have
Prewriting.

Me: Good.

Thembi: Secondly, we have Drafting.
I nod.

Thembi: Thirdly, we have Editing.

Me: Good.

Thembi: Next, we have Rewriting.
I nod.

Thembi: And lastly, we have Publishing.

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

sentences! Excellent!

Thembi smiles brightly as we clap for her.

I carry on teaching till lunchtime.

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

There's a knock on my door.

Me: Come in!

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

Rori: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Yes, baby?

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

I frown.

Me: Is it?

She walks to me and gives me the paper bag.

Rori: Yes.

Me: Thank you, baby.

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

paper bag.

I smile as I take out all kinds of flu meds...

There's everything you can think of...

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

“Were you not taught in university that multi-vitamins are a teacher's best friend?

Please take

these meds religiously until you are healed. We cannot afford to lose excellent educators

because of a lousy illness. Please eat, drink lots of water, and most importantly, get well soon.

Regards, Derek.”

I read it a hundred times.

I finally stop smiling.

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

I walk back to my class and eat...

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

Me: You're so sweet!

Camille, my principal, even went as far as getting me a "Flu Basket." Apparently she does that

every time someone gets sick. These people are so kind, man. It's beyond heart-warming.

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

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

I think he will also remain my best kept secret.

My secret crush.

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

Me: Is it?

She nods and rolls her eyes.

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

Me: Cute.

Lwazi: Hai suka.

We share a hug and she leaves.

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

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

Derek: Yes.

I open the door and walk in.

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

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi. How are you feeling?

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

He puts down his pen and smiles.

Him: I'm glad.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome, Ms Dlamini.

I smile.

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

Me: We?

He raises an eyebrow again.

Me: You're speaking for Camille as well?

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

Me: Hmm.

He laughs lightly.

Him: So you feel better?

Me: Yes, sir.

He nods.

Him: Are you leaving?

Me: Yes.

Him: You're using taxis?

Me: Yes.

He frowns.

Me: Is there a problem?

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

Me: Hmm I doubt.

Him: Are you leaving by yourself?

Me: No, with Zama.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Goodbye. Once again, thank you.

Him: Sure.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

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

Zama: Kunini!

Me: Sorry! I was tidying up my class.

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

INSERT 13

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

I've been thinking about Bongani all day. I haven't seen him in over a month. I need to see him

ASAP because I am slowly losing control of myself. He needs to stabilize me once again.

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

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

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

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

Gosh now I'm thinking about Derek. I've tried my best to avoid thinking about him in this way,

but right now? I am extremely hot...

I wonder if he is good in bed. He looks like he has a lot of experience, and would break my

bones. Nxa, what if he has a girlfriend? Or a regular “friend”, like I have Bongani? I hear someone clearing their throat and I immediately get back to my senses and tense up.

Me: Uhm Derek?

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

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

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

Gosh he really is sexy. The way his shirt is hugging his body, and his broad shoulders... The pants are tailored so perfectly and it's obvious that he has leg days, because he is not shaped

like those lollipop-looking gym freaks that have weird lower bodies...

He is perfect...

For me...

Why isn't he mine?

I am disturbed once again by the clearing of a throat. I snap out of it and realize that I have

been staring at his groin area.

Can the Earth please swallow me?!

What the hell is wrong with me??

Did he notice??

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

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

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

Derek: Ziyanda, are you okay?

Me: Yes. How may I help you?

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

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

He is staring at me. Like, really staring. I try to look away but now I feel

hypnotized. If he tells

me to run around naked, I will gladly oblige. He's hypnotic. Sexy, magnetic, beast.

Me: Derek?

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

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

I look at him, confused.

Me: I'm confused.

Him: I'll take you home.

Me: Oh. You don-

He shakes his head and I keep quiet.

Him: Be ready as soon as school is out.

Me: Uhm b-

He walks out before I can even say anything.

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

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

It's now 15:00 and I am packing up my things. Zama had to leave immediately after school

because she has to go somewhere. Lwazi also left because she and her man are going on a
baecation.

People are all busy, and I'm just chilling here thinking about how much sleep I'm going to get

this weekend. My life is boring and drama free. Just perfect for me.

I finish packing and cleaning up, and then I walk out. I honestly thought that if I do things

slowly, Derek would leave without me, but of course he is still here.

The school is now empty.

Derek: Ready?

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

Derek: You don't want a lift?

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

Derek: I apologize.

I sigh.

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

Him: Seriously, I apologize.

Me: It's fine.

We walk out and he locks the school.

Me: So everyone has left?

He nods.

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

Shit, it's Bongani.

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

Me: Hello.

Bongani: Hey stranger.

Me: I've been trying to contact you.

Him: It's been a busy month.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Are you okay? You sound reserved.

Me: Is it?

I clear my throat and he laughs.

Him: How have you been? I miss you.

Me: I miss you too.

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

Me: I'm okay hey. Just busy.

Him: I'm in KZN...

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

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

I can't even hide the disappointment anymore.

Wow my life really sucks right now, hey?

Bongani: I'll be back next week.

Me: Is everything okay?

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

Me: And?

Him: Everything is intact, thankfully.

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

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

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

Me: I'm sorry.

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

We both laugh.

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

Him: See you soon?

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

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

Him: Sure.

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

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

I completely forgot about him for a sec...

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

We get to Maboneng and he parks at Pata Pata.

Him: Come.

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

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

Me: Come? Am I your pet?

He takes a deep breath.

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

I stare at him and his face softens.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: Fine.

Him: Please come with me?

Me: Where are we going?

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

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

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

Me: Hmkay...

I take my bag and get out of the car. We walk to Pata Pata and get a table outside. He places an order, while I ask for water. He looks at me weirdly and I shrug.

Me: I'm full.

Him: Are you sure?

I nod and he nods.

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

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

Me: Your property person?

He nods.

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

Him: Yes.

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

Me: What's his name?

Him: Uhm... Siyabonga.

I chuckle again and nod.

Me: Thought as much...

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

Me: He's my ex.

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

We sit in silence for a long time.

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

He then clears his throat.

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

I look at him and he doesn't say anything. When his food comes, he tells the waiter to make it take-away.

He seems restless now. All fidgety and stuff.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods and stares at me. I stare back at him and we just there staring at each other until the

waiter comes back with his paper bag. He then pays the bill and stands up.

Me: Uhm? Agent?

Him: Cancelled.

Me: Oh... Okay then...

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

We drive in silence...

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

Him: Are you doing this on purpose?

I frown in confusion.

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

Haike I am not about to question him.

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

I want to go home and sleep...

I'm tired of masturbating...

INSERT 14

It's now Saturday, and I am cleaning the house. My mom and dad are out doing their own things

and I am left alone. Honestly, I love living with my parents. I love how chilled they are, and how

they trust me. I don't have to explain myself or convince them that I'm old...

In the afternoon, I get a call from Zama.

Me: Hey Zama.

Zama: Hey, love. Ukuphi?

Me: At home, what's up?

Her: Listen, are you up for lunch?

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

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

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

We both laugh.

Me: How about tomorrow?

Her: I'll call you later to confirm.

Me: Cool cool.

Her: Bye.

Me: Shap.

I end the call and take a bath.

Lwazi runs to me and squeezes me for dear life.

Me: My baby!

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

Me: Aww don't cry!

I wipe her tears and she smiles.

Lwazi: I thought you forgot about me.

Me: What? I would never!

She blushes and hugs me again.

Me: How are you?

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

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

Lwazi: How is your new school?

I sigh.

Her: Is it bad?

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

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

I laugh and she rests her head on my arm.

Me: How's school?

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

Me: Really?

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

I laugh. I really missed this girl.

Me: She shouts at you guys?

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

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

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

What Lwazi wants, Lwazi gets.

We get to a restaurant and place our orders.

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

She giggles as she looks around in fascination.

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

Her: Yay!

She flashes a smile and I wink at her.

As we're eating, I see Siya coming in with some girl. He talks to the waiter and they are led to

their table. This one will never change...

Thank God I'm done with him because he put me

through the most.

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

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

much about her.

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

The waiter eventually brings our food.

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

Siya: Well, what do we have here?

Me: Hi.

Siya: Hello...

He then looks at Lwazi and glances at me.

Siya: Lwazi?

I nod and he smiles.

Lwazi: How do you know me?

Siya chuckles.

Siya: Ms Dlamini always talks about you.

Lwazi looks at me and smiles.

Siya: How are you?

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

Siya: I'm fantastic too.

He looks at me.

Siya: I get it now.

Me: Yep.

He is also caught up in Lwazi's spell. The girl's aura is contagious. She's loveable.

While we

were together, he never understood why I was so attached to her, but it took a

simple

introduction for him to get it.

Lwazi: Are you mommy's boyfriend?

Me: Lwazi!

She giggles and focuses on Siya, who seems amused.

Siya: I'm not her boyfriend.

Lwazi: Hmm.

She looks at both of us and continues to giggle.

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

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

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

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

Me: Lwazi finish up.

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

She smiles innocently and continues eating.

Siya: So I don't look old?

Lwazi shakes her head.

Lwazi: You look youngish.

I roll my eyes.

Siya: Youngish?

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

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

other's company.

After about an hour, they brought our dessert.

Lwazi: This is yummy!

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

Me: Siya.

Siya looks at me.

Him: But I

give him a look and he sighs.

Him: Hmkay.

He looks at Lwazi and smiles.

Him: I have to go.

Lwazi: Ahh...

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

Him: I'll see you around.

Lwazi: You promise?

Heeh.

Him: Yes.

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

Haike.

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

Me: Bye.

Him: No hug?

Me: No.

He chuckles and walks back to his table.

I stare at Lwazi and she giggles.

Lwazi: Can I have more dessert?

I give her mine and she digs in.

Me: Eat up!

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

with his shady ass.

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

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

Her eyes pop out and she squeals excitedly.

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

As we walk out, we bump into Derek.

You know, sometimes I am convinced that the Devil is trying me. How did my life go from

boring and peaceful, to this?

Derek is also out here looking at me all confused.

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

He smiles and I smile back.

Him: What brings you this side?

Me: Spending the day with my baby.
He raises an eyebrow and looks down at Lwazi. He seems surprised and confused. Lwazi looks up at him, and squeezes my hand. I look at her and realise that she is nervous. I

have to keep myself from laughing. Lwazi, Miss Know It All, is scared of someone?

Wow!

Me: I'll see you on Monday.

Him: Uhm sure...

Lwazi and I walk out together and get in our Uber. I decide not to ask her how she feels about

Derek because I already know she doesn't like him.

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

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda, it's me.

Me: Derek?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Oh.

I feel my insides churn.

Derek: When are you free?

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: When are you free?

Me: Uhm...

What's happening?

Him: I would like us to meet.

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

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

Me: Uhm not really.

Him: Can I fetch you?

Me: Uhm sure...

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

Me: Uhm okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

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

INSERT 15

I drop off Lwazi and then make my way home. I obviously need to take a bath and freshen up a

bit. My parents are still not back and it's now around 4pm.

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

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi, did you arrive safely at home?

Me: Yes.

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

Me: May I ask why you want to meet?

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

Me: Oh.

Him: I'll see you soon. Bye.

Me: Bye.

He ends the call and I finish getting dressed.

I then call Niki and she doesn't answer.

Damit I need to talk to someone about this because I

honestly feel like I'm going crazy!

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

outside. I approach his car and he unlocks it.

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

I get in the car and he sighs quietly.

Me: Hi.

Derek: Hey.

Me: So what's up?

Him: I would like to eat first.

I find myself giggling.

Me: You love eating, don't you?

He chuckles and starts the car.

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

Me: Wait, what?

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

Me: Excuse me?

I look at him in shock.

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

I am stunned!

Him: Am I lying?

I don't respond.

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

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

Me: But...

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

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

I'm suddenly annoyed.

He keeps quiet and drives on. After about 30 minutes, we're walking to News Cafe, Maponya

Mall. We sit inside and he places his order. He looks at me, expecting me to order food but I get water.

The waiter walks off.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Ya.

Him: You're offended by what I said?

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

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

Me: So I think I was rude?

He sighs as if he is not in the mood to deal with me. I recognize this sigh because I do it every

time I have to deal with that one annoying kid in class. Am I annoying him right now?

Why the

hell did he bring me here?

Him: Are you listening to me?

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

even on my period right now.

Him: Ziyanda?

I look at him blankly.

Him: I'm sorry for offending you.

I sigh.

Me: It's fine.

He keeps quiet and stares at me intently.

Now I'm uncomfortable.

Me: Why are we here?

Him: Can I eat first?

I try not to roll my eyes.

After a while, his food comes and he eats.

Him: You are awfully quiet.

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

He laughs and nods.

Him: Okay...

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

He smiles as my drink is brought to me.

Me: Thanks.

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

Me: I need the bathroom. Please excuse me.

Him: Sure.

I stand up and go to the bathroom. I finish peeing and stand there for 5 minutes and try to keep

my composure (which I feel like I'm losing). I wash and dry my hands, and as I open the door,

Derek walks through the main bathroom entrance. I'm not sure if I want to go back to the ladies bathroom or what...

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

Me: Derek, what's the problem?

Him: You.

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

Me: I'm the problem?

Him: Yes.

I look at him in confusion.

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

Before I can even process what has happened, his arms are around me and I am pressed

against the wall. Suddenly this little passage seems too small, but I don't mind.

Me: You're my boss.

Him: I know.

I groan as I inhale his cologne and my senses open up to him. My rationality is on 40% at this

point and I'm afraid that it keeps decreasing bit by bit.

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

He looks at us and laughs.

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

Derek lets go of me and we move out of the way. The guy gets in the guys' bathroom and Derek

walks out. I contemplate following him but I need a few minutes to break out of his spell. I walk

back to the ladies bathroom and go straight to a basin to sprinkle my face with some cold

water. I stand there for a few minutes until I feel a bit stable. I walk out, and make my way to the

table. When I get there, Derek is standing up, paying the bill.

Me: What's happening?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Siyaphi?

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

Honestly, I'm just trying to suppress all of my feelings right now. I'm not trying to be found dead

in a parking lot. What will my parents be told? That I was killed by a damn sexy beast? I think

not.

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

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

I just...I...

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

Dear Universe, I do not know what awaits me, but please give me the strength and stamina,

because I am ready to tear shit up.

INSERT 16

We get to his loft in Maboneng.

How am I feeling? Numb, perhaps?

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

Derek: Would you like something to drink?

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

Me: Wine?

He smiles lightly and nods.

Derek: Red or white?

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

Me: White, please.

He nods and walks to the kitchen. I sit there, staring at nothing. I'm very uncomfortable right

now. What the hell am I doing here? This man is my boss! What am I expecting?

Sex? What

happens afterwards?

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

Me: Thank you.

He nods and I take a sip.

Lord, I can't deal with this awkwardness.

Maybe I should just down this wine so I end up tipsy.

I look over at him and he is so chilled.

Like, he is relaxed. I'm out here feeling like a little school

girl, while he's so relaxed.

Why doesn't he switch on the TV? Is he enjoying all this awkwardness? I look at him again and I

see him smiling. He is actually enjoying this.

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

Me: Derek.

Derek: Yes, Ziyanda?

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

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

Me: Did you?

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

Me: Hmm.

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

He laughs quietly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He walks back with a grin on his face.

Him: My dad and brother are coming up.

Me: What??

I stand up and stare at him in shock.

He laughs.

Him: Calm down. They're not monsters.

Me: Really, Derek?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Him: Well, now I am offended.

Me: I don't mean it in an offensive manner.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Stop stealing my lingo, Ngidi.

He laughs for a couple of seconds and then leans closer to my face. I honestly have no idea

what happened... I just know that I died and came back to life when I heard a knock on the door.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it and he smiles playfully.

Him: They're here.

I exhale.

Me: Can I sneak out?

He laughs and shakes his head.

Him: You're not going anywhere.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and let go of me. He then walks to the door, while I stand there,

frozen. I touch my lips and try to recall the kiss but I don't remember anything.

Did I really zone

out at such a crucial moment in my life?

Out of nowhere, I am hearing voices and laughter.

Gosh I need to gather myself. I can't have Derek's father and brother thinking I'm an idiot.

I take a deep breath and smile as they approach the lounge.

The older man, who is obviously the dad, looks at me weirdly, but eventually smiles. He then

looks at Derek and smiles.

Derek: This is Ziyanda Dlamini, whom I work with...

Derek says that with a sly smile. I have concluded that he is a playful person...

Derek: Ziyanda, this is my father, Derek Senior.

I have to stop myself from laughing. How corny.

Me: Hi, Mr Ngidi.

Senior: Hi, dear. How are you?

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

Senior looks at Junior with the same sly smile and then looks back at me.

Senior: I am well, too.

Derek: And this is my brother, Xolani...

Xolani, Ziyanda...

I look at Xolani and smile. He is clearly fashionable.

Xolani smiles kindly and walks to me.

Xolani: Hey babe. Nice to meet you!

Oh... I see what kinda party this is.

He hugs me and I inhale his lovely cologne.

Me: Nice to meet you, too.

He let go of me and then stares at me.

Him: You're beautiful.

Me: Thank you.

Senior: So you two work together?

Derek: Yes.

Senior walks to the couch and sits down.

Senior: Are you leaving, dear?

I remember that I am still holding my bag.

Xolani: Uyaphi? Don't let our presence interrupt you. We are just popping by to check on this

scarce brother of mine.

I don't respond. Instead, I check the time and it's now 8pm.

Xolani makes me sit down and he glances at the unfinished wine on the table. He looks at me

disapprovingly and I bite my bottom lip.

Xolani: We don't waste alcohol.

They all stare at me and I glance at Derek.

I am beyond uncomfortable. So am I supposed to

take the glass and gobble it down? Then they'll call me an alcoholic? Nope.

Senior: How old are you, Ziyanda?

Me: 25.

He nods and then looks at Derek.

Senior: Well, now that we know you're alive, we will leave you in peace.

Derek: I've been busy.

Senior: You know we don't allow work to consume our lives to such an extent.

Xolani: Tell him.

Derek rolls his eyes and I chuckle to myself.

Derek: I'll do better.

Senior: Good. Xolani and I are going out for dinner. Will we see you tomorrow?

Derek: Yes, I'll be there.

Senior then turns to look at me.

Senior: You can bring Ziyanda, if she doesn't mind.

How did I get brought into all of this?

Derek: Let's take it down a notch, dad.

Thanks for the visit.

Xolani then looks at me.

Xolani: We're having a fundraising brunch for an orphanage our family has been connected with. Would you like to come?

Me: Uhm...

Now all three of them are staring at me. How do I say no to such a charitable thing? Would they think I'm an evil person?

Me: Sure.

Xolani: I know you'll come with Derek. However, you can bring an extra person. Even though it is an exclusive event, we could use a few more rands.

Niki.

The bitch will come whether she likes it or not.

Me: I'll come. Thank you for the invite. Xolani smiles sweetly and nods.

Senior: Well there we have it then. We will see you both tomorrow.

Derek: Sure.

Senior and Xolani stand up and hug me.

Senior: It was lovely meeting you, young lady.

Me: Likewise, sir.

Xolani: Bye, love. See you tomorrow. The dress code is strictly classy...

He looks at me from head to toe.

Xolani: I trust that you will do the damn thing.

Hehe.

Me: I will try to surpass your expectations.

He hugs me again.

They say their goodbyes and Derek walks them out. I throw myself on the couch, reach for my wine, and then gobble it all up and sigh in defeat.

How in the world did I end up here?

INSERT 17

Derek walks back in.

Me: Can I use the bathroom?

Him: Sure.

I stand up and walk to the bathroom. As I get in, I'm not surprised when I see everything

exceedingly organised. He does give me OCD vibes. I finish peeing and then stare at myself in

the mirror.

Me: What the hell are you doing here, Ziyanda?

My reflection stares back at me.

Me: Damn fool.

I moisturize my lips and walk out, closing the door behind me. I then walk to the lounge and

realize that he is at the balcony. I check the time and it is now 9pm. I'm sure my mom and dad are a bit worried because I didn't tell them I'd be out. I get my phone and see that I got their missed calls. I dial my mom's number and she answers.

Mom: Haibo sisi no sms, no phone call?

Me: I thought I'd be back my now. Sorry sthandwa.

Mom: Who are you with? Niki?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Alright then. You have your keys angithi?

Me: Yep.

Mom: Bye then.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and sigh. So what now?

What happens?

I walk to the balcony and find him standing there.

Me: Nice view.

Of course I was referring to him, but the Joburg view wasn't that bad.

He turns, looks at me intently and smiles.

Him: Nice view indeed.

I walk towards him and we stand next to each other, looking at Joburg the view.

Me: How often are you this side?

Him: A couple of times a week.

I keep quiet. I am suddenly so calm. He's not making me nervous or uncomfortable.

It's

probably because we're outside and the fresh breeze is keeping me steady.

Me: I have to go...

He looks at me sharply.

Me: What?

Him: Please don't.

I am dumbfounded.

He sighs and focuses on the view. We stand there for a long time in silence...

Eventually he

takes my hand and makes me face him.

Him: Are you staying?

Me: Okay.

Him: Wait, are you serious?

I nod.

He smiles like a little kid and for once, I am reminded that I also have control

here. This man

has been driving me crazy for so long that I lost myself for a while.

Him: Great.

My stomach grumbles and I frown.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

He stares at me disapprovingly and I groan.

Me: I'm hungry.

Him: So what was your plan?

Me: I beg your pardon?

Him: Were you going to pretend you're not hungry?

Me: I only realised now.

He narrows his eyes and shakes his head.

Him: Why do I get the feeling that you don't like eating in front of me?

Me: No, I'm always full when I'm with you.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: You think I'm self-conscious?

He doesn't respond so I laugh quietly.

Me: I may be a lot of things, Ngidi, but self-conscious is most definitely not one of them.

He grins.

Him: Perfect. Then let's go eat.

I nod and we walk inside. I get my bag and wait for him to get whatever he needs. We then walk

out and make our way to the lift. He places his arm on my shoulders and pulls me closer.

Him: Still okay?

Me: Yes.

I'm lying. He really does have an effect on me and I can't seem to control myself.

Him: I'm not.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: You.

The lift stops and he lets go of me, and walks out. I follow him and try my best to stay cool.

Him: I don't see the use of driving. We're close to everything.

I nod and don't say anything. We walk out of the building...

Him: I hope you're not too overwhelmed by my dad and brother.

Me: Not really.

Lies!

Him: My brother tends to be invasive.

Me: He's not that bad.

Him: Hmm.

He reaches for my hand and squeezes it. I think he's going to let go, but he doesn't.

Weirdly

enough, that calms me.

Him: I don't feel like being around a lot of people.

Me: Likewise.

Him: Then let's go to The Cosmopolitan.

I have never been there. I nod and we continue walking. When we get there, he tells them that

we didn't make a reservation but they agreed because the place was practically empty. We get

a table and look through the menu.

Him: What do you enjoy eating?

Me: Honestly?

He nods.

Me: I'm obsessed with burgers.

Him: Just burgers?

Me: Yes.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

He laughs.

We place our orders and they bring us a bottle of wine.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki. I look at Derek.

Me: I have to take this. Please excuse me?

Him: Sure.

I stand and walk out of the place as I answer.

Me: Niki!

Niki: Hey boo!

Me: I have been trying to call you!

Her: Kanti yini?

I quickly tell her what has happened and she screams.

Niki: Whaat?!

Me: Dude!

Niki: I'm actually at Shakers right now.

Me: Niki, I have to see you! For my own sanity!

She laughs.

Niki: Just find a way to come this side.

Me: No, Niki. He says he's not in the mood for people. You must come here! You're literally

across the road!

She laughs.

Niki: Okay, I'll see you in a bit.

Me: Shap.

Her: Does this guy know how crazy you are? Has he seen the other side of you?

Me: Bye!

She laughs as I end the call. I don't need her negativity right now.

I walk back inside and find him busy with his phone.

Me: Sorry about that.

He puts down his phone.

Him: No problem.

Me: That was my friend, Niki. She's going to come see me shortly.

He looks at me confused.

Me: I haven't seen her in a while, and she told me she's in Maboneng.

Him: Okay.

He pours me a glass of wine and I take a sip.

Him: Do you like wine?

I nod.

Him: Anything specific?

Me: Chardonnay.

He nods.

Me: So why do you keep saying I'm a problem?

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki again.

Me: Sorry.

He nods and I answer.

Me: Niki?

Niki: Friend, I can't come. I'm not on my way to Melville.

Me: Wow.

She laughs.

Niki: This life chose me!

Me: I'll call you later.

Her: Okay boo. Please use a condom!

Me: Wow!

Her: Love you, bye!

She hangs up and I roll my eyes.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Turns out, she's won't be coming. I look at him and realise that he is hiding a smile.

I put my phone away and drink some wine.

Him: You were saying?

Me: You keep saying I'm a problem.

Him: You are, to me.

Me: How so?

Him: Like I stated before, I can't stay away from you.

I try to keep a straight face but I fail dismally. I'm now blushing. At least I'm not the only one who is going crazy here.

Him: However, I feel like I'm bothering you.

Me: Huh?

Him: You're always cold.

Me: I am?

Really? So this man hasn't been seeing the effect he has on me? Does my body language tell a different story? Thank the Universe! I don't want him thinking he has a hectic effect on me.

He clears his throat and I snap out of it.

Him: Like now, for example. I can't seem to read your mood.

Me: Oh.

Him: So I'm going to have to rely on you to tell me what exactly is going through your mind.

My mind drifts back to when Siya and I always argued about my weird ways of communicating my thoughts and feeling.

Me: It's not like you do the same.

Him: Is it not obvious that I'm crazy about you?

Oh my goodness! I take another sip of my wine.

Him: I've felt this way ever since I met you, but obviously things are a bit intense because I work closely with you.

I bite bottom lip because I have nothing to say.

We stare at each other for a while.

Me: We work together. You're my boss.

Him: Stop calling me your boss. You make it sound like I'm a tyrant.

Me: Well...

Him: What?

He looks at me shocked and I laugh.

Me: You have your moments...

Him: I am highly offended!

I continue to laugh and he smiles.

Me: Don't be weird.

Him: Weird?

Me: Yes. That specific smile of yours makes me feel awkward.

Him: So I make you feel awkward?

Me: Mostly.

Him: Well that's not desirable.

I giggle and he smiles again.

Me: See? There's the weird smile.

Him: Or you mean this one? I'm afraid I can't help myself... You're the cause of it. I keep quiet.

Him: We'll refer to it as a Ziyanda symptom.

Me: Oh wow. I'm a whole sickness now?

Him: More like a plague, outbreak, or epidemic.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and our food eventually comes.

Him: So how is your daughter?

I look at him in confusion.

Me: Daughter?

Him: Today you mentioned that that little girl is your baby.

Me: Oh, Lwazi?

I giggle.

Me: She's not my biological child.

Now he is the confused one.

Me: I used to teach her.

I had to stop myself from laughing when I saw the relief on his face.

Me: Would you be affected if she was really my child?

Him: Not at all. You just don't strike me as a person who has a child.

Me: Wow. Because?

Him: It's not meant to be an insult.

Me: Hmm.

We both focus on our food.

Him: I hope I didn't offend you.

Me: Just a little.

Him: I apologise.

I nod.

Him: How's the chicken?

Me: It's good. Would you like to taste?

He frowns and I sigh. Everyone in my life has mentioned this bad habit of mine. I can't focus on

my plate of food only... I just feel like, if we're having separate meals (whether they're the same

or different) we should taste each other's meals. Isn't that an act of kindness?

I push my plate closer to him and encourage him to taste. I then look at his plate expectantly and he pushes it closer to me. I cut some of his lamb and taste it, while he does the same with my chicken.

Him: Not bad.

Me: Do you like cooking?

Him: I was probably a chef in my past life.

Me: Oh wow. That deep, huh?

Him: Yep. What about you?

Me: I can't cook.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: I'll teach you...

Me: Hmm...

Him: Hmm indeed...

On that note, I focused on my plate...

INSERT 18

We're now making our way back to his place. I must say, I've learnt a few things about him

today:

1. He is playful.
2. He hates being around a lot of people.
3. He enjoys travelling.
4. He studied Accounting, but ended up in the education sector.

At least I wasn't a nervous wreck anymore. Yes, there were moments where I felt like I was a little school girl, but overall it was a nice dinner.

We get to his loft, and he rushes to the bathroom. I check my phone and I'm glad to find no missed calls or messages. I sit on the couch and switch on the TV. I go to Vuzu Amp and sure

enough, they're playing ratchet reality shows. I get lost in the ratchetness, that I don't even

realise that Derek is sitting next to me.

Derek: How do you even watch such?

Me: Shh.

He raises his hands in defeat and keeps quiet while I focus on Kenya Moore's shade in

RHOATL. The show ends after a while and I sigh.

Me: I don't think I can wait for the next episode.

He gives me a weird look.

Him: Go ahead...

I take the remote and go to my usual online series site. I get the episode and watch it while he is busy with his phone.

Him: Xolani is busy bothering me.

I pause the episode and look at him.

Him: Sorry, don't mind me.

He chuckles as I continue playing the episode... After a while, I'm done.

Him: You enjoy watching other people's lives?

Me: Yes, actually. Mine is very quiet, so these women's lives entertain me.

Him: Your life is peaceful?

Me: Yes.

Him: I guess we have something in common.

Me: Probably the only thing.

Him: Well aren't you feisty.

I look away shyly and realise that I may be tipsy.

Me: Sorry.

Him: You think we don't have anything in common?

I keep quiet and focus on the TV.

Him: Yabona ke? Why am I being ignored?

Me: Sorry.

I honestly don't like the way this man makes me feel. I just fail to understand when things changed. I didn't want anything to do with him at first, but now I'm affected by the sight of him, his touch, and whatever he says. How did I get to this point? I hate myself for this. This was never part of my plan, man.

I feel him pull me closer to him until half of my body is on him.

Him: Talk to me.

Me: Derek, as much as we're making each other blush and all that other rosy stuff, we still have to deal with the fact that we work together.

Him: Wait, so you like me?

Me: Really?

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Him: Then I'll quit. Will that make you feel better?

I roll my eyes again and he presses me against him. I let out a groan and rest my head on his

neck. I can't deal with this anymore. I've lost control of my body. I am horny.

We don't say anything for the longest time. I don't know, I must have dozed off, because I hear

him saying my name softly in my ear.

Derek: Dlamini.

Me: Hmm.

He nudges me lightly and I groan.

Him: Let's go to bed.

I open my eyes and look at him sleepily.

Me: I fell asleep?

Him: Yes.

Me: Manje why don't you pick me up? Is it because I'm fat?

He looks at me in shock and I laugh sleepily as I stand up.

Me: I'm just kidding. Don't get your panties in a knot.

I walk to the bedroom and take off my shoes and cardigan. Thank God I'm wearing leggings and a loose top, so I'll sleep comfortably. I take off my bra as well and get in bed. At this point, I'm

not worried about Derek. My sleep is more important.

I didn't even hear him come in, but I now feel him besides me. He pulls me closer and I rest my head on his chest.

When I wake up the next morning, I am greeted by the worst headache on Earth. I blink a couple of times, confused as hell. Where am I?

I remember everything.

Shit.

I rub my eyes in frustration. I get out of bed and look around. Where is this man?

Did I really
pass out like that?

I begin making the bed. I'm going to get an Uber and go home. I don't even want a lift from him.

Argh konje there's that charity event I agreed to? I'll just pretend that I'm sick.

I finish making the bed and then look around for my things. I spot them on the chair and go get

them. As I am about to go to the bathroom, Derek walks in.

Derek: Good morning, Dlamini.

Me: Morning, Ngidi.

Him: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

Him: You can take a shower. I have prepared toiletries for you.

Me: Thank you.

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

I walk to the lounge, feeling a bit better. I find him cleaning up the kitchen.

Me: Hey.

Him: Hey.

Me: Uhm, I'll get going.

Him: I made you breakfast.

Me: Oh.

My stomach grumbles and I rub it.

Him: Sit.

I do as I am told, and wait as he dishes up for me.

He comes with my plate and then gives it to me.

Me: Thank you.

It's filled with bacon, and my heart is just happy. I smile as I eat happily.

Me: Aren't you eating?

Him: I don't really enjoy my cooking.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: I do.

I look at him.

Me: Are you blushing, Mr N?

He smiles.

Me: Love the bacon.

He takes my plate and I protest.

Him: Relax.

He comes back with more bacon and I smile. I eat up and sigh happily.

Me: Thank you!

Him: You're welcome.

He takes my plate and walks to the kitchen. I follow him and look around.

Me: I was about to offer to wash the dishes, but I see you've got that covered.

Him: I hate untidy spaces.

Me: I see...

He finishes up and then looks at me.

Him: I have to go and help Xolani with something...

Me: It's fine, I'll get a taxi.

He looks at me with a weird expression.

Me: What?

Him: I'll get you an Uber.

Me: Really unnecessary.

He ignores me and walks away.

Me: Haike.

I get my bag and he comes back a while later.

Him: What's your physical address?

I tell him and he nods. After about 5 minutes he tells me that it's here.

Him: Come here for a sec.

I walk to him and he wraps his arms around me. My whole body tenses up. I thought I got over

this vibe, but I haven't.

Him: Are you coming to the fundraising brunch?

I sigh and he looks at me questioningly.

Me: Uhm... I'll come.

He leans closer to me and I feel his lips touching me. I hold on to him for balance because I

think I'm going to crumble. I can't believe we're kissing right now, this instant, and I am present.

His tongue leads me and I follow freely... I let out a moan as I feel my whole body go light.

Everything about this kiss is perfect.

I hear his phone ring, but I zone it out. I don't want to stop kissing. I want more.

I wrap my arms around his neck and he holds me firmly.

The phone rings once again, but now it's a distant sound.

Honestly, this is the moment. I'm not going anywhere until I release all these crazy emotions. I

need to be sane, and this man that's been driving me insane is the only solution.

INSERT 19

We're now in the bedroom, and our clothes are all over the place. To be honest, I don't want to be held tenderly right now. I want it rough and thoroughly. It seems like we're both on the same page because he is also giving me an animalistic vibe right now. He stops kissing me, and I open my eyes to find him staring at me with an unfamiliar look. I'm too hyped up to even analyse his actions right now.

He spreads my legs apart and I wince. My whole body is already vibrating. I feel his tongue slid inside and I shift. I could burst any moment, that's how bad this situation is. He comes to my face and smashes his tongue in my mouth. It's all slimy from my juices. I feel him smile as he stops the kiss. I don't want him to stop, and he sees that, so he kisses me again. I feel his hand slide down, and a finger slide inside. I let out a moan and he stops kissing me. Me: Derek, I need you. Please! I am close to tears at this point. I have never craved someone and something as much as I am right now. Derek: I need you too. I wiggle under him and wince loudly.

Me: Please...

He shifts and reaches for something. A condom. Yes, that's good. I'm glad he's still rational

because I could accept a million pregnancies right now.

I reposition, so that I'm comfortable.

Him: You okay?

I nod and close my eyes.

The second I feel him slide inside, I swear I lose it. My whole body tenses up. It's in complete

shock. I flinch and he freezes.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: You're big.

He laughs.

Him: Am I supposed to apologize?

He moves a bit and I wince again.

Him: I'll take it slow.

I nod and shut my eyes. He begins to move and I bite my bottom lip. At first it's painful, but

within a minute, it's a pleasurable pain.

Me: Ah...

He moans as well, and within seconds the desperation is back on. He quickens his pace and I

pant like a hungry lion. I just want to cum, so I can come back to my senses. I don't like that this

man has this kind of effect on me.

I feel his lips on mine.

Him: Zi. Look at me.

This damn sexy soul snatcher.

I open my eyes and find him staring at me like a hungry beast. Surely this

combination is not good?

He grinds harder and I move to his pace.
He pounds me more intensely and I let
out a moan.

Me: I'm about to cum.

He pounds even harder and I tighten my
grip on him. I hold onto him for dear life.

Him: Let go...

I roll my neck and feel that thrust... That
thrust that led me to the Great Wall of
China. I let out a
cry and get lost for a while. He continues
pounding me and within seconds, he also
cums. He
lets out a loud grunt and presses himself
on me.

I lay there, feeling like I am in another
world.

I want more.

Now that's we've gotten over the first
intense round, I want more of him. I want
to be more

present this time around.

As I walk inside the yard, I feel like a different person.

Like, my whole perspective on life has changed.

I am a changed woman.

I have just been given thee best orgasms ever. I don't usually compare my sexual experiences,

but come on now, Derek? Geesh!

I say hi to my dad and tell him that I have to be somewhere in 2 hours. He nods and dismisses

me. I then walk in and am grateful that my mom is at church. I go to the bathroom and fill the

tub with water. I then go to my bedroom to call Niki. She doesn't answer. Argh I'm so annoyed. I

really wanted her to come with me to this brunch but she's probably out living her best life.

As I'm in the bath, my phone rings and it's Bongani.

Oh wow...

How could I possibly forget about him?

I sigh and answer.

Me: Hey you.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: Ngi-right. Wena?

Him: I'm good...

Me: Ubuya nini kanti?

Him: During the week... I'll let you know when I'm that side.

Me: Alright then...

Him: Shap ke.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

I end the call.

I don't even feel guilty. Bongani is not my boyfriend. However, I do have to think about this new phase in my life... I'll use this week to think things through...

I finish getting dressed and I must say Xolani would be proud. Lol as I was picking an outfit, I just kept thinking to myself, "What would Xolani say?"

I look at myself in the mirror and twerk just a little bit.

I get my makeup done and set my weave free, honey.

I check my phone, and I got a text from Derek.

Derek: Your Uber should be there in 10 minutes.

I finish up and make my way outside.

Dad: Heeeeh!

I laugh.

Him: This breakfast lunch of yours must be top notch.

I laugh.

Him: You must come back with a husband.

Me: Haike.

Him: And he mustn't be an Uber driver. I want someone who will be able to pay proper lobola.

Me: Uber drivers make up to 10 grand a week though.

Him: Really? Heeh I must join it!

I say goodbye and get in the Uber as soon as it arrives.

I text Derek.

Me: I'm on my way.

Derek: Alright, see you soon.

I sigh and look out the window.

My phone rings and it's Niki.

Me: Ha wena. You're a legitimate flop.

Niki: Friend! I got your text! So you're on your way to the event?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Argh and I would have loved to be there!

Me: Hai suka.

Niki: So did you guys have sex?

Me: Yes.

She screams and I roll my eyes.

Niki: Girrrl!

Me: I'm not in the mood to talk to you.

Her: I'm sorry!

Me: Hai suka. Bye bye.

Her: Love you!

I hang up.

We drive in the yard and I see Derek waiting... I have no idea whose house this is but it is huge

as hell. I thank the Uber driver and he drives out. As soon as I am in close proximity with Derek, I am a mess all over again. He looks so good. Damn sexy beast. Honestly, mina I don't know what needs to be done. Why does he make me feel this way? I honestly have never felt so crazy about another human being. This is on another level. He wraps his arms around me and we share a hug. His cologne is different... It's refreshing... I inhale his scent and try not to get any makeup on his shirt. Thankfully, I'm not much of a foundation fan so I keep it very minimal. Him: You look breathtakingly dazzling. I giggle.

Me: Good use of an adverb and adjective.

I'm a happy English teacher, Mr N.

He chuckles and stares at me.

Him: Umuhle.

Me: Thank you.

He smiles warmly and then I look around.

Me: Whose house is this?

Him: Family friend.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

We both laugh.

Him: Let's go, before my brother has an anxiety attack.

We walk to the other side of the yard.

Gosh people are living good lives out there, hey.

As we walk to the table, Xolani, who is dressed to the T (even better than Derek) walks to us, smiling.

Xolani: She came, and she slayed!

Stunning!

I smile happily. I knew he'd be pleased. I clean up nicely sometimes.

We share a hug and he leads us to our seats...

INSERT 20

Senior: Well what do we have here?

He smiles warmly and stands to hug me.

We share a hug and he looks at me.

Senior: You look amazing.

Me: Thank you. How are you, sir?

Senior: I am well, dear. I'm glad you could join us.

Derek: Dad.

Senior: Nkanyezi.

His other name is Nkanyezi? I look at him and he rolls his eyes.

Before I know it, a woman is next to

Senior. I instantly know that she's the wife. She assesses

me from head to toe and I try my best to hide how discomfited I feel.

Derek: Ziyanda, this is my wife, Khwezi...
Khwezi, this is Ziyanda Dlamini,
Nkanyezi's colleague.

Khwezi, who looks like she's in her 40s, continues to assess me. She seems to be those typical housewives.

Khwezi: Colleague?

I keep quiet.

Khwezi: What's so special about this colleague that she is brought here?

Hehe. Haibo guys, I'm being referred to as "this colleague" now?

Derek: Mom, how are you?

Khwezi: I'm well, son.

She doesn't keep her eyes off of me. I even have to look away. What's wrong with this woman?

Senior: Have a seat... It looks like we're about to start.

Derek: Let's go sit on the other side of the table.

Just as we're about to walk off, Khwezi says Derek's name.

Khwezi: Where are you going, dear?

Derek: We're sitting on the other side.

Khwezi: No. Here are your seats here. I was unaware that you were bringing a guest, but your brother obviously knew, because he reserved two seats for you.

Derek grunts and we sit down. She sits opposite me, and Senior sits opposite Derek.

Gosh, Niki, where are you when I need you?

This woman hasn't greeted me. She clearly doesn't see me. I am a peasant in her eyes.

Hehe.

I feel Derek's hand squeezing mine under the table, and I snap out of it. I glance at him and he

gives me a reassuring smile. I tighten my jaw and that stupid smile of his disappears.

I didn't come here to be disrespected by some middle-aged, bored and possessive housewife.

My morning started off phenomenally with splendid orgasms. I refuse for the rest of my day to be ruined by this rude woman.

Khwezi: So, Zinathi... You're a teacher?

I keep quiet.

Zinathi will give her an answer wherever she is.

I see the shock on her face as she stares at Derek Junior and Senior. Senior has a grin on his

face.

Derek: It's Ziyanda, not Zinathi.

Khwezi: So is this what happens at your school, Nkanyezi? Teachers are-

Xolani: Zizi, do you mind helping me with our gift bags? One of our helpers didn't pitch.

Where did he come from?

He smiles and I nod.

Me: Sure.

Derek lets go of my hand and I stand.

Xolani holds my hand and we walk away and make our

way inside the house. I am so relieved!

Xolani: I had to rescue you. I could tell that she was ready to eat you up.

I exhale loudly.

Me: Why though?

Xolani: She's naturally a bitch.

I look at him in shock. He said that so casually.

Him: I love her, but she's not a nice person...

I sigh and he smiles.

Him: Don't sit there and take it though. She hates weak people.

Me: Yoh.

Now I just want to go home, snuggle in my blankets while watching Little Women Atlanta.

He gives me a glass of champagne and laughs.

Him: Bamba, this should calm you down a bit.

I take it and drink.

Me: So you need help with gift bags?

Him: No, love. I was just helping you out. I could see that you were ready to burst.

Me: She called me Zinathi.

He laughs lightly and shakes his head.

Him: Classic.

I finish the champagne and he pours me another one. I'm not really a champagne lover, but this

one seems to go down nicely. It's that opulent, lavish champopo.

Him: Finish up quickly because we have start in a minute.

I finish it and he looks at me.

Him: So are you and D dating?

I look at him as if he's speaking a different language. I don't understand.

Me: No.

Him: So you're just having sex?

Me: Xolani!

He shrugs.

Him: Are you really a teacher at his school?

Me: Yes.

Him: So how is this arrangement going to work? You'll fuck in his office?

Me: Xolani!

He is so chilled that time.

Him: I'm just asking.

I keep quiet.

Him: Asambe. Are you feeling better?

Me: Well I just went through an interrogation, so I don't know...

Him: Don't even worry about me. I'm not judging anyone. Derek can sleep with whoever he

wants... You're cute, so I don't have a problem.

Me: Cute?

He chuckles.

Me: What a tired adjective. Do better, Ngidi.

He laughs.

Him: Beautiful?

Me: Too common. Try again.

Him: Strikingly attractive?

Me: Hmm.

Him: Stunning!

I laugh. He seems to love this stunning word, and he says it with so much rigour, that it cracks me up.

Him: Let's go.

We walk out and make our way to the long table. I go to my seat and Xolani walks to the podium.

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Stunning!

I see him relax as he laughs.

I look over at Khwezi and find her staring at me. I smile kindly and she gives me a fake smile.

Nxaa.

Xolani: Ladies and gentlemen...

Everyone quietens down and we all listen to Xolani.

Xolani: It's a pleasure to welcome you to our annual fundraising brunch. We started the Ngidi Foundation a few years back, because we felt the need to give back to the less fortunate. I am blessed to come from a family that is generous, and to have parents who stress the importance of values such as kindness and service. We are very grateful to have friends who are on the same page with us, because it allows us to reach more people. Thank you for joining us once again. We will have various speakers today, and I am delighted to let you know that some of the older kids from our orphanage are here to share their stories and interact with us. I hope you

have a great afternoon. Thank you...
We all clap and I feel all warm and fuzzy.
This family is really invested in giving,
and that's
admirable.

I look at Derek and smile.

Derek: What?

Me: I didn't know you were so invested in
serving the community.

He laughs as he drinks his water.

Him: Well, you don't really know me...

Me: Hmm...

Him: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

They bring the starters and we begin
eating. People are having their different
conversations,
and I'm just grateful that Derek's parents
are no longer focusing on me.

Xolani comes over to us and looks at
Derek.

Xolani: You're up in 15 minutes. As soon as everyone is done eating.

Derek: Got it.

Xolani walks away.

Me: You're delivering a speech?

Him: Something like that.

Me: Should I assess you?

He laughs.

Him: So what will you assess?

Me: The usual...Quality of content and delivery.

He continues to laugh.

Him: Such pressure...

We continue chatting for a while, and then Xolani goes back to the podium.

Everyone becomes quiet.

Xolani: I would like to welcome my big brother, Derek Ngidi...

Me: Good luck.

Derek: What in the world is luck, Ms Dlamini?

He winks at me as he stands and walks to the podium with his sexy self.

Derek: Good morning, everyone.

They all greet back.

Derek: I am used to delivering speeches and talks to tiny ones, so please forgive me if you feel

like I am addressing you like children.

Everyone laughs.

Derek: So this is what I would like us to do before we move on. In the classroom environment,

we always do icebreakers as a way to get everyone comfortable and on the same page. At the

moment, we're all still a bit tense, so I think I'll facilitate an icebreaker, just to set a good tone

for the rest of the morning and afternoon.

I have to stop myself from smiling like a lunatic. My love for teaching is so deep; my heart literally warms up when I come across people who are just as passionate about it.

Derek: Okay... First, I will test your Maths. They all laugh and I hear others complaining that their maths is horrible. Derek: Don't worry, we'll do baby maths. He laughs.

Derek: Can someone spell 158 000 in 30 seconds?

People raise their hands and it gets all rowdy. For a second there, I forgot that these people are old. Just like kids, their hands were high up and they were saying, "Pick me, pick me!"

Derek: Let's establish a few rules: firstly, if you know the answer, you should raise a silent hand.

I will not give you the opportunity to answer if you are noisy. Secondly, when you answer my questions, you should use full sentences. I do not acknowledge half-answers.

They all laugh. He really is treating them like kids.

Derek: Now, raise a silent hand if you know how to spell 158 000 in 30 seconds. People raise their hands and there's silence.

Derek: Well done...

He looks around and picks someone. That lady manages to spell it in 30 seconds.

Derek: Excellent. Give her three claps in the count of two... 1... 2...

Everyone claps three times and he smiles.

Derek: Such excellent learners. I am amazed.

Everyone laughs.

He continues for a while, and it is obvious that people are having a good time.

They're relaxed.

Derek: Okay, I will ask you two bonus questions that are English related.

He looks at me and smiles.

Derek: The rules are similar to charades. I will choose a concept from English, and pretend that

I am that concept. I will explain myself and you will have to use my clues to figure out what I am.

He looks around.

Derek: Do we all understand?

Everyone nods.

Derek: Give me a silent high five if you understand my instructions.

Everyone gives him a silent high five.

Derek: Great. Let's start with an easy one...

He keeps quiet for a while. He then clears his throat.

Derek: I am in every sentence...

Everyone seems to be trying to figure it out.

Derek: My main purpose is to ensure that your sentence makes sense.

Of course I know this answer. I look around and a few hands are up. He asks a couple of them to answer, but they don't get it.

Derek: I am also responsible for making your sentences more interesting.

He looks around, and they seem to have given up. I raise a silent hand and he stares at me.

Derek: Ms Dlamini.

Everyone turns to look at me. I clear my throat.

Me: You are all the punctuation marks. They all exclaim when they realise how easy it was.

He asks another one and I get it once again...

People are now in high spirits.

Derek: Now, this is what I would like you to think about, for a minute... What are you truly grateful for?

He looks around.

Derek: I will give you one minute to think about it. What are you truly grateful for in your life?

He keeps quiet and everyone is silent. What am I grateful for? Most definitely my mom and dad. They are my most valued treasure.

However, I am also grateful for my friendships. I've reached a point in my life where I know who is here to stay. My friends are my extended family. I am also grateful for children. Honestly, my love for little ones is extremely deep. I am able to connect with children from various backgrounds, and build strong bonds with them. I strongly feel like they represent hope. I'm in a position to groom young minds, and that's a powerful position... So I have concluded that I am grateful for the gift of love. As cliché and corny as it sounds, love really is a prevailing emotion. It makes it easier to survive in this horrible world we live in.

Derek: Alright... I would like to share what I am grateful for. I've decided to focus on gratitude, because it has been a constant factor in my life.

What is this weird feeling I'm feeling? I can't seem to explain it.

Derek: I am grateful for love.

Oh my goodness! Lol how coincidental.

Derek: I was 10 years old when I was adopted by my mother and father.

What? He's adopted?

Derek: Before then, I lived in an orphanage, Twilight Orphanage, the same orphanage we are connected with today. I know you're probably thinking that my life was a mess, and that I had a tough time in the orphanage. I will have you know that it was actually the complete opposite.

He smiles and looks at an old woman who is sitting next to Senior. She's wiping her tears.

Derek: For as long as I can remember, I grew up in a place filled with love and kindness. I don't know who my biological parents are. I have never met them. This goes for Xolani as well. One would think that this affected me, but it didn't. While living at Twilight, we received unconditional love from Mam'Thuli. She was my mother from the get go. She loved me from the moment she met me, which was when I was 6 months. She loved each and every boy and girl that stayed there. She was our mother. He smiles at her.

Derek: When it was time for me to move in with my new family, she was very emotional, but she kept emphasising that I would benefit greatly. I didn't see it at first, but I sure did as time went by. The Ngidi family welcomed me wholeheartedly and it was easy to accept the love because it was genuine. There was never a moment when I questioned their love...

Oh my word.

Derek: This is why I decided to quit my job in Accounting, and work with children. Those little one will really get you thinking about life. You just get a different perspective. You start seeing the world in their eyes, and it blows your mind. You feel your heart open up in ways it has never

done before, and the love just overflows. He then looks at me, and I'm out here trying to make sense of what I'm feeling. Derek: I am grateful that I get to interact with passionate people. People who genuinely love what they do. You see the love in their eyes, and you feel it whenever they interact with people.

Yhu nkos' yami.

Derek: Yes, the wealth is a bonus and it makes our lives easier. However, love just makes living worth it.

People are busy wiping their tears.

Thankfully, I am made of steel. Crying is not my thing.

Derek: So as we continue living our lives, let's try to be kinder and loving. None of us truly know

what the next person is going through, so let us give love. Be it a stranger, the person who works for you, your gardener...

He laughs quietly.

Him: Your boss...

Everyone chuckles and he glances at me with a smirk.

Him: Thank you for listening to me. I hope you have a good day.

The man gets a standing ovation. We are all shook.

He comes back to his seat.

Do I hug him? Shake his hand?

He sits down. Haiké I guess I won't be hugging him.

Senior: You continue to make me proud...

Khwezi: Now my makeup is ruined!

He smiles at his parents and I feel the love. How sweet.

He looks at me with that smile of his.

Him: Did I do well, ma'am?

Me: That was beautiful.

Him: Stunning!

We both laugh.

Him: Thank you.

He looks over at Mam'Thuli.

She winks at him and he winks back.

At this point, I am very overwhelmed. Is this an appropriate time or place to be turned on?

INSERT 21

We're now having the main course...

Khwezi has been giving me looks and I have been ignoring her. I don't have time for this

woman. Also, I am now feeling a bit irritable. I just want to go home and sleep.

There's only so much social vibes I can take.

Derek: Are you okay?

I snap out of it and nod lightly.

He looks at me suspiciously and I give him a fake smile. He continues chatting to Mam' Thuli, who seems to like me. She has been raving about me, saying I remind her of her daughter. It was cute. She's a lovely woman. I excuse myself and try to find the bathroom. I have no idea where it is, because this castle is just too much. Why don't they have signs to help us, unaware folk? I walked around downstairs but couldn't find one. I then went up the stairs and randomly chose a room. I get in, and thank the universe that there was a bathroom in that bedroom. These people will have to excuse me for being so explorative, but a girl's got to pee. I dash to the bathroom and

pee... How I wish I grew up in such places.
The wealth is enticing.

Do people actually live here, or is it an
event venue of some sort?

As I get out of the bathroom, I'm shocked
to find Derek standing by the bedroom
door.

He raises an eyebrow when he sees me.

Derek: What are you doing here, Ms
Dlamini?

Me: I needed the bathroom.

He looks at me questioningly.

Me: I looked for it downstairs, but I
couldn't find it.

Him: So you randomly chose this room?

Me: Yep.

Him: My room?

Me: Huh?

He closes the door and walks to me with a
grin on his face.

Me: Didn't you say that this is a family friend's house?

Him: I may have lied.

I look around and see a huge picture of him, Xolani and the parentals above the headboard.

Me: Oh.

Him: Is there a problem?

Me: Not at all.

He gets closer to me, and places his hands on my shoulders.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: To be honest, I am tired.

Him: I wonder why...

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Him: Do you want to leave?

I look at him guiltily and he laughs.

Him: You don't have to pretend. I personally hate such events.

Me: You do?

He nods.

Him: Did I not tell you that I hate being around too many people?

Me: You mentioned it.

Him: I've reached my quota.

Me: Oh.

Well I'm glad he also feels the same way. I know this is a good event, but I'm tired.

Him: Thank you for coming.

Me: You're welcome. I learnt a lot about you.

Him: I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing.

Me: Me too.

His hands make their way to my waist.

Him: Ready to go?

Me: I'd like to make a donation.

Him: You can give it me and I'll pass it on to Xolani.

Me: He won't mind?

Him: He won't.

Me: Okay.

I stare at him, and for the first time in a while, I don't feel awkward. I see him quite differently now. He doesn't have a 'perfect' life after-all, and that makes him more intriguing. He leans closer to my face and places his lips on mine.

Him: Don't look at me like that.

I don't respond. We begin to kiss, and I am instantly reminded why I always freak out in his presence. He has an alluring effect on me. I've never been so captivated by anyone, especially at such a short period of time. It's too overwhelming and addictive.

We're now lying on his bed, and I don't even care that it's his parents' house, and we've just had sex (sorry not sorry).

Me: Derek.

Him: Hmm?

I sigh heavily.

Me: At some point, we're going to have to talk about this.

Him: What?

Me: This.

He is facing the ceiling, with his head rested on his hands. He looks so relaxed.

Him: Do you want to talk now?

Haike naye. I'm not ready. I need to go home and think things through.

I keep quiet.

Him: We have already established that we like each other.

Me: We have?

Him: Don't do that.

Me: What?

He sighs.

Him: So you don't like me?

I keep quiet.

Him: You have sex with people you don't like?

I look at him sharply and he just glances at me casually.

Him: If we're going to discuss "this" as you call it, then I'd appreciate honesty.

I keep quiet and he puts up his head, so he can look at me properly.

Him: Ziyanda?

I grunt.

Him: You're not much of a talker, are you?

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Him: Don't try to digress.

I keep quiet.

Him: You said you want to talk about this...

I regret even mentioning it. I didn't think he would take it so seriously.

Me: I do.

Him: Do you want to facilitate the conversation?

Me: Why are you making it sound so deep?

He keeps quiet for a while.

Him: Maybe it's because my feelings for you are getting deep...

I swallow hard and avoid his eyes. He rests his head on his hands and faces the ceiling again.

Him: I've been trying my best to keep it together. However, I must admit that I am very shocked at how "this" has developed...

Me: Me too.

Pheew I have finally vocalized my feelings. Well, technically I didn't go in depth, but that "me too" is something, right?

Him: You feel the same way?

Me: Ya.

We are silent for a very long time.

I turn my back on him and rest my head on my hands.

I had promised myself that I was going to stay single. I was going to work on myself.

How in the

world did I end up liking a guy that irritated me? I wanted nothing to do with

Derek. He was

annoying. How did he become this admirable man?

He turns me around and looks at me oddly.

Him: Are you-

Me: No, I'm not crying, Derek.

Him: Oh...

He sighs in relief and I roll my eyes.

Me: And if I was, I wouldn't appreciate you asking if I'm crying.

He tries saying something, but stops himself. I sit up and look at him angrily.

Why am I acting like this? The rational and mature side of me is watching me in disgust, but the drama queen in me, Petty LaBelle, is flicking her weave telling me to keep the pettiness going.

Derek seems confused and conflicted.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: You confuse me.

Me: I confuse myself, too.

He chuckles as he pulls me closer to him. I place my head on his chest and he places his hand on my back.

Him: You don't want to talk?

Me: I'm tired.

Him: I won't be around the whole week.

Me: Huh?

Him: I'm going to Durban.

I put my head up and look at him.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

I put my head down again.

Him: So how about we use this week to do some individual introspection?

Me: How are we supposed to work together?

Him: We'll figure that out once we talk about 'this'.

Me: Okay.

Him: So you like me?

Me: Derek.

He laughs and repositions me so I can be on top of him.

Him: I'm sorry. I'll stop making you uncomfortable.

He slides his hand under my dress and I groan. As tired as I am, his touch has an electrifying effect, as usual...

I guess I'll use the upcoming week to figure out what I want...

INSERT 22

It's now Monday, and the day is dragging. I gave my kids work so I wouldn't have to teach them.

I'm beyond exhausted.

It's now lunchtime and I've been locked up in my class...

The door opens and Zama walks in.

Zama: Babe.

Me: Hey.

She comes to me and looks at me with concern.

Zama: Yini sthandwa sami?

Me: Do I look that bad?

Her: No, you don't look bad. Are you okay?

Me: I'm just tired yazi.

Her: What did you get up to this weekend?

Me: My dad needed an extra pair of hands...

Lies! I was got pounded left, right and centre.

Her: You look good though.

Me: Is it?

She nods and I try not to think back to the last two days.

Me: I just want this day to end.

She laughs.

Her: Me too. I'm so grumpy and sleepy.

Me: If I were pregnant, I would use my baby as an excuse to not come to work.

We laugh and continue chatting...

Honestly, this day is dragging. I am bored and tired.

It's now Thursday, and I am honestly having the dullest week ever.

I'm in my class, getting ready to knock off, when I get a text from Derek.

My heart skips a beat when I see his name.

Derek: Hi, I hope you are well. Do you mind if I call you tonight? I miss hearing your voice.

I find myself sitting down.

Is this why my week has been so horrible? I haven't seen or spoken to him since Sunday.

I text him back.

Me: Hi. I am well, thanks. I don't mind the call.

I stand, get my bag, and walk out to the passage.

Me: Zama!

Zama: Coming!

Me: I'll wait for you outside!

Zama: Cool!

Lol I honestly thought that Lwazi and I would be close, but things didn't work out that way. Yes,

we're cool, but we're not that tight. Zama, on the other hand, has become a good friend. Our walks to the rank solidified our friendship.

We're now walking to the rank.

Zama: So when are you meeting your sex friend?

I laugh.

Me: When he comes back, I guess.

I told Zama about Bongani. I had to tell somebody. If I can't tell anyone about Derek, for obvious reasons, then I need to vent about this Bongani situation.

Her: So you really want to end things with him?

Me: I think so...

Her: How I wish I was you. Getting married at a young age is a bad choice.

Me: So you're not happy in your marriage?

Her: It's not that I'm unhappy. It's just that I have my moments when I want to live my old carefree life.

Me: That's deep!

She laughs sweetly and rubs her belly.

Her: It's okay. I'm happy though.

Me: Are you sure?

Her: My husband is okay, I guess.

Me: Really?

Her: Men lie and cheat, Ziyanda.

Yhu I decide not to respond to that. I am not about to listen to someone's marriage problems.

I'm not a good listener, especially if I have to listen to people's relationship problems.

Anyway, as I get home, I realise that my mood has lifted a lot. Konje I am expecting a call later...

I take a long bath, and take some time to think about this Derek situation.

I am already in it, so there's no point in acting like nothing is happening.

What exactly do I want? Am I ready for a relationship? Physically, yes. That man has proven he

can take care of my sexual needs. I am sorted in that department. Now, am I ready emotionally?

My relationship with Siya left me scarred for a very long time, and I am still shocked that I got

over it. I thought I would take some time off, and I did. Bongani and I have managed to keep a

civil relationship. Do I feel anything for him? Not really. I like him because we have sex. I don't see myself being with him in a serious relationship. He's a great person, but I don't have intense feelings for him. I'm actually proud of myself for sustaining that sexual relationship without falling for him...

And then there's Derek...

He has turned everything upside down. I never thought I'd even be in such a situation with him.

What I'm trying to figure out now is whether I'm acting like this because of the sexual attraction, or because I really truly like him. It's obvious that we have some sort of connection, but do I really want to be "with" him?

I finish lotioning myself and get in my pyjamas. I decide not to watch TV with my parents because I am not in the mood to be around them. I say goodnight to them and lock myself in my room...

My only problem is that I get lost in his spell when I'm around him, something happens...

That sexy beast has bewitched me. Just as I am about to doze off, my phone rings and I snap out of it.

It's him!

I clear my throat before answering.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Hi Ziyanda.

My stomach churns at the sound of his voice. See why I say he has bewitched me? He's not

physically here, but he has me feeling all sorts of ways.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm well, and how are you?

Me: I'm well...

I keep quiet.

Him: How is your week going?

Me: Uhm it's fine, I guess.

Him: Lucky you.

Me: You're not having a good week?

Him: Not at all.

Me: Oh.

Do I have the right to know why he's not having a good week? Are we at that level where he can

tell me about his bad days?

Him: At first I couldn't understand why I was so grumpy and unproductive... Then Xolani sent

me some of the pictures that were taken on Sunday... I saw a picture of us, and it instantly clicked that it's because I haven't seen you.

I try to say something. I am speechless.

Him: I miss you.

He says that so sincerely, that I find myself telling him I miss him too.

Him: I'm so used to seeing you every day. I laugh.

Him: Is the school still functioning without my presence?

Me: Yes, I think so...

Him: What about you?

I giggle quietly.

Me: I'm fine.

Him: Hmm...

Me: When are you coming back?

Him: On Saturday.

What?? But that's so far!

Him: Ziyanda?

I struggle to speak. What the hell am I going to do-

I stop myself from thinking all of these things. Why am I behaving like this? This man is not my

boyfriend. Like, what the hell Ziyanda?

Me: I'm here.

Him: So have you been doing any thinking?

Oh gosh. Not this again.

Me: Kinda.

He chuckles.

Him: Kinda?

Me: Ya.

Him: Any progress report?

Me: Not yet.

Him: Okay then...

We are silent for a while.

Him: Enjoy the rest of your night.

What? Is he ending the call? Why?

Me: Thanks.

I end the call and sit up angrily. Petty LaBelle has come out full force and there is no stopping her. I want to let out a scream, but I know better. I can hear my phone ringing but I ignore it.

Why does he have to be so far? Also, why am I suddenly so attached to him?

I hate all this uncertainty.

I hate him. It's his entire fault.

I take my phone as it's ringing, and reject the call. I then type a text quickly and send it. He must

leave me alone, and stop calling.

Me: I'm ending this... whatever this is.

As I press send, my phone rings.

Bongani.

Shit.

I reject the call.

He must also leave me alone.

I lay on my back, facing the ceiling. I am going coo-coo right now. This is a side of me that I have tried my best to let go, but I guess it is what it is... Petty LaBelle is out to kill at this point.

INSERT 23

It's now Friday, and I am dreading going to work... I am in the worst mood.

I go straight to my class and decide that I will miss assembly.

As I am checking my emails, I see one from Derek. It was sent late last night, after we spoke and I hung up on him.

Dear Ms Dlamini,

I hope you are well. My brother has asked me send you some of the photos that were taken this

past Sunday at our family's fundraising brunch. Furthermore, he thanks you for your donation towards our orphanage.

Please find attached the photos.

Kind regards,

Derek Ngidi.

I open the attachment and look through the photos.

Shame, I looked good, hey.

Out of nowhere, my heart sinks.

I'm now staring at us. I miss him.

I'm busy talking to Xolani, laughing (probably at something stupid he was saying), and Derek is looking at me, with his usual intense stare.

I've been staring at this photo for a while...

I eventually go through the other photos and my heart is all heavy now.

The photographer captured those moments so beautifully.

I close my laptop and get ready to welcome my kids...

It's now lunchtime, and I am ready to leave this place. I get a call from Bongani and I answer it.

Me: Hey.

Bongani: I'm outside.

Me: Okay.

I end the call, and get my bag.

I decided to meet with Bongani for lunch, because I just want to get this conversation over and done with.

I get in his car and realise just how much I missed his calm and collected self.

Me: It's been so long!

We share a hug and he smiles.

Him: Angithi you've been ignoring me.

Me: Me? Ignore you? Never!
He rolls his eyes and I laugh.
He drives to a restaurant and we place
our order.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm fine. How are you?

Him: Fine? What's wrong?

I take a deep breath stare at him. I just
want to get it over and done with.

Bongani: What?

I drink some of my water.

Him: You met someone?

My eyes pop out and I almost choke on
my water. He laughs quietly and shakes
his head.

Him: Thought as much...

Me: It's complicated.

Him: Is it?

I nod.

Him: Well I also met someone.

Me: What??

I stare at him in shock.

Him: Yep.

I sigh and nod.

Me: I guess this is it?

Him: I guess.

Me: How are you though?

Him: I'm okay...

Bongani and I had a conversation about this. We discussed that should one of us "meet

someone," we will immediately cut ties, out of respect.

Our food comes and we continue chatting.

I must admit that I will miss him, but I'm not trying

to be a side chick.

After an hour, we're done. We get in the car and he drives me back to school.

Me: I hope she treats you right.

He laughs.

Him: Who would have thought?

I shrug. He seems to be more comfortable talking about this girl. I can't even tell him much

about my situation because it confuses the crap out of me.

He gets out of the car and we share a long hug.

Me: I'm going to miss our ratchet TV moments.

Him: Me too.

Me: Treat her right, please.

He nods and we let go of each other.

Him: I hope he also treats you right.

I grunt.

Him: Bye Ms Dlamini.

Me: Bye.

We share another hug before I watch him drive off. I then make my way inside and go straight to my classroom. I get there and find my kids working quietly.

I sit down and just zone out...

Part of me is sad about cutting ties with Bongani, but I it is what it is. I'll get over it eventually.

Now that I've also cut ties with Derek, I guess I can slowly go back to my normal life.

I go through the photos again and my heart sinks deeper.

My kids can even sense my mood, because they keep giving me love letters. Lol they really

know how to bring a smile on my face, these angels.

It's finally after school, and as much as I love my babies, I am beyond glad that they are gone. I

pack up my things and get ready to leave.

Today I am planning on leaving early. I want to go

home and drown myself in my Rum and Raisin ice-cream.

As I am about to walk out, Camille calls me and asks me to come to her office. I

start

panicking.

Does she know about this situation with Derek?

What if someone told her?

Who told her?

Is she going to fire me?

At this point I'm a mess. I walk to her office and knock.

Camille: Come in!

I walk in and she smiles.

Camille: Hi, Ziyanda!

Me: Hey.

I sit down and she stops working.

Camille: I wanted to check on you.

I look at her in confusion.

Camille: I just wanted to let you know that I am here if you need to talk.

Gosh.

Me: Oh okay.

She smiles warmly.

Me: I've been helping my dad with his cooking business. It's been hectic lately.

Her: Oh... I'm glad it's just exhaustion.

I smile reassuringly.

Me: I'll get some rest this weekend.

She nods.

Her: If you need-

Just then, there's a knock. I'm glad because it means I can leave.

Her: Come in!

The door opens.

My heart stops beating!

Derek!

He stands by the door and seems shocked to see me.

Derek: Good afternoon, ladies.

Camille: D!

She stands and walks to him and they share a hug.

Must be nice.

I watch them have their little moment.

They're like brother and sister, these two.

I've heard that

Camille's husband is one of Derek's close friends...

They let go of each other, and Derek looks at me. My throat is dry as hell.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I try to speak, but nothing comes out.

He focuses on Camille and they have a mini catch up session. I stand and clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, I'll see you next week.

Camille: Thank you. I hope you get some rest.

Me: I will.

Derek looks at both of us, confused.

Me: Bye.

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: Can I have a word with you,
Ziyanda?

Me: I have to go...

Him: I'll be quick.

I nod lightly as I walk out.

Camille: Have a good weekend!

Me: You too.

I feel Derek following me. I stop, so that
he leads the way. He opens his office door
and I follow

him in. He closes the door and then looks
at me carefully, as if he is trying to figure
out what to

say.

We are silent for a while.

At times, I wish I was a person who wears
her heart on her sleeve. Being an open
communicator

has its advantages... I'm the complete opposite...

I involuntarily step closer to him and find myself wrapping my arms around him. I rest my head on his chest and inhale his cologne. At this point, I'm not thinking about anything other than the fact that his absence has deeply affected me.

Does that say something about the way I feel about him?

I feel his arms around me and I smile. He lowers his head, and I feel his chin on my face.

Him: Hey.

Me: Hi.

We are quiet once again, and I am okay with that. I eventually put up my face and look at him.

I went a week without seeing him, and it was pure torture. I only spoke to him once. Once!

Our lips touch and I get lost in that kiss. Very tender and comforting.

He stares at me and smiles.

Him: I missed you.

He tightens his hold on me and I smile and kiss him again. He stops the kiss and looks at me,

with a weird expression, as if he's remembering something.

Me: I'm sorry for the text.

I sigh.

Me: I didn't mean what I said. I was angry.

Him: Did I anger you?

I nod.

Him: What did I do?

Me: You wanted to end the call.

Him: But... Didn't you want to end it too?

Me: No!

He pouts and I laugh quietly.

Him: Miscommunication...

He let's go of me, but I'm still holding on.

He realises this, and holds me again.

I am very clingy right now, and this rarely happens.

I'll just live in the moment for a few minutes.

Surely it won't hurt me?

I missed Nkanyezi...

INSERT 24

Everyone has left, and once again, it's just the both of us left.

I am in his office, busy with my phone while he is finishing up some work.

Derek: Did you get the pictures?

Me: I did. They're lovely.

He smiles and gets back to his work.

Him: I should be done in 10 minutes.

Me: Okay.

10 minutes, and sure enough, he is done.

Him: Asambe.

We get our things and make our way out.

He locks up and we get in his car.

Him: So where am I taking you?

Me: Home.

He laughs as he starts the car.

Him: Home being my place?

Me: I won't respond to that.

He reaches for my hand and kisses it
lightly.

We get to his apartment in Randburg, but
he tells me we're going to the one in
Maboneng.

Me: I thought you don't like the loft in
Maboneng.

Him: I didn't, but now I do.

Me: What changed?

Him: It holds great memories.

He gives me his usual corny look and I
blush.

Me: My parents will start thinking that I have disowned them.

Him: Really?

Me: I've been a house prisoner for months now. I'm sure they're worried because I haven't been around much lately.

Him: So what needs to be done? Should I ask for permission from them?

Me: If you want to die, then go ahead.

He laughs and I watch as he packs some clothes.

Me: I would like to go home and get fresh clothes as well.

Him: No problem.

He finishes up and we make our way out.

Him: I'm supposed to meet a few friends of mine for dinner. Do you mind joining me?

Me: Uhm...

Him: Please?

I sigh and nod.

Him: Thank you.

We drive to Soweto and he parks outside my house.

Me: I'll be back soon.

Him: Are you sure you don't want me to come in?

He laughs when I give him a threatening look.

Me: Stay in your lane, Uber driver!

Him: Wait, what?

Me: As far as I'm concerned, you're an Uber driver.

He laughs loudly as I get out and rush inside. I get in the house and find both mommy and daddy sitting in the lounge, watching Rhythm City.

Me: Hey good people!

They greet me back excitedly.

Me: I am spending the weekend at Thato's house.

Mom: Aww how is Thato? It's been so long!

Me: She's great! She says I must tell you guys that she misses you, and she'll visit soon.

Heeeh! Dick appointments will have you formulating some calculated lies!

Dad: Oh maan we miss her yazi. Is she still working at that law firm?

Me: Yep.

I walk to my bedroom and begin packing my things. My phone rings and I answer it without

checking who is calling.

Me: Hello?

Person: I am charging you extra for making me wait, ma'am.

I giggle.

Me: Really?

Derek: It's been 10 minutes.

Me: I'll be done soon!

I hang up and finish up packing. Once I'm done, I go back to the lounge.

Me: See you soon, loved ones.

They both laugh and nod.

Dad: So is that your Uber out there?

Me: Yep.

He laughs and nods.

Me: Bye bye.

They say bye and I am out...

We're now in Maboneng, his loft.

Me: Can I take a shower?

He gives me a disapproving look.

Him: Are you also going to ask me to pee?

Me: Yes, sir.

Him: I'll throw you out.

I chuckle as I walk to the bathroom.

The mature part of me, Granny Zee, is just looking at me, with pride. She's busy telling me to keep things like this... Chilled... But Petty LaBelle? The bitch is sitting on her throne, with her tiara, looking at me critically. Petty just wants drama and she refuses to see the good in situations. Granny Zee has tamed her a bit, because although she is on her throne, with her diamond tiara, poor Petty's mouth is taped...

While showering, my thoughts are interrupted by someone's presence. I turn around and Derek is standing a few steps away from me. I quickly cover myself and look at him in shock.

He now has a confused look on his face.

Me: Privacy? Personal space?

Him: Oh...

He pulls me closer and I wince.

Him: Better?

Me: Argh.

Him: Are you not burning in here? Why is the water so hot?

Me: Because...

He groans as he reaches for the taps and adjusts the water.

Me: This is quite disrespectful. Do you usually disturb people when they're showering privately?

He laughs and wraps his arms around me.

He then kisses me and my body instantly turns into jelly.

How I have missed thee!

We're done dressing up and having sex, for now...

We go to the lounge and sit down,
because he says his guests are running.
He puts his arm around my shoulders and
I look at him.

Me: How was Durban?

Him: It was okay...

I nod.

Him: The only highlight was meeting up
with some friends.

Me: Hmm.

Him: And how was your week?

Me: It was okay...

Him: Why was Camille worried about
you?

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Him: So it's nothing hectic?

I shake my head and he nods. I think he is
trying to figure me out. I'm not much of a
deep
talker...

We continue chatting until his phone rings and he answers.

Derek: Hello?... Alright, I'll be there in 5 minutes...

He laughs.

Him: Hai suka calm down... Bye...

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

Him: Let's go.

We get up and make our way out.

Him: We're going to The Cosmo again.

Me: Hmm...

He winks.

Me: Is it too late to change my mind and stay in, while you entertain your people?

Him: Definitely too late.

Me: Gosh.

Him: Gosh? Is that part of your vocabulary, Ms Dlamini?

Me: Sometimes, a girl's got to pull out something different.

He laughs... We finally get to The Cosmo and walk in. He talks to a waiter and we are led to our table, which is already occupied.

I have to stop myself from staring at these people.

The man just looks intense...

Like, that's the only way I can describe him...

Hot and intense...

The woman, pregnant as hell, is beautiful, very beautiful.

Derek: Lose the face, idiot.

The man looks at Derek angrily, but within seconds, he is smiling.

Yhu I feel the earth shake a bit.

Derek: I'm glad you arrived safely.

The woman smiles sweetly and mentions that she wants nuts. The man quickly stands and

disappears, but he is back in a flash, with a packet of nuts. The woman smiles at the man and

they're staring at each other all lovingly. They're in love. Cute.

Derek: Ziyanda, these are very good friends of mine, Dean and Nolwazi.

I look at Dean... Lord...

He looks at me blankly and nods.

Tjo. What's his deal?

Nolwazi, who is chewing her nuts, smiles.

Nolwazi: Hi, love. How are you?

Me: I am well, thank you.

Nolwazi: I would stand and give you a hug, but I'm immobile.

She smiles kindly.

Me: It's okay.

Derek and I sit down and I look over at that rude bastard. He's now rubbing Nolwazi's belly.

Derek: Liwa just texted me, he's 5 minutes away...

Dean: You idiots are disrespectful as fuck. You don't set appointments and then arrive late.

Derek: Lwazi, are you the pregnant one or is Dean carrying the third child?

Third? Are they having twins?

Before I know it, another couple walks in.

The wife? Beautiful as hell!

Gosh I am just overwhelmed at this point.

I can die, and I won't mind.

I feel Derek's hand on mine under the table. He brushes me lightly and I try my best to keep it

together. At this point in time, Petty

LaBelle is on her feet, eyes wide open, and pissed as hell...

Universe, do best, please...

INSERT 25

The man, whom I assume is the Liwa guy they were talking about, is holding his wife's hand as

they walk towards the table. They get to us and Derek stands. They share a hug.

Liwa: What the fuck is this place?

Dean: Ask him...

Nolwazi: Can you all stop being snobs?

This is Maboneng. The new hangout spot.

Dean: For kids...

Nolwazi: Are you finally admitting that you're old?

They all laugh, except Liwa's wife, who seems annoyed. I can't help but stare at her. Her beauty

is striking...

Liwa: I'm definitely too old for this shit.

His eyes land on me and he gives me the weirdest look. I stare back at him and he eventually

looks away.

I'm not about to be intimidated by these hot men and their gorgeous wives.

Derek looks at Liwa and they share some non-verbal vibes...

Derek: This is Ziyanda.

Liwa: Oh I see... Hi, Ms Dlamini.

Liwa smiles warmly and comes to my side. He pulls me up and before I can even process

anything, I'm being hugged.

Him: I'm Liwa. It's lovely to meet you.

I clear my throat.

Me: Lovely to meet you too.

He walks to the other side of the table and pulls the chair for his wife, who sits down.

Liwa: This is my wife, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo looks at me and smiles. I'm surprised she can even smile.

Some people are just bitchy nje, it's in their blood...

I feel Derek's hand on mine again under the table and I am just too overwhelmed to even be pissed right now. Why did he bring me here?

Nolwazi: So Ziyanda, what do you do for a living?

Well damn. We're just going to focus on me?

I feel everyone staring at me.

Me: I'm a teacher.

She smiles as she looks at Derek.

Dean: You work with Derek?

Me: Yes, I do.

He looks at me blankly and I stare right back at him expressionlessly. If he thinks he's going to make me feel small then unyile.

Nomvuyo: Wait. You guys work together? Oh this one has a voice after-all.

Me: We do.

She then looks at us in confusion.

Nomvuyo: So how-

Liwa clears his throat and tries to change the subject, but I'm still looking at

Nomvuyo. What

does she mean? Does she think we're in a relationship? Also, she seems like a very nosy

person.

Liwa: Where are you two staying?

Nolwazi: My parents' house.

Liwa: What?

He laughs and looks at Dean, who seems annoyed.

Dean: I didn't even have a say...

Nolwazi: Why would we go to a hotel when we have a family home this side?

Dean: You think I enjoy being around your father? The man doesn't like me.

Derek: Who does?

They laugh once again and I'm just here thinking about getting drunk and forgetting about this night.

Honestly, being around wealthy people is not easy. They have a certain aura, and I can't deal with it.

Dean: My only problem is that Nolwazi's father hates me. He's civil, but he definitely hates me.

Nolwazi: No, he does not!

She punches him lightly and he rubs her belly.

Derek: We have to go.

Liwa: Huh?

Derek: We have other plans... I just came to make sure you've settled in this side.

Nomvuyo: Wher-

Liwa: Alright then. We'll see you tomorrow.

I am so confused right now.

Derek: Sure.

Derek glances at me and stands. I stand as well.

Nolwazi: Help me stand, Langa.

Dean stands and helps Nolwazi, who is quite big. Now I see that she is carrying twins. She

wobbles to my side and gives me a hug.

Nolwazi: It was lovely meeting you, Ziyanda. You're beautiful.

Beautiful? Lol.

Me: Thank you. It was lovely meeting you too.

Dean looks at me and nods. Is that a smile I see on his face?

Dean: Enjoy the rest of your evening.

Me: Thanks.

Liwa and Nomvuyo stand, and they both hug me.

Liwa: See you soon, Ms Dlamini.

I can't help but think that this one knows more than he should. He smiles mischievously and then hugs Derek.

Nomvuyo: Bye, Ziyanda.

Me: Bye.

We finish saying our goodbyes, and before I know it, we're outside, and it's raining.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I shake my head. He must just shut up and leave me alone. I start walking fast and he follows

me. My weave is getting wet, I'm getting wet.

Fuck Derek actually.

Derek: I can get us an Uber.

I ignore him and continue walking.

After 10 minutes, we get to the loft, and I go straight to the bathroom. I am so annoyed right

now. I don't even know why I'm here. I take a quick shower just to get warm.

Once I'm done, I

lotion myself and put on my pyjamas. I put my towel around my weave, just to get it dry...

I then walk to the lounge, and find the TV on.

This sneaky man. An episode of Real Housewives of ATL is playing... I sit down and see a glass

of white wine on the table. I look over at him, in the kitchen... He seems busy.

All I know is that he must stay away from me.

I take the glass of wine, and drink...

Chardonnay...

Petty LaBelle sits down with her arms crossed.

Derek: I have to go somewhere quickly... I'll be back.

I ignore him as he rushes out...

I feel a bit better now that I'm watching my favourite show... I'm annoyed, but better...

Derek: Zi...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times. I find him staring down at me nervously.

Me: What?

Him: You fell asleep.

I yawn and sit up properly. Why is acting all nervous?

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing.

I stretch and sit properly. That nap was glorious.

Him: I cooked.

My tummy grumbles and I rub it.

Me: Okay.

He walks away and comes back with a tray.

Me: Oh...

He frowns.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing.

I take the tray and place it on my lap.

Me: Thank you.

I look at the plate and smile.

Me: Burger?

Him: You said it's your favourite food.

My tummy continues to rumble and I sigh.

Me: Thank you.

I take a bite and my tasting buds dance.

Me: Where did you buy this?

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: I made it.

Me: Wait, what?

He smiles and nods.

Me: It's delicious.

He sighs in relief as I eat quietly. It has all the important ingredients, more especially pickles

and a well-done egg.

This chardonnay is also doing its job.

I finish after a while, and look at him.

Me: That was amazing.

He smiles nervously and I frown.

Me: What's wrong?

He sighs.

Him: You are angry.

Me: I was...

I put down the tray and look at him.

Him: Tell me what exactly angered you.

I grunt.

Me: I'm not angry anymore.

Him: I'm glad... However, I still would like to know.

Me: You put me in an uncomfortable position.

He nods.

Me: I hate being around strangers...

Especially if I get thrown into that kind of situation.

He rubs his chin thoughtfully and nods.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm over it.

Him: So what works for you when you're angry or annoyed?

Me: Space.

He nods again and then stands and takes the tray to the kitchen. He then disappears to the

bedroom and I'm just sitting here

wondering what the fuck is going on...

I sit there for a while and eventually walk to the bedroom and find him putting on his pj pants.

Me: Derek?

He glances at me.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I just needed to take a quick shower.

Me: Oh.

I watch as he cleans up the space. I'm starting to feel like I've done something wrong. Am I invading his space? Did I make him angry?

Me: Derek, are you angry?

Him: No, I'm not.

He finishes what he's doing, and then sits on the edge of the bed. He pats the space next to him.

Him: Come here for a sec...

I go and sit next to him. We are silent for a while.

Him: I'm trying to get to know you.

I keep quiet.

Him: As soon as I figure something out about you, something else comes up. You have many layers.

I don't say anything.

Him: I care about you.

He takes my hand.

Him: We're adults. I don't want us to find ourselves in a complicated situation.

My heart starts beating. He wants to have this conversation now?

Him: What do you want?

He looks at me softly.

Him: Ziyanda.

I look at him.

Him: What do you want?

Me: You.

He keeps quiet for a while.

Him: Then I'm all yours...

With that said he makes me sit on his lap and holds me tight.

I want to tell him that I want to make this work, but the words can't seem to come out. I can't

allow myself to do it...

Me: Derek...

Him: You don't have to say anything...

I sigh in relief and he chuckles.

Our faces touch and we kiss...

I'm tired of talking.

INSERT 26

Heartbreak is a unique feeling... not just heartbreak from a romantic relationship, but

heartbreak in general... As you go through it, you find yourself thinking you will never make it.

The healing process seems impossible. It's unfortunate that you come across people who you

fall in love with, make great memories with, and then they turn around and hurt you. That pain

cuts deep because you don't expect them to tear you apart.

What's even more frustrating is coming across people who don't understand why you behave a certain way: people who just don't empathise with you. Some people fail to understand that our experiences shape us. Just because they manage to survive their fallbacks and still have a positive attitude, it doesn't mean that the rest of us will be the same. Some of us struggle with dealing with fallbacks, and the intensity of those fallbacks ultimately change us in a negative way...

All these thoughts are running through my mind, and I find myself waking up. I check the time and it's around 3am. I get out of bed and walk to the lounge and switch on the TV.

I call Niki and she answers. She sounds sleepy.

Niki: Hey, friend.

Me: Nikiwe...

Her: What's up?

I sigh heavily...

Niki and I have known each other forever. She's been through it all with me. I don't even need to explain myself to her.

Her: Where are you?

Me: I'm at Derek's place.

Her: Where is he?

Me: Bedroom...

She sighs.

Her: I'm sorry I can't be there...

Me: It's fine, friend. I'll be fine.

We've been chatting for about 40 minutes, when I see Derek walking towards me.

Me: I have to go.

Niki: Is here there?

Me: Bye.

She laughs and tells me she loves me.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up just as he sits next to me. He opens up his arms and I get closer to him till I'm resting my head on his chest.

Him: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing. Just couldn't sleep.

He caresses my back and I feel myself relax again. Living with depression is not easy. It always creeps in when it wants to, but I've been living with it for so long, that I am able to identify my triggers, and when I'm about to get an episode.

Him: I'm worried...

Me: Don't. I'm fine.

I look at him and give him a reassuring smile.

Me: I'm just restless.

We reposition and end up on our backs, cuddling.

Me: Your friends, hey...

He laughs.

Him: What about them?

Me: Definitely not my type.

Him: Why?

Me: Firstly, Dean is rude. I strongly dislike him.

Him: No one likes Dean. He's a dick.

Me: Why is he so obnoxious?

Him: It's his personality. You either love or hate him.

I roll my eyes.

Him: Carry on... I'm very interested in what you have to say about them.

Me: Nolwazi is nice.

Him: Nice? Come on now, Ms Dlamini.

I laugh.

Me: She's kind.

Him: She is...

Me: They're cute together though.

Him: Dean is Nolwazi's boss.

I put up my head and look at him in shock.

Me: Huh?

He nods.

Him: They're both economic analysts, and Dean is the head of their division.

Me: Wow. They met at work?

He nods.

Me: Are they still working together?

Him: Yes.

Me: Wow.

He smiles as I rest my head on his chest again.

Him: There's hope after-all.

I punch him lightly and giggle.

Me: Liwa seems forward.

He laughs.

Him: He's more sociable than all of us.

Me: How long have you known them?

Him: It's been many years...

I look at him.

Me: Do you even hang out with poor people?

Him: I beg your pardon?

Me: You heard me.

He chuckles.

Him: I don't really pay attention.

Me: Hmm... I'll be your first poor friend.

He repositions me so I'm on top.

Him: You're special.

I chuckle.

Him: You are an extrovert and introvert at the same time. You're honest and closed off at the same time.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Very special.

I lower my face and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: And you talk too much.

He looks at me in shock and I smile innocently.

Him: How dare you speak to your leader like that?

I laugh in disbelief.

Me: Wow!

He squeezes my butt and I squeal.

Me: Don't start something you won't be able to finish.

Him: Are you not familiar with my ways yet?

Me: Hmm. I don't think so.

He swiftly repositions so that he is on top.

He kisses me passionately and I moan in between.

Me: Nkanyezi...

He looks at me amusingly and I smile.

Him: I hate that name...

Me: What? It's a beautiful name.

He frowns and I wrap my leg around him.

Me: Nkanyezi...

He smiles.

Him: Are you trying to make me fall in love it?

I giggle and nod.

Me: I love it!

Him: Not as much as I love you.

Wooooah!

Everything stops moving.

I feel like I'm sinking. Why is he saying this? Is he trying t-

I feel his lips on mine and he kisses me slowly. As much as I try to fight it, the kiss has a good

effect on me. It calms me. How did he do that? I went from losing my mind, to feeling all warm and fuzzy.

He eventually stops the kiss and I open my eyes to find him staring at me.

Him: Relax.

I don't say anything.

Him: I don't intend on hurting you.

Me: Don't sell me dreams, Derek.

Him: I'm not.

I keep quiet and he kisses me again. Just as I'm about to freak out again, the kiss does its job. I

feel his hand slide up my pj top. He massages my breast and I moan.

This was like nothing I have ever experienced before. The way he held me, and looked at me

was intense yet soft at the same time.

There were moments I felt like I was pulling back, but he

managed to reel me back in and I found myself drowning in his spell yet again.

I don't know what this man is doing to me, and that's what's frightening.

As I reach my climax, I try to keep it together, but I fail dismally.

I am a sobbing mess.

I fight as he tries to comfort me, but I end up giving up. He holds me as I sob even more. After

the longest time, I'm calm and I doze off in his arms...

Life really is unfair. You get damaged and hurt by people who claim to love you, and then the

world struggles to understand why it's so difficult to open yourself up again, when all you know

is pain... For some of us, loving openly is a luxury.

INSERT 27

I'm awakened by aches all over my body. I
put up my head and remember where I
am. Did I
really sleep on this couch?
I sit up and groan. My body is achy.
I get up and make my way to the
bathroom to pee. I don't even want to
look at myself in the
mirror because I know I'm mess.
I wonder where Derek is... My heart aches
as soon as I think about him. I was so
vulnerable last
night and I'm genuinely scared of how
things will be from now on.
He told me he loves me...
I brush my teeth and stare at myself in the
mirror. My eyes are swollen and puffy... I
wash my
face, but I still look a mess. I walk back to
the lounge, and see Derek in the kitchen.
He sees me

and smiles. This one has a really sincere smile.

He walks to me, opens up his arms and I wrap my arms around him.

Him: Morning, Dlamini.

Me: Hey, Ngidi.

We stand in each other's arms for a while.

Him: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm fine.

Him: Fine is not a feeling.

I sigh.

Me: I'm okay.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and we let go of each other.

Him: I had to get a few things for breakfast.

Me: You're cooking?

Him: Yes.

Me: Are you trying to make me fatter?

He laughs and spanks my butt.

Him: Would you like anything to drink?

Me: I'll have water.

I follow him to the kitchen and he gets me water.

Me: Do you enjoy doing things for people?

Him: Well it depends on who they are.

Me: Hmm.

I'm happy he is not one of those traditional guys who expect me to cook and clean because I am the wrong person.

I take a sip of my water and watch him cook.

Me: Do you need help?

Him: No, thanks. Please go away.

Me: Rude much?

He chuckles and signals for me to leave him alone. I walk to the lounge and watch the news. I

get my phone and text Niki, letting her know that I'm feeling better.

Derek's phone rings and it's right next to me.

Me: Your phone!

Him: Answer it.

Me: Huh?

He ignores me. I take it and roll my eyes as I answer it.

Me: Derek's phone, hello.

Dean: Hi, may I speak to Derek?

Me: He has asked me take a message.

He chuckles and I growl.

Arrogant man.

Dean: Well, tell him we're here and these receptionists don't want to let us in.

Wait, what?

Me: I beg your pardon?

Dean: Sisi, we are downstairs. Tshela uDerek ukuthi we're here.

Argh.

Dean: Never mind. We've been allowed access.

With that said, he ends the call.

I start panicking. They're here? Is it all of them? What are they doing here?

I quickly stand up and go to Derek.

Me: Derek!

He looks at me calmly.

Me: Dean says they're here!

Derek: Ah shit.

I look at him angrily.

Him: We were supposed to meet, but I forgot to cancel.

I narrow my eyes and he looks at me apologetically.

Me: I'll be in the bedroom.

Him: But-

Me: Zip it, Nkanyezi!

He looks at me in disbelief as I rush to the bedroom. Why would he invite these people here?

Also, does he really think I'm dumb enough to believe that he "forgot to cancel"?

Nxa I go to the bathroom and take a long shower. I feel lighter. I don't know why, but I definitely feel lighter.

I moisturize my weave and it gets revived, but now I need a hairdryer just to revive it to the

fullest. The rain from last night did the most. I decide to put a head wrap because I'm not feeling myself right now.

As I finish getting dressed, Derek walks in and looks at me in disbelief.

Me: What?

Him: You look beautiful.

Argh I'm annoyed, but the butterflies are busy having a party in my stomach.

Me: I don't feel beautiful right now. My eyes are red and swollen.

Him: They're not that bad.

Me: I hope you can see that I'm actually rolling them.

He laughs.

Him: Is it safe to get closer?

Me: Whatever.

He walks closer to me and hugs me from behind.

Him: I'm sorry about the unannounced guests.

Me: Are you sure they're unannounced?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Thought as much.

He nuzzles his head on my neck.

Me: Such a liar... How shameful.

He chuckles and I join him. I don't see the use of being pissed. I'm too tired right now.

Me: Why did we sleep on the couch? My whole body is achy.

Him: I was quite comfortable.

He turns me around and smiles.

Him: Breakfast is ready.

Me: Give me 5 minutes.

Him: Anything for you.

I blush and he smiles victoriously. I'm sure he keeps track of how many times he makes me

blush, because I'm stone cold.

He gives me a kiss and then walks out. I clean up the space I was using and then go to the

bathroom to look at myself in the mirror...

My eyes damit... I'm sure the universe is trying to keep me humble, because if it weren't for

these swollen eyes, I'd be there next to Beyonce and the rest... Lol I kid, I kid... A girl can only

dream...

I eventually walk out, but slowly. I am dreading this! I really don't like this Dean dude.

Dean: So what exactly is your plan?

Derek: I'm just following her pace...

Dean: And work? How will that work out?

Derek: I'm not thinking about that right now.

Liwa: Dean, stop acting righteous. You fucked Nolwazi while she was married, and working under your leadership.

My mouth drops. So this man is a home wrecker?! I knew he was shady! Sies!

Dean: I'm not acting righteous, you idiot. This fool needs to think things through realistically.

Nolwazi may have been under my leadership, but she was high ranked. We're technically

equals...

Liwa: So what's your qualm?

Dean: Derek and Ziyanda's work dynamic is completely different. They work with a lot of people, so this shit is bound to come out. I'm pretty sure your school has a strict policy on employee relationships?

Silence.

Dean: I'm not disputing your connection with her, which is very evident. My only issue is whether you'll be able to maintain a civil working relationship. Additionally, what happens when rumours start spreading and shit?

Liwa: True...

Dean: Just think about it, and have that conversation with her...

Derek: Hmkay...

Dean: And what's with the hmms lately?
What's happening to your dialect?

Derek chuckles and I hear him telling
Dean to leave him alone.

Liwa: Listen, I'm all for having
conversations and shit, but at the end of
the day, you love who
you love. No amount of pressure or
policies can suppress emotions... I'm
happy for you buddy.

Dean: But you st-

I have heard enough.

I take a deep breath and walk in... They all
stare at me as if they've seen a ghost.

It takes them a couple of seconds to snap
of it.

Nxa damn gossipers.

Liwa: Ms Dlamini!

He walks to me and gives me a hug. He
has such a positive aura that I can't help
but relax and

smile.

Me: Hi, Liwa.

Liwa: How are you?

He stares at me worriedly... It's the damn eyes.

Me: I'm well, and you?

He eyes me suspiciously.

Me: Had a rough night.

Liwa: I see... But you still look good.

Me: Hmm... Flattery...

He laughs loudly and looks at Derek, who looks nervous. Lol shame I'm sure he's waiting for me

to act up. I'm proud to say that Petty LaBelle has been given sleeping pills... For now... But let a nigga try me though...

I look at Dean blankly. Bloody home wrecker!

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: Hi.

Dean: Slept well?

Me: Like a baby.

He raises an eyebrow and I see a slight smile.

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: I'll dish up now.

Dean: You cook?

They all laugh, as if they're referring to some secret joke. I look at them weirdly.

They're like brothers... It's so weird.

Liwa holds my hand and leads me to the couch. We sit next to each other, and Dean sits on the one-seater.

Liwa: So I have a 9 year old daughter...

Me: Is it?

He nods excitedly and then takes out his phone. He shows me pictures of her, and I instantly smile. She's a reflection of her mom and dad. So precious...

Liwa: She's cute neh?

Me: Too much.

He smiles proudly.

Liwa: Her teacher wants us to meet...

Apparently she's too smart for her grade.

I'm not

surprised because she comes from a family of intelligent motherfuckers.

I laugh. He is so vile and loveable at the same time.

Me: So they want to take her up?

Liwa: Yes.

Me: Hmm...

He instantly turns to face Dean and they look at each other for just a second... I

honestly don't

understand these people.

Anyway, Liwa and I went on to discuss the pros and cons of skipping grades in primary school...

I admire how invested he is in his daughter's education. I wish more parents were like this...

INSERT 28

Liwa: So, do you see yourself doing anything else besides teaching?

I sigh thoughtfully.

Me: Not really... However, I would love to open my own restaurant.

Derek's eyes pop out and he swallows his food quickly.

Derek: What??

I look at him amusingly.

Me: Is there a problem?

Derek: You can't even cook!

Me: So?

Derek: That's like a blind man saying he wants to be an optometrist.

I burst out laughing and they join me.

Me: Well, I will handle the food side...
tasting and stuff, while you deal with the
business side of
things.

Liwa: Heeh so you see yourself owning a
restaurant with this fool?

Me: He's not a fool.

Liwa laughs loudly while Dean chuckles
quietly. Derek on the other hand looks
like he's
blushing.

Liwa: Heeeh! You're defending him?
I roll my eyes playfully and we continue
chatting. Just then, Dean's phone rings
and he excuses
himself...

Liwa: Listen, I know Dean is a dick-

Me: He is.

Liwa raises an eyebrow and smiles.

Liwa: You know what? I like you Zizi.
Zizi? Hehe.

Liwa: He's just testing you. He's really not a people's person.

Me: Hmm.

Liwa: Hmmmm.

He imitates me and I smile. I look at Derek and he is just happy...

Dean walks back to the lounge and sits down.

Dean: That was Nolwazi...

Liwa: Everything okay?

Dean: Ya she was just asking me to bring some shit for her lunch shindig.

Liwa: Hmm.

Dean looks at Liwa weirdly and shakes his head lightly.

Dean: Anyway, Nolwazi is extending an invitation to you.

Me: Me?

He nods and finishes his food.

Dean: Liwa, let's get going. Lwazi won't be happy if I don't oblige.

Hmm so he jumps when it comes to Nolwazi? Clearly he loves her. Cute. They finish eating and I offer to get their plates, but they refuse. Liwa takes my plate; they stand and go to the kitchen. Derek is next to me within a split second. He wraps his arm around me and asks me to kiss him. I shake my head and he sulks. Look at him being clingy... My sexy, clingy, soul snatching beast... Liwa: Alright people, we will see you later? Derek looks at me questioningly and I sigh. Me: Okay. Liwa: Great. Enjoy the rest of your morning. It was lovely getting to know you, Zizi. Me: Thank you, Liwa.

I stand up and we share a hug. I look over at Dean, who's busy on his phone.

Derek: See you soon...

Liwa: Sure.

Dean: See you soonest.

He looks at me and nods, but this time, I see the smile.

Me: Bye.

They walk out and close the door. I walk to the balcony. I need some fresh air right now.

I feel Derek behind me. He wraps his arms around me and I feel myself relax.

I turn and face him. He has a very soft expression.

Me: Thank you.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: A lot has happened in the last 24 hours.

I hug him and we stand there for a while.

Him: I love you.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm here for you. If you need anything, Ziyanda, I am here. Please don't forget that.

We hug again.

This man is doing something to me. I can't even control myself anymore.

We are now driving to Lwazi's parents' house.

Derek: Let me fill you in on everyone...

I nod.

Him: So I already told you about Dean and Nolwazi.

Me: That was a very brief summary. I need details, Nkanyezi!

He laughs.

Him: So Nolwazi was married for 5 years or so... She couldn't have kids.

Me: Hmm.

Him: Then her husband decided to get a second wife.

Me: What?!

He nods and glances at me.

Him: She was hurt obviously, and Dean was there supporting her. That's how the relationship formed.

Me: You call it support?

Him: Huh?

Me: More like taking advantage of a vulnerable woman.

He chuckles.

Him: Well that's your opinion.

Me: You don't think so?

Him: Dean loved Nolwazi from when they started working together.

Me: So that makes it okay for him to interfere in her healing process?

Him: He didn't interfere. He was being supportive, and that led to something else.

I roll my eyes.

Him: Like I said, it's your opinion.

Me: Mxm.

He shakes his head lightly.

Him: So that's Nolwazi and Dean.

He takes my hand and kisses it.

Him: Don't be too consumed by other people's issues.

Me: I don't like him.

He brushes my hand.

Him: Dean is a good man. He may be arrogant and cold, but he loves very deeply.

I look at him blankly and he laughs.

Him: I guess there's no use trying to change your mind... Hopefully, you'll see for yourself through time.

I grunt.

Him: Anyway, Liwa and Nomvuyo...

Me: Liwa is amazing.

Him: He is, but don't mess with his family.

He would kill for them.

Me: That's good. I'm glad he cares for them.

Him: His whole world revolves around Nomvuyo.

Me: The bitchy one?

He bursts out in laughter.

Him: Wow.

Me: I didn't even fully recognize her beauty because of her vibe... I don't like her.

Him: You know, Ms Dlamini, you aren't the kindest person either.

I look at him in shock.

Him: Does that shock you?

Me: I will have you know that I'm the kindest person ever.

Him: No, you're not. You're only kind once a person get to know you...

I sigh in disbelief.

Him: Maybe the reason you don't like these people is because you're a tad like them.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and shrugs.

Me: I am nothing like Dean!

Him: Hmm.

Me: Argh just tell me about Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Him: Okay... So Nomvuyo and Liwa grew up in the same house.

I look at him in confusion.

Him: Nomvuyo's grandmother worked for the Mzinyathis.

Me: The Mzinyathis?

Him: Liwa's family... Google them...

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles.

Him: So Nomvuyo's grandmother was their helper.

Me: Really?

And here I thought Nomvuyo also came from money.

Him: Nomvuyo's mother was Zodwa. She was very close with Zimkitha, Liwa's mother. They were like sisters.

Me: Okay...

Him: Zodwa had a sister, her name is Zukiswa.

Me: Okay...

Him: Are you following?

Me: Yes.

Him: So Zodwa, Zukiswa and Zimkitha became close... The Mzinyanthis even built a guesthouse for them in the yard...

Zimkitha didn't even think of them as the help. She

considered them family.

Me: So Nomvuyo's family lived there 24/7?

Him: Yes, it was the sisters and their mother.

Me: Okay.

Him: Zimkitha and Zodwa were very close, and Zukiswa and Zimkitha had a love-hate relationship.

I nod.

Him: Anyway, Liwa and his twin, Princess, where born. Zimkitha is their mother.

Me: Liwa has a twin?

He nods.

Him: Then Nomvuyo was born and she grew up with her mother, Zodwa.

Zukiswa was now nowhere to be found.

Me: Where did she go?

He shrugs.

Him: Nomvuyo and Liwa were close, just like their mothers.

Me: Well clearly their version of close was different.

He laughs.

Him: So that's their love story... It's more complicated though because Nomvuyo found out that

her mother was actually Zukiswa, and her father was Zimkitha's husband.

Me: What??? So their relationship is incestuous?? They share a father?!

Him: No, no! Turned out Liwa and Princess' father is out there somewhere. I sigh in relief.

Me: So Zimkitha stole Zodwa's man? Her so called sister? Wow!

He chuckles.

Him: Their family history is extremely complicated.

Me: Wow.

We finally drive into Nolwazi's family house.

He brushes my hand and I glance at him.

Him: Relax.

Me: Too late.

He chuckles and we get out of the car.

He holds my hand as we walk to the front door, which is open.

A woman walks out with the biggest smile on her face. She looks just like Nolwazi, so I'm

assuming she's her mother.

Her: My bright and shining star!

Derek: Mam' Thandeka.

She gets to us and they share a hug.

She seems nice.

She lets go of him and stares at me.

Her: Is this Ziyanda Dlamini?

Well damn...

Derek laughs.

Derek: Yes.

Her: We have heard so much about you,
love! Welcome!

She gives me a hug and I try my best not
to act awkward.

Petty LaBelle is also very confused right
now.

Her: Please relax. I know we can be
overwhelming, but it's all love.

Me: Okay.

I look at Derek and he's looking at me like
he feels sorry for me. This is too much.

Her: I'm Nolwazi's mom, Thandeka.

Me: Pleasure to meet you.

She smiles.

Her: Everyone is on the other side of the
yard...

I say a silent prayer.

Her: I'm busy in the kitchen.

Derek: Okay, we'll make our way to the
other side.

She nods and walks away.

Derek wraps his arms around me and I groan.

Derek: We can easily go back home.

Me: We're already here...

He squeezes me and gives me a kiss.

Dean: Stop acting like love struck teenagers...

Where did he come from??

Dean: We're all that side... Wozani.

He walks off and we follow him. He really is hot though... But Nkanyezi is still leading, with 2 points.

We get to the backyard and a big round table is set...

It looks lovely.

Nolwazi: Zizi!

So we're just going to go with the Zizi name?

Me: Hello everyone.

They all greet back. Liwa, Nomvuyo, Dean, Nolwazi are there.

Liwa: I'm glad you came.

I smile and glance at Nomvuyo, who seems intrigued by me.

Nomvuyo: Sit next to me, Zizi.

I try not to look at her weirdly.

What's going on?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

What's happening?

She sees my confusion.

Nomvuyo: My husband tells me you can handle Dean.

They all laugh, and Dean chuckles.

Nolwazi: Anyone who can handle this bully is accepted.

I look at Dean, and he's looking at me coolly. He definitely intimidates me, but I don't go around

showing people that they have that kind of effect on me. My parents would be ashamed.

Person: What the fuck is going on here?
We all turn and Nolwazi exclaims happily.

Nolwazi: Mdu!

What??

Mdu: Is this one of mom's stupid family reunions?

Nolwazi: Stop being mea-

Mdu: Hold on...

He looks at me.

Mdu: Ziyanda?

I'm sure my eyes are popping out.

Mdu: What the fuck is going on here?

Everyone looks at us in confusion.

Mdu: Why is my ex here? Is mom trying to set me up?

Silence.

Lord, take me! Take me now!

INSERT 29

The silence is so awkward that I have to clear my throat.

Even Dean is raising an eyebrow.

Mdu: Ziyanda? What's going on?

I look at Derek and he just looks like he is sick. He's not fine!

I touch his hand and he doesn't look at me. Is he angry?

Mdu walks away and makes his way inside the house.

Nolwazi: Uhm... Ziyanda, you used to date Mdu?

Me: Yes.

Everyone is now staring at Derek. He's expressionless.

Me: It was 5 or 6 years ago in varsity. We weren't serious.

Well it was kinda serious, but I'm not trying to make things worse here.

Nomvuyo: It doesn't matter now.

Everyone stares at her, including Derek.

Nomvuyo: It happened years ago, and like you said, it wasn't serious.

Liwa nods slowly. I think he's just shocked that his wife is on my side.

Liwa: Yes...

Nolwazi: Uhm ya. It's not a big deal.

Now we're all staring at Derek... I feel so sorry for him! He's obviously overwhelmed!

Derek: Excuse me...

He stands and leaves the table. Where is he going?

As I'm about to stand, Nomvuyo takes my hand.

Liwa: Give him time to process it.

Dean: Such drama...

They all laugh and I'm just sitting there, trying not to burst out in tears. Where is Derek? I want to assure him that I'm not attached to Mdu.

Mdu walks back and seems more relaxed.

Mdu: Sanibonani.

They greet back.

Nomvuyo: So you guys dated in varsity?

What I have noticed about this one is that she is very nosy. Even the bitch face disappears

when she is fishing for information.

Mdu looks at me and smiles.

He chuckles and takes a bottle of champagne, and drinks it.

Mdu: Did you come with Derek?

I nod. I'm trying not cry at this point. I feel so guilty.

Mdu: This is very awkward. Where is he?

Nomvuyo: He left.

Nolwazi: I feel so bad. I'm sorry Zizi.

Mdu: What are you sorry for? That I'm your brother? How treacherous, Lwazi!

Dean chuckles.

Liwa: What a fucken small world!

I stand up. I can't deal with this. These people are too much, and I don't like how lightly they're taking this. I walk to the direction Derek took, and I see him on the other side of the yard, by the pool.

I walk to him and he glances at me blankly.

Me: Are you angry?

He keeps quiet for a while.

Me: Derek. Please say something.

He still doesn't say anything. My anxiety levels are shooting up.

Me: Okay then, I'll give you your space.

Just as I'm about to turn, he grabs my arm.

I turn to look at him and he exhales loudly.

Him: I'm angry.

I want to cry.

Him: But not at you... I guess I'm pissed at the universe...

I sigh in relief.

The universe is not loyal. One moment it's on your side, the next it's against you.

Him: When did you...

He can't even finish the sentence.

Me: About 5 or 6 years ago, when I was in varsity.

Him: Was it serious?

I shake my head.

He nods slowly.

Me: I was in varsity... We dated for a couple of months, nothing serious.

Well we technically dated for 2 years but he doesn't need to know all of that. I don't want him to freak out.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: I'm not angry at you, baby.

My body turns into jelly again. I'm not a fan of pet names, but hearing him call me baby eased me up a bit. He notices this, and pulls me closer and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I can't seem to imagine you with another man. It makes me uncomfortable. I completely understand. I mean, I've secretly had a crush on him for a while, and it always makes me cringe to think of him with another woman.

I plant a kiss on his lips and he smiles.

Me: We both have exes, unfortunately... He chuckles.

Me: It's unfortunate that my ex happens to be linked to you.

He tightens his hold on me and we share another kiss. I'm trying my best to assure him that I'm

not fazed by Mdu's presence. I don't want to him to start questioning "this." We're literally at the beginning stages.

He's a good man, and I acknowledge his efforts to get to know me. I appreciate him.

Him: Thank you.

I kiss him again.

Now I'm the clingy one.

I don't want to go back to those people, but I know we have to.

Him: Let's go back.

We walk back to the other side, hand in hand. As we sit, everyone continues with their

conversation as if nothing happened.

I appreciate their maturity. They're clearly above drama and pettiness.

Petty LaBelle is now hiding behind her golden chair. She's not about to involve herself in this situation.

I look over at Mdu. This little bitch is still hot as hell. Damn whore of a man.

Petty LaBelle rises a little bit, but she stops herself.

Mdu: Derek, can I have a word with you?

I look at Mdu sharply, and he ignores me.

What the hell is wrong with him? I've just tamed the

beast, and now he wants to ruin everything?

Derek: Sure.

They stand and walk away. I just want to protect Derek. This must be embarrassing for him.

Nolwazi: We told him to clear the air. We don't want any unnecessary tension.

I ignore her.

I'm so annoyed right now. What is Mdu saying??

I feel Nomvuyo's hand on mine under the table and I glance at her. She smiles reassuringly.

Nomvuyo: Relax.

Somehow, I end up relaxing. Surely Mdu is not that dumb, right? He knows very well that I am not the one to test...

Eventually they come back, and they seem fine. I look at Derek and he smiles sweetly. The sexy beast is back. I don't know what that idiot said to him, but my Nkanyezi's back, and that's all I care about.

We are now eating and the vibe is much better.

I need the bathroom. I excuse myself and go inside.

As I am making my way back outside, Mdu calls my name and I stop. We're in the kitchen.

Mdu: Hi.

I keep quiet.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: Listen here, just because we are currently crossing paths, it doesn't mean we're fine.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: I don't like you. I doubt I ever will.

Mdu: Yoh.

Me: So do me a favour, and zip it, blabbermouth.

With that said, I walk off and make my way back outside.

Overall, it was a good lunch, but I was over it.

I want to go back to Nkanyezi's place and cuddle. As much as I hate that shit, it definitely

sounds better than being here.

Derek senses my mood and announces our departure.

Liwa: We also have to get going.

Thandeka: We should do this more often!

I look over at Dean, and I know he hates all of this. I laugh to myself... At least we have

something in common.

We say our goodbyes.

Mdu and Derek hug and I try not to vomit.

Mdu tries to hug me, and I give him one look before

he tries. He stops himself and focuses his attention on Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Nolwazi: Hope to see you soon!

I give her a smile. A fake smile. I need a few months away from these people...

INSERT 30

We get to Derek's place.

Me: It's been a long day.

He doesn't say anything. He's been quiet since we left Nolwazi's place.

He cleans up his kitchen, which is already clean.

Me: I'll take shower while you do your thing.

He ignores me and I make my way to the bedroom. I sit on the edge of the bed and sigh deeply.

The past 24 hours have been a rollercoaster. I went from wanting nothing to do with Derek, to wanting him, all of him. Seeing him embarrassed like that because of Mdu was just horrible. I know he needs his space, but I don't want to give it to him. What if he realises that I'm just a

complicated person who will mess up his life?

I go to the bathroom and get in the shower. I start crying silently and hope that I'll feel better. I hate crying, but there's nothing else I can do.

After much wailing, I feel slightly lighter. I feel him behind me and turn around to face him.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods.

Him: Thanks for giving me space.

I nod.

He wraps his arms around me and I hold on to him.

Him: I'm not angry.

Me: You're not?

Him: I'm not.

He leans closer to my face and I feel his lips touch mine. He presses me against the wall and I wince. I'm just going with the flow. There's still that part of me that doesn't want to open up, but Derek's presence always reassures me for some weird reason. I let out a moan as I feel him inside me. I'm uncomfortable, because I hate shower sex, but this man is making it impossible to complain. I'm as loose as a jellyfish. He pounds me so intensely, that I scream. I dig my fingers on him and he pounds me even harder. As I reach my climax, he holds me tightly. He follows soon after, and we both just pant like

vicious animals. He loosens his hold on me and I find myself sitting down. I know he's looking at me weirdly right now, but I'm exhausted. All that flexibility got a girl shook.

The hot water hits my face, and he adjusts the shower head so it's facing the other way. He then sits next to me.

Out of nowhere, everything sinks in.

Me: Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Fuck!

Him: Yini?

Me: We didn't use a condom!

He chuckles and relaxes again.

Him: We'll get you those pills.

Me: Those pills?

Him: What are they called?

I groan.

Me: After sex pills? No baby pills?

We both laugh and he pulls me so that I'm sitting in between his legs. I'll just act like I'm not so

close to his dick.

He kisses my ear and I giggle.

Me: Stop!

Him: Is it ticklish?

Me: Yes.

He does it again and I try moving, but he holds me tight.

Me: Ngidi!

He continues to do it while I giggle away.

He eventually stops once I can't breathe.

I exhale loudly and relax.

Me: You want to kill me.

Him: I wouldn't dare.

We sit there for a long time...

Me: What's your biggest fear?

Him: My biggest fear?

Me: Uh-huh.

Him: Hmm I've never thought of that...

I keep quiet.

Him: I don't think I have a fear...

Me: Lies!

He chuckles.

Him: What's your biggest fear?

Me: Snakes. Spiders. Insects. Heights.

Should I go on?

He laughs.

Him: You are so dramatic.

Me: Ohho.

Him: I think my biggest fear is meeting my real parents.

I freeze. I didn't expect that.

Me: Really?

Him: Mmm.

Me: I thought you don't want to meet them?

Him: I don't.

Me: Do you think about them?

Him: Sometimes...

He wraps his arms around my neck and kisses my cheek.

Him: I don't want to spend my days wondering what could have been... I have to live my life.

Me: That's very strong of you.

Him: I try...

We are silent once again.

Him: Why are you so closed off?

I tense up and he kisses my cheek again. I didn't expect this to be a serious Q and A. I sigh.

Me: I've been through a lot...

He nods and we sit in silence for a long time.

Me: I was sexually abused for most of my childhood...

His body tenses.

Me: I was depressed most of my life, still am. I only got help when I was in varsity, because

things just spiralled out of control.

I can't believe I'm telling him all of this...

Me: I was hospitalized for over a month because my depression was undiagnosed for many

years...

He is still tense.

Me: And my first boyfriend, whom I loved dearly, turned out to be an abuser...

I stay silent for a while.

Me: I've been through a lot of shit, Derek. That's why I'm cautious with my heart.

We sit there for a long time. I can feel a thigh cramp approaching, so I stand and close the taps.

I walk out of the shower and dry myself...

As I am lotioning myself in the bedroom, he walks in with a towel wrapped around his waist. I

hold my breath. How is this handsome man with me?

Petty LaBelle instantly stands up and tells me to check myself. According to her, Derek is the one who should be asking himself how he got to be with a badass like myself. Petty really is a good girl. Always keeps the self-esteem in check.

I didn't even feel him next to me. He's now lotioning my arms.

He smiles when he sees that I've snapped out of it.

Him: You zone out quite a lot, don't you?
I look at him, feeling embarrassed.

Him: Why?

Me: It's a coping mechanism.

Him: I see...

He's now spreading lotion on my thighs.

Him: I need you to stay focused now...

He caresses my thighs and my heart skips a beat.

Him: Don't zone out, okay?

I nod.

I can't even speak.

One of his hands makes its way up between my thighs and I moan. He continues going up and I squeal.

Him: Ever so ready...

I feel his fingers massaging me, and I moan once more.

Him: Don't close your eyes, baby.

He continues to rub me softly and I hold my breath.

Him: Breathe, Zi.

I exhale and stare back at him. He's looking at me softly.

Him: I won't hurt you.

I don't say anything.

Him: Trust me...

He does something with his fingers and I moan.

He focuses on one area and I feel the pressure. My whole abdomen area is anticipating the quick climax. Seconds later, I'm holding on to him, craving more of him.

He lifts me and places me on the bed.

He lies down next to me, and I look at him in confusion.

Him: Do as you please...

Argh I love sex, but I'm really not a fan of being on top. Shit's too draining if you're carrying extra weight.

I reposition and slowly let him in... When I feel him in my womb, I forget my dislike of this position, and get to work...

As we both reach our end goal, he wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

I feel him smile, but I'm too tired to look at him. I'm sleepy.

Him: I'll take good care of you, I promise. I try responding but end up dozing off, safe in his embrace...

One of the precious things about love is that it heals... The process may not be easy or quick, but it heals.

I am going to take this chance...

INSERT 31

It's now 10am Sunday morning, and we've been in bed since last night.

Derek: What are we going to do today?

Me: I don't know.

He gets out of bed and disappears.

I take my phone and call Niki.

Niki: Babe.

Me: I told him I love him.

Niki: Whaaat?!

I sigh.

Niki: Friend!

She laughs in disbelief.

Me: I still can't believe it.

Her: Are you still with him?

Me: Yep.

Her: Wow, I need to meet this man ASAP!

Me: Definitely.

Niki's judgement is always accurate. I need her to meet Derek, so she can give me her honest opinion.

We continue chatting for a while and then Derek walks in.

Me: Bye bye ke.

Niki: Bye bye Juliet.

Me: Eeuw she died! Don't compare me to her!

Niki: But, she died in love!

Derek pulls me closer and I wince, because his cold.

Me: Bye, Niki.

Niki: Shap love.

I end the call and Derek rests his head on my chest.

Derek: These boobs.

Me: I know.

He groans happily.

Right now, I'm not going to entertain negative thoughts. I am happy. This man makes me happy, and that's all that matters right now.

Me: Are you falling asleep?

He moans and is gone minutes later...

I browse through my phone and it rings.

It's an unfamiliar number.

I answer.

Me: Hello.

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda?

The voice sounds familiar.

Me: Yes, who am I speaking to?

Person: Hi, Zizi. You're speaking to Nomvuyo.

Nom-who? Nom-what?

Me: Uhm okay...

She laughs lightly.

Nomvuyo: I know I'm the last person you'd expect a call from.

Me: Hi.

Her: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Her: I'm well, thanks. I just wanted to check if you're fine.

Me: Oh.

Her: I know yesterday was awkward for you...

Me: I'm fine...

Her: Okay...

Me: Uhm thank you. That's very sweet of you.

Her: Well I know you had a bad first impression of me... Unfortunately I'm not as sociable as everyone in this group. Additionally, I'm overprotective...

Me: I can relate.

Her: I know... You remind of my young self.

Me: Surely you're not that old.

Her: I'm 34.

Geesh, she's 9 years older than me? These people aren't young, are they? Also, how old is

Derek? I should ask him.

Her: I'm old...

She laughs and I smile. She really is loveable a bit.

Her: Anyway, how is Derek?

Him: He's fine.

Her: Distract him with sex. This group of men tends to be very dramatic at times.

Me: Really?

Her: Yes! They love sulking. You just have to learn a few ways to distract them.

Me: Oh.

I chuckle.

Her: On a serious note though, Derek has been a family friend for years. He's a very good man.

I keep quiet. Maybe Nomvuyo can give me some insight on him.

Her: If you haven't noticed yet, they love wholeheartedly. Derek is literally the only one who is not married with kids in our group of friends.

Me: Oh.

I'm glad he doesn't have a baby.

Her: He wears his heart on his sleeve, and that has landed him in some hurtful situations.

Nxa why would anyone hurt this sweet man? Damn whores!

Her: He told us briefly about you some time ago. Apparently you kept telling him to leave you alone?

Me: What??

Her: He was acting like a love struck teenager. It was so random, seeing as he was on a break.

You know what? I officially love Mrs Gossip Girl! She is out here spilling all the tea! I obviously don't need to stalk D because Vuvu the tea spiller is doing the most. Love it!

Me: Break?

Her: His last relationship ended badly.

Me: Is it?

Her: The girl was just busy...

Me: Oh...

I brush Derek's face. He's sleeping peacefully here.

Her: He decided to take a break, and I guess you came into the picture.

Me: For how long?

Her: About 2 years.

Me: Hmm.

Her: Anyway, don't put pressure on yourself. My advice for you is to accept the love. All these men were raised well, by strong women, and they don't think it's a weakness to love wholeheartedly. I'm sure you've noticed this.

Me: Yes.

Her: Don't drive yourself crazy, questioning things. If it feels right, then go for it.

Me: Thank you.

Her: I have to go... You should come visit us.

Me: Will do.

Her: Enjoy your day, love.

Me: Thanks, you too.

Her: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and end up falling asleep...
I'm glad I got to know about this one a bit...

When I finish showering, I find him making the bed.

Derek: Why didn't you wake me up?

Me: You were sleeping so peacefully.

He yawns.

Him: I wanted to shower with you.

Me: Haike.

He finishes up and goes to the bathroom while I get dressed.

I am starving.

It's now around 2pm, and I assume we're driving to a restaurant.

Me: Are you trying to kill me?

Him: What's wrong?

Me: I'm starving, Nkanyezi!

He chuckles and focuses on the road.

We're driving to Zoo Lake.

Him: I just need to meet someone quickly.

Me: Derek!

Him: It won't even take 5 minutes!

I look at him angrily.

Him: I promise!

We get out of the car and begin walking.

Me: I'm tired of your people. This is the last time.

Him: Offensive much?

Me: I don't care how you take it.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Him: Hungry Lion.

Me: Argh.

We get to a spot, where there aren't people. There's a girl standing under some tree.

Derek: Sindi.

Sindi smiles and hugs him.

There's a blanket, and a cute picnic setup...

Derek: Thanks.

Sindi: You owe me!

She looks at me and smiles.

Sindi: Bye.

She walks off, and I'm just standing there, confused.

Derek: Sit, and eat.

I look at the setup.

Me: Is this for us?

Him: Yes.

Me: Aww this is so cute!

Him: Cute? Come on now.

Me: Delightful! Charming! Lovely!

Enchanting!

He laughs.

Me: Aww man, thank you!

I give him a hug and sit down. A girl has got to eat.

Me: Who was that girl?

He sits down.

Him: My cousin, Sindi.

He opens up the food and dishes up for us.

Me: Thank you.

Him: You're welcome.

We begin eating.

I've decided that I won't mention

Nomvuyo's call. She'll be my secret spy...

Me: So... Can we please discuss how we're going to make this work?

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What?

Him: I didn't think you'd be the one to start this conversation.

Me: Listen, things are great and shit, but I'm still realistic.

He nods.

Me: So what are we going to do at work?

Him: You just have to stop looking at me with puppy eyes.

Me: Excuse me??

He laughs.

Me: You are the one who stares at me with the soggy eyes. Please check yourself.

He sighs.

Him: I do, don't I?

Me: So does this mean we can't interact?

Him: I think we should stay away from each other as much as possible. I'm afraid

I can't control the way I look at you.

I blush.

Him: Am I supposed to look at you like you're some enemy?

Me: Maybe try to imagine me in a negative way.

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Him: The bottom line is that we should keep it as professional as possible...

I nod.

Him: I'm thinking of telling Camille about us.

Me: What??

Him: She's a close friend.

Me: What if she tattles?

Him: She would never.

I sigh.

Him: It would make things easier.

Me: You think?

He nods.

Him: I've known her for years. I trust her.

Me: I'm not comfortable with that...

Him: You're not?

I nod.

Him: Okay... Let's see how this week goes...

Me: Sounds like a plan.

We continue eating and chatting.

Honestly, I am very interested to see how this work dynamic is going to turn out...

INSERT 32 (Couldn't edit)

It's now Monday and I am actually having a great day.

Lol life is good.

I've been cooped up in my class, teaching my babies happily.

During lunchtime, I'm in the staffroom warming up my food. Zama, Lwazi and two other teachers are there.

Derek walks in.

Zama: Mr N, we're having a debate here, and I think we need a man's perspective.

Derek: What's up?

I decide to add an extra minute for my food; I don't want to be part of this conversation.

Zama: So we're having a discussion about marriage... I personally think people should move in together before they get married, and these three think moving in will just delay the marriage process.

Lwazi: What do you think?

Derek: I think it depends on how traditional you are...

Zama: Elaborate.

Derek: Well if you're a traditional couple, you won't live together before getting marriage because you think it's a sin.

Lwazi: And it is a sin!

Derek: However, I think moving in together for a while will allow you to learn different things

about each other. That learning process might be a deal breaker for one of you, so it will be less complicated to leave because you aren't married, you know?

Zama: Exactly!

They continue to discuss this and I get my food. Derek is now walking towards the microwave. I

can smell him. My stomach churns.

Him: Ms Dlamini.

Me: Hey.

Him: Your food looks delicious.

I chuckle.

Me: I have a personal chef.

Him: Is it?

Me: Yep.

I make my way out and walk to my class. I'm not trying to have a staring contest with Nkanyezi,

because people will notice. What I will do though, is chow the food he cooked for me.

It's now after school, and I can't wait to go home. I just want to watch TV with my parents and sleep. I miss them. As I am packing up, there's a knock on my door.

Me: Come in.

Derek walks in and I have to stop myself from wrapping my hands around him.

Honestly, this professionalism thing is not going to be easy.

Derek: Hi, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Mr N.

He smiles and I pull myself towards myself.

Derek: Had a good day?

Me: Yes, and you?

Him: It was okay...

I finish packing my things and he frowns.

Him: Leaving already?

Me: Yep. See you later, alligator.

I quickly walk out and yell for Zama to hurry up. Within 5 minutes, she's out and we're walking to the taxi rank.

I don't want to be tempted to do some crazy crap at work. Furthermore, I need a break from

Nkanyezi, so I can break away from his spell a bit.

Zama: How was your weekend, sthandwa?

Me: It was great yazi.

Her: Mine was also great.

Me: Really? What did you get up to?

Her: Hubby took me to Haarties.

Me: Aww how sweet!

She smiles and rubs her belly.

Her: He tries shame yena...

We continue chatting, and I listen to her marriage stories. *rolls eyes*

It's now Wednesday, and I am still feeling fantastic. I've been avoiding Derek as much as

possible, and he's being such a baby...

I thought I would be the clingy one, but hai umuntu is doing the most. Can I say he's my man

now? Are we there yet? *blushes*

As I am packing up and getting ready to leave, he comes in my class and shuts the door.

Me: Hey stranger danger.

I laugh when he rolls his eyes.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I don't like this...

I chuckle as he steps closer to me.

Me: Don't you dare touch me! I am not trying to get fired!

I move away and he stops and looks at me sadly.

Him: Are you enjoying this?

Me: Go away.

I quickly get my bag and rush out of the classroom...

I guess this is how it is. I'm going to spend my time here running away from him.

That night when I was busy journaling, I get a call from him.

Me: Hello.

Derek: You are evil.

I chuckle.

Me: Just because I can shut my emotions, it doesn't mean I'm evil, Nkanyi.

He groans dramatically and I laugh.

Him: Pack an overnight bag tomorrow.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Pack an overnight bag, Ziyanda. I'm tired of this shit.

Me: Uhm feisty much?

Him: Ziyanda don't test me. I'm even considering driving to Soweto right now.

Me: Geesh relax, tiger.

I continue laughing at him.

Him: I'm glad to know that this is entertaining.

I listen to him complain for a few more minutes.

Me: Are you okay?

He sighs.

Him: I miss you.

Me: I miss you too.

Him: Please pack an overnight bag?

Me: What will I even say to my parents? It's during the week, and I don't usually sleep out.

Him: Tell them you're going to Niki's or something.

Me: Niki literally lives around the corner.

He moans and I laugh.

Me: I'll see what I can do...

Him: Okay.

We continue chatting until I doze off...

It's now Thursday. I have managed to avoid him this whole week, and I am proud of myself. I

know he's suffering, but he'll get over it eventually. During lunchtime, I go to his office and knock.

Derek: Come in.

I walk in and close the door.

Me: Hi, Mr N.

I smile warmly and he looks up from his work.

I walk to him and he stands and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I miss you.

We stand there for a while, until he eventually kisses me. I must admit, I missed him as well.

Him: Are you good?

Me: Uh-huh.

Him: I'm not.

He pouts and I giggle.

Me: Stop being a baby.

Him: But I miss you.

He squeezes me and nuzzles his head on my neck.

Him: Did you pack an overnight bag?

Me: Say what now?

He freezes and lets go of me.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Did you?

Me: Huh?

He lets go of me and looks at me angrily.

Him: Go away from me.

Me: But-

He gives me one look and I know he's not about my life right now. I make my way out of the

office, and go to the bathroom.

I made him angry!

I just wanted us to go a week without being in each other's spaces, so we can get used to this...

I didn't mean any harm.

I go back to my class, and find my babies there. At least they'll distract me...

Just as I am packing my things, I get an sms.

It's from him.

Derek: Please come to my office.

Zama is busy with something in her class and she says it's going to take her 30 minutes max. I

tell her I'll wait for her outside...

I make my way to D's office and close the door.

Him: Lock it.

I do as I am told.

I walk towards him, and he stands. I walk to his side.

Him: You've made me angry.

Me: I know.

He grunts.

Me: D, this is all for the best. We have one week left of school! We have the December holidays

to be love struck. We need to establish a professional working rela-

He slams himself against me, and before I know it, my butt is pressed against his desk. I try to

keep it together, but my body is not playing along. I turn into jelly instantly.

He kisses me strongly and I wrap my legs around him.

Damit my body really missed this man.

After a quick pounding session, I am now fixing my dress. He sits down and looks at me with a smile on his face.

Me: Uhm I'll see you... tomorrow.

Him: Bye, baby.

I carefully walk out and make my way to the bathroom. I fix myself...

Why is Derek doing this? Now I just want more of him. Did he do this on purpose?

I go to Zama's class and find her packing up.

Me: Done?

Zama: Yes, love.

I wait for her and then we walk out. We bump into Derek.

Zama: Bye Mr N!

Derek: See you tomorrow, ladies.

Zama: One more week and we're done for the year!

Derek: Hmm...

I'm very angry at him, and I can tell he knows, because he has that stupid smug smile of his.

Zama and I walk out and vent about our day. Zama is one of those people who are so

self-consumed that they don't even pay attention to what's happening around them. I love

listening to her because she never tries to get me to open up and shit.

When I get home, I see a few texts and missed calls from Derek. I decide to ignore his inconsiderate ass.

INSERT 33 (Couldn't edit)

That Friday as I get to work, I am still very much pissed at Nkanyezi. I can't believe he used sex to make me crave him like that! How low!

My babies run to me as usual and take my bag to my class. They go back to the playground and

I thank them for their service.

As I walk into my class, I find a basket on my desk. I open the wrap, and find all of my favourite

things: Pringles, Speckled Eggs, Biltong and a few other things.

What's happening?

I take the card, and it reads:

Zizi,

I apologise for yesterday. However, you were partly to blame, because you decided to not bring an overnight bag when I asked so kindly.

Will you forgive me?

Love,

Your Star

If he thinks this shit will make me feel better, he's wrong... Well, I am a bit happy that he got everything I like, but still! Petty is not letting this go!

I put the card in my bag, because I know Zama is going to walk in here. I can't have people know my business.

Anyway, I make my way out just in time for assembly.

I see him from a distance, and my heart skips a beat. I can never get over how handsome he is.

He's perfect.

Once we're done with assembly, he walks to me and smiles. I keep a straight face, just in case

anyone is watching. It seems like I'm the only one who cares about my job! This fool is too

chilled.

Derek: Good morning, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Morning.

Him: How are you?

Me: Great.

I get my kids to quieten down and then lead them to class. I don't have time for

Derek right

now.

It's now lunchtime, and I am in my class sending a few emails to parents about final exams.

Someone knocks, and I tell them to come in. Lebo, the receptionist, walks in.

Lebo: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes.

I really don't like her.

Lebo: There's a delivery for you.

I frown and she walks away. I'm sure she's just annoyed that she had to walk all the way to my class to tell me this. Anyway, I get up and make my way to the reception area. Some guy is standing there with a brown paper bag.

Guy: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

Guy: This is for you.

Me: From?

He looks at me weirdly and hands me the paper bag before walking off. Mxm how rude.

I walk back to my class, knowing very well that Nkanyezi has something to do with this.

He got me a burger. A scrumptious burger.

I smile lightly as my tummy grumbles. I didn't even bring lunch today, so this is just perfect. I eat half of it and feel much better. A hungry Ziyanda is a vulture... At least he tamed me a bit. I get my shit together and get ready to teach...

It's now after school and I am finally knocking off! I am exhausted, but overall I had a good week. I am also excited that I'm done teaching. The kids will be busy with assessments next week. I'm also thankful that marking won't be a train smash because this is relatively a small school.

Zama walks in my class.

Zama: Babe, are we leaving together?

Me: No, friend.

She smiles mischievously.

Zama: You found another sex buddy?

Me: Yep.

Her: How I wish!

She says goodbye and leaves...

As I clean up my classroom, I get a text from Derek, whom I managed to avoid throughout the day.

Derek: Let me know when you're ready to go home.

Me: If by "home" you mean my parents' house, then sure- I will let you know.

I chuckle. I'm going to play hard to get.

This one did me wrong yesterday, and I don't forgive easily.

My phone beeps.

Derek: Please don't do this. I love you, and I miss you.

Swoons!

I begin packing up.

My phone beeps again.

Derek: I'm sorry about yesterday. I was frustrated.

I don't respond.

I finish packing up and as I'm about to make my way out, my door opens and he walks in and closes the door.

Derek: Are you leaving?

He looks at me all sad and shit.

Me: Let's go...

His face immediately softens and he steps closer to me.

Me: Check yourself.

He stops and turns.

Me: 5 minutes, Ngidi!

He walks out and I smile. Every Friday, people knock off right on time hey. As soon as the clock

strikes 3pm, people are gone and the school is empty...

I walk to Derek's office and find Camille there.

Camille: Hey Ziyanda.

Me: Hey...

Camille: D, I'll see you on Sunday.

Derek: Cool.

Camille: Have a great weekend, Ziyanda.

Me: Thanks, you too.

They share a hug and she walks out. Our school leaders have an open door policy, so teachers

can literally come in and out of their offices. This is why people haven't suspected anything.

I watch as he packs up and cleans his space, which is already clean.

He finishes up and we walk out of the office, and he locks up the school. We then get in his car

and he drives off.

Derek: Am I taking you home first?

Me: Yes.

He nods and focuses on the road.

I take a nap and he wakes me up when we get to my house.

Me: I'll be back.

He nods.

Just as I am getting out, my dad walks to the car and I cringe.

Dad: Ziyanda, let me have a word with this Uber driver of yours! I really want to get a car, and get someone to drive. Make extra money, you know?

Me: Huh??

I look at Derek in shock, and he is also shocked.

My dad walks to the other side of the car, Derek's side.

He knocks lightly on the window and my heart stops beating. I am ready to die! Derek opens the window and my dad bends.

Dad: Hello...

Derek clears his throat.

Lord!

Derek: Hi, sir.

Dad: Awusho, how do I apply to be a driver for this Uber thing?

Really??

Derek: Uhm... The website.

Is it really the website? This is so awkward!

Dad: Hmm... Write it down for me, please. My daughter tells me you people make money...

Derek smiles awkwardly and scratches his chin.

Me: Uhm I know the website, dad... He has to go. Phela he has other trips.

Dad: How does it work?

Me: I'll explain it to you.

Dad: But I want to get the explanation from him, seeing as-

Me: Don't worry! Woza!

I quickly get out of the car and get my dad.

Me: You have to call their customer care first angithi...

Dad: Is it?

Me: Yes!

We walk in the yard and I continue entertaining him with lies! Lies, I tell you!

Once inside, he gets distracted and focuses on his pap that almost got burnt. I

pack up my

things and rush out. I had already told them that I was spending the weekend

elsewhere so

there was no need to explain myself.

I get in the car.

Me: Drive, now!

He does as he is told and once we're out of my neighbourhood, I sigh heavily and sink on my seat.

Me: Shit.

He chuckles.

Him: Talk about awkward...

Me: Zip it, Uber driver!

He laughs and I join him...

INSERT 34

We drive to his place in Maboneng.

Me: Did you manage to get the property?

He looks at me.

Derek: Yes.

Me: Well that's good. Congratulations.

We get to his place, and chill at the balcony.

Me: I feel like going out tonight.

He gives me a weird look.

Me: Yini?

Him: You're random.

Me: I'm serious.

Him: What do you want to do?

Me: I don't know.

Him: But I want you all to myself. It's been a rough week.

I laugh and wrap my arms around him.

Me: Such a baby.

He plants kisses on my face and squeezes me.

Him: We'll go out tomorrow. I want to cuddle tonight.

Me: Gosh.

He continues being all touchy until his phone rings.

Him: It's Dean...

He answers.

Him: Dean... Yes, I'm at my place in Mabo...

No, man I don't want to go out... Ya, I'm with her...

He chuckles.

Him: Okay... I'll get back to you...

He hangs up and I look at him.

Him: Dean wants to meet. He says he can't stand being in that house.

Me: Kanti why are they this side anyway?

Him: Nolwazi is about to give birth. Her parents want her this side.

Me: So Dean doesn't have a say?

Him: He's been planning on moving this side anyway.

Me: Hmm.

Him: He just doesn't like sharing his space.

Me: Shame uzoqina. That's what he gets for knocking up Nolwazi.

Him: You are so mean.

I roll my eyes and he holds me again.

Me: You can go out.

Him: Angifuni.

Me: I really don't mind...

Just then, my phone rings, and I recognise the number. I answer.

Me: Hello.

Person: Hi Zi, it's Vuvu.

Me: Hey, unjani?

Nomvuyo: Ngiyaphila. Are you with Derek?

Me: Yes, is everything okay?

Her: Yes, is he going out with the guys? The guys? I thought it was just Dean.

Me: He hasn't really confirmed.

Her: I wanted to invite you to my house for dinner...

Me: Oh...

She is really random, hey.

Me: I'll talk to D, and let you know.

Her: Alright. Bye.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek weirdly.

Him: What's up?

Me: That was Nomvuyo.

He frowns.

Him: Really?

I tell him about the call and he sighs.

Him: Are you comfortable with going to her?

Me: I don't mind.

Of course I don't mind. Mrs Gossip Girl will give me more important details.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: I told you I want to go out. This is fine, really.

He nods.

Him: Let me call Dean then...

He calls Dean and tells him he's available.

He stands up and then looks at me.

Him: Come.

I follow him inside and we go to the bedroom.

Him: I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Him: You need to bring some of your clothes here... You should have clothes this side, and my

other apartment.

I chuckle.

Him: Secondly, don't ever do what you did this week.

I laugh and he sulks.

Me: You are so dramatic.

Him: I'm serious, Zi. I missed you and you dismissed me.

Me: Will you ever forgive me for that shit?

Him: I doubt.

He makes me sit on his lap.

Me: I'm sorry neh?

He nods and I plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I'll bring as many clothes as you want! You want me to move in? I'll move in! You want me

to have your kids and marry you? I will do it all!

Him: Stop mocking me.

I laugh and plant another kiss on his lips.

Me: On a serious note though, I'll bring some clothes.

He smiles.

Me: Can you believe I was planning on moving in with Lwazi?

Him: Really? What happened?

Me: I didn't feel her.

Him: I'm glad you didn't.

Me: FYI it would have been convenient for you if I moved in with her because it's closer to your place that side.

Him: I love that you live with your parents. I know you're loved and safe there.

Me: Aww!

We then got ready for our evening...

We make our way inside Nomvuyo and Liwa's house and I marvel at how lovely it is...

Me: You people are rich huh?

Derek: Just a little bit...

We walk in, and Nomvuyo welcomes us.

She really is beautiful... She makes a plain white t-shirt

and leggings, seem like couture...

Nomvuyo: Sanibonani.

We share a hug and then she hugs Derek.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: Relieved... My daughter just went to her grandma's house.

Derek: Is Zimi this side?

Nomvuyo: She got here this morning.

Derek: How is she?

Nomvuyo: Uyajola.

Derek: No surprise there...

They both laugh.

Nomvuyo: She's never been one to not have men chasing after her.

We walk in and she leads us to the lounge.

Derek: I'm just dropping off Zizi. I'll fetch her later.

Nomvuyo: Liwa is still at the office, but he said he'll meet you there.

Derek: No problem.

Nomvuyo: See you later then.

Derek looks at me.

Nomvuyo: You'll find me in the kitchen, Zi. She walks off and Derek wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Ditto.

We share a hug and a kiss.

Derek: See you later.

Me: Enjoy yourself. Don't act like a lost puppy.

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Him: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

He lets go of me and walks out of the car. I sigh. I miss him already.

I walk to the kitchen and find Nomvuyo stirring a pot.

Nomvuyo: Uhambile umuntu wakho?

Me: Yep.

Her: He is really lovesick huh?

Me: I guess.

She looks at me.

Her: You have told each other, right?

Me: That we love each other?

She nods.

Me: Yes.

Her: Good.

She finishes stirring and then closes the pot.

Her: Should be ready in 10 minutes.

Would you like something to drink?

Me: Yes, please.

She leads me to the bar, and I'm amazed.

There's everything an alcoholic needs.

Me: Wine?

Her: Alright.

She leads me to the wine cellar and asks me what I would like. I tell her to choose anything good, and she chooses red wine. We walk back to the lounge.

I can't stop staring at her.

I think I have a crush on Nomvuyo.

I have a girl crush.

She pours me a glass.

Me: What about you?

She rolls her eyes and sighs.

Her: I'm pregnant.

My eyes pop out.

Me: What??

She groans.

Her: I don't want this baby... It's for Liwa.

Me: Does he know?

She shakes her head.

Her: He's been bothering me for a while now.

Me: How far along are you?

Her: I don't know. I'm only seeing my doctor next week.

Me: What made you think you're pregnant?

Her: I know my body...

Me: Geesh.

She sighs.

Her: We'll see...

Me: I'm sure he'll be thrilled.

Her: You don't know him... He'll be dramatic.

I laugh.

Her: So do you think Derek is the one?

I almost choke on my drink. I didn't expect that.

Me: Uhm...

She smiles.

Her: You don't have to answer... However, you must think about it.

I take a sip of my wine.

Her: When I found out about Nyami, I was so shocked...

Me: Really? She wasn't planned?

Her: What? My baby was definitely not planned. Liwa was also in a relationship with some stray dog.

I laugh.

Her: I resent her.

I continue laughing.

Me: So you didn't know you were pregnant?

Her: Nope. I guess we forgot to use protection, because I don't remember being-

And then the world stops.

Every-fucken-thing-stops-fucken-moving.

I keep hearing her say my name, but I am now panicking.

I put down the wine and stand.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I start pacing around the space.

Nomvuyo: Zi!

I'm crying.

I'm crying uncontrollably.

I'm panicking.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I feel her shake me, and I stare at her.

She's also panicking.

Me: We forgot...

Her: Ziyanda?

Me: Oh my God! We forgot the pills! We forgot to use a condom!

Yhu I cry all over again.

What have I done?

How could I be so stupid??

My parents?

What have I done??

INSERT 35

Nomvuyo is now forcing me to drink water.

Me: What if I'm pregnant?!

Nomvuyo: I need you to calm down...
I feel her brushing my back and I take a few deep breaths. I eventually calm down, and look at her.

Nomvuyo: When was this?

Me: Last weekend, and yesterday.

She sighs.

Her: We can't even use a pregnancy test to find out.

Me: Why?

Her: It's too soon.

I sink on the couch and huff heavily.

Me: What am I going to do?

Her: Ziyanda, calm down.

Me: Calm down? Nomvuyo, do I look like I am ready to have a baby?!

She keeps quiet.

Me: Call, Derek. Tell him to come, now!

Her: There's noth-

Me: Nomvuyo, please don't. I'm not in the mood to listen to a prep-talk.

She sighs.

Her: There's nothing any of you can do. I look at her angrily.

Her: When are you supposed to be on your period?

Me: Next week.

Her: Okay, let's wait until then. You can even come with me to my doctor and we can both do our blood tests.

She smiles and I sigh.

Me: I'm not ready to be a mother. I can't! I won't!

Her: So what will you do-

Me: Don't even go there, please.

She sighs and nods.

Her: At least you have a solid career.

Me: I am not ready, Nomvuyo! Physically! Mentally! Emotionally! Zonke!

She keeps quiet.

Me: My parents are going to kill me... I am going to die...

Her: Let's not over think, okay?

I sigh heavily and she stands and pulls me up.

Her: Let's eat.

We walk to the kitchen and I watch her dish up for us. We then walk out to the veranda.

Her: Ziyanda, the world is not going to end. Stop stressing.

Me: Do you have a pregnancy test?

Her: Ziyanda-

Me: Nomvuyo, give me a pregnancy test!

Her: Love, listen...There's no use taking it. You need at least 8 days.

I sigh and reach for the wine, and then I remember that I COULD be pregnant.

Me: Fuck.

I try to eat, but end up losing my appetite.

Me: I can't focus right now.

She takes my plate and comes back with a cup of tea.

Her: Woza. I think you need to take a nap.

She leads me up the stairs and we walk into a bedroom. She puts down the cup of tea and then

prepares the bed. I get in and she gives me the tea.

I have never thought of having children.

This is the first time I'm confronted with such.

I take a sip and she sits on the edge and watches me.

Once I'm done, she takes the cup and I settle in. I check my phone and see a message from

Derek, telling me that he misses me.

I close my eyes and pray that this is just a wakeup call from the universe. I'm not trying to have

a baby right now. I have learnt my lesson.
Sex is bad. Sex gets you kids. I have learnt
my lesson,
I will stop having sex!
I doze off...

When I wake up, I hear loud laughter...
I try not to think about why I was put to
sleep in the first place.
I walk down the stairs...
Derek, Liwa, Dean and two other men are
in the lounge watching a soccer match.
They're loud. A bit too loud.
Where is Nomvuyo?
As soon as Derek sees me, he jumps up
and staggers towards me.
Wait a minute, is this one drunk?
Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!
Are they that drunk? Geesh.
Derek wraps his arms around me and
plants kisses all over my face.

Him: The love of my life...

I am really not in the mood for this. I need him to sober so I can tell him about this nonsense.

Him: Baby, do you understand how much I love you?

Suddenly there's noise and chaos.

It seems like there's a team that scored or whatever.

Derek squeezes me and I just look at him blankly.

Him: Baby.

He is so drunk. Like, I can't deal right now.

Nomvuyo: Derek, go sit with your friends.

Derek: No.

Nomvuyo: Please don't make me ask again.

He lets go of me and staggers back to his fellow drunkards.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo takes my hand and we walk to the kitchen. I'm shocked to see Nolwazi. It seems like she grew even bigger.

Nolwazi: I can't believe you guys had dinner without me!

I don't respond.

I have bigger shit to worry about. There's a possibility that I'm also going to be in her position.

The mere thought of that makes me want to cry. Nomvuyo gives me a bottle of water and I drink it.

Nolwazi: Zi, what's wrong?

I look at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: She has a headache.

Nolwazi: Aww man, sorry. Did you give her something?

Nomvuyo nods and I sit on one of the high stools.

Nolwazi: These men are so drunk.

Nomvuyo grunts angrily.

Nomvuyo: Annoying nje.

Nolwazi: I've never seen Dean this drunk.

Nomvuyo: Konje he was your boss...

Nomvuyo! This woman is so spicy!

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Is that what he is telling you people?

Nomvuyo: Kanti what's the story?

I have to stop myself from laughing.

Here's the Gossip Girl that I love.

Nolwazi: We're equals... The only reason it seems like he's my boss is that he is a man and I am

a woman. That's how it is in the corporate world.

Nomvuyo: Hmm I'll stick to being a housewife.

I find myself chuckling. It is very clear that Nomvuyo doesn't particularly like Nolwazi. I wonder

why...

Nomvuyo: Are you hungry?

Nolwazi: Can I have some nuts?

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Nomvuyo walks away...

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles.

She's just like Liwa, but she's not out there. She's a very kind and lovable woman.

Nomvuyo comes back with a packet of nuts.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Just then, I feel someone wrapping their arms around me.

Derek doesn't understand that now is not the time?

Nolwazi: Weeh.

Derek: Baby, let's go home.

Nomvuyo: Ungazobheda wena. You're not going anywhere this drunk.

Derek groans.

I shift and he lets go of me.

Nolwazi: Go away. We don't talk to drunk men.

Nomvuyo: Hamba, please.

Derek: Sour and bitter...

He kisses me and walks away...

Ngiphethwe yi-stress yazi and lesdakwa is not helping right now. I can't right now. I just can't.

Nolwazi: I need to sleep...

Nomvuyo: Woza...

As Nolwazi stands, she frowns.

Nolwazi: Oops.

Nomvuyo: Yini?

Nolwazi: Uhm...

She laughs innocently.

Nolwazi: I think my water just broke...

Nomvuyo walks to her and sure enough, there's water on the tiles.

Sweet baby Jesus!

I sit there, frozen. This cannot be happening right now.

Nomvuyo: Okay. Are you experiencing any pains?

Nolwazi: Not really.

Nomvuyo: Let's take you to the hospital.

Nolwazi looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: Breathe, Zizi.

I think I'm too young for all of this shit.

They walk to the lounge and I don't move an inch.

I hear silence...

Out of nowhere there's rowdiness.

Dean: WHAT?!

Liwa: OH SHIT!

The rowdiness continues.

Nomvuyo: Shut the fuck up! All of you!

There's silence again.

Nomvuyo: I am driving her to the hospital...

Derek: Where's Ziya-

Nomvuyo: Shut up.

Silence.

Nomvuyo: I need all of you to get your
shit together. Nolwazi is not experiencing
any pains, so

we can all calm down.

I stand and walk to the lounge and see
everyone standing.

These men are so drunk, but now they're
busy pretending they're sober. If I was not
going

through the most, I'd be laughing at this
scene.

Nolwazi is now busy on her phone.

Why is she so calm?

Derek staggers towards me.

Derek: Baby, did you hear the good news?

Nang'omunye...

It's obviously going to be a long night...

INSERT 36

We're now driving to the hospital. We get there, and Nolwazi is taken to her room, so the doctor can check her. Nomvuyo goes with her, and the rest of us are sitting in some fancy lounge area.

I'm sure I'll give birth at Bara...

I really need Derek right now, and he is not here. Yes, he's here physically, but this fool is drunk.

Uphelile. I need him to hold me...

But now, he's the one resting comfortably on me...

Dean is trying his best to be sober, and it's funny to watch. Whatever they drank, is defeating

him. I keep looking at him and stopping myself from laughing. For a man who always has his shit together, this is hilarious.

All these men are lying on these couches
ngathi they're in their houses.

Liwa: Dean, you're going to be a dad...

There's silence.

Liwa: I can't believe this shit...

I'm sure in his mind Liwa thinks he
sounds deep and inspirational, but he's
out here slurring his
words.

We sit in silence. Derek's head is now on
my lap. I keep pinching his nose, so he
doesn't pass
out.

Derek: Baby, you're hurting me.

Me: Don't close your eyes.

Derek: I'm just going to close them for five
minutes. I promise.

I sigh and let him be. The others seem to
have passed out as well.

So is this my life? I'm just going to sit here
and guard grown ass drunks?

Just then, I hear voices and snap out of my stressful thoughts.

I see Nolwazi's mom.

Thandeka: Hi Zizi, what's going on here?

Me: They're drunk.

She hisses and looks around... You'd swear a massacre took place. Five men lying there like they're done with this thing called life.

Thandeka: Dean must just be grateful that Lwazi's father will only join us in the morning.

I keep quiet. Angizingeni ke lezi.

Thandeka: So why are you sitting here?

Me: Uhm...

Thandeka: You're not going to babysit old men... Woza...

I carefully reposition Derek and then follow Nolwazi's mother to Nolwazi's room. She's so calm.

We get there and find Nolwazi sitting on the edge of the bed.

Nolwazi: Mommy!

Thandeka: Baby.

Nolwazi smiles and Thandeka hugs her daughter.

Thandeka: What's the scoop?

Nolwazi sighs.

Nolwazi: I still have a very long way to go...

Nomvuyo: She's nowhere near ready to give birth.

Thandeka nods.

Nolwazi: However, I want to stay here once... Considering my history of stress, the doctor suggests I stick around vele.

Thandeka: How long do we have to wait?

Nolwazi: Probably 24 hours.

Thandeka nods thoughtfully.

Thandeka: Your father will be here in the morning.

Nolwazi nods.

Thandeka: And at least Dean and his tavern people will sober up.

Tavern people? I know she's not talking about my star.

Nolwazi laughs and lies comfortably on the bed.

Nolwazi: I thought I would freak out...

She smiles at Nomvuyo.

Nolwazi: Nomvuyo, you're a life saver.

Thank you.

Nomvuyo: It's a pleasure.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry you got dragged into all of this.

I clear my throat.

Me: It's okay.

Thandeka: My suggestion right now is that I go back to the house to prepare and get your things. Nomvuyo and Zizi can stay with you.

Nolwazi: No problem.

Thandeka: I'll also get stuff for those men, because they'll be a mess when they wake up.

Nolwazi: Sounds like a plan.

Thandeka: Okay then, I should be back in a few hours.

Nolwazi: Thank you, mommy.

They share another hug, and I can't help but smile. Nolwazi's like a little girl next to her mommy.

Cute.

Nomvuyo: I just need some fresh air...

Thandeka nods.

I decide to walk out with Nomvuyo.

Me: Wait for me phela. I'm pregnant and can't walk fast.

She smiles as I catch up. We then make our way outside. The cold breeze hits me and I wince.

Nomvuyo: What a night.

Me: What a fucken night...

We chuckle.

Nomvuyo: These babies just had to make their debut today, when those men are drunk...

Me: Good timing...

We sit on a bench.

Her phone rings and she answers.

Nomvuyo: Hello?... Ivy...

She laughs for a good minute. I've never heard her laugh like this. She must love this Ivy person...

Nomvuyo: Okay then, bye... Love you too... She ends the call and sighs lightly.

Me: Why are you such a bitch?

She looks at me in shock. Surely she has heard this before, so why is she acting surprised?

Me: You're a bitch.

She's still looking at me in shock and I shrug.

Me: I'm not judging you though... But you're a bitch.

We're silent for a while and she eventually chuckles.

Her: I don't want to be a bitch.

Me: She says sarcastically...
She laughs and looks at me.

Her: You're also a bitch.

Me: I know. I fully own it.

Her: Oh wow.

Me: I'm not a fan of people. They drive me crazy.

Her: They're annoying, aren't they?

Me: Argh.

We laugh quietly.

Me: So why exactly do you dislike Nolwazi?

Her: What??

Me: Oh please Vuvu. Save that gasp for Dr. Phil...

She laughs.

Her: It's not that I don't like her...

Me: Hmm...

Her: I'm just getting used to her.

Me: Hmkay.

Her: But her younger sister and I get along.

Me: Is it?

Her: Part of you reminds me of her. She's also dramatic.

I sigh.

Me: Bitchy and dramatic... Girl, we've got to change.

We continue chatting for a while...

It's now 7am. Nomvuyo and I crashed in Nolwazi's room. My whole body is achy and I know my mood won't be chirpy. I just want to go home.

Why are my weekends with Derek so dramatic?

I go to the bathroom to freshen up a bit. God bless these VIP hospitals, hey. A girl can only dream.

Just then, the door opens...

Nazoke.

Dean runs to Nolwazi and the rest of the crew follows.

They are so predictable.

Dean: Nolwazi. Baby, are you fine? What's going on? When d-

Nolwazi: Woooah can we chill a bit.

They're all surrounding her bed, except for Derek.

Where is Derek?

Dean: What happened? When did you get here?

Nolwazi: You seriously can't remember?

Liwa: Where the fuck is my wife? Is she fine?

Now Liwa is panicking. He looks at me and I don't say anything. I'm overwhelmed as fuck.

I decide to ignore him and walk out. I need to get out of here.

How am I losing my sleep over these people? Heck, I also have my own crap to deal with!

Just as I walk out, Derek yells my name and rushes to me. Before I know it, I'm bombarded with thousands of questions.

I just keep quiet and let him ask these questions until he is satisfied. Once he's done, he exhales.

Me: Are you done?

He avoids my eyes and looks down, a bit embarrassed.

Gosh now I feel sorry for him. It's clear that a hangover is killing him, but he's acting strong.

Also, he seems to be worried about me. Just then, Nomvuyo approaches us on the passage. Liwa walks out of the room and spots her.

Liwa: Baby!

Nomvuyo gives him one look, and the bold man instantly becomes a puppy.

Liwa: Vu-

She walks to us and looks at Liwa uninterestedly.

Nomvuyo: We don't have time right now. Nolwazi is probably going to start getting contractions. Furthermore, her father is on his way. What I suggest is that instead of

bombarding us with your foul smells, you go home and clean yourselves up.

Eisaan.

Liwa: Uhm...

She walks in the room and I look at Derek. I don't feel sorry for him anymore!

Derek: Baby-

Me: Zip it, Stinky!

I quickly walk in the room before he tries to grab me and bewitch me with his usual spell.

Nomvuyo: Dean, Malusi and Joe, I suggest you go to the house and freshen up.

Nolwazi's father

is on hiShe

didn't even need to finish her sentence.

They were out of that room within a second.

As soon as they are gone, Nolwazi sighs lightly.

Nomvuyo: What's wrong?

Nolwazi: Just a little contraction...

Nomvuyo: Walk around a bit. You've been in bed for a while...

I walk to Nolwazi and help her stand. She then walks around.

Nomvuyo: I'll call your mom and doctor...

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Nomvuyo walks out and I sit on the bed and stare at Nolwazi, who seems to be groaning more...

I don't need this negativity in my life. I cannot deal.

INSERT 37 (Couldn't edit)

It's now around 8am and things are getting a bit intense. Nolwazi's contractions are getting worse...

I decided to exclude myself from this situation, because firstly- I don't know these people like

that, and secondly- I don't want to be left more traumatized than I already am. I am sitting outside, on a bench by the garden.

Derek: Zi.

I keep quiet. When did he get back?

He sits next to me.

He smells good. However, I am so overwhelmed right now, that I can't even move. The past few

hours have been such a rollercoaster...

I feel him get closer to me and he wraps his arms around my shoulders. I want to resist, but I

can't. I relax next to him and I feel him relax as well.

Me: I'm not angry.

He keeps quiet and I look at him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I just spent the past two hours thinking you hate me.

I grunt.

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

Him: I was really drunk.

Me: Drunk is an understatement.

Him: Don't make me feel worse.

I chuckle.

Me: What the hell did you people drink?

You were finished.

He tightens his hold on me and kisses me again.

Him: I promise- this is our last dramatic weekend.

Me: Well, it's not really your fault.

Him: What the fuck happened?

I go on to tell him about last night, leaving out my little problem.

Him: Baby, you must be overwhelmed...

I'm sorry.

Me: Kinda...

I feel myself getting emotional at the thought of being pregnant... When should I tell him? This is definitely not the place.

Just then, my phone rings, and I answer it.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Where are you?

Me: Outside.

Her: Woza.

Me: Is everything okay?

Her: Ya.

Me: Okay.

I end the call.

Me: Let's go see how things are going.

He nods and we stand. He then wraps his arms around me and we share a warm hug.

Him: I keep putting you in strange situations.

Me: You do.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

He kisses me and I feel my whole body ignite. I haven't had sex with him since that quickie in his office- and even before that, we hadn't done it since the weekend.

He breaks the kiss when he realizes that we might just end up having sex this instant.

Him: I think we should leave.

Me: Me too.

He wraps his arms around me and we walk inside. We make our way to Nolwazi's room and find all of them there. Where is Nolwazi's dad kanti? I want to see this man who scares everyone.

Nolwazi is on her bed. I can see she's in pain, but she seems fine. She's not acting like those

people we've seen on TV. I'm sure they've medicated her.

I look at these men, and I am amazed. One wouldn't even know that they had a rough night.

Who are these other two konje?

Liwa: Hey Zizi Dlamini.

Me: Hi, Liwa.

Liwa: Have you met our two friends?

He looks at the two men.

Liwa: This is Ziyanda...

One of the men smiles and the other one chuckles.

Liwa: Ziyanda, this is Malusi, and that is Joe.

Malusi... He is out here trying, but Derek is still 2 points ahead. Where do all these hot men

hide? Geesh!

Joe: It's a pleasure to meet you, Ziyanda.

Malusi: You two work together? Is this a trend in this group?

Liwa: He's recently divorced, Zi. Bitter and divorced.

They all laugh happily.

I can't help but feel the love in this room.

It's heart-warming.

I look over at Dean, who is right next to Nolwazi. These two should just tie the knot already.

They're adorable. I still don't like him though.

Also, where is Nomvuyo?

I look around.

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Nolwazi: She's outside.

Liwa: You two have become inseparable huh?

Nolwazi: At least she likes someone... I mean, we all know she hates me.

Malusi: The Ice Queen...

They all laugh. I don't find this funny one bit. They shouldn't talk about my girl like that.

Just then, Nomvuyo walks in with ice cubes. She walks to the bed and gives the glass to

Nolwazi who thanks her.

Nomvuyo: The doctor is on her way.

Nolwazi: Okay.

She walks out and Liwa follows her. I also need some fresh air. I can only take these people in

small doses. As I close the door, I find them hugging each other.

Nomvuyo: I'm tired.

Liwa: Let's go home.

Nomvuyo: And leave Nolwazi alone?

Liwa: Kanti where are the parents?

Nomvuyo: Her mother was busy preparing the house. They should be here soon.

She then looks at me and smiles.

Her: Come take a walk with me.

She lets go of Liwa.

Liwa: Are you trying to steal my wife?

I think I am.

I really have a crush on her.

The door opens and Derek walks out.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Nomvuyo grabs my arm and we walk away.

Nomvuyo: So clingy.

Me: But I like that.

Nomvuyo: Now is not the time.

I chuckle as she yawns.

Me: You haven't even slept. How are you still functioning?

She shrugs.

Her: Strong black woman things.

I laugh.

Me: When is she giving birth?

Her: Probably in a few hours.

We get ourselves some water and go outside.

Me: So who'll be taking care of you when you give birth?

She laughs.

Her: What I know for sure is that no one except my husband and mother will be there.

Me: Mother?

She nods.

Her: Zimkitha.

I keep quiet. Konje she doesn't know that I know about her life.

Me: So you just want Liwa and Zimkitha?

Her: Yes. I don't know how Nolwazi is coping right now with so many people there. I'd kill all of them.

Me: Well, she's more of a people's person.

Her: Hmm.

After about 15 minutes, we walk back to the room, and they're chatting.

Nolwazi looks genuinely happy. I think back to what Derek told me about her and how she

thought she was infertile. I'm sure this is a precious moment for her.

Dean is super quiet.

I think he's nervous...

Out of nowhere, the door opens and everyone stops talking.

It's silent.

A man stands there, and looks around coolly. He looks just like Mdu... He's an older version of

Mdu...

Everyone immediately stands and takes their things.

One by one, they walk out the door like little boys, greeting the man on their way out.

I feel Derek's hand on mine. He leads me out and says a low "Sawubona" on our way out.

Is this Nolwazi's dad? Geesh.

Once we're out of the room, everyone exhales loudly. Dean and Nomvuyo are still in there.

We then see Thandeka with a 20-something year old girl walk towards us. They all greet her with their heads bowed.

Thandeka: Hai suka.

She walks in the room...

The girl looks at the guys.

Girl: I can't believe you idiots got drunk without me!

With that said, she walks in, and the door is closed...

I think this is the perfect time for us to leave. The family is here mos...

I want to sleep and be fed by this here drunkard of mine.

INSERT 38

We get to his loft.

Derek: Take a shower while I cook, okay?

I nod and make my way to the bathroom. I take a long shower, and I swear I feel 100 times

better.

I put on my pyjamas and get in bed, dozing off immediately.

Derek: Baby.

I groan and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Wake up, love. The food is ready.

I blink a couple of times and he plants another kiss. I sit up and he walks off.

How long have I

been gone? I check the time and it's around 1pm.

Derek walks back with a tray and places it on my lap.

Me: Thank you.

He kisses my forehead.

I deserve to be spoiled right now. After what I've been through, I deserve all of this pampering.

I groan and he chuckles.

He begins feeding me.

Him: Such a baby...

He continues feeding me until I'm done eating.

Me: Thank you.

He takes everything back to the kitchen and comes back with a glass of chardonnay,

I take a sip and feel my whole body relax fully...

Me: How is your hangover?

Him: I don't get that shit.

Me: Hmm lies.

He gets in bed and rests his head on my thighs.

Just then, his phone rings and he asks me to reach out and get it. I give it to him and he

answers.

Him: Hello... Is it?

He smiles.

Him: That's fantastic... Okay, we'll see you soon... Bye...

He hangs up and smiles.

Him: The twins are safe and sound.

I find myself smiling as well. Part of me is a bit disappointed that I left, but I was too overwhelmed.

Me: To God be the glory!

Him: Amen!

We laugh and he repositions and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I love you more every single day...

My insides curl up and I smile.

Him: I think we've also established that my friends love you.

Me: They're good people.

He places his lips on mine and smiles.

Him: Do you want to know why I love you?

I keep quiet.

Him: Besides the fact that you're stunning, and spectacular...

I giggle.

Him: My heart is now regulated by you...

Swoons!

Him: I love how you've managed to show me your vulnerability... Your moments of weakness

have made me love you even more.

You've let your guard down with me, and I appreciate that.

Argh. This drunkard of mine.

Him: I hope being around my friends has given you an idea of who I am...

Me: It has.

He smiles and we start kissing. Within a few seconds, I'm already panting like an unfed dog.

This man goes on and makes love to me...
The sweetest love...

As I reach all those climaxes, my heart continues to open up and let him in.

Being around his friends has really given me an idea of who he is. They love wholeheartedly.

These men are not afraid to love their women openly. They are proud of being in love. Who

doesn't want a man like that? A man who constantly tries to figure you out, so that you find

yourself living comfortably in your skin?

A man who prioritises your heart, and tries his best to

keep it safe? Who doesn't want that?

I certainly want that... And I think I've found it.

Derek is it.

We eventually doze off in each other's arms. I wake up in the middle of the night to pee. He's up working on his laptop.

I quickly get up and as I am peeing, I remember the pregnancy thing, and my heart rate

increases. I walk back to the bedroom and get in bed and face the other way.

Him: Baby.

Me: Mmm.

Argh I know I said I deserve to be figured out and shit, but I don't want him to figure out that I'm freaking out right now.

Him: Zi.

I keep quiet and seconds later, I feel him pulling me. I reluctantly turn around and stare at him.

He looks startled and confused.

Him: Angel, what's wrong?

Me: We haven't been using condoms...

He looks at me blankly, and then his face changes, as everything sinks in.

Him: Fuck.

I feel myself getting emotional again.

Him: Shit.

He gets out of bed, and turns to look at me.

Me: I could be pregnant.

He sits on the edge of the bed and rubs his forehead thoughtfully.

Him: We have to get those test stick things.

Me: Nomvuyo says it's too early to detect using those. We have to go see a doctor.

Him: Nomvuyo?

Me: I remembered all of this in her presence last night.

Him: Fuck.

He stands and walks out of the room.

Why is he acting like this?

I know all of this is shocking, but his reaction is throwing me off a bit.

I get out of bed and find him in the kitchen, drinking cold water.

Me: Listen here, if you want to break up with me, then do so!

He gives me a confused look.

Me: I will take care of this kid by myself! I won't run after you!

He tries saying something, but he seems speechless.

I am now an emotional mess.

Me: My parents are going to kill me!

I feel him wrapping his arms around.

Me: I am not ready for a baby! What the fuck am I going to do?!

Him: Baby, breathe.

I feel an anxiety attack approach. I can't breathe at this point.

I don't even know how I ended up on the couch. He gives me a glass of water and I gobble it all down.

Him: Zi, are you okay now?

I take deep breath and he pulls me closer to him.

Him: Listen to me, and listen carefully. He stares at me seriously.

Him: If you think I am going to leave you, then you're obviously fucked up.

Well damn.

Him: I'm shocked as fuck right now. I'm pissed at myself for not being responsible. He sighs and then looks at me more softly.

Him: I am not going anywhere...

He takes my hand.

Him: I'll stay, pregnant or not.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: You were having an anxiety attack, I understand.

I keep quiet.

Him: But don't ever, even for a split second, think that I will make you pregnant and then walk away. I'm not that fucked up.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods and then pulls me in for a hug.

Him: We'll go to a doctor and see what happens.

Me: Okay.

He kisses my forehead.

We then reposition and I rest my head on his chest while he brushes my back.

Him: What a weird weekend.

I close my eyes and decide that sleep will just do the damn thing...

INSERT 39

It's now Monday, and I don't know how I feel about going to work. I still feel like I didn't get enough rest. As I walk in, my kids run to me as usual, and they tell me how excited they are that it's the last week of school. I go to my class and prepare my assessments... It's now lunchtime and I have not seen or spoken to Derek. Apparently all the principals had a meeting to attend so he would only come in a bit later... I miss him. I decide to call him and it takes me straight to voicemail. Zama walk in and we have lunch together. She tastes some of my food and then looks at me in shock. Zama: Who cooked this? This is amazing! Me: My mom...

Zama: Oh wow, you should invite me for lunch sometime.

Me: Sure.

Hehe she'll eat my dad's pap and chicken, because my mom sure as hell did not cook this food.

Just then, my phone rings and I find myself smiling as I answer.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hi, baby. How are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Him: I'm miserable.

Me: I know...

We go on to chat for about 5 minutes and then he tells me that he has to go. I end the call and focus on my food.

Zama: Hmm uyajola wena.

Me: I think you're right yazi.

She squeals in excitement.

Her: Tell me about him!

Gosh Zama, what happened to minding your business?

Me: There's nothing to tell...

Her: What does he do for a living?

Me: Accountant.

Kahle kahle this is not a lie. He was an accountant mos?

Her: Hmm I'm sure he is filthy rich!

I frown.

Me: It's not about money though.

Her: Oh please. As if you'd date a peasant.

I chuckle.

Me: No, man.

Her: Realistically speaking, you can't settle down with someone who won't be able to take care

of you in the long run. Yes, love is important, but once you're married, you realise that you need more...

Me: So wena your husband is rich?

Her: I mean, it's our money now...

We both laugh.

Her: He's not filthy rich, but we are well-off. I don't have to stress about money.

We're at that level.

Me: That's good.

We hear a knock on my door and I yell for the person to come in.

Lwazi walks in.

She gets a chair and sits down.

Lwazi: Argh relationships are really tiring. Nazoke.

I try my best not to roll my eyes.

Zama: What's wrong?

Zama loves giving people relationship advice. I'm actually glad she's here

because it means I

can zone out and think about my man, while she listens to this nonsense and gives advice.

Lwazi: He's been so distant lately...

Zama: Really? Why?

This is the perfect time to zone out...

As I'm packing up and getting ready to go home, my phone rings and I answer.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: I'm still stuck in Pretoria. I thought I'd be able to see you...

Me: It's okay. I'll see you tomorrow.

He grunts.

Him: Let me know when you get home, okay?

Me: Okay. I love you.

He laughs lightly.

Me: What?

Him: You've never said it before me...

Me: Argh whatever. Bye.

Him: I love you too, baby. Bye.

I hang up and finish packing up. I have a lot of marking to do, so I'm going straight home, and locking myself up in the room.

The following day, I get to school and go to my class. I'm not in the mood for assembly... They can sketch me...

When I walk in my class, and see Nkanyenzi sitting on a desk, I squeal excitedly.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: I haven't seen you in 1 day!

We both laugh. This is actually ridiculous.

There are people who don't see their partners for

weeks, and we're out here suffering from separation anxiety after one day.

Me: I'm so tired. I was up the whole night, marking.

He kisses me and then we let go of each other.

Him: Are you done?

I nod.

Me: Camille tells me you're going to another meeting today?

He nods.

Him: We're planning shit for next year.

Me: Sorry.

He sighs.

Him: I'll come by before I leave.

Me: Okay.

He walks out and I submit some papers for moderation...

It's now the last day of school. Boy, am I happy!

We all had to dress up like book characters, and I chose to be Waldo, that guy who's dressed in

a red and white sweater, and the reader has to find him in various crowds...

Overall, it was a great day. I had been avoiding Derek like a plague, for a very corny reason...

I decided to have a party with my kids and watch movies the whole day. While we were

watching Annie, the door opens and someone walks in. My kids are too focused to even notice anything. I watch as Derek walks to the back and sits next to me.

Derek: Why am I being avoided?

Me: I wanted you to find me...

He looks at me weirdly and I chuckle.

Me: Finding Waldo? Get it?

His face relaxes and he laughs a little too loud. Some of my kids say "shhh." Lol at this point

they don't even care whose speaking,
everyone just needs to shut up and focus
on the movie.

I turn up the volume so they can't hear us.

Me: Go away. You're pissing off my babies.

He sulks and takes a packet of popcorn.

Him: You don't like movies neh?

Me: Can't concentrate for too long.

Him: Weirdo.

Me: Mxm.

We focus on the movie till it ends...

Him: We've just had our first movie date.

Me: How romantic.

He gets up and walks out of the class.

My kids and I then clean up the classroom
and I give them their party packs. The rest
of the day

was spent having a talent show...

School is out! Finally!

Classes are clean, and we're all ready to leave. The rest of the staff is going out for drinks, and I have kindly declined.

Nolwazi has invited us for dinner.

As I'm packing up, Lwazi walks in and says goodbye to me.

Lwazi: I hope we'll meet up for lunch dates.

I give her a fake smile.

Me: We'll see.

I am going to block her number as soon as she walks out of this classroom. I'm not trying to be a personal adviser.

Her: Don't you want to meet my boyfriend?

Me: Uhm-

She's already pulling my hand. We walk to her class.

Lwazi: I had to force him to come inside. I don't know what his problem is...

When we get in, and I see Bongani standing there, I swear the world stops moving for like a split second.

I keep telling myself to keep a straight face.

What the fuck is going on here??

Lwazi: Baby, this is Ziyanda- my friend and colleague.

Bongani is also trying to keep a straight face.

Lwazi: Ziyanda, this is Bongani...

Me: Hi, Bongani.

Bongani: Hey... Nice to meet you.

Me: Likewise.

I then focus on Lwazi.

Me: Alright then... Have a good vac.

She gives me a hug and I walk out quickly.

When I get to my class, I have to sit down, to process this shit.

Bongani was in a relationship while sleeping with me?? What the actual fuck?!

Men!

Fucken men!

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What do you want?

I didn't even see him come in. He gives me a confused look.

I get my things and walk to the door.

Me: Asambe.

Him: Uhm... Okay...

I walk out and wait for him outside...

I cannot believe this shit. That idiot played me!

INSERT 40

We haven't said a word to each other since we left the school. We're now in his apartment in Randburg.

After I finish showering, he goes to the bathroom.

I cannot believe this! Bongani is Lwazi's boyfriend? He lied to me and gave me the impression

that he is not "into" relationships kanti that whore was busy two-timing me!

I was the side-chick!

Sies!

I didn't even see that Derek is now sitting next to me.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He sighs and goes back to the bathroom. I finish getting dressed and then unpack my bag. I've

brought quite a few clothes: formal (for work) and casual for weekends. At least I'll be covered

if we ever have spontaneous sleepovers.

Nxa Bongani. That disrespectful pig!

Derek is now done getting dressed. I can never get over him. I don't think I ever will. He looks so good.

He takes me hand and leads me to the lounge, where he sits me down.

Derek: Ready to talk?

I sigh.

Him: Because we're not leaving here until you tell me what's happening.

Me: I'm just annoyed.

Him: What did I do?

Me: Not everything is about you.

He tries saying something but stops himself. I take a deep breath.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: It's okay. Just tell me what's bothering you.

Should I tell him?

I sigh again.

Me: Lwazi just keeps pestering me about her boyfriend issues and I'm not interested.

He narrows his eyes and I keep a straight face.

Me: I can't deal with the drama!

Technically, this is not a lie. I don't want to ruin his evening by telling him the truth. I'll talk to

him after dinner, once it's just him and I, no disturbances.

Him: So you're snappy because you were asked to give relationship advice?

I nod. I'm sticking to this.

He stares at me, as if he's trying to figure something out. He then exhales and shakes his head.

Me: What?

I feel offended for some odd reason.

Him: I just... You amaze me...

He chuckles and stands me.

Me: Are you judging me?

Him: Not at all...

Me: Mxm.

Him: It's weird how this dramatic side of yours has grown on me... It's scary and entertaining at the same time.

Me: Argh whatever. Let's go.

We get our things and leave.

While he's driving, I get a call from Bongani. I ignore it and put my phone on silent.

Me: I'm sleepy...

Him: Nothing new...

I doze off and take a quick nap.

Derek: Zi.

He shakes me lightly and I wake up.

We get out of the car and he takes my hand.

Him: Feel better?

Me: Yes.

We get to the door and we are led in by some oldish lady. I think she's their helper.

We walk to the lounge and find Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Zizi!

I did miss her, hey.

We share a hug and she smiles.

Nomvuyo: Hey D.

They share a hug.

Nomvuyo: Liwa is in Dean's office. He said I should tell you to meet him there...

Derek: Sure.

He then wraps his arms around me.

Nomvuyo: She won't go anywhere.

He ignores her and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He walks away and Nomvuyo sighs.

Nomvuyo: Love...

Me: Love indeed.

We sit down and she looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Did you have a good week?

Me: It was okay, I guess.

She nods.

Nomvuyo: I'm 2 months pregnant.

My jaw drops and she laughs quietly.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

I've been avoiding this baby thing for the whole week. Derek didn't even bring it up because he

knew not to. I think I'm still in denial.

Nomvuyo: I wanted to call and ask you to come with, and then I remembered that you're a

working citizen.

We laugh.

Me: Don't you want to work?

She shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: Not now... I'm still enjoying being a housewife.

Me: I'd go crazy.

Nomvuyo: Being a mother is a full time job. It's weird that people think I sit in the house for the whole day.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, I'm going back to school. Liwa's been nagging me.

Me: Is it? Ufundani?

Nomvuyo: I'll see... I was studying medicine, but I dropped out because I couldn't afford it.

I look at her in confusion and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: I ran away from home and thought I could do everything alone... I refused help from the family.

Me: Geesh.

Nomvuyo: I should probably tell you my life story. I didn't have a perfect upbringing,

unfortunately. Also, Liwa and I faced a lot of shit.

Me: Well now I'm definitely interested.

Nomvuyo: Such an inquisitive girl!

Me: Excuse me? Gossip Girl?

We both laugh and then someone clears their throat. This is the same girl who came to the hospital last weekend.

Nomvuyo: Zamo, please get me water. The girl complains as she heads to the kitchen.

Nomvuyo: That's Ivy, Nolwazi's sister.

Me: And your fav.

I try not to act like a jealous girlfriend.

Ivy comes back and gives Nomvuyo the glass.

Ivy: Why are there so many strangers in this house? For fuck's sake.

Hai phela, surely she is not referring to me. That's impossible.

Nomvuyo: Ivy, this is not a stranger. This is Ziyanda, Derek's girlfriend.

Ivy stares at me.

I stare right back at her. Rude bitch.

Ivy: I need a drink, honestly...

She walks off and disappears.

Nomvuyo: Please don't mind her... She's not- uhm what's the word- refined... Yes, she's not refined.

I roll my eyes. Ivy, or whoever she is, better stay in her lane. Today is not the day.

I will gladly slap the piss out of anyone who disrespects me.

Me: Yazi I have a problem.

Nomvuyo: What's up?

I tell her all about the Lwazi and Bongani situation. She has proven before that I can trust her.

Me: What should I do?

Nomvuyo: Yoh just tell him once.

Me: Eish.

Nomvuyo: Don't lie about irrelevant things. You're not with Bongani anymore, right?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: Ya so tell him and move on. It's not that deep.

Me: Men are fucked up yazi.

Nomvuyo: Definitely. Garbage.

Suddenly, someone clears their throat, and it's Mdu.

Kanti kahle kahle what did I do to spite the Universe? Universe ngakwenzani? Hai man dis tew much.

Mdu: Sanibonani.

Nomvuyo: Hey, Mdu. Have you seen Ivy?

Mdu: Outside.

Nomvuyo stands and then looks at me.

Nomvuyo: I need to check on her.

This bitch! How the hell is she going to leave me with this idiot?

She walks away and Mdu stands there, looking all sheepish. I can tell that something's up.

I grunt.

Me: Yini?

He exhales and sits next to me.

Mdu: You've always been a problem solver.

Me: But I sure as hell couldn't solve you now could I?

Mdu: Eish awume man Ziyanda.

I look at him weirdly. Something's definitely bothering him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I made a girl pregnant.

Me: What?!

Him: Shhh!

I stand.

Me: No, fuck you! Why is this any of my business?!

He pulls me back down and I sit.

Mdu: I'm in fucken shit.

I look at him in shock.

Mdu: The girl was partly responsible for my sister's divorce.

Me: WHAT?!

What the fuck is wrong with him?!

Mdu: Ziyanda, focus.

Me: Uh-uh. Fuck you! Don't involve me in your shit.

I stand and find the nearest door. I need to get out of here.

What the fuck is wrong with everyone?!

Universe, screw you, fam!

INSERT 41

I've been on the other side of the yard for about 15 minutes, when Mdu comes.

Me: Leave me alone!

Mdu: No, I'm not going to leave you alone.

Me: Mdu, really??

Him: Yes, really.

Me: Why are you telling me all of this?

Him: Because I trust you...

He looks at me so innocently, that I soften up just a little bit.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Uthi kwenzakalani?

He scratches his head.

Him: Nolwazi is divorced...

Me: I know.

Him: I'm currently in a relationship with the girl who Kwanele, the ex-husband, married.

Me: The second wife??

Him: Her name is Tholi.

Yoh nkos' yami! What in the world??

He waits for me to process this nonsense.

Me: Mduduzi what is wrong with you??

He looks at me guiltily.

Me: How could you be so stupid??

He keeps quiet.

Me: So you made her pregnant?

Him: I love her, Ziyanda.

Yhu yhu yhu I need a drink.

Suddenly, I remember this baby dilemma that I am also facing, ngaphathwa esinye i-stress

same time.

He leads me to the gazebo and we sit down.

Me: You fucken idiot!

He keeps quiet.

Me: You think you can just go around acting recklessly without thinking about how those close

to you will be affected? Selfish bastard!

He listens while I shout at him for a good 5 minutes. See now I'm going off. I'm shouting at him

for all the hurt he brought me when we were together, I'm shouting at him for Siyabonga's bullshit, and I'm also shouting at him for Bongani's fucked up-ness.

I am just letting it all out.

After I am done, he looks at me.

Him: Are you done having your seizure?

Me: No! I am far from done. You are so stupid! Why would you even do such a dumb thing?!

I go on for another 5 minutes telling him how stupid he is.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Now, I'm done.

He sighs.

Him: I fucked up, but I don't regret it.

Me: Mduduzi, do you realize that you're telling me this? Your ex?

He sighs.

Him: Like I said, I trust you.

He then looks at me intently.

Him: I'm sorry for all the hurt I've caused. I was not ready to be serious... I should have told you earlier on instead of dragging you along.

Me: Mxm.

He keeps quiet.

Me: So what is your plan?

Him: She's going to give birth soon.

Me: Where is she?

Him: We're moving to Joburg permanently.

Me: So all of you people are relocating to this side? Nifunani la? Our lives were very peaceful

without you. Nonke futhi.

Him: Stop with the low blows.

I grunt.

Me: You have two options: you tell your family and deal with the consequences, or you hide your

pregnant home-wrecker and live in exile forever.

Him: Ziyanda!

Me: Heyi let me have my moment.

He exhales.

Me: What do you want to do?

Him: I don't know.

Me: My suggestion is that you tell them now. Everyone is too focused on the babies right now, and they're over the moon. They probably won't take it too harshly...

Him: You think so?

I nod.

Him: I'll talk to Tholi...

I look at him and see how stressed he is. Unfortunately, I don't really care that much because nami I am dying of stress. Phela mina I am

going to be a single mother living in the streets. The thought of being under a bridge begging for nyaope money is very traumatic, so Mdu's problem is not my concern right now...

Ngixakekile nje nami some-self. It's a dog eat dog world, so Mdu must find his own way. I can't be dealing with someone else's pregnancy when mine is going to ruin my entire existence.

As Mdu and I walk in, we hear laughter. Good times.

Mdu and I look at each other sadly. Impilo inzima yazi. Sifile yi-stress and people are out here living their best lives.

Nolwazi: Zi!

Me: Hey, Lwazi!

She's holding a tiny human. I walk to her and bend, to see...

She uncovers the tiny human, and I see the tiny face.

I smile.

Me: How cute...

He still looks like a little mushroom though...

For a person who loves teaching, I'm not really a fan of really tiny humans. They look like aliens and I'm always so scared of dropping them.

Nolwazi: I just brought them down so you guys can see them. We're taking them back up in 5 minutes... Dean will kill me.

I look over at Dean, who is holding the second megabyte.

Derek is busy smiling like a lost sheep. Angazi uchazwa yini.

Me: So both of them are boys?

Nolwazi: Yep. I thought we'd have a girl and boy...

Dean: Okay, now that everyone has seen them, they can be taken back to their room.

He needs to chill. No one here wants to steal those babies. We all got our problems... In fact, everybody up in this bitch is either pregnant or has a child. Children overfloweth in this room right now, and his babies are honestly the least of my problems.

Nolwazi and her mom walk upstairs with the babies, and Dean relaxes a bit. Mxm.

Dean: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello.

Dean: You good?

Me: Yep, and you?

Dean: Holding up.

Me: Hmm.

I feel Derek next to me.

Derek: Missed you...

Nazoke...

Derek's clinginess always comes at the wrong time. I'm trying my best to avoid Mdu right now...

Me: Missed you too, Nkanyi.

Thandeka emerges and tells us that dinner is ready.

We go to the table and sit.

Ivy: Am I the only one who's going to drink?

Liwa: We're taking a break from alcohol.

Ivy: Booo!

She takes the bottle of champagne and opens it. She then looks at me.

Ivy: Uyaphuza?

Me: No, thanks.

Ivy: How boring.

Me: No one wants to drink 24/7...

There's awkward silence for a few seconds.

Nomvuyo: So Dean, when are you going back to work?

Dean: When I feel like going back.

Liwa: Joys of being the boss, huh?

They go on with their conversation. I look over at Ivy and she's staring at me. I stare right back at her.

I did say that today is not the day to try me, right?

She pours herself some champagne and drinks it slowly.

I roll my eyes and look away.

Derek puts his arm around my chair and I look at him.

Derek: Don't lose it.

Me: I'm going to slap her... Don't stop me, okay?

He looks at me in shock and then I smile. I can't be mad around this one for too long. He's too cute right now, because I know he's trying not to step on my toes.

Me: I'm joking, Star.

He sighs and I laugh.

It's a fake laugh, because I really do want to shake that Ivy girl up a bit.

I then glance at Mdu, and I see him chuckling.

Now, he knows me very well...

He probably sees how much I don't like he's sister...

I don't even know why he's smiling because if his family finds out about his shit, he'll be sniffing nyaope with me.

INSERT 42

We're now eating and the conversation is flowing...

I'm still a bit uneasy, but Derek keeps brushes my back and thigh. He really does have a good effect on me. I could just look at him the whole day.

Derek: Baby.

I look at him.

He takes my hand and places it on his lap.

I choke on my drink and he chuckles.

Him: It's been a week.

Me: I know...

I brush his thigh and continue eating.

Geesh now my fat inner thighs are sweating and I

desperately need some form of release.

I excuse myself and make my way to the bathroom. It's not like any of them even noticed,

because they were too engaged in some deep conversation.

As I pee, I'm not sure if I'm experiencing a mini-orgasm or I was pressed nje.

The door opens and my man walks in.

Now I know for a fact that I'm about to get this orgasm.

He locks the door and doesn't even waste time.

Within 5 minutes, I'm good- for now. We make our way back to the table and these people are

still having some deep conversation.

I look over at Ivy and she seems to be laughing at something. Wow, I don't think I've ever

disliked a person like this, hey? I don't even know her that well, but she rubs me the wrong way.

Angim'funi.

After a while, we all finish up and do our own thing. Others are chilling outside, others in the

lounge. I wonder where Nolwazi's father is. Lol I'm sure it would be tense right now.

Nomvuyo steals me from Derek and we go outside.

Nomvuyo: Bitchy, much?!

Me: Awume man, Nomvuyo.

She hisses.

Nomvuyo: Also, you two are busy sneaking off for quickies. Are you even using condoms?

Yhu and then it hits me. Why the fuck am I so stupid? You know what, Universe? I deserve this

shit! I'm stressing about a pregnancy that hasn't been confirmed, yet I'm busy getting pounded

left, right and centre.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo: Are you okay?

Me: I think I'm losing my mind.

She gives me a hug and laughs sweetly.

Nomvuyo: Oh sweetie, you're in love.

You're crazy in love.

Me: That man is my drug.

Nomvuyo: And he's not the toxic type of drug.

Me: Exactly.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Now why are you being bitchy towards my Ivy?

Me: I don't like her.

Nomvuyo: Wow, just like that.

Me: Yes, and it will end there. I don't like talking about people I don't like. Waste of energy...

She looks at me in shock.

Me: And don't try to make us friends. I'll resent you for the rest of my life.

She tries to say something, but keeps quiet.

What people need to understand about me is that when I unleash the drama, it comes out full force. I go all out. Don't cross me when I'm in my drama zone. Don't talk to me or try to be funny, because I will sort you out, and I don't give a rat's ass if it comes across as childish.

Petty LaBelle should never be tested. The bitch is crazy.

Nomvuyo: Uhm okay...

Me: I love you, but don't overstep some boundaries.

Nomvuyo: Wow, fuck you.

Me: Fuck you too.

We stare at each other for a while and end up laughing.

Nomvuyo: You dramatic piece of shit!

Me: Eish I'm going through the most. Have mercy on me.

She laughs and we walk back to the house.

I need my dose of Nkanyezi. Where is he?

I spot him.

I say a silent prayer.

I walk to him and he smiles as I stand next to him. He places his arms around my waist and I

look at Ivy blankly.

Ivy: Derek tells me you're a teacher...

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Ivy: Nice...

Me: Hmm.

I then focus on Derek.

Me: Liwa has asked me to tell you to meet him outside.

Derek: Thanks.

Me: Sure.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and walks off.

Now is the perfect time to punch this heffer, and make it seem like I was stretching. Confuse the enemy a bit. I can't have these people seeing my ghetto side.

Ivy: Ziyanda.

I realise that I was too busy visualising the punch, that I completely zoned out.

Me: Yes?

Ivy: You're beautiful.

Okay. What's happening?

Ivy: We should probably start thinking of ways of getting rid of this sexual tension between us, don't you think?

Wait, what??

I can't even help but be shocked.

She smiles sweetly and walks away.

What the hell??

I need a drink! Surely this unconfirmed baby won't be affected by a little bit of wine? Let's just pretend I didn't know about him/she. Universe, forgive me, but I need something strong to ease all these crazy emotions. I go to the bar and as I'm about to take a lil sumfin, Nomvuyo stops me.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: You're not touching alcohol until you go to the doctor!

Me: Do you see how this baby is creating problems in my life?

Nomvuyo: Well you seem to have created a connection.

Me: Girl, bye. I may be crazy, but not enough to be making connections with my empty lungs and womb.

She laughs and we go to the kitchen.

Nomvuyo: Have you come to terms with the possi-

Me: Vuvu.

Her: Okay, I'm sorry.

She drops the subject. Nolwazi walks to us...

Nolwazi: You two have been hiding...

Me: Not at all.

I look at Nomvuyo and I know what's going through her mind. Nomvuyo is me. I am Nomvuyo.

The only difference is that I really like Nolwazi.

Nolwazi is that woman you aim to be.

Chilled and comfortable with her life.

She's career-driven and is just amazing.

Maybe that's why Nomvuyo doesn't like her. Maybe deep down, Nomvuyo is a bit bitter about

not finishing school and building her own career.

I don't care though. Vuvu is still my girl. She's the type of lady who'll give you a hair tie/gutter so you can tie your hair, before she gives you an ass whooping... A considerate bitch. A generous bitch.

Me: Are the megabytes behaving?

Nolwazi: Megabytes?

Me: The twins.

She laughs and sighs.

Nolwazi: Megabytes? Oh my goodness!

She then goes on to tell me about their sleeping patterns and shit. I love Nolwazi, but I had to

zone out here and there. Listening to her go on about her angels was very triggering.

I need to go to the doctor ASAP.

After a while, Liwa calls us and tell us to meet at the lounge. We all sit down and he stands...

Liwa: Okay... Are we all here?

Thandeka: Yep.

Liwa: So the past week has been something...

They all chuckle.

Liwa: We've been looking forward to the birth of these twins for so long, that none of us thought they'd decide to pop out on the day we're all out and about...

Thandeka: Sies!

Liwa smiles shyly.

Liwa: Anyway, I just wanted to say that I am very happy that our families are blending. The love that that is felt when we're together is just magical, and it just proves that above all else, love is

important.

He then looks at Nolwazi.

Liwa: I speak for everyone when I say we admire your strength. You carried two babies, and

delivered them naturally. They're both healthy and happy.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Liwa: If you need anything, please let us know. We've been parents since our early 20s, I think

we're now experts at this parenting thing.

Everyone laughs. I'm just sitting there, zoning in and out. I can't deal right now.

Liwa: Congratulations on this new journey, and we wish you all the best.

Nolwazi: How sweet! Thank you.

Everyone claps and drops the usual "ooo's" and "aaah's."

Liwa: Dean was supposed to speak, but we all know he's a pig. Right now, he's twitching- he wants to go to his babies, so I think we should finish up.

I look at Dean and he really does look like he is suffering from separation anxiety.

Liwa: We decided to get you ladies a little something...

Derek stands and gives us hand-sized boxes.

Liwa: This is just to thank you, as the women who keep us sane, for being so strong and fearless last weekend, when we were somewhere else...

Thandeka: You were drunk and lost. Say it!

Liwa: We were just too excited, that's all. No one was drunk. I plead the fifth. Everyone laughs.

Liwa: That's it... Have a good weekend...
I'm very excited that all of us are now in
Jo'burg. We're
just waiting for Zimi and Lindelwa.

Thandeka: Yaay!

Maybe I should relocate.

Everyone hugs and say their goodbyes.

Mdu comes to me.

Mdu: I'll call you.

Me: Mxm.

I find Derek and we head for the door.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Hai this one...

Me: Liwa...

He gives me a big hug.

Liwa: You see, you?

He chuckles.

Liwa: I'm watching you...

Me: Haibo what did I do?

Liwa: Hmmmm.

I laugh and we share another hug.

Me: Bye!

Nomvuyo: Bye, love. Chat later.

Derek and I make our way to the car.

Me: That was sweet.

He nods and smiles.

We get in and he drives out of the yard.

Me: What did you get me?

I open the box, and it's a Cartier watch.

Me: Aww I love it!

Him: Good.

He brushes my hand and then focuses on the road.

Petty can go back to sleep now...

I'm finally going to my calm and safe space...

INSERT 43 (Couldn't edit)

That weekend was spent indoors, cuddling and getting to know each other even more.

My heart is filled with so much peace, love and happiness right now. Yes, I have my low

moments, but overall, I'm happy.

Derek had to go to some meeting in Pretoria, and I refused to go with him. I am going to meet

with Mdu... He's been calling me nonstop, asking me to meet him.

I finish getting dressed and make my way to the Uber.

I get to his complex and call him. He fetches me and we make our way to his place.

Mdu: I didn't think you'd agree to come.

Me: Me too.

We walk in and he offers me something to drink.

Me: I'm not here for drinks, Mduduzi.

He leads me to the lounge and we sit down.

I look at him, and he genuinely seems stressed.

Me: You didn't think things through, did you?

He sighs.

Me: So you just thought you'd hide forever?

Mdu: I wasn't thinking about all of that.

Me: What was going through your mind?

He scratches his head and groans.

Me: You fell in love with her?

He nods.

I've never seen him like this. He must love this girl.

Me: What about her family?

Him: She doesn't have a family.

Me: Huh?

Mdu: Her mother died when she was young, so her aunt took care of her.

Me: So where is the aunt?

He shakes his head angrily.

Mdu: There's no way I'm letting her go back to that woman. She's the one who sold Tholi in the first place.

Me: Sold?

Mdu: She linked up with Thenjiwe, Kwanele's mother

Me: Kwanele being Nolwazi's ex-husband? He nods.

Mdu: She linked up with Thenjiwe, and they decided to make Tholi the second wife, so she can produce children- seeing as Nolwazi was considered infertile.

Me: Wow.

Him: Tholi has been through a lot, Zi. I'm the only person who has shown her true love.

Me: Wena na.

Him: Not now, please.

Me: So how did you guys even start dating?

Him: I went after her for fun, but I could see she was miserable... Kwanele disappeared after

Nolwazi told him about the divorce, and I spent all that time with Tholi...

Me: Does Kwanele know about you guys?
He nods.

Him: He thought he was the father, when he found out- but he figured it out...

Me: And did he threaten to expose you?

Him: I think his world just shattered permanently after that. He didn't even bother fighting.

Me: Wow...

We sit in silence while I process everything.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Bongani. I decide to answer.

Me: Bongani?

Bongani: Hey.

Me: Hello.

There's an awkward silence.

Me: What do you want? I'm really busy right now, and the last thing I want is to sit here and

listen to you breathing heavily.

Him: Oh.

Me: How may I help you?

He sighs.

Him: I want to apologise.

Me: For playing me? So all this time I was your side chick?

Him: Uhm no-

Me: At this point I'm over it. Thankfully, I wasn't that invested in you, so I'm not that touched.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I won't mention this to anyone, especially Lwazi- so don't stress.

I hang up, block his number, and then focus on Mdu, who seems surprised.

Me: Don't act surprised. Niyafeba nonke.

Him: What about Derek?

Me: He's special. He's a real man.

Him: You'll never forgive me, huh?

Me: Not at all. I'm just tolerating you, because I have no choice.

He sighs in defeat, and then looks at me seriously.

Him: So you think I should tell them?

Me: Yes.

He groans.

Me: Start with Thandeka. I think she'll be more forgiving because you're her baby.

She'll find a

way to break the news to Nolwazi in a better way, because she doesn't want her to stress.

Mdu: I can't tell them now. I don't want to ruin my sister's vibe right now. She is really happy.

Me: True...

Mdu: But Dean knows.

Me: He does??

He nods.

Me: And??

Him: Dean doesn't involve himself in other people's shit.

How noble of him.

Him: I don't know hey... I'll talk to Zimkitha, because she also knows.

Me: Liwa's mom?

He nods.

Me: I'm really sorry that you're going through this...

Just then, someone clears their throat, and I turn around.

This must be her.

Oh my goodness, she is so adorable and round.

She wobbles to us and sits down.

She then looks at me nervously and her face turns red. Thank God, I'm not a yellow bone. I'm

too emotional, and my poor skin would complain with my constant moods.

Me: Hi.

She looks at Mdu, as if she wants permission to speak.

Mdu: Chubby Cheeks, this is Ziyanda, a friend from varsity.

Tholi: Your ex.

Haike angizingeni.

Mdu: Chubby Cheeks-

She raises her hand and he stops. Lol people know how to control their men out here, hey.

She then looks at me.

Tholi: Why are you here?

What a wow.

Me: Mdu asked me to come.

Tholi: But you're his ex.

Me: And I want nothing to do with him.

She looks at me in confusion.

Mdu: Baby, it's nothing deep. I just wanted her perspective about this situation.

Tholi: So I'm a situation? That's what you think of me, Mdu?

I have concluded that the universe is putting me in these situations, to show me that pregnancy is not the way.

Mdu: Come on, Tholi.

Tholi: No, IMdu:

Do you know how stressed I fucken am, Tholakele? I'm in this with you! Why the fuck

would I turn my back against you, and do stupid shit? I am trying to figure out how we can start

living our lives freely!

He stands and walks away.

Lord...

Tholi's face turns red and I see tears approaching her eyes.

What did I ever do to deserve such?

I stand and sit next to her.

Me: Uhm... Sorry...

Tholi: I'm sorry for being rude.

She sobs quietly and my heart sinks.

Tholi: I'm so scared. I've been scared since I met Mdu. I have been living in fear that we're going

to get caught, and his family will disown

him. I don't want him to be like me. I

know how it feels

like to lose loved ones, and I also know that he would never survive without his family.

Shame, man.

She wipes her tears.

Tholi: Whenever he leaves me, I always panic and think he won't come back...

Me: He loves you, and he's obviously willing to fight for you.

Tholi: But how am I supposed to live with myself knowing that I separated him from his family?

I sigh...

People have real problems, hey.

My life is very peaceful compared to this shit.

Her: Sorry, I need the bathroom.

Me: Okay.

As she stands, she lets out a scream. My heart skips a beat.

Me: Thol-

She lets out another one, and then touches her belly.

Mdu is here within a blink of an eye.

Mdu: Tholakele.

She groans and starts crying hysterically.

Tholakele: What's happening??

Oh hell no! I am not about to be part of another stranger's birth!

INSERT 44

We're now driving to the hospital.

What the hell is going on?

Why am I driving with these people?

Why the fuck am I here?!

We get to the hospital, and Tholi is taken to her room.

The doctor then confirms that they have to perform an emergency caesarean.

Mdu is a nervous mess, and as much as I am also freaking out, I know that I have to be more rational.

Me: I'm calling Nomvuyo.

He's so freaked out, that he probably didn't even hear me. I quickly dial Nomvuyo's number and she answers.

Nomvuyo: Lo-

Me: Vuvu, I need you!

Nomvuyo: Wha-

I quickly tell her where I am, and to drop whatever she's doing. She assures me that she'll be

here shortly, and then I hang up.

I wake into the room, and the doctor and nurses are busy preparing everything. I am so

overwhelmed and confused. Tholi has stopped crying, but you can tell that she's scared. Mdu is

holding her hand, comforting her. I just want to hug both of them at this point.

Poor souls just

have each other...

The doctor confirms a few things, they run more tests, and then prepare for the operation...

I decide to go outside; I'm not trying to witness any of this.

I see Nomvuyo approaching me and I hug her as soon as she gets to me.

Nomvuyo: What the hell is going on??

She gives me the bag with baby stuff and I just sigh.

Nomvuyo: Let me get you some water...

She rushes off somewhere and then I knock on the door. A nurse opens, and I give her the bag.

She shuts the door and I sit on the couch just opposite the door. Nomvuyo walks back and

gives me a bottle of cold water.

Me: Thanks.

I drink some and we sit in silence for a while.

Me: Mdu made a girl pregnant.

Her: What??

I nod.

Me: Tholi is the girl.

She looks at me in confusion.

Me: Tholi, Kwanele's second wife.

She stands and looks at me in complete shock.

I drink my water and keep quiet. I am so overwhelmed, I feel like I'm going to faint.

I feel an anxiety attack approaching.

What's worse is that I didn't even take my medication,

because I had such a relaxing weekend. I didn't think I'd need my meds. My

psychiatrist will

definitely feel some type of way about this.

Nomvuyo sees this, and I start hyperventilating. I genuinely feel like I can't breathe... She calls one of the nurses and I am led to one of the room.

I blank out at this point...

When I wake up, my mouth is super dry, and as usual, I feel like I am in another world.

It takes me a few minutes to recall everything, and come back to my senses.

Nomvuyo: Zizi...

I feel her warm hand brushing my cheek. I sit up and my heart pounds as soon as I spot Derek, standing by the door.

He sees the panic on my face and quickly walks to the bed.

Derek: Calm down.

Me: I'm sorry!

I feel another anxiety attack approach.

Me: I wasn't thinking! I'm sorry for lying!

Derek: ZiyandMe:

Derek, I'm sorry!

Nomvuyo: Zi, calm down. He's not angry.

Me: I was just trying to help!

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: Breathe.

She takes my hands and stares at me.

Her: Take a deep breath in...

I can't really focus right now.

Her: Ziyanda, listen to me... Take a deep breath in... In 1... 2... 3...

I find myself taking a deep breath in.

Her: And out...2...3...

She continues making me breathe until I feel better.

She then gives me a glass of water and pills.

Nomvuyo: Feeling better?

I put my head down and close my eyes.

Me: I'll be fine.

They let me be for a while, until I feel stable. I then get out of bed, and put on my shoes. I need some fresh air. I walk out and find the nearest door. It leads me to the garden. I've been standing there for a while.

Where is Derek?

I need to talk to him and make him understand that I didn't mean for any of this to happen.

As I move, I see him approaching me. I stand and wait for him to get to me.

He stares at me blankly. I can't read him. Is he angry?

Me: I'll understand if you want to break up with me.

He doesn't say anything. I want to cry, but I'm not trying to be dramatic right now. I genuinely feel bad for lying to him.

Me: I didn't mean to lie to you. I was going to tell you.

Him: But you didn't.

Me: I'm sorry, Derek.

Him: How am I supposed to trust you if you keep things from me?

I try to say something, but stop myself. I realise that defending myself will just make things

work. I'll just keep quiet and take responsibility for my actions.

Him: You know you can't handle tense situations, because of your anxiety. Why would you even

put yourself in such a position?

Me: I was just trying to help.

Him: By doing what? Tell me how you've helped these people.

I keep quiet.

Him: Instead of helping, you've just involved yourself in their business, and you're now part of this lie, that could potentially damage family ties.

I sigh.

Me: That poor girl has no family, Derek! He keeps quiet.

Me: I regret not telling you- I really do, but after meeting her, and seeing how dependent she is on this one person, I felt the need to be there. She only has Mdu, Derek. She literally has no one she can depend on.

Him: But it's not your responsibility to carry their problems.

Me: I didn't even have time to think about all of this. Everything happened so fast. He sighs.

Me: I feel bad for her. She's a bruised person. You can just see it in her eyes.

Him: So what are going to do?

Me: I don't know...

He looks at me intently and I look down.

Me: Don't look at me like that.

Him: You try to act like you don't care about people, but you actually have a good heart.

I sigh.

He then wraps his arms around me and I melt. He sees this, and chuckles.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you.

Him: I forgive you.

I look at him.

Him: I know you thought you were protecting them...

Me: I just didn't know how to tell you.

Him: Next time, just tell me... I want to be there for you, as much you want to be there for

everyone else.

Swoons!

Him: I want to support you as much as I can... I'm glad I witnessed how Nomvuyo handled your attack; at least I will be able to help you in future.

This man...

Him: Just don't lie to me, Ziyanda. I value honesty.

Me: Okay.

We stand there for a while, staring at each other all lovey dovey.

Him: I love you so much...

We share a hug and I honestly just want to cry. What did I do to deserve such a wonderful man?

Me: I love you too.

We share a kiss.

Nomvuyo: Heyi nina wozani...

We let go of each other.

Nomvuyo: Come see the twins. They're so cute.

Me: Twins???

She laughs and nods.

Derek: For fuck's sake.

Nomvuyo: Come!

Derek: This is just fucked up...

We walk back in, hand in hand...

INSERT 45

Derek and I are now in his apartment.

Me: This is crazy.

Derek: Fucked up.

Me: I wonder how all of this will unfold.

He goes to the bathroom and I throw myself on the bed. He then comes back and rests his

head on my thighs.

Him: It's a mess.

Me: Do you think Nolwazi will be fine?

Him: I don't know...

Me: I think she'll understand.

Him: Hmm but this is a bit deep. Mdu messed up.

Me: He's always been impulsive, I'm not surprised.

I regret that as soon as I say it. Who wants to sit here and listen to their partner talk about an

ex? How dumb, Ziyanda!

Him: He's impulsive?

Oh... He doesn't seem mad.

Me: Yes, very.

Him: So how the fuck did you deal with each other?

Me: What do you mean?

Him: Seeing as both of you are impulsive.

Me: Excuse me??

Him: Wait, is this news to you?

Me: I am not impulsive, Derek!

He chuckles and I punch him lightly.

Me: I'm offended.

Him: Don't be. I love your impulsiveness.

Me: Argh.

Him: You don't think before you act.

Me: Stop!

He laughs.

Him: So how was your relationship?

Gosh, here I am trying to change the subject and this one keeps reeling me back in.

Me: It was a very dramatic relationship.

Him: How so?

Me: We fought every second.

Him: Hmm.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Hmm.

I punch him again.

Me: Can we stop talking about this?

Him: Baby, you are the one who dragged us into this whole mess.

Me: I wasn't thinking!

Him: Impulsive...

Me: Argh.

He repositions and then gets on top of me.

Him: We need to go to the doctor.

I groan.

Him: Why are you avoiding it?

Me: I'm not.

Him: Ziyanda.

I sigh.

Me: I just don't want to face the results.

Him: Okay, but you do realize that we'll face them anyway?

I keep quiet.

Him: What are you scared of the most?

Me: Duuh! Being pregnant!

Him: What scares you about being pregnant?

Me: Derek!

Him: I just want to know.

Me: So wena you're okay with me being pregnant?

He sighs thoughtfully.

Him: I'm okay with anything. Like I said, pregnant or not, I'm here.

I groan.

Me: I don't want to be pregnant.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'm not even going to sugar-coat it, or lie- I don't want to be pregnant. I am not ready!

He still doesn't say anything.

Me: We've been irresponsible.

Contraceptives are must.

Him: This is why we need to go to the doctor.

Me: Hmkay.

We lay there for a while, and I even feel myself doze off.

He gets up.

Me: Where are you going?

Him: Need some air...

Me: Oh.

He puts on a t-shirt and walks out.

Uhm...

What the hell just happened?

I dial Niki's number and she answers.

Me: I need to see you ASAP!

Niki: Angithi uyajola!

I sigh heavily.

Me: So much shit has happened.

Her: Let's have our usual indoor weekend.

Me: This weekend?

Her: Yes, love.

Me: Okay then.

Her: Hopefully, your man won't hate me for taking you away from him.

Me: I think I need some distance and alone time, just to reflect on everything that has happened.

Her: Good, you'll use this weekend, and tell me all about him.

We laugh.

Her: Take care of yourself.

Me: Hmkay bye, friend.

Her: Byee!

I hang up and am startled by Derek's phone ringing. I reach for it and see Xolani's name. I think

of answering it, but stop myself. I can't be answering other people's phones...

It stops ringing.

Where is Derek? Why did he even need some air? Is he tired of me? Am I invading his space?

I stand and make my way to the lounge. I am definitely going back home tomorrow.

I haven't

been there since last week Friday. It's now Tuesday.

My thoughts are interrupted by the knock on the door. Did he forget the key?

I open the door, and am shocked to see Xolani, standing there.

Me: Xolani!

He looks at me from head to toe and frowns.

Xolani: What's wrong with you?

Me: What do you mean?

He walks in and I close the door.

Him: You have eye bags and-

Me: I have eye bags??

He laughs and nods.

Me: It's been a rough couple of weeks.

Him: Is my brother putting you through the most?

Me: Not him per se.

He looks around.

Him: Where is he?

Me: He is out.

He raises an eyebrow.

Him: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Well... I think so.

He opens the fridge and gets a bottle of water.

Him: Are you guys fighting?

Me: No.

I don't even see myself fighting with Derek. I just refuse to put us in that position.

Him: Well, let me give you some insight on my beloved brother.

He goes to the lounge and I follow him. We then sit down and he looks at me intently.

Him: What have you learnt about him so far?

Me: Uhm...

Really? I thought this would be a time for me to get more information about Derek, and now

Xolani wants me to tell him things.

Xolani: Derek is a very loving person, I'm sure you've seen that.

Me: I have.

He smiles.

Him: I don't know how he manages to love so much, even after people screw him over.

Me: People screw him over?

Argh I can't imagine why anyone would want to hurt him intentionally.

Him: I'm sure you've also been through your share of heartbreaks.

I nod.

Him: But D doesn't seem to hold those experiences against anyone.

He sighs.

Him: Please take care of him, Zi. I'm asking this from the bottom of my heart. I've watched him trust people, who don't even give a shit about him. He's too much. Too generous, too loving, too kind...

He drinks some of his water.

Him: And you know what they say about such people... Once they reach their breaking point, shit gets too real.

Me: I love his circle of friends though. They're good for him.

He nods.

Him: They are... He just has bad luck when it comes to romantic relationships. They always take advantage of him.

Me: Well that's unfortunate.

Him: He always puts other people's needs before his. He's been like that forever. He has never

been one to ask for help, or show how affected he is by hurtful situations.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not telling you this to make you feel guilty. I just want you to know that you're with an

amazing person, who'll love you deeply.
However, I also ask that you take care of
him. Try to let
him open up... None of us have been able
to get him to open up...
All this time I thought I was the closed off
one, but maybe both of us are the same-
or he's
worse, but he just knows how to make it
seem like he's fine...

Me: Thank you...

He nods and then looks at me from head
to toes.

Me: Stop looking at me like that!

Him: Tomorrow, you're spending the day
with me. I cannot have you looking like
this, Zi.

Me: Do I even have a choice?

Him: No.

Me: Okay then.

Him: Stunning!

I laugh and we continue chatting.

Just then, the door opens and Derek walks in.

Xolani: Brother!

Derek: Hey. When did you get here?

Xolani: It's been a while.

Derek walks to the lounge and looks at me.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Me? Yes.

He nods and looks at Xolani.

Derek: What's up?

Xolani: Was in the area...

Derek: Hmm. I'd like to crash, if you don't mind.

Xolani: Of course not. Zi and I are good.

He nods and walks away to the bedroom.

As I am about to stand, Xolani stops me.

Xolani: Give him space.

Me: No...

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: See you tomorrow.

Him: Well damn!

I pull him up and push him towards the door.

Me: Bye, see you tomorrow!

He gets out and I lock the door. I then make my way to the bedroom, and find Derek lying on the bed, facing up.

I sit on the edge and look at him.

Me: Do you want space?

He shakes his head and I keep quiet. I don't really know what's happening. We were fine mos?

He pulls me and I relax next to him.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: Nothing. I'm just tired.

That's what I also say when something's bothering me and I don't want to talk!

Me: Just remember... We value honesty, right?

He keeps quiet and I decide to let him be. Hopefully he'll let me know what changed his mood.

INSERT 46 (Short Insert)

It's now around 7pm, and I am starving.

As I get out of bed, he groans and I get back in and look at him. He looks so peaceful, but I can't

help but think, he's not as happy or "put together" as he makes it seem. Maybe it's time for me

to put on my big girl panties (excuse the pun) and get him to fully open up. I mean, he has

managed to get me to trust him and open up; surely I can do the same for him?

After a while, he wakes up and looks so innocent, that my heart dances.

Me: Hey, sleepyhead.

He looks at me and smiles lightly.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm okay.

I want to ask him, but decide not to. I don't want to corner him.

Him: Are you hungry?

Me: Just a little bit.

He gets out of bed and walks to the bathroom. He seems better, but still a bit down.

Him: Let's go out. I'm too lazy to cook.

Me: Or we can order something.

Him: I'd like some fresh air.

Me: Oh. Okay.

I go to the bathroom and get in the shower. He then comes in and we clean ourselves, without

exchanging words. I am so awkward when it comes to such situations. We finish showering

and he leaves me in the bathroom.

When I'm done, I walk to the bedroom and find him getting dressed.

Me: Derek, is it me?

He stops and looks at me.

Me: Did I say something to make you feel like this?

Him: We'll talk later.

I nod and get dressed. Now I definitely know that his mood has to do with me.

I'm now trying to think of everything I said to him.

Was it the Mdu thing?

We finish up and then make our way out of the place.

While driving, his phone rings and he gives it to me.

Him: Please answer it.

I look at the caller id. It's Dean.

I sigh before answering.

Me: Hello.

Dean: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

Him: Is he there?

Me: Yes, he's driving.

Him: Is he okay?

Me: Uhm yes...

What's happening?

Him: Alright. Please ask him to call me back.

Me: Okay.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call.

Me: He has asked you to call him back.

He nods and then glances at me.

Now I'm down. His mood is affecting me.

I feel his hand on mine, and he brushes my knuckles.

Him: I'm not angry.

I keep quiet and look out the window.

We get to a restaurant in Rosebank and get a table, despite not making a reservation.

We've been here for about 30 minutes,
and haven't really spoken.

Me: What did I do?

He sighs.

Him: You didn't really do-

Me: Don't lie to me. I obviously said
something to offend you.

He rubs his chin and looks down.

Him: I don't know... I just felt a bit down
after that pregnancy discussion.

Wait, what?

I look at him in confusion.

Him: It's fine actually, let's drop it

Me: Don't do that.

He sighs.

Him: It's petty.

Me: Derek, come on.

He looks at me.

Him: I just felt a bit weird after you told
me that you don't want to be pregnant.

Me: I don't vele.

He tries to say something, but stops himself.

Our food comes and we begin eating.

Me: Derek, I don't like what's happening right now. I feel very disconnected to you, and I hate it.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Please talk to me. How did I offend you?

Him: I didn't really think about having children until you brought the whole pregnancy thing up.

I keep quiet. Now it makes sense, I think...

Him: I know it's not a big deal, but I am a bit hurt by how you're reacting to this whole thing.

I decide to keep quiet and let him explain himself. I know I can come across as insensitive at times.

Him: And hearing how you talk about this unconfirmed pregnancy, as if it's something

disgusting... It just threw me off.

Me: So... You want a baby?

He looks at me, a bit embarrassed.

Me: But...

When did this happen? How did we get to this?

Me: Derek, I'm not ready to have a baby.

Him: I know. You've made that clear.

Me: But here's what you don't comprehend, just because I don't want a baby, it doesn't mean I don't want a baby with you.

He stares at me.

Me: I do want children, but I don't them now. I'm not ready emotionally or financially. I'm not in that phase yet.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Derek, I love you. I may be shitty at times, but I really love you. Furthermore, you already have a place in my future. I love you that much.

His face softens and I sigh.

Me: Maybe I'm not expressive enough, and that's why you're behaving this way. I look at him, and now I'm the emotional one. I hate the fact that he doesn't understand the depth of my love for him. I just want him to get it through his thick skull that I love him. A baby won't make any difference.

Me: You don't need a baby to make me stay. I want to be with you regardless. I love you.

We are silent for a while.

Me: I apologise for making you feel like this. I was just trying to emphasise how worried I am about the situation. I'm sorry for coming across as insensitive.

Him: Your apology means a lot to me.

Me: And I hate apologising.

Him: I know.

I smile.

Me: I don't care how long I've known you... My love for you is incalculable, and it scares me at times.

He reaches for my hands and brushes them.

Him: Thank you.

Me: Can we stop being sad now? It's too draining.

He stands and I give him a weird look.

Him: Come here.

He pulls me up and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I love you so much, Ziyanda.

Me: I love you too.

We squeeze each other and share a kiss.

Him: I've run out of condoms.

I squeal and he laughs. We then sit down and finish up eating.

Me: You know, I thought it was about Mdu.

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: I'm not that insecure.

Me: Yaas!

He laughs and we continue chatting...

INSERT 47

Me: Derek.

Derek: Yes, baby.

Me: I'm going home today.

He stops typing whatever he is working on, and stares at me.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Star, I haven't seen my parents in 4 days!

Him: Are you dead?

Me: Argh.

Him: I don't want you to leave.

Me: Heeh so I am must die first?

He smiles and nods.

Me: I need to see my baby, Lwazi.

He raises an eyebrow.

Him: Your daughter.

Me: Yep.

Him: Hmm.

He continues typing and zones me out.

He's now driving me back home.

Derek: So when am I going to officially meet your parents?

Me: Uhm excuse me?

He chuckles.

Me: How about never?

Him: Uyahlananya.

Me: They're going to freak out. They've never met any boyfriend of mine.

Him: I'd like to think that I'm not just any boyfriend.

Me: Hehe! Wena na.

He smiles and my heart jumps.

Me: You have the cutest smile.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: I thought you said it freaks you out.

Me: That was when I was in denial about how I feel about your ass.

Him: Hmm I'm glad to know that I have an effect on you.

Me: What?? Are you telling me that you're not aware of the effect you have on me?

Him: I've said this before... You're stone cold.

Me: Derek!

Him: I'm serious. There are times when I think I'm winning, and then most of the time I'm just hopeful...

I laugh. So my craziness is not evident in my actions? Does he not see how insane he makes me?

Me: Wow.

Him: But I know how to win you over. He smiles mischievously and I giggle. He then slides his hand between my thighs and I hit him.

Me: Disgusting human being.

He laughs and focuses on the road.

Me: You think my parents want to meet the man who's always spreading my legs?

Him: If only they knew how loud you moan.

Me: Derek!

He continues teasing me until we get to my house.

Thank God my mom is still at work. My mom is a bit intense compared to my dad...

My dad is outside, as usual- taking care of his customers.

As I get out of the car, Derek gets out as well.

Me: What the hell??

He smiles.

Him: I would like to taste your father's food.

Me: Dere-

Him: Zip it, drama queen.

I look at him in complete shock.

My dad exclaims as soon as he sees me.

Dad: I have missed you!

Me: Me too!

I am uncomfortable as hell right now.

He spots Derek, and is a bit confused...

Then he smiles.

Dad: Hawu kanti wena you don't change your Uber driver, Zizi?

Me: Uhm...

Derek: Sawubona.

Dad: Hello.

My dad looks at me briefly.

Me: I mentioned that you sell amazing chicken, now he wants to get a plate.

Dad: Ohhh kanti?

He smiles.

Dad: Hlala phansi... Futhi I have many questions ngaleUber yenu...

Gosh I want to go, but at the same time, I want to stay-just to make sure that Derek doesn't say anything stupid.

My dad then looks at me.

Dad: And then?

Me: Huh?

Dad: Go inside phela. Angithi the Uber driver got you home? You've reached your destination, so he's no longer your concern.

I look at him in shock. Derek is stifling a laugh.

Dad: Bye bye.

I reluctantly turn and make my way inside the house. My heart beat is on another level. I'm freaking out!

As soon as I get inside, I go straight to the window and take a peek. I see Derek is sitting down, and my dad is busy preparing his plate. If Derek thinks he'll get some from me, then his ass is playing. He won't even get a sniff!

He's now eating... I know for a fact that he's enjoying the food. My dad does the damn thing

phela.

Argh I give up.

I go to my bedroom and unpack some of my shit.

I eventually go out and people are out here having fat chats and laughs ngaphandle.

Dad: Uyaphi?

Me: I'm going to fetch Lwazi, and take her to the mall.

Dad: Hamba neUber driver yakho phela.

I try by all means to keep a straight face.

Dad: He has explained everything to me...

He smiles and now I'm just confused.

What exactly did this man explain to my father?

I watch as Derek stand, shake my dad's hand and give him money. He then comes to me with

two plastics that have 6 takeaways.

Me: What's happening?

Derek: Nothing.

Derek and I walk to his car and get in.

Me: You better start ta-

Him: Shhh...

Me Excuse me??

He chuckles as he starts the car and drive off.

Me: You better check yourself!

Him: Ukhuluma kakhulu sometimes.

Me: Derek!

He looks at me and smiles playfully.

Me: What did you talk about?

Him: Uber.

Me: Uber?

Him: I'm your Uber driver, remember?

I groan and roll my eyes.

Him: Ngiyadlala, baby.

He slides his hand under my dress and strokes my thigh.

Him: He just asked me questions about joining Uber. I had to make shit up.

Me: He doesn't suspect anything?

He shakes his head.

Me: Why the fuck would you even get out of the car? How dare you?!

Him: Your father has a business, and I'm a supporter of black businesses.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles and I direct him to Lwazi's house.

Me: I'll see you around.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: Derek, I'm not spending the afternoon with you, I'm spending it with Lwazi.

Him: What about me?

Me: What about you?

He sulks and pouts.

Me: Go away!

Him: I'll go back to your father. Those old men are good company.

Me: Asingaphaphelani, Derek.

Him: But I want to be with you...

He continues sulking till I agree.

Me: I'll be back.

I get out of the car and make my way inside Lwazi's yard. As soon as she sees me, she squeals excitedly.

Lwazi: Mommy!

Me: Hey sweetie, are you alone?

She nods and locks up. We then make our way out.

Me: How have you been?

Lwazi: I'm well, and you?

Me: I'm well, too.

I open the door for her and she frowns as she gets in and sees Derek.

Lwazi: Is this the driver, mommy?

I laugh.

Me: Yes, baby. This is our driver, Uncle D.

Lwazi: Uncle D?

Me: Yes.

She keeps quiet and I get in the front.

Derek: Hi, Lwazi.

Lwazi: Hello.

It is very clear that she doesn't feel this one.

I look over at Derek and I know he's a bit touched. Lwazi doesn't fail to make it clear if she doesn't like you.

Me: We're going to Maponya.

Derek nods and drives...

Lord, this is going to be an interesting afternoon...

INSERT 48

We're now at Maponya Mall and Lwazi has been on her phone...

Gosh she's such a mini-me. I'm sure there's a mini-Petty LaBelle in there telling her to act up and wait for me to shower her with love and attention.

Me: Baby, let's go.

We get out of the car.

Lwazi: Are we watching a movie, mommy?

Me: Yes, we are. Let's eat first. I can't have you eating junk in an empty stomach.

Her: I haven't eaten at all today.

My heart aches immediately.

Me: What happened to the money I gave you?

She shrugs.

Her: Someone took it...

I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: Well we'll stuff your face now now.

She giggles.

Me: What do you want to eat?

Her: Duuuh! McDonalds!

Me: McDs it is.

We walk to McDonalds and I look at Derek. I can't seem to read his expression.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods.

Him: Lwazi, what are you going to have?
Lwazi looks at him blankly and I chuckle.
She then tells him what she'll have.

Derek: What will you have, Zi?

Me: Uhm... I'll have a Big Mac.

He nods.

Him: Go get a table.

I nod and walk upstairs with Lwazi. We
get a table and sit.

Me: Where's mom and dad?

Lwazi: I don't know. They've been gone
for two days.

Me: What?? You've been living by yourself
for two days?

Lwazi: My brother was around, but he
was outside with his friends. They were
so loud and
drunk.

I groan.

Me: Did you eat yesterday?

She nods and smiles.

Lwazi: Mommy, I'm a big girl. Stop stressing.

Me: You're coming to my house, until they come back. I can't have you living by yourself with no food.

Lwazi: Or electricity.
For fuck's sake, man.

Derek walks to the table with our food, and sits.

Derek: There you go.

Lwazi: Thank you.

She delves in immediately and I try not to show her how stressed I am. Derek looks at me

questioningly and I just sigh and focus on my food.

We listen to her tell us her usual crazy and dramatic stories until we finish eating. We then

make our way to the cinema and she decides what she wants to watch. She decided that yena she doesn't want to sit in the middle, because she wants "breathing space" and doesn't want to listen to us talk during the movie, so she skipped a seat and focused on the movie, while Derek and I sat next to each other.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Not really.

He glances at me.

Me: She comes from a very fucked up family.

Him: Really?

Me: The parents are alcoholics. The mom and dad constantly fight, and then the dad leaves for days on end... The mom will then leave as well, looking for the dad... It's just a messy

environment.

Him: They leave her all alone?

Me: Yes, she's been by herself for two days now. The brother is 25, but he is also drowning in alcohol.

Him: That's fucked up.

Me: My heart breaks every time I see her. She's not safe in that house.

I look at her, and she's giggling away.

Me: She's going to stay at my house until we find a way forward.

Him: Are you going to call child protection services?

Me: I don't want her to go stay at some orphanage where she'll be treated badly.

She'll stay at my house for now, while I make a plan.

Him: Hmm.

He reaches for my hand and strokes it.

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: I love this girl so much. I'd kill or die for her, honestly.

He keeps quiet and I try to focus on the movie...

Me: Let's get you some new clothes...

Lwazi: Really??

I nod and she squeals.

Lwazi: Yaay!

We walk to different stores and Derek insists on paying...

Lol Lwazi went all out, I was even jealous a bit. The girl got everything she wanted and needed.

From, clothes, to shoes, to underwear...

She got it all.

By the time we were done, we (Derek) had spent a few thousands... I was just glad that this shit didn't come out of my pocket.

It's now around 5pm, and we're making our way to the car.

As soon as we get in the car, Lwazi passes out.

Me: Well aren't you sneaky.

Derek: What?

Me: You know a girl can't be mad at you after such a shopping spree.

He chuckles and drives off.

Him: I'm just being a kind person...

Me: Lies!

He looks at me seriously.

Him: Am I taking you home?

Me: Where else would you take me?

Him: Your other home.

I laugh and shake my head.

Me: I can't leave Lwazi right now.

Him: She can come with us.

Me: I don't want to overwhelm her, Derek.

He nods and keeps quiet.

We eventually get to my house and he parks outside. I pat Lwazi and she wakes up.

Me: We're here, baby. Go inside.

She blinks and looks at me so innocently, with her cute self.

Lwazi: Okay.

She sits up and then looks at Derek.

Lwazi: Thank you for buying me everything, Uncle D.

Derek: You're welcome, love.

Lwazi: Goodbye. Enjoy the rest of your evening.

Aww man.

Derek's smile is just out of this world.

Derek: Thank you, you too.

Me: I'll bring your things...

She nods and gets out of the car. She then walks in the yard...

Derek: Your parents know her?

I nod.

Me: She's part of the family.

He smiles.

Me: At least she's not mean anymore.

He groans.

Him: She's exactly like you.

Me: Right?

He chuckles.

Me: She'll eventually open up to you, don't worry.

Him: She has no choice. It's not like I'm going anywhere.

Me: Gosh.

He then looks at me seriously.

Him: So I'm only seeing you on Friday?

Me: Yes, for our appointment with the doctor.

He nods thoughtfully.

Me: See you then.

He sulks.

Me: Derek, it's unrealistic to think we're going to spend every single day together.

Him: Why? There's nothing unrealistic about that.

Me: Well, unlike you, I live with my parents. I can't disappear nje just like that.

Him: Then maybe you should move out.

Me: Were you not the one who said you love the fact that I stay here?

Him: Argh.

I laugh and lean closer to him.

Me: I love you.

Him: No, you don't.

Me: Such a baby.

I plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: Thank you for today. Lwazi and I are very grateful.

He smiles and we share a kiss. My insides churn.

After a long kissing and touching session, I finally get out of the car and make my way inside

the house. I want to go back and be with him, but I'm also glad that we're going to be apart for a bit. I'm worried that I might be addicted to him.

As I get in the house, with thousands of plastics, Lwazi runs and helps me.

Mom: Oh wow!

Me: Hey ma.

Mom: Hey, baby. I see you had a fruitful day.

Me: Quite.

Mom: Lwa, try on some clothes for us phela.

Lwazi hops happily to my bedroom, and we all laugh.

Dad: Did they disappear once again?

Me: Yep.

Mom: Mxm.

I sit down and sigh.

Me: I'm thinking of adopting her.

Both of them look at me, a bit startled.
Me: I don't want her to stay in that house,
with those messed up people.
Just then, Lwazi walks to the lounge,
dressed in a lovely dress.
We all clap and she smiles brightly.
Dad: Beautiful!
Lwazi: Uncle D loved this one!
I swear the world stops moving!
Lwazi: Let me try on the other dress!
She walks away and I'm just out here
trying to keep a straight face.
I look at my parents, and they're both
staring at me.
Me: So yes, I want to adopt her...
I stand.
Me: I'm sure she needs my help...
I quickly walk away.
Universe, swallow me!
INSERT 49 (Couldn't edit)

Lwazi and I spent the following day in bed, cuddling.

Me: What are we going to do today?

Her: Watch cartoons.

Me: Perfect!

She smiles and rests her head on my chest.

Lwazi: I love you, mommy.

Me: I love you even more.

She giggles and dozes off once again...

My phone rings and it's Derek video calling me. I answer.

Me: Hey...

He's also in bed.

Derek: I had the longest, toughest night ever.

I giggle quietly and he groans.

Him: I'm miserable. Come back!

Me: I can't.

Lwazi repositions and I get out bed and go to my parents' bedroom. I close the door and sit on the bed.

Me: You're so cute.

Him: Can I come fetch you?

Me: No.

Him: Yoh.

I laugh as he continues being dramatic.

Me: I want to spend the day with Lwazi.

Him: And I want to spend all my days with you.

Me: So dramatic!

He sulks.

Me: Okay Derek, you can spend the day with us.

He smiles and I roll my eyes.

Him: Let's go to Gold Reef City.

Me: Hmm that's actually not a bad idea.

Him: I'm sure Lwazi will be ecstatic.

Me: Definitely.

Him: I'll fetch-

Me: No, you won't. I'm still dealing with the repercussions of what you did yesterday. I will meet you somewhere.

Him: What happened?

I tell him about Lwazi mentioning him, and he laughs.

Him: It's about time.

Me: Hell no!

Him: So what did you tell them?

Me: Nothing. They didn't ask me.

Him: Are you a coward, Ms Dlamini?

Me: I am not ready to introduce to my parents.

Him: Ouch.

Me: Zip it, Sensitive Susie.

Him: So when are you planning on introducing me?

Me: The day you take me as your wife.

Bye, see you later!

I hang up before he tries to convince me to introduce him...

I go to the bathroom and clean myself up. Once I'm done, I wake Lwazi up and tell her to take a bath.

Lwazi: Where are we going?

Me: It's a surprise.

She smiles and gets out of bed. I clean up the room, and then get dressed.

We're now in Derek's car... We met up some other place, away from my house. I can't have my father seeing me with him ever again.

Derek: How are you, Lwazi?

Lwazi: I'm great, and how are you, Uncle D?

Derek: I'm fantastic, thank you.

I look at Lwazi, and she's smiling sweetly. Cute girl, this one.

He drives off and I listen to them chat about her favourite music.

We finally arrive at Gold Reef City, and Lwazi is beyond excited. We follow her while she goes on the rides. I didn't even want to try anything; the thought of twirling around is enough to drive me crazy.

Derek wraps his arms around me and we share a hug.

Derek: Ms Dlamini.

He gives me a kiss and I blush.

Me: Staaap.

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Him: I can't seem to stay away from you. I was in a foul mood the whole night.

Me: Such a baby.

Him: You didn't miss me?

Me: I did.

He groans and kisses my forehead.

Him: I want to be with you 24/7. You've bewitched me.

Me: You are the one who's bewitched me.
He smiles and we share another kiss.

Me: I've been thinking...

Him: Hmm?

Me: I want to adopt her.

His body tenses up, and he looks at me in disbelief.

Him: What?

Me: I want to adopt her. I just want to take care of her.

Him: But... How?

Me: How?

Him: I thought... I thought you don't want children.

Me: Lwazi is different, Derek. She's been in my life for years. I am all she has.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I told my parents and they don't disagree.

He sighs.

Him: That's... That's a lot...

Me: I know...

Him: Are you sure about this?

Me: I don't know.

Him: So you're against orphanages?

Me: Yes.

Him: But I turned out alright.

I keep quiet.

Him: Maybe you could get her to stay at Twilight Orphanage.

Me: Your orphanage?

He nods and I keep quiet.

Him: I could help you.

Me: I'll think about it.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: What?

Him: You love this child.

Me: I do. A lot.

Him: She's lucky to have you.

I sigh and relax in his arms.

Me: I want her to live comfortably.

He kisses my forehead and we watch as Lwazi runs to us.

Lwazi: That was amazing!

Derek: Great. Where do you want to go next?

Lwazi: Tower of-

Me: Nope. You're too young.

Lwazi: But mommy!

Me: Uh-uh.

She continues begging me but ends up giving up. We then went to the more kid-friendly rides.

Derek: She's adorable.

Me: Too much, but she thinks her cuteness will allow her to do as she pleases.

He chuckles and looks at me intently.

Me: What?

Him: Nothing.

Me: We should probably get something to eat now... We've been here for a while now.

He nods and we continue chatting as we wait for Lwazi. She eventually comes and wraps her arms around me.

Lwazi: You're the best!

I squeeze her.

Me: Ready to eat?

Her: One more ride? Please?

Me: Nope. You have to eat.

Her: Pleeeeease?!

I shake my head. She then looks at Derek and blinks innocently.

Her: Uncle D, please?

She lets go of me and wraps her arms around Derek.

This child!

I watch as Derek gets lost in her spell.

Derek: Okay, one last ride.

Lwazi: Yaaay!

She runs off and we follow her.

Me: Gosh! Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Uyabhora yazi. Why in the world would you give in like that??

Him: But... But I was just...

He sighs.

Me: Argh.

Him: She's so cute.

Me: Hai suka.

He puts his arm around my shoulders and we wait for Lwazi.

Him: Did I really give in?

Me: Yes!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Me: Channel your inner strictness, Daddy D.

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Me: You can't be out here falling for dimples and sparkly eyes.

Him: Whatever, Nanny McZee.

Me: Wow!

Lwazi finally comes back...

Me: Can we get out of here? I'm over the crowd.

Derek: Sure.

He then looks at Lwazi.

Derek: Did you have fun?

Lwazi: Yes!

She is just on another level right now.

We've now eaten, and it's safe to say that Lwazi and Derek have formed a little relationship that

I don't like. Derek is proving to be spellbound here. I just can't deal.

As we're driving to Soweto, my phone rings. It's Nomvuyo. I answer.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Hey, you!

Me: How are you?

Her: I'm well, and you?

Me: Ngi-right.

Her: Ukuphi?

Me: On my way home.

Her: Are you with Derek?

Me: Yes.

Her: Say hi to him.

Me: Okay.

Her: When am I seeing you?

Me: I'll call you later.

Her: Okay, love.

Me: Bye.

Her: Bye.

I hang up.

After a while, we get to Soweto, and he parks outside my house.

Lwazi: Thank you, Uncle D!

Derek: You're welcome, baby.

Lwazi: Byeeee!

Derek: Bye.

Me: And remember, you do not mention anything about Uncle D.

She giggles and nods.

Lwazi: Your secret is safe with me!

She giggles as she gets out and makes her way inside.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow...

He sighs and nods.

Me: Love you.

Him: Love you more.

We share kiss and I get out of the car...

When I walk in the house, Lwazi is now watching TV with my mom.

Me: Ma.

Mom: Hi, baby.

Me: I'm exhausted...

She laughs.

Mom: Kids tend to have that effect...

Me: Hmm...

I go to my bedroom, and throw myself on the bed...

I'm glad I'm finally seeing the doctor, but I honestly don't want to face the results...

INSERT 50

The following day, Lwazi begged me to come with to the doctor, and I declined. I don't want her to be around when I am told the results...

As I am walking out of the yard, my dad calls me. I walk to him and he smiles.

Dad: You've really grown yazi...

I smile.

Me: I don't know if that's a good thing.

Him: Of course it is... I am very proud of you. You've been respectful all your life- we've never

had any problems with you.

Me: Thank you.

He chuckles and nods.

Him: Hamba ke. I'm sure Derek is waiting...

My eyes pop out.

Me: Huh?!

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: Did you really think that I'm that dumb kodwa Ziyanda?

Me: But... He... He's...

Him: He's your boyfriend.

I try to say something, but words fail me.

He looks at me playfully and I still don't say anything.

One of his customers walks to us and greets. They begin having a conversation, and then he

looks at me.

Dad: Bye bye, sisi.

He focuses on his customer and I find myself walking away.

As I get in Derek's car, I find him smiling brightly.

Derek: Sthandwa sami.

Me: I want nothing to do with you.

His facial expression changes and he looks at me in shock.

Me: How dare you tell my father about us? How dare you?

He tries to say something but stops himself.

Me: I told you I'm not fucken ready! Why do you always feel the need to be forward?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: I told you I'm not ready to introduce you to my parents, and you blatantly disregarded that.

Why, Derek?

He keeps quiet.

Me: I don't care how much we love each other, I told you I'm not ready, and you decided to do your own shit and go against my wishes. I see his jaw tighten.

Me: Is this how our relationship is going to be like? I express my wishes and you go against them?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Mxm.

He starts the car and drives off.

To be honest, I really don't appreciate what he did. I made it clear that I don't want to introduce him to my parents, so why would he do such? I don't find it cute at all. I know that my parents will love him; I know this for a fact. However, I wanted to sit them down and explain everything

properly. He might not understand this, but I wanted to introduce him properly. What annoys me more is that I told him not to do this, but he decided not to listen, and do his own shit. That's what pisses me off more. His intent may have been innocent, but he still went against my wishes.

We get to the doctor and the tension between us is as thick as my thighs. He speaks to the receptionist and we are led to some room.

The doctor walks in and smiles. She sits on a chair and looks at us.

Doctor: Good afternoon.

Derek: Hi.

She looks at both us and smiles awkwardly.

Doctor: Uhm so you're here for a pregnancy test?

Derek nods.

Doctor: Okay... I have to ask you a few qu-

Derek: We don't have time for all of that.

Surely this is not a HIV test.

Both the doctor and I, stare at him.

Whoa.

Doctor: Oh... Uhm...

She tries to keep a straight face, but I can tell that she felt that.

She stands.

Doctor: I will be back shortly.

She walks out of the room, and there is complete silence. I'm still pissed, and he is obviously

feeling some type of way, and I really don't care. Screw him.

The doctor comes back and sits down.

She stares at us.

Doctor: There are two main types of pregnancy tests- blood tests and urine tests. These tests

identify pregnancy by detecting a hormone called Human Chorionic Gonadotropin (hGC) which is commonly known as the pregnancy hormone. This hormone is created soon after the embryo has attached itself to the uterine lining in the womb. This hormone is easily measurable in the blood and urine within 10 days of fertilization, or 1 or 2 days after implantation has taken place.

My heart rate at this point is out of this world. I'm shocked I haven't peed on myself.

Doctor: There are two types of blood tests for pregnancy: a quantitative blood test, and a qualitative blood test. A quantitative blood test measures the exact amount of hCG in the

blood. In other words, we are able to tell the age of the fetus. The qualitative blood test, on the other hand, gives a simple yes or no answer to whether you are pregnant or not.

I am so overwhelmed right now; that I don't know what is happening to my body. My anxiety is doing the most.

Doctor: Are we all on the same page?

Derek nods, and she looks at me. I nod.

Doctor: Alright, so which blood test do you want us to conduct?

Derek: A qualitative blood test is fine for now.

The doctor looks at me and I just nod. She nods.

Doctor: Alright then, we need to draw your blood...

Derek: When will we get the results?

Doctor: In 2-4 hours.

We are now in another room... A nurse walks in and they explain what they're going to do...

I can't even hear anything right now. My brain and body is not functioning properly.

She first cleans the area with an antiseptic, and then she applies something that apparently enlarges the vein... She then withdraws the blood from my forearm and at this point I'm a sobbing mess.

I hate needles, I hate blood...

Derek is now by my side, holding my hand. Once they're done, I cry even more.

Now I'm crying because of our fight earlier. I'm still pissed at him for what he did, but now I'm so scared about

the possibility of being pregnant, that I'm just an emotional mess.

The doctor brings a glass of water, and they try to calm me down.

Derek asks her to leave us, and she walks out. He then wraps his arms around me and I rest my

head on his shoulder. I can hear him breathe, as his mouth is by my ear.

Him: Zi, breathe...

The warmth of his body is comforting... I concentrate on his breathing, and slowly follow his pace...

I concentrate on nothing else but his breathing...

After 5 minutes, I feel myself stabilize again.

He strokes my back gently and I look at him.

He looks a bit frightened, but I can tell his trying not to show me.

Him: Are you okay?

I rest my head on his shoulder again and close my eyes. I just need to fully gather myself.

I feel his lips on my cheek and I look up at him again.

Him: I'm sorry for going against your wishes.

I nod.

Him: I didn't mean to-

Me: I'm sorry... I overreacted. I know you didn't mean any harm.

He plants a kiss on my forehead, and then plants another one on my nose. Then he gets to my mouth.

Him: Feeling better?

I nod and we share a slow kiss.

It seals the deal.

I feel more stable.

Him: I love you.

Me: And that scares me.

Him: I would never hurt you intentionally, Ziyanda. You need to trust me.

My eyes tear up again and he kisses my forehead.

Him: I will make mistakes, I'm only human. However, I don't go around hurting my loved ones deliberately.

We stand there for a while and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Him: Let's get a milkshake, while we wait for the results.

Me: Milkshake?

Him: Yes.

Me: Uhm okay...

We let go of each other and the doctor walks in. She confirms that the results will be ready in

about 2 hours, and she'll call us.

We walk out...

INSERT 51

We're now in his car, drinking our milkshakes.

Me: You are quite random.

Derek: Why?

Me: Milkshakes?

He chuckles and we sit in silence.

Me: You were so mean to that doctor.

Him: She was quite annoying.

Me: She was following procedure.

Him: I wasn't in the mood.

Me: I pissed you off that much?

Him: You didn't piss me off per se... You just threw me off.

Me: Sorry.

Him: Your father told me he knows about us.

Me: What??

Him: He said I have two choices: I continue lying and get beaten, or I tell the truth and stay alive.

Me: My father said that??

He chuckles and nods.

Him: I was a bit freaked out because he was quite serious.

Me: Whoa...

He sighs.

Him: I had no choice but to tell him.

Me: What did you tell him?

Him: That I'm in love with you.

I sigh.

We sit in silence once again, and his phone rings, and he answers.

Derek: Yes?... No, I'm not at my place, ma...

No, I won't be able to see you today, maybe

tomorrow... Yes... I am with Ziyanda... No, I can't meet you today, I'll see you tomorrow... Bye...

He hangs up and grunts.

I won't even bother asking what's up.

He then reaches for my hand and brushes it.

Him: I'm sorry for angering you...

Me: It's okay... I guess you had no choice.

Him: Give me a kiss.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss. I feel myself relax even more, and he smiles.

Me: I'm meeting my psychiatrist on Monday.

Him: Really?

I nod.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I see her once or twice a month...

He nods and we sit in silence once again.

His phone rings again, and he answers.

Him: Hello?... Oh... Okay, thanks, we'll be there shortly...

My heart starts beating fast.

Him: Baby, that was the doctor... The results are ready.

I groan and he brushes my hand.

He then starts the car and drives off...

We get to the room we were in earlier, and sit next to each other. The doctor walks in with an envelope and sits as well.

Doctor: Hi again.

Derek and I nod.

Doctor: I have your results here...

Derek puts his hand out and the doctor gives him the results.

At this point I have zoned her out.

Derek opens the envelope and reads silently...

Why isn't he saying anything?

He gives me the paper, and my hand is shaking...

I read it...

I don't really understand what is happening...

She begins to explain the hormone levels or whatever...

Me: Am I pregnant or not?

Her: According to your hCG levels, you're not pregnant.

Father God! Lord Jesus!

I exhale very loudly, and feel the whole world spin for a couple of seconds.

Me: I'm not pregnant??

The doctor nods and I exhale again.

If this whole experience was supposed to teach me lesson, I have definitely learnt it.

Doctor: Would you like me to tell you about the different contraceptives available for you?

I look over at Derek, and he literally looks like he has been punched in the face multiple times.

I understand that he wanted this child,
but it's still early. We're still getting to
know each other,
and a baby would come in between that.
Me: Uhm, please excuse us for a moment?
The doctor nods and stands. She then
walks out and closes the door.

I look at Derek and it doesn't take rocket
science to figure out that he is
disappointed.

Me: Derek.

He glances at me.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods.

Him: I'll wait in the car.

He stands and walks out of the room.

Shortly after, the doctor comes back and
we discuss an

appropriate contraceptive plan...

After a while, we finish up, and I make my
way outside.

As I walk to the car, I'm not going to lie, I'm beyond happy about this. I am not ready to carry a child and be a mother... I then think about Lwazi... I think my parents should be the one to adopt her. She can live with us...

I get in the car, and find Derek sleeping...

Me: Derek, let's go...

He adjusts his seat and starts the car.

Derek: I'll drop you off at home...

Me: Okay.

We drive in silence.

I know he's not happy about this, but it's honestly better this way. He'll get over it.

I'll give him

some space, and he'll come to terms with it.

We finally get to Soweto, and he parks outside my house.

Me: Bye.

Him: Bye.

I plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: Love you.

Him: Love you too.

I get out of the car and make my way inside the house. I find Lwazi dancing in the lounge,
listening to Justin Bieber.

Me: Hey, baby.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy!

We share a hug and she continues dancing. I sit down and watch her... I feel so lighter...

She eventually stops and then sits next to me.

Me: Lwazi.

Her: Yes?

Me: You know that I love you, right?

She nods.

Her: Duuuh!

I smile and she stands and continues doing her thing. I walk to my bedroom and throw myself on the bed.

I then get a call, and answer it sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda?

Me: Yes... Who am I speaking to?

Person: Derek's mother, Khwezi.

I quickly get up and my heart starts racing.

Khwezi: I would like to meet with you.

Me: Excuse me?

Her: When are you available?

Me: Uhm...

Her: Would you like me to send a car to fetch you?

Me: Uhm sorry... I'm not available right now.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: We can meet tomorrow.

Her: Okay. 10am, Wanderers Club.

Me: Bu-

Her: I will send a driver for you...Goodbye.
She hangs up and I sit there, still confused
and shocked.

Seconds later, my phone rings and it's
Niki.

Niki: Babe.

Me: Hey, you.

Her: I'm knocking off early today. Ukuphi?

Me: At home.

Her: Can we just have a few drinks
eVilakazi? I miss you.

Me: Uhm okay.

Her: I'll let you know when you should
leave the house.

Me: Okay.

Her: Bye.

Me: Shap.

She hangs up and I throw myself on the
bed again.

I guess I could use a few drinks...

INSERT 52 (Couldn't edit)

I arrive at Vilakazi, Nex Door, and find Niki already there.

Me: Nik Nak!

Niki: Ziyaya!

We share a long hug and sit.

Me: It's been so long!

Her: Angithi uyajola.

I groan as I think of Derek. I really miss him. We haven't spoken since the pregnancy thing.

Her: So fill me in!

Me: Gosh where do I even begin?

I start from scratch, just so I can build context of everything. I tell her every single thing...

She sips her drink and sighs dramatically.

Niki: Friend, that is crazy! So Mdu is part of the family?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Why are all your exes like this? They all have to be part of your life somehow.

Me: So annoying!

Her: So you want to adopt Lwazi?

I nod.

Her: I think it's a good idea, but I don't think you should be the adopter. Your parents should...

Me: That's what I was thinking vele.

Her: That would change her life for the better. Those parents are horrible.

Me: There's no way I'm going to let her live in an orphanage. She should live with us officially.

She nods.

Me: This pregnancy thing almost killed me.

Her: I can only imagine.

She then looks at me seriously.

Her: That's the disadvantage of being with someone older, and more experienced.

He's ready to settle down, and you're not.

Me: True.

Her: Don't allow him to make you feel guilty for not walking at the same pace as him. You two

haven't even been dating for six months, yet he wants to have children? Haibo he needs to chill.

I chuckle.

I can always trust this one to put things in perspective.

Her: Has he dealt with you when you're experiencing a depressive episode? Can he confidently say that he accepts you and your mental illness?

I sigh.

Her: You guys still have a long way to go. Use this time to get to know more about each other. A

baby was just going to get in the way.

Me: True...

Her: He needs to understand how difficult it is to be close to someone with a mental illness. I

don't think he fully understands...

Me: He tries...

Her: Good. He should stay longer, and completely understand the type of person you are, and

how to deal with you when things are not so great.

I nod.

Her: He seems like a good person... I hope he is...

Me: He is...

Her: Then I am happy for you... I'm just here to protect you, at the end of the day.

Me: Yes, ma'am.

We continue chatting for a while, and then my phone rings.

Me: It's him.

Her: Hopefully, he is over it. He must stop being a baby...

She chuckles.

Her: Excuse the pun.

Me: Argh. He is my baby.

Her: Weeeh!

I stand and go to the bathroom as I answer.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Where are you?

Me: Vilakazi, with Niki.

He is quiet for a few seconds.

Him: Can I come?

Me: Of course.

Him: Thank you.

Argh this one is so sweet though. Such a big baby.

Me: See you soon.

Him: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and walk back to our table.

Niki: How is he?

Me: He's on his way.

Her: Good. It's about time I meet this sexy beast.

Me: Sexy soul snatcher.

We laugh and continue chatting.

After an hour or so, he texts to tell me he's arrived. I walk to the entrance and see him. He spots me and walks in.

Me: Hey.

He wraps his arms around me.

Him: Hey.

As he's about to kiss me, the security guard asks us to move, because we're blocking the way.

Mxm jealous idiot.

We walk to the table and find Niki, on her phone.

I clear my throat and she looks up. She looks at Derek, and I know what she's thinking.

Sexy motherfucken beast.

Me: Star, this is Niki, whom I've told you about...

He smiles.

Me: Niki, you know who this is...

Niki: Uh-uh, introduce us properly!

I laugh and she stands.

Niki: Hey Derek, how are you?

Derek smiles warmly and they share a hug.

Derek: I'm well, thank you. How are you?

Niki: I guess I'm well too.

He chuckles and we all sit.

Niki: Geesh you are really easy on the eye, hey.

Derek: Thank you.

The waiter comes and Derek orders a beer. Niki then asks for another bottle of wine...

Derek glances at me and smiles lightly.

Derek: Drinking spree?

Me: Not really.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we share a kiss.

We stop, and Niki rolls her eyes.

Niki: So Derek, let's get down to it...

Derek: Oh shit...

I laugh.

Niki goes on to ask him lots of questions, while I chuckle away.

After about an hour, I think she is satisfied. We're now talking about random things.

Niki: Have you ever dated someone with a mental illness?

Derek shakes his head.

Niki: Hmkay...

Derek seems uncomfortable.

Niki: Don't be uncomfortable. We accepted a long time ago that Zi has this, and we pledged to never be ashamed or sugar coat things.

Derek: Oh...

He looks at Niki seriously.

Niki: I'm very happy for you two... Just know though, that if you hurt her, I'm right here, ready to fight...

Derek: I'm not safe, am I?

Me: First my dad, now this one... Askies...

He looks at me and smiles. We then share a kiss.

Niki's phone rings and she walks away...

Me: I hope she didn't overwhelm you.

He shakes his head.

Him: I like her... Straightforward.

Me: She's like a sister.

He nods.

Him: I love her for loving you... Very heart-warming.

I smile and he kisses me.

Him: I'm sorry about earlier.

Me: It's okay.

Him: Was a little disappointed.

I keep quiet.

Him: How are you?

Me: Honestly?

He nods.

Me: I'm relieved.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: The idea of having a baby is great, but realistically we're not ready. I think we still need to

spend more time together, and get to know each other, you know?

Him: Yes.

Me: I still want you all to myself.

Him: You do?

Me: I was going to be a very jealous mother.

He smiles.

Me: I would have a love-hate relationship with your child.

He laughs and I kiss him.

Me: I'm now on contraceptives...

Him: Good.

I smile.

Him: Now can we go home? I'd like to get drunk as well.

Me: Yaas!

He chuckles.

Me: I'll be drunk in love with you...

Niki comes back.

Niki: Do you guys want to com-

Me: Nope.

She rolls her eyes and Derek looks at me questioningly.

Me: She wants us to go paint the town red with her.

Derek: Oh... No, thank you.

Me: That's not our thing.

Niki: Starting to sound like an old married couple. Check yourselves, my loves.

We laugh.

Niki: See you...

She packs her things.

Niki: Derek, I hope to see you soon. It was lovely getting to know you.

Derek: Likewise.

He stands and they share a hug.

Niki: I'm guessing you'll cover the bill? Coz I mean, you have to score brownie points, fam.

Derek: I've got you.

Niki: You see, you? You is kind and you is important.

She blows me a kiss.

Niki: Byee!

Me: Bye.

She rushes out and I shake my head.

Derek: She reminds me of Ivy...

Me: Ewww my best friend is nothing like that girl.

He laughs and calls the waiter...

We're now heading to his place in Maboneng, and I am beyond thankful that he's feeling better...

Me: I think we've now established how to deal with conflict between us?

He reaches for my hand and nods.

Him: But don't give me too much space...

Me: Wow dramatic much?

Him: I did say you bewitched me...

I smile and squeeze his hand...

Universe, you is great!

INSERT 53 (Short Insert)

When we get to his apartment, we take a shower, and go to the lounge and watch some TV.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Him: I think we should move in together...

Me: Excuse me?

I look at him and he seems serious.

Me: Derek!

Him: What?

Me: Are you crazy??

Him: What's wrong?

Me: I am not moving in with you. That's like forbidden in our culture.

Him: Why? I want to be with you all the time.

I look at him in shock.

Him: And it's not like I'm not going to marry you.

I chuckle.

Me: You're going to marry me?

Him: You think I'm going to allow another man to be with you?

Me: Hehe.

Him: So you don't see yourself as my wife?

Me: Uhm... I'm not thinking that far.

Him: Well, too bad...

He kisses my forehead.

Him: We're in this till death.

Somehow, I believe him...

Me: But we can't move in together now.

Him: Why?

Me: Because!

He chuckles.

Him: I don't give a shit about traditions and shit. I want to move in with you because I love you and want to be with you every day.

Me: And my parents?

Him: What about them?

Me: Derek!

Him: They can't complain. I'm sure they're tired of you. You've been invading their space since

birth. You're 25 years old now.

I keep quiet.

Him: You want me to ask them?

Me: Don't even test me, Nkanyezi.

Him: I'm serious. I think it's the perfect way to get to know each other.

I groan and he laughs.

Him: Hmkay I'll drop it.

Me: Please.

He kisses my forehead.

Me: So about the Lwazi situation...

Him: Yes?

Me: I think my parents should be the ones who adopt her...

He nods.

Me: And she can stay with us.

Him: You're against orphanages?

Me: Definitely. I think it would harm me more than Lwazi.

He chuckles.

Me: I love her.

Him: And I love you even more for that.
You're amazing.

Me: Really? Silly old me?

He makes me reposition, so I can face him.

Him: This child will never forget what
you've done for her.

I smile and kiss him.

Me: Just like I won't forget what you've
done for me.

Him: What in the world have I done?

Me: You'll always be the guy who taught
me how to love again.

Him: Really? Silly old me?

We share a kiss and continue chatting...

Me: Oh BTW, your mother called me.

His body tenses up and he looks at me
seriously.

Me: She wants to meet...

Him: What?

Me: Even sending a driver, honey. Lavish
lifestyle!

Him: What the fuck does she want?

Me: I don't know. I hope she's not trying to shoo me away, because it won't work.
He smiles.

Him: It won't?

Me: Boo, I'm here to stay. Ain't no way imma let you go!
He laughs.

Him: Well that's comforting.

Me: Let me tell you something interesting about myself...

Him: I'm all ears.

Me: I used to beat people up.

Him: Huh?

I chuckle.

Me: I used to fight a lot.

Him: Fight who? Fight for what? Ziyanda!

Me: I couldn't control my anger. I used to have quick hands. Punch bitches left, right and centre.

His eyes pop out and I smile innocently.

Me: But that was back in varsity... I've outgrown fist fighting.

Him: What the fuck??

I chuckle.

Him: But why?

Me: Haibo Star, why do people fight? I had a lot to be mad about...

He looks at me in shock.

I laugh at him for a few minutes until he snaps out of it.

Me: But you can't possibly be shocked.

Him: I know you're strong and-

Me: Crazy.

He smiles.

Him: But I didn't think you'd physically hit people.

Me: Ya well...

Him: So you've stopped?

Me: Yes.

He chuckles.

Me: Ivy, tested me a bit... If I met her years ago, I would definitely beat her...

Him: Really?

Me: She rubs me the wrong way.

Him: Ohh yes, I remember. You didn't like her.

Me: Argh, so annoying.

He kisses me and spanks my butt.

Him: She also annoys me.

Me: Really?

Him: Your enemy is my enemy.

Me Yaas!

I kiss him.

Me: Can you believe she said that we have sexual tension?

Him: Who??

Me: Mina naye.

Him: Uyanya.

I giggle.

Me: Sizom'nyisa neh?

Him: Angasinyeli.

We share another kiss...

The following morning, I decided to wake up early and make breakfast for him.

I look at all my ingredients, and smile.

This will be amazing!

After about 2 hours, I manage to make bacon, eggs, toast, and hash browns.

I dish up for him and make my way to the bedroom, with a tray.

Me: Wakey wakeeey!

He opens his eyes and blinks.

Me: Wakeey!

He smiles and sits up.

Me: Morning, snore face.

Him: I do not snore!

Me: Well...

Him: You should be the last person talking, snorey.

Me: Fuck off, fam.

We laugh and I place the tray on his lap.

Him: Oh...

He smiles...

Him: Looks... Uhm... Very delicious.

Me: Really? Yaay!

He smiles.

Me: Eat up, soldier.

Him: I'd like to eat you first...

I blush.

Me: No, eat this first.

He sighs and takes a bite of the toast.

Him: Hmm...It's so...well-done.

I smile proudly.

He then takes a bite of a hash brown.

Him: Delicious...

Me: Try the bacon, it's to die for!

He takes a bite of some bacon and smiles.

Him: Stunning.

I smile and stand.

Me: Yaaas! And they said I couldn't cook!

Mama I made it!

I twerk playfully and within seconds, he pulls me and the tray has vanished.

Me: DHim:

You can't be shaking your ass like that, and expect me to focus on bacon and eggs.

I squeal and he chuckles.

Me: That was a joyful twerk...

Him: Joyful twerk?

Me: Yep.

He repositions and I find myself on top.

Him: How about you twerk right here...

I feel his erection between my thighs.

Me: Yaas!

INSERT 54

It's been a week, and Derek and I have been locked up in his place...

We're now having lunch on the balcony.

Me: Can I go home to my mom and dad, please?

He groans.

Me: Your pouting won't help anymore. I won't fall for it.

Derek: But, I don't want you to leave...
He sulks and I smile.

Me: As cute as you are right now, I refuse to fall for it.

He focuses on his food and I stand.

Me: Don't be pouty; I'll see you in a couple of days.

I walk in, and go to the kitchen. He follows me, and I move aside, so that he can wash the

dishes. Derek refuses to let me do anything when we're together. I volunteer to clean, he

refuses. I volunteer to cook, he refuses...

He insists that I need to "rest" and that doesn't even make sense.

He finishes cleaning up and then looks at me.

Derek: Uhamba nini?

Me: Today.

He sighs and nods.

Me: What's wrong?

Him: I love spending time with you.

He says that so innocently, that I smile.

Me: You're cute.

He wraps his arms around me and I melt.

Me: It'll only be a couple of days. I just don't want them to feel abandoned.

He nods lightly and kisses my cheek.

Him: You've become my drug.

Me: I don't know if that's a good thing.

Him: Not the toxic kind.

I smile and we share a kiss.

Him: Get ready...

Me: Okay.

I walk to the bedroom, to get some things...

As I am busy, something tells me to go to the lounge...I walk back there, and my jaw almost

drops when I see Derek's mom, Khwezi, sitting on the couch.

Derek and I had decided that I shouldn't even meet with her. I told him I was not in the mood to

deal with his mom, because let's face it, the woman is not that kind.

Me: Good afternoon.

Khwezi turns and looks at me from head to toe, expressionlessly.

Argh.

Khwezi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

Her: I am well, and you?

Me: I am well, thanks.

She stares at me and I squirm.

Derek walks to the lounge and looks at me with a smile on his face.

Derek: Ready to go, baby?

Me: Yes.

Khwezi: I find it rude that you decided to cancel on our meeting so suddenly.

Me: Oh... I a-

Derek: She was busy.

She looks at him sharply, and he seems unaffected.

Derek: Remind me why you're here?

I look at Derek in shock. I have never heard him address someone like this, especially his mom!

Khwezi: How disrespectful! Is this what she is teaching you?

Derek: Excuse me?

Khwezi: Is she influencing all this disrespect?

Derek: Mom, how may I help you? What I won't do is sit here and listen to you disrespect

Ziyanda.

At this point, I am watching a movie. This shit right here is deep!

Khwezi: Wow!

She looks at him in shock.

Derek: We really have to go... I thought we agreed on calling before we pitch at someone's place?

Khwezi: Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi!

Derek keeps quiet.

Khwezi: How dare you?!

She stands and walks to him. She lays a good slap, and I instantly walk to her.

She's not about

to hit my man! I don't care if she's his mama.

Khwezi: How dare you disrespect me?!

How dare you?!

Derek rubs his cheek lightly and looks at her unemotionally. I have never seen him like this! This

is not my Nkanyezi! This woman is bringing out a side of him I am not familiar with!

Khwezi: I raise you, and then you talk to me like I'm some whore in the streets?!

Derek keeps quiet.

She slaps him again.

Me: Mrs Ngidi!

She looks at me and I shudder. She also looks unfamiliar at this point. The class and poise is gone with the wind.

Khwezi: You, shut up!

Me: Why are you doing this? I haven't bee-

I feel a piercing hot sensation on my cheek, and I swear to the Universe, I lose it. Did this woman really slap me?

As I try to reach for her, Derek is already blocking my way. He wraps his arms around me, and I hear Khwezi throwing insults left, right and centre.

What the hell is this woman's problem? She physically assaults me, and then goes on to do the most verbally? What is wrong with her?

Derek: Ziyanda...

At this point, I have completely zoned out.

Derek: Ziyanda...

I finally snap out of it, and walk to the bedroom. I throw myself on the bed, and count to a 100.

This woman is still out there throwing insults. I learnt today that I am a peasant whore, who sleeps with men, just to get a taste of the good life.

Really? Is this why she wanted to meet with me? To insult me over mimosas? I must have dozed off, because I feel Derek planting kisses on my face. I open my eyes and groan.

Derek: Finally.

He plants a kiss on my eye lids, and I snuggle closer to him.

Me: How long have I been asleep?

Him: About 2 hours.

I inhale his scent and my body relaxes further.

Me: Where is your psycho mom?

Him: Threw her out.

Me: Threw her out??

He grunts.

Me: What was that about?

Him: She's a crazy woman.

Me: Well duuh.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Him: I'm sorry you had to go through that.

Me: She actually slapped me!

I look up at him in disbelief and he smiles.

Him: Your reaction was priceless...

Me: The nerve!

I snuggle and inhale him again.

Me: Fucked up.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I thought you guys had a good relationship?

Him: Mxm.

I want to know more, but I don't think he wants to talk. Also, I'm not in the mood, myself. I'm a bit drained.

Him: Are you still going home?

I shake my head, and I know he is smiling.

Me: Tomorrow.

He repositions me and I find myself on top of him.

Him: No one will ever disrespect you, so long as I live.

I blush.

Him: I don't give a shit if it's a family member or a random person. No one will disrespect you.

Me: You don't have to defend me...

Him: I know you can fight your own battles, but I'm not going to tolerate bullshit when it comes

to you. She really tested me today.

Me: I'm okay.

I kiss him.

Me: Has she always felt this way about me?

Him: Since that fundraising lunch.

Me: Wow. Just because I'm poor?

Him: Mxm.

Me: How shallow...

Him: She's been bothering me since...

Me: She wants you to end things with me?

He nods.

Him: As if I'm some teenager who'll follow whatever she says... Imagine...

I sigh.

Me: Well that's unfortunate...

Him: Let's stop talking about her.

Me: Okay.

Him: And let's talk about us...

Me: Us?

Him: I really want you to move in with me.

Me: Derek!

Him: I'm serious.

I keep quiet.

I don't want to tell him that part of me also wants to live with him... I've been thinking about it, and I kinda get what he's saying. But I know that shit ain't right.

Me: Let's date for a while.

Him: I just think that...

He keeps talking...

I start dry humping him slowly...

I need to distract him, so he can stop talking about this living situation...

He falls for it...

Soon, we're rolling around the bed, making out...

INSERT 55

Melinda looks at me and smiles.

Melinda: I'm happy to see you!

Me: Me too!

We get to her "office" and sit on the single couches opposite each other.

Melinda: How have you been?

I sigh and try to find an appropriate word to describe how I feel...

Melinda is my psychiatrist... I've been under her wing for a couple of years now. She's the only

person in my life who truly knows and understands what I go through. She has helped me a lot!

Me: Hmm I think I feel content.

She raises an eyebrow and smiles.

Her: Content?

Me: Yes, a huge part of me is at ease.

She smiles and nods.

Me: A lot has happened since I last saw you.

Her: Really?

Me: Yep.

I begin to tell her about Derek, and how our “love story” began.

She listens attentively, as usual, and I find myself talking nonstop. She likes it when I’m like this,

considering how closed-off I am.

After a while, I finish up, and she nods.

Her: So you’ve found love?

Me: I think so... Yes...

She smiles.

Her: You look and sound happy. That is great.

Me: I guess...

I sigh.

Me: I have a couple of things bothering me though.

Her: Go on...

Me: He knows about my issues.

Her: You told him?

Me: Yes.

Her: How did that conversation go?

Me: Uhm it wasn't really a conversation.

We were just having a deep moment and I briefly

mentioned some of the things I went through.

Her: So it wasn't a full-on conversation?

I nod.

Her: And does he know about your anxiety?

Me: Yes. He has seen me go through a few attacks, but they weren't that bad.

She nods.

Me: Do you think I should have a conversation with him?

She nods slowly.

Her: From what you've told me, it seems like this is a serious relationship. I think it's only fair, for you and him, to be on the same page about you.

I nod.

Her: People have a lot of misconceptions about depression. Firstly, they think there's only one type of depression, whereas there are various types. Secondly, they think depression is as simple as feeling sad. They think you're just going through the blues, but they aren't aware that

the symptoms can even manifest themselves physically. Additionally, they think antidepressants are the easy answer, and that they solve the illness instantly. They have no idea that it takes time to find the right medication for each individual- it's trial and error.

Me: Or that people are always depressed for a reason.

She nods.

Her: They always need a definitive source to explain the illness. Depression can be genetic; it can be caused by no reason at all.

However, on the other side of the coin, going through something difficult or tragic can cause depressive symptoms without you actually being

depressed...

Me: I guess that distinction between being depressed vs. deeply sad is confusing...

Her: Yes, but depression is an interior struggle, rather than one that's on the surface. You relentlessly feel empty.

I nod.

Her: Another misconception is that it's obvious when people are depressed.

Other people are pros at hiding it. That's why it's more of an interior struggle...

Me: But the one misconception that annoys me the most is that depressed people can snap out of it. People think it's possible to regulate your "mood swings" if you "try harder" but they don't understand that it's not that simple.
She sighs.

Her: So does Derek understand all of this?

Me: We haven't talked about it.

Her: This is why it is important to have the conversation. Do you remember how confused your

parents were at first? They didn't understand depression, and they didn't even know how to support you.

Me: Those were some dark days...

I sigh as I reflect back...

Her: It took them getting plenty of information, and understanding how to support you. Look at how much progress they've made!

Me: True...

She looks at me intently.

Me: I'll talk to him.

Her: Explain what Bipolar Disorder is, and fill him in on your type, which is type 2.

He'll then

understand that your “mood swings” are not just based on the fact that you’re a woman, or whatever misconception there is about Bipolar.

Me: Okay, I’ll try.

Her: I’ll give you all the necessary information, for him. I cannot emphasise enough the importance of being educated on mental illnesses. It’s not fair for you to surround yourself with people who don’t understand what you are going through, because those relationships won’t benefit you... They’ll constantly be frustrated towards you, and you will also be frustrated, because there is a lack of understanding. I nod and she smiles.

Me: So I shouldn’t move in with him?

She chuckles and sighs.

Her: Well, you two still need to know each other.

Me: And I think being that close to each other will help us figure each other out.

She nods.

Me: Is it weird that I already want to move in with him?

Her: It's what you want...

I sigh.

Me: I just know that he's the right one, you know?

She smiles.

Me: But I hear you, he needs to be schooled first.

We laugh and continue talking...

Derek: I've missed you.

He squeezes me and I inhale his scent.

Me: Me too.

He lets go of me and looks at me weirdly, like he's uncomfortable.

Him: Uhm how did it go?

I laugh.

Me: It went well.

He sighs.

Me: You can stop acting weird. I don't come back from my psychiatrist feeling down. She has a very good effect on me.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Me: She's amazing. Helps me figure out a lot of shit.

Him: That's good.

Me: Uh-huh.

He wraps his arms around my shoulders and we walk to Mike's Kitchen. We are led to our table, and then sit.

Me: We talked about a lot of things...

He looks at me intently.

Me: Her name is Melinda, by the way.

He nods.

Me: We even talked about you.

Him: Me?

He looks nervous.

Me: Yes.

He hesitates.

Me: She suggests that we go our separate ways, because we're not compatible.

I watch as he processes this.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: She says, from her perspective, our relationship will never work.

Him: What?

I sigh.

Him: Why the fuck would she say that? Is she even allowed to tell you that?

I try to keep a straight face because I can see that he is losing it. I don't know if he wants to

break down and cry, or he wants to drag this table and cause a scene.

Me: What do you mean is she allowed to tell me that?

He stands and hesitates. He seems to be going through the most.

Me: Derek?

Him: Are you... Are you breaking up with me?

Okay. I didn't expect him to react like this.

Him: Ziyanda? Are you ending things?

Me: Derek-

Him: I need some air.

We're outside, mind you.

Me: Woooah bhuti, don't even move.

I quickly stand and walk to his side.

Me: I was just joking.

He stares at me, and I think he's going to cry.

Me: Derek! I was just joking!

I wrap my arms around him.

He is silent for a while.

Me: Nkanyezi.

He looks at me.

Him: You were joking?

I nod slowly. This is definitely a sick joke.

I feel bad.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Why?

Me: I'm sorry! I didn't think you'd take it this badly!

Oh my goodness, he really looks like he got bumped by a bus.

He keeps quiet for a while and I squeeze him.

Me: Nkanyezi, askies!

He sighs and nods.

Him: Don't joke like that...

Me: First and last time!

He wraps his arms around me and we hug.

Me: I'm sorry.

He nods and we let go of each other and sit.

Him: I need a drink.

I smile and he grunts.

Him: I was about to have a major breakdown. Fuck you, actually.

I giggle.

Me: Geesh!

Him: I was about to go to that Melinda, and ask for a consultation.

Me: Aww!

He smiles.

Him: Please don't joke like that...

Me: Okay.

Our drinks come...

Me: Anyway, we did discuss you.

Him: And?

Me: I think she has an understanding of how much I love you.

Him: Really? How much do you love me?

Me: I love you so much, that I'm even considering moving in with you...

His eyes pop out and his jaw drops.

Him: What??

I sigh.

Me: I'm considering it. I'm not confirming.

He smiles brightly.

Him: Are you serious?

I nod.

Me: However, you still need to know about me, my triggers and shit.

He becomes serious.

Me: It won't be easy.

He reaches for my hand and squeezes it.

Him: Like I always say, I'm not going anywhere.

I smile.

Him: I'm more than willing to educate myself, so I can support you properly.

Me: That means a lot to me.

Him: I'd do anything for you...

The waiter eventually comes with our food, and I stuff my face...

INSERT 56

We're now getting ready to go to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place for lunch. It's now the 23rd of December.

I've been so caught up in Derek's spell, that I completely forgot about other people- especially his friends.

As we're heading out, my phone rings, and it's my mom.

Me: Hello, mommy.

Mom: Hi, love. Are you spending Christmas here?

Me: Hawu, why are you asking me such? Of course I am.

Her: Angithi you've been hiding with that boyfriend of your...

Me: Mama!

She laughs.

Her: Hai sisi I'm just saying... When are we meeting him?

Me: Uhm...

Her: Invite him for Christmas lunch.

Me: No!

She laughs.

Me: Bye!

I quickly hang up and grunt. Derek, who is focusing on the road, glances at me.

Him: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

He nods and focuses on the road again.

We finally get to the Mzinyathi's...

As soon as we get in, I hear Liwa's bold laugh.

I really missed these people, weirdly enough.

As soon as I see Nomvuyo, I squeal excitedly.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Zizi!

We share a long hug and she plants a kiss on my cheek.

Nomvuyo: You are such a ghost yazi!

Me: Excuse me?? You're the ghost here!

She laughs.

Me: So how was Thailand?

Her: Great. We got to relax a bit.

Me: Must be nice.

Her: Hai suka. Derek is going to take you wherever you want. Aim high ke nawe, not Durban and shit.

Me: Wow!

We laugh and I see Nolwazi, sitting alone. She seems to be on the phone.

Nomvuyo: Work related.

Me: Oh... Are the twins here?

She smiles and nods

Me: Did they end up deciding on names?

Nomvuyo: Khulekani and Simosihle.

Me: Aww!

Nomvuyo: Too sweet.

Me: Beautiful names.

Just then, Nolwazi walks to us and my jaw drops. Where did all the weight go?

Me: Nolwazi, you look amazing!

She smiles sweetly and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: Thank you, Zi. I've been going crazy.

Me: Geesh.

Nolwazi: Come see my babies.

She looks at me excitedly, and for once, I am also excited- genuinely. Phela the last time I saw

her, I was stressed about my potential pregnancy.

She leads me to one of the guest bedrooms and we walk to the bed. Of course Dean is watching over them.

Me: Hi, Dean.

He looks at me and smiles.

Geesh he also looks good.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Him: I'm good.

He looks at Nolwazi lovingly and they share one of those eye contact moments where you just

look at your person, and realise how lucky you are. Yes, I know these moments very well.

Me: Vuvu tells me you named them Khulekani, and Simosihle. Who named them?

Nolwazi: My dad.

Me: How sweet. I love them.

I walk towards the bed, and Simosihle, the girl, is now up. She is groaning and squirming.

Dean: This one is an attention seeker.

Me: I can tell...

He looks down at his daughter and smiles.

How cute.

Dean: You can take her.

Me: Okay.

I carefully reach down and take her. She smiles and sneezes.

Me: Hey you...

Argh she smells so good. She stops squirming and relaxes in my arms.

Me: She loves being held?

Nolwazi: Yep. Her brother, on the other hand, is always grumpy.

Me: Just like his dad.

I regret that as soon as I say it. I thought I said it in my head.

Nolwazi: He is definitely like his daddy.

Dean: Ohho.

He gets up.

Dean: I'll be downstairs.

Nolwazi nods and Dean walks out.

Me: He's so overprotective.

Nolwazi: You have no idea.

Me: It's cute.

Out of nowhere, Simosihle starts crying, and Nolwazi takes her. I watch as she sits on the bed and breastfeeds her.

Nolwazi: Simo is really a problem, hey. I smile.

Nolwazi: Everyone has concluded that she will be just like Ivy.

I try not to roll my eyes. These people must try by all means to raise this child to be a normal citizen, and not that train wreck, Ivy.

Nolwazi: They also get along...

Simo calms down, and is asleep in 5 minutes.

As she puts her down, Khulekani starts squirming as well, but he doesn't cry. He moans quietly,

and I see myself taking him.

I think I'm in love with him, not the diva. I give him kisses and he smiles.

Me: I'm officially in love.

Nolwazi: He's adorable.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

Nolwazi: Hey, Derek.

Derek: How are you? You look amazing.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

He walks to me.

Me: D, he's so cute.

Derek looks at Khulekani and smiles.

I give him to him and he also gets lost in his spell.

Nolwazi is just sitting there like a proud mom. I'm sure her life is complete- considering how tough her journey has been.

After a while, Dean walks back in.

Dean: Lunch is ready...

Nolwazi: Great!

Dean: I'm glad it's your cheat day.

They both chuckle, as if that was some kind of secret joke.

Dean: Let's go.

Derek walks out with Khulekani and leaves us there.

Me: I think he's a bit obsessed.

Dean: Who wouldn't? My genes are fucken phenomenal.

Me: Wow!

Nolwazi: You just had to make this about you!

He chuckles and we all walk out, Nolwazi is now carrying a sleeping Simo.

We get to the table that is set outside, and I am shocked by the crowd. I thought this would be a

small nyana lunch, but now there are too many people.

Nomvuyo: Let me introduce you to everyone, before you run off.

I grunt and she takes my hand.

Nomvuyo: Okay, so you know Malusi and Joe. This is Gabi, Joe's wife.

I look at Gabi, and I try not to gape.

She looks like a cast member of Real Housewives of Beverly Hills. She's a typical gorgeous

woman who looks and smells like money: hair nails, shoes, bag, everything...

Gabi: Hey, Zi. I'm glad we're finally meeting you. I've been hearing about you! How am I supposed to respond to that?

Me: Uhm hello.

She smiles sweetly and focuses on her husband, who smiles at me as well.

Gabi: Baby, so as I was saying, that bitch of an assistant has to go...

Oh wow...

I look at Malusi.

Me: Hi.

Malusi: Unjani Ms Dlamini?

Me: Ngiyaphila, and how are you?

Malusi: Holding up...

Nomvuyo: And this is Dean's mother,
Lindelwa.

I look at the woman and smile. I mean,
they don't really look alike.

Me: Hi ma.

Lindelwa: Hi, baby. How are you? We've
heard a lot about you.

Kanti?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

Nomvuyo: Where's Zimi?

Lindelwa: She had to answer a call...

I then said hello to Thandeka, and greeted
Ivy briefly. I was shocked at how quiet she
was. She

seems to be mama's girl today, because
she is clinging to mommy dearest.

This was a big round table.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hey, Liwa.

We share a hug.

Liwa: How have you been? It's been a while.

Me: I'm great, and you?

Liwa: I'm fantastic. Got to relax a bit, you know.

Me: Hmm.

I sit next to Derek, who is still holding Khulekani.

Me: Look at you...

He smiles and drinks some water.

Derek: He's cute.

Me: Hmm.

Overall, it's a good vibe.

I stand to go to the bathroom...

I go to one of the many guestrooms, and use the ensuite bathroom.

Woman: You don't understand...

Who is this? I've never heard this voice before.

Woman: No, you don't understand. This will break my family...

Oh gosh. I know for a fact that I am not supposed to hear any of this. What am I supposed to do

now? I can't walk out, she'll see me. I decide to not flush.

I'm now sitting on the toilet seat, waiting for this woman to finish her conversation, and leave.

Woman: If these kids find out, they will hate me. I will lose them forever.

Which kids?

She sounds so calm.

Woman: No, Zweli, I am not going to ruin my family.

She is quiet for a while...

Woman: No, they've built great lives for themselves. You're taking us many steps back...

She is quiet.

Woman: Zweli, no...

There is silence for a while.

Woman: You don't seem to understand the depth of this situation...

I didn't even realise that I had stopped breathing.

Woman: I'll see you soon... Goodbye...

I hear silence...

After about 5 minutes, I open the door and take a peak. She's not here. I flush the toilet and

wash my hands. I then make my way out...

When I get to the table, they're already having their starters.

I sit next to Derek and he is too focused on Khulekani.

Gosh.

Nomvuyo: Zizi, this is Zimkitha, my mom.

I look at Zimkitha.

My stomach churns.

She smiles sweetly.

Zimkitha: I'm glad to finally meet you.

The voice. It's definitely her...

I try to keep a straight face.

Universe, why do you always come for me? Hai man!

INSERT 57

We're now having dessert...

Nomvuyo is quite the cook. Maybe I should partner up with her, so I can cook for Derek as well.

Nomvuyo: So tell me, Malusi. How is Nandi?

Nomvuyo already informed me about Malusi's situation. He's basically as divorced serial cheater.

Malusi: She's okay.

Zimkitha: Do you see yourself getting married again?

Malusi: Yes.

Nolwazi: Really?

Malusi nods.

Liwa: To whom?

Malusi: Nandipha.

Everyone laughs and he grunts.

Nolwazi: You expect her to marry you again?

Malusi: Laugh all you want... Nandi is my soul mate.

Zimkitha: So what's your plan?

Malusi: I'm giving her space, for now.

Dean: I don't think you should.

Nolwazi: What do you mean?

Dean: If we were in the same position, I would follow you till you give in.

Nolwazi: Oh wow!

Nomvuyo: It's not that simple.

Thandeka: You can't cheat continuously and then expect her to not get hurt.

Dean: I think this fool has learnt from his mistakes.

Me: Cheating is unforgiveable though.

Everyone looks at me and I keep a straight face. I may be a bit intimidated right now, but I don't care. Cheating is bad, and I'm prepared to shout it out loud!

Me: It's unfair to expect her to forgive and forget. Did anyone force you to cheat? There is silence. An awkward silence.

Me: You're selfish.

Everyone is staring at me. Lord, what have I done?

Me: You were married to her. You chose to spend the rest of your life with her. Deal with the consequences and leave her alone.

I want to stop talking, but this champagne is really loosening me up.

Nomvuyo: I agree 100%. Leave her alone.

Thandeka: I would kill Vusi if he cheated on me.

Nolwazi: You messed up. Instead of being in denial, be a man and be accountable for your actions.

Thandeka: As far as I am concerned, you were a bad husband.

Zimkitha: Haibo can we not attack him though? He regrets messing up.

We all look at Zimkitha. She can't possibly be sympathetic to this selfish man!

Zimkitha: He made a mistake-

Nolwazi: MistakeS.

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: Let's not sit here and pretend we're perfect.

Thandeka: No one is saying we're perfect.

We're just not going to sit here and pretend as if

Malusi respected his vows. His mistakes ruined his family, and he needs to take responsibility.

Zimkitha: But who says he's not? He is regretful, isn't he?

We keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I don't condone what he did. However, I'm not going to sit here and attack him every chance I get. That's counterproductive. We need to help him move on as well, so he can live properly, having learnt from his mistakes. At this point, I'm just over this conversation. I have decided that I don't like this Malusi guy. In my eyes, he's a grown ass man who asked a woman to spend the rest of his life with him. Now why the hell would he turn around and cheat? Selfish. Malusi stands and walks away.

Liwa: Okay, I get that we're opinionated, but can we also be empathetic? I don't think sitting

here as a family, attacking him, will help.

Dean: We all know he's wrong, so there's no use pointing it out.

Me: Well it's clear that he is struggling to acknowledge what he did. And for me, that means he

is not remorseful. He's just sorry that he was caught and dumped.

Zimkitha looks at me seriously. She doesn't scare me one bit. Nxaa I could easily expose her shady ass in front of her people.

I look at Derek and he is just looking at me coolly. I think he has figured me out a bit. He knows

that I have my "mbokodo" moments, and that I get fired up when I'm in that zone.

I decide to back off. These people are not ready to see my crazy side. However, I'm glad it is clear that I don't condone cheating. I hope Derek was listening, because if he even attempts such, kuzonyiwa straight. He will run barefoot to the walls of Jericho. Nolwazi changes the subject, and we all move on swiftly with no beef... I feel Derek's hand on mine and I look at him. He smiles and I smile back.

Derek: I love it when you're feisty.

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles and winks at me. I honestly just want him inside me 24/7.

Malusi comes back and we continue chatting, as if nothing happened. I appreciate these people's maturity. They don't entertain awkward moments.

Liwa: Where's Mdu?

My whole body tenses. I avoid Derek, because I know he is also tense.

Nolwazi: He's out and about.

Thandeka: We think he's in love somewhere.

Ivy: He better not spend my parents' money on random bitches.

Everyone laughs.

I don't find that funny. Why is she talking?

Who asked her for her opinion? Because I sure as hell

don't value it. I had even forgotten about her.

We continue chatting for a while...

Good varbz...

Once we're done eating, the chats continue in the lounge, and outside.

I'm standing with Nolwazi by the garden.

Nolwazi: When my husband introduced a second wife, I really thought my world was ending.

Oh gosh.

She sighs and smiles.

Nolwazi: But look at me now, I managed to move on.

Me: Have you forgiven them?

Nolwazi: I've forgiven Kwanele... He was just so fragile after everything.

Me: Really?

Nolwazi: His mother is the one who infiltrated everything, and he was just a pawn in her chess game.

Me: And the second wife?

Nolwazi: I don't know...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: She allowed herself to be used.

Me: Maybe she was forced?

Nolwazi: I have avoided thinking about her. It's just better that way.

She shakes her head lightly and then smiles.

Nolwazi: But, I see you and Derek are going strong.

Me: Quite.

Nolwazi: You guys are cute.

Me: Hmm...

Just then, someone clears their throat, and it's Zimkitha.

Argh.

Zimkitha: Can I have a word with you?

Me: Me?

She nods.

Nolwazi walks off and I am left alone in the lion's den.

She looks at me intently and then smiles.

Zimkitha: Derek really loves you...

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: Do you also feel the same?

Me: Yes.

She nods.

Zimkitha: Well, I'm happy that he has found someone special. I love him dearly.

Me: Like his mother?

She chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: They're all my babies. I'd die and kill for them...

I keep quiet.

Suddenly, my heart is beating fast. This woman really freaks me out.

Zimkitha: Take care of him, okay?

Me: Okay.

She smiles sweetly, and walks away.

I'm not even going to entertain what I'm thinking. I refuse!

I miss Nkanyezi. Where is he?

As I'm about to walk back inside the house, I see him approaching me. He gets to me and I

wrap my arms around him.

Me: Missed you.

He kisses my forehead and stares at me.

Derek: You okay?

I nod and he smiles.

Derek: Would you like something to drink?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm too full.

He chuckles.

Me: I think I'm going to cook something for you tonight... I have a great idea.

He clears his throat.

Derek: Oh... You do?

I nod excitedly.

Derek: But, I'm so full...

Me: No, silly! You'll be hungry later on.

He plants a kiss on my lips and I melt.

Just then, my phone rings and I answer it.

Me: Mama?

Mom: Hi, baby.

Me: What's up?

Mom: I cooked such a lovely meal... Please come for dinner?

Me: Uhm sure...

Mom: And bring Derek.

Me: But I

She hangs up and I stare at my phone in shock.

Derek: Zi?

I look at him.

Derek: Is everything okay?

Me: Uhm... My mom...

He looks at me intently.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: Uhm, she wants me to come home for dinner.

Derek looks at me sadly.

Me: With you...

His eyes pop out and he smiles.

Derek: Finally!

Me: No! Not finally!

He chuckles and hugs me.

Derek: I guess you'll cook another time, angel... I'm having dinner with the future-in-laws.

I groan and he takes my hand and leads me back to the house.

Like, really? Universe, why you gotta do me like this? I thought we were on the same page!

I suddenly feel like vomiting. That's how anxious I am about this "dinner."

Derek, on the other hand, is beaming.

INSERT 58 (Short Insert)

It's now around 4pm, and everyone is getting ready to leave. Derek is now glued to one of the megabytes.

Dean: Have your own kids and leave mine alone.

Derek: Mxm.

Derek kisses little Simosihle, and I swear the little diva is in heaven. She's giggling away.

Thanda amadoda.

Thandeka: I'm afraid these kids are going to be spoiled rotten.

Nolwazi: I mean, I'm already struggling to keep up with the gifts.

Ivy: How about they send money instead of gifts? It's not like we need all the shit they're buying.

Everyone laughs.

Mxm.

Dean: And I guess the money has to be transferred to you?

Ivy: Of course!

I look at Derek, and he knows it's time to go. He gives Dean his baby, and clears his throat.

Derek: We have to get going... I have dinner plans with Ziyanda's parents.

Everyone gasps.

Really, Derek?

Nolwazi: That's amazing!

Zimkitha: When are we meeting them?

Uhm excuse me? I don't want this gangster woman in my mommy and daddy's house.

Derek: See you later, people.

Dean: Make a good impression ke nawe.

Liwa: Ungasihlazi.

Derek: What the hell is wrong with you people? Am I kid?

Liwa: Well, you are the youngest, so...

Oh shit. I don't know this man's age!

Heeeh!

Derek: Mxm, baby, let's go.

Me: Goodbye, everyone. Thank you for a lovely afternoon.

Derek goes to the bathroom.

They all say goodbye, and I hug them.
When I get to Dean, he wraps his arm
around my
shoulders.

Dean: I'll walk you out...

Me: Lucky me.

He chuckles, and we walk out.

Dean: Derek tells me you're considering
moving in with him?

Me: He did?

Dean: Well we're close...

Me: Hmm I see...

He chuckles.

I feel like I'm being charmed by this man,
and I thought I didn't like him? What's
happening?

Dean: So you want to move in with him?

Me: I think so...

Dean: He's a great guy, if you haven't
noticed.

I chuckle.

Dean: Move in with him.

Me: Are you now our counsellor?

Dean: Shit, I'd be excellent, right?

Me: You don't strike me as stable.

Dean: Excuse me?

I chuckle.

Dean: I'm just overprotective of the people I love.

Me: I see...

Dean: Stop trying to change the subject.

Me: I'm not!

We get to the car and stand there, with his broad arm still around me. I'm surprised I haven't melted.

Dean: So we agree that you're going to move in?

Me: I'll think about it...

Dean: And then he'll resign and work somewhere else.

Me: What?!

Dean: Sisi, I know you're not that stupid.

Me: Bhuti, I don't need your negativity right now.

He chuckles and nods.

Dean: Alright then.

I grunt.

Dean: How are your parents? Are they extreme?

I laugh.

Me: Why?

Derek: We need to know... We might be meeting them soon.

Me: Shame.

Dean: You obviously don't know us. We are persistent people.

Me: Dean, you're doing the most right now.

Derek walks to us and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yep.

He then looks at Dean.

Derek: Fuck off.

Dean: Hai suka.

I look at both of them and smile. They really are close, and it's cute.

But still, I push aside these thoughts that are bothering me. I refuse to even go there.

Derek: Let's go, baby.

Me: Bye Langa.

Dean: Bye Mrs Ngidi.

Me: Haike. I'm too expensive... My surname will not be removed by just love.

They both laugh.

Me: Wena when are you marrying Nolwazi?

Dean: Heyi, mind your own business.

I laugh.

Me: So our business is open for all?

Dean: Yes.

Me: Wow.

Derek: Vele when are you planning on proposing?

Dean: Her 30th birthday.

Me: When is it?

Dean: In a month.

Me: Really?!

He nods.

Me: Can I help??

Dean glances at Derek and they laugh quietly.

Derek: And she's quite good with secrets.

Dean: I don't know if that a good, or bad thing.

Me: Definitely good, in your case.

He nods.

Dean: I shall contact you.

Me: I already have plans! Hmmyghad!

Derek: Uhm, okay, baby. Let's calm down.

Me: Call me!

Dean: Hehe.

Derek: We have to go.

I groan loudly.

Dean: I didn't know you were so dramatic.

I gasp.

Me: Silly old me?

He chuckles.

Derek: Baby, let's go.

Me: Derek, I'm bonding with Dean. Leave me alone!

Dean: No, you're trying to pass time...

I really don't want to go home right now.

Me: Also, you had a few drinks, Derek.

You can't drink and driv-

Derek: Sisi... Don't try me.

I gasp as he pulls me and opens the door for me.

Me: Star, I don't wanna!

He ignores me and closes the door. He chats to Dean for a minute, and then gets in and starts

the car. I wave goodbye, and we drive off...

Me: I need to pee.

I sink on my seat and he ignores me.

We're now back at his place, because he insists on freshening up.

Me: I'm not freshening up for anyone.

He ignores me and goes to the bathroom.

Mxm he is so excited. Like, I really don't get it.

After 10 minutes, he's back, naked.

Me: I'm horny.

Derek: Now is really not the time.

My eyes pop and he lotions himself.

Me: Wow!

I sulk and he continues to ignore me.

Derek: I'm not going to allow you to sabotage this shit. I know you're trying to distract me.

Thankfully, I can spot the Devil, before he attacks.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles and gets dressed.

He looks so good though.

Me: I miss seeing you in formal clothes though.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: I'll have a fashion show for you later.

I giggle and watch him finish up.

After a while, he's done, and looks fresh.

Sexy and casual. My man, people!

Him: Ready to go?

Me: No.

He pulls me up and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Whatever. Let's just go.

He kisses me and we walk out...

We're now parked outside my house. The gate is even open...

Just then, my phone rings and it's my mom.

I answer.

Me: Ma?

Mom: Tell him to park inside.

I groan.

Mom: See you now now.

Gosh.

I end the call, and look at Derek.

Me: Ngena.

He does as he is told...

I sigh and look at him.

Me: I guess this is it...

He nods and smiles.

Derek: Everyone loves me, Ziyanda. This is standard.

Me: Wow!

He laughs and takes my hand.

Derek: But I love you more than anything.

Me: Yeah yeah whatever.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go...

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

Universe, I'm really not a fan of you right now. I hope you redeem yourself as time goes by.

Prove your loyalty, fam!

INSERT 59

As we walk inside the house, my whole body is just numb. This whole thing is just making me

very uncomfortable. I've never introduced a man to my parents, especially a man who seems to

have stolen my heart (corny, I know).

We get to the lounge, and find my dad.

He is watching the news.

He looks up and I struggle to read his expression.

Derek is right behind me. I'm not even going to turn around and figure out what he is going

through. Every man for himself...

Dad: Oh... You're here already?

I keep quiet.

Derek: Sawubona, baba.

Dad smiles and looks at Derek.

Dad: Yebo, Ngidi. How are you?

He even knows his surname? How? Did they really have a fat chat that day?

My stomach growls.

Derek: How are you?

Derek walks past me, and I watch as he shakes my dad's hands.

Gross.

Dad: I'm good... Just trying to make a living, that's all.

They both laugh.

What in the world is happening?

Dad: Have a seat...

Derek: Thank you.

He walks back to me, takes my hand, and pulls me to the couch.

Really? So he's bold enough to hold my hand in front of my dad? This man.

Dad: Ziyanda.

I look at my dad. Now, I feel like the intruder. Lord!

Dad: You are awfully quiet. U-right?

Me: I'm tired.

Dad: Hmm I see December is treating you well.

I keep quiet and focus on the TV.

I feel like a school girl. I feel like I'm in trouble and I'm waiting for my parents to scold me.

Mom: Heeeh!

Oh gosh. I really don't need this right now.

Mom: Heheeee!

We all look at her. Derek thinks I'm dramatic? He is about to understand that the drama runs deep in the fam-bam.

Mom: Is the Uber driver here??

She walks to us and looks at Derek. I also decide to finally look at Derek, and the man seems to be chilled. He is flashing that beautiful smile of his that sends waves of shivers all over my body.

Dad: The Uber driver is here indeed.

Mom: Hmm.

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello ma.

Mom: Wathula nje sisi? U-right?

Me: I'm fine.

She looks at my dad and they chuckle.

Mom: So you have a personal Uber driver?

Argh.

Mom: Hello, Uber driver.

Universe, please swallow me? I swear we'll be best friends from now onwards!

Derek: Hello, ma. How are you?

Mom: Hai siyazama yazi. How are you?

You sure look good...

Derek chuckles and I feel his hand on mine. I slide my hand away from him. Can he not be so

forward though?? Uphapha too much.

Derek: I'm well, thank you.

Mom then looks at me and smiles.

Mom: Are you okay? You look like you are ready to collapse.

Me: Maybe I should.

My parents laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: And let the poor driver hold your hand!

Really??

I stand.

I need to get out of here.

I walk to the bathroom, and lock myself in there... I feel so awkward.

After about 5 minutes, I walk back to the lounge and sit. They are having a conversation about what's happening in the news. I just zone them out, because I can't deal.

Mom: Let me prepare the table...

She stands and does her thing.

Derek and my dad are having a fat chat about the currency and whatever.

Eventually, my mom walks back and tells us that everything is ready. We all get up and go to the table, and sit.

She really did the most, hey. This is a feast phela.

She dishes up for dad and herself. Derek then dishes for himself and me.

Mom: I see you've discovered how much of a baby she is...

Derek: Definitely.

Me: Wow.

Dad: More like spoilt.

Me: Wow.

Mom: I guess we're partly to blame... We didn't torture her that much while growing up.

Derek: Only child privilege?

They all laugh, and I'm just sitting here, on some...?? Dis tew much.

Derek finishes up.

Me: Thanks.

Mom: I wish I also had a driver who dishes up for me...

Me: Your husband cooks slaughtered chickens... I think you're well on your way.

They laugh and I grunt.

Mom: She is so tense, man. Angisathandi.

Me: You're all making me uncomfortable.

Mom: Really?

Me: Yes!

Dad: Uzoba strong.

I groan and they laugh.

Mom: Let's pray first...

Dad: Derek?

Derek: Sure.

We all bow our heads and listen to Derek say a short prayer.

We all say amen, and begin eating.

Mom: So what do you do besides drive an Uber, Derek?

Derek: I'm a principal at a primary school.

Mom: Really? Which school?

Derek: The same school as Ziyanda.

Mom: Haibo! Are you serious? Kanti where did you two meet?

Derek: We met a while ago... We both didn't know that we'd be working together.

Mom: Interesting... Manje niqale nini ukujola?

I just want to disappear, honestly.

Derek: Shortly after she started working there.

Mom: Yoh so isn't that illegal? Phela my child could lose her job!

Derek chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: I'd never allow that.

Mom: Hmm.

Dad: What did you study?

Derek: Accounting.

Mom: Is it?

Derek: Yes, I am a qualified Chartered Accountant.

Dad: Interesting... So what made you change lanes?

Derek: I wasn't happy. I had to change, and do what I love.

Mom: So you decided to do education?

Derek: Yes, that was probably one of the best decisions I have ever made in my life.

Mom: Good for you.

Dad: I have always encouraged Ziyanda to do what she loves as well.

Mom: We didn't really want her to do teaching, for obvious reasons, but we had to allow her to

make her own decisions. I'd like to think that she's happy right now.

Me: You didn't want me to do teaching?

Mom: Yes.

Me: Oh wow.

Dad: We hid it well, right?

Derek: At least you didn't push her to do something she doesn't want to do.

Mom: There's nothing worse than parents who want to live their own dreams through their children. We're not that ignorant.

Dad: So, your colleagues don't know about this relationship?

Derek: No, they don't.

Mom: And what will happen when they find out?

Derek: I'll leave.

Me: Huh??

Mom: And she speaks!

They all laugh and I look at Derek seriously.

Me: What do you mean?

Derek: One of us will have to go.

Employee relationships are frowned upon, more especially if one of us is in a superior position. It comes across as unethical.

I look at him blankly.

I have never really allowed myself to think about what will happen when we're exposed at work.

I've been so spellbound, that I didn't even give it a thought.

Dad: Well, it only makes sense that one of you leaves...

Mom: But it definitely won't be Ziyanda. Well, at least she still has my back. I know she doesn't want to deal with an unemployed Ziyanda, because she drives everyone crazy.

Derek: I have already accepted that I'll be the one to leave. I'm okay with that.

Mom: How noble of you.

Derek looks at me and smiles. I don't smile back. I'm not about to be caught up in his spell, in front of my parents.

Dad: So what are your career plans?

Derek: I would like to open my own school.

Mom: That's amazing!

I am also finding this interesting.

Derek: I think I have enough business and education knowledge to start from scratch.

Mom: And Zizi will obviously help you.
Phela she is well-informed!

Oh wow.

Derek: She will definitely be involved.

Hehe.

We focus on our food while chatting
about the South African education system.

Because of my

passion in education, I find myself taking
part in the conversation as well.

Mom: Do you have any kids?

Derek: No, well, not that I know of...

They all laugh, and I chuckle.

Mom: That's great.

Dad: Do you want to have children?

Derek: Most definitely.

My mom glances at me with a smirk and I
ignore her. She seems to be captured by

Derek

Nkanyezi Ngidi. The sexy beast should
just snatch souls for a living.

Dad: And marriage?

Derek: Ziyanda is going to be my wife, and the mother of my children...

I choke on my food and I look at my mom, who is blushing. Lord!

Dad: Well, that's a conversation for another day...

Derek chuckles.

Dad: Alright.

Mom: So has she met your parents?

Derek: Yes.

She then looks at me.

Mom: And? Did they like you? I know you can come across as intense.

Me: Excuse me?

Mom: Surely this is not shocking news.

I grunt.

Derek: They're my adoptive parents.

Dad: You were adopted?

Derek: Yes.

Mom: Oh wow...

Dad: Do you know your real parents?

Derek: No, I have no desire to.

My stomach churns.

Mom: I don't blame you.

Derek: I think my reason for wanting to build a family is based on my situation... I want to be

there for my children, the way my biological parents weren't.

My parents nod.

Suddenly, I don't feel well.

I excuse myself and go to the bathroom. I need to vomit... I don't know why I feel so uncomfortable. He's doing a great job, and my parents seem to love him...

INSERT 60

I'm now back at the table, and I'm still feeling uncomfortable. I'm still caught up in the fact that

Derek is the first man who's been in this house because of me.

My mom is now serving dessert.

Mom: Are you okay, love?

Me: Yes.

They all chuckle and I shrug.

Mom: So, Derek, you have no desire whatsoever to meet your real parents?

Derek: Not at all.

I look at him, and I can't help but smile. I love him so much, and I genuinely want the best for him.

Mom: Well, as long as you grew up surrounded by loving people, I think your life is more fulfilled.

Me: And he definitely has a lot of love around him.

Mom: Is it?

I nod.

Mom: So you've met his friends as well?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Did you get along with them?

Me: Mama kanti? I'm not that bad!

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: Well, I'm glad they love you,
sthandwa sami. Has Derek met Nikiwe?

Me: Of course.

Mom: I'm sure she was too curious?

Derek: Yes...

We all chuckle.

Mom: So do you know about Ziyanda's
mental state?

Me: Gee, thanks for making it seem like
I'm a nutcase.

Mom: Well, you have your moments...

Derek chuckles.

Derek: We've been talking about it...

Mom: That's good...

Derek: How did you take it as parents?

My mom looks at my dad, who sighs.

Dad: It has been a scary journey, I won't lie. Seeing how sick she was when we were first introduced to what she has, was very traumatic. When we grew up, we didn't know anything about mental illnesses. We always say people are just being dramatic, and attention seekers.

We didn't have enough information.

Derek: And that still happens.

My dad nods.

Dad: Ziyanda went through some disturbing things as a child and young adult...When we finally took her to a doctor, and they told us she was badly damaged, we knew we had to pull up our socks and find help. The doctor transferred us to a psychiatrist and Ziyanda was hospitalized

for months.

Mom: It was the scariest moment of my life.

I glance at Derek, and he is expressionless.

Dad: We didn't think she would be fine. We couldn't even recognize her... It seemed like she had also given up on herself.

I sigh quietly as I also think back... I'm still shocked that I am alive today. I thought I was dying.

Dad: Yes, we prayed, and did all we could, but we also knew that she needed medical assistance.

Mom: She attended various classes that helped her regain her power. We also took part in some of those classes, because we were clueless on what was going on.

Dad: Years later, she is alive, and has regained her power.

They all look at me. My mom is teary, and my dad has a proud smile. Derek, on the other hand, I can't read.

Dad: As parents, all we have to do is support her like no else in this world. A lot of people are secretly dying, because they can't really explain what they are going through. They know that they will be misunderstood and judged, because mental illnesses are still frowned upon. People need physical prove for a sickness to be validated. They cannot fathom how a person can suffer internally, while looking healthy on the outside.

Mom: And that's why it is important for Zizi to surround herself with people who truly understand her. I don't want her to leave this loving home, only to be mistreated by people who love her, besides us.

Dad: That's why it is crucial to have a strong support system, and I don't think that will happen with large groups of friends. A lot of miscommunication takes place in such groups. Ziyanda has managed to narrow down her friends, and be aware of who is worth her love. We are silent for a while.

Mom: Anyway, we are very supportive... That's all we can provide...

Derek nods and then glances at me. Are those tears I see??

Derek: Please excuse me for a second...

Mom: Sure, baby.

He stands and walks out of the house.

We all sigh.

Dad: I hope he understands you, Ziyanda.

That's all I need to know... I don't want you to get hurt.

Me: He won't hurt me.

My dad nods and keeps quiet.

Mom: Go check on him, shame...

I stand and walk out of the house.

I find him leaning against his car. I walk till I'm standing opposite him.

Me: Hey.

He looks at me sadly, and I wrap my arms around him.

Me: Sorry about that.

He still doesn't say anything; instead he wraps his arms around me, and buries his head on my neck.

We stand there for a while, until he lifts his head and looks at me. I forgot to switch on the lights, so now I can't see his face, but I think he's crying.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Why are you apologizing?

Me: You're sad.

Him: I'm sad that you had to go through all that shit...

I sigh.

Him: And I wasn't there...

Me: There's nothing you could have done.

He sighs and we are silent once again.

Me: At least I'm much better now. I made it out alive.

He nods and kisses my forehead.

Him: And I thank God for that. I can't seem to imagine my life without you anymore.

I giggle and I feel him smile.

Him: You're a strong person...

Me: I am.

Him: But I don't want you to be strong around me.

I sigh.

Him: Don't feel the need to protect yourself when you're with me. Be yourself, your true self.

Me: Crazy and all?

Him: Crazy and all.

I sigh.

Him: I know it won't be easy, but I'm here. 100%.

I look at him.

Him: I will never hurt you intentionally. I may make mistakes, but my intentions will never be hurtful. I need you to understand this, Ziyanda.

Me: Okay.

He plants a kiss on my nose, and I groan.

Me: Can we go back in? I'm cold.

Him: And you sound like you're coming down with a cold.

Me: I think I am...

He squeezes me and we share a kiss. We then make our way back inside the house, and he

asks for the bathroom, and I lead him there. I go back to the table, and find my mom cleaning up.

Mom: *whispering* Is he fine?

Me: Yes.

Mom: Shame, he's emotional neh?

Me: Quite.

Mom: Cute. Now I'm blushing on your behalf.

Me: Mama!

She giggles.

Derek walks back, and smiles.

Derek: I should get going.

Mom: Okay, love. It was lovely meeting you.

Dad: I knew this Uber nonsense was a lie from the get go.

I blush.

Dad: She has never brought a man here... I'm shocked she's still alive. I'm sure she was

panicking all day?

Derek: You have no idea.

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Mom: What are your plans for Christmas?

Derek: I always spend Christmas at the orphanage.

Mom: That's great! Maybe Ziyanda should join you.

Derek looks at me and smiles.

Derek: I was going to ask...

Me: Uhm sure...

He smiles brightly and I smile back.

Mom: I love that you're so charitable.

Derek: Thank you.

Dad: Is there any way we can contribute?

Derek: You can donate clothes and toys.

Dad: Alright, you can fetch them tomorrow.

Derek: Thank you.

Mom: No problem...

Derek: Thank you for inviting me. I'm happy that I got to spend some time with you, and have the opportunity to know more about you.

Mom: It's a pleasure, dear. We're also glad that you came. I'm sure Zizi tried to sabotage everything.

Derek: You know her too well.

They all laugh.

Dad: See you soon...

Derek: Most definitely...

They shake hands, and then my mom goes in for a hug.

Gosh.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Dad: Enjoy the rest of your evening...

Derek: Thank you.

Mom: Walk him out ke Yanda...

Me: Hmkay.

Argh now I can't go with him, because "respect" and shit. Bleh.

We walk out, and get to his car.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow, Star.

He groans.

Me: Uh-uh. This is your fault bhuti.

Him: Yoh I was planning on making love to you like never before.

Me: Derek!

I feel my insides churn.

Him: I guess we have something to look forward to tomorrow...

He kisses me tenderly, and I melt in his arms.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Him: See you, tomorrow, okay?

I nod.

Him: Sleep tight.

We share another kiss, and let go of each other. I watch as he gets in the car, and drive out of

the yard. I close the gate, lockup, and make my way back inside the house...

INSERT 61

The following day, I wake up in such a foul mood. Not only am I feeling fluey, I'm not in the

mood to interact with anyone. I decide to switch off my phone, and stay in bed.

I hear a knock on my door, and my mom walks in.

Mom: Baby.

I keep quiet.

Mom: I've left your breakfast in the oven. She plants a kiss on my forehead.

Mom: I'm going to town...

I nod and she walks out, and closes the door...

At around 1pm, I wake up, and my flu seems worse. My throat is on fire.

I groan, as I reach for my phone and am immediately flooded with Derek's missed calls and

messages. I dial his number, and he answers within a second.

Derek: Ziyanda, really?

Me: Sorry, I just woke up.

He exhales loudly.

Him: Are you okay?

Me: I woke up in a bad state mentally. I'm okay now.

Him: Are you sure?

Me: I took my meds.

Him: But you don't sound okay.

Me: This flu sprung up. My throat is on fire, and nose is blocked.

Him: I'm driving to your house.

I sigh.

Him: Bye.

He hangs up and I groan. So I guess he's now comfortable to pop by anytime? Must be so nice.

Anyway, I get out of bed, and sit there for a while, trying to get myself together. This illness is

the Devil, honestly. It hits you when you're least expecting it... The lows are just something I can never get used to.

You find yourself questioning why you're even alive. You lose your senses for a while, and just

sink deeper and deeper into a pit of nothingness. I can never get used to it. It's painful and

haunting.

After I'm done bathing, I get dressed and clean up my bedroom. I then call my mom, just to tell

her that I'm feeling better... My dad is outside, dealing with his customers.

As I warm up my food, there's a knock on the door.

I open and there he is...

I smile and he smiles.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hi, baby.

He's carrying a paper bag. He gives it to me and I look inside.

Me: How thoughtful...

Him: I came to pick you up... I'm not comfortable enough to take care of you in your parents' house.

I giggle.

Him: Get your things and let's go.

Me: Kanjalo nje?

Him: Kanjalo nje.

I chuckle and nod.

Me: Can I eat first?

He sighs and nods.

He watches as I dish up for myself and we walk to the lounge and sit.

Me: Did my dad see you?

Him: I was with him for about 15 minutes before I came in.

Me: Must be nice.

He watches me eat.

Me: Are you hungry?

Him: Definitely, but I'll eat you later.

I squeal and he laughs.

Me: Don't say such things... You scare me sometimes.

Him: Ohho.

He watches me eat and I finish up. Once I'm done, I pack my things and walk back to the

lounge. I find him looking at some of the picture frames around there. I catch him taking out his phone and snapping away.

Me: What the hell do you think you're doing?

He ignores me and chuckles.

Him: You're so cute. Look at this...

Me: Let's go.

He finishes up and we walk out of the house. We go to my dad's tent, and find him talking to a customer.

Dad: Derek, Ziyanda's mom is still not back. I guess we'll give you our donations some other time.

Derek: No problem, sir.

Dad nods and looks at me.

Dad: Have a good day.

Me: Thanks.

We say goodbye, and make our way out.
We then get in his car and drive off.

Derek: You had a rough morning?

Me: Quite.

He brushes my hand and focuses on the road.

I then sink on my seat and immediately doze off. The medication is doing the damn thing.

We finally get to his place and I go straight to bed.

Me: Did you drug me on purpose?

He laughs.

Him: That's the only way you'll heal. I'll make you some Med-Lemon before you sleep.

He walks off and comes back later, waking me up.

Me: Ang'funi...

Him: Hai phela you have to drink this for your throat and shit.

I groan as I drink it...

Once I'm done, I doze off again, with my sore throat...

When I wake up, it's around 5pm, and it's as if I've never been sick before. Yes, I still feel a bit

fluey, but I'm much better.

Derek is sitting next to me, on his laptop.

He looks down at me and smiles.

Derek: Hey, Snore Face.

Me: Fuck you.

He chuckles as he puts away the laptop and repositions. He wraps his arms

around me and I

get closer to him.

Him: How are you feeling?

Me: A bit better.

Him: A bit?

I've decided that I will make him think I'm still sick. I love all this extra attention that I'm getting.

Me: I need a massage.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Him: Will that make you feel better?

Me: Maybe.

He kisses my forehead and repositions.

He then sits on the edge of the bed, and places my feet

on his lap. He starts massaging them, and I sigh happily.

Me: Ahh...

Him: So dramatic...

He continues massaging me, and eventually gets to my big ass thighs...

It's safe to say the Universe and I are now aligned. I'm out here getting massages and orgasms.

Life is good.

Universe, I forgive you. You and I are back together now.

Derek and I are chilling, watching TV, when my phone rings and I answer.

Me: Hello.

Niki: Hey boo!

Me: Hey, friend.

I smile.

Niki: So, you're inviting me to your man's Christmas charity thingie?

Me: Yebo.

Her: I'll see you there ke.

Me: Perfect.

Her: And I have to tell you about someone I met.

Me: Heheeee!

She giggles.

Her: He's very different, but I like him.

Me: Hmm, I can't wait!

Her: Bye bye ke. Say hi to Daddy D.

I laugh.

Me: Bye, boo.

I hang up and chuckle.

Me: Niki says hi.

Derek smiles and nods.

Me: She'll come ksasa.

Derek: Perfect.

He looks at me and smiles.

Me: What?

He shakes his head and focuses on the TV.

Me: My mom can't stop raving about you.

Him: Really?

He looks at me excitedly.

Me: She is obsessed.

Him: But, I told you that they'll love me.

This is me we're talking about... The
adorable Uber
driver.

Me: Argh!

He laughs.

He gets up and goes to the bathroom.
Seconds later, his phone rings and it's
Dean. I answer.

Me: Derek's phone, hello.

Dean: Ya Mam'Dlami.

Me: Hello Langelihle.

He chuckles.

Him: How are you? Are you feeling
better?

Me: Yes, I am.

Him: Nkanyezi was a bit worried.

Me: Of course he was...

We both chuckle.

Him: I hear the meeting with the parents
went well...

Me: Uzithembe too much uDerek.

Him: Hai phela it's not our fault that we're
the shit. We can't be blamed for our
awesomeness.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles.

Me: So when are we discussing the proposal?

Him: We'll talk tomorrow.

Me: You're coming?

Him: It's Christmas, of course we'll be together.

I groan.

Him: You'll just have to get used to the crowd. It also gets overwhelming for me at times.

Me: Argh.

Him: See you tomorrow... Tell Derek that everything is sorted on my side.

Me: Okay.

Him: Have a good night.

Me: Thank you. Bye.

Him: Bye Dlams.

I end the call and sigh. Dean has really managed to make me like him? Kanjalo nje? What is it with these charismatic bastards? Damit.

Mdu crosses my mind, and I sigh. I need to call and see how he's doing...

Derek comes back and we cuddle.

Me: Dean called.

Him: Is everything sorted?

Me: Apparently.

He chuckles.

Him: He was in charge of gifts.

Me: Nice...

Him: I'm so happy we're spending Christmas together.

Me: Hmm.

Him: We still have many more to come...

He plants a kiss on my lips and we watch TV...

I don't think I've ever been this happy in my life. I feel loved. My family has my back, my friends are awesome, and my man is just the icing on the cake. Love is a powerful emotion, man. This

shit feels good: more especially if you have been through your fair share of falls and suddenly you wake up and find yourself drowning in it. Love just makes life worth living. All the frogs I've kissed throughout my life were moulding me for this exact moment. I love my Star.
INSERT 62

The following morning, I decided to wake up and make breakfast. I looked up a few recipes...

Nkanyezi was still fast asleep.

As I am busy, my phone rings, and it's my mom wishing me a Merry Christmas.

Me: Thank you, sthandwa.

Mom: Uphi u-Uber?

Me: Usalele.

Mom: Have a good day, my love. Enjoy yourself.

Me: So you approve?

Mom: He seems genuine. It's worth a try.

Me: True.

Mom: However, I do think he is also battling a few things, but he hasn't really opened up.

Me: Really?

Mom: Definitely. Akekho right.

Me: Oh wow.

She laughs.

Mom: Try your best to get him to open up, the same way he got you to.

Me: I'll try.

Mom: I'm happy for you yazi. I was starting to think uyis'shimani.

Me: Mama!

She laughs and I join.

Mom: Bye bye ke baby.

Me: Bye.

Mom: Say hi to him.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and finish up making breakfast. As I'm cleaning up, I feel Derek's presence. I turn around, and sure enough, he's standing there.

Me: Morning!

He smiles lightly.

Fake smile much?

Me: Merrry Christmas!

We share a hug.

Me: Grumpy?

He nods and I kiss his cheek.

Me: I'll dish up for you.

He looks around the kitchen. It's such a mess...

I can tell that he is not happy about this.

He lets go of me and starts cleaning up.

Me: Hold up, OCD freak. I'll clean.

He ignores me and I let him be. I'm in a good mood and I can't deal with his grumpiness.

After a while, he comes to the bedroom and sits on the edge of the bed. His face is all tightened, ngathi he's pissed.

Me: Derek?

Him: What?

I raise an eyebrow.

Surely he is not addressing me like this?

Me: Derek?

Him: You made a fucken mess.

Me: Excuse me?

He looks at me sharply and grunts.

Me: Derek?

He stands and walks to the bathroom, leaving me shocked as hell.

What the fuck just happened?

I sit there. I don't move an inch. I'm waiting for him to come here and tell me what the hell is wrong with him.

After a long time, he finally comes back with a towel wrapped around his waist. I don't even care that he looks yummy.

Me: Derek?

Derek: I'm in a bad mood.

Me: Do you want space?

Him: Yes.

I stand and walk out, pissed. I go to the kitchen and eat some of the food I cooked.

As soon as I

bite the omelette, I spit it out.

What the fuck did I make? This shit is gross.

I drink water and go to the lounge to watch TV. I've never seen him like this.

That was mean! He is mean!

I eventually doze off, feeling very angry. I'm awakened by Derek caressing me. I look at him, and realise I'm still angry.

He looks at me and smiles.

Me: Mxm.

I sit up and look at him grudgingly.

Me: So now you don't want your space?

He frowns.

Me: Mxm.

Him: So I'm supposed to be in a good mood 24/7?

I keep quiet.

I have a feeling I'm going to lose this argument.

Him: Don't be silly.

Me: Excuse me?

He sighs and looks at me softly.

Him: You're being unreasonable. Am I not allowed to have a bad morning?

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not a robot.

Me: No one said you are.

Him: Good.

I stand and he pulls me back down.

Him: I'm sorry for being rude. Like I said, I just woke up in a bad mood.

I sigh.

Me: I wasn't expecting it.

Him: I had a bad dream... Woke up feeling shitty.

Me: I understand.

Trust me, out of everyone in this world, I definitely understand mood swings.

Him: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: It's okay. You've been dealing with my mood swings since day one. I guess this is your moment to shine.

He laughs and I smile.

Me: So I should give you space when you're like that?

Him: Just don't pester me.

I nod.

Him: But, like I've stated before, don't give me too much space. I'd die.

I nod and he pulls me closer and we share a kiss.

Him: Merry Christmas.

Me: Happy!

He chuckles and kisses me again.

Me: I tasted my food, and it was horrible.

Him: Really?

Me: I'll cook another day. For now, do you mind making something? I'm starving.

He smiles and nods.

Him: Anything for you. What would you like?

Me: Whatever it is, should have lots of eggs.

He nods and stands.

I then go to the bathroom to clean myself up. It seems like today may be a long day.

As we're eating, he keeps looking at me and smiling.

Me: And then?

Him: I'm just recalling how you reacted this morning. You were pissed.

Me: I was!

Him: But, why?

Me: Coz you're Derek. You don't get pissed or moody.

He laughs and shakes his head.

Him: I'm not perfect, Ziyanda.

Me: You are, to me.

He smiles.

Me: What if you're also Bipolar? We'd be twinnies.

Him: Urrr I don't think so...

We laugh and continue chatting for a while...

Just then, there's a knock on the door. He goes to open, and in walks Xolani with a very

gorgeous girl who looks like she's my age.

Xolani: Hey, people!

Me: Hey!

I stand and we share a hug.

Xolani: Zi, this is Fifi, a good friend of mine.

Me: Hello.

Fifi smiles and gives me a hug.

Uhm okay then...

Fifi: Hi, Ziyanda. I've heard a lot about you.

Me: Oh...

Derek: So is everything sorted?

Xolani: Yes... I'm just waiting for the caterers to finish setting up.

Derek nods.

Fifi: So Ziyanda...

I look at her.

Something ain't right with this girl.

Fifi: You're obviously coming to the luncheon neh?

Me: Yes.

Fifi: D has been so scarce lately. Clearly you're keeping him busy.

Me: Hmm.

I look at Derek, and he knows what to do.

Derek: We'll see you there...

Fifi is staring at me, and I feel uncomfortable.

Xolani: Okay... Zizi, remember- we dress for success.

Me: Yes, sir.

He gives me a hug and walk off. Fifi tries hugging me but I cross my arms and give her that smile white people always give us.

Me: Bye.

Fifi: Bye!

She then looks at Derek and smiles.

Fifi: See you.

Derek: Hmm.

She follows Xolani, and soon, they're both gone...

Me: I guess we have our first name for the No-Hoe-Zone List.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: See all the women I don't gel with?

He keeps quiet.

Me: A list is compiled, and you stay away from them. Surely you know this, Mr Principal

Accountant?

He looks at me in shock and I walk away.

Me: Don't make me fight skanks, Ngidi...

I go to the bathroom to get ready...

INSERT 63

We're now dressed and ready. We didn't even plan on matching, but we are. I just feel like we're

getting ready to walk down the aisle. The Universe is probably preparing us...

I kid, I kid... Marriage is the last thing on my mind.

Derek: Wow.

Me: I know.

Him: You look stunning.

Me: You don't look too bad yourself, Ngidi.

He smiles and wraps his arms around me.

Him: I must admit though, the makeup makes it hard to kiss you thoroughly.

Me: Hai manje you want me to walk around looking plain?

He laughs.

Him: You're beautiful, baby.

Me: I know, but I can't go to functions looking like a hoodrat.

Him: A hoodrat?

Me: Phela that's how Fifi and them take our men...

Him: What??

Me: Hmm you know very well that I'm right.

Him: Baby, I don't condone cheating.

Me: Is it?

Him: I'm too grown for that shit.

Me: Even 50 year old men cheat.

Him: Selfish 50 year old men.

Me: So wena you're not selfish?

Him: Hmm.

I giggle.

Him: I am very selfish... When it comes to you.

Me: How so?

Him: I want you all to myself.

I blush.

Me: Good, because I also want you to myself.

Him: You do?

Me: Derek, I may not communicate properly, but I'm really crazy about you. I watch him blush and I laugh.

Me: Now, can we go?

Him: Of course.

Just then, there's a knock on the door, and I frown.

Me: And then?

He shrugs.

He goes to the door and opens it. In walks Dean, looking all scrumptious...

Dean: Ya nina.

Derek: So who exactly did you tell that you're coming here?

Dean: I had to drop off my mom at her sister's place...

Me: Are you not spending Christmas with her?

He shakes his head.

Dean: I have my own family now, Dlamini.

Me: Yeah, yeah, whatever.

He chuckles.

Dean: You clean up nicely, don't you?

Me: Excuse me?

Both he and Derek laugh.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Baby, you know he's talking shit.

Me: Mxm!

Just then, my phone rings and I see my mom's name. I answer.

Me: Mama?

Mom: Baby, there's a problem here.

Me: What's wrong?

She sighs.

Mom: Lwazi's parents don't want her to come to us.

Me: Kanjani? Angithi we spoke about this, and they agreed ukuthi she'll spend the day lapho?

Mom: They refuse...

I sigh heavily.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and dial Lwazi's number.

Derek: Is everything okay?

I ignore him. It rings for the longest time, but she eventually answers.

Lwazi: Mommy.

My heart instantly sinks. I know she's crying.

Me: Lwazi, what happened?

Lwazi: I had just gotten dressed, and as I was about to leave to go to your house, they stopped me.

Me: Batheni?

Lwazi: They just said I must stop spreading our secrets to strangers. That doesn't even make any sense! These idiots know me very well, and they always dump

Lwazi at our house when they're tired. What the fuck has gotten into them?

Me: Ukuphi manje?

Lwazi: I'm in the bedroom.

Me: Have you even eaten?

She sobs quietly and I sigh.

Me: I'm coming, okay? I will be there in no time. Don't leave the house, okay?

Lwazi: Okay.

Me: Bye bye baby.

Lwazi: Bye.

I end the call and find Derek and Dean staring at me.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: My dad was supposed to fetch Lwazi, so she could spend Christmas with them, but the

parents are suddenly not budging.

Derek: Why?

Me: They're probably drunk and irrational.

Dean: Is this the little girl youMe:

Yes, and I have to go to her.

I look at Derek. I know this event means a lot to him, but I won't be able to join them. Lwazi

needs me.

Derek: Let's go.

Me: Derek, no.

Derek: What?

Me: I'll be fine. I'll get an Uber. I can't make you miss your event.

He ignores me and takes his keys.

Dean: We can use my car...

Derek: What about Nolwazi?

Dean: She's coming with her mother and sister later...

Derek nods and they both look at me.

Derek: Let's go...

Me: I really don't want to b-

Dean: Haike, Ziyanda. We really don't enjoy repeating ourselves- especially if we're offering to help.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Is she in Soweto?

I nod.

Dean: Let's go.

I get my bag and we're out...

As we're driving, I call my mom to tell her I'm on my way.

Mom: I'm sorry. I know you were looking forward to Nkanyezi's event.

Me: It's okay. Lwazi needs me.

Mom: I don't understand why those fools are being difficult.

I sigh.

Mom: I'll see you soon ke.

Me: Okay, bye.

Mom: Bye.

I end the call.

Dean, who is sitting in the front, glances at me.

Dean: Are the parents negligent?

Me: Negligent is an understatement.

Dean: So does she always spend Christmas at your house?

Me: For the past two years.

Dean: So how's your relationship with her parents?

Me: We're okay... However, they become problematic when they're drunk.

Derek hisses.

Derek: And that's most of the time.

Dean: Wow...

We drive in silence till we get to my house. Derek leads the way, and I find myself chuckling, despite my anger towards this Lwazi situation.

This one is out here leading the way ngathi this is his house...

Dean is right behind me.

As we get in, we find my mom busy in the kitchen.

Mom: Oh wow!

Derek: Hello, ma.

They share a long ass hug, and I refrain from rolling my eyes.

Mom: I'm so sorry for this. Lwazi is an important part of this little family of ours.

Derek: It's okay. We'll go fetch her.

Ziyanda will speak to her parents.

My mom glances at me and smiles.

Mom: Howzit?

Me: Quite angry.

Mom: I'm sure they'll-

Her eyes zoom in on Dean, and she stops speaking for a few seconds.

Mom: And then? Derek, you didn't mention that you have a twin!

Derek chuckles, and so does Dean. These men make our kitchen seem so tiny, with their overpowering presence.

Derek: This is Dean, a close friend.

Dean pushes me aside gently, and steps closer to my mother, who is smitten.

Dean: Sawubona, ma.

Mom: Dean? You even have similar names.

Derek: He's Langelihle.

Mom: Beautiful name!

Dean groans.

Me: Can we all focus?!

They snap out of it and nod.

Derek: Yes, let's go...

Me: Where' dad?

Mom: He went to Shoprite... I need a few things.

Me: Hmkay. Shap ke.

Mom: Shap.

Dean: Derek brought us some of your husband's chicken. It's amazing. Can I buy some?

Mom: Hehe I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that.

Me: Focus!

Derek: Okay, let's go.

Me: You've said "let's go" 100 times now!

Mom: Wooo i-drama engaka sisi?

I grunt and walk out of the house. I can't deal with these people right now. I need to talk to

Lwazi's parents k'qala.

We're now outside. We get in the car, and Derek drives to Lwazi's house.

As soon as we're outside, I try to open the door, but Derek locks it.

Derek: Baby, you need to stay calm.

Me: I am.

Dean: If you want to adopt this child, you need the parents' buy-in. Play nice, until we get her.

I sigh and Derek turns to look at me.

Derek: If we play nice, they'll be open to whatever you want to do. If you attack them, they'll continue refusing to let Lwazi go.

Me: Okay.

He unlocks the door and we all get out...

I just want to get Lwazi, and leave these careless alcoholics.

INSERT 64 (Short Insert)

We make our way inside the yard, and Derek holds my hand. God knows how grateful I am that

Derek is here with me. He has become such a pillar of strength lately...

As we get to the back door, we hear loud music.

Dean: Is this a shebeen?

My heart is aching at this point. I just want to get this child out of here.

We knock, but obviously no one hears us.

Derek walks in first and I follow, while Dean is right behind me. We get to the lounge, and find

Lwazi's mom sitting on a chair...

There's no furniture, just plastic chairs.

She looks up and stares at me. She was once such a beautiful woman, but now?

She looks like the Devil.

She switches off the music.

Me: Hello, Mam'Sindi.

Sindi: Ufunani?

I feel my blood boil.

Derek: Can we have a seat?

Sindi looks at Derek sharply.

Sindi: Mpendulo! Woza!

We hear Lwazi's dad complain, but he eventually walks in the lounge, and stares at us.

Mpendulo: And then?

Sindi: Ask them...

Mpendulo: What's going on?

Me: Hello.

He looks at me.

Mpendulo: I already told that father of yours that our daughter is not going anywhere!

Me: She hasn't even eaten!

I feel Derek's arm around me, and I remove it.

Me: How are you both sitting here while this child is locked in the bedroom, hungry?!

Sindi: Futsek wena!

Dean: We came to fetch Lwazi.

Sindi: And who are you?!

Dean: Someone you do not want to cross. Now, stop this nonsense, and let go of the child.

Mpendulo laughs boldly, and I swear I lose my mind. Thankfully, Derek is holding me back.

Mpendulo: Heeeh man! Fuck off!

Me: I am going to take you to jail!

They both laugh.

Sindi: You think you are Mother Theresa, huh? Not here ke sisi!

Dean: Derek, take Ziyanda outside.

Me: Dean-

He gives me one look, and I shut up. Derek takes my hand and leads me out of the house. Once

outside, he makes me face him.

Derek: Breathe...

He lets go of me, and I step away from him. I explicitly told him not to hold me when I'm having an anxiety/panic attack.

I start counting to 100...

Derek: Ziyanda...

I look at him. I can see him, but my whole body is on panic mode.

Derek: Ziyanda, listen to me.

I lean against the wall and close my eyes.

Derek: I need you to tell me five things you can see...

I take a deep breath and open my eyes.

Derek: Five things you can see...

I look around and continue breathing.

Derek: Tell me, baby.

Me: Trees... houses... street... wall...car...

My heart rate is still high.

Derek: Four things you can hear...

I close my eyes and focus on my breathing.

Derek: Ziyanda...

I sigh

Me: I can hear the cars hooting and driving past...

Derek: And?

I sigh.

Me: The birds chirping... kids yelling and laughing... and your voice...

Derek: Good.

I can feel my heart rate improving.

Derek: Now tell me three things you can touch.

I open my eyes and look around.

Me: The flowers... the gate... you...

He smiles and steps closer to me.

Derek: Two things you can smell...

I inhale and focus.

Me: Braai meat... your cologne.

He smiles even more.

Derek: And one thing you can taste...

I take a deep breath.

Me: You...

He chuckles.

I'm back.

I'm back to my senses, and this man helped me. Where did he even get this technique?

I stare at him, and I find myself getting emotional. He looks at me weirdly.

Derek: Ziyanda?

I feel the tears approaching.

Derek: Can I?

I nod and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: You calmed me down...

Derek: I didn't think it would work.

Me: But how did you know?

Derek: I did some research on how I can support you...

My heart.

My heart, Lord!

I rest my head on him, and don't even care that my foundation will ruin his shirt.

We stand there for a while, and I eventually look at him.

Me: Thank you.

He smiles and nods.

Derek: My love for you is overwhelming.

I giggle.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you.

We share a kiss.

Me: What is Dean up to?

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean is a passionate man... I'd rather you not see that passionate side of him.

Me: Passionate?

He nods and kisses me.

Derek: We'll get Lwazi. We'll make sure of it.

Somehow, I believe him.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: I'll enrol her in another school, and make sure she has access to the best shit.

Me: Derek!

He smiles.

Derek: And please don't try to stop me.

I've fallen in love with her as well.

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: We'll discuss this later...

He groans.

Just then, we hear footsteps and Lwazi runs to us.

Lwazi: Mommy!

I let go of Derek and open my arms for Lwazi.

Me: Hey, baby!

I squeeze her, and find myself getting emotional again.

After a while, I let go of her, and she looks up at Derek with a huge smile on her face.

Her eyes

are red and swollen from all the crying, but the bright smile of hers remains intact.

Lwazi: Hello, Uncle D!

Derek: Hi, sweetie.

He opens his arms and they share a hug.

Derek: I have a surprise for you. You'll eat first, and then I'll show you...

Lwazi: Yaay!

I look at him in confusion, and he ignores me.

After a while, Dean walks out, and comes to us. He looks calm and collected. He's even carrying a bag, which I assume has Lwazi's clothes.

Dean: Ready to go?

Lwazi: Yes! I'm starving!

He looks at Lwazi and smiles.

Dean: Well, I hope your stomach is ready, because it will be filled with lots of food.

Lwazi giggles.

We then walk out. I look at Derek.

Me: Surprise?

Derek: Just go with the flow... Sometimes, you have to improvise in life.

He kisses my cheek and gets in the car.

Dean opens the door for Lwazi and she gets in. Dean

and I get in as well, and Derek drives off.

Dean: You need to take a bath first, eat, and then you can come with us, okay?

Lwazi looks at me and I nod.

Lwazi: Okay!

She rests her head on me and I smile.

I am so thankful right now. I can't even describe my feelings.

INSERT 65 (Short Insert)

We're now back in my house, and Lwazi is in the bathroom...

Dean, Derek, my mom and I are sitting outside. My dad is still not back.

Mom: So how did you get them to let go of Lwazi?

I look at Dean. I also want to know.

Dean: We had a civil conversation. I basically explained how this is affecting Lwazi, and how

she will end up resenting them forever.

I look at him suspiciously and he smiles innocently.

Mom: I'm glad you got her out of there.

Dean: So are you going to adopt her?

Mom: I think we don't have a choice at this point.

Dean: I think it's a great idea. That place is toxic.

My mom looks at me.

Me: I don't even know where to start.

Derek: I'll help...

I look at him and smile. Lona nje has outdone himself today. I need to think of ways to thank him for being so awesome.

Mom: So Dean, wena where are your parents?

Dean: My dad passed away, and my mom is around.

Mom: And what's the age difference between you two?

Dean: I'm 34 and this one is 32.

My mom nods and looks at Derek.

Mom: How are you?

Derek smiles sweetly.

Derek: I'm well.

She smiles.

Mom: You are both so handsome... Dean, are you married?

Derek: I am about to...

Mom: Really? You're planning a proposal?

He nods and I smile.

Dean: She gave birth to our twins recently.

Mom: Really? Congratulations!

Dean: Thank you.

Mom: That's amazing. Are they your first babies?

Dean nods tightly, and I can't help but notice his jaw tighten, as if something crossed his mind.

Just then, Lwazi walks to us and squeals excitedly. She's wearing her new dress; the one Derek

bought for her a while back. She specifically stated that she was reserving it for Christmas. She

is so cute!

Lwazi: Mama I'm hungry!

Mama, who is my mother, stands and sighs.

Mom: Ngaze ngavelelwa!

My mom walks back in the house and
Lwazi sits down.

Lwazi: Uncle D, thank you for saving me!

Me: Which Uncle D?

She groans dramatically.

Lwazi: Konje!

She looks at Dean.

Lwazi: I have to call you something else.

We all laugh.

Lwazi: How about Uncle D number 2?

Dean: I don't settle for second best, love.

Lwazi: Huh?

Me: Uncle D number 2 is perfect. Call him
that, baby!

Lwazi looks at me and smiles.

Me: Are you feeling better?

Lwazi: I'm just annoyed that I had to be in
the bedroom for so long.

I chuckle.

Me: Well, at least you're here now.

She stands and gives me a hug.

Lwazi: You're the best!

My heart skips a beat. My love for this child is quite deep.

She then goes to Dean and opens up her arms.

Lwazi: Thank you!

Dean pulls her for a hug and smiles. I must say that Dean has definitely wormed his way into

my heart. I can't believe he has that other cold side, that he tortured me with.

However, Liwa,

Nolwazi and Derek were right: Dean may be a cold person, but as soon as he gets to know you

and accept you, you start to see another loving and loyal side of him. I guess I'm one of the

lucky ones.

Lwazi then hugs Derek.

Lwazi: Thank you daddy.

Derek's face changes. He's shocked.

Lwazi: I didn't like you at first, because I thought you were mean.

Derek's face softens up and he smiles.

Derek: You were the mean one!

Lwazi giggles and they share a hug. Just then, her tummy grumbles and she groans.

Me: Woah! Go inside and eat, please!

She laughs as she walks back inside the house.

I check the time and it's now 2pm.

I look at Dean and Derek, and they both seem chilled.

Me: Let's go to the event.

Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Yini?

Derek: We don't have to go...

Me: But I want to...

He sighs and glances at Dean, who doesn't seem to care.

Dean: I'm quite comfortable here... I was looking forward to your father's chicken. I also want to meet the funny guy.

Me: My dad is now the funny guy?

They both laugh and I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go. I dressed up for this shit.

Dean grunts.

Me: You'll meet my dad some other time.

Derek: And what about Lwazi?

Me: I'd rather she stay here.

Dean: No, she must come with us.

I sigh.

Derek: She'll interact with other kids.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Kanti thina we're not going to eat your mother's food? Haibo Dlamini.

I sigh.

Derek: Let's go inside.

Me: Wow! Go ahead and do as you please in my parents' house!

Dean: Our future in-laws...

Me: Argh.

Dean: You definitely take the cup for being the most dramatic person I know.

Me: Zip it, Uncle D number 2.

Dean: Low blow...

I stand and they follow me inside...

Also, my dad has been gone hey? Lol I'm so glad. I hope Shoprite is packed as hell.

Once we're done eating, I go to my bedroom to freshen up a bit. Once I'm done, we all walk out.

The conversations have been so chilled, hey. My mom is dramatic and all, but she is definitely a people's person.

As we get to the car, I see my dad at a distance.

Me: Okay, bye bye mama. See you later.

Mom: Okay, baby.

Dean: It was lovely meeting you, ma. I'll be back for my chicken.

Mom: You're more than welcome... Just know ke that I'm charging extra.

Dean laughs.

Dean: Message received.

Me: Okay, let's go.

Mom: Bye bye Nkanyezi.

They share a hug.

Derek: Usale kahle. Please send our greetings to Bab'Dlamini.

Mom: Okay, darling.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Let's go, people!

Mom: Heyi ke wena!

Lwazi gets in the car, Dean follows...

Me: Shap mama. We'll bring Lwazi back.

Mom: Shap, baby.

Me: Love you.

She winks and I smile.

Derek: Bye, ma.

Mom: Bye, baby.

We get in the car.

Me: Drive phela.

Dean: What's your problem wena?

Derek starts the car and we drive off.

Thank God they didn't see my dad. It seems like I'm the only one who saw him.

As we're driving, my phone rings and it's my mom.

Me: Mama?

Mom: You sneaky girl!

I laugh.

Mom: Sies!

Me: I'm not in the mood for a meet and greet.

We both laugh.

Mom: Have fun ke sisi and take care of Lwazi.

Me: Of course.

Mom: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and relax...

Words cannot describe how happy I am right now.

I am loved by a sexy beast. This beast feeds me, treats me like royalty, and gives me the best orgasms.

I am happy.

INSERT 66

Here I was, thinking we're going to some intimate lunch, kanti this is an actual event. We've arrived at the orphanage...

Me: I didn't know this was a huge thing.

Dean: Go big or go home...

Me: Hmm.

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Derek: I have to check in on Xolani.

Me: Sure.

He wraps one arm around me and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He lets go of me and rushes off somewhere. There are kids all over the place, running and playing. There are different games and stations- it genuinely feels like a festival of some sorts.

Lwazi: Mommy, can I go and play?

Me: Of course.

I don't have to worry about her safety.

She runs off and I sigh.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

He looks at me suspiciously and I groan.

Me: I'm a bit nervous about taking this responsibility.

Dean: Adopting Lwazi?

I nod.

Dean: You do realise that you're already acting motherly, right?

Me: I am?

Dean: Don't over-think it. This child brings out the best in you.

I sigh.

Dean: There's no guide on being a parent. I'm also going through a lot of confusion and

frustration, but I'm finding my feet.

I nod.

Dean: Just give her all the love you can...

Me: Thanks, Dr. Phil.

He chuckles and we walk around.

Dean: I miss Nolwazi. I'm ditching you.

Me: How foul!

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I answer it excitedly.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby. Ukuphi kanti? I just saw Derek.

Me: I'm with Dean.

Nomvuyo: Your new bestie?

I laugh.

Me: Where are you? I want to see you.

Nomvuyo: I'm by the water slides... My daughter is just driving me crazy.

Me: Okay. I'll see you now now.

Nomvuyo: Bye, love.

I end the call and look at Dean.

Me: I'm ditching you.

Dean: Uyahlanya. You're going to help me look for my woman.

He grabs my hand as he puts his phone to his ear.

Dean: Lwazi...I just got here now... No...

Where are you?...

He ends the call and looks at me.

Dean: She is not happy.

Me: Really?

He nods tightly.

I'm sure Nolwazi hates me wherever she is. This is probably her first Christmas with Dean, and I basically took half of his day.

We walk around.

Me: Is she angry?

Dean: Just a little.

Me: Yoh manje why are you taking me with?

He ignores me.

We get to some food stall, and find Nolwazi standing there by herself.

The pregnancy really didn't do her beauty justice. She looks amazing.

She looks at us and smiles.

It's that fake smile.

That, "I'm smiling, but I really want to fuck you up" smile.

Dean: Lwazi.

Nolwazi: Hi.

Dean lets go of my hand and wraps his arm around her. She gives him a look, and he lets go of her.

Me: Hi, Nolwazi.

She looks at me.

Nolwazi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: I'm sorry for all of this. It's my entire fault, really.

She keeps quiet.

Me: They helped me get Lwazi out of that house.

Nolwazi: The girl you're planning on adopting?

Geesh news travels fast in this circle.

Me: Yes.

Nolwazi: What was the problem?

Me: The parents were being difficult. She hadn't eaten, and she was locked up in the bedroom.

Her face changes, and she now seems worried.

Nolwazi: Is she okay?

Me: We were on our way here, when I got a call from my parents. Dean and Derek helped me get her...

Nolwazi looks at Dean, and he smiles.

Dean: I'm a hero. I didn't ditch you for nothing.

Her face softens and she chuckles.

Nolwazi: Well, I would appreciate a little heads up next time. You can't just disappear like that and expect me to not react.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Nolwazi: You owe me another Christmas day, Dr. Hlongwane.

Me: Dr. who, now?

They both look at me and chuckle.

Nolwazi: So he hasn't forced you to call him by his title?

Me: Uhm, no.

Dean: I was about to... Ziyanda just talks too much, that I never get the chance to brag and shit.

Me: Wow!

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry for coming across as cold, Zi. I was just baffled.

Me: It's okay.

We share a hug.

Dean: Manje mina? Where's my hug?

Nolwazi: You're still in the doghouse.

Dean groans and I laugh.

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I answer.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Haibo sisi.

Me: Sorry, I'm on my way!

I end the call and look at Dean and Nolvazi.

Me: I'll see you around.

They're both so caught up in each other's presence that I'm no longer a factor.

I walk away from them and try to find the water slides. I spot Nomvuyo there and walk to her.

Once I'm behind her, I poke her and she squeals and I laugh.

Me: I see you're still a virgin.

Nomvuyo: Of course I am.

We laugh and share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: I am exhausted. Nyami is obviously trying to remind me why I don't want more children.

Me: You are so dramatic.

Nomvuyo: Look at her...

I look over at the children, and spot Nyami there, having fun.

I remember her from all the pictures I have seen.

Me: I wish I was a kid.

Nomvuyo: Right? These little one look so carefree

She sighs and rubs her belly.

Nomvuyo: I don't know how I feel about this pregnancy.

Me: When are you going to tell Liwa?

She shrugs.

Me: Stop being so negative. This baby is a blessing.

Nomvuyo: Says the person who was freaking out when she thought she was pregnant.

I chuckle.

Me: Better you than me.

She grunts.

Nomvuyo: So is Lwazi fine?

Me: Ya, Dean spoke to the parents.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Me: I didn't know that this would be a big event.

Nomvuyo: Derek is very passionate about these children.

Derek.

Where is he? I miss him.

Nomvuyo: Nyami! Woza!

I look over at Nyami, who doesn't want to come.

Nomvuyo: Don't make me repeat myself!

Nyami walks over to us, wet and all.

Nyami: But, mommy I st-

Nomvuyo shakes her head.

Nyami is just like her mommy and daddy.

Gorgeous little girl.

Me: Hello, Nyami.

She looks at me and frowns.

Nomvuyo: This is Auntie Zizi.

Nyami: Hello, Auntie Zizi.

She really isn't happy about this water slide situation. From my understanding, she is a bubbly girl, but right now, she is the opposite.

Nomvuyo: Let's go to the car, so you can change. I do not want you to catch a cold.

Nyami: But, momm-

Nomvuyo: Don't even try to talk back.

Nyami sighs and keeps quiet.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I'll be back...

Me: Okay...

They walk off, and I find myself smiling.

That was a very cute interaction, but I know Nomvuyo would disagree.

I take my phone and dial Derek's number. It rings for a while, and he eventually answers.

Derek: Baby, where are you?

Me: I'm by the water slides.

Derek: Okay, I'll be there shortly.

Me: Okay.

I end the call, and I'm shocked to see Zimkitha standing next to me. When did she get here?

She looks at me and smiles. There's something about this woman's presence. It's intimidating, yet loving at the same time. I don't know, man...

Zimkitha: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: You look stunning.

Me: Thank you.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: Derek tells me you had to get Lwazi, the girl you want to adopt...

Me: Uhm, yes...

Zimkitha: And the parents? Did they cooperate?

Me: Only once Dean spoke to them. She nods and becomes serious.

Zimkitha: If they give you problems, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Me: Thanks.

Her face then softens up again.

Zimkitha: How did the meeting with your parents go?

Me: Uhm... It went well.

She nods.

Zimkitha: Do they love Nkanyezi?

Me: They do.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: That's great.

I nod lightly, and feel someone behind me.

Derek's scent fills the space, and he wraps his arms

around me from the back.

Derek: Hey, snore face.

Me: Argh.

He kisses my cheek.

Derek: Zimi.

Zimkitha: Derek.

Derek: Liwa is looking for you.

Zimkitha nods and walks off.

I shiver and he chuckles.

Me: She freaks me out.

Derek: She's the best, trust me. She's just overprotective.

Me: This overprotective trait seems to be common in this circle.

Derek: Quite.

I groan.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's an unrecognized number. I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda...

Me: Yes?

Person: It's Mdu...

I immediately tense up and Derek notices this.

Me: What's up?

Mdu: I need you...

I can tell that something is wrong.

Me: Mdu?

Mdu: I just... I need you... Please come...

Me: Where are you?

Mdu: My place.

I sigh.

Mdu: Please, Ziyanda.

Me: Uhm okay.

He ends the call and I look at Derek.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Something's wrong...

He stares at me.

I don't know what to do. Is it Tholi? Are the babies fine? What's wrong?

Derek: So you're leaving?

I sigh.

Derek: Would you like me to go with you?

Me: I've already taken up most of your day... I feel bad.

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Let's go.

We then make our way out, after checking on Lwazi, and then got in the car.

Derek: Did he tell you what exactly is wrong?

I shake my head.

He drives off, and I pray that whatever it is is fixable.

When we get to Mdu's apartment, it's safe to say I was never ready.

The atmosphere is just dark and haunting.

Me: Mdu, what's going on?

Mdu: Tholi wants to kill herself.

Me: What??

Mdu: I found her-

He stops himself and tries to gather himself.

I have never seen him like this.

Just then, we hear crying.

It's the babies.

Mdu: I'm losing it.

Me: Where is she?

Mdu: In the bedroom.

Me: We have to take her to the hospital.

He nods.

He also seems like his brain is not functioning properly.

Derek has already disappeared. He went to the kids' room.

Me: What happened? I thought she was fine.

He shakes his head.

Me: Let's go...

He leads me to the bedroom and Tholi is in bed.

We walk towards the bed.

Mdu: Tholi...

Nothing.

He opens the covers and we look down at her. He pulls her out of bed.

She's literally a zombie. She has lost so much weight.

Me: Mdu, we need to go now.

He nods and is carrying her within seconds.

As we walk out, Derek is carrying one of the twins.

Derek: I called Nomvuyo. She's on her way.

I nod.

Me: We're going to the hospital.

He nods.

We walk out, and make our way to the car. He puts Tholi at the back and we get in and drive off.

Me: Why didn't you reach out sooner, Mduduzi?

He keeps quiet and drives on.

We've been at the hospital for over three hours now...

The doctor finally comes to us, and Mdu starts flooding him with questions.

Doctor: Tholi has symptoms of Postpartum Depression.

Mdu: What?

Doctor: On top of that, it seems like she has been suffering from depression symptoms long before her pregnancy.

Mdu: Postpartum depression?

Doctor: It's also known as Postnatal Depression. It's a type of clinical depression which can affect both parents after childbirth. You find yourself feeling overwhelmed, and it's not like "I'm new at this parenting thing, and I find it hard," but it's more like, "I can't do this and I'm never going to be able to do this." You feel like you just can't handle being a parent. You feel guilty

because you believe you should be handling new parenthood better. You feel like your baby deserves better.

I am honestly blown away at this point. I have always known of this type of depression, but I honestly didn't think it was this deep.

Doctor: You don't feel bonded to your baby. You just can't understand why this is happening.

You feel hate and anger towards your baby, or your partner, or your friends who don't have

babies. You also feel hopeless, like this situation will never get better. You can't function

properly. You're disconnected: like there's an invisible wall between you and the rest of the world.

At this point, I am out of words.

Doctor: I am certain that Tholi is suffering from this, and other things... We have contacted the

psychiatrist and he is on his way... He will be able to handle this issue properly.

The doctor looks at us sadly and walks away.

I find myself pulling Mdu and hugging him.

This shit is crazy.

INSERT 67

I'm so emotionally drained. I feel like I am carrying the whole world, literally.

Mdu and I are now in Tholi's room. She is now sleeping.

Mdu: Thank you for coming.

Me: I'm glad we finally know what is wrong. She'll get all the help she needs.

Mdu: Do you think she'll be fine?

Me: Over time... It definitely won't be easy.

He keeps quiet.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek. I answer.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Baby, we're here.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and stand.

Me: Vuvu and Derek are here.

He nods and I walk out.

I find Derek and Nomvuyo...

I immediately go straight to Derek and let him hold me... We stand there for a long time, until I

feel more stable.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Mdu is in a state. I'm more worried about him at this point.

Nomvuyo: Shame...

Me: Where are the babies?

Nomvuyo: With Zimkitha.

I stare at her in shock.

Nomvuyo: Zimkitha knows about this.

Me: Really?

She nods lightly.

Nomvuyo: Mdu told her a while back.

I sigh heavily.

Nomvuyo: So Tholi has Postpartum Depression?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: I also had it.

Me: Really?

Nomvuyo: It took months to heal, but I did...

Me: The problem is that she has Depression as well...

Nomvuyo: Have they diagnosed her?

Me: The psychiatrist will make a proper diagnosis.

Nomvuyo: She'll be fine.

Derek wraps his arms around me again and we share a hug.

Derek: I'm sorry...

Me: I feel bad for them.

Nomvuyo: But I think it's time the family knows about this. This secret life is going to kill both of them. They need the family's love and support.

Derek: I agree.

Nomvuyo: And I think if the family sees them like this, they will be open to helping them.

I sigh and relax in Derek's arms.

It's now around 6pm. My body is giving up on me as well.

Derek: Let's go home, Zi.

Me: We can't leave them like this...

He looks at me intently and I sigh.

Me: I just want to help them.

Derek: And you've done all that you could.
He pulls me closer and plants a kiss on my nose.

Derek: It's been a hectic day for you.
Please let me take you back home, so you can eat and sleep.

Me: What a weird Christmas day.
He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: Will Dean take Lwazi back to my parents' house?

He nods.

Derek: Let's go. We'll come back tomorrow.

Me: Okay, let me say goodbye to him.
He nods and lets go of me. I go to Tholi's room and find Mdu there, sleeping on the chair next to the bed.

Me: Mdu...

I walk to him and he wakes up.

Mdu: Hey...

Me: Hey...

He smiles lightly.

Mdu: Thank you.

Me: You're welcome.

He stands and we share a hug. We stand there for a long time while he sobs quietly.

Universe, I'll get back to you about this...

We'll discuss it once everything is fine.

I comfort him until he feels better.

But then, a thought arises.

Me: Mdu, please get yourself checked out as well.

He gives me a weird look and I wipe his tears.

Me: I think this situation with Tholi has really affected you. I just want you to be aware of your

mental health the same way you're so aware of your emotional and physical health.

He sighs.

Mdu: You think I'm not fine?

Me: You're not.

He nods lightly and I smile.

Me: Will you be fine?

Mdu: I will.

Me: Are you sure? I can stay if you want.

Mdu: I don't want Derek to freak out. You already spent half of your day here.

Me: I'm sorry.

Mdu: I'll be fine, man.

We share another hug.

Me: Maybe it's time to tell the family?

He looks at me intently.

Me: Just think about it, okay?

He nods.

Me: Shap ke.

Mdu: Good night.

Me: Same to you.

I brush Tholi's hand and walk out of the room, feeling a bit better. He seems better as well.

Nomvuyo: Is he fine?

I nod.

Me: So the babies are sleeping over at your house?

Nomvuyo: Yes, they're safe and sound.

Me: Good.

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: It's been a crazy day... I'll see you tomorrow. Get some rest, love.

Me: Bye.

We share a hug and she walks away. I then look at Derek tiredly.

Derek: Ready?

I nod.

He takes my hand and we walk out...

Derek is holding onto me for dear life...

I check the time and it's around 1am.

I try to move, but he holds me tighter.

Me: Derek, you're hurting me...

He is groaning.

What's going on?

His groaning gets louder, and he squeezes me even tighter.

Me: Derek.

He is starting to sound like he's in pain.

Me: Derek!

I break free and switch on the lamp. He is sweating furiously. I shake him and he

tries fighting

me, but he wakes up suddenly.

Me: Star!

He is breathing heavily.

Me: Nkanyezi, what's happening?

He closes his eyes and sighs. I watch as he breathes in and out slowly.

After a while, he pulls me closer and my face touches his.

Derek: Hey, I'm sorry...

My heart rate is on another level. I didn't even realise that I was crying.

He scared me.

He brushes my back, and I place my lips on his.

Him: I'm sorry...

Me: What were you dreaming about?

He sighs.

I keep quiet. I'm not backing off on this one. I want him to open up to me.

He kisses me. He is tender, like he's doesn't want to break me. He slides his hand under the

pyjama top and I moan. I want him badly, but I also want us to talk.

He repositions us and is now on top.

Me: Derek, please talk to me...

He stares at me, and I feel his fingers slide in me...

I know I'm ready. I'm always ready for him.

He goes down and his face gets locked between my thighs. He eventually comes up, and I welcome his erection...

Him: Baby...

He is so slow. Every single sense of mine is wide awake. I'm enjoying this...

I'm now lost in my moans and groans.

I feel myself shudder, as that familiar rush approaches. Seconds later, he follows, and we both

tighten our hold on each other.

Him: I love you.

He plants a kiss on my lips and repositions.

Why doesn't he want me to face him?

He's now holding me from the back. My head is resting on his arm, and his other arm is

wrapped around me.

Me: Derek...

He pulls me even closer until we're pressed against each other.

Me: Derek...

Him: Hmm?

Me: Talk to me...

Him: Go to sleep, baby...

Yes, I want to talk, but the heaviness in my eyes is too overwhelming. I try to keep my eyes open, but fail.

I feel him planting soft kisses on my shoulder, until I completely doze off...

INSERT 68

The following morning, I woke up to find Derek in the kitchen, making breakfast.

I'm still

thinking about what happened in the middle of the night.

Me: Morning.

He turns and smiles warmly. My insides churn. I don't think I'll ever get used to being his girlfriend.

Derek: Hi, baby.

Me: How are you?

Him: I'm surprisingly in a very good mood.

I look at him suspiciously. I know I'm going to burst his bubble, because I will force him to speak. Usile lo.

Me: That's nice...

He chuckles.

Him: And how are you?

Me: Could be better.

Him: Go back to bed. I'll wake you up once I'm done.

Me: I'll watch you cook. Why you tryna get rid of me though?

He laughs and shakes his head. He then continues with what he's doing while I watch.

Derek: Yesterday was quite hectic.

Me: Hmm.

Him: I'm going to make sure that we have a peaceful day today.

Me: How so?

Him: We're not going anywhere. I'm going to fetch Lwazi, and we'll chill indoors.

Me: Sounds nice, but I'd rather not include Lwazi right now. She's fine with my parents.

He looks at me, smiles, and then continues with what he's doing.

Him: We'll check on Mdu...

Me: I encouraged him to tell his family.

Him: It's about time. He can't keep living like this.

Just then, his phone rings and he asks me to answer it.

I reach for it and see Khwezi's name.

Me: It's your mother.

Him: And?

I grunt as I answer.

Me: Derek's phone, hello?

Khwezi hisses and I roll my eyes. I'm not in the mood to fight.

Khwezi: Give Nkanyezi his phone.

Me: He's busy.

Khwezi: Mxm.

She ends the call and I grunt.

Derek: Any message?

He looks at me and laughs.

Me: Not funny, Ngidi.

A minute later, a text messages comes through.

Khwezi: Derek, I do not like this girl.

Something about her rubs me the wrong way. You have

become so distant since you started being with her, and I hate that. She is obviously with you

for money... Why did you leave so abruptly yesterday? It is so unlike you.

Did she put you up to it? You missed the whole event, and I'm sure everyone at Twilight is disappointed. Rolls eyes. Rolls eyes. Rolls eyes.

Somebody call the nywembulence for this grown ass woman.

I read the message to Derek and he shakes his head in defeat and disinterest.

Derek: She's childish.

Me: Has she always been like this, or is it with me?

Him: She thinks she owns me.

Me: Is it?

He nods.

Me: So she hates all your ex girlfriends?

He laughs lightly.

Him: I think she hates you the most.

Me: Wow.

Him: She can see how much I love you.

Me: Mxm.

He finishes up and I help him dish up, even after he refused. Once we're done, we go to the

lounge and sit next to each other.

Me: How long have we been dating?

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I haven't been counting. Have you?

Him: A lot of shit has happened.

Me: Exactly. I think we need a moment to reflect on how far we've come. It genuinely feels like

I've known you forever.

He nods.

Him: Well, I think we started getting serious in November.

I laugh.

Me: So we're approaching two months?

We both laugh.

Me: Infancy...

We continue chatting while eating. After a while, we finish up and put the plates aside.

Me: Do you like Christmas?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: Do you like Christmas?

Him: Uhm... Ya...

I nod.

Him: Why?

Me: Just asking.

Him: You're random.

Me: Can't help it.

He pulls me closer and kisses me.

Me: If there's one thing you could change in your life, what would it be?

Him: What's going on?

Me: I'm just asking hawu!

He chuckles and looks at me thoughtfully.

Him: One thing I could change in my life?

Me: Yep.

Him: Hmm...

He's quiet for a few seconds...

Him: I don't think I would change anything.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: Why?

Him: I don't know...

He looks at me.

Him: And you?

Me: What?

Him: What would you change?

Me: I'd want to be born into a rich family.

He laughs.

Him: What??

Me: I'm serious. Yazi it wasn't easy growing up without money.

Him: But it made you who you are.

Me: Hai hai you grew up rich, but you're an amazing person.

Him: True...

Me: So yes, I'd want my parents to be rich.
He chuckles and kisses me again.

Me: One thing you'd want to change about your personality?

He looks at me thoughtfully. I know he's probably confused as to why I'm asking these random

questions, but this is all part of my big plan. Operation Get Star to Open Up.

Him: Well... I've been told that I love too deeply.

Me: Okay...

Him: And as a result I become naive.

Me: Hmm so you love so much that you become naive?

He nods.

Me: Is that what you would like to change?

Him: I think so...

Me: I love that you love deeply and unapologetically. That's what makes you Star.

He smiles.

Me: Very few people can get over hurt and recycle love.

Him: Thank you, baby.

I kiss him.

Him: Is there anything you would change?

Me: My impulsiveness.

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Me: You know, I try my best to think before I act, but when I'm in thaaat zone...

I lose it.

Him: You are quite irrational.

Me: I don't mean any harm.

Him: But I love you regardless.

I smile and decide to give him a break. I'll have to be strategic if I want him to open up. I don't want to crowd him.

At around 12pm, we're still lazing around... I didn't realize I missed spending time with him.

We've been dealing with other people's drama.

His phone rings, and it's his mother again. He ignores it and we carry on watching ratchet reality shows. Minutes later, there's a loud knock on the door and we both look at each other.

Derek: Let's ignore her.

I laugh.

He increases the volume till we can't hear much.

Me: You're so bad.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: You're a bad son.

The knocking eventually stops and she send him a heated message which we didn't read.

Me: When is your birthday?

He laughs.

Him: 1st of Jan.

Me: What??

He continues laughing.

Me: You were born on the 1st?

He nods.

Me: OMG!

Him: It's funny how we know all these deep things about each other, but we're clueless about the little things.

Me: Are you big on birthdays?

Him: Definitely. My favourite day.

I smile.

Me: Really?

Him: I love celebrating life. We get so caught up in the bullshit we face daily that we forget to celebrate being alive.

Me: Hmm.

Him: I love celebrating birthdays.

Me: Well, that's good, because I'm not big on them.

Him: What? Why?

I shrug.

Him: Well, that will change. Birthdays are a big deal.

Me: Hmkay.

Suddenly, it hits me that his birthday is in 6 days! What am I going to do for him?

Gosh.

Me: So when were you planning on telling me that your birthday is 6 days?

He chuckles.

Him: Angazi. I haven't gotten time to think about it, because of you.

Me: So what are your plans?

Him: None so far... I'll see.

I shake my head in defeat.

Me: My birthday is on the 20th of Feb.

Him: I know.

Me: How?

Him: I'm your boss.

Me: Argh.

He chuckles.

Me: I'm the best with gifts.

Him: Really?

I nod excitedly.

Him: I can't wait.

He reels me in for a kiss...

Him: You're definitely the best gift
though.

Me: Swoons!

He laughs...

It's now the 30th and I am meeting up with Dean to discuss a surprise birthday dinner for

Nkanyezi. I haven't seen him since the 26th when he told me his birth date. I've been at home, spending time with my parents and Lwazi.

When I get to the restaurant, I find Dean there. I join him and place my order.

Me: I spoke to Vuvu, and she insists on cooking everything.

Dean nods.

Dean: Nolwazi will help her.

Me: Okay. Are you done with your Jar?

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Dean, get that shit done.

Him: You want me to write 100 reasons why I love him? I don't have the time.

Quite frankly, I hate writing.

Me: I don't give a shit. I need it by tomorrow.

Him: You are going all out, aren't you?

Me: Don't patronise me.

He laughs.

Our food eventually comes.

Me: I want this to be an intimate dinner with all the people he values.

Him: We see each other all the time.

Me: The only difference is that this dinner is for Derek, so the focus will be on him, and not the

craziness that surrounds this group.

He laughs

Me: If anyone tries to jeopardize it, I will deal with them personally.

Him: Okay Rambo, calm the fuck down.

Me: Anyway, I'm meeting up with Nolwazi's friend, Slindile. Apparently she's a great event planner.

Dean: She is.

Me: Good.

He gives me a bank card and I frown.

Him: From my knowledge, teachers are underpaid.

I don't even know how to respond to that. I just laugh.

Him: Do as you please.

Me: I never thought I would find a blesser in my lifetime. I'm lucky. I would like to thank my

mother, father... The Universe...

He laughs and we continue chatting. He is definitely right. Teachers are underpaid, therefore, I

will use this card like there is no

tomorrow. I'm not one to say no when the Universe comes through for me.

Once we're done, he offers to give me a lift.

It's so weird how close we've grown. He's like a big brother that I never had. Weird shit I tell you.

We get to some rented offices and he leads the way. We get to Slindile's office and she leads us in. She's one of those fit girls who are obsessed with the gym.

Me: Hi.

Slindile: Hi, I'm Sly.

Me: Ziyanda.

She smiles and looks at Dean.

Sly: Dean.

Dean: Slindile.

Sly: So, Nolwazi tells me you need help with your man's birthday dinner?

Me: Yes. I know it's a bit last minute.

Sly: I'll sort it out. I just need to know your vision...

We sit down and I explain to her how I want everything. Once she has been informed, we leave and Dean drops me off at Maboneng. I'm meeting up Niki.

Dean: Bye then.

Me: See you tomorrow.

We share a hug and he drives off.

I make my way to La Musa and find Niki there. Only, she's not alone. She's with a yummy guy.

I thought we were meeting up just to talk about this new man in her life, not this.

I get to the table and look at her with a grin on my face.

Me: Good afternoon.

Niki: Good afternoon, ma'am.

We laugh and share a hug. I then look at this guy and smile. He's definitely not her type. Niki

loves skinny guys for some odd reason.
This one is well-built and toned and shit.

Me: Hi.

Him: Hi.

He flashes a smile. He has a lovely smile...
But he's eyes? I feel like they tell some
deep ass
story.

Niki: This is Ziyanda, the one I always tell
you about.

He looks at Niki all lovingly and I can't
help but want to high 5 my girl. Where in
the world did

she get this man? Also, I'm a bit
embarrassed that I don't know much
about him. I've been so
focused on my Star lately.

Niki: Zi, this is Kwanele.

Me: Nice to meet you.

He stands and we share a hug.

I am about to question the shit out of him...

INSERT 69

I look at him and he smiles knowingly. It seems like Niki has told him a lot about me.

Me: So what do you do for a living?

Kwanele: I'm a lawyer.

I nod slowly and look at Niki, who is smiling from ear to ear.

Me: How old are you?

Kwanele: 34.

I nod.

Me: So how did you two meet?

Kwanele: Through a mutual friend.

Me: And who is that mutual friend?

Niki: Jeff.

I laugh.

Me: You hang out with that weed addict?

Kwanele: Yep.

Me: Wow, how weird.

Niki: I know, right? I was so shocked when I first met him at Jeff's place.

Me: Do you know what he does for a living?

Kwanele: Jeff?

Me: Yep.

Niki and I laugh.

Kwanele: Escort?

Me: Hmm I guess you really are friends.

Niki: But at least he has stopped.

Me: Oh please. Jeff will always be linked to prostitution.

Kwanele: No, he really has stopped.

Me: Hmm maybe I'm out of touch. I haven't seen him in a long time.

Our drinks and their food come.

Me: So, you like Niki?

Kwanele: Yes, I do.

Me: Hmkay.

I think I like him. He seems down to earth.

Me: You seem quiet. Does Niki's vibrant personality get too much?

Niki: Really??

I laugh.

Me: I'm just asking!

Kwanele: No, it doesn't get too much.

Me: Hmm...

I watch them eat while I drink a cocktail, which tastes like hell. I end up giving up and settling for a glass of water.

Me: So Star's birthday is in 2 days.

Niki: Really??

I look at Kwanele.

Me: Star is my boyfriend.

Kwanele: Star?

Me: Nkanyezi.

He chuckles.

Kwanele: Got me worried for a sec.

Me: Anyway, I'm throwing him a surprise birthday dinner.

Niki: That's nice.

Me: I want to make it a memorable day.

You know mos I do the most.

We both laugh.

Me: I'm extending an invite to you...

Kwanele can be your plus 1.

Niki: The 1st?

Me: Yep.

Niki: Sorry, boo. We also have plans.

Me: Heeh! What are you doing?

Kwanele: Going to Durban.

Me: Argh.

Niki giggles and they share a kiss.

Me: Wow. Lovebirds.

I take out my phone and take a few snaps of them. My phone rings and my heart leaps when I

see Derek's name.

I answer it as I stand and go outside.

Me: D?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: I miss you too, Star.

Derek: Ukuphi?

Me: I'm spending time with Niki and her boyfriend.

Derek: Can I come?

Me: No.

He groans.

Derek: I haven't seen you in three days.

Me: Baby, you'll see me on your birthday. I'd really like to spend some quality time with the people I've abandoned because of you.

Derek: Mxm.

I laugh.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I love you too.

Me: Bye, I'll call you when I get home.

He groans as I end the call. I then go back inside and find them kissing.

Me: Gosh.

Niki: Was that Derek?

I nod.

Me: So, Kwanele you guys are officially dating?

Kwanele: I mean, I'd like to think so.

Niki: Uh-uh, you still have a long way to go.

Kwanele looks at her and they stare at each other amusingly. Very cute.

Kwanele: Really?

She nods and giggles.

Lord, I need to be with Derek. I can't deal with this right now.

My phone vibrates and it's a message from Dean, telling me that he just finished up writing his

100 reasons why he loved Derek. I send him a wink emoji. I'm glad that's done.

Now I need to go home...

The following day, I was meeting up with Vuvu to make sure the heffer was doing her damn job.

I was serious when I said that no one was going to jeopardize this shit.

When I get to their home, I am met by a very cheerful Nyami. She reminds me so much of Lwazi.

There's just an "It" factor that they both have.

Me: Hey, Nyami.

Nyami: Hey, Auntie Zizi.

Me: How are you, sweetie?

She smiles and gives me a hug.

Nyami: I'm great!

Me: Where's mommy?

Nyami: In the kitchen. She said you are going to kill her if she doesn't cook.

I chuckle and she leads me to the kitchen.

Vuvu is busy there with pots and shit.

Me: Hellooo!

She looks up and rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: You've turned me into your slave.

Me: A slave for love!

She grunts and I give her a hug.

Me: Thank you for doing your job!

Nomvuyo: As if I had a choice. You're such a tyrant.

Me: Hai phela sisi. You are the one who offered to cook.

She rolls her eyes.

Me: I came to check on you.

Nomvuyo: Whatever, Hitler.

Nyami: Who's birthday is it?

Me: Uncle Derek.

Nyami nods and walks away.

Me: So how are you?

Nomvuyo: I'm fine, love. How are you?

How's Operation Get Star to Open Up?

I sigh.

Me: I'll get there someday.

Nomvuyo: Just be patient.

Me: I'll try.

Nomvuyo: And don't take anything he does personally...

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo: Getting someone to open up is not easy.

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: But I'm sure he'll appreciate your assortments of birthday gifts.

Me: I hope so.

I smile.

Me: Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: So you're not even staying for lunch nyana?

Me: Nope. I'm meeting up with Nolwazi's friend, Sly, who's planning the setup. She rolls her eyes and I laugh.

Me: Bye!!!

I hug her and make my way out, after saying goodbye to Nyami.

When I got home, I was beyond shocked to find Derek's car parked outside. So this man feels

so confident that he can come as he pleases now? Wowzer!

I walk in and hear laughter.

When I get to the lounge, I find them (my mom, Derek and Lwazi) chilling there.

Me: Hehe.

Mom: Hey, baby.

I look at Derek and he has a mischievous smile.

Me: Looks like I'm not needed here...

Mom: Haike don't start!

Me: Derek?

Derek: I'm actually here to get some chicken...

Mom: Exactly. Not everything is about you.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy!

Me: Hey, love.

She hugs me and takes my things. She then walks to our bedroom.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He's with his brother.

Me: Is he coming back?

Mom: Probably not.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek stands and we walk outside.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm too exhausted to be angry.

He looks at me suspiciously and I shrug.

Me: I'm not angry.

He assesses me and then smiles. When he wraps his arms around me, I melt.

Me: My mom is in love with you.

He smiles shyly.

Derek: I'm grateful she likes me.

Me: Hmm...

He places his lips on mine and I wince. I want him so badly.

Me: This is neither the time nor place.

He laughs and kisses me.

Him: I can give you a quick one?

Me: Not here!

He laughs and I push him away from me before I do sinful things in my parents' yard.

Me: Go home, please.

Him: But my home is with you.

Me: Corrrny!

I laugh at him as he starts sulking.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow.

Him: Come home with me, please?

I shake my head.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow for breakfast.

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'll get your chicken...

We walk in and he says goodbye to my mother.

Mom: Hold on for a second... I have a gift for you...

I look at her weirdly and she ignores me and goes to the bedroom. She then comes back with a gift bag.

Mom: Happy birthday, for tomorrow. Open it tomorrow.

Derek is beaming at this point. Argh.

Derek: Wow, this mean a lot to me. Thank you, ma.

Mom: You're welcome, baby.

They share a hug and I roll my eyes.

Derek: Wow, thank you.

His smile is cute and all, but I'm not feeling this little relationship they have.

Anyway, after saying goodbye to Lwazi and my mom, I walk with him outside.

We get to his car, and I look at him. He's smiling from ear to ear.

Me: Happy?

Him: You have no idea.

I sigh.

Him: Being accepted by your mother is a big deal for me. I don't take it for granted. I smile.

Him: I don't know... I just... I have a weird connection with her...

Me: Is it?

He nods.

Him: Her motherliness is just heart-warming.

Me: I'm happy that she makes you feel that way.

Him: She's a good mother figure.

I nod and he touches my hand.

Him: Please come with me?

I sigh.

Me: I ha-

Him: I want you to be the first person I hold when I turn 33.

Me: Oh gosh.

Him: Please, baby?

Me: Okay.

He squeals and I grunt.

Me: I'll go tell my mom.

He nods as I get out and go to the house. I get in and my mom is shocked to see me.

Me: What's wrong?

Mom: I thought you left with him.

Me: Oh... I came to tell you ukuthi ngihamba naye. It wasn't part of the plan though.

Mom: You can go.

I get everything I need and then say goodbye to Lwazi.

Lwazi: Don't forget to give him my gift!

Me: Okay, sweetie.

I make my way back to the car and he drives off excitedly.

Derek: I don't think I've ever been this happy in my life.

I glance at him and we both smile.

Him: Thank you...

He focuses on the road and I smile to myself. I want him to feel very special tomorrow... Once again, anyone that even tries to mess this man's day up, will catch these hands.

INSERT 70

Derek is now fast asleep with his head on my chest. I check the time and it's around 10pm. I carefully get out of bed and make my way to the lounge, with my bag. I have to finish up my 100 reasons for loving him. I've been pestering Dean, yet I'm not nearly done with mine. I quickly write them neatly, cut them individually and then put them in the small jar I bought. This is definitely the best gift, because I'm basically pouring out my heart to him. I know he'll love it,

because he's cornier than me.

After a while, I finish up.

I'm so excited. I just want him to feel loved!

I clean up the space, and make my way to the bedroom.

I drop the bag, as I see Derek struggling in his sleep again. I rush to the bed and shake him lightly.

Me: D!

I shake him harder and he finally wakes up. He stares at me in shock and I'm crying again.

Derek: Oh, baby. I'm sorry.

He tries pulling me closer, but I refuse.

Me: Please talk to me.

He wipes his face, and rubs his eyes.

Me: Derek.

He sighs heavily and looks at me. I'm sitting on the edge of the bed.

Him: Come here.

He pulls me and we lie there, facing up.

We're silent for a long time.

Derek: I've been having nightmares lately.

Me: You don't usually have them?

He shakes his head.

I keep quiet.

Him: I keep seeing Xolani getting beaten, and Dean is also in the mix. It's just weird...

Me: Beaten?

Him: I can't explain it...

Me: Can you see who's beating them?

He sighs.

Him: Zimkitha.

Me: What??

I feel goosebumps as I think of that creepy woman.

He chuckles as he glances at me.

Him: She's not a bad person...

I grunt.

Him: And then... I see some old woman,
who keeps telling me to run...

I look at him weirdly.

I am a bit creeped out.

Him: This woman keeps pestering me
about running away while I'm trying to
focus on Dean and
Xolani.

I sigh.

Him: It's weird explaining it out loud, but
it's so raw and... scary in the dream...

I sigh and then reposition so I am on top
of him. He places his hands on my butt
and I stare at
him.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: It's only a dream.

I nod.

Me: Do you want to pray?

He stares at me for a while and eventually
nods.

Me: Okay.

We both get up and then kneel by the bed.

I hold his hand and look at him.

Me: I am a strong believer in God, Derek.

He has really been a pillar of mine

through everything.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Whenever you feel scared, lonely, or

sad- don't be afraid to talk to him. Just

express

yourself openly. It's not about how many

bible verses you know... He will never

judge you.

He smiles.

Him: He'll listen?

Me: Always.

He nods and we both close our eyes.

Me: Do you want me to start?

Him: I'd appreciate that.

Me: Okay...

I sigh heavily.

Me: Dear God...

I keep quiet for a while.

Me: As you can see, I have a special guest here... Someone I've grown to love quite deeply, and

who is still a bit unsure where he stands with you.

I sigh.

Me: Anyway, I ask that you open up his heart and allow him to see your

greatness. I'm quite

relieved that he agreed to pray with me, because now our connection can also be linked to you.

It's his birthday in a couple of hours. We thank you for always being here, even

when we

abandon you. Please bless him

abundantly. I also ask that you continue building our bond and

make it stronger...

I feel myself get emotional.

I feel like this is a deep moment for Derek and me.

Me: Anyway, I'm going to give him the opportunity to speak to you, since I speak to you every chance I get...

I keep quiet...

Derek, please just open up?

There is silence for a long time.

Eventually, he sighs and squeezes my hand.

Derek: Uhm...

Silence...

He groans and then I open my eyes.

I sigh.

Me: It's okay...

He sits on the floor, and I stand. As I am about to give him space, he grabs my hand. I sit in

between his legs and he wraps his arms around me.

Me: I understand...

He doesn't say anything.

We are silent for a long time.

Eventually, I stand because my ass is in pain. He stands as well and we get in bed.

He wraps his

arms around me and buries his head on my neck. He's sobbing.

My heart is so torn right now. I want to be here for him, but I don't know what to do.

Me: Derek, I love you.

He doesn't say anything.

After a long time, he dozes off.

I just feel so defeated right now, but I can't begin to imagine how he is feeling.

My phone beeps.

I reach for it and sigh.

It's 12am.

I shift, and carefully break free from his hold. I then walk to my bag, and get my jar...

I walk back to bed with it, and shake him lightly.

Me: Star...

I'm so sleepy right now, but it is what it is.

Me: Star...

I shake him again and he opens his eyes.

Me: Hey...

He smiles at me with his swollen eyes.

Me: Sit up.

He does as he is told, and then looks at me.

Me: Happy birthday.

I smile at him warmly and he smiles back.

I get closer to him and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Him: I love you more.

I smile and then give him the small jar.

Me: There you go... Your first gift.

His smile broadens.

Him: What's this?

Me: A jar filled with love.

He chuckles.

Him: So how does it work?

Me: You read one note per day.

Him: So it's filled with notes?

Me: Yes, notes written by me. 100 notes to be exact.

He smiles wider.

Me: Open it.

He opens it and takes out one note.

Him: You wrote all of these?

I nod proudly.

He opens the note and smiles as he reads it.

Me: What does it say?

He chuckles.

Him: Despite both of us being so smart, I appreciate the fact that we can be stupid together.

We both laugh.

Him: I love this, baby.

He looks like a kid in a candy store.

Him: Can I read another one?

Me: No! This should last you for 100 days!

He sulks.

Me: Don't test me!

He sighs and reads the note again.

Him: Despite both of us being so smart, I appreciate the fact that we can be stupid together.

He smiles again.

Him: Baby, this is the most thoughtful gift I've ever received.

I smile.

Him: Thank you.

Me: Anything for you.

He puts the jar aside and pulls me.

Him: You're special.

Me: Not as much as you.

He chuckles and I kiss him.

Him: Thank you.

I nod and we kiss again.

I yawn and he laughs.

Him: Let's get some sleep.

Me: Please! I thought I would wake you up with a blowjob, but I'm tired.

He laughs as we reposition. He switches off the side lamp and we cuddle.

I feel myself doze off...

Me: Derek...

Him: Yes?

Me: I'm here for you...

Him: I know.

Me: And so is God...

He sighs.

Me: Love you.

He kisses my forehead.

Him: I know...

I immediately doze off...

INSERT 71

The following morning, I was awakened by Derek's kisses. I instantly wake up and he chuckles.

I was supposed to wake up and make him breakfast!

Derek: Morning, sleepyhead.

Me: Argh I was supposed to wake up earlier and make you breakfast.

Him: Guess I beat you to it.

I grunt.

Him: Breakfast will be ready in 5 minutes. I look at him and smile. I don't know what it is, but he seems a bit lighter.

Me: Happy birthday, Nkanyi.

He smiles and plants a kiss on my lips.

Him: I can't believe I love hearing you use this Nkanyezi nonsense.

I chuckle and kiss him.

Me: Let me brush my teeth.

Him: Stinky.

Me: Futsek.

He laughs as I get out of the bed and go to the bathroom to freshen up. I still feel like I could

use a couple of hours of sleep, but I know that's not possible.

Once I'm done, I walk to the kitchen and find him dishing up.

Me: I'm starving!

Him: I'll feed you soonest.

I walk to the lounge and wait for him. He follows after a while, with a tray.

Me: I feel like I'm the one who is supposed to serve you like this.

Him: I think we've established that I rule the kitchen; therefore you will be served by yours truly.

Me: Whatever.

He sits next to me and we begin to eat.

Me: Do you have any birthday memories that stand out?

Him: I do actually.

I look at him.

Him: I was 12 years old, and I ran away from home.

Me: Home? As in the Ngidi household?
He chuckles and nods.

Me: Why?

Him: That whole year nje I just felt like I didn't belong there.

Me: Really?

Him: I was starting to understand what they meant by "adoption" and I felt like I was a charity case.

Me: So where did you run away to?

I can just imagine a cute 12 year old Nkanyezi doing shit by himself.

Him: Different places... I ended up going back to Twilight, to Mam'Thuli.

Me: And?

Him: She took me back to the Ngidis.

Me: I'm sure Khwezi was going crazy.

Him: Of course.

Me: So the Ngidis changed your biological surname?

He nods.

Me: Do you know your real surname?

Him: No. I used Mam'Thuli's before that.

Me: Really? So Mam'Thuli knows your biological parents?

He goes quiet.

Me: Have you ever asked her about them?

He shakes his head.

Him: Like I said, I have no desire to know them.

He keeps quiet.

I also keep quiet.

I'm not sure how he's feeling right now. I think he's a bit angry.

Me: Anyway, I have another gift for you.

He looks at me and his face immediately softens up.

Him: You really are the gift expert aren't you?

Me: Yep.

I put the tray aside and walk to the bedroom. I get the gift and walk back to the lounge.

Me: Let's finish eating first.

Him: No, I want to see it!

Me: Uh-uh.

He sulks, but I ignore him.

We eat and chat for a while, until we finish.

I then take the plates to the kitchen, and we wash them together. Once we're done, we go back

to the lounge and I take the gift and give it to him. His smile is just something else. I love

seeing him like this, more especially because I'm the one who's making him so happy.

Me: Okay, you can open it.

He takes it out of the gift bag, and stares at it.

Me: Do you want me to explain first, or you want to see it?

Him: Let me see it...

I nod and watch him.

It's an A4 envelope. He opens it and takes out its contents.

Me: Can I explain?

He nods with a childish smile on his face.

Me: There are 12 cards there, as you can see.

He nods.

Me: I'm actually glad that your birthday is in Jan, because this plan of mine will be smooth sailing.

He chuckles.

Me: Anyway, these are monthly date cards.

He nods slowly as he looks at them with more understanding.

Me: Read them...

He takes the one that's written January.

Him: January- Let's find a recipe and make dinner together. Nom, nom, nom!

He smiles and looks at me.

Me: So that's our main date this month.

We're going to find a recipe, and make dinner together.

Him: Fuck, Ziyanda...

Petty LaBelle is just sitting there, fanning herself. She knows she's a champion

when it comes

to gifts.

Him: Can I read the others?

Me: Sure.

He looks for February, and then chuckles.

Him: February- Go to the Market Theatre and watch a play together... Preferably a historical play.

He looks at me.

Me: Are you game?

He nods as he looks for March.

Him: March- Movie Date! You get to pick the movie, because you're the star!

He laughs and I join him.

Me: Okay, don't read all of them at once.

Him: Last one?

Me: Okay.

He finds April.

Him: April- Camping. Derek, I hate this shit, but I think it will be a fun experience.

If this shit

doesn't work out (because I plan on bailing out anyway) we can go bowling or something.

He bursts out laughing and I roll my eyes.

Me: We'll go bowling. I hate camping!

Him: We are definitely camping. Fuck you.

Me: Argh.

He puts everything aside and then pulls me till I'm very close to him.

Him: You are... You're something else...

Me: I know...

He kisses me and I smile.

Me: Happy birthday.

Him: It's a happy day, indeed.

Me: I even forgot that it's New Year.

Him: Happy New Year.

Me: Happppyyy!

We kiss again and reposition.

Me: Now, let me get rid of this erection of yours...

Him: Do best...

It's now around 10am and Derek and I are supposed to go somewhere, but he's busy trying to

get us to stay in bed.

Me: Derek, don't test me.

He grunts and finally gets out of bed.

Me: Angazi yini inkinga yakho.

Him: I just want to cuddle with you.

Me: Not now...

We go to the shower, and clean ourselves up... Even there, we have sex, as much as I hate

shower sex.

Heyi this one is in heaven. Must be nice.

We eventually finish up and I request an Uber.

Him: I just don't understand why we have to use an Uber when we have a car.

Me: Zip it, Uber driver.

He laughs.

I decide to get Uber Black. Dean gave me his card mos? So why must I be basic and use Uber

X? Hai man.

We walk out, and find a Merc waiting for us. Yaaas hunny!

Me: Hmyghad!

Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Hai bhuti, this is a historical moment.

Him: Mxm.

We get in, and off we go.

Derek: Where are we going?

Me: Uzobona.

We're sitting together at the back. He's phone rings and it's Dean. He answers it and puts it on

loudspeaker.

Derek: Dean?

Dean: Ya wena njandini.

Derek chuckles.

Dean: You're growing up, huh?

Derek: I'm a man now.

They laugh, as if there's some deeper joke they're referring to. Cute.

Dean: Have a good day. I'll see you tomorrow.

Derek: Sure.

Dean: Are you with Dlams?

Derek: Of course.

Dean: Am I on speaker?

Derek: Yep..

Dean: Ya wena Dlamini.

Me: Ya Langelihle.

Dean: Take care of that fool.

Me: I plan to... Angithi you all decided to make other plans, knowing very well that it's his birthday.

Dean: Hai suka.

Me: Faatsek!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Mxm, I'll take Lwazi away from you, uswabe.

Me: Low blow!

He laughs.

Me: Bye, loser.

Derek: See you tomorrow.

Dean: Bye.

Derek hangs up and looks at me.

Me: I can't believe they have other plans.

The nerve!

Derek: I actually don't care... I'm with you, angithi?

Me: I'm also doing you a favour nje... I could be with other important people right now. I don't understand why you had to be born on a public holiday.

He wraps his arm around me and laughs.

We continue chatting until we get to Parkview and he looks at me weirdly.

Him: Where are we going?

Me: The zoo.

He looks at me in shock and then bursts out in laughter.

Him: Are you fucken kidding me?

Me: You've mentioned once that you've never been to the zoo... Fortunately, I listen... So now we're here...

He stares at me, dumbstruck.

Him: Fuck, Ziyanda...

I smile and kiss his cheek.

Me: Let's go see the lions, monkeys, and the rest of your relatives, Mr. Ngidi!

He shakes his head in disbelief and just smiles.

Oh, Star... This is only the beginning...

INSERT 72

After 3 hours, I must admit that I am fed up. I have never been a fan of zoos.

Growing up, I was always the girl who misbehaved when we went to school trips. Derek, on the other hand, was

beyond ecstatic. It felt like I was with a 6 year old boy. The excitement was overboard, but cute.

We're now heading out.

Me: Are you good?

He nods excitedly.

Him: We're definitely coming back.

Me: I doubt the animals will be different, baby.

He looks at me disapprovingly and I chuckle.

Me: Look at you, being all protective of your relatives.

He spanks my ass and I laugh. Once we're out, our car is waiting. I'm busy listening to him tell

me all about the animals we saw. Well, I'm pretending to listen...

I take my phone and check my messages.

I'm glad that everything is on track. I'm an excellent

planner, hey. There's nothing I hate more than unnecessary chaos.

Him: Where are we going now?

Me: Thula.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and reels me in for a kiss.

Him: I don't know what I did to deserve you.

Me: I prayed for you...

He looks at me seriously.

Him: Really?

I nod.

Me: I was tired of going through fucked up relationships. My mom is the one who encouraged

me to pray. I just felt uncomfortable at first, asking God for a partner...

He chuckles.

Me: But I guess he has finally answered my prayers. He sent me a star.

He smiles sincerely and I kiss him.

Me: Having a good day?

Him: You have no idea.

We continue kissing until we get to our destination.

Zoo Lake.

Derek: Picnic?

Me: Yep.

He smiles.

Him: And you hate picnics.

Me: Anything for you, Nkanyi.

We walk out, hand in hand... I lead him to where the set up is (thanks to Nomvuyo).

Him: Wow, baby.

It looks amazing, lovely and intimate.

We sit and I insist on dishing up for us.

Him: Who set this up?

Me: A friend of mine.

He nods and smiles. He looks so happy, and that makes me happier.

I give him his food, and we delve in.

Me: So I met up with Niki and her man.

Him: How is he?

Me: He seems cool and chilled.

Him: You like him?

I nod.

Me: He's different. I think he's good.

Him: That's good.

I take out my phone and show him the picture.

Me: Aren't they cute?

Him: Quite. Does Niki like him?

I nod and put my phone away.

Me: They have a good vibe.

Him: Good for them.

I look at him and smile.

Me: I enjoy seeing you so carefree.

Him: I'm like this only when I'm with you.

Me: And that makes me happy.

We share a kiss and continue chatting.

I've been getting him to open up without him even realising. I guess I've learnt a lot from my

psychiatrist.

Me: I have another gift...

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Well it's not really from me.

Him: Who's it from?

Me: Lwazi.

He smiles brightly and I giggle as I take it out. I give it to him and he takes it out of the gift back.

He takes out the card first and in true child form, it's decorated with flowers and stars.

Derek: Dear Uncle D, thank you so much for being the best man for my mommy and myself. I

love all the things you have bought for me. You are the best, and you treat me like your child. I

hope that you enjoy your day. Have a splendid day! From: Lwazi.

He keeps quiet.

He stares at the letter intently.

What's wrong now?

He sighs and then looks at me.

Him: I love this.

I smile.

Him: I didn't know she loved me.

Me: She loves you.

He smiles and reads it again.

Him: I'll support both of you.

I smile.

He then takes out the gift and it's a slab of chocolate.

Derek: Sweet.

Me: Literally.

He chuckles and then I take his gift and put it away.

Me: Here's my gift...

Him: Another one??

Me: Yep.

He laughs in disbelief as I take it out. I hand it to him and he unwraps it.

He smiles.

Him: Cologne?

I nod excitedly.

Me: I'd like this one to be added to your already awesome collection!

He laughs and smells it.

Me: Divine!

Him: I like it.

Me: Well, it doesn't really matter if you like it or not. It's for my pleasure, quite frankly.

Him: Poor me!

I laugh and pull him closer, and he sits in between my legs. He relaxes on me.

This shit was expensive, but worth it. I didn't use Dean's card, unfortunately. All these gifts are from my pocket. Dean's card will be used for trivial things like Uber rides and maybe a major personal shopping spree, you know?

We have one last stop, before we head to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house...

After about 2 hours, we're done...

He insists on packing up... He is such a domestic man. He's definitely perfect for me.

We get in our Uber, and drive off.

I check the time, and it's around 4pm.

We get to Maboneng.

Him: Are we going to my loft?

Me: Not yet. We have one last stop.

He nods excitedly. My Sexy Soul Snatching Star.

I lead him inside Moad (Museum of African Design).

Him: And then?

Me: You'll see...

We head inside, and as soon as he processes everything, he lets go of my hand and exclaims.

Him: Zi!

I smile happily.

One of his favourite photographers is having an exhibition of some sort. This photographer focuses on education. She travels around the world, collects people's stories regarding education, and captures some raw moments.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Him: For fuck's sake!

I giggle.

Him: I love you!

Me: Okay okay, let's get in and see what she has in store for us...

He smiles widely and we walk in further, hand in hand.

As a person who's passionate about education, I must say I thoroughly enjoyed this exhibition.

Derek is on another level ke yena. He even purchased some of her work. Yes, I love this shit, but

I wouldn't pay 10k for some photograph that has random school children... But, I guess it's the stories behind the photographs that capture people's hearts...

Derek is now in the bathroom. I walk around, and manage to talk to the photographer. I tell her about Derek, and how invested he is in her work. She's so humble, and lovely.

When Derek comes back and sees us, he almost freezes. He is such a schoolboy right now.

He gets to us, and they start having a conversation...

I'm happy for him.

At around 5pm, we finish up, and walk out.

He is holding me very tightly right now.

Me: Happy?

Him: I'm speechless.

He kisses me.

Him: Thank you, Ziyanda.

Me: You're more than welcome.

He sighs.

Him: Are we heading to my loft?

Me: Yes, we can walk.

He nods and we begin walking hand in hand.

Him: This has got to be the best day of my life.

I smile.

Eventually, we get to his loft, and we head straight to the bathroom, to freshen up.

As much as I

tried to avoid having sex, we did, and I am glad because it reignited my energy.

At 7pm, we're heading to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house. I managed to convince him that I needed something from Nomvuyo. He thinks we're going to a restaurant after the quick stop.

I had to stop him from trying to make out with me in the Uber...

We eventually get to Nomvuyo's house, and I am so excited.

I call her as we approach the gate.

Me: Hey Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Are you here?

Me: Yes, I'm here. Can you let us in?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: He doesn't know?

Me: No.

She chuckles.

Me: Okay, bye. See you now now. Hurry up, we have places to be!

Nomvuyo: Cute.

I end the call and look at Derek, who seems unbothered.

Derek: I'm hungry.

Me: Me too.

He strokes my thigh.

Derek: I'm craving you more than anything.

Me: Staap!

We get out of the car, and make our way inside the yard.

I am so excited!

I lead the way to the door, and walk in first.

As soon as he steps in...

Everyone shouts, "Surprise!"

His face?! His fucken face!

Liwa, Nomvuyo, Nyami, Dean, Nolwazi, Zimkitha, Xolani, Lindelwa, Malusi, Joe, Gabi and a few

other randoms are there.

They're all smiling.

Derek: What the fuck?!

Zimkitha: Heyiii mind your language!

Everyone laughs as they walk to us and begin to shower him with hugs.

My heart!

He glances at me and I smile.

My Star is happy!

INSERT 73

Everyone is now making their way to the lounge. Derek pulls me aside and wraps his arms

around me.

Derek: You...

Me: Me...

He chuckles and kisses my forehead.

Derek: I'm speechless.

I smile and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Derek: Not as much as I love you...

We share a tender kiss.

Someone clears their throat and we stop kissing.

Dean: Ya wena.

Derek grunts and lets go of me.

Dean: Happy birthday.

They share a hug.

Me: Aww!

Dean: I'm glad you're here. Dlamini has been annoying us for the past two days.

Me: Watch it.

Dean wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: You good?

Me: Yep.

He nods and looks at Derek.

Dean: Had a good day?

Derek: Indescribable.

Dean: Hmmmm.

Derek: Hmmmm.

They laugh as they look at me.

Me: Mxm whatever.

We then walk to the lounge and find everyone there, drinking champagne and having finger foods.

Derek: I'm starving!

Zimkitha: Relax, the table will be ready in 10 minutes or so.

He groaned.

Everyone was chatting, and I absolutely loved the vibe.

Zimkitha walks to Derek, Dean and I, and Derek wraps his arms around her shoulders.

Zimkitha: Happy birthday, Nkanyezi.

Derek: Thank you.

Zimkitha: I trust that you had a good day?

Derek: Definitely.

They smile at each other. Zimkitha is giving off very loving vibes right now, so I'll stop judging her (for now).

She then turns and looks at me.

Zimkitha: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: Hello.

Zimkitha: I've been told that you're an excellent planner.

Me: I try...

She smiles and nods.

Zimkitha: Let me go help Vuvu...

Derek lets go of her and she walks away.

Why am I suddenly feeling sorry for her?

After a few minutes, we are instructed to come to the table, by Nomvuyo. We all walk to the

table and sit. It's a huge round table. I've

been told that everyone in this circle

believes in having

circular tables rather than rectangular

ones, because it allows everyone to

interact equally, and

you get to look at everyone, instead of just the person who is opposite, or next to you...

Derek squeezes me hand and we smile at each other.

Nomvuyo walks in and sits next to me. I also asked her to organise people who would bring our food, and be “waitresses” because I didn’t want anyone running around trying to dish up for

people and shit. Even though she didn’t want to, she eventually agreed...

As we’re sitting, the starter’s served.

Liwa: Just so everyone knows, this food was prepared by my wife.

Dean: And the mother of my twins...

Malusi: You’ve told us a million times. We know.

Dean: Look at the wifeless man being bitter...

Everyone in the room laughed. Malusi rolled his eyes.

Malusi: I don't know why I'm friends with you people...

Gabi: How is Nandi, anyway? Have you guys been communicating?

I look at Gabi. She really is beautiful, but obviously my girl Vuvu is there at the top. I'm not one

who focuses on people's looks, but it's almost impossible to not acknowledge when someone

looks unreal. I'm surrounded by beautiful women and handsome men... The men are not that

humble, but they love their women tremendously. It's beautiful to watch.

Malusi: I was with her today.

Gabi: So you guys are spending holidays together?

Malusi nods begrudgingly.

Gabi: Well that's nice.

Liwa: So why isn't she here?

Malusi: She says she'll meet up with Derek separately.

Liwa: Kunzima mos...

Joe: Hey, stop coming for my friend!

Everyone laughs, including Malusi. I still don't know how I feel about him. I just can't get past

the fact that he cheated on his wife.

Xolani: How was your trip to the zoo?

I roll my eyes and they laugh.

Derek: It was great.

Nolwazi: So you had never been to the zoo?

Derek shakes his head.

Nolwazi: Aww that's so cute.

Dean: Finally got to meet his relatives.

Everyone laughs, including me, because that's the exact thing I said earlier. Clearly Dean and I

are on the same page these days.

After a while, the first course is served.

Nomvuyo: How is that Londiwe woman who shot your cheating friend, JT?

My eyes popped.

Me: What??

Nomvuyo: Heyi Zizi these people are crazy, I tell you.

Me: What happened?

Nomvuyo: The husband was a serial cheater. On their wedding day, the wife held us hostage, tied up hubby and mistress on the bed, shot hubby's leg.

Me: Whooaa!

Zimkitha: Londi was just fed up. JT had been doing too much.

Malusi: That was a dramatic wedding... I was so shocked, but I knew my girl, Vuvu would update me later.

It's been around three hours, and we've been talking nonstop. These people are really great company. The conversations are childish, mature, crazy and deep at the same time. Once we're done eating the main course, Liwa stands and we all quieten down. Liwa: Okay... So this was not part of Ms Dlamini's plan, but we all thought it would be worthwhile to each share how we feel about Derek, seeing as it's his special day...

I smile.

I had planned on having Dean and Xolani say something since they're the closest, but I'm glad that they all want to...

Liwa: So I'll start, because I've always been the leader anyway...

We all chuckle.

Liwa: We all know Derek is the calmer one, out of all of us...

They all agree, and I take a glance at Derek, who looks genuinely happy.

Liwa: But what we can all say is that he is also the smartest, and most patient...

I'm glad I copped the smartest one of the bunch. I can't with a dumb dumb.

Liwa: On this day, we're all thankful that we have you in our lives. You've been through a

shitload, but you made it. You're the epitome of resilience and hard work.

Liwa then looks at Derek and smiles.

Liwa: You're like a brother to all of us... To many more years, Nkanyezi...

He raises his glass and we do the same.

Derek: Thanks buddy.

Everyone then glances at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Do I have to?

We laugh and she chuckles. She then clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: I know we've known each other for many years, but I can safely say that every

interaction with you leaves me feeling more knowledgeable...

She smiles sweetly.

Nomvuyo: You carry a lot of wisdom for someone your age, and I think it's a trait that only a few

have. I admire you greatly, and like Liwa said, you're like a brother to all of us... The last born...

Everyone just wants to shower you with love as soon as they get to know you.

That's a rare trait,

because it means you're a genuine person, and people are drawn to genuineness...

She's so deep! Hmmyghad!

Nomvuyo: I wish you many more years...

Happy birthday, Nkanyezi...

Malusi: Well damn...

We all chuckle, but somehow the atmosphere has changed. It's just quiet, and deep.

Nomvuyo: I'm not a woman of many words, but Derek does that to a person...

Please allow...

We laugh.

Nomvuyo: Now as you were...

She takes a sip of her water, and we all turn our attention to Malusi.

Malusi: Listen, I'm not into this deep shit, but I'm grateful to have you in my life... in our lives...

Derek nods.

Malusi: I love you.

Derek: I love you too.

Liwa: Maybe that's why you got a divorce. You don't have a way with words.

Everyone laughs and Malusi grunts.

Malusi: I'll get you wena...

Liwa: I kid, I kid, buddy...

We then focus on Gabi.

Gabi: Is it my turn?

She smiles sweetly and looks at Derek.

Gabi: Gosh where do I even begin? You're my favourite person to go shopping with!

Everyone laughs. Gabi is sweet.

Gabi: You just get me. I know we don't know each other that well, but I'm just glad that you were the first person who accepted me into this circle, despite others calling me a gold digger when I first dated Joey...

Zimkitha: Who called you a gold digger?

Gabi: They know themselves...

Zimkitha: Hehe...

Gabi: Anyway, I hope we'll spend more time with each other, you know? Happy birthday!

She raises her glass and we do the same. We then turn our attention to Joe...

Joe: Happy birthday, buddy. Like Vuvu said, you carry so much wisdom, and you're always willing to humble yourself, just to elevate others. Your humility is astounding... I look forward to many years with you in our lives...

I am feeling so emotional. Derek is really loved by these people.

Xolani: My brother, and best friend. Only you and God know what you've been through, honestly.

I'm just happy that I get to be here, and call you my brother. You've provided support for me

when I was confused as fuck about my sexuality, worried about what people will think. You always encourage me to live in my truth, and not stress about others. Thank you for constantly checking up on me, and making sure that I am comfortable in my truth... We've been through some crazy shit, but we're both here now...

Derek stood up and walked to Xolani. They then shared a hug. I feel like everyone knows about these dark times, because now everyone is mellow and emotional...

Derek comes back and sits.

There is silence for a while.

Dean clears his throat and we all look at him.

Dean: I think it's difficult to make sense of our challenges as we go through them...

It's only

when you've survived that you are able to look back and realize how strong we are...

He sighs.

Dean: I always tell you that your biggest flaw, despite people saying that it's an admirable trait,

is being too strong. From my personal experience, and observations throughout my life, there's

nothing admirable about being too strong, especially if you don't know when to pause, and

allow yourself to go through the emotions that are brewing in you... I think as a family, and

friends, we've failed you. You've become everyone's "go to" person for problems, that we

haven't invested sufficient time and energy in ensuring that you are supported... As a person who is close to you, I don't want you to be strong around me; I want you to be vulnerable...

I glanced at Zimkitha and she was wiping her tears. I completely agree with Dean, and I think it's what I have been battling with when it comes to Derek. He is so used to being the tough guy who comes through for everyone else, that he doesn't take care of himself...
Dean: Anyway, I think it's time we all reflect here... Are we always seeking support from others, yet we don't give out the same support? Are we not being selfish?
There is silence.

Dean: I appreciate every single person here, and I sincerely want us to grow stronger. This can only happen if every person feels valued... He sighs and then looks at Derek softly.

Dean: I'm not much of a talker, nor am I in touch with my emotions and shit... But I love and appreciate you... We all do...

Derek nods.

Dean: So like Joe said, may we grow and spend more time together...

We all raise our glasses.

Zimkitha: I don't think I have it in me to say something... I'm too emotional.

Nomvuyo: Should I get you more water?

Zimkitha: I'm okay, baby.

She sighs and then looks at everyone.

Zimkitha: More than anything, these birthdays just remind me how old I am!

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: But you look 30!

Zimkitha chuckles and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: Thanks, Gabi... And for your information, no one thought you were a gold digger. We

just didn't understand why you two rushed to get married.

Gabi giggles.

Zimkitha: And if you ask anyone who knows me, they'll tell you that I'm the last person to judge...

Liwa: She has wrecked many hearts.

Everyone laughs except me.

Say what now?

Dean: She is definitely the last person to judge...

Gabi laughs.

Gabi: Clearly you and I have to have lunch together, Zimi.

Zimkitha: I am more than willing to share my experiences...

Liwa: And you sure have a lot of experiences...

Nomvuyo: Hey! Don't come for my Zimi! They laugh.

I think I might need that lunch date as well. There's something about Zimkitha...

Zimkitha: Anyway, I feel blessed to have each and every one of you in my life. I didn't get to this

point easily... I had to make a lot of sacrifices... But I am blessed, regardless.

She looks at Derek, with tears in her eyes.

Zimkitha: I love you so much, Nkanyezi... Don't ever forget that...

She sighs and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I'll just leave it at that...

Derek stands and they share a hug...

Cute.

He sits down again and squeezes my hand. At this point, I just want to be alone with him. I miss

him. Is that weird?

When I look around the table, I am shocked to find everyone staring at me.

Haibo and then?

Liwa: Ms Dlamini...

I sigh.

Are they really expecting me to say something? Now? I'm so tired though!

I clear my throat and look at Derek. He's smiling.

Me: Uhm...

I sigh.

Me: I'm also not good with words...

Dean: Bullshit.

I grunt and take a deep breath.

There's silence for a while.

Me: I don't think I'll ever find ways to describe or explain how I feel when I'm with you...

I try my best not to break down.

Me: You love so openly and wholeheartedly, and I am so grateful that I get to be on the receiving end of such a true and raw kind of love.

I sigh.

Me: The memories we've shared so far have opened me to the point of no return.

Every day, I

aim to love you just as much as you love me. I aim to not just tell you I love you,

but show you

as well. Thank you for being patient with me, and showing me the true healing power of love.

I smile.

Me: I'm glad that you went through all the things you went through, because those experiences shaped you, and have made you my Star. I love you, and I wish you many more years... Happy birthday, Nkanyi.

He pulls me and we share a hug. I shed a couple of tears.

Derek: I love you more.

He kisses me, and I almost get lost in that kiss, but remember that we're not alone.

Liwa: Deep stuff...

Out of nowhere, everyone stands, and they shares hugs.

These people are so strange. It's like there's an unspoken language that they communicate in.

Nomvuyo: You're so sweet sometimes.

Me: You too.

We chuckle and share a hug.

After a while, we all go to the lounge, and find stacks upon stacks of gifts.

How I wish I was Derek right now. Yhu.

We're now in his apartment, cuddling in bed...

I'm exhausted.

Derek: Are you falling asleep?

Me: Mmm.

He kisses my forehead and I smile.

Me: Had a good day?

Him: I love you.

Me: Love you too.

Him: You're the best.

I giggle sleepily.

Me: I'll give you the rest of your gifts tomorrow.

Him: There's still more?

Me: Yep.

I feel him smile.

Me: One more thing...

Him: What?

I open my eyes and look at him sleepily.

Me: I spoke to my parents...

Him: About?

I keep quiet and he nudges me.

Me: I'm going to move in with you...

I swear the world may have stopped moving...

Him: WHAT?!

Me: Can I sleep now?

Him: Ziyanda!

Me: Hmm?

I was too tired to pay attention to him. I felt myself doze off into a very peaceful sleep.

INSERT 74

The following day, I wake up at around 10am- that's how tired I was...

Derek is nowhere to be found. I make my way to the bathroom to clean myself up and then

make the bed.

Derek: So you walk around naked when I'm not around?

I squeal as I take a gown and cover myself. He shakes his head and smiles.

Derek: You do know that we have sex all the time, and I know your body, right?

Me: Whatever.

He chuckles and walks to me.

Derek: Slept well?

Me: Like a baby.

He wraps his arm around my waist and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: I couldn't sleep at all.

Me: Really?

He nods and smiles widely.

Me: I wonder why.

He squeezes me and I giggle.

Me: I don't remember what happened last night. I was that exhausted.

Him: Hey!

I continue to giggle and he sulks.

Me: What did I say?

Him: You're moving in with me.

Me: Hmm.

He looks at me intently, and I can just see the joy he's feeling.

Me: My mom didn't even hesitate to agree.

Him: Are you serious?

Me: Yep. She says it's the perfect way to get to know each other.

He nods and smiles.

Me: My dad, on the other hand, is a bit sceptical.

Him: Did he say why?

Me: He's a bit traditional, so I think the thought of living together before marriage, is a bit daunting.

Him: I understand...

Me: But he's supportive...

He nods slowly and we sit down.

Me: But you do realise that it's not going to be peaches and cream all the time, right?

Him: Definitely, but it's worth it...

I nod.

Him: I want us to work out, and I know we will.

I smile.

Me: You are so corny.

I kiss him.

Him: Breakfast is ready...

Me: Perfect, let me get dressed.

Him: Let me help you...

I roll my eyes as he stands and pulls me up...

It's Wednesday, two days since Derek's birthday. As much as he was sulking, I insisted on going

home and spending time with my parents and Lwazi.

My mom has already started packing my things. All of this feels rushed, but right. I haven't had

time to let it sink in, but it is what it is. I genuinely want to move in with this one.

Mom: So the plan is to move in next week?

Me: Yes.

She smiles.

Mom: I think it's a great idea, to be honest. At least you'll know him before you two decide to get married.

Me: Mmm.

Mom: Don't over-analyse it, baby. I personally trust Derek.

Me: Hmkay.

Mom: And I think we should meet his parents, you know?

Me: The mom resents me.

Mom: Really??

Me: Yep.

I decide not to tell her about the slap situation, because I know she would run to wherever

Khwezi is, and rearrange her.

Mom: Haike, Derek will have to intervene and sort that out.

Me: I don't even have the energy for that situation. That woman is deranged.

She laughs.

Mom: Childish woman. I'll deal with her if things get out of hand.

Me: I know you will...

We both laugh and I watch as she continues packing.

Mom: So when are you going to start learning how to cook?

Me: I can cook hawu.

Mom: Hmm okay ke sisi.

We continue chatting...

The following day, Derek, being the person that he is, pitched out of nowhere. I was inside the house, watching TV, while my mom was busy doing the laundry outside.

Mom: Baby, Derek is here!

Me: Tell him to go back to wherever he comes from!

Mom: Hai suka. Come here.

I walk to the kitchen, and I'm completely shocked to see plastics filled with groceries.

Me: And then what?

He looks at me innocently and smiles.

Mom: Heyi we are being spoilt here.

Me: Derek?

Derek: I thought I should get you a few things...

Me: A few?

I look at all these plastics and he shrugs.

Mom: Hai suka wena Ziyanda. Stop being ungrateful!

She takes her phone and dials my dad's number.

Mom: Heyi phela you will not believe this... Derek bought groceries... Yebo...

She laughs.

Mom: Hmkay I will tell him... Bye, see you soon...

She hangs up and looks at Derek happily.

Mom: He says this must be a consistent gesture, because he doesn't appreciate inconsistency.

They both laugh and I'm just out here confused and annoyed. Why is he doing this? Argh.

I walk back to the lounge and continue watching TV. Lwazi is outside playing with her friends,

and my dad is spending time with his side of the family...

Derek follows me and sits next to me. He looks so chilled, and that annoys me even more.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Hello.

He keeps quiet and I focus on the TV.

My mom walks to the lounge.

Mom: I'll be back a bit later. I'm meeting up noVuyi...

Me: Okay.

Mom: And don't be childish about this. Don't bore us.

She then looks at Derek and smiles.

Mom: Thank you very much for your kind gesture, Nkanyezi. I'll see you soon, right?

Derek: Definitely, and you're welcome.

Mom: Bye.

She walks out and closes the door.

We both focus on the TV for a while.

Eventually, he turns to look at me.

Derek: How are you?

I sigh.

Me: I'm good, and you?

He sighs.

Him: I miss you.

Me: Hmm.

Him: There's nothing wrong with what I've just did.

Me: I don't even have the energy to be angry.

He smiles and pulls me closer to him so we can kiss.

Him: Missed you.

Me: Me too.

Him: You're mean.

Me: Silly old me?

He kisses me.

Me: Sorry, I'm just grumpy.

He kisses me again and I smile.

Me: Let's go out for lunch.

Him: Perfect.

Me: Let me get ready...

Him: Where's Lwazi?

Me: Playing with her friends... She'll come back later.

Him: I miss her.

Me: She's been asking me about you.

Him: We should have a play date.

Me: You do know that she is 11 years old, right?

Him: Don't rain on my parade.

I chuckle and stand.

Me: Will be back now now.

I walk to the bedroom, and get dressed properly. As I finish up, he walks in and by the looks of it; we might just have sex...

We're now at Nex Door, waiting for our order

Me: So Nikki and I always stop drinking alcohol for the first two months of the year.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What?

Him: You? No alcohol? What?

I laugh.

Me: We've been doing it for three years now. We obviously start on the 2nd, because the 1st is always spent drunk.

Him: You weren't that drunk on my birthday.

Me: Because I spent it with your old friends. Nikki and I usually spend NYE in pyjamas, drinking and stuffing our faces.

Him: So am I supposed to hold you accountable?

Me: No need to. I know how to control myself. Alcohol is not an addiction of mine...

Him: Hmm.

Me: Anyway, Nikki wants us to have a double date.

Him: With her boyfriend?

I nod.

Him: Hmkay.

Me: I think you'll like him. You two have similar personalities.

Him: You've met him once.

Me: So?

He shakes his head and chuckles.

Me: So, I'll let her know that you're up for it.

Our food finally comes and we start eating.

Him: So I've organized this whole moving process...

Me: Thank God. I don't think I want to lift a finger.

Him: Lazy bone.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's an unrecognized number.

Me: Excuse me...

He nods and I answer.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

Person: Hi, dear, you're speaking to Zimkitha.

Me: Oh.

Say what now?

Zimkitha: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Zimkitha: I'm good, love.

I keep quiet.

Universe, what does she want from me?

Zimkitha: I would like to extend an invitation for lunch, tomorrow.

Me: Uhm...

Zimkitha: Derek told me that you're planning on moving together... I'm very happy for you two.

Me: Uhm... Okay...

Zimkitha: Is that a yes?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Would you like me to send a driver for you?

Me: No, thanks. Just send me the location.

Zimkitha: Alright then... And don't come with Derek, please.

Whoa does she want to secretly chop me and bury me somewhere?

Zimkitha: Bye, dear.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek weirdly.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Zimkitha has invited me for lunch.

Derek: Oh...

He carries on eating as if he doesn't really care.

Me: You knew?

Derek: She asked for my permission.

Me: Oh... And you don't have a problem with that?

He shakes his head and smiles.

Derek: She wants to know you better...

Me: Hmkay.

I focus on my food.

I wonder what Zimkitha wants from me...

INSERT 75

Niki is finally back from her baecation and I'm happy for her. This guy seems good and chilled...

Just what my girl needs.

I'm meeting up with her later, and we're meeting up with Jeff and Ziggy, our good ol' mates.

They are a story for another day...

My mom on the other hand, is still busy packing. To me, it seems like she is excited ngathi she has always wanted to get rid of me. My dad, on the other hand, is all sad and shit. He keeps saying that the house will be too quiet without me.

At around 1pm, I made my way out of the house, to Zimkitha's house. I've been told that it's a mansion that Zimkitha refuses to let go. It's a Mzinyathi gem.

My Uber ride is expensive as hell. Maybe I should have taken Zimkitha's offer...

Anyway, as I get out of the car, the gate opens, and Nyami runs to me.

Nyami: Auntie Zizi!

Me: Hey, baby!

She wraps her arms around me and we walk in. Now, Nyami loves her parents, but she is obsessed with her Granny Zimi. They're inseparable.

Nyami: I'm so glad you're here. Zimi even cooked for you.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Well, now I just wish I had brought Lwazi with. I concluded a while back that they would get along if they met noNyami.

Anyway, I am beyond stunned by this house or "mansion" rather.

Me: This house is huge.

She giggles.

Nyami: Vuvu and Gog'Zodwa used to live in that cottage over there.

She points at a guesthouse at a distance... It's probably the size of my house...

We get to the door and Nyami leads me in. I don't know how I feel right now. I think I'm numb. Zimkitha freaks me out a bit, because she's intimidating, yet she has a loving aura at the same time.

As we get in the kitchen, we find Zimkitha there. She smiles as soon as she sees us.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda!

Me: Hey...

She opens up her arms and we share a hug. She smells really good... Like generational wealth...

Zimkitha: How are you? You look great.

Me: Thank you. I'm well, and you?

Zimkitha: I'm well...

Nyami: I'll be in my room, Zimi.

Zimkitha: Okay, baby.

Nyami runs off, and I am left with

Zimkitha all by myself. Save me, Universe!

Zimkitha: Would you like something to drink?

Me: Water is fine.

Zimkitha: No champagne?

Me: I'm not really a fan of champagne.

Her: Really?

I shake my head.

Her: I have a wine cellar, if you're a wine enthusiast.

"Wine enthusiast" hehe thatha English...

Me: No, thank you. Water will do.

She nods and gets some bottled water from the humongous fridge.

Me: Beautiful house.

Her: Oh, this little shack of mine?

She laughs and I join her.

Her: My grandparents worked tirelessly to build this...

Me: Do you live here by yourself?

Her: Yes, unfortunately.

Me: Geesh, and the cleaning?

She chuckles.

Her: Well... I have helpers...

Me: Hmm.

Her: I've noticed that you and Vuvu get along...

Me: Yes, we do.

She smiles and nods.

Her: She is not a people's person, so I'm always happy to see her gravitate towards someone.

I smile.

Her: And I'm sure she has told you our family history.

I try to keep a straight face and she laughs.

Her: Oh, sweetie, the Mzinyathi history is fucked up. No need to hide your shock and horror...

I sigh and she continues laughing.

Her: Let's go to the lounge...

I follow her and we sit opposite each other.

Her: The food will be ready soon.

I nod.

Her: So what made you agree to move in with Derek?

Me: It just feels right.

She nods slowly and looks at me softly.

Her: Derek is really loveable, isn't he?

Me: Too much.

She chuckles and takes a sip of her whiskey... Yes, whiskey...

Me: Why do you live by yourself?

She raises an eyebrow and takes another sip of her drink.

Her: Well, firstly, I'm recently divorced...

Me: Divorced?

She nods.

Her: My marriage was arranged, but I grew to love that poor man.

Me: Poor?

She giggles.

Her: Poor in every sense of the word.

Me: Ouch.

Her: Unfortunately, he was also in love with Nomvuyo's real mom...Technically, I stole him from her.

Me: She's still alive?

Her: Yep. She still hates me. She just fails to understand that the whole thing was arranged.

Me: So your ex-husband is Nomvuyo's real father?

She nods and smiles sweetly.

Woooah! I feel like my brain is going through the most right now.

Her: I have a very rich history, Ziyanda. Liwa always says I'm a walking textbook. I keep quiet.

Her: Anyway, to answer your question fully, I live alone because I'm divorced, and my kids are all grown...

Me: How many kids do you have?

She pouts a bit and sighs.

Her: Two.

Me: Two? I only know Liwa.

Her: Liwa has a twin.

Me: Really?

I don't remember if I was told this before, but I'm a bit surprised.

Her: Her name is Princess.

I nod.

Her: She is in the UK.

Me: That's nice.

Her: Definitely. She is not the nicest person though...

Me: Really?

She chuckles.

Her: Liwa is the kindest.

Me: He is.

Her: But he has a really cold side as well...

Me: I've noticed that that's a common trait with all of them.

She raises an eyebrow.

Her: All of them?

Me: Yeah, Liwa, Dean, and Derek.

She sighs and nods.

Her: They're all very close, and they've somehow become the same. It's creepy, isn't it?

Me: Very creepy, but I understand. They hang out with each other all the time, so their habits probably rubbed off on all of them.

Her: They've always been in each other's lives.

She looks at me intently, and I can feel myself squirm uncomfortably. See what I mean with

Zimkitha? One minute, she's all cute and lovey dovey, then the next minute, she's all intense and shit.

Her: I've watched all of them grow, and I am very proud of the men they've become.

Me: You were in all of their lives?

She nods.

She takes a sip of her whiskey and looks at me sweetly.

My heart rate is on another level.

Me: I admire the love they share. It's very deep.

Her: They all have one thing in common...

She stares at me.

Her: And I have a feeling you know...

I want to stand and run, but my body is failing me.

Her: They're all my sons...

Really, Universe?!

At this point in time, I'm dumbstruck.

INSERT 76 (Couldn't edit)

I look at her.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda?

She looks at me softly as she stands and sits next to me.

Me: What?

She continues to look at me softly.

Me: What do you mean they're your sons?

She keeps quiet.

I stand and look down at her.

Me: I need the bathroom.

She tells me where to go and I make my way there. I'm too calm for my liking right now. I get to

the bathroom, and sit there for a while.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek.

I answer without any hesitation.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Hi, baby. How's it going? I miss you.

I smile.

Me: I'm very overwhelmed by this gigantic house.

He chuckles and I feel myself relax. He's my happy place, this one.

Him: And how's Zimkitha? She hasn't killed you?

Me: Not yet, but I'm anticipating it.

He laughs and I join him.

Him: Okay then... I'll know where to find you once you disappear.

Me: Bye.

Him: Love you.

Me: Right back at ya.

I end the call and sigh. Once I've gathered my thoughts, I walk back to the lounge.

Where is she?

Zimkitha: I'm here!

I follow her voice and it leads me to a room with a large circular table. I did mention that they only use circular tables to eat, right? She's already sitting down... I sit next to her and a young woman serves us our food.

Zimkitha: Are you okay?

Me: I'm fine.

I stare at her and she smiles.

Me: What do you mean they're your sons?

Her: Everyone knows they're my sons...

I look at her in confusion.

Her: Liwa may be my only biological son, but I've always treated them the same.

She smiles sweetly.

Her: They've been in each other's lives forever... They're like brothers.

I sigh.

Her: And I'm sure Lindelwa would also say the same thing... They're all her sons...

Me: What about Khwezi?

She tightens her jaw, but remains smiling.

Her: What about her?

Me: Would she also say Dean and Liwa are her sons?

She sighs.

Her: Khwezi is different.

Me: How so?

Her: Well, she is not as invested in family as the rest of us.

Me: Really? Then why would she adopt Derek and Xolani?

She is quiet for a few seconds.

Her: Her husband is the one who pushed for the adoption, because she can't conceive.

Me: She can't conceive?

She shakes her head lightly.

I keep quiet. I need to process this information. What she is saying makes a bit of sense.

But then again, Zimkitha confuses the shit out of me.

Me: Has she always been this mean?

She laughs sweetly.

Her: Khwezi is a typical housewife...

I don't say anything.

Her: Is she mean to you?

Me: She slapped me.

Her jaw drops and she looks at me in shock.

Her: What??

I shrug.

Me: I couldn't be bothered, honestly. I also don't like her.

Her: She slapped you??

I nod and she hisses as she takes a sip of her whiskey.

Her: She is quite annoying.

I can't help but chuckle.

Me: So you don't like her?

She shakes her head.

Her: I don't get along with people who lack substance.

Me: Well damn...

She smiles and we begin to eat.

Her: Something tells me you have a lot of substance...

Me: Boring old me?

She laughs.

Her: Tell me about your family.

Me: There isn't much to tell, really...

Her: Tell me.

I sigh as I begin telling her about my mom and dad.

After a while, once I'm done, she smiles.

Her: You sound like you've had a love-filled life.

Me: Definitely.

Her: That's amazing. I could always tell that you come from a stable family...

Me: Uhm okay...

Her: So according to Derek, I freak you out?

Really, Derek? How you gonna expose our gossip like that?

Me: I can't seem to figure you out.

Her: Really?

I nod.

Her: Well, I'm a mystery to myself as well...

I chuckle.

Her: I've just been through a lot, that's all. Above all, I'm a protective mother...

Me: I've noticed.

Her: And because of that, I tend to come across as hardcore, when in fact, I just overly love.

Me: Hmm.

We focus on our food for a while.

Me: So do you have a favourite son?

She giggles and sighs.

Her: I love them for different reasons...

Liwa is my go to person for anything. Out of everyone in my life, he genuinely gets me, and he never judges me.

Me: That's sweet.

Her: He always has my back, ever since he was young...

I nod.

Her: And he knows everything about me.

Me: Everything?

Her: Let's say 95%...

Me: Hmm.

She smiles.

Her: Dean, on the other hand, is my business confidant. I learn a lot from him... I love his toughness. He just doesn't give a shit what anyone has to say about him. He does whatever he

wants, and he has taught me to do the same- shamelessly.

I nod. I have to say I also admire Dean for that. He does his own thing...

Her: Xolani is just amazing. I always knew he was gay, and he was always free around me- even before he came out.

Me: I love him.

Her: He's just stunning!

We both chuckle.

Her: And then there's Nkanyezi...

I feel myself smile. Argh I miss him.

Her: I think you understand why I love him...

I nod.

Her: I don't know where he gets all the love he gives. It's mind-blowing.

She smiles.

Her: I just want to see him happy. He has been through so much.

Me: I want him to open up to me.

She looks at me sympathetically.

Her: Give him time.

Me: Okay.

Her: He loves you, I know... He'll open up...

Me: Okay.

Her: So do you understand what I mean by them being my sons? I would die for every single one of them.

I smile. I think I'm less judgemental towards her now. She's just a loving person.

Her: And of course Nomvuyo is part of the equation.

Me: Of course.

She laughs quietly.

Her: We have a very strange dynamic, but it works for us.

I nod lightly.

Her: Anyway, enough about the deep stuff. How amazing was his birthday?

Me: Amazing and exhausting.

Her: He can't stop talking about it.

I smile.

Her: Thank you for making it memorable.

Me: You're welcome. I'm glad he enjoyed it.

After a while, we finish up eating, and we're served dessert.

Overall, that lunch was good. I think I got to know Zimkitha on a deeper level, and understand

why she behaves the way she does. I still have my suspicions about her, but I think I'll just mind

my own business...

I'm now meeting with Niki for a quick catch-up session...

I give her a squeeze and we make our way to Cocobel in Maboneng for milkshakes.

Me: So how does it feel to be a Love Lives Here resident?

She laughs.

Niki: Love doesn't live here as yet... I'm taking it slow.

Me: I like him though.

Her: That makes two of us.

I smile.

Her: He opened up to me yazi...

Me: Really?

She sighs heavily and nods.

Me: Yini?

Her: He was married twice...

Me: Huh??

Her: Ya... He's still waiting for confirmation of his second divorce.

Me: Geesh.

She sighs.

Her: Yep... I don't know how I feel about all of that.

Me: Yoh...

Her: But I'm not one to judge... It's just too much, you know?

I nod.

Her: He's just been through so much... I feel bad for him.

Me: I guess we all have our bullshit...

Her: Definitely. I want to be with him.

Me: Then be with him.

She sighs and nods.

Her: He's just very broken...

Me: I doubt he surpasses Sexy Beast.

We both laugh.

Her: You must give me tips phela.

Me: I've ghat you.

We continue to chat.

Me: Oh, and Nkanyi agreed to a double date... Set it up.

Her: Yay!

Just then, her phone rings and she answers it.

Niki: We're at Cocobel... Hai suka...

She laughs and ends the call.

Me: Jeff?

She nods.

Just then, a car pulls up by our table...

Jeff and Ziggy walk out and I exclaim.

Me: My people!

They get to us and I give them big hugs.

Woo but I missed Ziggy. We've always had a strangely

close relationship. We met them at a house party back in varsity (they weren't students though)

and we've been cool ever since. Ziggy is my person though...

Niki: Gosh I forgot about Zi Squared...

Me: Don't be jealous!

Ziggy: You have really abandoned us, you fool.

Me: Dude, I have a boyfriend now. Leave me alone.

Jeff: Hehe Niki tells us you're fucking your boss.

Me: Mxm.

They join us and I force them to order milkshakes as well.

Ziggy asks them to add some alcohol...

Me: How's Luu?

Jeff grunts and I chuckle. Luyanda and Jeff are beyond inseparable. They're high-key addicted

to each other, and it's a bit toxic as well.

Jeff: The baby has calmed her a bit.

Ziggy: But she's still a bitch.

Niki and I laugh.

Jeff: Hey! I'll fuck all of you up!

We continue laughing at him.

Jeff: I think you guys should reach out to her.

Niki: No way!

Jeff sulks.

Me: I'm good, fam. Your girlfriend still has a lot of growing up to do...

Jeff: Mxm.

Ziggy: So wena how's your love life?

Me: Fantastic. Being loved is nice, guys.

Jeff: Preach.

Ziggy: Mxm.

Me: Weeh you're still out and about?

Jeff: Nope, he has fallen in love with a rebel.

I shake my head disapprovingly.

Me: What do I always say to you? You need a solid woman... Not a childish person.

Ziggy: I love living in the fast lane.

Jeff: And Ivy sure as hell offers that shit. I blink a couple of times.

Me: Say what now?

They all look at me weirdly.

Me: Ivy??

Ziggy: Yep, lovely name, huh?

Me: Ivy Dumakude?

Ziggy smiles.

Me: What the hell??

Gosh, I am actually fed up. Can the world get any smaller?

INSERT 77

Niki: And then wena?

I roll my eyes.

Me: Ivy is that annoying kid I told you about.

Ziggy: Annoying? Uyanya wena!

Me: Argh how did you even meet? What a disgusting combination!

Ziggy: We met at a house party... We clicked...

Me: Mxm.

Jeff: She also annoys me. Childish.

Me: I'm glad we're on the same page.

Jeff: How do you know her?

Me: Through mutual relations...

I grunt.

Me: Anyway, how's fatherhood, friend?

Jeff: I'm trying by all means to adjust to this shit. It's not easy.

I nod.

Jeff: And Luyanda seems to be going through a lot of emotional shit as well.

Me: Is she still going through a lot with her father?

He nods.

Me: Shame.

He sighs.

Jeff: We'll get through it though...

Me: Shout if you need help.

He nods.

Me: You guys can join our double date?

Jeff: Double date?

Me: Niki is organizing it.

Jeff: That would be perfect for Luu. I think she could use some air.

Ziggy: Can I also come?

Me: Euww, no. We're good.

Ziggy: Mxm rude.

We all laugh at him.

Niki: It seems like your girl is a no-go-zone.

Ziggy: She's amazing. Zi is just a judgemental bitch.

Me: More like a truthful bitch. I speak nothing but the truth.

Ziggy: Mxm.

We continue chatting for a while... Good vibes, man...

After a long time, my phone rings and it's Derek.

Me: Excuse me.

I stand and walk away from the table as I answer.

Me: Nkanyi.

Derek: Can I fetch you?

Me: But what kind of an Uber driver are you? Are you not supposed to wait for me to request first?

He groans and I laugh at him. His separation anxiety is on another level.

Me: You can come.

Derek: I'll see you soon.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and walk back to the table and sit.

Jeff: So, I'm telling Niki that I want to start a business.

Me: Really? That's great.

Niki: As long as it has nothing to do with prostitutes, then I'm behind you all the way.

We all laugh.

Me: So what do you want to do?

Jeff: Open up restaurants...

I nod slowly.

Me: Yazi that's my dream. Imagine all the eating I'd do?

Ziggy: You'll get fatter.

Me: And my man will still love me. Wena?

Ivy is going to leave you as soon as she finds another idiot.

Niki: Ohhh!

Jeff: Ziyanda 2... Ziggy 0...

Me: Don't come for me!

Ziggy: I don't know what my baby did to you.

I chuckle and try to hug him but he sulks.

Me: Haike... Anyway, Jeff, I love the idea.

Have you completely stopped this escorting business?

He looks at Ziggy and they both nod.

Me: Hehe... If you say so.

Niki: I still can't believe we're friends with you idiots. You're technically doing some illegal shit.

Me: If the police ever approach me, I will deny knowing anything about your shit.

Jeff: That's what you're supposed to do vele.

We continue chatting until I spot Derek walking towards us. He looks so yummy, but I can tell that he is in a sulky mood.

He finally gets to us, and he greets.

Niki: Derek!

She stands and they share a hug.

Derek: How are you, Nikiwe?

Niki: I'm good, and you? Happy belated birthday!

Derek smiles and nods.

Derek: Thank you.

He then looks at Jeff and Ziggy. I can tell that he is trying to figure out what the hell is going on.

Ziggy: What's up, mate?

Derek: Hi.

Jeff: Howzit?

Derek: I'm well.

Aww shame this snob of mine.

He looks at me.

I stand and he instantly wraps one arm around my waist.

Territorial much? If only he knew that he has nothing to worry about here.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hey...

I then look at Jeff and Ziggy.

Me: This is Derek, my boyfriend.

I then look at Derek.

Me: This is Jeff and Ziggy, very good friends of mine.

Derek nods expressionlessly.

Ziggy: Nice to finally meet you, mate.

Derek nods tightly.

Me: Okay then, bye guys.

Ziggy: See you soon?

Me: Definitely.

Ziggy stands and we share a hug.

Me: Jeff? We'll meet up, angithi?

Jeff: Definitely.

Me: Bye.

Niki: See you soon... Bye, Derek.

Derek: Goodbye.

I get my bag and we walk away. He is still holding on to me.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods tightly. I decide not to probe him further. He'll come around...

We get to his loft and I go to the lounge while he goes to the bathroom. My phone rings and it's

Niki.

Me: Friend?

Niki: Is he fine? Why was he so cold?

I chuckle.

Me: Ngimazelaphi?

Niki: Haike... bye.

Me: Shap.

Niki: Ziggy doesn't like him.

Me: As if Ziggy's approval controls my intake of oxygen...

She laughs.

Me: Bye, friend.

Niki: Byee!

I end the call and Derek walks back and sits.

Me: Yini manje, Mr. Grumpy?

He looks at me blankly.

Me: You can't possibly be jealous...

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: You can't possibly think I'm that insecure.

Me: Whooa!

Him: I'd like to think that I'm experienced enough to identify a threat when I encounter one.

Me: Heee! Thatha Derek!

His face softens up and I pull him closer to me.

Me: I'm all yours.

Him: Who are those weirdos, anyway?

Me: Very good friends of mine.

He grunts.

Him: You sure know how to pick 'em.

Me: Don't come for me.

He kisses me, and I relax.

Me: My mom has sent me a message telling me that she's done packing my shit.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Him: Are you serious??

Me: Yep. She is so excited. It's obvious that she wants to get rid of me.

Him: Well, you've basically been cock-blocking your parents for 25 years.

Me: Heey!

He laughs and kisses me again.

Him: How was your lunch?

Me: It was weird...

Him: Weird?

Me: Weird, but good.

Him: She's not bad, right?

Me: Not at all.

Him: So we love Zimkitha?

Me: Hmm I still need time to think about it...

He huffs.

Me: Anyway, can we take a long shower, and cuddle? I'm tired.

He nods excitedly as he stands and pulls me up.

Two days later, I'm super excited for our double date!

I am putting a lot of energy in dressing up and looking pretty. Yes, I'm that excited!

It's around 5pm, and I'm at Derek's place.

It's so weird how I'm always with Derek...

Technically,

we've already moved in together. I still want us to discuss how I'm going to contribute to rent and shit. I'm not about to kipita for free... Anyway, I help Derek get dressed, and I marvel.

Me: You look stunning!

He smiles.

Derek: I feel like you're too excited for this date.

Me: Because duuh!

He chuckles.

Me: Niki and I have always fantasized about having amazing boyfriends, and linking them up.

This is a big deal!

He looks at me weirdly and I giggle.

Me: You don't get it...

Him: Clearly.

We finish up and I get a call from Niki telling me that they are on the way.

We get to the car and drive off.

Derek: So you're basically going to force me to be friends with this person?

Me: Yep. I like him.

He glances at me and shakes his head lightly.

Me: He's so calm. Ufana nawe!

Him: I doubt there's another Derek in this world... I'm special, boo.

Me: Boo?

I laugh and he joins.

Me: Euww don't ever call me that. You're far too sophisticated for such lingo.

Him: Gosh.

I continue laughing as he mocks and imitates me.

Eventually, we get to the restaurant and we are led to our table.

We find Niki and Kwani (yes, I call him that now) sitting already.

Me: Hey, people!

Niki: Heey!

She stands and we share a hug.

I look at Kwani and smile happily. He beee handsome, hunny.

Me: Heeyii!

Kwanele chuckles as he stands and hugs me.

Me: You smell stunning!

Kwanele: Uhm... Thanks?

Niki: She's obsessed with smells.

Derek: Definitely.

Me: Kwanele, this is Derek, my boyfriend.

Derek: Boyfriend? Are we kids?

Me: What am I supposed to say? I'm not used to introducing you to people.

Derek: I'm your man... Your future husband...

Me: My roommate?

We laugh.

Niki: Haike! We don't have time for your inside jokes. Finish up this introduction phela.

Me: Oh, yes! Kwanele, this is Derek...

Derek, this is Kwanele, Niki's boyfriend...

Boyfriend?

Kwanele chuckles.

Kwanele: Quite a childish term...

Derek: I'm glad we're on the same page.

They shake hands as they chuckle.

I knew they'd get along. Stunning!

We sit and order.

Me: How was your baecation?

Derek: Bae what?

Me: Stop exposing your age, grandpa.

Derek chuckles.

Me: They went on a vacation.

Derek: Lovely. We should probably do the same.

Me: True... Considering the fact that schools open the week after next.

Kwanele: You also teach, Derek?

Derek shakes his head.

Derek: I'm the head master.

Me: Master...

We both laugh quietly.

Niki rolls her eyes. It's only when I'm around people that I realize that Derek and I always have these random moments when we laugh about dumb things... And Niki is the one who always points it out.

Kwanele: So you two work together?

Me: Yes.

Kwanele: What an interesting dynamic.

Derek: I'm interested to see how things will be, because we only got really close during the holidays.

Kwanele: Hmm... I'm sure you'll expose yourselves...

Derek: I'm planning on resigning anyway...

Kwanele: Future plans?

Derek: Opening my own school.

Kwanele: Great concept... If you need property assistance, hit me up.

Niki: He's a lawyer... Used to specialise in property.

Derek: What changed?

Kwanele: Got boring after a while... I'm into family issues now, so that's what I'm studying.

Derek nods slowly.

Derek: What's your surname?

Kwanele: Buthelezi...

Derek nods and glances at me. I'm smiling. This is just amazing!

After a while, our food finally arrives and we begin eating. The conversation is flowing,

kumnandi, you know?

Derek: So you mentioned that you were married...

Kwanele: Twice.

Derek nods.

Kwanele: It's a very complicated story, and I'm only recovering now. It was a bad situation.

Derek: Really?

Kwanele nods lightly.

Kwanele: I messed up badly, and that resulted in my wife moving on with her boss and having two kids with him...

Derek glances at me. He seems interested in Kwanele. I'm glad they're getting along.

Kwanele: The divorce was very messy, but it's over now... I'm just waiting for this second one to be finalised. My second wife is MIA.

This second wife better bring her ass here and sign these papers. Niki can't be cock-blocked by

a selfish wife who won't let go.

Anyway, we continue chatting for a while.

Good vibes.

Kwanele's phone rings and he sighs.

Kwanele: Please excuse me...

We all nod and he walks away...

Niki is so happy, and I'm happy for her.

She asks to go the bathroom and disappears as well.

Me: How amazing is he?

Derek drinks his wine and then looks at me coolly.

Me: And I like that you're two are getting along.

Derek: You are clueless, aren't you?

Me: About what?

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: Ah... Ziyanda Dlamini...

He drinks his wine and shakes his head calmly.

I don't know what his problem is.

Kwanele is great.

INSERT 78 (Couldn't edit the insert)

Derek: I'm finding you very cute right now...

Me: Kanti yini wena?

He chuckles and shakes his head lightly.

Shortly after, Kwanele and Niki come back at the same time.

Just then, Derek's phone rings and he excuses himself and walks away.

Niki: So, baby, do you like Derek?

Kwanele: You two are really serious about hooking us up, huh?

Niki and I laugh.

Me: Well, I just think you two are very similar. You're both calm and collected, you know?

Niki: Match made in heaven!

Kwanele chuckles and continues shaking his head lightly. Derek eventually comes back and we

finish up our food. I'm glad that the conversation is flowing. I am happy that Derek gets to

interact more with my people, because we're always with his people. Lol Kwanele is officially

my person now. He and Niki are good together.

It's now around 9pm, and I am exhausted.

Derek: I think we should get going...

I yawn and nod.

Derek: Great meeting you, Kwanele.

Kwanele: Likewise.

They smile at each other and nod.

Derek: Niki, I'll see you around?

Niki: Definitely.

We say our goodbyes and make our way out.

Derek: You seem tired.

Me: I am.

Him: It's all the talking you did tonight.

Me: Zip it, hater.

He laughs as we get in the car and drive off.

The following day, I get a call from Mdu, asking me to come through. I was not in the mood, but when I thought of poor Tholi, I had no choice but to agree. I honestly just want to find out how she is after she was diagnosed with Postpartum Depression.

Derek comes back from the bathroom and I look at him.

Derek: What?

Me: Am I not allowed to take a close look at the person I sleep with?

He chuckles.

I watch as he lotions his body and gets dressed.

Me: So...

He sits next to me and looks at me coolly.

Me: Uhm so... Mdu just called me...

He looks at me weirdly.

Him: No.

Me: No, what?

Him: Stop involving yourself in other people's business.

Me: I'm not!

He shakes his head sternly.

Him: Ziyanda, do you understand that this is bigger than what you think it is? Why

hasn't Mdu

told his family about this shit?

I keep quiet.

Him: People are going to get hurt by this revelation.

Me: But still...

He looks at me.

Me: Tholi is depressed.

He still doesn't say anything.

Me: I don't have it in me to dismiss people when they need me. I'm not like you.

Him: What you won't do is try to turn this around, just to make yourself feel better.

I sigh.

Me: They need us!

Him: Can you imagine what will happen when these people find out that we were in on this?

Me: I will face those consequences when we get there. What I will not do is shut these people out when they are going through all this bullshit.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'm a helper, I can't help it.

Him: You like taking on projects.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Solving other people's problems fuels you.

I swear the world stops moving for a second.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: Part of you is obsessed with helping out other people and solving their problems.

I try to stand and he pulls me down.

Him: Don't go running off, being dramatic.

I mean this in a good way. It shows how thoughtful

you are.

I sigh.

Him: I just think there has to be a limit.

You can't allow yourself to be too consumed with other

people's lives...

Me: I can't help it.

Him: I know.

He takes my hand.

Him: And I'm not going to try to change you. I just don't want you to be so involved in other people's drama.

I sigh.

Him: But because I love you so much, I will be here for you... Even if it means I dig us a deeper hole...

Me: We'll just check up on them, and leave. I promise!

He chuckles.

He stands and I watch him finish getting dressed. Once he is done, he looks at me expectantly.

Him: Asambe.

I stand and we make our way out.

We get to the complex, and meet Mdu.

Me: How is she?

Mdu: She's getting better. She's been seeing a psychiatrist, and has the necessary meds.

Me: That's good.

He nods.

We get to their penthouse and find Tholi washing the dishes.

Me: Hey, Tholi.

She looks at me and smiles. She looks much better. Her chubby cheeks are back, and she looks normal again.

Tholi: Hi, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

We share a brief hug and she looks at me awkwardly.

Tholi: I'm okay, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

She avoids Derek's eyes.

Derek: Hello, Tholi.

Tholi: Hi.

Derek and Mdu walk off to the balcony and I look at Tholi softly. I just want to hold her tight, and assure her that everything will be okay.

Me: How are the babies?

Tholi: They're okay.

Me: Are they still nameless?

She giggles and nods.

Me: Oh my goodness. When are you planning on naming them?

She shrugs.

Okay. She hasn't recovered. I won't discuss the babies. She seems uneasy as soon as I bring them up.

Me: You look good yazi.

Tholi: Don't lie.

I smile genuinely and she smiles back. She then finishes up cleaning and we walk to the lounge and sit down.

Me: Is the treatment helping?

She looks away, clearly embarrassed.

Me: Tholi, did Mdu tell you that I was diagnosed with depression?

She looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Yep.

Tholi: But... You don't seem...

She sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I look normal... I know...

She looks at me softly.

Me: But it took a lot for me to get to where I am right now.

Tholi: Really?

I nod as I begin to tell her what I also went through.

Once I'm done, I'm shocked that both of us are a sobbing mess.

Me: It's not easy...

Tholi: I thought I was crazy.

Me: But, you're not.

She keeps quiet.

Me: Depression is a silent killer. We've always been told that people who suffer mentally are attention seekers and dramatic...

Tholi: I couldn't explain what I was feeling.

Me: Because no one understood?

She nods.

Tholi: No one really paid attention to me. I always had to take care of other people's needs.

I nod. I want her to open up. I want her to trust me. I don't know why, but I genuinely feel like I have a connection with her.

Tholi: My mother died of AIDS and my aunt basically sold me off...

She sighs and wipes her tears.

Tholi: I've been through so much, Ziyanda, and I honestly don't think I have it in me to be happy.

I'm scared of being happy.

Me: But Mdu makes you happy.

She smiles and nods.

Tholi: I'm scared I'm going to lose him. Once his family finds out about us, things will change drastically.

Me: Don't worry about all of that. Focus on your emotional and mental progress.

Tholi: It's not easy.

Me: Mdu is willing to fight for you. He will never abandon what you've managed to build together.

Tholi: But I won't be able to live with myself, knowing that I ruined his relationship with his

family.

I sigh and nod.

Tholi: I'm very overwhelmed.

Me: Take it one step at a time.

She nods.

Me: From now onwards, you have to focus on getting healed. You won't be able to raise these

babies if you're like this.

She keeps quiet.

Me: And I'll also support you. I've been through all of this.

Tholi: Will it get better?

Me: Most definitely.

She sighs heavily.

Just then, Mdu and Derek walk back to the lounge, and Derek sits next to me, while

Mdu

disappears.

Tholi looks at Derek worriedly.

Tholi: Is he okay?

Derek: Ya, he's going to the bathroom.

She nods and fidgets with her fingers.

Derek: Don't put yourself under too much pressure.

Tholi looks at him.

Derek: You're being too hard on yourself...

She doesn't say anything.

I look at Derek and smile. I'm glad he's not being cold...

Tholi: Would you like something to eat?

Derek: I'm famished.

She looks at me and I nod as well.

Tholi: Okay.

She smiles as she stands and walks to the kitchen.

I look at Derek.

Derek: You're lucky I love you...

I get closer to him and plant a kiss on his cheek.

Me: You're the best!

He chuckles and shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Hmm...

INSERT 78

After a long afternoon with Tholi and Mdu, I could tell that Mdu was a bit calmer. This whole situation had obviously taken its toll on him, and he for a while, he had lost his rational self...

Tholi, on the other hand, seems more comfortable around me now, and I'm glad. As messed up as this situation is, I really sympathise with her.

Anyway, after saying our goodbyes, Derek and I are heading back to his place.

Derek: Do you mind if I drop you off?

Dean wants to see me.

Me: Are you having a boy's night?

Him: You could say that.

Me: Okay. I'll have an early night.

Him: Are you okay with me leaving you alone?

Me: I love you and all, but I think I can survive a few hours without you.

He chuckles and focuses on the road...

Before he left, Derek ensured that I had enough food. Clearly, this boy's night will end with him

being drunk. I'm actually glad that he's going out. He and I have been glued together for a while

now.

I'm now in the lounge, catching up on Little Women, when I get a call from an unrecognized

number.

I answer reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Ziyanda?

Me: Yes, who am I speaking to?

Person: Siya.

I legit have to stop myself from laughing. I had completely forgotten about the infamous worm!

Me: Hello, Siyabonga.

Siya: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Him: I'm good. I was just checking up on you... You sort of disappeared.

Me: How sweet.

Him: Still sarcastic, I see.

Me: Hmm... I'm good. Now can I end the call?

He groans.

Him: Apparently you're in a relationship?

Me: Keeping tabs on me, I see...

Him: Word on the street.

Me: Well, please tell the streets to stop keeping up with my irrelevant fat self.

Surely there are

other important people they can focus on.

He laughs.

Me: Don't call me again, yes?

He grunts.

Me: Bye...

Him: Bye.

I end the call and roll my eyes.

Yazi there's nothing I resent more than these exes. I'm not even going to entertain this shit. He's

a non-factor right now, and he disturbed me while I watched one of my fav ratchet reality

shows. Nxa.

Afte a while, I'm already snoring on that couch. I don't even remember dozing off.

So...

I'm finally moving out of my parents' house.

I'm legit moving in with my boyfriend.

Lol, who would have thought?

Derek organized for my things to be moved, so thankfully, I didn't have to lift a finger. My mom is too excited for my liking. She just wants to get rid of me ASAP.

We're in the lounge, and my dad is all sad. Me: It's not like I'm leaving the country, you know?

Dad: I'm not used to any of this. I don't think it's a good idea.

Mom: Things are done differently now. She must get to know Derek properly before they get married.

Me: Wooah! Who said anything about marriage?

I'm low-key nervous about this move, but I'm also at peace with it.

Dad: It will take time to convince me.

Mom: You'll be fine...

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It has to be Derek, because my dad insisted on having a chat with him. As he walks in the lounge, he looks at me and smiles, and then greets my parents.

Mom: Hi, dear.

My dad nods.

Derek then sits down and I walk out.

I make my way out of the yard and find Lwazi playing with her friends.

Me: Lwazi.

She runs to me and I wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: I feel like having some Tropika... Let's go get some.

She gets her shoes and we begin walking.

Me: Are you sure that you're okay with me moving out?

She nods.

Lwazi: It's not like I'm going back to my parents' house.

I nod.

Lwazi: Stop worrying about me, I'll be fine here.

Me: But you know that I'll still see you, angithi?

She nods and smiles.

Lwazi: I hope you have lots of fun with Uncle Derek.

I chuckle.

Me: We'll have lots of fun, sweetie.

We get to the shop and buy some Tropika.

We then make our way back to the house.

I'm glad

she's taking this so maturely. I guess my parents' love is sufficient.

Once we get to the house, Derek is walking out.

Me: Done?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yoh.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll wait for you in the car.

I nod.

Derek: See you around, Lwazi?

Lwazi: Yes!

They share a hug and I walk in the house.

Mom: Bye bye ke sisi.

Me: So, I'll see you around?

We all chuckle and shake our heads in unison. This feels a bit weird.

Dad: Derek has somehow eased my stress.

Me: Really?

He nods and chuckles.

Me: Hmkay then. Nisale kahle.

Mom: Have you spoken to Lwazi?

Me: Yep.

I hug them and leave. I squeeze Lwazi and then make my way to the car. I'm actually quite

touched now. This has been my quiet and safe space for 25 years. Now I'm leaving? Lord, it better be worth it, otherwise I'll come back running.

Derek: Ready?

Me: I guess.

Derek: We're still in South Africa. No worries.

Me: Whatever.

He takes my hand and kisses it.

Derek: I appreciate this.

Me: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

He starts the car and drives off.

Me: I'm so sad...

Derek: You'll be fine...

We drive in silence, while I take a nap.

Once we get to Randburg, we make our way to his place. As we're walking, he wraps his arms

around my shoulders and makes me stop.

Derek: Still sad?

Me: Kinda.

Derek: I feel bad.

Me: I'll be fine. I just need to sleep it off.

Derek: You want to sleep?

I nod and his face changes. I can't seem to read it, nor do I have the energy to.

Derek: Uhm... Okay.

He takes his phone and begins typing.

We starting walking, and as soon as we get to the door, and I open it, I hear people yell,

“Welcome to your new home!”

It takes me a minute to register what is going on.

Me: What the hell?

I look at Derek, and he looks nervous, probably waiting for my reaction.

Zimkitha, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Nyami, Dean, Nolwazi, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Xolani are there.

Malusi: Is she okay? She looks frazzled.

Dean walks to me and pats my shoulders.

Dean: Ms Dlamz.

I snap out of it.

Nomvuyo: Surprise!

She walks to me and laughs. She gives me a hug and I sigh. I'm so overwhelmed right now.

Nomvuyo: How are you? You look sad.

Me: I'm just tired.

I look at everyone and smile.

Me: Hey, everyone.

Zimkitha is smiling very warmly.

Gabi: So you guys are moving in? That's perfect!

I look at her and she walks to me with a glass of champagne.

Me: No, thank you.

Gabi: Champagne solves everything, babe. She smiles sweetly.

Me: Sabbatical.

Nomvuyo takes my hand and leads me to the table filled with food.

Nomvuyo: You're probably hungry. I know I am...

She winks at me and I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: You're not in a people mood, huh?

Me: I mean, this is cute.

She dishes up for both of us.

Me: Let me go greet them, before they think I'm rude.

Nomvuyo: Hmkay.

I walk away and go to everyone. They're chatting up a storm, as usual.

Zimkitha: Hey, dear.

Me: Hi.

We share a hug.

Zimkitha: We're excited for both of you.

Me: Thank you.

She nods and takes a sip of her whiskey.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Liwa: How are your parents?

Me: My mom seems very excited that I'm leaving.

Liwa: 25 years is a long time.

Zimkitha: Haibo, you should be the last person to say anything. You've been attached to me since birth.

Liwa: Oh, please, woman... We can't live without each other, you and me...

They look at each other and chuckle.

They're cute.

I then walk to Dean and Nolwazi. They're busy sharing their usual lovey dovey moments.

Me: Hey, lovebirds.

Nolwazi: Hey, beautiful!

She gives me a warm hug.

Nolwazi: I guess you've finally joined the vat en sit squad.

We laugh.

Me: Yeah, I guess.

Nolwazi: Don't worry about it. You'll learn how to live together.

Me: Have you guys figured it out?

Nolwazi: Dean is predictable, so I'm okay.

Dean: Wow, I won't stand here and listen to such disrespect.

Nolwazi chuckles and kisses him before he walks away.

Nolwazi and I continue chatting for a while. I really admire this one. She's so confident and chilled. I listen to her tell me all about her megabytes...

After a while, I find my way to Dean, and he's with Derek.

Dean: Derek tells me you were in a foul mood?

Me: Not necessarily foul...

Dean: Are you okay now?

I nod.

Dean: Good.

I then look at Derek.

Me: I'm fine, Nkanyezi.

Dean chuckles.

Derek then plants a kiss on my cheek and excuses himself.

Dean: He worries a lot about you. A lot.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: I was just sad about leaving my parents.

Dean: He tends to take things personally.

I sigh.

Dean: He tells me you were with Mdu and his little family.

My eyes pop out and he chuckles.

Dean: Mdu told me a while back.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Dean: Word of advice?

I sigh, because I already know what he's about to say.

Dean: Don't cross the line.

I keep quiet.

Dean: You're not stupid, you know that this is a fucked up situation that has the potential to damage this family.

Me: It's not that simple.

Dean: I'm not going to have a back and forth with you.

Me: Haike don't try to act all macho on me. Leave me alone.

He chuckles and nods.

Dean: I'm also trying to protect Derek. He's involved because he loves you a bit too much.

I don't say anything.

Dean: I don't want you putting him in compromising situations.

Me: Are you threatening me?

Dean: What? How could I possibly threaten the great Ziyanda of the Dlamini? I try to keep a straight face, but end up laughing.

Me: Argh, I hear you. I'll back off.

Dean: Good. Mdu is a man. He put himself in this position, so he must work it out.

Me: You are all such cold people. Gosh. He laughs and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: Let's feed you. Apparently you're a beast when you're hungry.

Me: Fuck whoever told you that.

He chuckles as he leads me to the table with food.

INSERT 79

It's been a few hours, and my mood has changed. Being around these people seems to have some form of positive effect on me. I have been avoiding Malusi as much as I can. I'm still on the fence with this one and his cheating ways.

I'm now chilling with Joe and Gabi. She's busy telling me how she got Joe's assistant fired, but she's still bothering them.

Gabi: I just feel like she is trying to test me.

Me: She has some guts. Fetch the bitch. She laughs and I join her.

Joe: I don't think you're a good influence right now, Dlamini.

Me: Well, this ex-assistance of yours is clearly a problem.

He grunts.

Gabi: He slept with her.

My eyes pop and Joe looks at me casually.

Gabi: It was when we weren't together.

I sigh in relieve.

Me: Joe, couldn't you pick someone else to sleep with?

Gabi: Ask him, Zizi. He just had to go for a thirsty bitch that works for him.

Joe chuckles.

Joe: I feel attacked right now.

Gabi then takes my hand and leads me to the champagne. She's obsessed with it.

Gabi: You think I should fetch the bitch?

I laugh.

Me: I was just joking.

She stares at me and narrows her eyes.

Gabi: You're low-key crazy, aren't you?

Me: I don't know what you're talking about! I plead the fifth!

We both laugh as we walk back to Joe, who is now joined by Malusi. Malusi is also very intimidating, but because I don't like him, he really doesn't faze me.

Gabi: Baby, let's go say hi to Zimkitha. I think she doesn't like me.

Malusi: Now who in the world wouldn't like you, Gabi?

Gabi: Treacherous, right?!

She giggles as she takes Joe's arm, and leads him to Zimkitha. I guess I'm not the only one who

secretly wants Zimkitha's approval. The woman is a powerhouse, man.

Malusi: And I finally get to interact with the great Ziyanda of the Dlamini...

I find myself rolling my eyes.

What a bore.

Malusi: You really don't like me, huh?

I look at him blankly, despite feeling some type of way about his handsome self.

Malusi: You don't know me, Ziyanda.

Me: But I know what you've done.

Malusi: So you'll avoid me forever?

Me: I mean, I don't mind.

He laughs quietly and shakes his head lightly.

Malusi: Well, as long as you're fully aware that your avoidance won't really eliminate me. I'll still be here.

I stare at him serious, as he grins.

Me: I don't like people who hurt other people.

His face changes and he becomes serious.

Me: I've been a victim of that, and I don't find it funny.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Who died and gave you the right to intentionally mess up someone's life, more especially someone you claim to love?

Malusi: It wasn't intentional.

Me: Once... maybe... Twice, you're trying it... But, more than that? Bullshit.

He keeps quiet.

Me: In my eyes, you're a horrible person, and it's going to take a lot to change my mind.

Malusi: And who died and made you God?

Me: I'm definitely not God... But I am a woman who has been hurt by a person who's exactly like

you: arrogant and not remorseful. Don't you feel out of place with these people in this room?

Do you not see that you're the odd one out? All of these people seem to cherish the women

they love. Now where in the world did you get picked up from?

He grunts.

Malusi: For fuck's sake...

We stare at each other for a while.

Just then, I feel someone's arms on my waist, and Derek's scent fills me.

I missed him.

I look at him and smile.

Me: Hey, you.

Derek: Hey, baby.

Me: Are you avoiding me?

Derek pouts and I giggle.

Malusi: Well, now you know how it feels to be avoided, oh great Ziyanda.

I roll my eyes and he walks away.

Derek: And then?

Me: Argh, he really gets to me.

Derek: You two will never get along?

Me: No, I don't want to get along with him. I'm fine without him.

Derek smiles and pulls me closer.

Derek: I miss you.

Me: You've been running away from me.

Derek: Giving you space.

Me: Hmm.

We share a kiss.

Derek: I'm ready to kick these people out.

Me: Rude, Ngidi, rude.

Derek: I want you all to myself.

Me: Really??

He nods and kisses me.

Derek: I want to welcome you properly.

Me: Yaaas!

We kiss again.

Nomvuyo: Heey!

We stop and look at her.

Nomvuyo: You have the rest of your lives to be all sexed up. Come to the lounge...

We didn't even realize that people had gone to the lounge. Xolani even left, because he has

other appointments apparently. I miss him. I make a mental note to set an appointment with him so we can catch up.

Anyway, we walk to the lounge, and find everyone there.

Liwa: Finally! We had to leave you two there...

Zimkitha: Oh, please. You and Vuvu are always attached to each other.

Everyone laughs. Well know about Liwa and Nomvuyo. These two are waaay too addicted to each other, and we know that if they disappear, they're busy humping each other.

Me: Where's Nyami?

Nomvuyo: She's sleeping.

I nod.

Zimkitha: Anyway, we thought it would be a lovely idea to welcome you here...

Liwa: This group is known for doing some unconventional things, so this move is quite normal to us.

Dean: I'm more of a logical person, so my suggestion is that as of tomorrow, you sit and have a conversation about how you plan to live. Set clear rules.

Gabi: Gosh, Dean you are too much!

Dean looks at Gabi disapprovingly, but Gabi couldn't give a shit.

Gabi: Everything will work out. You'll figure out how to function properly.

Nolwazi: But it won't always be perfect. I think I agree with Langelihle.

Dean: You think? Woman, you are supposed to agree with me regardless.

Nolwazi: Ha.ha. Cute. Very cute.

Derek: Can you all stop flooding us with unsolicited advice? Are we children?

Achuu! Tell 'em Nkanyi!

Liwa: Haike. Sour much?

Malusi: Dramatic much?

Joe: Bold much?

Dean: Unnecessary much?

Nomvuyo: Aniphaphi much?

They all laugh.

Me: Thank you for your kind words, but
Derek and I will figure it out.

Nomvuyo: Tell them!

Nolwazi: We apologise. We are quite
opinionated.

Zimkitha: Quite.

Derek: The party is over now.

Liwa: Wow! Snaax much?

Malusi: Disrespectful much?

Joe: Rude much?

Dean: Unnecessary much?

Derek: It's time to leave, much?

Liwa: You want to have sex, much?

Malusi: You want a private party, much?

Joe: It's about to go down, much?

Dean: Tear up the roof, much?

At this point we're all just watching these men go on and on...

There's no stopping them!

Zimkitha: Okay, stop!

They stop and laugh like little boys.

Nomvuyo: Gosh, let me get Nyami.

Liwa: Okay, baby.

Nomvuyo: Because I'm annoyed, much.

Liwa: Yoh.

Nomvuyo walks away.

Nolwazi looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: Ready to go, much? Because I'm also annoyed, much.

Dean: Yoh.

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: See you soon, love.

Me: Shap.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Let's go.

Dean: Tense, much?

Derek: Not getting any sex, much?

Dean: Fuck you, much?

They chuckle and Dean walks to me.

Dean: See you soon, Dlamz.

Me: Hmkay.

We share a hug.

Dean: Bye, people.

We all say bye and they walk out.

Gabi: We should head out as well.

She hugs me and everyone else.

Gabi: I'll call you, Zi. I'm sure you want to redecorate this place.

I chuckle and nod.

They say their goodbyes and head out as well. Malusi leaves with them, cheating bastard.

Nomvuyo comes back with a sleepy Nyami.

Nyami: Bye, Aunty Zizi.

Me: Bye, baby.

We share a hug. Nomvuyo winks at me and I wink back at her.

Liwa: Bye, Ziyanda Dlamini.

Me: Bye, Liwa Mzinyathi.

We share a hug and they also leave.

Zimkitha: I can't wait to be invited for lunch... I hear you're an interesting cook, Ziyanda?

Me: Really?

She nods and looks at Derek with a grin.

She then looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: I'm happy for you two.

Me: Thank you.

She nods and looks at Derek.

Zimkitha: Bye, baby.

Derek: Bye, Zimi.

She hugs and leaves...

We are finally left alone!

Me: Geesh.

Derek: There's too many of them.

We both laugh as we begin cleaning up. I know he's having a secret anxiety attack right now.

Once we're done, we go to the lounge and throw ourselves on the couch.

Derek: Wanna take a shower together?

I giggle and nod.

I stand and pull him up.

Me: We need to discuss the rent.

He gives me a weird look.

Me: I'm not going to let you pay for everything.

His about to protest, but I stop him.

Me: I'm not compromising on this.

Derek: My shit is already paid for. What are you talking about?

I grunt.

Derek: You'll contribute towards toiletries or cleaning stuff.

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: I'm not in the mood to have deep conversations tonight. I want to take a shower, and

nuzzle my head on your boobs.

He pulls me and we walk to the bedroom, hand in hand.

So far, so good...

INSERT 80 (Short insert)

It's been two days...

Derek and I have been locked up and in bed the whole time. He even switched off his phone,

because we all know how needy his friends can be.

Me: So... What are some of the things you don't want to compromise on?

Derek looks at me and he can tell I'm serious. Just like Dean, I also think we should approach

this move rationally. Yes, it's cute and all right now, but we all know that's not how it's going to be forever. It's going to be a long process. Getting to know each other won't be a sweet journey.

Derek: Let's see...

He sighs thoughtfully.

Derek: You know I love clean spaces.

I nod.

Derek: So I would appreciate it if you could always keep that in mind.

Me: I already know this.

Derek: Secondly, there's nothing I hate more than the toothpaste being squeezed out the wrong way.

I keep quiet. This man is crazy.

Derek: You must squeeze from the bottom, until you finish it. The toothpaste thingie mustn't be

squished carelessly.

I sigh.

Me: Derek, everything of yours has to do with your OCDness.

He sighs as well and smiles.

Derek: I'm not that bad, aren't I?

Me: You are.

He groans.

Me: I'll try to respect your OCD wishes.

He nods and pulls me for a kiss.

Derek: Keep the space clean, and I'm all good.

Me: Okay.

Him: And you?

Me: Hmm...

He brushes my thigh and I stop him.

I want to have this conversation, and he needs to stop distracting me with sex.

Me: I'm not a morning person.

Him: Boy, do I know.

Me: I'm just worried that you'll be closely affected by my mood swings.

He pulls me closer and brushes my back.

Him: Don't worry about me. I'm a big boy.
I smile.

Him: Yes, I agree, we should have a serious discussion about rules and shit.
He kisses me.

Him: However, I love how spontaneous our relationship is. I love discovering new things about you, even though it means we butt heads from time to time.

He kisses me again.

Him: Don't focus too much on all of that...
We'll deal with things as they happen.
Okay?

Me: Okay.

He smiles and we kiss, but this time, it's more intense.

Him: I love you.

Me: Right back at ya, Ngidi.

The following day, while I'm in bed, Derek comes back to the bedroom, all smiles.

Me: And then?

Derek: I've just confirmed shit.

Me: Shit?

Him: I thought it would be an excellent idea to leave Joburg for a few days before we go back to work.

Me: Really?

He nods excitedly.

Him: Our flight to Port Elizabeth is later on at 5pm.

To be honest, I am not against this at all. I would love some alone time with him.

Derek: Let's pack up.

Me: Yaaas!

I immediately get out of bed and get ready!

It's been a hectic afternoon, and evening, but we've finally made it to PE. I may have delayed the process, and made us late, and as a result, annoyed Derek. I think he's still a bit annoyed but uzoba strong. I mean, we made it safely, right?

As we're driving to the hotel, I glance at him.

Me: Still mad?

He looks at me, and I try to pull off a very innocent and pouty look.

He stares at me for a while, and takes my hand.

Me: I'm sorry; I wasn't keeping track of the time.

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Am I forgiven?

He nods and I smile.

Me: Yaay!

He squeezes my hand and focuses on the road.

After a while, we get to the hotel and check in.

Derek: Dinner out or in?

Me: Out. I could use some fresh air.

He nods and we settle in before freshening up.

Once we're done, we head on out to some place in Somerset. I've never been one who cares

about places. All I am excited about is the beach, okunye I don't really care.

We get to a restaurant and we're led to our table. We place our orders and the waiter disappears.

Me: So tell me, is Malusi's ex-wife with someone else now?

Derek: Yes, she has moved on...

Me: Good for her.

Him: Why do you ask?

Me: Nje...

Him: Don't be too hard on him.

Me: I'd rather not discuss cheating people right now, if you don't mind.

Him: Well... You did bring it up.

I hiss.

Me: Are you ready for work next week?

He shakes his head.

Him: I could use an extra week.

Me: Me too.

His bottle of wine comes and I swear my whole body craves it. He sees this and asks for

another glass.

Me: Don't tempt me.

Him: It's just this once.

I grunt as the waiter gives me the glass and Derek pours some for me.

Derek: So, are you ready for work?

Me: I miss the kids.

He nods and smiles.

I take a sip of wine and sigh happily.

Derek: I need to start making this starting a school thing a real thing.

Me: I'm excited for you.

Him: You're going to be with me, right?

Me: I guess...

He smiles widely.

Him: I'll only involve you once everything has been finalised.

Me: So are we going back to pretending like we don't fuck each other?

He laughs and nods.

Me: I'm better at it than you.

Him: I seem to want you more, when I know I can't have you.

Me: Don't know how I feel about that.

He laughs and I smile. I love seeing this one happy.

As I take another sip of the wine, I literally feel like my whole body is getting rearranged.

Me: Argh I knew I shouldn't have drank this shit. I need water.

I ask for a glass of water from the waiter and he disappears once again.

Just then, Derek's face changes, and I ask him what's wrong. He's not even looking at me.

Me: Ngidi?

His jaw tightens.

Kanti?

Suddenly, someone clears their throat, and I turn and see a woman standing there. I look at her in confusion.

She takes two steps and is now looking down at us.

Woman: Derek?

I stare at this woman. She's tall, toned, and gorgeous.

I then look over at Derek and he has a straight face.

Woman: Oh my goodness...

Derek: Hi, Busi.

What's going on?

What's happening?

Busi: How are you?

Derek: I'm well.

Busi then looks at me for a few seconds.

Busi: Sorry for being rude... Hi.

Me: Hi.

She then looks at Derek again.

There's something about the way she looks at him that makes me uncomfortable. I genuinely feel like I'm invading their space, like I'm the intruder. Njani, guys?

Busi: Uhm... It was great seeing you.

Goodbye.

Derek nods tightly and Busi walks away.
The tension?

Universe, what in the world is going on
right now?

Suddenly, Petty LaBelle awakens from her
very deep sleep...

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He tries speaking, but stops himself.

Me: I need the bathroom.

I stand, walk away, and make my way to
the bathroom. I feel like calling someone
right now,

and venting. Like, what the hell just
happened? Those two obviously have
some history.

I finish up after a while and find Derek on
the phone. As soon as he sees me, he ends
the call

and looks at me coolly. I sit down and
gulp down my water.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Why wouldn't I be?

He keeps quiet and drinks his wine. He must just focus on his wine, and leave me alone.

Our food finally arrives and I delve in. My whole system is not even agreeing with this food. I'm

so angry. I don't even know why... Well, I do know, but I can't explain it.

The way these two looked at each other?
The vibe?

I am shooketh.

It's been 10 minutes now.

Kushubile la, because no one is saying anything. Kuthe tuu.

My phone suddenly rings, and it's Dean. I frown as I answer.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Dlamz!

Me: What?

Dean: Yoh. And then?

Me: How may I help you?

Dean: I was checking if you arrived safely.

No need to eat me up.

Me: We did. Is that all?

He grunts.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and stare at him.

Derek: Are you done having your episode?

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You seem to be having a dramatic episode...

At this point, Petty's jaw on the floor.

Me: Listen here, don't you dare try to turn this shit around. Had it been my ex coming here, and

looking at me like I'm the only thing in the world, you would be ready to fight. Don't come for me.

Him: You should be the last person to talk about exes popping out...

Me: Excuse me?

Him: You're not stupid. Don't start acting like you are.

Me: Are you hearing yourself?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Fuck you, Derek.

I stand and walk away. I find my way outside and stand by the entrance of the restaurant.

What the hell just happened??

I swear I feel like screaming my lungs out.

Surely I'm losing my mind?

After a while, my Uber arrives and I get in.

The drive to the hotel is quick. As soon as I get there,

I go straight to our room and take a quick shower to regain my rationality.

INSERT 81

It's been two hours. Where the fuck is Derek?

I get some junk food via room service, and stuff my face. I'm now certain that he's with Busi the Bitch.

I dial Niki's number and she answers.

Niki: Hey, friend.

Me: Shoot me, now!

Niki: What's wrong?

Me: I'm being tested.

Niki: Yini?

Me: Derek's ex pitched out of nowhere.

Niki: What??

I tell her what happened and she gasps.

Niki: They had a deep eye moment?

Me: Deep as fuck!

Niki: Yoh.

Me: It's been 2 hours and his shady ass is not back!

Niki: Okay... Calm down, friend.

Me: I knew this shit was too good to be true.

Niki: Woaah woah woah! Stop jumping into conclusions!

Just then, the door opens, and in walks Derek. I end the call.

He walks to me and sits opposite me.

Derek: Ready to talk?

Me: Mxm.

Him: Okay.

He stands and walks away.

Nxa he must go and leave me alone.

Once I'm done eating, I switch on the TV and browse through the channels.

My phone rings again, and it's Niki. I ignore it, because I'm really not in the mood right now.

I stand and walk to the bedroom. I find him changing into his pjs.

Me: So she's the woman who broke your fragile heart?

Him: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me.

Him: What you won't do, is come here and be disrespectful. If you need to go and cool off

before you address me, then do so.

Me: Don't speak to me like that!

What the fuck is wrong with him?

He looks at me calmly.

Him: You're being unnecessary.

Me: If you want to piss me off, you've succeeded.

He stares at me for a long time, and I stare right back at him. At this point, all I see is red.

Him: What exactly is the problem here?

Me: You!

Him: What did I do?

Me: You had a moment with your ex.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: And don't you dare tell me about my ex. Mdu is my ex, but I don't go around looking at him like I have residual feelings for him. He keeps quiet.

Me: You know very well that that situation is completely different. He doesn't say anything.

Me: But, you see that Busi? I don't have such moments with my exes. He sighs lightly.

Me: So don't use Mdu's situation to try to justify this shit.

Him: What am I justifying? I keep quiet.

Him: For fuck's sake... I was just as surprised to see her.

Me: Maybe had I known about your past, I'd understand you better. Right now, all I know is that

you saw your ex, and I witnessed the deep moment between you two. And don't you dare make

it seem like I'm crazy or dramatic. The reason you're okay with Mdu is because you know I'm over him. You wouldn't be up and down with me if that were not the case.

He keeps quiet.

Me: So don't stand there and make it seem like I'm imagining things.

He scratches his head.

Me: Tell me I'm imagining things and I will gladly apologize.

We stare at each other.

Me: Tell me...

I am secretly wishing he does. I honestly don't think I have it in me to handle knowing that

Derek loves someone else as well. I don't have it in me.

He sighs.

Him: You're imagining things.

Me: Okay.

I walk back to the lounge and continue eating my food. I want to burst out in tears, but I try not to.

If it didn't hit me before, well, it's definitely hitting me now. Derek has a history, and I know nothing about it. All I know is that he went through the most. But what exactly? I don't know.

He knows everything about me.

I don't know anything other than the fact that he was adopted.

I doze off, feeling very uncomfortable...

The following morning, I am in bed. I don't even know or remember how I got there.

I have a terrible headache, and my stomach is doing the most. I clearly had too much junk food last night. I walk to the bathroom to brush my teeth and try to gather myself. Derek is still in bed.

I walk to the lounge, and sit there. I'm not angry anymore. Instead, I'm over everything. I just want to go back to Jozi, and forget about this shit. I hate PE.

I switch on the TV and watch it absentmindedly.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I see him walk towards me, and sit next to me.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hello.

He watches me as I watch TV. Eventually, he takes the remote and switches it off.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes, Derek.

I look at him and he scratches his head.

Him: Can we talk?

I shrug.

Him: You don't want to?

Me: What difference will it make? It's not like I know anything about you.

He looks at me intently.

Me: So what's the point? Let's just go home.

Him: You want to go home?

I nod.

Him: Okay.

He stands and walks away. I switch on the TV and continue watching it absentmindedly.

Uhm so our "baecation" is over.

Was it even a baecation?

We're legit heading to the airport.

We're now driving to his apartment. Thankfully, the vibe isn't awkward. It's weird, but not awkward.

Once we're there, it hits me that I now live with this person.

I can't even run away from this situation, damnit.

Me: I need some air...

He looks at me, and nods lightly. It's quite clear that he is not fine. Heck, I'm also not fine, but I

need some space from him.

I'm finding it quite annoying that he doesn't want to open up to me. He expects me to be an

open book, but he fails to do the same. Of course I'm going to freak out when I see his ex. Had I

known who she was and her back story, maybe I'd be a bit better. Manje what am I supposed to do? I only have my conclusions to work with phela...

I get my bag and walk out. I find my Uber waiting for me, and it takes me straight to Mike's

Kitchen. I walk to the outside area, and find Melinda, my psychiatrist, sitting there. We share a hug and sit.

Melinda: How are you?

Me: I'm not fine.

She looks at me gently.

Me: I feel like my emotions are all over the place, and I'm being controlled by them.

Her: Please elaborate...

I begin to tell her everything that happened in the last 24 hours.

She sighs.

Her: Why do you think you're this affected?

Me: I'm jealous.

She nods slowly.

Me: I'm jealous that other people seem to know him, and I don't know much about him.

Her: And that's understandable.

Me: And I'm also angry. I feel like he has double standards: he expects me to be open, yet he's not. That's not fair.

She nods.

Me: When I saw the way they looked at each other, I genuinely felt like I was missing out on something big.

Her: And what does he have to say about this?

I keep quiet and she looks at me expectantly.

I take a deep breath.

Me: He hasn't said anything.

Her: Did you give him a chance?

I shake my head.

Her: Why?

Me: I lost it.

She nods slowly.

Me: I was too angry.

Her: Still having a difficult time controlling your emotions?

I nod shamefully and she looks at me softly.

Her: It's a process; it has its ups and downs.

Me: I don't want to lose him.

Her: Then initiate a civil conversation.

I keep quiet.

Her: Instead of wilding out, ask him to hear you out. Voice out every single thing you're feeling, and see how he takes it.

I sigh.

Her: You live together now, Ziyanda... Communication is your only tool. I also have a bunch of other tools that I know will help you out...

Me: Okay...

We continue chatting, and I am beyond thankful, that I walk out feeling 10 times better...

Melinda is my life saver.

As I walk in the apartment, I find Derek cooking. He glances at me briefly before continuing...

I decide to give him some space, because I know the kitchen is his safe space...

After about 10 minutes, I can't deal... I walk back to the kitchen and wrap my arms around him as he's busy on the stove.

His body tenses up, but eventually relaxes.

Me: Can we talk?

Derek: Give me a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

I let go of him and go to the lounge.

It's time for this one to tell me about his past. I'm tired of this ongoing puzzle.

Also, I'm going to introduce these tools that Melinda introduced to me...

INSERT 82

We're now sitting next to each other on the couch.

Me: Before we start, I would like to apologize about how I handled this situation.

He looks at me, and I honestly just want to hold him. I've never seen him like this.

Me: I apologize for snapping, and running off.

He nods.

Me: With that said, I spoke to Melinda...

His expression changes and he seems shocked and nervous.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: No, I'm not leaving you.

He looks at me pleadingly.

Me: I'm not breaking up with you, Derek.

He processes this and I see his expression go softer.

Me: I realize that I struggle with controlling my emotions, especially if they come at me too

strong. I get overwhelmed and I fail to think rationally.

I keep quiet and he doesn't say anything.

Me: You obviously share a connection with that woman...

He tries to say something, but stops himself...

Me: Melinda told me about a certain toolbox, which consists of 12 human capacities that reside in all of us. It supports mostly young children, but she suggests I tell you about it, and we can start incorporating the tools in developing our relationship.

I can see that he is not on the same page as me.

Me: These tools will help us understand and manage our emotional and social success, both individually, and as a couple.

He looks at me intently.

I take my bag and dig for a paper that Melinda gave me...

Me: The toolbox consists of the: Breathing Tool; Quiet/Safe Space Tool; Listening Tool; Empathy Tool; Personal Space Tool; Using Our Words Tool; Garbage Can Tool; Taking Time Tool; Please and Thank You Tool; Apology and Forgiveness Tool; Patience Tool; and lastly Courage Tool.

He seems intrigued.

Me: Apparently it's usually used in the classroom context, but it can also be applied elsewhere.

Melinda thinks it will have a good impact on our relationship.

Derek: What does each tool mean?

Me: The Breathing Tool states that I calm myself and check-in... Melinda explained that this tool

should be used whenever we feel like we're losing control of our emotions. We simply stop everything, and focus on getting our breathing right.

He nods.

Me: That's basically what I try to do when I have an anxiety attack.

He nods.

Me: So you basically put one hand on your heart and the other on your tummy, and then you take deep breaths until you feel stable again.

He nods.

Me: Okay... The second one is the Quiet/Safe Space Tool. It says I remember my quiet/safe place.

I look at him.

Me: I know that your quiet/safe place is the kitchen. You seem calm whenever you're there.

He smiles lightly.

Him: What's your quiet/safe space?

Me: I don't know.

Him: You need to find one.

I nod.

Me: So this is basically a place one goes to whenever they feel overwhelmed or some type of

way. This space is a safe space, and if we know each other's safe spaces, it is important to respect them.

He nods.

Me: Next, we have the Empathy Tool- I care for others and I care for myself.

Him: You're the most empathetic person I know.

I smile.

Him: Very admirable.

Me: Thank you.

I sigh.

Me: So this tool promotes the awareness of the people around you, and what they are going

through. One has to constantly care for themselves as much as he/she cares for others.

Relationships grow when everyone practices empathy.

He nods.

Me: The Personal Space Tool states that I have the right to my space and so do you.

I think this

one is self-explanatory.

He chuckles.

Me: I think we've been practicing this one.

Him: But too much personal space can create some form of gap that won't be easily bridged.

Me: I hear you.

Him: So there has to be a limit.

Me: Okay.

Him: Next tool?

Me Using Our Words Tool- I use the right words, in the right ways.

We stare at each other for a while.

Me: We're quite bad at this.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I say a lot of things when I'm emotional... I don't use my words properly...

He sighs.

Me: And you don't use your words at all... You don't open up to me.

Him: But I always tell you how I feel.

Me: You tell me how you feel about me.

Me, only. I don't know how you feel about other things.

You're not open.

He scratches his head.

Me: I want to know what's going through your mind, Derek.

He tries to say something, but stops himself.

Me: How are we going to grow if the communication is one-sided?

To think, when we started this relationship, I was the one with emotional and communication issues. He made me think he's all good, kanti he's not.

Him: What's the next tool?

Me: Taking Time Tool- I take time in, and time away.

He nods.

Me: It also involves using our time wisely.

Him: Okay.

Me: I know I need to work on this, because my time management sucks.

He chuckles and I smile.

I want to hold him, but I stop myself.

Me: Next, we have the Please and Thank You Tool- I treat others with kindness and appreciation.

He nods.

Me: Next, there's the Apology and Forgiveness Tool- I admit my mistakes and work to forgive yours.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Like you always say, whenever you hurt me, it's never intentional... That also applies to me.

I will never hurt you on purpose.

Him: Good.

Me: Hence this tool... We recognize that we will make mistakes along the way, but it is

important to apologise and forgive wholeheartedly.

He reaches for me and pulls me closer.

Him: I love you so much.

Me: I know...

We stare at each other for a while...

Me: The next tool is the Patience Tool... It states that I am strong enough to wait...

His eyes drop.

Me: I will use this tool for you, Derek. I will be strong enough to wait...

He finally looks at me.

Me: I'll be patient, just like you are patient with me.

He plants a kiss on my lips and I relax.

Him: And the last tool?

Me: Courage Tool- I have the courage to do the right thing...

He smiles.

Me: And I think you use this tool all the time by taking a chance on love, despite the hurt you've experienced.

His eyes drop once again.

Me: I don't know what has left you so bruised, but I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going to leave you.

I find myself in his arms as he holds me tight and hides his face.

Me: Nkanyezi?

He doesn't respond, instead, I he breathes heavily.

We're in that holding position for a long time... I think he's crying.

My heart is in pieces at this point.

He fell asleep holding on to me...

I'm just out here trying to figure out how to approach this situation. I really don't want to

overwhelm him, because I understand that we all have different coping mechanisms.

I manage to break free from him and walk away. I go to the bedroom and sit there for a long time, not thinking about anything in particular.

I don't know what to do. I really don't. I take my phone and find myself going to Zimkitha's number. It rings for a while, but she doesn't answer.

I sigh and go to Dean's number. He eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini?

Me: Hi.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: I don't know how to help him.

Dean: Trust me, you are.

Me: What should I do?

Dean: Don't leave him.

I keep quiet.

Dean: You're both good for each other.

Me: I feel helpless.

Dean: Don't... He'll let you in...

I sigh.

Dean: Are you back this side?

Me: Yes.

He chuckles.

Dean: That has to be the shortest vacation ever.

I grunt and he laughs lightly.

Dean: Be patient.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Bye, Dlamz.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and sigh heavily.

INSERT 83

After telling him about the tools, I decided not to push him too hard. I know very well how it

feels to be with someone you love, and struggle to be vulnerable with them. Heck, I've always

been the closed off one in my relationships, so I completely understand. My relationship with Derek is opening up so many learning opportunities for me...

We finish up eating, and I can see that he is not fine, but he is pretending to be.

Me: You do know that you don't have to pretend with me, right?

He looks at me.

Me: Even if we don't talk about what's bothering you, I'd appreciate it if you don't pretend to be fine.

He pulls me closer till half of my body is on him.

Me: I'm here.

Derek: I know.

I nod and plant a kiss on his lips and he smiles.

Me: Want to take a walk?

Him: Let's clean up first.

I nod and stand. I then pull him up and we begin cleaning up the space.

We're now taking a walk around the quiet area. Thank God, there aren't any dusty kids running around the street, as in Soweto...

Me: My dad still wants to know about Uber.

We both laugh.

I've been trying my best to make him lighten up a bit. As much as I hate seeing him so down, I

think it's good for our relationship. I want to see him in his low moments as well.

Derek: I can't believe you were willing to carry on with this Uber lie.

Me: I have too much respect for my parents. I don't know man; it's just feels strange to be this

open with them.

Him: There's nothing worse than having to play hide and seek, because you're scared of your parents.

I sigh.

Me: I guess...

Him: And look at how understanding they are... They trust you.

Me: Because I'm a good girl.

Him: Are you?

Me: Excuse me? You know very well that I'm good.

He wraps his arm round my shoulders, and I place mine on his waist as we walk peacefully.

Him: Of course, you're good.

Me: Good.

He chuckles and I pinch him.

Me: Have you travelled out of the country?

Him: Duuh.

Me: Geesh, excuse me!

He chuckles.

Him: I'm assuming you haven't?

Me: Duuh!

He laughs and I roll my eyes.

Him: Where would you like to go?

Me: I don't know... I think everyone starts with America or London, right?

He nods.

Him: Start with the basics.

Me: But I'm not into travelling.

Him: Why am I not surprised?

I chuckle.

Him: You don't like new things.

Me: Change is a big deal for me. I'm fine in my comfort zone.

Him: That's a bad thing. You need to allow yourself to experiment.

I sigh and he chuckles.

Me: Argh leave me alone.

He kisses my cheek and we walk in silence for a while, no awkwardness though.

Him: Ziyanda.

Me: Nkanyezi.

I don't look at him, instead I look ahead.

Him: I'm not a talker.

I gasp in shock.

Me: You're not a talker? What? You? I had no idea!

He laughs.

Him: Fuck you.

I squeeze him and smile.

Him: I'm worse than you.

Me: Mmm.

I look at him and he avoids my eyes.

We're quiet for a while.

Him: I see you're testing me...

Me: Not necessarily testing you... More like trying to get you to see that you can trust me.

He sighs and nods.

Him: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

We continue walking and talking about random things...

The following day, we were in bed the whole day. I honestly wanted him all to myself. I can't help but feel more drawn to him when his like this.

That evening, we get a call from Nomvuyo inviting us to dinner.

Nomvuyo: I miss you, Zizi. I need to see you.

I groan.

Nomvuyo: You're with Nkanyezi 24/7. Surely you can spare a couple of hours and spend it with us?

I sigh.

Derek: Okay, we'll come.

Nomvuyo: Haike I wasn't asking your permission wena D.

Derek: Ohho.

Nomvuyo: So you're coming?

Me: I guess so. The man of the house has spoken.

Nomvuyo: Weeh!

I end the call and look at Derek.

Me: We don't have to go. I'm perfectly fine here.

Derek: No, man. We could use some fresh air. But, let's do this first...

He pulls me closer and we share a kiss. I get on top and he chuckles.

Me: Gladly!

As we're driving to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place, I get a call from Mdu. It immediately goes on

speaker. I glance at Derek and he seems expressionless.

Me: Hey.

Mdu: Hey, Zi, how are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Mdu: I'm good...

Me: What's up?

Mdu: I wanted to thank you. Things have been a bit easier since you were involved in this situation.

I relax. I'm beyond glad that I could assist.

Mdu: Tholi is much better, and she can't stop raving about you.

Me: Aww how is she?

Mdu: We're taking it slowly. She's also getting used to her meds.

Me: That's great!

Mdu: Ya, and thank Derek for me. I know we've put him in an uncomfortable position.

I glance at Derek and he looks at me. He's expression is more soft.

Me: I'll let him know.

Mdu: Thanks.

Me: Alright then. Say hi to Tholi.

Mdu: Cool. Bye.

Me: Shap.

I hang up and sigh. I decide not to say anything.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Hmm?

Him: I'm sorry.

Me: For what?

Him: For making you feel like I was using the Mdu situation to justify the shit that took place in PE.

Me: Aww.

He chuckles.

Me: I don't have any feelings for Mdu, at all.

Him: I know.

Me: So there's no reason for you to even feel some type of way. Whenever I end a relationship, I always prepare myself mentally just to ensure that I don't go running back, or hold on to the person in the hopes that one day I'll be with them.

Him: That's not easy.

Me: But I value myself more. I don't see why I should waste my time and energy holding on to someone who doesn't care about me.

He keeps quiet.

Me: This mind-set didn't come easy, but it came after a lot of introspection.

He nods...

After a while, we finally get to Nomvuyo and Liwa's place. As we make our way in, we hear

Nyami singing happily. I smile when I see her; I guess she's having a solo karaoke night.

She runs to me as soon as she spots me.

Me: Hey, you!

Nyami: Auntie ZIzi!

We share a hug and then she hugs Derek as well.

Derek: How are you, Nyamz?

Nyami: I'm well, thank you!

She then runs off and carries on singing.

Just then, Nomvuyo appears and I smile.

Gosh, will I ever get over this woman's beauty?

Nomvuyo: Hey, hey!

We share hug and then she hugs Derek as well.

Me: You've been missed!

Nomvuyo: Angithi you are too busy locking yourselves up in your dungeon.

Me: Oh, please!

Nomvuyo: The food is almost ready. You can go to the patio, where Liwa and Dean are.

Me: Dean is here?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: He needed a break from Nolwazi's parents.

Me: Kanti when are they planning on getting their own place?

Nomvuyo: You're asking the wrong person. I don't get involved in other people's business.

Derek laughs as he walks away.

Me: Okay, Gossip Girl.

Nomvuyo: Would you like something to drink?

Me: I feel like having some orange juice. Hook me up, boo.

We walk to the kitchen.

Me: So, when exactly are you planning on telling your family about this pregnancy?

Nomvuyo: Awume, man, Ziyanda. I need some time.

I nod understandingly.

Me: Well, everyone is going to be excited.

Nomvuyo: And that's what I'm not ready to handle. I don't want people running after me.

Me: Negative much?

Nomvuyo: You need to understand that when I was pregnant with Nyami, it was just Liwa,

Princess and I. I didn't get attention. Now, I know that everyone is going to make it a big deal, especially Zimkitha.

Me: Hmm... I just think you're being unnecessary. This is another chance to do things differently.

She gives me my glass of juice, and rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: Leave me alone.

Me: Hmkay.

She checks her pots, and the space is suddenly smells like Dean. I turn around, and sure

enough, his here.

Me: Hey.

Dean: Hello, Dlamz.

Nomvuyo: You two are really strange.

Me: How so?

Nomvuyo: You hated each other's guts, but now we're inseparable.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: I thought you were a dumb gold digger.

Me: Hey! Offensive much?

He shrugs.

Me: And I thought you were an arrogant piece of shit.

Dean: Which I am...

Me: Argh.

Dean: Let's go outside, I want to have a word with you.

Me: Hmkay.

I follow him out and Nomvuyo rolls her eyes. We walk to the other side of the yard, and he turns to look at me.

Dean: Unjani?

Me: Okay, I guess...

He nods and doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm just worried about him.

Dean: He'll open up to you.

Me: Why is he like this?

Dean: Well, there are numerous reasons, but I feel like it would be good for you, if he shares them with you himself. I don't want to be that invasive.

I nod.

Me: I hear you.

Dean: But what I will say is that Derek has always felt like he doesn't belong, and I think it stems from not knowing his real parents. The adoption affected him badly, but he managed to suppress those feelings.

Me: Don't you think finding his parents will help?

He shrugs.

Dean: He doesn't want to meet them; that's if they're even alive.

I sigh heavily.

Dean: And a lot of shit has happened in his life...

Me: Do you think seeing someone will help?

Dean: I think you're the perfect person to suggest that. He seems to value your opinion.

Me: Maybe he'll be open to discussing his issues openly with me, after he speaks to a professional who'll help him make sense of everything...

Dean nods.

Me: I'll talk to him.

Dean: Just be patient. I'm sure this experience, as fucked up as it is, will solidify your relationship.

I sigh.

Me: Okay.

He opens his arms and I look at him weirdly.

Dean: Don't leave me hanging. I hate giving hugs, but I'm making an exception here.

Me: Argh.

I step closer and we share a hug.

Dean: Let's go in... I'm starving.

We walk in and find Liwa, Derek and Nomvuyo there.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Nomvuyo: You two act like 5 year olds.

Liwa: Whatever, Negative Nancy.

We sit and Nomvuyo serves us.

Me: You are such a perfect makoti, yazi.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Liwa: I know how to pick 'em.

Nomvuyo: I can't wait to divorce you, and take all your money.

Liwa: Unganya.

We all laugh and start eating.

I glance at Derek, and it is clear that he is feeling much better. I appreciate that his friends

make him feel like this.

Liwa: Uhm so are we going to discuss the many elephants in the room, or should we discuss them later?

Nomvuyo: Let's get it over and done with.

Me: What's going on?

They all stare at me.

I look at Derek, and he has a mischievous smile.

Liwa: So it has come to our attention that you are the Iyanla of South Africa.

Me: Excuse me?

I look at them in confusion.

Liwa: You are Mdu's go-to person, apparently.

Me: Uhm... What's happening?

I look at Derek and he sips his wine.

Liwa: But, not only are you involved in that situation, you're also linking up with someone who is not particularly liked by this family.

Me: Who?

Liwa: What's the name of your best friend's new man?

Me: Uhm...

I continue looking at them in confusion.

Me: What's that to you?

Liwa: You are really clueless, aren't you?
I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Can I be the one who breaks it to her? Please?

Liwa chuckles and nods.

Dean: Your friend is dating Nolwazi's ex-husband, Ziyanda. She's basically dating a spineless polygamist.

Woaah.

Everything stops moving.

I blink a couple of times.

Nomvuyo: Dean, really??

I hear them going back on forth, but I zone them out.

What the hell??

INSERT 84

Me: What the fuck are you people talking about?!

I swear I'm about to have a heart attack.

Nomvuyo: Here's a glass of water, love.

I dismiss her and look at Dean, who is sitting next to me.

Me: Dean?!

Dean: What?

Me: What the hell are you saying to me??

He looks at coolly.

Dean: Your best friend is dating Nolwazi's ex-husband.

Oh my goodness.

I touch my chest, and try to control my breathing. Now it makes sense! It all makes sense! I

remember how Kwanele told me about his ex wife and the wife who disappeared. Nolwazi?

Tholi?

Yoh nkos' yami.

Liwa: Wow, you are so slow.

Nomvuyo: How unexpected.

Liwa and Nomvuyo chuckle and I look at Derek, who is smiling lightly.

Me: You knew??

He nods.

Me: Really, Derek??

Derek: What?

Me: Don't say nywhat!

He looks at me coolly.

Me: Why didn't you tell me??

Derek: Because I didn't want to burst your bubble in front of Niki, and have you act weird. It is

evident that she genuinely likes him. I didn't want to ruin the date.

Dean: For fuck's sake. You're really slow.

Me: Fuck you!

Nomvuyo: Hey! Stop swearing! My daughter is in the next room!

I huff and stare at all of them.

Me: Do you understand where this puts me?

Dean: Enlighten us.

I grunt.

Me: I've grown close to Tholi!

Liwa: That in itself is another issue. Tholi is responsible for the downfall of Nolwazi's marriage.

I don't say anything. I'm overwhelmed.

I'm in shit.

I'm deep, deep in shit.

Liwa: You don't think things through, do you?

Me: How the hell was I supposed to know that this circle has so many intersections? They keep quiet and look at me.

Me: For fuck's sake! Do you understand how peaceful my life was before I met you people??

Nomvuyo: Haike don't come for us. No one forced you to be Mother Theresa.

Me: So I'm being crucified for being kind-hearted?

Dean: This is not an episode of Days of our Lives- cut the melodrama.

Derek: Hey, now.

Dean: She's grown, and I'd like to think-

Derek: Nobody really cares about what you think, just in case you weren't aware.

Dean raises an eyebrow and Derek looks at him expressionlessly.

Derek: Like I stated, when I broke the news to you, I don't want anyone to make Ziyanda feel bad

for caring about other people- a trait you obviously don't possess.

Dean chuckles quietly and shakes his head.

And then it hits me. Was Dean trying to come for me? Anganginyeli!

Derek: Baby, I felt the need to tell them, because I'm protecting you.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I don't want these people to misinterpret your actions, and think you're being shady.

I want to be mad at him right now, but he's making it very difficult. I mean, he basically put Dean in his place for me.

Nomvuyo: But, we know you're not being shady. You're just a sweet, young and naive girl.

Me: Don't patronise me.

Nomvuyo raises an eyebrow.

Me: Do you people understand that now I'm going to be torn between my best friend and this side?

Liwa: No one is asking you to choose sides.

I sigh.

Derek: I'd like to think that we're mature enough to understand that the world is not that huge, and we'll bump into people we don't necessarily desire to see from time to time.

Liwa: The only awkward thing about this is that you're involved in Tholi and Mdu's situation.

Nomvuyo: We don't want you to be caught up in the middle of this specific situation. The

Kwanele thing is awkward, but manageable. Kodwa this one with Mdu has the potential to damage relationships.

I sigh.

I think Derek notices that I'm on the verge of a breakdown, because he stands and pulls me up.

He then takes my hand and leads me outside. We get to the veranda, and he wraps his arms around me.

Me: Don't.

He lets go of me and apologizes. He knows that he's not supposed to hold me when

I'm

experiencing an intense wave of emotions, because I feel suffocated. He steps back, and I

focus on my breathing. What freaks me out more than anything is the fact that I'm in the middle of this bullshit. I unintentionally put myself in the middle of this bullshit. After a few minutes, I feel better.

Derek: Better?

I nod.

Derek: Can I?

I nod, and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: I have a lot going on in my mind right now.

Derek: Talk to me.

Me: Firstly, what the fuck??

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I get that you were trying to protect me, but geesh, couldn't you at least give me a heads up?

He shakes his head.

Him: I know you, Ziyanda. You were going to act all weird and dramatic during that date.

Me: But, still... You should have told me!

Him: I'm sorry, baby.

I sigh.

Me: Secondly, Nolwazi is obviously going to hate me because: 1, I am out here having double

dates with his ex; and 2, I'm out here being Tholi and Mdu's life coach!

He tries to stifle a laugh, but fails. I end up joining him. Honestly, what am I supposed to do at this point?

Me: I'm screwed.

Him: Life coach?

He continues laughing and I sigh heavily.

Him: Whatever happens, I've got your back. I don't think Nolwazi will hate you though. She's

quite understanding, and I think she'll be open to listen to everyone.

Me: Then Mdu needs to open up ASAP!

Him: Keep pestering him. I think he listens to you as his life coach.

Me: Fuck off, Derek!

He laughs and kisses me.

Me: And now I'm worried about Niki.

What if Kwanele hasn't changed? There is no way I'm

going to allow my friend to date a man who's done all these hurtful things!

Him: So what are you going to do?

Me: Angazi... I'll think about my next move.

He nods.

Him: At least we're not meeting up with them in secret now. I hate secrets,

Ziyanda.

Me: Argh.

He smiles.

Me: And as for Dean?

Him: He was pissed at first, but I put him in his place. He needs to stop thinking everything is about him.

Me: Ouch.

Him: Tough love.

Me: Thank you.

Him: I did say I'm prepared to fight your battles, right?

Swoons!

Him: I've come to accept that you're an irrational Mother Theresa. It's about time everyone accepts it as well.

He smiles and we walk back inside the house.

I feel 100 times better now.

We sit and continue eating.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Leave me alone, loser.

Dean chuckles.

Me: So here's what's going to happen...

I look at all of them.

Me: I am going call Mdu and I will set up a meeting with his sister.

All of them look at me in shock.

Me: I'm tired of this bullshit. I'm already involved, so I'm going to end this.

Derek: Uhm, babyMe:

No, guys, angithi you all find it easy to involve me in your business?

They stare at me in shock.

Me: Mdu will tell his sister whether he likes it or not. I'm tired of carrying all these secrets.

They don't say anything.

There is an awkward silence for a tleast a full minute.

Nomvuyo: So, I'm pregnant.

Liwa: WHAT?!

Oh, Lord.

Universe, is it too late to go back to PE?

INSERT 85

Liwa: WHAT?!

Nomvuyo looks at him and rolls his eyes.

All these men are just looking at

Nomvuyo in shock.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda said she's releasing people secrets, so I don't want to be part of that.

Liwa stands, and within seconds, he is lifting Nomvuyo high up in the air.

Oh gosh. Dis tew much.

Liwa: You're pregnant?!

Nomvuyo: Liwa, put me down!

Liwa squeezes her and exclaims.

Nomvuyo: Liwa!

Liwa: I'm going to be a father again?!

Dean: Can't we just have a peaceful dinner?

After a while, Liwa finally calms down and puts Vuvu down. They sit, and he has the biggest smile on his face.

Liwa: I'm going to be a father again, motherfuckers.

Me: Woaah! Ease up on the vulgarity. There's a child in this house!

Derek: You knew about this?

Me: Of course. Angithi people seem to think I'm their secret guru.

Dean: Ziyanda Theresa.

I look at him disapprovingly, and he laughs.

Me: Gosh it's been a hectic evening.

I feel Derek's hand on mine, and I look at him. I just want to be in his arms right now.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

He kisses my cheek and I smile.

Dean: Well, this is my cue to leave.

Nomvuyo: Don't you dare. I made dessert from scratch.

Dean: Then dish the fuck up. I miss my woman and kids.

Me: How are the megabytes?

Dean: Megabytes? Respect my kids.

I laugh and he grunts.

Me: I'm still mad at you for addressing me like a bitch in the streets.

Dean: Nawe you must stop being so slow. You're a teacher for fuck's sake.

Me: Dean!

He and I begin going back and forth, while the others ignore us and continue with their

conversation. Eventually, Dean apologizes.

Me: Good. Don't come for me.

Liwa: You two are weird.

I glance at Derek and catch him smiling.

Me: Everything okay?

He nods and kisses me again.

It's safe to say the rest of the dinner went by smoothly, with great conversation...

It's now two days before schools open, and boy am I glad. I miss my kids, and I miss distracting myself with work!

Earlier that day, I called Nolwazi, and she had agreed to meet up with me. Mdu, on the other

hand, also agreed to meet up with me.

Little do they both know that I'm setting them up.

I am tired.

I am tired of being in the middle of this.

The truth needs to come out ASAP!

When I get to the restaurant, I find Mdu waiting for me. We go to our table and sit.

Mdu: And then?

Me: What?

Him: What's with the meeting?

Me: You'll see...

The waiter gets our drinks and disappears.

Me: I don't like this position that I've been put in.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: I know you might end up hating me after this, but I think it's all for the best.

Him: What the fuck are you talking about?

Just then, Nolwazi approaches our table.

My heart?

I am close to shitting my pants, I tell you.

He sees Nolwazi, and then he looks at me intensely.

I've never been one to be intimidated easily, but that look he gave me? I almost crawled under the table.

Before he can say anything, Nolwazi finally reaches our table, and exclaims.

Nolwazi: Duzi??

Mdu looks up at her, and fails to even smile. He seems angry.

What the hell have I done?? Universe, I know I'm irrational! I have learnt from this experience!

Nolwazi: I haven't seen you in such a long time, brother!

I want to stand and run, but my body is on some, "Naah fam!"

They share a hug and she sits.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zizi.

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

Oh gosh. This is a bad idea! A very bad idea! I think back to Derek telling me that I shouldn't go through with it this morning, and me dismissing him.

Nolwazi: What's up? I had no idea that you'd invite my little big brother.

I laugh awkwardly as I glance at Mdu, who is looking at me with so much anger, nkos' yami.

Me: Uhm... So...

Nolwazi looks at me weirdly.

I'm good with hiding how I feel, but right now, I'm struggling. I'm sure it's very clear that

something is bothering me.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda?

I look at her nervously.

I am not going to look at Mdu, because his looks seem to have the power to make me feel like a

naughty 5 years old that's in trouble.

I finally take a deep breath.

Me: Okay, I'll just start by saying-

Mdu: Ziyanda.

I stop talking and fidget with my hands.

I am really invasive aren't I?

Damnit.

Nolwazi: What's going on here?

Mdu looks at Nolwazi, and his face softens.

They stare at each other for a long time in silence. Somehow, this staring contest has calmed me down.

Nolwazi: Talk to me.

She's also very calm.

Mdu takes a deep breath and scratches his head.

Mdu: Please don't hate me.

Nolwazi looks at him in shock.

Mdu: Whatever you do, just don't hate me... I need you more than ever right now...

He rubs his eyes.

Is he crying?

Nolwazi is definitely crying.

Nolwazi: What's wrong?

Mdu: I can't afford to lose you...

Nolwazi: Mdu, you're scaring me.

My heart has stopped beating at this point. I'm also on the verge of tears.

Nolwazi reaches out to him and takes his hands.

Nolwazi: Mdu?

Mdu sighs and closes his eyes.

There's silence for a while.

Mdu takes a deep breath, and exhales loudly.

Mdu: I'm in love with someone...

Nolwazi keeps quiet.

Mdu then opens his eyes and looks at her softly.

Mdu: At first, it was for revenge, but things changed.

Nolwazi: Revenge?

Mdu: Yes.

Nolwazi: Revenge?

Mdu nods.

Mdu: I wanted to get back at Kwanele.

There's silence.

I'm scared of breathing, because it would disrupt the silence.

Nolwazi: I... I'm not following...

Mdu: I've fallen in love with Tholakele, and she has given birth to my twins.

Wooaah.

I want to stand and run, but my body is not budging.

Nolwazi removes her hands from Mdu's and looks at him intensely.

Nolwazi: What?

Mdu: I'm in love with Tholi.

She stares at him for a long time. Tears have filled her face.

Before we know it, she stands, gets her bag, and walks out of the restaurant.

I finally exhale, and look at Mdu. He's rubbing his eyes.

I don't know how I feel right now; I can't seem to describe it.

I want to leave, but I can't.

Me: Mdu.

He doesn't say anything; instead, he stands and walks away as well...

The truth is finally out.

As fucked up as this is, a huge part of me is glad.

At least we can start finding a way forward.

Yes, "we."

It's quite clear that I'm in this shit, whether I like it or not...

INSERT 86 (Short Insert)

Derek is now with me.

He came as soon as I called him, panicking.

Me: What if she hates me??

Derek: You're overreacting.

Me: Derek!

He sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I've messed up! This is a mess!

I think my actions are only sinking in now. What the hell have I done?!

Me: Why in the world did I involve myself in this?

He looks at me, with a smile.

Me: Don't you dare tell me that you told me so!

Him: I'm not. I'd never!

I sigh heavily

Me: What have I done?

He stands and pulls me up.

Him: Come here.

I stand and he wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Him: You need some love right now, let's go.

I groan and he kisses me again.

We're now at Milky Lane, and we're having milkshakes.

I feel a bit calmer.

Derek: How are you feeling now?

Me: I feel a bit better.

I take his milkshake and taste it.

Him: We're going back to work in 2 days.

Me: I know.

I groan.

Me: But I'm glad, I need the distraction.

Him: Definitely.

Just then, his phone rings, and he shows me that it's Dean. He answers it coolly.

Derek: Hello?... Ya, I'm with her... Okay, hold on...

He hands me the phone and I put it on my ear.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Now, why the fuck would you do this shit?

Me: Dean, I already feel like shit! Don't make me feel worse!

Dean: Do you understand that I'm the one who has to deal with an angry Nolwazi?

Me: She's angry??

Dean: I've never seen her like this.

My heart starts racing.

Dean: She's pissed.

Me: Fuck, did she mention that she hates me?

He chuckles.

Dean: You're really lucky that I have a soft spot for you.

I groan.

Dean: I'll continue putting in a good word for you.

I sigh heavily.

Me: Yoh...

Dean: I'll fill you in on the progress.

I sigh.

Dean: I don't like dealing with such shit.

Me: Bye!

I hang up and finish Derek's milkshake.

Me: I need another one ASAP.

Derek: Already ordered one for you.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Niki.

Me: Gosh.

I answer.

Me: Hey, friend.

Niki: Heyyy boo!

I smile sadly.

Me: Unjani?

Niki: I'm okay. How's it going there with Sexy Beast?

Me: So far so good.

Niki: That's great, friend. I need to see you though! We have so much to catch up on!

Me: Really?

Niki: Yeboo!

Me: Hehe, I wonder.

I clear my throat.

Me: How's Kwani?

Even saying his name feels weird now.

I just... Woo I don't know...

Niki: He's good. That's why I need some Zizi. He and I have been inseparable.

Me: Hmm. When do you want to meet?

Niki: Dinner tonight?

Me: Uhm sure.

Niki: Are you okay?

Me: Ya, friend. I'll call you a bit later to confirm location.

Niki: Shap shap. Then we'll talk about what's bothering you.

I groan and she laughs.

Niki: Bitch, don't nobody know you like I do!

Me: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Niki: Bye bye ke.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and sigh.

Me: She wants to meet.

Derek: How about you invite her over at our- yes, our- place?

I giggle.

Him: I'll cook a lovely meal for you two, and you can have your bonding session. I have a lot of preparing to do for work.

I sigh heavily and nod.

Me: Okay.

Him: Ziyanda, stop this.

He looks at me seriously.

Him: You're being too hard on yourself for absolutely nothing.

I don't say anything.

He seems too serious right now, and I'm going through the most.

Him: First of all, if people didn't want their secrets exposed, then they should have kept them to themselves.

I keep quiet.

Him: I'm not going to have you feel guilty for shit that doesn't even concern you.

He looks at me.

Him: If Mdu or Nolwazi have a problem with you, then I'll deal with them personally. No one should use you as a scapegoat. Fuck that shit.

This man? This man is mine. Nxa, damnit!

Him: Secondly, don't even entertain the guilt with the Kwanele situation. Were you supposed to play God, and stop Niki and Kwanele from meeting?

He hisses.

Him: No one should even try coming at you with crap.

I take a sip of the milkshake and look at him.

Me: Wowzer. Is it an appropriate time to tell you that I'm turned on?

His face softens up and he smiles.

Him: I thought so...

Me: Thank you, Nkanyezi.

Him: Let's take this one day at a time... At least everything is out in the open now.

I nod.

Him: Don't be too hard on yourself, okay?

I nod.

Him: Now, finish up, so we can do something about this turned on-ness of yours...

I squeal in excitement and he laughs.

That evening, Derek went all out, as usual.

Me: How about we produce a book with all the food you make? I feel like we should capitalize on this talent of yours.

He laughs.

Him: Really?

Me: Yes!

Him: We'll discuss this properly in bed... I need a proper business plan.

Me: Hmkay.

Him: It will take a lot of persuading.

Me: Our meeting will be in the bedroom?

Hmm, I think I'll manage.

I spank his ass and he grunts.

Him: Okay, so you know how to dish up right?

Me: Excuse me?

Him: I'm just asking.

Me: Don't come for me!

He kisses me and then disappears.

Just then, Niki calls to tell me she's at the reception area...

Niki: I am loving this!

She looks around the place happily.

Niki: Hunnny!

Me: Gosh.

Her: This is such a cute and cozy home!

Just then, Derek emerges, and she squeals.

Niki: Heeey!

Derek smiles.

Derek: Hey, Nikiwe.

They share a hug and chat for a while.

Derek then excuses himself and goes to the bedroom.

Niki: Boo, this place is amazing!

Me: I know.

I get us some juice and lead us to the balcony.

Niki: So, before we even go anywhere...

What the hell is wrong with you? I'd rather deal with that

first than spend the rest of the night wondering.

I sigh heavily and pout.

Me: I'm in deep shit.

Niki: Yini manje?

I tell her about the Mdu, Tholi and Nolwazi situation, and the meeting earlier.

She rolls her eyes.

Niki: Don't even try to feel guilty for that shit!

Me: I can't help it!

She reprimands me for about 5 minutes. Thereafter, she stares at me.

Niki: What else is bothering you? Are you two fighting?

Me: What? Derek and I?

She nods.

Me: No, we're good...

Niki: So what's the problem?

I sigh again.

Niki: Ziyanda!

Me: Oh my God! Kwanele is Nolwazi's ex-husband and I am friends with Nolwazi and Tholi is

also my friend because I'm helping her
with her depression and I feel like I have
to choose sides

and I feel bad for even liking Kwanele
because everyone else hates him.

I say that so fast, that I don't even
remember much.

Niki: Say what now?

I shut my eyes and repeat myself.

After a while, I open one eye, and see Niki
looking at me blankly.

I open both my eyes and take a deep
breath.

Me: I'm so sorry!

Niki: For what?

Me: For this!

Niki: You think I give a shit that you know
Kwanele's exes?

Yoh.

Haike.

Niki: I don't give a rat's ass about any of that.

Me: Oh.

Her: Ziyanda, you really need to stop taking things too personally... All this drama for nothing.

Geesh!

Me: Oh.

Her: Now, please dish up for me, a bitch is hungry.

Me: Oh.

She walks back in and leaves me there, gobsmacked.

INSERT 87

Niki and I had a lovely evening, I must say. She managed to make me realise that I've been

stressing about nothing. She also emphasised that she really didn't care about this Kwanele situation, because it didn't affect her.

I have to admit though, that a huge part of me has decided that I'll distance myself a bit from

Nolwazi ad Mdu. I'm very loyal to Niki, she comes first compared to all these other randoms I

just met through Derek.

Anyway, I'm now in bed with Derek, and he is finishing up his work.

Derek: Good evening?

Me: Absolutely stunning!

He smiles and I watch as he finishes up.

When he's done, he puts his laptop aside, and looks at me.

Derek: How did Niki react?

Me: She's very chilled about it.

He nods.

Him: She had no reason to be pissed. It's not like you befriended Nolwazi knowingly. You met

these people through me.

Me: So I guess you're to blame?

Him: Heyi, ungalinge!

I giggle and get closer to him.

Me: Now, let's discuss the recipe book business plan thingy.

He raises an eyebrow and I look at him innocently.

Me: So I was thinking, we release a book with all your amazing recipes.

Him: Is it?

I nod.

Him: Elaborate.

Me: I just feel like we need more South African based recipe books, you know?

Food that is

easily relatable, you know?

Him: Hmm.

Me: So what do you say?

Him: I'm not quite sure.

Me: Hmm.

I get even closer and plant a kiss on his lips.

From that point, we're just going back and forth, playfully.

I love my Nkanyi, guys, struu.

The following morning, I wake up a bit late. I thought I'd make breakfast for Nkanyi, but I guess

last night's festivities left me exhausted.

As I make the bed, I see an envelope with my name on it. I immediately stop what I'm doing, and

take it. It's Derek's handwriting.

Me: Derek?!

I walk out of the bedroom, and around the place, but he's nowhere to be found.

I walk back to the bedroom, and sit on the bed. I reach for my phone and see a message from him.

Derek: At the gym, baby. It's been a while since I've been here. Clearly I've been spending too much time with you. Please don't bother making breakfast, I'd like to prepare one of my great recipes... *wink*

I chuckle and put my phone away. I'm more interested in this envelope over here. What could it be? Why didn't he mention it in his message?

I decide to put it down and continue making the bed. Once I'm done, my curiosity gets the best of me. I sit and open it. I'm shocked to see a long piece of writing. I began reading...

Dear Ziyanda,

We've already established that I'm probably the worst communicator in this relationship. I

thought I'd be able to hide this fact about me, but clearly I was wrong, because you are quite

the inquisitive little girl.

Anyway, I wanted to formally apologise for what took place in PE. I've been cracking my skull,

trying to figure out how to begin to articulate my thoughts... I know you were deeply affected,

but because you're Ziyanda, you've put all of that aside just to sustain peace

between us. I

must admit that I've never come across such a selfless person... I love you (please note that I

am going to randomly write how much I love you, because I'm that crazy about you).

The woman you saw in PE was definitely an ex of mine.

Unfortunately, she wasn't just any ex...

I know you're probably freaking out, and hyperventilating, so I would like you to take a few deep

breaths before you have an unnecessary attack.

I fold the letter and do as I am told.

So now that you're calmer, I assume, I would like to give you a bit of context...

Busisiwe and I

used to be in a relationship about 2 years

ago. She and I had quite a close

relationship, I loved

her.

My heart is doing the most right now, but I can't seem to stop reading. I want to know about this bitch, Busi.

I loved her so much that I even asked her to marry me.

Woooah! I put the letter down... Why the fuck is he telling me this?... Anyway, after a few minutes, I start reading again...

I asked her to marry me, and she actually agreed... I was genuinely happy about our relationship. What's even greater was that she was pregnant.

Haike. Fuck this shit. I put the letter down again, and go to the bathroom to pee. Once I'm done, I try calling his shady ass, but he doesn't answer. Damn him! Nxa I go back to reading this nonsense.

Now, you have to understand that this person was the love of my life. We had been together for just over 3 years, and I was convinced that she was the one. When she told me that she was pregnant, my whole world changed. I felt like I had a purpose. She's the one who even encouraged me to change my career... We had a good thing going, and everything felt right... But, obviously I was wrong... To summarise, I found out that she was in another relationship and I wasn't the father of the baby... I was basically her backup plan. I was her crutch, simply because the man she loved was

married to another woman, and she was seeing him on the side. She thought she'd build a life with me, but couldn't keep it up, because she never actually loved me. She loved someone else... All of this was revealed when we were busy with Lobola negotiations. She brought this man there and they professed their love for each other in front of both my family and hers...

At this point, I'm dumfounded.

I was devastated, Ziyanda. I really thought that I would spend the rest of my life with this woman. She was "it" for me. She had promised me this amazing life, but it all came crashing

down. Heck, it didn't even exist. I've never dealt with my anger and hurt towards her. She sold me a dream, and it cost me my heart. I bought that dream, only to find out later on that I was being played. I felt humiliated, hurt, and angry.

Seeing her that evening, reignited all the emotions I managed to suppress. She reminded me of how stupid I was.

So when you saw my reaction, I know you assumed I was all love struck, but it's the complete opposite. If you weren't there, I would have probably hurt her, I swear. I just fail to believe that she did that to me. She knew everything about me, and what I had been through prior to our

relationship, so I couldn't understand why she would play me like that.

We fast forward to the day I met you... As cliché as it is, I was genuinely intrigued by you...

When I got to know you, my heart opened itself up involuntarily. It decided independently that it

would welcome you, and give you a fair chance. My mind was against it, but we know that the

heart controls a lot of shit we do...

I love you so much, and I'm proud of my love for you. I'm proud of my heart. I don't know where I

get the capability to love so deeply even after the shit I've been through. I don't even bother

questioning this capability. All I know is that I love you, and my love for you grows every time

you cross my mind, or when I see you get lost in your crazy thoughts, or when I watch you sleep and snore next to me...

I apologise for how the PE incident came across... I want nothing to do with

Busisiwe. She

basically used and abused me, and I think I also value myself enough to know when to

eliminate myself from a toxic situation.

I'm just still angered and saddened by the situation.

Seeing her after such a long time just threw me off, that's all. I don't want to run off with her, as you thought.

Who in the world would leave The Great Ziyanda of the Dlamini? A stupid motherfucker.

Anyway, I'd love to discuss this with you more when I come back. I know for a fact that you

have a lot of questions and "shady" comments (I do pay attention to your "ratchet" shows and

I'm picking up the "trashy" lingo). I just thought it was a great idea to write this letter, so you

can get my side of the story (without interrupting me).

This letter will be the basis of our next conversation, I guess.

I love you, baby.

See you soonest,

Your Star.

I put the letter down and go to the bathroom to pee some more.

I'm a bit flabbergasted right now.

INSERT 88

I'm done showering, and as I'm getting dressed, Derek walks in.

I swear I have to catch my breath for a second.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hi.

He looks so good!

Me: So I made you stop going to gym?

Him: That's questionable.

I roll my eyes and he steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: Well, now I definitely feel fat.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: Maybe I should join you.

Him: You are more than welcome to.

Me: You want me to be thin?

Him: Uh-uh, see, I won't allow you to trap me and put me in a do or die position like you women always do...

Me: I'm just asking pertinent questions here, buddy.

Him: Ya, but I'm not going to fall for it. I laugh and he joins me.

Me: Please shower quickly... I'm starving. He kisses me and I groan. Now I'm suddenly hungry for him.

Him: Please shower with me?

Me: Hai hai.

Him: Baby, please...

He kisses me, and I eventually give in...

We're now clean (well I'm cleaner, considering how I showered twice) and I'm waiting for him to finish preparing breakfast.

My phone rings, and I answer without checking my caller id.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, Ziyanda.

I frown as I check the caller id.

Didn't I block this person?

I put the phone back on my ear and sigh.

Me: Hello, Bongani.

Bongani: How are you?

Me: I'm well.

He sighs.

Bongani: All this time I thought you blocked me.

Me: Ufunani?

Bongani: I wanted to hear your voice.

Me: Okay, so now that you've heard it, is it possible for you to continue thinking I've blocked you?

Bongani: Ouch.

Me: I'm in a very happy relationship, and I don't need this negativity.

Bongani: I hear you.

Me: Bye.

Bongani: Bye.

I hang up and instantly block that damn number. What the hell was that about? Yazi it seems like these exes can always sense when you're living your best life. They'll come weaselling their slimy asses back, and try to cause havoc. If you don't deal with them accordingly, you'll find yourself in messy situations. The Devil has been said to come in different forms, so you better start preaching in tongues when he tries coming at you!

Derek eventually finishes and gives me my food.

Me: Thank you, sir.

He smiles.

Me: Methinks you're the best cook in the whole wide world!

Him: You don't say...

Me: Yep.

Him: Thank you, baby.

Me: So, I thought we'd discuss your letter, while eating.

He laughs.

Me: Cause you know I prioritise food first, so I think I'll be calm and rational.

Him: Smart girl...

I sigh.

Me: And I don't want us to be all sad and shit. I'd like us to have a casual conversation.

He nods and smiles.

Me: Okay... So I have the tools here with me, and I think we can start incorporating them.

Him: Okay.

Me: So, because we're about to have a discussion, both of us are about to use the "Using Your Words" tool.

Him: Okay.

Me: And we're going to use the "Listening" tool, which states that I listen with my eyes, ears and heart.

He nods.

Me: Okay... I think I'll also use my "Breathing" tool when I start freaking out. He laughs and nods. I eat some of my food, and then sigh.

Me: Can I start?

Him: Go ahead; I'm using my Listening Tool.

Me: Okay... I've read your letter, and I'm actually thankful that you expressed yourself in that way. I know I have a tendency to freak out and not listen attentively.

He nods as he chews slowly.

Me: Now with that said, I would like to express what I went through while reading it.

Him: Go ahead, love.

I smile. He really is loveable.

Me: So, at first I was angry, because I couldn't believe that you were telling me about your ex.

He chuckles.

Him: So you were angry that I was telling you about something you wanted to know about?

Me: Pretty much.

Him: Kodwa Ziyanda.

Me: Yeah, yeah. I know... Anyway, after a while, I was deeply saddened by what this bitch did to you.

Him: Bitch?

Me: Backhanded, Bacterioidal, Basic, Bitch.

He chuckles.

Him: Lovely use of alliteration, Ms Dlamini.

Me: I can't believe she put you through all of that.

Him: You are not alone.

Me: When was the last time you saw or spoke to her?

He sighs and looks at me thoughtfully.

Him: Probably over a year ago.

I nod.

Me: And did you cut ties with her immediately after what happened?

He shakes his head.

Him: I was ind denial. I thought we'd still make it work.

Yoh.

Him: Dean and Liwa had to bring me back to reality. I was really ind denial.

Me: I'm sorry.

Him: Seeing her that night took me back to that emotional place I was in.

I nod.

Him: I was very invested in that relationship. I was never ready for that shit.

Me: I guess we live and we learn.

He nods.

Him: So, how are you feeling now?

Me: I'm okay... I just feel bad for you.

Him: You don't have to.

We finish up eating and sit back.

Him: So is this what talking feels like?

I laugh and nod.

Me: As long as we don't make it a tedious task, then we should be fine. See how constructive

we've been this morning?

Him: Definitely.

I get closer to his face and plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Him: I know.

Me: You do?

He nods.

Him: I don't feel insecure when I'm with you. I know you love me.

Me: And I'm not planning on leaving you for my side man.

Him: You have a side man?

Me: A lady never tells...

He laughs and groans.

Him: See, for you, I'd kill... So, please don't test me.

Me: Oh wow.

We continue making out on the couch...

Overall, I'm glad that he has taken the next step. What I will do is continue being patient, and

not bombard him with deep chats. I don't want him to feel like I'm putting him under too much

pressure.

So it's around 11am and I am in the mood to cook. I looked up tons of recipes, and ended up

narrowing it down to pasta and mince.

Simple, right? I'm not a chef, like Derek, but I'd like to

meet him halfway.

Me: So, I'm cooking lunch.

He raises an eyebrow and smiles weirdly.

Derek: Ahh is it?

Me: Yes.

Him: Uhm, baby, I'm more than willing to-

Me: Derek, no. I also want to meet you halfway.

Him: But, I'm not complaining.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm inviting Dean and the Mzinyathis.

He raises an eyebrow again.

Him: Is it?

Me: Yep. I'm in a very good mood.

Him: Uhm so can I help?

Me: No.

Him: I insist.

Me: I don't give a shit.

Him: Yoh.

I look at him and smile.

Me: You can finish up your work or something. Stay away!

He sighs and nods.

I understand that he likes spoiling me, but he needs to chill. I don't understand why he is acting so weird.

I get my phone and dial Nomvuyo's number.

It rings for a while, and she eventually answers.

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby!

Me: Hey, Vuvz, unjani?

Nomvuyo: I'm great, love. Just being treated like an egg by Liwa.

Me: Aww, mommy!

Nomvuyo: It's your entire fault. Angithi you're on a mission to expose people's secrets.

Me: Gosh, I'll tell you how that meeting went... Kunzima!

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: They'll get over it eventually.

Me: Anyway, Derek and I would like to invite you two for lunch.

Nomvuyo: Thank God. I'm not in the mood to cook!

Me: Yaay! See you soon?

Nomvuyo: Shap, love.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye.

I hang up and look at Derek victoriously.

Me: At least other people are excited.

Derek: Oh, baby. I'm very excited, believe me.

He smiles reassuringly and I giggle.

Derek: Let me give you your space.

He walks away as I dial Dean's number.

I'm not expecting him to come, because Nolwazi is

probably gowishing, but I'll try...

He answers.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hey, Langa. Unjani?

Dean: I'm alright, and you?

Me: I'm well, thanks.

Dean: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes, actually. How are things that side?

Dean: Nolwazi is MIA.

Me: What??

Also, why is he so cool about it?

Me: Where is she?

Dean: Probably went to her best friend's place.

Me: Oh. How are you?

Dean: I can't be running after Nolwazi when we have kids to take care of. She'll come back once she has dealt with all her anger.

Me: Yoh.

Dean: Insensitive, I know. But it works for us.

Me: Hmm.

Dean: So what's up?

Me: Uhm I wanted to invite you for lunch.

Dean: Cool. See you soonest.

Me: Dean, are you sure you're okay?

Dean: Ya. Bye.

Me: Bye.

He hangs up and I sigh. He is definitely not fine. I'll interrogate him properly when I see him.

After 3 hours, I think I'm finally done...
I'm actually exhausted.

Derek emerges and is shocked when he sees the mess in the kitchen.

Derek: Baby-

Me: I'll clean!

Him: Still don't need any help?

Me: No.

He nods, gets a bottle of water, and disappears again.

I look around in defeat.

I should have told him I need help with cleaning.

Argh, anyway, I begin cleaning, and finish after a while.

Derek then emerges again, and smiles.

Derek: Our guests are here.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: Okay.

Him: Still okay?

Me: Yes.

Him: Okay.

Thankfully, everything is on track...

Within minutes, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Dean walk in.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!
I smile.

Me: Hey, Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug. Boy, do these men smell good.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. I'd like some hot chocolate, please.

Me: Find it.

Nomvuyo: Hawu, what happened to hospitality?

Me: You're not a guest here.

She laughs as she makes herself some hot chocolate.

Me: Hey, Dean.

Dean: Ya Dlamini.

Me: No hug?

He grunts as he opens his arms and I hug him.

Me: What's wrong?

Dean: I desperately need my own space. I'm tired of living with the Dumakudes.

Me: Yoh, manje what is Lwazi saying?

Dean: Now is not the time to bring up my shit. I have to wait for this Mdu thing to blow over.

Me: Is she that bad?

He groans.

Dean: She feels like people always expect her to react to shit maturely, and dismiss the hurt

they cause her.

He pats my shoulder.

Dean: I'd rather not talk about it.

Me: Okay.

Liwa: Derek, can you dish up? We're famished.

Me: No, I'm the one who's dishing up. I cooked.

Liwa: Oh...

Nomvuyo: You cooked?

Dean: You?

Me: Yep.

I smile proudly.

Liwa: Uhm... Okay then, Dlamini...

They make their way to the lounge and I go to the kitchen.

Once I'm done dishing up for them, I give them their plates.

I sit and look at them expectantly.

Nomvuyo: Love, I'm actually craving a peanut butter and jam sandwich. My doctor says I

shouldn't eat too much pasta. Had I known you were making it, I would have told you earlier.

Me: Whatever, Pregnant Petunia.

I take her plate back to the kitchen and then sit and look at them.

Derek: Baby, aren't you eating?

Me: I'll eat later...

He nods and looks at Liwa and Dean.

Liwa: Uhm, should we pray?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

We all close our eyes and Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Uhm, God... We ask you, from the depths of our hearts, to please bless this food, and the

hands that prepared it. Protect and bless the people who will eat it as all. Amen.

We all murmur, "Amen."

I look at them and smile.

Me: Dig in!

Derek is the first one. Dean and Liwa look at him closely as he chews with a smile on his face.

Liwa then follows... He also has a smile on his face.

I feel good. I was very nervous about them not liking it, because they do have strong opinions.

Dean then follows. I can't read his face. I'm sure he's too stressed about his Nolwazi issues.

He chews.

Dean: This shit is-

Derek: Amazing!

Derek looks at Dean.

Derek: This shit is amazing.

Liwa: Hmm.

Dean: Hmm indeed...

I watch as they eat slowly. I'm glad they're taking their time.

Nomvuyo: Well, lookie here... We have another great cook in the family...

They all laugh quietly and I smile...

INSERT 89

The following day, I decide to go visit my parents. I need some TLC from them, and to catch up with Lwazi as well.

As soon as I get there, Lwazi is all over me.

Lwazi: Mommy!

Me: Hey, baby!

We walk in, hand in hand.

Me: How are you?

Lwazi: I'm amazing!

Me: Have you been treating these old people well?

Mom: Don't you dare!

We laugh and share a hug.

Me: Hey, ma.

Mom: Unjani, sisi?

Me: Ngiyaphila. How's everything this side?

Mom: Lwazi is obviously running the house.

I laugh as Lwazi runs off to play with her friends.

Me: Has she settled in kahle?

Mom nods and smiles.

Mom: And how are you? You look gorgeous.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Mom: Clearly you are well taken care of.

Me: Hmm.

She chuckles.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He went to stock chickens, so I'm sure you won't see him.

Me: I'll come back next weekend.

She nods.

Mom: How's Ngidi?

Me: I need a debrief session vele.

She laughs and we sit.

I then begin to tell her everything that has happened so far...

Once I'm done, she nods.

Mom: See, I did mention that he is not fine.

Me: You can spot them from a mile away.
We laugh.

Mom: Continue being you, sthandwa sami. I think things are going the way they're supposed to go. Be as supportive as you can.

Me: Of course.

She smiles.

Mom: I'm so proud of you. Who would have thought that my little baby would grow up to be this mature woman with so much love and patience?

Me: Aww!

Mom: I'm happy for you. I know a lot of parents would never allow this arrangement, but I trust

you with my life. I also can't make decisions for a 25 year old. Umdala manje sthandwa sami.

Me: Thank you. I appreciate your support. We share a hug.

Mom: So, would you like to eat, noma you are just popping by?

Me: Of course I'd like to eat. Derek also asked for a takeaway.

We both laugh as she stands and walks to the kitchen. I go out and call Lwazi. I need some of

her craziness right now.

Argh, seeing as I popped by the good ol' township (cause you know, I now live on the other side

of the world, with Caucasians) I insisted on meeting up with Niki.

We decided to meet at Bafokeng for some braai meat.

As I get there, I'm shocked to find her with Kwanele.

Universe, I thought we were getting along. You just couldn't wait a full 48 hours to let me get my shit together? Hai man. It's time I find another parallel universe that will have my back.

I get to the table, and Niki exclaims, with her usual bubbly self.

Me: Hey, Kwani.

Kwanele smiles and my heart does a little dance. He really does have a lovely smile.

Kwanele: Ziyanda.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: You smell nice.

Kwanele: I thank you.

We sit and I assess him. How could people hate this person? I don't get it, man. He's so calm

and collected... But then again, these calm ones are the dangerous type...

Me: How are you?

Kwanele: I'm well... Are you well?

Me: I mean, I'm okay.

He chuckles and looks at Niki, who looks at me.

Niki: I told him about your new squad.

My heart stops beating for a few seconds.

Me: What?

Niki: I told him about your dilemma.

I look at Kwanele nervously and he chuckles again.

Kwanele: It must be an awkward position for you.

I sigh in relief. He seems chilled.

Me: You have no idea.

Niki: As long as people don't come for me, and what's mine, then I'm good.

I look at Niki, and end up laughing, because I know she means that. Niki is the type to throw hands, and make one's life a living hell if they come for her.

Me: I doubt anyone will come for you.

Kwanele: How about we stop discussing all of this from now onwards?

Niki and I look at him.

Kwanele: I think its best we all move on.

Niki: You're right, baby. There's nothing desirable about discussing exes.

They smile at each other, and I smile, because they look so happy, smiling at each other.

Kwanele then looks at me intently.

Kwanele: Is Derek well?

Me: Yes, he is. Thanks for asking.

He nods.

Overall, the vibe is chilled and our conversation is flowing. I don't feel awkward at all!

Just then, Niki's phone rings and she walks away as she answers.

I then look at Kwanele and sigh.

Me: I like you. Please don't hurt my friend.

He shakes his head and looks at me softly.

Kwanele: I won't.

I nod.

Niki: Look who's here?!

I turn and see Jeff and Luyanda.

Oh Lord... Why is the airhead here? Yazi, I can tolerate a lot of things in this thing called life, but

airheads? I caiint. Luyanda is one of those pretty girls with no substance. Also, she is a cold

bitch.

Already nje she's standing here looking constipated.

Me: Jeffy!

I stand and squeeze Jeff.

Jeff: Hey, Zizi Bear.

Me: I didn't know you were coming.

Jeff: Niki invited me last minute.

I look at Luyanda and try my best not to roll my eyes. I just... Gosh...

Me: Hello, Lu.

She mumbles a silent hi.

Futsek kanti! Swine!

I sit and decide that I will ignore her constipated ass.

Kwanele and Jeff greet each other and everyone sits. These are those usual wooden benches.

Niki and Kwanele are sitting next to each other, and I'm on the opposite side, facing Kwanele.

Jeff is next to me, so he's basically between Luyanda and me.

Jeff: Have you ordered meat?

Me: Yep.

Niki goes and checks for our meat.

Jeff: Mate, have you officially moved this side?

Kwanele: Yes.

Jeff: Finally.

They both chuckle.

Jeff: Baby, what would you like to drink?

Luyanda: Juice is fine.

Jeff then looks at me.

Jeff: You okay?

Me: Yep. I'm cleansing.

Jeff: Wena na.

Me: Don't come for me.

He chuckles as he gets up and disappears.

Kwanele: How's little Uluthando, Lu?

Luyanda smiles.

Luyanda: His good.

Kwanele nods and smiles as well.

Luyanda: He hardly ever cries.

Kwanele: He's calm like his dad.

They go on and on.

Mxm look at them bonding. How annoying. She's all kind now, because she's addressing a man, but let me talk to her, and the bitchiness goes to 100, with her dumb ass. Thanda kabi amadoda.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek. I excuse myself as I walk away from the music, to the gate.

Me: Hello?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey, Star.

Derek: What's with the loud music?

Me: I'm with Niki.

Derek: Is she good?

Me: Yep. She came with her man.

He chuckles.

Derek: You haven't freaked out?

Me: Nope, you'd be proud of me.

Derek: I'll congratulate you properly when you come back.

I squeal in excitement.

Me: Oh, and he even asked me about you.

I really think you two-

Derek: Don't even try.

I groan.

Derek: Enjoy your time with your people.

Me: Nywee!

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and walk back to the table.

Jeff is back with more juice for us.

Me: Thanks.

Jeff: Cool.

Niki also comes back with our meat, and we all delve in...

Just then, Niki's phone rings, and she walks away, answering it.

Minutes later, she comes back with Ziggy.

I literally choke on my juice when I see who's following him.

Why the hell would Ziggy bring Ivy??

Ziggy: Hey, mates!

I look over at Kwanele, and I swear his expression flipped. I've never seen him this cold.

Ivy: What the fuck is going on here?

She stares at me in shock, and then stares at Kwanele in disgust.

Ivy: What the fuck are you doing here?

I stand.

I don't know why, but I stand.

At this point, I'm ready.

I've been ready for this shallow bitch.

Luyanda can jump in if she wants.

INSERT 90

Niki: Zizi Bear, let's get more drinks for me.

I'm not sure if Niki knows about Ivy, because if she did, she'd be the first one to stand and get to whipping.

She stands, takes my hand, and leads me to the bar area.

We leave everyone and get to the bar area.

Niki: And then? Why are you suddenly so combative?

Me: Ivy is the girl I told you about.

Niki: You tell me about a lot of people lately.

I sigh.

Me: The one who annoys me. Nolwazi's little sister.

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Niki: Nolwazi being Kwanele's ex?

I nod.

Niki groans.

Niki: Why is she here?

Me: I have no idea.

Niki: And was all that aggression from her directed at Kwani?

Me: I think so.

Niki: Anganya.

With that said, she walks out and leaves me there. I decide to take a deep breath and gather my thoughts before I also walk back outside. I'm shocked to see Ivy still there. Niki is now sitting next to Kwanele.

Ivy: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hi.

I sit and pour myself some juice.

Luyanda: Why don't you guys sit?

I look at Kwanele and he is as cool as a cucumber now. Jeff on the other hand, is just watching a movie.

Ziggy: Uhm, how are you Zizi Bear?

Me: Good.

I drink some of my juice and look over at Niki.

Niki: Ziggy, as you can see, there's no space in this bench...

Ivy: I don't do places like this, so I'm okay...

Niki: As I said, Ziggy, there's no space... Do as you please.

She then looks at Kwani and smiles.

Niki: Need another drink?

Kwanele: I do, actually.

Niki: Good. Let's get you your drinks, baby.

They both stand.

Me: Get me more juice, please.

Niki: Shap.

They stand and walk away.

Hehe.

Ivy: What's with that one now? Does she know she's dating an idiot?

Jeff: Hey, now.

Me: Contrary to popular belief, Ziggy is also an idiot, so I don't think you're any different from that one, who's my best friend.

Ivy: And you would know, how?
I smile.

Me: How about you ask your idiot?
That stupid grin on her face immediately disappears and I smile ever so kindly.

Jeff clears his throat.

Ziggy: So, I'm an idiot now?

Jeff: This can't be news to you, mate.

Luyanda: Definitely.

Ziggy, Jeff and Luyanda all chuckle and I join them.

Ivy: So you know these people, Ziyanda?

Jeff: We've been in each other's lives for a while now.

Thank God Jeff has my back right now. I would disown his ass if he did the opposite. It's clear

that he doesn't really like Ivy.

Ivy: So, you're busy hanging out with my sister's ex, the one who's fucked up her life, while

you're building a friendship with her as well?

Me: If jumping into senseless conclusions is going to be the key to getting you to leave right

now, then you're more than welcome to do so.

She takes out her phone and storms off.

Ziggy: Rea-

Jeff: Fuck off. We've told you numerous times to keep your relationship separate from this shit

we have with Kwanele. Why do you have to be stupid?

Ziggy scratches his head.

Jeff: You really are an idiot.

Me: A senseless one, at that.

Ziggy sighs as he walks away and disappears as well.

Jeff: He's been acting foolishly since he met this girl.

Luyanda: Ivy is a free spirit.

I decide not to take part in this conversation, because I feel like freeing these fists across

Luyanda's face.

Jeff: She's disrespectful and spoilt- a very bad combination.

Luyanda: Don't go too hard. She helped us by introducing Nomvuyo.

Jeff: That's the only good th-

Me: Nomvuyo?

They both look at me and nod.

Me: How do you know her?

Jeff began telling me about how Nomvuyo was there when Luyanda gave birth and how

amazing she was.

At this point, I'm too overwhelmed to even respond. This world is way too small.

Jeff: So, Derek is related to that crew?

Me: Sorta.

Jeff nods and chuckles.

Jeff: Fucken small world.

Kwanele and Niki come back with more drinks and sit.

Niki: Did they leave?

Jeff: Yep.

Niki: Good riddance.

Luyanda: So you also dislike Ivy? You don't even know her.

Niki: I've known you for years, and I don't particularly like you, so what's your point?

Whoaa!

Jeff: Come on, Niki.

Niki: No, I'm just trying to understand what she's saying. If someone comes for Jeff, will you not be the first one to defend him?

Luyanda: There's no reason for you to be a bitch.

Niki: Then stop talking out your ass. I sip on my juice.

Jeff: Niki, calm the fuck down.

Niki: I'm calm as hell right now, trust me.

Jeff: I think you guys need to talk this shit out right now. I'm getting tired of the unnecessary bitchiness that ensues when you're around each other.

He looks at me.

Me: Heyi, I'm not part of this. Don't even.

Jeff: I'm serious.

Luyanda tries to stand, but Jeff stops her.

Luyanda: Jeff!

Jeff: Sit down and stop being dramatic.

She looks at him angrily.

Jeff: All three of you are being childish right now.

Niki: Asingaphaphelani, Jeff.

Jeff sighs and looks at Kwanele in defeat.

Jeff: Help me out here, mate.

Kwanele chuckles.

Kwanele: Why don't you like each other?

Me: Luyanda thinks she shits rainbows.

Luyanda: Excuse me??

Niki: You walk around thinking you're better than everyone.

Luyanda: What? And what about you two mean girls?

Niki: Don't even try going that angle, because you know you started this nonsense.

Luyanda: Wow.

She looks at Jeff coldly.

Luyanda: I'm leaving.

Jeff: Baby-

She gives him one look, and he sighs.

Jeff: Okay.

He looks at us.

Jeff: We're not done here.

Niki: Hambani wethu.

Luyanda stands and walks away angrily.

Jeff: See you soon.

Kwanele: You're in big trouble.

Jeff: Tell me about it...

He stands and pats my shoulder.

Jeff: I'm mad at you.

Me: You'll be fine.

I smile at him and he eventually smiles.

Jeff: Bye, Nik.

Niki: Love you too.

He grunts and walks away.

Peace at last!

Niki: Such drama.

Me: And whose fault is it?

Niki: Heyi heyi don't you dare!

Me: Sisi, are you not the one who invited all these people.

Niki: Argh.

Me: Exactly.

Kwanele: Went from peaceful to deadly quite randomly.

Me: So Ivy doesn't get along with you?

He shakes his head.

Kwanele: It's understandable, seeing as I hurt her sister...

Niki: But, it's not like everything was your entire fault, so I don't get the melodrama.

Me: Really?

My inner Nomvuyo is now awakening.

Me: Kanti what happened?

Kwanele sighs as he begins telling me everything.

To say I am shocked would be an understatement.

Me: So your mom planned the whole thing?

He nods.

Me: But, why did you allow her to control you?

Kwanele: I was desperate. She knew how desperate and she used that. She's my mother, so she obviously knows how to press the right buttons.

Me: Yoh.

Kwanele: But, I admit that it wasn't just her... I messed up by agreeing.

I don't say anything. I need to process this side of the story.

Kwanele: The problem with Ivy is that she's overly disrespectful.

Niki: Mxm.

Kwanele: She frustrates me a lot, but I guess she has her sister's back.

Niki: And I'll gladly have your back as well.

They look at each other and start sharing one of their usual lovey dovey moments.

Me: I'm still here.

They stop and chuckle.

I miss Nkanyezi now.

My phone rings just on time, and boy am I relieved!

I answer it happily.

Me: Star!

Derek: Your Uber is a few minutes away.

Me: My what, now?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: So, Ivy got here and then Niki

Derek: Save all of that for when you get here.

I laugh.

Me: Hmkay then, see you soon.

Derek: Bye, love.

He ends the call and I walk back to the two lovebirds.

Me: I've got to love and leave you...

Niki: Finally!

Me: Excuse me?

Niki: I didn't know how I'd get rid of you.

Me: For your information, I came all the way from my Caucasian suburbs to bless you township

peasants with my presence.

Niki: Heeee!

We laugh and she stands.

Niki: See you soon, Petty LaBelle.

Me: Bye, Bitchy Bianca.

We continue laughing as we share a hug.

Me: Bye, Kwani.

He stands as well and we share a hug.

Me: Sorry for all the drama.

Kwanele: No problem.

Me: See you soon.

Kwanele: Of course.

Me: Bye, people!

I walk out and find my Uber waiting outside.

As I walk in, I'm greeted by the amazing smell of Derek's cooking.

Me: Hello!

I wrap my arms around him and he sniffs me.

Derek: Stinky.

Me: Excuse me??

Derek: Braai...

Me: Ohho.

He kisses my cheek and I let go of him.

Me: I'll take a shower, master... Anything else master would like me to do?

He laughs.

Derek: Uyabheda.

Me: I'll be back...

I walk away and take a long shower...

Once I'm done, I walk to the lounge and find him there. We sit next to each other.

Derek: So what happened?

I begin to tell him everything that happened...

Once I'm done, he chuckles.

Derek: No offense, but my crew is better than yours.

Me: Whatever!

Derek: I'm glad you didn't fight.

Me: I'm a lady.

Derek: Is it?

Me: Yep.

He pulls me closer and we kiss.

Derek: A very dramatic lady.

Me: Mxm.

He kisses me and I smile.

Me: Wanna know where my quiet and safe space is?

He nods.

Me: Right here, in your arms.

Derek: Don't make me blush.

I giggle.

Derek: So how about you use the Garbage Can Tool and let go of what happened today?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Good.

He kisses me again and I relax even more in his arms.

Things are getting better with Star, and I'm beyond grateful.

Universe, I guess you aren't that selfish...

INSERT 91

The following day was our last day of freedom. I'm happy, but bitter at the same time. I could

use a few more months...

Anyway, Derek and I decided we'd spend the day together, with no disturbances.

We've had

quite a tremendous wave of disturbances during this holiday time.

It's around 11am and we're still in bed.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Yes?

Me: Do you think Nolwazi will ever like me after this?

He looks at me blankly.

Derek: It's not like her disliking you, will make you disappear.

Me: Hehe.

Derek: And she can't direct her anger towards you, Mdu is the one who messed up.

Me: I'm the messenger...

Derek: Give it some time...

Just then, my phone rings and it's an unfamiliar number.

I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Hello?

Person: Am I speaking to Ziyanda?

Me: Uhm, yes. Who-

Person: Nolwazi.

Hmmyghaad!

My heart stops beating, I swear.

Me: Hi, LwaNolwazi:

I'd like to meet with you in an hour if you don't mind.

She is so cold.

I look at Derek.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi: I'll text you the location.

Me: Sure.

She ends the call and I quickly get out of bed and look at Derek in shock.

Me: Ngidi!

Derek: What?

Me: Don't say what! That was Nolwazi!

He raises an eyebrow and looks at me seriously.

Derek: Ufunani?

Me: She wants to meet! She was so cold!

Derek: She wants to meet?

I nod.

Derek: And you said yes?

Me: Duuh!

Derek: What happened to having a drama-free day?

Me: How the hell am I going to say no to someone I've done something like this to?

He sighs and rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Derek: I'm coming with.

Me: No!

Derek: I'm not necessarily asking for permission...

I sigh and throw myself on the bed.

Me: She sounds pissed.

Derek: Mxm.

I look at him in shock and he grunts.

Derek: Let's get ready then...

He gets out of bed and pulls me.

Derek: I'm tired of this shit.

We go to the bathroom...

We're now sitting at a restaurant, waiting for Nolwazi. I know I'm a nervous wreck, but I'm not about to let any of that show. Derek is the only one who knows my panicky side, and it will stay that way.

Derek: You okay?

Me: Ya.

I see Nolwazi approaching, and I take a sip of my water.

She gets to the table and clears her throat.

Nolwazi: Good morning.

She sits.

Me: Morning.

Derek: Hi.

She stares at me, and as much as I don't want to, I stare back at her.

Nolwazi: I didn't know you'd be joining us, Derek.

Derek shrugs.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: Good to have people who fight your battles, right?

Wowzer... She really threw a jab at me? I decide not to say anything, and Derek dismisses that as well.

Derek: Nolwazi, why exactly is Ziyanda here?

Nolwazi raises an eyebrow.

Nolwazi: Because she decided to interfere in shit that has nothing to do with her.

Derek tries to say something and I clear my throat. Although I love his supportiveness, I know I need to deal with this myself, seeing as I put myself in this position in the first place.

Nolwazi then looks at me.

Nolwazi: Ready to speak for yourself?

Me: Please cut the unnecessary jabs, Nolwazi.

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: I have a big problem with your statement. I didn't interfere in any way...

Mdu, your brother,
is the one who involved me.

Nolwazi: Why are you even having such contact with your ex?

Me: I don't think that has anything to do with you.

Nolwazi: Well, clearly your conversations centred around me.

Me: They sure did... But your brother is the one who initiated all of that... I don't know you from a bar of soap.

Nolwazi: Which is precisely why I'm baffled as to why you felt the need to bring all of this to me.

Derek: You're barking up the wrong tree.

Nolwazi: Derek-

Derek: No, Ziyanda was involved without any choice, so I won't allow any of you to put this shit on her. She's not the one who led your brother into Tholi's arms. In addition, she's not the one who made them fall in love and hide it from you.

Nolwazi looks at me intently.

Me: Mdu is the one who messed up. I get that you're pissed at me for bringing it to your

attention, but I honestly think your anger is misdirected.

Nolwazi: You're young. You don't understand what I went through.

Me: Nolwazi you can't expect me to sympathise with you when I don't fully know what you went through. I won't take the blame for what other people have done to you, I refuse to.

She takes a deep breath and sighs.

Me: I feel bad, I really do.

Nolwazi: Ivy tells me your friend is dating Kwanele?

I groan.

Me: I'd rather not discuss that, because my best friend is not part of this group.

She has a separate life, and I don't see why it should be an issue.

Nolwazi: Ivy came back fuming, but I really couldn't be bothered by that. Kwanele has every right to move on. I've also moved on.

I keep quiet.

I thought she'd stand and slap me.

Nolwazi: I hope you're not stressed about that.

Me: I feel conflicted, because on one side, I'm getting to know you, and on the other side, I've

known Niki for years, and she really likes Kwanele. It's a weird situation.

Nolwazi: Kwanele is the least of my worries. He's a good man that found himself in a corner.

I've had a lot of time to go through the hurt and anger, but I've honestly just accepted the situation for what it is. Dean and I are building our life, so why should I expect Kwanele to stand still and not move on?

I sigh.

Nolwazi: The only thing that's pissing me off is the Mdu situation, and you are correct in saying that my anger is misdirected.

Derek: I'm glad you've reached that realisation.

Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: You were ready to bite my head off weren't you?

Derek nods.

Nolwazi: I don't blame you. Dean would have done the same thing.

Derek: Here's the thing, Lwazi... Mdu is the one who fucked up. Ziyanda may have been the

bearer of bad news, but she's not the one to blame... Additionally, the situation with Kwanele

and her best friend is honestly none of our business. Your sister may be defending you and shit,

but please caution her to not come off too strong around Ziyanda. I can already see how she'll

behave when we're together.

Nolwazi: Ivy is being Ivy.

Derek: But, Ivy must know her place. Now that she has established that Kwanele has moved on, she mustn't involve herself in that shit. Like you stated, the man has every right to move on. Whatever he's currently doing with his life shouldn't even affect us this side. It's unfortunate that Ziyanda is in the middle, but what will not happen is everyone assuming that she is responsible for putting herself in this position. Niki likes the guy, and who are we to come between that? Ziyanda has decided to separate what she has with you, with what she has with her best friend. Niki has been transparent about her feelings about this whole thing, and

concluded that if she wants to be informed about something, she will direct all of that to Kwanele.

Nolwazi: I hear you, Derek. I will speak to Ivy. However, she also has every right to not like Kwanele.

Derek: But, she shouldn't intentionally go to his space and be invasive. She can talk shit about him all she wants, but she has no right to invade whatever he's building for himself right now.

Nolwazi: Okay, I will have a conversation with her.

Derek: And as for Mdu and Tholi... I understand your anger, but we all know how love is...

Nolwazi sighs.

Me: Tholi is not necessarily to blame... She was forced into this.

Nolwazi looks at me intently.

Me: I've gotten to know her, and she is really going through a lot.

Nolwazi: Really?

Me: She's a wounded person, and from my understanding, she was forced into this by her aunt and Kwanele's mother.

Nolwazi hisses.

Nolwazi: I've heard it all before.

Me: But, I guarantee you that Tholi was not out to get you. She was a victim of circumstance.

She sighs.

Me: She is very remorseful, and she's even depressed severely.

Nolwazi: Really?

I quickly tell her about Tholi. I'm trying to change the way she sees Tholi. The poor girl is going through the most!

Once I'm done, Nolwazi drinks her water. She seems touched. I think I managed to convince her!

Nolwazi: Wow.

I sigh.

Me: I'm caught up in a very weird position, Nolwazi... I got to know you and I liked you, then Mdu introduced me to Tholi and then I liked her, then Niki introduced me to Kwanele and I liked him.

What's worse with Kwanele is that I liked him before I knew his story. I didn't even connect the

dots. He told me he made mistakes and I didn't take that seriously, because I didn't think those mistakes involved you or Tholi. I got three different perspectives on the same issue.

You exposed me to the hurt you experienced because of Kwanele, Tholi and Kwanele's mother.

Tholi told me she was forced and she had no choice, because of her aunt and Kwanele's mother. Kwanele told me that he was backed into a corner by his mother. I don't think any of you understand how confusing and draining this is.

Derek: In all honesty, do you all realise who the common denominator is?

Nolwazi: Of course... Thenjiwe...

Derek: That woman is obviously a great manipulator.

Ziyanda: I may be dramatic and crazy, but my intentions are never shady. I don't want you to see me in a negative light because of this. I'm in the middle of this shit, and it's a confusing mind fuck.

Nolwazi: I don't see you in a negative light, Ziyanda. I've moved on from Kwanele. I cannot emphasise this enough.

Me: I'll understand if you don't trust me.

Nolwazi: Trust you with what? You already know everything there is to know about me.

She smiles.

Nolwazi: I apologise for the way I came in here. I was pissed as fuck.

Me: Which is understandable.

Nolwazi: And I think you did well by bringing Derek. Even though he's a bias mediator, he definitely brought me to my senses. Derek chuckles.

Me: I apologise for my part as well.

Nolwazi: You shouldn't even apologise. I know how Mdu can be, and I'm sure he involved you without even considering how conflicted you'd feel.

I take a sip of my drink.

I'm so relieved.

Me: So we're good?

Nolwazi: Yes, we good.

I sigh out loud and she laughs.

Nolwazi: And please don't feel the need to tell me about Kwanele as well. I'm good. I wish him and your best friend well.

Me: Please talk to Mdu. He genuinely loves Tholi. His love saved her... I know losing you would kill him.

Nolwazi: I don't hate him.

Me: Talk to him. Hear him out. What I've learnt from all of this is that yes, there's the truth, but there are also all these other perspectives that influence the way we see the truth. It's not easy to hold on solely to the truth.

Nolwazi: I don't know how you do it. I'd die.

Me: My life was very peaceful before I met you people.

Nolwazi: Hey!
I look at Derek.

Me: How is your crew better wena Ngidi? Firstly, you have a couple that grew up as brother and

sister and ended up falling in love...
Secondly, you have a couple that divorced
and got married
again... Thirdly, you have a man who was,
and probably still is, a serial cheater...
Then you have
a polygamous epic fail... Oh, and an old
woman who behaves like a gangster...
Who can beat
that?

They both laugh.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

Derek: Let's see... Your crew is running a
prostitution ring; has over the top
dramatic
bullfighters, and of course, mentally ill
people.

Me: Hey!

I punch him lightly and we laugh.

Nolwazi: Nothing beats us. We're a mess.

Me: Exactly!

Derek: A fucked up yet love-filled mess. A complicated mess.

Me: Likewise.

We continue chatting for a while, and I must say I am beyond relieved.

Universe, I officially love you! You do have my back, after-all!

INSERT 92

That night we ended up getting invited to Nolwazi's house for dinner.

Even though our plan was to stay in bed the whole day, we knew that was

impossible with this

specific crew. They love spending time together, and I don't blame them.

Derek and I are now in the shower.

Derek: Feeling better?

Me: Definitely.

He kisses me.

Me: Thank you so much for having my back.

Derek: None of them know you the way I know you. I don't want them to get shit twisted.

Me: So sweet.

I wrap my arms around him and kiss him.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Likewise.

We continue chatting as we get ourselves cleaned up.

We're now in Nolwazi's house, and Nyami runs to me.

Me: Nyami!

We share a hug and catch up.

Nyami: Granny Zimi took me to the Gold Reef City yesterday. We had so much fun!

Me: Really?

I listen as she tells me all about it.

Once she's done, she runs off.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a hug.

Liwa: We heard that you met with Nolwazi. How did it go?

Me: I'm here, so...

He laughs.

Liwa: Glad to know we can move on from that situation.

Me: Yep.

Liwa: Where's Derek?

Me: Bathroom.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we walk to the veranda.

Liwa: So, you knew that my wife is pregnant?

Me: Yep.

Liwa: You seem to be the secret keeper.

Me: And I hate that. It's too much.

Liwa: I also have something to tell you.

Me: Liwa, don't you dare!

He chuckles.

Liwa: What?

Me: I don't want to know your secrets!

Liwa: I'm an open book, love. No secrets here.

Me: Good!

He smiles.

Me: I'm so relieved that Lwazi understood.

Liwa: She's a good person by nature. Some of us have to dig deeper to find the good in us.

We laugh.

Me: Do you guys ever fight?

Liwa: We used to, but we got over it. If it's a small issue, we talk about it and move on. We're

definitely past the small fights.

Me: That's admirable.

Liwa: So how's Kwanele?

I look at him weirdly and he chuckles.

Me: Why would you want to know about Kwanele?

Liwa: Nje... Is he good?

I nod.

Me: He's a nice guy.

Liwa: Hmm...

Me: Do you also hate him?

Liwa: Hate? Not at all. I'm Zimkitha's son, and that automatically means I have a lot of tolerance.

Me: What's that supposed to mean?

Liwa: Zimkitha has exposed me to a lot. A bit too much, to be honest. I know the world.

I look at him intently. He seems serious.

Liwa: Through that exposure, I've come to realise that everyone has a history and I can't judge.

Me: Hmm.

Liwa: Zimkitha is a special kind of woman,
I tell you...

He smiles.

Liwa: But going back to your question, I
definitely don't hate Kwanele. I actually
sympathise
with the guy...

Me: Me too.

Liwa: But you can't mention that when
you're with Dean. He'll shoot you.

Me: Where is that evil man?

We both chuckle.

Liwa: He's built differently...

Me: Then Zimkitha must expose him to
the shit she exposed you to.

Liwa: Uh-uh Zimkitha and I share a deep
connection. I get very jealous when it
comes to her.

Me: Really?

He laughs and nods.

Liwa: The only people she loves more than me are Nomvuyo and Nyami. She's obsessed with Nomvuyo.

Me: I've noticed.

Liwa: But I'm also obsessed with Vuvu, so it's okay.

Me: Cute.

Liwa: Let's go inside... I just wanted to check in and make sure you're okay.

Me: I'm okay, thank you.

Liwa: Good.

We walk back inside the house and find everyone there.

Nomvuyo: Where did you two disappear to?

Liwa: We had to sneak in a quickie.

Nomvuyo: Hehe.

I walk to her and share a hug.

Me: Hey, bestie boo.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: How are you, love?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

Nolwazi walks to us, and she's with some woman who's the same age group as her, I assume. I

don't even need to go in-depth on her looks. It seems like these people eliminate you if you're challenged in the looks department. I wonder when my time is coming.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey Lwazi.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Had a good afternoon?

Me: Very relaxing.

She smiles and nods.

Nolwazi: This is Nandipha.

I look at Nandi and smile. She seems sweet.

Nolwazi: Nandz, this is Ziyanda, Derek's girlfriend.

Nandi: Nice to meet you, Ziyanda.

Me: Likewise.

Nandi: Vuvu, Nyami has really grown yazi.

Nomvuyo: Definitely. She's a big girl now.

Nandi: I haven't seen her in such a long time.

Nomvuyo: Angithi you've been MIA.

Nandi: Haibo, I was not about to be here when Malusi and I were still going through a rough patch.

Ohh so this is the Nandipha I've been hearing about?

Nomvuyo: Malusi is the one who should have been cancelled, not you.

Nandi: He depends on you guys more...

Nomvuyo: Ohho.

Nolwazi: But, I'm glad you two are good now.

I groan.

I've been too involved in these people's business. I need to go chill with my person.

I manage to slip away and find Dean.

Me: Dr. Hlongz!

Dean smiles and we share a hug.

Me: I missed you!

Dean: I don't like girls who get attached to me.

Me: Boooo!

He chuckles and hugs me again.

Dean: I hear that everything went well?

I nod.

Dean: Usindile.

Me: Argh, whatever.

Dean: I'm sure she came guns blazing?

Me: Heyii beku-tense. It's was very bad, I tell you.

He laughs.

Me: I had to keep myself from snapping.

Thank God Nkanyi was there.

Dean: Safa uNkanyi wakho.

Me: Don't come for my man!

Dean: Hai suka.

Just then, I feel Derek's arms around me and I smile.

Me: Derek, I've missed you.

He kisses my cheek and looks at Dean, with a grin on his face.

Derek: What's this idiot saying to you?

Me: He's busy whispering sweet nothings.

Dean: You wish. You're not my type.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I love women who can cook.

Wooooaaah!

I feel the world crashing.

Derek's body is all tense against me.

Me: What??

Dean smiles mischievously.

Dean: You heard me.

I look at Derek in shock.

Derek: I need the bathroom.

He lets go of me.

Me: Don't you dare!

He looks at me sheepishly.

Me: What's this idiot saying?

Derek: Angazi. I don't have a problem with your cooking.

Dean laughs boldly and pats my shoulder.

Dean: Stay away from the kitchen, Ms Pasta Killer.

I'm so speechless right now.

Liwa and Nomvuyo join us.

Nomvuyo: And then? Did you just see a ghost?

Dean: Just told her she can't cook.

Liwa: Oh, uhm, Vuvz, there's something I have to show you over there...

Nomvuyo: Oh, yes, love...

They quickly walk away and disappear.

Dean continues laughing senselessly.

INSERT 93

I'm currently going through the most. I cannot believe these people! So, all this time they

thought I was a horrible cook? Njani?!

And Derek! That son of a Khwezi!

As they go to the table, I make my way to the bathroom. Why would Dean blurt it out like that?

He looked like he had been waiting to burst my bubble! I am so pissed at him! At all of them!

The door opens and Derek walks in, looking nervous as hell. Damn piece of shit!

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

He looks at me in confusion. He obviously expected me to have a drama fit.

Derek: Uhm, are you okay?

Me: Ya. I'd like to pee, if you don't mind...

Derek: Oh... Uhm... Okay...

He stands by the basin and watches as I lower my leggings and pee. Once I'm done, I flush the toilet, and stand close to him.

Me: Ngidi.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: I'd like to wash my hands.

Derek: Oh. Sorry.

He moves aside and watches as I wash my hands and dry them. Once I'm done, I walk to the door and look at him.

Me: Asambe.

He nods as I open the door, and he follows me to where everyone is. I'm now seated between him and Dean.

Dean looks at me with a stupid grin on his face.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Yes?

Dean: You alright there?

Me: I'm fantastic.

He chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: Hi, Zizi! I haven't seen you!

She's next to Liwa, of course. Nomvuyo is sitting next to Nandi, Nandi is sitting next to Joe, and

of course Joe is sitting next to Gabi, who is sitting next to Nolwazi. It's a full circle.

Me: Hey, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: How are you, dear?

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

She smiles.

Zimkitha: I'm okay, baby.

Gabi: Lwazi and Dean, how are the babies?

Nolwazi: The megabytes are getting chubbier by the day.

Zimkitha: They really are...

They all laugh and start talking about Nolwazi's megabytes. I easily zone them out and think back to when I cooked or even tried to cook for Derek. Now that I think of it, he always found excuses not to eat my food! How dare he??

Argh!

Just then, I feel someone nudging me, it's Derek, and I snap out of it.

Everyone is staring at me.

What did I miss?

I look at them expectantly.

Zimkitha: Nolwazi told us about your meeting.

I don't say anything.

Gabi: Personally, I think everyone in this family likes overreacting. Why can't we be happy for

Mdu? The boy is in love, and who are you to stand in between that?

Zimkitha: I completely agree.

Dean: How about we sit this one out and let Nolwazi go through it how she wants to?

Gabi: Haike Dean. No one is coming for your woman. You can stop acting like you have a dick in your ass.

Nolwazi: Gabi!

Joe, Liwa and Derek laugh loudly and happily.

Must be so nice. I'm out here going through the most, while they're laughing and giggling. Mxm.

Zimkitha: We definitely want Nolwazi to go through it how she wants to, but I think we're entitled to having opinions and giving advice.

Dean: Your opinions and advice are unsolicited.

Joe: Do you want to go change your tampon, Diana?

They laugh once again and I refrain from rolling my eyes. Honestly, I'm just shattered.

Nomvuyo: You're all so childish.

They instantly stop laughing.

Nomvuyo: Everyone should mind their own business.

Liwa: Oh, baby. You should be the last person to say such...

Nomvuyo looks at him sharply.

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Liwa laughs.

Nomvuyo: What are you trying to say?

Dean: You're the gossip girl of the group.

Nomvuyo: What??

Now, as much as I tried suppressing it, I also ended up laughing.

Nomvuyo is out here trying to act like her ass doesn't like other people's business?
Hehe.

Nomvuyo: Whatever.

Liwa: Sorry, baby.

He tries kissing her, but she pushes him away.

Nomvuyo: You'll sleep on the couch tonight.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: When are your parents coming back from their vacation, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: I have no idea. They're going to four different countries.

Gabi: So cute.

Dean grunts.

Nolwazi: Please don't start.

Dean: I want us to move out. I'm tired of this shit.

Nolwazi sighs in defeat.

Liwa: I don't understand why you're making it seem so bad, Dean. I love living with Zimkitha.

Dean: Good for you.

Liwa: You are extra sensitive today, huh?

Nolwazi: But we've discussed this before.

We agreed that we'd stay with my parents until the

babies are properly developed.

Dean: It's been a while now. You think we're not ready?

Nolwazi sighs.

It's very clear that she doesn't want to move out of her parents' house. I think she's enjoying the convenience, and I don't even blame her.

Living with one's parents is amazing.

Nolwazi: Okay, Dean.

Dean: Everyone here knows how I feel about personal space. I don't like living with your parents.

I have nothing against them.

Nolwazi: I said okay.

Things are getting a bit awks right now.

Gabi clears her throat.

Gabi: Can we have more champagne,
please?

Nolwazi: Okay.

She stands and walks away.

Everyone stares at Dean and he looks at
us blankly.

Gabi: You're such a dick.

Dean glances at me.

Dean: You think I'm being unreasonable?

I don't say anything. I don't know why
he's trying to involve me. Angithi mina
I'm a bad cook?

Nxa.

After a while, Nolwazi comes back with a
bottle of champagne.

Gabi: Thanks, babe!

They all continue chatting and I add my two cents here and there...

Derek gets close to my ear.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Sure.

He clears his throat and everyone looks at him.

Nomvuyo: You two are leaving already?

Derek: We have work tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: Konje you still have that bridge to cross.

Derek: Yep.

We both stand.

Me: Night everyone.

They all say good night.

Nolwazi: Zi, can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

What did I do now?

I follow her to another room and she turns to look at me.

Me: Is everything okay?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I spoke to Mdu.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Me: And?

Nolwazi: He told me his side...

I look at her nervously.

Nolwazi: I'd like to thank you for telling me about that situation...

I sigh in relieve and she also sighs, but sadly.

Me: What's wrong?

Nolwazi: He's not the same anymore... I don't know...

Me: This secret has been eating him up. She doesn't say anything.

Me: He's the only one supporting Tholi, so I think he was under too much emotional pressure.

What makes it worse is that he had to keep everything to himself.

She nods.

Me: But at least you can be there for him now.

Nolwazi: We have to tell mom and dad.

Me: You haven't?

She shakes her head.

Me: When are you planning on telling them?

Nolwazi: When they come back...

Me: I think they'll understand if it comes from both you and him. The only reason people were or are against that situation is because they have you in mind. They're considering how hurtful it is from your perspective.

Nolwazi: Not knowing that I'm over Kwanele.

I nod.

Nolwazi: Okay... I'll talk to my parents.

Me: It's crucial for you to be there when Mdu tells them...

She smiles.

Nolwazi: I have no idea why the universe chose you to be involved in this, but I'm glad. Thank you for supporting them.

Me: It was the least I could do.

She smiles.

Me: Is he mad at me?

Nolwazi: Of course.

Me: Uzoba strong. I helped his ass!

We both chuckle and share a hug.

Nolwazi: Now, tell me, why were you so offish tonight?

Me: Argh.

Nolwazi: Everything okay?

I tell her what happened and she stifles a laugh.

Me: What?

Nolwazi: Uhm nothing... I can't believe they did that to you!

Me: The nerve!

She laughs.

Me: Wena noDean?

Nolwazi: He's too much sometimes.

Me: But don't you think he also has the right to voice out how this living arrangement makes him feel?

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Don't be hard on him. He just wants you guys to build your own home.

I can't believe I'm even putting in a good word for that idiot after what he did to me.

Nolwazi: You think I'm being too hard?

Me: Just a tad.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Okay... I'll initiate a conversation tonight.

Me: Good.

Nolwazi: One would swear you two have known each other for a long time. The way you stick up for each other?

Me: He sticks up for me?

Nolwazi: Phela I was ready to show you another side of me after the Mdu thing, but he kept telling me how sincere your actions are...

Me: Aww that evil man thinks I'm sincere? She laughs.

Nolwazi: Dean is not as evil as he makes it seem. Only a few know his true loving self.

Me: I guess I should be honoured.

Nolwazi: We all should... The man can be cold...

She wraps her arm around my shoulders and we walk off. As we get to where everyone is, Derek

immediately walks to me, and looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Baby, is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Nolwazi: Don't worry, D. I didn't bite her.

Derek: Good for you.

Nolwazi: See around, Zi?

Me: Sure.

We share another hug and she walks off.

Derek looks at me all nervously and guiltily.

Me: I'm ready.

Derek: Okay.

We say goodbye to everyone and Dean pulls me aside.

Dean: You're really mad?

I keep quiet and stare at him blankly.

I want to hear him apologise. Apparently he's not one to do such, but I want him to!

Dean: Dlamini?

Me: What?

He groans and looks at me.

Dean: Sorry.

Me: Excuse me?

He groans again.

Dean: For fuck sake, I said I'm sorry.

Me: For what?

Dean: For telling you the honest truth about your atrocious cooking.

Me: Dean!

He laughs and I end up joining.

Dean: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: You really hurt my feelings.

Dean: You are really going to drag this out, huh?

Me: Best believe.

He chuckles as he pulls and hugs me.

Dean: Dramatic.

Me: Mxm.

He lets go of me. We walk back to everyone and I give them hugs, except Liwa and her gossip

girl. I'm not speaking to them till further notice. They must go dry hump each other till kingdom come, damn sex addicts.

Derek: Ready?

Me: Yes.

I say goodbye and we make our way out. He opens the door for me and I get in. He gets in as well, and looks at me before he starts the car.

Derek: Baby-

Me: Derek, I'm extremely tired.

Derek: I know, but I still want to talk to you. You haven't said one word to me this evening.

I really want to be pissed right now, but he's making it very difficult.

Derek: Zi, say something...

Me: Okay, we'll talk later.

Derek: When we get home?

I chuckle and nod.

Me: Yes.

Derek: Good. I was about to pull out the Apology and Forgiveness Tool on you.

Me: Argh.

He starts the car and drives off, smiling...

INSERT 94 (Very short insert. Couldn't finish- I'll work on another one later)

When we get home (blushes profusely) I go to the bathroom to pee. When I get back to the

lounge, I find him sitting on the couch. He pats the space next to him and I sit.

We sit in silence for a while.

Derek: Zi.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I'm sorry.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I know you're furious.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Zi.

Me: Derek, I just fail to understand why you didn't tell me personally.

He tries to say something and I stop him.

Me: I have a huge problem with how you've handled this whole thing. You always preach about

honesty, but why was Dean the one who told me my cooking is fucked up?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: At the end of the day, I'm in a relationship with you, and only you. I don't sleep with your

crew, I sleep with you. Therefore, if anything happens between us, it needs to be addressed by

us first before it's taken to our friends. He sighs.

Him: I'm sorry. I never really thought about it like that.

Me: I shouldn't have to hear such from other people... You have to tell me, and then we can laugh about it with your people... I know you didn't tell me because you didn't want to hurt my feelings, but still...

Him: I hear you.

Me: Do you?

He nods.

Me: Seeing as I'm going back to teaching tomorrow, let me check for understanding... What have we discussed?

He laughs and groans.

Him: You've mentioned that you don't appreciate what I've done.

Me: And what exactly don't I appreciate?

Him: That I was not honest with you about your cooking.

Me: What would I like you to do?

Him: Talk to you first.

Me: Good. Glad we're on the same page.

He laughs and pulls me closer.

Him: I love you so much.

Me: I love you too.

Him: Do you, really?

I nod and he kisses me.

Him: How much do you love me?

Me: Right now?

Him: Remember to use your Garbage Can Tool...

Me: Let the little things go?

He nods and I giggle.

Me: Okay, I'll let it go.

He kisses me again.

Him: Tell me how much you love me...

Me: Needy much?

Him: I'm very needy right now. You've been cold to me.

I kiss him and smile.

Me: Sometimes, one has to be reminded that they can be replaced.

Him: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me.

Him: Uyanya.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles.

Me: I don't love you right now.

Him: Baby, come on...

He groans dramatically and I laugh.

Me: My love for you basically recycles itself every second.

Him: Wait... Whoa... That's deep.

I laugh.

Him: Damn, so every second it's recycled?

Me: Yep. This means it's fresh and seasoned 24/7.

Him: Well, that's good.

I laugh.

Him: So your love for me is recyclable and reusable?

Me: Yes, but definitely not reducible.
He squeezes me and we kiss yet again, but
this time, we're more at ease. I'm just
ready to be
ate and put to sleep...
Derek must get to work...

The following morning, my alarm does
the absolute most, but I switch the damn
thing off, and
go back to sleep!
I must have closed my eyes for 2 seconds
before I felt Derek's lips on mine.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Him: Wake up...

Me: Hmm.

I feel like crying. Why do we have to go to
work? Can't I just stay home and be
Derek's
homemaker?

Mxm konje I can't cook.

Him: Ziyanda...

Me: What?!

Him: Vuka phela.

Me: Hai ang'funi! Go away!

He sighs and I feel him get off of me. I immediately doze off again.

After a while, I feel his face again, but this time, he's between my thighs. As much as I want to

chase him away, the sudden sensation brought forth by his dancing smooth tongue is making

me want more of him. All of my senses shoot up, and I forget about sleeping.

He gives me a quick yet thrilling orgasm, and I am awakened like a prostitute when a car pulls

up there by Nugget Street eJozi.

I get out of bed, and make my way to the bedroom while he cleans up. Once I'm done, I get dressed and put on a bit of makeup. When I go to the lounge, I find my tray of food. He sits and pats the space next to him. I sit and we eat in silence.

After 20 minutes, we're done. I go to the bedroom and say a prayer, something I'm accustomed to. I'm going to have to make Derek realise God's importance in our lives. I can't be living with a man who thinks everything he gets in life is through his own hard work only...

Anyway, I'll get through this as time goes by...

We get in the car and he glances at me with a warm smile.

Him: Good morning.

Me: Morning.

Him: All ready?

Me: We can't travel to school together.

Him: Why?

Me: We're not supposed to be seen together!

Him: Don't worry about that.

Me: Derek!

Him: Ziyanda, trust me...

I sigh.

He starts the car and drives off.

Him: I'm submitting my resignation letter today.

Me: What??

He nods and focuses on the road.

I sigh in defeat.

Me: When were you planning on telling me this?

Him: This morning.

Me: So you're really serious about leaving that place?

Him: I don't want any unnecessary drama when it comes to us. Plus, I'm serious about opening my own school.

Me: Lord...

He smiles.

Him: Don't stress, sthandwa sami.

Me: You're something else.

Him: See, as soon as I give these people my letter, I'm going to find you, and I will hold you, and kiss you big time.

Me: In front of my kids?

Him: Those little fuckers will learn.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and glances at me.

Him: This will be our school, an us thing... You should start thinking of names and shit.

Me: Uhm okay...

Him: We're building a future here... When we're 50 years old, the money has to be like a self cleaning oven- run itself without the help of anyone.

Me: So you want us to retire at 50?

Him: I'm not going to be a working old man. Do you think I'm crazy?

Me: Wowzer.

Him: Can't be old and hustling. We hustle now, so we can enjoy the fruits of our labour when we're old and tired.

Me: How inspirational.

He laughs and focuses on the road.

Him: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I switch on the music and he focuses on the road.

I guess he really does see me in his future, huh? It's both heart-warming, and scary as hell.

INSERT 95

As soon as we walk through the gates, we are overwhelmed by hugs and squeezes. I am in heaven right now! I've missed my babies so much!

They take my bags and 10 of them walk with me to my class. We get there and I'm happy that

Derek and I have been separated.

Rorisang: Ms Dlamini, my mom and I went to Durban and North West!

The others also begin to talk at the same time excitedly. I'm now listening to all these different

vac stories. Just then, there's a knock on my door, and it's Zama.

How I've missed this crazy soul!

Me: Friend!

Zama: Heyi nina, hambani. Go and play outside!

The kids run off and Zama closes the door. She assesses me and smiles broadly.

Zama: You fucken liar!

Me: What did I do now?

Zama: What happened to us linking up? Are we just work buddies?

I laugh and she joins me.

Me: Friend, I had a crazy holiday.

Zama: I can tell. You're glowing like never before.

Me: I am?

She nods.

Me: Well, I guess that makes both of us. The pregnancy looks good on you!

She rubs her belly and smiles.

Zama: You must be getting some good dick.

Me: Definitely. This is what happens when one falls in love with dick.

She eyes me and we both laugh. We share a warm hug and I brush her belly.

Me: How's Zizi junior doing?

She giggles.

Zama: Zizi junior is doing just fine. She has started kicking like crazy, but she's healthy.

Me: Aww.

I continue brushing her, and feel a few kicks.

Zama: So you fell in love with a specific dick?

Me: Damn right I did.

She laughs and shakes her head.

Zama: Love is overrated.

Me: Is it, really?

She nods.

Me: Says the happily married pregnant woman...

We laugh and walk out.

Zama: I'm happy for you. This guy must be great for him to keep you hidden for a full month.

Me: He is quite special...

She chuckles.

Me: And how's hubby bae?

Zama: Things are great, I guess.

Me: That's good.

As we walk out, we bump into Derek. For a second there, I had completely forgotten about him.

Zama: Hey, Mr. Ngidi.

Derek looks at Zama and smiles.

My heart skips a beat. I just want to wrap my arms around him and kiss him.

How am I going to survive?

Derek: Hey, Zama. How are you?

He opens up his arms and they share a hug.

I also want to hug him!

Zama: I'm great, thank you.

Derek: Pregnancy looks good on you.

She chuckles as she rubs her belly.

Zama: Clearly Zizi junior has a good effect on me.

Me: That's right.

Derek raises an eyebrow.

Derek: Zizi junior?

Zama: Ziyanda has decided to name my baby girl after her.

Derek: Ah, I see...

He looks at me and smiles.

Hmyghad!

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

I think he can tell that I also want to hug him, because he opens up his arms and I eagerly go in

for a hug I deserve. I inhale his cologne and feel myself melt.

I feel his lips on my ear. He kisses me lightly.

Yoh.

He must just submit this resignation letter ASAP. I caiin't!

Zama: I'll go check on my babies.

I'm not even paying attention to her. I'm holding on to Derek, and I don't care at this point.

Derek: You can let go of me now.

Me: I don't wanna.

He chuckles as he manages to escape my grip.

Me: Mxm.

He looks at me softly.

Derek: I'm irresistible...

Me: Fuck off.

I walk away and leave him there.

After a while, it's time for assembly.

All the students line up in their classes and we walk to the amphitheatre.

Derek is standing at the front with his sexy soul snatching self.

People are still chatting... He slowly raises his right hand and touches his forehead. A few scholars see this, and they do the same. Within seconds, the whole school is silent, and everyone's right hands are on their foreheads.

After that, he touches his knee, and we all do the same. He touches his right eye and we do the same once again.

He smiles and clears his throat.

Derek: Good morning, students!

Everyone greets him back excitedly.

Derek: How are we feeling on this Wednesday morning?

Everyone: Whimsical, and how are you?

Derek: I am wonderful, thank you.

He goes on to do a quick Maths warm up and then gives some students the opportunity to tell everyone how their holiday was...

Within 15 minutes, we're done and we're making our way to our classes.

Zama: See you later, friend.

Me: Shap.

I take my kids to my class. Where is Lwazi? I wonder... I can't help but laugh when I think back to how shocked I was when I found out that I was Bongani's side dish. The nerve! We get to the class and my students immediately get to work. As I'm checking their work, my phone beeps and I go to my desk to check it.

It's a message from Derek.

Derek: Hi, Ms Dlamini. I must admit that I am fortunate to get to see you every day. I don't think

I'll ever get tired of it. I love you, and I hope you have great day.

I smile senselessly as I reread the text.

Argh. Swoons!

I type a reply.

Me: Hi, Mr. Ngidi. You have me smiling like a fat kid trapped in a candy store.

Thank you for

your ever so lovely words. I must admit as well that seeing you daily is proving to have a good

effect on me. I love you too, and I can't wait to have you all to myself later.

I press send.

Within seconds, my phone beeps again.

Derek: Now, get back to work before I fire you.

Me: How evil! Bye!

I put my phone on silent and get back to checking my kids' work.

It's now lunchtime and I am still fresh and excited. My love for teaching is quite deep, hey.

I'm eating in my classroom, when I hear a knock on my door.

Me: Come in!

The door opens and I literally drop my fork.

Me: Lwazi?!

Lwazi, my Lwazi, walks in. She's dressed in our school uniform, looking cute as hell!

Lwazi: Hey, mommy! I've beeeen looking for you!

Me: What?? What are you doing here??

She giggles as she comes to my desk.

Lwazi: This is my new school, silly.

Me: What??

She kisses my cheek and I continue staring at her in shock.

Lwazi: Mommy, don't cry!

Me: What's going on?

She smiles brightly.

Lwazi: Uncle D wanted to surprise you.

He asked me if I want to be in this school and I said yes.

Me: When?

Lwazi: Last year.

Me: What??

She giggles.

I didn't even realise that I was crying.

I wrap my arms around her and squeeze her.

Me: Why didn't I see you?

Lwazi: You obviously don't pay close attention. I'm in grade 5B.

I'm teaching grade 4 this year, so this explains why I didn't really see her.

Me: Lwazi!

She continues giggling and wipes my tears.

Lwazi: You're going to ruin your makeup.

Me: You sneaky girl!

She sighs.

Lwazi: Uncle D is the best!

Me: Did mom and dad know?

Lwazi: Of course, silly!

Me: How sneaky!

She laughs and gets a chair. She then sits by my desk.

Lwazi: I like this school. At least I'm with smart kids.

Me: Oh gosh.

She laughs.

Lwazi: I like challenges.

Me: You sure do.

Just then, there's a knock and Zama walks in.

Zama: Friend.

Me: Hey, friend.

Zama looks at Lwazi.

Zama: Lwazi, go eat lunch with other kids.

Lwazi: But-

Zama: Lwazi... You don't even know Ms Dlamini.

Lwazi: I do! She used to teach me.

Zama: Really?

Lwazi smiles and nods.

Lwazi: See you later, mommy.

Me: Bye, baby.

She walks out.

Zama looks at me questioningly.

I begin telling her about Lwazi... Leaving out Derek's role...

Zama: She's a lovely girl. I fell in love with her as soon as she introduced herself in class.

Zama is the grade 3-5 isiZulu teacher.

Me: She's very loveable.

Zama then looks at me mischievously.

Me: What?

Zama: I thought I'd wait for you to spill the tea, but damnit you're taking too long!

Me: Huh?

Zama: Argh, you're in love with Ngidi, aren't you?!

Me: What?!

She pouts and crosses her arms.

I quickly stand and walk to the door.

Me: I will not dignify that with a response!

She laughs as I walk out and make my way to Derek's office. Apparently Camille is still

overseas having the time of her life with her man... Must be nice!

I open Derek's door, and walk in. I find him typing.

I close the door and walk to his desk.

Me: Nkanyezi!

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: Lwazi?? Really?!

He stops typing and relaxes on his chair.

He's smiling.

Me: You sneaky bastard!

He chuckles and stands. I immediately wrap my arms around his waist and squeeze him.

Me: I love you!

I look at him and smile.

Me: You're the best!

Derek: I know...

Me: I'm pleasantly surprised.

Derek: Hmm.

He kisses my forehead.

Derek: I'm glad...

I let go of him and sigh.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Bye, baby.

I walk out and close the door.

I'm so happy right now. Derek is something else!

INSERT 96

By the end of the school day, I was a bit exhausted, but in a good way. It feels good being back at work!

Lwazi was now on her way home with her transport which my dad organised. I'm still shocked by what Derek has done. I don't know what I've done to deserve this star of mine.

I'm in my class when I hear a light knock. Seconds later, Zama walks in.

Me: Go away, demon!

She laughs and closes the door.

Zama: Unyile, I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what the fuck is going on. She sits on my desk and looks down at me with a grin.

Me: I don't know what you're talking about.

Zama: The first time it hit me was when we were in one of our subject meetings last year, and you two kept glancing at each other like teenagers.

Me: What??

Zama: Everyone knows that you two are a thing.

Me: Zama!

She laughs.

Zama: And then there are the little jokes and giggles you share without even realising.

Me: Are you serious?

She nods.

Zama: We all know... Mina I was just waiting on you to confirm.

Me: Everyone knows?

She nods lightly.

Zama: People are wondering how you managed to lock the great Ngidi down. He seems

untouchable to us low class folks.

We both laugh and I shake my head in disbelief.

Me: Argh I really don't know what you're talking about.

Zama: Hmm so you're O.J'ing this whole thing?

Me: Deny, deny, deny!

We both laugh and my phone beeps.

Zama: So I'm guessing you're not coming with me?

Me: Nope.

Zama: Heheeee!

She stands and gives me a hug.

Zama: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

She walks out and I begin packing my things and preparing my board for the following day.

Once I'm done, I make my way to Derek's office, and find him packing as well.

Me: Hey, can I come in?

He looks up and smiles. I don't know why I find him cuter at work. Seeing him all serious and quiet makes him sexier...

I walk in and close the door.

Me: How was your day?

He sighs.

Derek: Hectic, but good.

Me: Hectic?

He nods.

Derek: These people don't want to let me go.

Me: Huh?

Derek: Tried submitting my resignation letter, but they refuse to let me go. I have a meeting with them tomorrow.

Me: Really?

He nods and grunts.

Me: I guess they value you.

Derek: Won't change my mind...

Me: Are you sure?

He nods.

Derek: I already got a few properties to look at.

Me: For your school?

Derek: Our school.

I sigh.

Me: You are moving too fast.

Derek: Don't see why I should waste time when I know what I want.

Me: Hmm.

He finishes up and walks to where I'm standing. He wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me closer to him.

Derek: Did you have a good day?

Me: It was fantastic!

He laughs lightly.

Me: All because of you!

Him: I'm glad I could make it fantastic.

Me: Can we go home now?

Him: Home?

Me: Yep.

He smiles and nods.

Him: Sounds good.

He kisses me lightly and lets go of me.

We get our things and make our way out.

It seems like everyone left early today. I

guess some

people didn't have a great day, like some of us. Shwem!

We get to the car and he drives off.

Me: Apparently everyone knows about us.
He looks at me in confusion and a bit of disbelief.

Me: Zama told me.

Him: Really?

I nod and he chuckles.

Him: People are quick when it comes to other people's business, but they struggle to

implement shit we ask them to in their classrooms.

My jaw drops.

Me: Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi!

Him: I'm just saying.

Me: The shade?? The shade!

He chuckles.

Him: People need to stick to developing their competency and mind their business.

Me: Derek!

He focuses on the road and I laugh in disbelief. What is he trying to say? Is Zama not a good teacher kanti? Hehe yoh angizingeni!

That evening, we ordered food, because a certain somebody was not in the mood to cook. It's

unfortunate that he's the only one with cooking skills in this apartment, otherwise he'd be provided with something to eat.

We're now in the lounge, and he's busy on his laptop while I'm watching TV.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Him: What do you think about this vision and mission?

He gives me his laptop and I read.

Me: Whoa you're already working on the school's vision and mission?

He nods lightly.

Me: Hmm.

Him: What do you think?

Me: I like it.

Him: Baby, I'd appreciate more substantial feedback. "Like" is very inadequate.

Me: Haike.

I read it again and then sigh.

Me: What do you want to achieve through this school?

He sighs

Him: I want the kids to be recognized.

Me: Nationally? Internationally?

Him: Internationally, of course.

Me: Then why don't you add that? So maybe the vision should be to equip students from different backgrounds with all the necessary intellectual, social and emotional skills to become

worldwide citizens? And that through our education, these students will transform society?

He looks at me in silence for a good minute. Thereafter, he reels me in for a kiss.

Him: You fucken genius!

Me: Yaaas!

Him: Fuck.

He takes his laptop and begins typing. Once he's done, he smiles brightly.

Him: What about the mission?

Me: The mission is perfect... Maybe add that the education provided is aimed mostly at

students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds?

He looks at me once again.

Him: I didn't think about that... So you think the school should be for poor kids?

Me: We already have the Saint what
whats... Let's create a school for kids who
can't afford
those schools.

He laughs in disbelief and types again.

Me: So, we have a vision and mission?

He finishes typing and nods.

Him: We sure do!

Me: And we should also start thinking
about our values...

He puts the laptop aside and pulls me so
half of my body is on him.

Him: You're the best.

Me: I've been told.

Him: Hey, now...

I kiss him.

Me: Thank you for surprising me with
Lwazi. You're the best.

He kisses me and we reposition till he's
on top of me.

Him: This is going to be a great year.

Me: Preach!

He laughs as we share another kiss...

The rest of the week went by smoothly. Derek met up with his line manager and some people from the head office, and they finally agreed to let him go. Unfortunately, they refused to let him go immediately, so he is going to stay for the first term. They're going to find his replacement and he'll be responsible for training him/her. I am honestly happy about this. I enjoy seeing him at work and indulging in a few stolen moments.

Anyway, that Friday, we were busy getting our kids lined up and ready for assembly, when Zama came to me squealing.

Zama: Girl!

Me: Yini?

She's smiling and giggling.

Zama: Why didn't you tell me that Derek has a twin?

Me: Huh?

She fans herself.

Zama: He is so hot!

Me: Uhm okay...

I push her aside and get my kids ready. I then ask them to walk to the amphitheatre.

I look at Zama questioningly.

Me: Uthi kwenzakalani, sisi?

Zama: Look at him!

She turns and I also turn.

Me: Gosh, really?

I see Derek standing with Dean.

I must say though that they do look scrumptious.

But, what is Dean doing here? He has never popped up.

Zama: Zi!

Me: Yoh Zama, awume man. Kanti are you not married?

She giggles.

Me: Geesh.

Zama: Who is he?

Me: A friend...

As we walk to the assembly area, I realise that all the female teachers are staring as they pass

these two men.

If only they knew that Dean is just...

Dean...

Anyway, we get to assembly and one of the teachers run it, because Derek's voice is apparently giving him problems. He woke me up in the middle of the night complaining about his throat...

Such drama...

Once we're done with assembly, we all walk back inside the building.

I get to where Derek and Dean are standing.

Dean smiles.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: Hello, Langelihle.

Dean: I see you're in your element.

Me: Best believe.

He opens his arms and we share a hug.

Me: You're driving girls crazy over here.

Dean: Nothing new there...

Me: Wow!

Derek: I think I'm going to leave early, baby. I'm really sick.

Dean: Stop being a baby wena.

Derek looks at me all sulky.

Me: Is it bad?

He nods.

Me: Who's going to take care of you?

Derek: Dean.

I laugh boldly.

Dean: Uhlekani wena slima?

Me: You? Take care of a sick person?

Wowzer.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: What are you even doing here?

Dean: I came to tell you that I'm planning on proposing to Nolwazi next week

Saturday, and you

should start planning shit. Just leave the catering to me...

My eyes pop out.

Me: Excuse me?!

He nods casually and then looks at Derek.

Dean: Get your shit, Ngidi. We'll drive past the pharmacy.

I'm so dumbstruck right now.

INSERT 97 (Couldn't edit)

That Friday, I went home by myself with an Uber, because Derek had to leave early. He's been calling me, complaining about how much pain he's in.

I've already prepared myself for the drama I'm about to experience. He is really channelling his inner boss baby right now.

As I make my way inside the apartment, I'm shocked to find Dean there.

Me: And then?

He's cooking.

Dean: I figured I should cook for my sick friend, seeing as he lives with someone who has the

potential to unintentionally poison him.

I take an apple and throw it at him, and he ducks.

Dean: What the fuck?!

Me: Fuck you!

He laughs as he focuses on the stove.

Me: Go away. Your services are no longer needed.

Dean: Derek has been sulking the whole day. Just go and give him the attention he needs.

Me: How is he?

Dean: A little sore throat and he's out here making it seem like he has lung cancer. I'm gatvol.

I chuckle as I walk to the bedroom.

Me: Nkanyi?

The bedroom is dark.

I switch on the side lamp and sit on the edge of the bed. I uncover him and he winces.

Aww man.

Me: Star, how are you?

He groans as he rubs his eyes and eventually looks at me.

Me: Ah, love. Are you in pain?

He nods sadly.

Derek: I'm in pain.

Me: I'm sorry.

I try to stand, but he holds my hand.

Derek: Don't go.

Me: Let me take a quick shower first.

Derek: I want to shower with you.

Me: Okay, baby.

I help him stand. Yes, I help him stand.

This flu seems to have paralysed his legs.

I take off his clothes and lead him to the bathroom. I walk out and go to the kitchen quickly.

Me: Dean, I'm taking a shower with my person. Don't even think of disturbing us.

Dean: I don't know what's more disgusting... Your pasta or seeing you and Derek naked...

Me: Fuck off!

He laughs as I rush back to the bedroom. I close the door and take off my clothes as well.

When I get to the bathroom, Derek is literally sitting on the toilet seat, looking all defeated. I did

say the drama is on a 100, right?

Me: Star, you should have gotten in the shower...

He looks at me like I'm speaking a different language.

Me: Woza ke.

I help him stand and we both get in the shower.

Derek: Please make sure the water is not too hot. My skin is a bit sensitive right now.

Me: Oh, is it?

He nods sheepishly.

Me: Okay. Anything for you.

I adjust the water to his liking and then I start cleaning him up.

He groans and I stop.

Me: Everything okay?

Him: You're too rough, baby.

I roll my eyes.

Ngaze ngavelelwa.

I clean him up gently and look at him.

Me: Better?

He nods.

As I'm about to clean myself, he takes my vaslaap and I look at him weirdly.

Me: So you're strong enough to clean me up?

He nods and I chuckle.

Me: Thank you, Nkanyi.

He strokes my breasts gently and I moan.

He really does have an effect on me, sick or not. I

wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him.

Me: I know you're sick right now, but I really need you to help me out here.

Him: I'll try...

I roll my eyes and he smacks my ass.

Me: Hey!

Him: You're very mean.

Me: Okay, I'm sorry. Love you, Star.

I kiss him as he tries to say something. I'd appreciate a quick orgasm to keep me going for a

couple of hours. It's quite clear that I won't get any sleep.

After much kissing, and all that other stuff, I get my quick orgasm and we get out of the

shower. I dry him up and he goes to the bedroom. I dry myself up as well and follow him back to the bedroom.

He's sitting on the bed.

Me: Ready to get lotioned up?

He nods.

I take his lotion and begin working. I'm sure this is what it's like to nurse old people in a home.

Once I'm done, I help him put on his pjs and he watches me lotion myself and put on my pjs as well.

Derek: You have a lovely body, baby. I love your curves.

I look at him weirdly, but end up blushing. He sounds so cute and sincere right now.

Me: I'm glad you find me appealing.

Him: Enticing.

Me: Alluring

Him: Tantalizing.

I giggle and he smiles.

Me: I'm sure Dean is done cooking...

Ready to go to the lounge?

Him: I don't know if I can walk to the lounge, but I'll try.

Me: Please try...

He nods and I try not to roll my eyes. The drama dramz is on a hunnid right now.

We walk to the lounge.

Dean: Done having weak sex?

Me: You're so vile and gross. Go away.

He chuckles.

Dean: The food is ready.

I help Derek sit and Dean rolls his eyes as well. We then walk to the kitchen.

Dean: I need to leave. I can't take his drama.

Me: Uyanya you're not going anywhere.

Dean: I have twins waiting for me.

Me: It's not like you enjoy living with your soon to be in-laws.

He groans.

Me: Exactly. Now dish up for us and suck it up solider. You can see ukuthi Derek is doing the most...

He sighs as he begins dishing up.

Once he's done, we walk to the lounge and I give Derek his plate.

Me: There you go...

Derek: Uhm, baby I'm full.

Me: Mxm I didn't prepare it, Dean did.

Derek: Oh...

He takes the plate and Dean laughs.

Me: Mxm.

We are all seated now. I'm in the middle of Derek and Dean.

Derek: Dean, can I have some salt?

Dean was about to protest when I nudged him hard. He got up and fetched salt.

Dean: Anything else?

Derek: No, thanks.

Nkanyi takes the salt and then sighs.

Me: What's wrong now?

He sighs and looks at his plate tiredly.

Me: Would you like me to feed you?

Derek: Oh, thank you for offering. I would appreciate that.

I look at Dean and we roll our eyes. I put my plate aside and begin feeding Nkanyezi slowly.

Derek: I'd like a bit of garlic sauce.

Dean: Uyanya wena. Go fetch that shit yourself.

Derek looks at him in shock. I stand and fetch the sauce.

Derek: Just a little, baby.

Me: Hmm.

I sit and finish off feeding him. He then watches me eat.

Me: Yini? Are you still hungry?

He nods and looks down all sadly.

Me: Dean.

Dean groans as he stands and takes Derek's plate.

Me: Dean is dishing up for you.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: Hmm.

After a while, Dean comes back with more food and then sits down.

Dean: What exactly is wrong with you? Is your throat sore, do you have chest pains?

Derek: My nose is blocked. It's painful.

Me: Your nose... Your nose is blocked?

He nods.

Gosh.

All this drama over a blocked nose?

Universe, why are these men such babies when they're sick?

Dean: Haike uxakwe yini ungafuthi?

Derek: Excuse me?

Dean stands.

Dean: I'll see you-

Me: No!

I pull him down and take his plate. I put it on the table and then take the remote and switch on the TV.

Me: Let's watch the Real Housewives of ATL.

Dean: What?

Derek: You'll enjoy it... You behave exactly like these women, you'll see.

Dean: Maybe one punch will get those nostrils functioning?

Me: Dean!

Both of them sink on the couch and get comfortable.

Me: And no talking!

Dean: Just play the damn thing, Dlamini...

I'm tired of hearing Derek's moaning.

I press play and relax as well...

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd be sitting here with my very very sick boyfriend

and his arrogant friend, watching ratchet TV.

Life, hey?

INSERT 98 (Short insert)

It's now around 5pm, and Dean and I came up with a brilliant plan. We decided to drug Derek so that he passes out and stops annoying us. We gave him his medication, and within 5 minutes, he was moaning about wanting to go back to bed.

I help him up and take him to the bedroom. Just as I am about to leave him, he moans.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: Don't leave.

I sigh heavily as I get in bed and he rests his head on my chest.

Derek: Thank you for taking care of me.

Me: Hmm...

He is quiet for a while.

I'm honestly over him at this point. I want him to fall asleep so I can open a bottle of wine. Yes,

Derek has driven me back to the bottle. I am scratching my sabbatical, that's how stressed I am.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I love you.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Hmm.

I listen to him mumble about his indescribable love for me. The way I'm so exhausted, I don't even find it cute. He must pass out now. Within a few minutes, he is breathing loudly due to his blocked nose. I carefully break free from him and then walk out...

I am free!

I get to the lounge and find Dean there, with a bottle of wine.

Me: Right on time!

I get myself a glass and pour some.
We sit in silence for a while and then I
take a sip. I swear my whole body ignites
from the dead. I

sigh happily and then look at him.

Me: So, you want to propose to Lwazi?

He nods lightly.

Me: That's amazing. Good for you.

He chuckles.

Me: What do you have in mind?

Dean: Simplicity.

I nod.

Me: So, the usual dinner setup?

He nods.

Me: Okay. I'll think of something, and hit
you up.

Dean: Do best.

I laugh.

Me: Do best?

Dean: It's your lingo.

Me: I never thought of myself as an influencer. I obviously underestimated myself.

Dean: An influencer that can't cook.

Me: You are really going to drag this out, huh?

He laughs.

Dean: You have no idea. I want to make you cry.

Me: It will take more than stupid jobs to make me cry, evil man. I am invincible.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: So, do you have a ring?

He shakes his head.

Dean: There's someone flying in from Germany for that.

Me: What?!

He looks at me blankly.

Dean: You think I'm going to buy those idiotic rings from American Swiss?

Me: Whooaa!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Dean: I work hard and generate loads of money, so I can enjoy such luxuries, Dlamini.

Me: Derek has been saying the same thing.

He looks at me seriously.

Dean: As black people, it's unfortunate that almost 100% of the population don't grow up in

households that value financial literacy.

Our people live pay check to pay check.

Thankfully, my

family broke that cycle and stressed the importance of saving and spending

wisely. I don't want

my kids to grow up feeling limited just because there isn't enough money...

Me: True... We're not that educated about budgeting.

Dean: So, this is why you should also break that cycle in your family. You should start saving now, so that you won't feel the pressure when you're close to retiring. Don't you want to sit back and do nothing while still getting money?

Me: Of course I do.

Dean: Then be aware of your finances.

Me: Okay, Mr. Economics.

He chuckles.

Dean: Anyway, back to the proposal... I have someone flying in from Germany, to show me all my options.

Me: That's nice.

Dean: You'll help me choose, right?

Me: I'd love to. And maybe you can get me a young something to show your appreciation...

Dean: See, you can definitely get something from American Swiss. It's more of your level.

Me: Dean!

He laughs.

Me: You're so mean!

Dean: I'm not mean to you... Ziyanda, I can be worse.

Me: Mxm, go away. I want to cuddle with Derek.

Dean: Hmm and I also have to go now. I miss my family.

Me: Awww! Even Bab'Dumz?

He looks at me sharply and I laugh.

Me: Go and bond with your future father-in-law.

He groans.

Dean: Probably the only man who makes me question myself.

Me: Really??

He nods nonchalantly and I continue laughing.

Me: I think I'm going to love Bab'Dumz!

Dean: Mxm.

Me: So did you ask him for permission to marry Lwazi?

Dean: Obviously, dummy.

Me: And what about lobola?

He sighs heavily.

Dean: We'll cross that bridge once I've proposed.

Me: But you know she's going to say yes mos.

Dean: That's not my main concern.

Me: Then what is?

Dean: My mother is reluctant to reach out to my uncles...

Me: Hawu why?

Dean: I have no idea.

Me: Do you know your uncles?

Dean: I don't know anything about my family, Ziyanda. I couldn't give two shits about those people. The only problem now is that Dumakude insists on having my so called uncles there.

Me: That doesn't even make sense. It's not like they raised you.

Dean: My point exactly.

Me: Wowzer.

He sighs and stands.

Dean: Anyway, we'll see how that goes.

Me: I'm sure Zimkitha is excited!

Dean: You know how she is.

Me: Cute.

I stand as well and put down the wine glass.

Me: I'll call you once I have some ideas.

Dean: Okay.

We share a hug and I walk him out.

Me: Say hi to Lwazi.

Dean: Will do.

Me: And Bab'Dumz!

Dean: Fuck off.

I laugh as he walks away and I make my way back to the bedroom to check on my cancer

patient.

I find him sleeping ever so peacefully.

Cute soul snatching thing.

I go back to the lounge with my laptop and look up some proposal ideas on Pinterest.

I wonder if Derek would ever propose to me. Would I even say yes? Hehe I don't even want to

think about all of that. I'm still wrapping my head around the fact that we live together...

The following morning, I decide to make breakfast. Yes, I will make breakfast, and I will shut

this nigga up once and for all. I am not a sore loser. I will look up a simple recipe, and I will slay

the shit out of it. I'm not going to be the laughing stock, nxa! I refuse!

I research how to make fruity french toast and an omelette. Once I have taken out my

requirements, I start following the recipes very very carefully. I even taste along the way.

As I'm busy, I keep thinking of Dean's evil laugh, and that motivates me even more.

It's the eye
of the tiger!

After a while, I'm finally done. I clean up the space and dish up for my cancer patient.

Once I'm satisfied, I walk back to the bedroom with a tray. I wake him up and he yawns.

I ignore how sexy he looks...

Me: Derek, wake up.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Hello. Vuka, I made you breakfast.

Derek: Baby, I'm not-

Me: Don't fuck with me. Thatha lokudla udle.

He looks at me in shock.

He then sits up and I place the tray on his lap. He assesses it, and I can tell that he is shocked.

The presentation is on point! I did the damn thing, I know it!

Derek: Uhm, thank you.

Me: Eat up.

He digs in the omelette and looks at me.

Derek: It looks good, baby.

Me: Hmm.

Eat up nigga!

He slowly opens his mouth, and in goes the omelette.

He chews slowly... I'm watching closely... I want to see how he reacts...

He looks at me.

Then he digs in again.

He chews faster this time around and then smiles.

Derek: Baby, this is-

Me: Amazing, I know.

I stand.

Derek: Manje uyaphi?

Me: I'm taking a shower.

Derek: Oh, but Me:

If you don't tell your people that I've redeemed myself, consider yourself girlfriend and roommate-less.

His eyes pop out and I walk to the bathroom.

Drops the damn mic, bitches!

INSERT 99

That afternoon, Derek miraculously got healed. Maybe the medication Dean got for him really worked. I was just grateful that I was no longer expected to run up and down. This experience made me realise that I'm not a very patient caregiver. I lose patience after a while...

It's now around 12pm and Derek has showered and up from the dead.

Me: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay.

Lord. Clearly he's touched by how I addressed him earlier.

Me: Want to take a walk?

Him: Okay.

I wait for him to finish up and then we make our way out and walk around the block.

Me: I'm glad you're feeling better. I hated seeing you like that.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: I can't stand seeing my Star all sick and fragile. It really was a traumatizing experience.

He smiles and we hold hands. As annoyed as I was, I have to admit that he was very cute

throughout his sick period.

Him: You're not quite a sympathetic caregiver.

Me: Excuse me??

Him: Baby, you were snappy, and you constantly rolled your eyes. I've concluded that I'm going to take myself to a home when I'm old.

Me: Hehe. We'll see about that.

We continue chatting... After a while, my phone rings and when I check the caller ID, I see

Nomvuyo's name. I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Nomvuyo: Hey, bestie boo.

Me: Who am I speaking to?

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, really??

Me: Excuse me?

Nomvuyo: Gosh, you are really going to drag this one, huh?

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Love, I'm sorry about not being honest with you. It was a very awkward situation, and

Liwa and I didn't want to burst your bubble.

Me: Mxm.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: What will it take for you to forgive me?

Me: You can't bribe me.

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry!

Me: Whatever.

Nomvuyo: I miss you. When am I seeing you? What about today?

Me: I'm spending the day with Derek, so it will have to be tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: Gosh... Alright then. I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Love you!

Me: Whatever!

She laughs as I hang up.

I look at Derek and he laughs.

Me: I can't believe you didn't tell me that my cooking sucks.

He sighs in defeat.

Derek: Baby, I don't want to be the one who bursts your bubble when it comes to such.

Me: So much for honesty.

He groans.

Derek: So you're going to breakup with me if I don't tell "my people" as you call them, that you've redeemed yourself?

I nod and he places his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Anything for you, baby.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Any plans for today?

Me: I'm in the mood for cuddles and lots of sex.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

I smile innocently.

Derek: But, your wish is my command.

Me: Damn right it is.

We continue chatting and walking...

That evening, Derek and I were watching a movie, when he got a call...

Derek: It's my dad.

I lower the volume and he answers.

Derek: Hello?... Hi, dad... What's wrong?...

His body tenses up and I look at him.

Derek: What happened?... When?...

He sighs again.

Derek: Okay... Alright... I'll be there shortly... Bye...

He hangs up and growls.

Me: What's wrong?

Derek: My mom's in hospital.

Me: Really? What happened?

Derek: It seems like she had a stroke... It's been two days...

Me: Oh my goodness. How is she?

Derek: My dad says she's not well.

Me: Let's go to the hospital.

He nods and we both stand. I don't know how I feel right now. I don't necessarily like Khwezi, but I don't want anything bad to happen to her. At the end of the day she's Derek's mother, and I know she means the world to him.

Once we've gotten ready, we make our way to the hospital.

He's very quiet, and I don't know what to say. I want to give him space and just let him be, but I know that's not what he wants. I can tell he's worried...

As we're driving, I glance at him.

Me: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay.

I nod lightly and decide to not enquire further, because he's clearly not in the right space.

After a while, we finally get to the hospital.

We are led to Khwezi's room.

Me: I'll wait here...

Derek: No.

He takes my hand and opens the door.

Senior is sitting by the bed, where Khwezi is. At first I don't see anything wrong with her, but as I

walk closer to her and see her face and actual body language, I can't help but be shocked. Her

whole left side is badly affected. We all know how stroke messes one up, but I never really

thought this happens. I was so shocked!

Derek: Why am I only told now that this happened?

Senior looks like his whole world is tumbling down.

Derek: I don't understand why you would keep this from me.

Senior sighs heavily and looks at Derek in defeat.

Senior: She didn't want you to know...

Derek tries to say something, but stops himself. He then focuses on Khwezi.

At this point, I'd rather focus my attention on Senior, because looking at Khwezi is making me

very uneasy. She looks completely different. My heart is genuinely pounding hard.

Derek: Mama.

Khwezi looks at him.

Derek: What's going on? What happened?

Khwezi: I don't want that girl here.

Nazoke. Even in her sick state, she's still being her mean old self. Till this day I have no idea

what I did to this woman.

Derek: Mama?

Khwezi: I said... I do not want that girl here...

Mind you, she's not speaking properly, because of the after effects of the stroke.

Derek: You're in your deathbed, and the first thing you can say to me is that you don't want

Ziyanda here?

Senior: Nkanyezi...

I clear my throat.

Me: I'll be outside.

Derek tries to say something, but I shake my head. Listen, I'm all for support, but what I will not

do is force myself into situations where I am clearly unwanted...

I get out of the room and see Zimkitha walking towards me.

Zimkitha: Zizi? What are you doing here?

Me: Uhm, I came with Derek.

Zimkitha: Is he here??

She looks shocked.

Me: Yes, his dad called and told him.

Zimkitha: Hmm.

I don't say anything.

She smiles kindly.

Zimkitha: Let me check in...

She walks in and I decide to take a walk and find the nearest vending machine. I'd like a packet

of chips to distract me from all of this.

I was having such a peaceful day with Nkanyi...

The Universe sure knows how to switch things up. Phela now I'm being insulted by a woman

who is suffering from a stroke. Kunzima.

My thoughts are interrupted by my phone ringing.

It's Derek.

I answer it.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Where are you?

Me: Reception area.

He hangs up and I groan. Things are definitely about to be intense... I can feel it...

Within a few minutes, I see him approach me. He seems angry.

Derek: Why did you leave?

Me: Haibo, Derek. Your mother didn't want me there.

He grunts and begins walking.

Me: Where are you going?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Manje why ungasho?

I get that he's going through the most, but he must also consider my presence. He can't be

walking off and leaving me confused.

He turns and walks back to me. I open my packet of Fritos and grab a few.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

He sighs and looks at me more softly as I chew.

Derek: I apologize for how I'm behaving; however, I'm pissed as fuck right now. My mother almost died, and I was only informed today...

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry about that...

He keeps quiet.

Me: How is she now?

Derek: The doctor says she's badly affected.

Me: I'm sorry.

Derek: Let's go home.

Me: You don't want to stay?

He shakes his head tightly.

Me: Okay.

He walks and I follow him.

Now I have to deal with an angry and grumpy Derek... Kunzima ukukupita mos...

INSERT 100

We're now in the apartment, and Derek has been in the bedroom. I ended up giving him space. I

can't seem to deal with his current mood for some odd reason. More than anything, I also need

the space, so I decided to watch TV till I fall asleep.

My phone rings and it's Dean.

Me: Dean?

Dean: Are you two at home?

Me: Yes.

Dean: How's Ngidi?

Me: He's pissed.

Dean: Hmm.

Me: Do you have a close relationship with Khwezi?

Dean: More or less...

Me: She hates me.

Dean: I've been told.

Me: The first thing she said when we got to her room, was that I should get out.

He chuckles.

Dean: Monster-in-law.

Me: Is it bad that I don't really care that she hates me?

Dean: Not at all. Don't let her get to you.

Me: Hmkay.

Dean: I'm on my way to the hospital now with Liwa.

Me: Alright then. Bye.

Dean: Bye.

I hang up and sink on the couch. This group of friends is very strange. There's something about

their dynamics that confuses and intrigues me... I don't know, man...

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek sitting next to me.

Derek: Love.

Me: Hey.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: I'm sorry for being a dick.

Me: It's okay... I love your dick...

He laughs and I look at him and smile.

Me: How are you?

He sighs heavily and rubs his eyes.

Derek: Still pissed.

Me: Kanti what exactly happened?

Derek: Apparently there was a lack of blood flow in her brain, so there was a poor supply of oxygen.

Me: Yoh, but is she going to be fine?

He shrugs.

Derek: I don't know all the details...

Me: When are you going back?

Derek: Angazi...

I sigh and sit up, so I can look at him properly.

Me: Ngidi, I know you're pissed as hell right now, I know... However, this is the one time you need to be by your mother's side.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Yes, they didn't tell you earlier, but it doesn't change much. She needs you.

Derek: You think I should go back?

I nod.

Me: As mean as she is, she's still your mother and she loves you. Go and support her.

Derek: Okay.

I get closer to his face and kiss him.

Me: You can go without me.

Derek: You don't get it, do you?

Me: Get what?

Derek: I've become dependent on you.
Being around you has a positive effect on me. I need you.

Me: Whoa.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: Just knowing that you're by my side is enough to make me conquer the world.

Me: Hmyghaad!

I kiss him again.

Me: Aren't you a little a poet.

Derek: I'd turn into a construction worker for you.

Me: And I'd turn into a prostitute for you.

Derek: What??

I laugh.

Me: For real...

He looks at me mischievously and quickly stands.

Derek: I'll be back.

He runs off like a little kid and leaves me wondering what the hell he's up to now. Within minutes, he's back next to me.

Me: And then?

He smiles and takes out 200 bucks.

Derek: Zip it, prosti...

I look at him in shock and laugh boldly.

Me: Are you kidding??

He chuckles.

Derek: 200 bucks for a blowjob.

Me: Uyahlanya. You think I'm going to suck your dick for 200 bucks?

He takes out another 200.

Me: Hmm...

He throws it at me and I laugh.

Derek: Get to work, woman.

Me: Hehe...

He pulls me closer till my lips are touching his. He tries kissing me, but I close my mouth.

Derek: Sisi?

Me: Bhuti, you only paid for a blowjob, no kisses... These lips are exclusive.

Derek: You're too fucken expensive.

Me: Yep. I'll show you why I'm costly.

He takes out another 100 and I smile brightly.

Me: Perfect! Now, let me get to work.

We begin kissing and I channel my inner hoe. Petty LaBelle is having the time of her life right

now. She has always thrived in such situations...

The following Sunday morning, I am awakened by Derek's usual awesome-smelling food. I get out of bed and make my way to the lounge.

Me: Morning!

I think I'm in a good mood. Yes, I'm definitely in a good mood.

I walk to him and wrap my arms around him.

Me: Hey, sugar foot!

Derek: Someone's in a good mood.

Me: Of course.

He chuckles and then kisses my forehead.

Derek: Slept well?

Me: Like a prostitute after getting paid!

He laughs and kisses me again.

Me: And you?

Derek: I didn't know you were into role-playing... You were really spectacular.

Me: I also didn't know... You have ignited something in me, buddy... My inner hoe has

unleashed!

He laughs and continues dishing up.

Derek: Uyabheda wena.

Me: Need any help?

Derek: You can wash the dishes.

Me: Mxm.

I clean up and wash the dishes while he finishes dishing up. When we're done, we go to the lounge and sit.

Derek: My property developer called me this morning.

Me: Really?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: We have 10 spaces that we can choose from.

Me: Really?

Derek: Yep. We'll start checking them out from next week.

Me: You are such a doer... It's admirable.

Derek: Don't make me blush.

Just then, his phone rings, and he answers it.

Derek: Dad... Yes, I'll come today... Yes...

He sighs.

Derek: Okay, bye...

He hangs up and groans.

Me: Shame, he really needs you right now.

Derek: I feel sorry for the guy, he loves the woman.

Me: You have to be there for him.

He grunts and focuses on his food.

Me: I wonder why your mom hates me so much.

Derek: Mxm.

I realise that discussing his parents frustrates him, so I shall stop. I don't want to deal with

grumpy Derek. We had such a fun-filled, erotic night, that my body is still on recovery mode, so I will not ruin the good vibe.

Me: Anyway, I'd like to go to my parents' house for dinner.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: That's a good idea actually.

Me: Will you join me?

He nods and smiles.

Derek: I miss your mom.

Me: Cute.

He chuckles.

Derek: Stop hating on my relationship with your mom. We love each other.

Me: You do realise that you sound creepy, huh?

He laughs and we continue chatting while eating...

That afternoon, I found myself accompanying Nkanyezi to the hospital again. The things we do for love...

I'm pleasantly surprised to find everyone there. As much as I hated to admit it, I missed seeing

Derek's crew.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I chuckle as he walks to me and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Liwa: I've been informed that we are currently not on your good books.

Me: Hmm, you don't say...

He smiles.

Liwa: As a matter of fact, unlike the others, I genuinely liked your food.

Me: Don't patronise me, Mzinyathi.

He laughs and sighs.

Liwa: Okay, okay... I'm sorry.

Me: I forgive you.

He hugs me tightly.

Liwa; Now, please go talk to my wife.

She's been whining about missing you.

Me: Has she, now?

He nods and I look over at Nomvuyo, who's sitting on a couch, looking like an unbothered goddess.

She looks at me and smiles.

Nomvuyo: So you forgive my husband, but make me sweat?

Me: Ngithanda amadoda.

Nomvuyo: Ngizokulimaza ngoLiwa.

Me: Let's take it outside...

She laughs as she stands and we share a hug.

Nomvuyo: I've missed you so much.

I look at her in shock.

How and when did her belly grow so much? Isn't she like 2 days pregnant?

Nomvuyo: I'm getting fat.

Me: Hmm... Not as fat as me though.

She laughs and spanks my butt.

Me: Not in front of people, lover...

Nomvuyo: I've been suffering without you...

We laugh and find everyone looking at us oddly.

Dean: You two are strange.

Nomvuyo: Whatever.

Nolwazi emerges from out of nowhere and smiles when she sees me.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

I push Nomvuyo aside and share a hug with Nolwazi.

Me: Hey, Lwazi. How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm great, and you?

Me: Great, thanks.

Nomvuyo goes back to where she was sitting.

I look at Joe, Gabi and Malusi.

Me: Hello.

Joe and Malusi greet me back.

Gabi: So we don't get hugs? What kind of bullshit is that?

I decide to laugh that comment off.

I'm not that comfortable around these three. I haven't really gotten to know them properly.

Malusi ke yena, I genuinely have no interest in being close to him. Gabi seems so different to

me. I don't know what we'd talk about if we were left alone, and I don't mean that in a bad way.

She's too perfect for a messy person like me, so I'd rather keep the distance.

Liwa, Dean and Derek seem to have disappeared. They must have gone to see Khwezi.

Gabi: How is Khwezi?

Nomvuyo: She's still not well.

Gabi: Poor thing. Strokes really are the worst... Imagine having only one side of your body function.

I go and sit next to Nomvuyo on the couch.

Nolwazi: I have to make a call... Please excuse me.

She walks away.

Just then, I see the same woman from one of our dinners, approach us. I think she's the one linked to Malusi.

Gabi: Nandi!

Yes, Nandi, that's her.

Nandi looks at all of us and smiles. She seems like those quiet and sweet women who mind their own business. I wonder why Malusi would even cheat on her. I'm glad she divorced his shady ass.

Nandi: Hello, everyone.

We all greet her back.

Nandi: Is everything okay?

Gabi: It seems like Khwezi is not getting any better.

Nandi sighs and then walks to Malusi, who wraps his arm around her. They stare at each other.

Wowzer... Ezama-couple azingenwa straight.

Nandi: How are you?

Malusi: I'm okay.

She nods and then looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: I thought you'd bring Lele.

Malusi: Why would we bring our daughter to a hospital?

Oops! Someone's in a crappy mood.

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Nandi looks at Malusi questioningly and he groans.

Nandi: Want to get some fresh air?

He nods tightly and they walk out.

Gabi: These two confuse me.

Nomvuyo: Malusi is just a bitter man. He must get over himself.

I decide not to say anything. I'm just confused as to why they're all lovey dovey.

Nomvuyo seems genuinely annoyed now.

Gabi: Joey, let's get some fresh air as well.

They walk out, hand in hand.

Nomvuyo: Fucken idiot.

Me: Relax...

She grunts.

Me: How's the pregnancy treating you?

Nomvuyo: I have a feeling it's going to be a very very long ride.

I laugh and she sighs.

Me: Liwa must be treating you like an egg.

Nomvuyo: Uyamazi.

Derek, Dean and Liwa come back.

Liwa: Where did they go?

Me: Fresh air.

Liwa looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: You okay?

Me: Malusi snapped at her, now she's sulking.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

This person is behind Derek, Dean and Liwa.

They all turn around...

As soon as I get a peak of the person, my whole stomach churns.

Liwa: Busi?

Busi stands there, staring at Derek.

Busi: Hey.

I feel like I just got punched in the stomach.

INSERT 101

You know, I try my best to be a kind and loving person. I pay my taxes, I don't litter, and I don't do drugs...

Why do I constantly have to be put through the most by the universe? My relationship with the universe is officially over. I don't want anything to do with such an abusive entity.

Liwa: How are you, Busi?

Busi: I'm well, thanks.

I can't seem to stop staring at her. I don't think I've ever hated anyone more.

Derek seems to be on the same page, because his face says it all.

Liwa: What are you doing here?

Nomvuyo: Liwa, if you could just get me some tea, the world would be a better place.

I look at Nomvuyo, and I can't help but chuckle. I guess this is her way of saying Liwa must back off. Unfortunately, I don't want him to back off, because he seems to be the one asking pertinent questions at this moment.

Liwa: Uhm...

Nomvuyo: Tea... You were about to get me tea...

Liwa: Okay.

He walks off like a little puppy.

Nomvuyo then sits back and stares at Busi. The Resting Bitch Face is so intense, that even I

feel the pressure! This one knows what loyalty is! Yaas!

Busi: Uhm... Please show me where Khwezi's room is.

She's looking at Derek.

Derek: Zi, let's get some fresh air.

Me: Okay.

I stand and he puts out his hand for me to hold. We then walk out holding hands. Is it bad that I

don't want to leave this bitch here? She's the one who should be leaving!

Anyway, we get outside and he looks at me softly.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: I'm okay, Nkanyi. A bit confused, but okay.

He smiles lightly.

Me: I'm not going to have a bitch fit, I promise.

Derek: Hmm.

He wraps his arms around me and I smile.

Me: I'm okay, Derek.

Derek: I didn't know she'd come.

Me: I know you didn't know.

He exhales.

Derek: I'm sure Khwezi asked her to come.

Me: Were they close?

He nods.

Me: Hmm, interesting.

Derek: They were definitely close...

He lets go of me and scratches his chin thoughtfully,

Derek: Khwezi is probably trying to get to you.

Me: It will take more than a lousy ex to get rid of me. Your mother seems to underestimate me.

He laughs lightly and I take his hand.

Me: As long as you and I are on the same page, I really couldn't give a rat's ass what happens.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Right back at ya, mate.

He wraps his arm around my shoulders and we walk back inside, and find Nomvuyo, Liwa and Dean still there.

Dean: Why the fuck would you leave me with her?

Liwa laughs.

Liwa: I personally had no choice but to leave.

Nomvuyo: I don't want you talking to that woman. She is bad news.

Liwa: You are the master here, Vuvu. What you say goes.

Nomvuyo looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: I hope you're not worked up, because she is definitely not worth it.

Me: No, I'm okay.

Nomvuyo: Good. We don't do well with damaged goods.

Me: Well damn.

Dean: I just fail to understand why I was left here with her.

Dean looks at me.

Dean: I've never liked her.

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Nandi come back. They have three boxes of pizza.

Gabi: We thought we'd get some food.

Me: Where's Nolwazi?

Dean: She had to go. One of her friends needs her.

Me: Okay.

As soon as the pizza is on the table, everyone digs in.

Nandi comes to me and smiles.

Nandi: I haven't had the chance to interact with you properly, Ziyanda. How are you?

I smile. She's sweet.

Me: I'm well, thanks.

She nods.

Nandi: How are things with Derek? I hear you two get on like a house on fire.

Me: Really?

She nods and takes a bite of her pizza.

Me: We're close.

Nandi: That's nice.

Me: Hmm.

Nandi: I also hear that you don't particularly like my ex-husband?

I feel a tad embarrassed. I hope she won't go off on me, telling me to mind my own business

and all that jazz.

Nandi: I also don't like him.

I raise an eyebrow and she laughs.

Me: Really?

Nandi: He is quite an obnoxious man...

Me: Aren't they all?

She laughs again and I join her. I'm glad she's cool.

As we're chatting, Malusi walks to us and they share a moment. I refuse to even think it's cute,

because Malusi is a cheating man. There's a very special place in hell for men who cheat, more

especially husbands with kids. I have no sympathy for them whatsoever. I don't care if this

makes me a Judgemental Judy... People who carelessly ruin the families they've built bug me. I

can't with them.

Malusi then looks at me.

Nandi: I was just telling Ziyanda that I don't like you.

Malusi: I guess you both have something in common.

Nandi laughs sweetly. She obviously likes this man, while mina on the other hand I genuinely don't.

Malusi: Ziyanda.

Me: Hi, Malusi.

He stares at me with a grin on his face.

Argh.

Nomvuyo: Zizi, I need some water!

She's yelling from wherever she is. I'm sure she can tell that I don't want to be where I currently am.

I walk to her and she laughs quietly.

Nomvuyo: Go get me the water phela.

Me: Heyi sisi, you're not disabled. Don't try me.

Nomvuyo: Is this the price of loyalty??
Disrespect??

Me: Gosh.

I walk away and try to find her bottled water. My phone rings and I answer without checking the caller id.

Me: Hello?

Mom: Baby!

Me: Hello, sthandwa!

Mom: Kanti when are you coming? I'm ready for you and Nkanyezi. I cooked up a storm!

I laugh.

Me: I don't think we'll make it. Things seem a bit tense and strange this side.

Mom: Eish is that woman still bad?

Me: Angazi, but it seems like it.

Mom: Unjani uDerek?

Me: He's okay.

Mom: Okay ke sisi. I guess we'll see you some other time.

Me: I'm sorry.

Mom: No, it's okay, love. You have to be there for him.

Me: Alright then. Bye.

Mom: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and walk back to everyone. I give Nomvuyo her water and she thanks me.

Joe: We're going to head out now... D, you'll let us know how things go?

Lol both Derek and Dean nod.

Gabi: I hope she gets better. I'll keep her in my thoughts.

Nandi: We'll pray for her...

Derek: Thank you.

They say goodbye, and walk out.

Now, it's just Derek, Dean, Liwa and Nomvuyo here...

I wonder where Busi is.

Washo wavela uSathane.

She walks to where we are and looks at Derek.

Busi: Derek, Mam'Khwezi would like to see you.

Mam'Khwezi? Lolzer!

Derek: What does she want?

Busi raises an eyebrow and looks at Derek disapprovingly.

Busi: Your mother has asked to see you. She then looks at me.

Busi: Goodbye.

She walks off and disappears.

Gosh. I can't deal, hey.

I look at Derek.

Me: I cancelled dinner with my parents.

Derek: Why?

Me: I thought-

Dean: You cancelled dinner with your parents? Are you crazy?

Me: Excuse me?

Liwa: Why would you do that? You don't cancel on your parents.

Nomvuyo: Honestly.

Me: Excuse me, what's happening?

Liwa: Derek, go check on Khwezi, and tell Zimkitha we're heading to Soweto.

Me: What?!

I look at all of them in shock.

Nomvuyo: God knows I've been craving a wholesome meal all day...

She stands and Liwa gets her bag.

Dean: Let's go.

Me: Whoa whoa whoa! What the hell is going on??

Nomvuyo: We're going to have dinner at your parents' house.

Me: Huh??

I look at Derek, and he frowns.

Liwa: Hurry up, Ngidi...

Listen, I'm dumbfounded right now.

Dean: I've been thinking about your dad's chicken futhi... Perfect timing...

What the hell just happened?

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, call your mom and tell her you have a few extra guests.

With that said, they all walk away. Derek also leaves me there and goes to Khwezi's room.

Really??

INSERT 102

We're now driving to Soweto...

Universe, why? Gosh, I definitely miss my peaceful single days. Derek's presence has shifted

everything!

Derek: I'm sure you want to kill me.

Me: Hmm.

He chuckles.

Derek: Relax, baby. Your parents will love my people.

Me: Mxm.

He brushes my hand and focuses on the road. Dean is riding with Liwa and Nomvuyo, and they're following us. I am beyond annoyed.

After a while, we get to the house and I know my mom is going to do the most, because she seemed excited when I told her that I have three extra guests.

I open the gate for them and they park their cars. They get out...

Liwa: I'm not a snob.

Dean: You're most definitely a snob.

Me: Have you ever been to Soweto?

Liwa: I mean, I've been here a few times.

Nomvuyo: Lies.

Liwa: I won't allow you people to paint me in such a negative light.

Me: Wena Vuvu have you ever been here?

Nomvuyo laughs sweetly.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I've been around...

Liwa: Only because you chose to run away.

Nomvuyo: Hai suka.

I chuckle and lead them in... Suddenly, our house seems tiny with all these people here.

My mom is in the kitchen. She squeals as soon as she sees us.

Mom: Yoh!

I groan. Lord, can't I just go chill by the spaza around the corner? Dis tew murch.

Dean: Sawubona, ma.

I roll my eyes. He's out here acting like he's my mom's bestie.

Mom: Langelihle, how are you? It's been long.

Dean: I'm well, and you? We've been busy...

Mom: Hmm, ngi-right.

Dean shares a hug with her and then she looks at Derek with the biggest smile.

Mom: There he is!

Derek also smiles broadly.

Derek: Hello, ma.

Mom: I was so disappointed when Zizi cancelled on me. I was looking forward to seeing you.

Derek: We insisted on coming. You know how she is.

They share a very long hug. *rolls eyes*

Mom: How's your mother?

Derek goes on to give my mother a brief summary.

Mom: Shame, we'll keep her in our prayers.

Derek: Thank you.

My mom then looks at Liwa and Nomvuyo.

Mom: Haibo... Are you the third brother?

They all laugh happily. Yazi it's a party...

Derek: This is Liwa.

Liwa pushes Derek aside and goes on to hug my mom like he's known her for years.

Liwa: I'm Liwa. I'm so glad we're finally meeting.

Mom: Liwa... You all have such lovely names. Your mothers did well.

Liwa: Indeed...

He looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: And this is my wife, Nomvuyo... She is your daughter's best friend.

My mom looks at Nomvuyo. I already know that she's going to go on about her beauty.

Nomvuyo is a showstopper kaloku.

Mom: Waze wamuhle, Nomvuyo. You're beautiful!

Nomvuyo smiles sweetly and they share a hug.

Nomvuyo: Hey, ma. I'm so happy to meet you. I've heard a lot about you!

Mom: All of you are so good-looking!

Me: Wow... Coz I'm ugly, right?

My mom looks at me in shock ngathi she even forgot I was here.

Me: Yep, I'm here.

They all laugh and she pulls me for a hug and kiss.

Mom: Hello, sthandwa sami. My star child!

Dean: Your star child needs to learn that we don't cancel on parents.

Mom: Oh, man... I'm sure she just wanted to be there for Nkanyezi.

Me: I'm still here!

They laugh again. Once again, this kitchen seems so congested with everyone here. I want to
them to leave!

Mom: Anyway, you can go to the lounge while I dish up... Derek can stay with me here; I want us to catch up.

Safa thina.

Me: Where's dad?

Mom: He's delivering chickens with his personal assistant, Lwazi... They'll be back a bit later.

Dean: Is there some chicken left? I'd like a few takeaways.

Liwa: Me too. I've heard some great reviews.

Mom: Heeh! I'm sure he'll be happy to hear that.

I lead Dean, Liwa and Nomvuyo to the lounge.

Nomvuyo: This is a cute house.

Me: By cute you mean tiny?

They laugh.

Nomvuyo: I'm serious. I'd love to live in a small and intimate house.

Liwa: But, it's not practical, considering the size of our family.

Nomvuyo: That's the only downside.

Dean: Good to know you consider us a downside.

I chuckle and we sit on the couches.

Liwa: So, you grew up here?

I nod.

Liwa: Then how is it that you can't cook?

Didn't your mom teach you?

Nomvuyo: Liwa!

Me: Wow!

I stand and they laugh.

Me: I would cuss you out, but this is a Christian house.

They continue laughing as I walk to the kitchen. Derek is now helping my mother dish up. As

bothered I am, I must admit that I find them quite cute. My mom really has a soft spot for

Derek. The guy has clearly won both of our hearts.

Me: I'm hungry.

Mom: Give me 10 minutes.

I nod and walk out. I need some fresh air.

Again, my house is too tiny for these people and their enormous personalities.

As I get to the gate, I see Lwazi and my dad approaching. Lwazi sees me and sprints to me.

Me: Hey, baby!

Lwazi: Mommy!

We share a hug and she starts telling me about her day with my dad. She seems to enjoy this

assistant role of hers, and she's taking it very seriously. My dad eventually gets to the gate, and he chuckles.

Me: Hey, you.

Dad: Hello, Zizi, unjani?

Me: Ngiyaphila, wena?

Dad: Ngiyaphila. Are your people here?

Me: My people?

He chuckles and I groan.

Me: I'm quite overwhelmed.

Dad: They seem like a good bunch.

Me: Go and check them out, mina I'm tired of them.

He laughs and walks in. I'll chill by the gate till I'm less overwhelmed.

Lwazi: Mommy, are you sleeping over?

Me: You want me to?

She nods excitedly and I chuckle.

Me: I'll talk to Uncle D first.

Lwazi: We have to ask him for permission?

I nod.

Lwazi: Why? He's not your father.

I laugh. Trust Lwazi to channel her inner feminist.

Me: I live with him, baby.

She sighs dramatically.

Lwazi: I don't get it.

Me: You will once you're my age.

Lwazi: Is he here?

Me: He's inside.

She smiles excitedly and runs off. I guess Derek is loved by these people...

My phone vibrates and I check the caller id. It's Zama...

I answer it.

Me: Lover.

Zama: Hey hey!

Me: What's up?

Zama: I don't think I'll come to work k'sasa. Can you pass on the message to Derek?

I laugh and she joins me.

Me: Futsek wena, I'm not your post woman!

She laughs and sighs.

Zama: I was just checking in.

Me: Unjani?

Zama: I'm okay, friend.

Me: Hmkay then.

Zama: See you tomorrow, Mrs. Ngidi!

Me: Faastsek!

She laughs as I hang up. Just then, I feel Derek's arms around my waist.

Me: I thought you forgot about me.

Derek: And I thought you ran away.

Me: Hmm.

I turn around and face him.

Derek: Food is ready.

Me: And are the introductions done?

He chuckles.

Derek: Yes, your dad is well-acquainted with my people.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Don't be a party pooper.

He takes my hand and leads me in. Yazi you'd swear he's the one who grew up here.

When I get in, I find everyone eating.

Mom: Sisi, where did you disappear to?

Me: I was at the gate.

Mom: I thought you went to Niki.

Me: Nope.

I get my plate and sit next to Derek.

Mom: So, we're discussing the proposal you're planning.

I look at Dean and he smiles. I'm still shocked by how close I am with this one. I hated his guts

at first phela... Now he's sitting here comfortably in my parents' house, clearly having a good time.

Me: I'm still juggling a few ideas.

Liwa: Do you mind sharing?

I shake my head.

Derek: She's adamant about not telling anyone until she has a constructive plan.

Liwa: Is one week realistic though, Dean?

Dean: I trust Dlamini.

Dad: As long as the parents have been informed, then I think all is all.

Dean nods.

Liwa: So, tell me about this chicken business of yours...

My dad gladly tells him why and how he developed that idea. The passion? Lol it's unmatched!

Once he's done, they all look at each other in awe.

Me: What's wrong?

Dean chuckles.

Dean: He just sold his business to us...

Me: Oh.

These people are so dramatic.

Liwa: Would you be interested in opening up an actual store?

Dad: That's the goal.

Liwa: Hmm, I'm sure my boss mom would agree to investing in you...

My dad looks at him excitedly.

Dad: Really?

Liwa: Of course... We'll meet again to discuss things properly. I'm thoroughly impressed... I'll

also need some free meat to serve as testers.

Dad: I will dish up some takeaway... Not free though.

Everyone laughs.

Hehe. Good for my dad. I trust that he will handle things.

They continue chatting while I zone them out and focus on my food.

Before I know it, there's a knock on the door.

Next thing I know, Zimkitha is also here. Ya, Universe, when you come, you come all the way through. Ndidikiwe.

INSERT 103

I'm sitting here wondering what the hell is going on.

I even feel sick. Ngathi ngiqalwa yi-flu.

I'm even having a difficult time breathing, that's how overwhelmed I am. No, I'm not being

dramatic. I genuinely feel overwhelmed by all these people here.

I think Derek notices, because he asks me to accompany him outside. I gladly stand and follow

him. Everyone is having a good time, and I'm happy for them...

We get outside and he looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Ziyanda?

Me: I'm going to take a walk down the street. I'll be back.

He tries to say something, but I shake my head.

Me: You don't get it. My anxiety is shooting up and I can't control it. I'm not angry, I'm anxious.

He looks at me intently and I can tell he feels bad.

Me: Derek, I'm not angry.

Derek: Okay. Then let's take the walk.

I sigh. I'd rather walk by myself, but I know he'll take it personally.

Me: Okay.

He takes my hand and we walk out of the yard. It's getting dark now...

Me: So, Zimkitha's here...

Derek: Yep...

He looks at me.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay. They were going to have to meet sooner or later.

Derek: They are quite overwhelming.

Me: Definitely...

As we continue walking and chatting, I'm actually glad that he tagged along. I feel much better

now. After a while, we get back to the house and get in.

Hehe people are laughing and having a good time. Kumnandi mos.

It seems like Zimkitha is recalling the time she found out that Nomvuyo and Liwa were secretly

in love with each other.

My mom is shocked, to say the least.

Mom: Why in the world would you two do that??

Liwa chuckles while Nomvuyo looks down ashamedly.

Liwa: We just fell in love... I don't know...

Mom: I hope you gave them a good beating, Zimi!

Zimi? Hehe must be so nice!

Lwazi is now in the bedroom, preparing for her week...

They continue chatting about the Liwa and Nomvuyo situation for a while...

Thereafter, they discuss marriage and children.

It's safe to say that they covered every topic in the book. I'm not even shocked that Zimkitha

and my mom are getting along. They have similar personalities.

At around 8pm, we finish up and conclude that it's time for everyone to go their separate ways.

Mom: It was so lovely meeting all of you. Now I know who my baby is with when she's vanished.

They laugh.

Zimkitha: She's a great person and she fits right in.

Mom: She hasn't shown you her overly dramatic side?

Dean: Trust me, that's the first thing we learnt about her.

Me: Wow.

They laugh once again.

Derek: All the women in this group are dramatic. It's nothing new.

Mom: Hmm then we should meet the other women as well.

Zimkitha: I'll invite you over to my house.

Mom: We'd love that.

I stand and go to Lwazi's bedroom and find her sleeping. Everyone else goes outside... I walk to the bed and plant a kiss on her forehead. As much as I want to wake her and give her a squeeze, I stop myself... I'm so happy that now I get to see her at school. I think this has to be the best thing Derek has ever done for me.

As I walk out of the bedroom, I feel a sharp pain in my back, and I have to stand still for a second and re-evaluate.

What the fuck?

Derek walks in and smiles.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Ya.

We walk out and I rub my back. Clearly I've been up and down today. I even feel like I'm coming down with the flu...

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: I need to sleep. My throat hurts, my nose is also starting to do things, and my whole body is tired.

Derek: Ohhh look who's sick now.

Me: Don't come for me. Unlike you, I'm not moaning and groaning;

Derek: Hmmmm.

Me: Whatever.

We get to where everyone is.

Zimktiha: Nisale kahle

Dad: Nihambe kahle.

Mom: It was such a pleasure getting to know you all.

Liwa: We will definitely be seeing each other again soon.

They all say goodbye to my parents and then get in their cars.

Dean: I'll see you tomorrow, Dlamini.

Me: Tomorrow?

He nods.

Dean: Some of us are not tied up from 8-5 at work.

Me: Argh whatever, evil man.

Liwa: Bye, Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Shap.

I wink at Nomvuyo and she winks back.

Zimkitha: Bye, sisi.

Me: Bye.

Zimkitha: Liwa, I'll follow you ngoba I don't remember the route.

Liwa: Sure...

They say goodbye once again, and then drive off.

Once it's quiet, I let out a loud sigh and my mom laughs.

Mom: Hawu shame mntanami.

Me: I'm exhausted now.

Derek wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: We should also get going.

Siyasebenza k'sasa

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Nina na.

Mom: Cute.

Me: I think I'll come by during the week... I just want to make sure that Lwazi is settling in kahle at school.

Mom: She would love that.

Me: And you have to make sure that she does her homework.

Dad: You can't tell us how to raise a child phela... We have been doing this for 25 years.

Me: Well, excuse me then, lovely people.

They laugh.

Me: Nisale kahle ke.

Mom: Bye bye, baby.

Me: I think I'm coming down with the flu now...

Dad: It's all the fresh air you've been getting this evening.

Me: Wow! Low blow!

He chuckles and I hug them.

Me: See you soon.

Mom: Shap baby.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Mom: Bye bye, Nkanyi.

They share a hug.

Yep, she loves the guy, probably more than me.

Derek and I get in the car and he drives off.

Haibo, did Derek really spread his flu to me? Why am I suddenly feeling so fluey?

Me: This is your entire fault.

Derek: I'm sorry.

I groan.

We then drive back home where I pass out as soon as I'm medicated with Derek's medication...

I guess it's my turn to be the baby...

The following morning, waking up was such a mission. It seems like I developed swine flu of some sort.

Derek: You should stay at home.

Me: I can't miss school.

Derek: I'm not asking you, Ziyanda.

I groan.

Derek: I have an important meeting now at 9am. I'll come back as soon as I'm done.

I groan again.

I'm not even being dramatic right now.

I'm in pain and it's all because of this man!

Derek: Baby, wake up so you can eat.

Me: I'm not hungry.

Derek: You have to eat, so you can take these meds.

He pulls me up and looks at me concernedly.

Me: I'll have cereal.

Derek: I made breakfast.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't have an appetite.

He sighs and nods.

Derek: Okay.

He walks out and I take out my phone and dial Zama's number. It rings for a while, but she eventually answers.

Zama: Girl? I'm in an Uber, what's up?

Me: I'm not coming in today.

Zama: Yini? Are you okay?

Me: I'm sick.

Zama: What's wrong?

I groan.

Me: I suddenly have full-blown flu.

Zama: Oh, man... Sorry, love. Why don't you go to the doctor?

Me: Ngizoya. I can't afford to miss work when we've just started the year.

Zama: True... Do you need me to give your kids work?

Me: Yes, please. Just get the green file on my shelf and you'll find work for them.

Zama: Okay, love. Get well.

Me: Thank you.

Zama: So, is Mr. Principal also missing school?

Me: Bye!

She laughs as I hang up.

Derek walks back with a bowl of cereal.

Me: Thanks.

He sits on the edge and watches me eat.

Me: You can go...

He sighs.

Derek: I'll be back soon, okay?

Me: Okay.

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: I'm sorry for making you sick.

Me: You make me sick, Ngidi!

He laughs and kisses me again as he stands.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I just want him to hold me. As he walks out, I want to stop him, but I stop myself.

I am suddenly awakened by my phone ringing.

It's Derek.

I answer sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm a bit better. My short breath is better.

Derek: Okay... I thought I'd be done by now, but I have another meeting.

Me: It's okay.

Derek: I asked Dean to bring you some meds...

Me: Okay.

Derek: But, I'll be there in 2 hours tops, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and go back to sleep.

I'm suddenly awakened by another phone call and I hiss. Why can't I sleep in peace?!

I grunt as I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Open the door.

Me: Huh?

Dean: Open the door.

I hang up and get out of bed angrily. I make my way to the door and open it.

Me: Ufunani?

Dean: Futsek wena.

He pushes me aside and walks in.

Dean: You look horrible.

Me: Don't you have a home and job?

Leave me the fuck alone!

He puts a plastic on the kitchen counter and pours himself a glass of water.

Dean: Take these meds...

I take the plastic and put out everything that's there.

Me: I hate pills.

Dean: You'll be strong...

As I take a bottle of medicine. Something catches my eye, and I swear to God my whole body tenses up.

Me: Dean??

He looks at me coolly.

Dean: Yes?

Me: What the hell??

He doesn't say anything.

Me: What the hell is this??

Dean: Pregnancy test.

I look at him in shock.

INSERT 104 (Couldn't edit)

Me: Ungazongiphaphela wena. Who died and made you a medical doctor?

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: You get a lousy PhD and a random Dr. Title, and you think you can come here and give me unsolicited advice?

His eyes pop out and his jaw drops.

Dean: Take that back, Dlamini!

Me: No!

Dean: How dare you devalue my doctorate?

Me: Go and shove your lousy doctorate up your nosy ass!

Before I know it, I am wet. This idiot threw his water at me.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Apologise.

Me: No!

He throws some more water and I take a glass and throw it at him, but he manages to duck. It

hits the fridge and breaks.

Me: Get out!

Dean: Zi-

Me: I'll call the police!

Dean: Ziyanda!

Before I know it, Dean is leading me to the lounge, and all I see is red.

Why is he giving me a pregnancy test?

Does he think I'm pregnant? Why? How?

I'm on panic mode at this point, and there's no turning back.

I keep hearing him say my name, but it's not helping. I feel like I'm drowning forcefully.

I can't be pregnant. Did the doctor confirm this? Yes, she did... I'm not pregnant. But why is Dean doing this? Do I look pregnant? Do I behave like a pregnant person?

My heart is pounding so fast, and my vision is blurry. I'm now at the centre of my anxiety attack.

I try to focus on something, something to narrow my attention span...

The huge clock on the wall... Yes... That's what I'll focus on...

Time... One second at a time... I count the seconds... Okay, my vision is becoming less blurry by

the second... 60 seconds... 1 minute... It's 11:27... 3 minutes till 11:30...

I take a deep breath...

Okay, my vision is clear now...

My heart though... It's still pounding hard... I need to take breaths in 5 second intervals... Let me time myself... I take a deep breath and watch closely as the clock ticks... 5 seconds done...

Next... 1 minute has passed...

I'm okay...

I blink a couple of times.

I'm fine.

I take one last deep breath, and exhale loudly.

I blink again.

Dean.

Yes, Dean... He's here...

I clear my throat.

He looks like he has just seen a ghost.

Me: Dean.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Dean.

He snaps out of it.

Me: Please get me some water.

He quickly stands and comes back within seconds with a glass of water. I drink half of it.

Okay, now I'm back.

I'm okay.

Me: Dean.

Dean: What the fuck just happened?

I sigh.

Me: Hasn't Derek told you about my attacks?

He shakes his head lightly.

Dean: I didn't know the extent.

He looks at me more softly.

Me: I'm okay.

Dean: I thought you were dying.

I chuckle.

Me: I get like that.

Dean: But, what triggers it?

Me: It can be anything from a pen not working, to being told that I might be pregnant.

He frowns.

Dean: Does the thought of pregnancy really drive you that crazy?

Me: Yes!

Dean: But, why?

Me: Dean, I'm not ready!

Dean: But, can one ever be ready for parenthood?

Me: Are you hearing yourself?

Parenthood?

He keeps quiet.

Me: Parenthood... Ziyanda... Parenthood...

Fucken Ziyanda Dlamini!

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Dean: You are a little coo coo, but I don't think you're irreparable.

Me: Argh!

I stand and make my way to the balcony.

Yazi, iphelile kwaleyo-flu.

I stand there and take in the fresh air.

Dean: I apologise for triggering all of this.

Me: I don't like what you did...

Dean: Can you hear me out for a sec? I'm about to go off-script.

I roll my eyes and he laughs quietly. He then rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Dean: I'm not going to lie, the first time I met you, I wanted nothing to do with you.

I thought you

were a random girl that came to fuck up my friend's life... I wasn't even willing to get to know

you.

Me: Wow.

Dean: But, would you like to know when I realised that you might not be that bad?

I don't respond.

Dean: When Liwa and I came here and found you with your swollen eyes... I think you had your first deep moment with Derek the night before...

I try to recall that night. I think that's when Derek asked me what I want...

Dean: When Liwa told you about his daughter, you engaged passionately with him, and you two discussed the pros and cons of teachers letting students skip grades... Your passion for children amazed me. I don't know, but it was at that moment that I realised that you might just be the one...

I don't know if he's trying to butter me up right now, but I'm feeling very buttered up.

Dean: We've grown quite close, and I'm being very honest when I tell you that I trust you. I've known a lot of people for many years, but I can confidently say that I don't trust or even value them as much as I do you... More than anything, my relationship with you is teaching me that loyalty, love and trust are not solidified by the number of years people have been in each other's lives, but they're solidified by the emotional connection that transpires between people, and emotional connections can form within a matter of seconds or minutes. There's no solid timeline that illustrates when loyalty, love and trust is developed. Whoa.

Dean: You have no idea how much I value you... Seeing how happy you make Derek, makes me value you more every single time I interact with you, or I see the way you look at each other, or even when he calls me and tells me how much you drive him crazy... I smile.

Dean: I gained respect for you, and that's something I couldn't control, even if I wanted to...

He chuckles and sighs.

Dean: What I'm trying to say is this; I understand that the development of your relationship with Derek can overwhelm you from time to time, because we're so used to building such love-filled

relationships for years and years... It's unconventional to fall in love in days or months...

However, the stress is not worth it...

I sigh.

I don't know why Dean is trying to get me all emotional.

Dean: You can't live your life stressing about such things. If it feels right, then allow it to feel

right. The Universe works in mysterious ways.

He scratches his chin thoughtfully and then stares at me. We are silent for a while.

Dean: Calm down, okay?

I nod lightly.

Dean: I'm hungry... Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

Dean: Would you like me to prepare something for you?

I nod and he opens up his arms.

Dean: You're like the little sister I never had. This shit is a fun and new experience for me.

Me: You must stop teasing me.

Dean: Oh no, that will never happen.

That's how I express my love. If I don't tease you, then you should be worried.

Me: Wow.

We share a hug and walk back in.

Dean: I'll get rid of the pregnancy test. I was honestly just pulling your leg, and I didn't think you'd have a panic attack.

Me: I'm not pregnant. The doctor even confirmed it.

Dean: You really are a crazy bitch. You should have seen how psycho you looked.

Me: Dean!

He laughs.

Dean: I kid, I kid...

Me: Let me take a shower while you clean up this mess and cook for me like my bitch.

Dean: Fuck off, lunatic.

Me: Argh!

I walk to the bedroom and leave him there...

INSERT 105

Dean gave me medication that made me pass out almost immediately after eating. I must have dozed off for a while, because when I wake up, I see Nkanyezi. He seems to be

rearranging the closet.

I clear my throat and he instantly drops some clothes and walks to the bed.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hey.

I missed him. I'm so used to spending my days with him, and today felt really strange without him.

He bends and plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: I missed you.

He smiles and sits on the edge.

Derek: You have no idea how weird today day was.

I smile.

Me: Did you check on my kids?

He nods.

Derek: Zama gave them work and I got someone to supervise them throughout the day.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Lwazi was worried sick.

I laugh.

Derek: She even came to my office to question me.

Me: Are you serious?

He nods.

Derek: She'll call you when she's done with her homework.

Me: Okay.

I sit up and give him a hug.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: A bit better.

Derek: But you don't look better.

Me: Really??

He chuckles and nods.

Derek: I'm not convinced. I think you're lying because you want to go to work tomorrow.

Me: I am going.

Derek: No, you're not.

Me: Derek!

He shakes his head.

Derek: As a teacher, you know how important it is to always be 100% healthy. I'm taking you to

the doctor tomorrow. There's only so much these pharmacy pills can do for us. We're both going to get vaccinated.

Me: Wow!

He leans closer to me and plants another kiss.

Me: I want to shower. I feel icky.

Derek: Let me finish packing up this closet.

Me: Hmkay...

He stands and I get back in the blanket and watch as he finishes his task.

Me: Dean professed his love for me.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: He went all poetic on me.

Derek: Really? Did you record him? That's rare.

I laugh and shake my head.

Derek: You seem to bring out the softer side of him.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: You did that with Nomvuyo as well...

He turns and looks at me with a smile.

Derek: Clearly you bring out the best in people.

Me: Aww!

He chuckles and continues.

Me: You also bring out the best in me.

Derek: I bring out the best in everyone. I'm the shit.

Me: Hey, now!

We laugh. Derek's calm vibe always has a good effect on me. I guess with my craziness, I need someone like Derek, who'll bring me back down to earth. Not every moment in one's life has to be hyper, you know?

We continue chatting until he finishes packing the closet. Once he's satisfied, he asks me to come. I get out of bed and walk to the closet. It's now divided, with his things on one side, and my things on the other side.

Derek: Our things shouldn't get mixed up.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: I've also divided these drawers...

Me: Hmkay.

I really don't think it's that deep, but if it makes him feel better, then good for him.

Derek: Now, let's take that well-deserved shower.

Me: Finally!

He chuckles and we walk to the bathroom.

Me: No shower sex, please!

Derek: What? I love that shit.

Me: Derek I'm not skinny. Those positions make me uncomfortable. You do not have the privilege to flip me around like a pancake. I'm a very fat pancake.

He laughs.

Me: That shit is uncomfortable and the cramps are torturous.

Derek: You get cramps?

Me: Yes!

He continues laughing.

Derek: Why didn't you say this before?

Me: Because you seem to enjoy it. I've been sucking it up all in the name of love.

Derek: Shame, baby. So you've been suffering while I'm busy thinking you're having fun.

Me: Those moans are mostly because of the pain I'm in when you're busy twisting me like a damn pretzel.

He continues laughing.

Me: Look at you laughing at my pain.

Derek: I'm sorry, love.

Me: We can give each other head, but it should end there. I caiin't!

We get in the shower and he starts cleaning me up.

Derek: I can't be this close to you and not have the desire to get in you.

Me: Hai Derek you'll get in me once we're done showering. It's only 15-20 minutes yoh.

He laughs and shakes his head lightly.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

We eventually finish showering and I am so thankful that no sex was had.

Me: I feel like going out...

He frowns.

Me: Let's go watch a movie.

Derek: Uhm...

Me: Yes, let's have a movie date.

Derek: You're sick.

Me: I'm not disabled!

Derek: No, we'll catch a movie once you've healed. Your flu will worsen if we go outside.

Me: Yoh, Derek, I left my dad in Soweto!

Derek: And I promised your dad that I'd take care of you.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: No, put on your pjs. I'm going to make us some soup.

Me: Soup? I don't even like soup!

Derek: Well, too bad...

He wears his gown and walks out.

Me: I don't like you right now!

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Argh.

He disappears and I throw myself on the bed...

As much as I don't want to admit it, I'm blushing deep down. This man is so invested in my well-being. I am blessed bazalwane.

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek.

As soon as I try to get out of bed, I am overwhelmed by aches.

I don't know what's going on. My whole body feels like it went through a dungeon filled with fire.

I squeal and Derek looks at me weirdly.

Me: Derek, I don't know what the fuck is going on!

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: My body is achy.

Derek: Is it too painful?

Me: I can't describe the pain. It's subtle, but intense.

He sighs.

Derek: Wake up and get dressed.

Me: Why?

Derek: We're going to the doctor.

I groan in frustration.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Okay!

I get out of bed and go to the bathroom to freshen up. He doesn't even want me to take a shower.

It's now around 10am and we're heading to the doctor.

I don't know why I suddenly feel uneasy.

I dismiss this...

We get there and we are led to some doctor. This one is different from the one we had the last time we were here.

Derek: I've put you under my medical aid.

Me: Huh?

He smiles.

Derek: You're my dependent.

Me: Wow. How insulting.

He chuckles.

Me: I'm an independent woman. I don't depend on nobody.

He chuckles.

I don't even have the energy to fight him.

She greets us and we greet back.

Doctor: So, what brings you here today?

Derek: Ziyanda?

They both look at me and I sigh heavily.

Me: I don't know what's going on. I think I have flu.

Doctor: You think?

Me: I have the symptoms, but now my body is also confusing me. I have aches all over. It's unexplainable.

She nods slowly and starts questioning me more.

Doctor: Alright then, I'll have to take samples of your blood and urine.

Me: Blood and urine? It can't be that deep. She chuckles.

Doctor: You'll never know... I'd also like a sample of your mucus, and we'll also conduct chest x-ray.

Me: What??

Derek is also as shocked as I am.

Derek: Isn't that too much?

The doctor shakes her head.

Doctor: All the symptoms you've described for me indicate a possibility of pneumonia.

Derek stands and gets me a glass of water. He knows me too well.

I take it and drink it all.

Doctor: Don't stress. Pneumonia is curable.

Me: But it's pneumonia!

She sighs.

Derek holds my hand and I groan. There's nothing I hate more than being sick. I hate being in pain.

Doctor: The chest X-ray will allow me to check for changes in the lungs and to look for other

causes of your symptoms. However, the X-ray does not always show whether you have

pneumonia, especially if it's done when you first get sick. The X-ray results will suggest the type

of organism causing pneumonia...

I sigh.

Doctor: The reason I'm testing your mucus is because you mentioned that you have shortness of breath.

Derek: And the urine test?

Doctor: This test can identify some bacteria that cause pneumonia. This can help guide treatment if you have been officially diagnosed with it.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Do you need some fresh air?

I shake my head.

Me: Just do what you have to... I'd like to leave.

Doctor: Alright then... Give me a few minutes...

I spent the rest of the day in bed.

I had called my mom and told her about this pneumonia thing and she insisted on coming over and taking care of me...

At around 4pm, we got a call from the doctor. She said she would push for the tests to be conducted immediately after we left...

My mom tagged along as we made our way there.

We got in and sat down.

Mom: Is my daughter okay?

Doctor: The results came back...

She looks at me.

Doctor: You definitely have pneumonia.

I swear my heart sinks.

How??

Doctor: However, it doesn't seem severe.

I'm glad you came here so soon.

I look at Derek.

I guess I have him to thank.

Doctor: It's nothing antibiotics and over-the-counter pain relievers can't fix.

Me: Okay.

She sighs.

Doctor: And it is crucial for you to take the medication religiously...

Me: Okay.

Doctor: Pregnancy puts you at risk for developing pneumonia. It's most commonly bacterial in origin.

She smiles.

I don't know what's happening.

What's happening?

What's going on?

What is she talking about?

Mom: Pregnancy?!

The doctor looks at me coolly.

Doctor: Yes, you're pregnant. Were you not aware?

Mom: Pregnant?!

They lost me at that point.

INSERT 106 (Unedited)

Mom: Ziyanda...

No, this can't be. I can't be pregnant.

Mom: Ziyanda... Baby, you have to wake up.

Wake up?

I feel my mom's hands on me and she brushes my cheeks. Her hands are warm.

Mom: Yanda... Ngicela uvuke... It's just you and me in this room...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Mom: Baby...

I feel the tears welling up.

Mom: Ziyanda, I need you to focus on your breathing. Take a deep breath now...

I listen to her and do as I'm told.

Mom: I want your breaths to be deeper. She takes a very deep breath and I also take one. I feel like I'm suffocating.

I groan. I'm in pain. Why am I on the floor? Did I pass out?

Mom: Let's try to stand. You've been on the floor for too long now.

She helps me stand and once I'm up, she makes me sit on a chair.

Mom: Drink some water...

I shake my head. I feel like I just got hit by the bus. I need to bury myself in my bed.

We stare at each other for a long time, and I end up bursting out in tears.

Mom: Oh, baby...

She pulls me and wraps her arms around me.

Mom: Shh...

She comforts me for the longest time, till I'm calm.

She then wipes my tears and makes me look at her.

Mom: Are you calm?

I nod lightly.

Mom: Let's go home. You need to rest.
Just then, the door opens and I see Derek.
He looks worried.

Mom: Nkanyezi, do you mind driving us to Soweto? I'd rather she sleep at home tonight.

Derek: Oh...Uhm, sure...
He's avoiding my eyes.

The doctor walks in as well.

Doctor: Can I have a word with you, Ziyanda?

Mom: I don't think this is the right time to have constructive conversations. Ziyanda will come back once she has stabilized.

The doctor sighs and nods.

Doctor: I apologize for the inconvenience caused.

Mom: Thanks... We'll see you soon.

The doctor nods and walks out. My mom then looks at me.

Mom: Baby, let's go...

I stand and Derek gets my bag.

Derek: I've got her medication.

Mom: Alright.

We all walk out and make our way to Derek's car. I get in at the back and fall asleep instantly.

After a while, I'm awakened by my mom's voice.

Mom: We're here, sisi.

I sit up and blink a couple of times. My chest is so closed off that I am struggling to breath.

Me: My chest is painful.

Mom: The doctor gave us something for that. Let's get in...

She looks at Derek and sighs.

Mom: See you soon.

Derek: Okay.

She gets out of the car.

It's silent for a long time. I can't seem to move.

Suddenly, he gets out of the car and within seconds, he's sitting next to me at the back.

Derek: Please don't hate me.

I look at him.

Me: Hate you?

Derek: I know you're not happy about this.

Me: I'm not.

He sighs and keeps quiet.

Me: I hate myself for being irresponsible.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm on contraceptives. How am I pregnant?

Derek: It seems like you were actually pregnant that time we did the test.

Me: But, how?

He shrugs.

Derek: I don't know...

I sigh and try not to cry all over again. The thought of the future is now enough to lead me to my grave.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: I should get in... I'm not feeling well.

Derek: How long are you going to stay here?

I shrug.

He scratches his head lightly and sighs.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Bye.

We both get out and he watches as I walk in...

It's been two days since I was told that I'm pregnant.

Yes, you are pregnant, Ziyanda.

I kept having nightmares, and my mom ended up sleeping with me. She definitely understands why I'm behaving like this, so I don't even have to explain myself. This is why I'm glad she was there when the news broke out and that she suggested that I come back home with her.

My dad hasn't said one word to me. My mom mentioned that she told him. I don't know where his head is at, but I think he's just giving me space to process it.

It's now Thursday...

I wanted to go to work, but my mom insisted that I stay.

She's right. Seeing my kids would be very triggering.

I'm so pissed at myself. How could I be so irresponsible? I don't want a baby. I don't want it.

That morning, Lwazi comes to my room.

Lwazi: Mommy.

I sigh.

Me: Yes, Lwazi?

She sits on the edge of my bed and looks at me as I'm lying there.

Lwazi: I don't like seeing you like this.

Me: I'm just sick, baby.

She gets closer to my face and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Lwazi: Did Uncle D make you sad?

Me: Not at all. I'm just sick.

Lwazi: Okay.

Me: Are you ready for school?

She nods excitedly.

Me: Do you enjoy it there?

Lwazi: I love it!

Me: That's great.

She goes on to tell me about her week,
and I end up smiling and laughing.

Oh, my Lwazi...Always ready to put a
smile on my face.

Just then, my mom walks in.

Mom: Lwazi, your transport is here. Woza.

Lwazi: Okay, ma!

She gives me another kiss.

Lwazi: Bye, mommy!

Me: Bye, baby.

She runs out of the room and my mom
chuckles.

Mom: She's been going through a tough
time this week. Your bleakness rubbed off
on her.

Me: Hmm.

Mom: Let me walk her out... Go back to
sleep.

Me: Okay.

She closes the door and I go back to
sleep...

That Friday, I decided to get out of bed. Well, it's not like I had a choice... That doctor insisted on seeing me for a thorough check up.

I guess from now on I'm going to be forced to do certain things all because I'm carrying a human...

Once I'm done getting ready, I walk to the lounge, and I see Derek.

My heart drops.

I haven't seen or spoken to him since Tuesday.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Hello, how are you?

Derek: Okay, and you?

Me: Okay.

Derek: How's the pneumonia?

Me: I think it's almost healed.

He nods lightly and stands.

My mom emerges and smiles.

Mom: We can go...

We all walk out and make our way to Derek's car. My mom gets in at the back and I honestly

want to cuss. Anyway, I get in at the front and Derek drives off.

They both chat throughout the drive while I fall asleep. Sleeping has been my coping

mechanism this entire week...

Eventually, we get there and we're led to the doctor's office.

She smiles brightly as soon as she sees us.

Dr: How are you feeling, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm much better.

She goes on to ask me more questions about the treatment...

Once she's done, she looks at me intently.

Dr: Now, I'd like us to discuss your pregnancy...

I nod lightly.

Dr: I would like to do a thorough check up because you've gone so many weeks not aware of

the pregnancy... I want to make sure that the baby is okay so that we start following necessary

procedures to ensure that all is well.

I nod.

Dr: Please give me a few minutes...

Mom: Okay, dear.

Dr. Modisa walks out.

Derek: Excuse me...

He stands and walks out as well.

My mom looks at me intently.

Mom: This is overwhelming for all of us, baby...

I don't say anything.

Mom: There's nothing we can do at this point. Don't allow the anxiety to rule you.

Me: Easier said than done.

She sighs.

I need bubblegum to distract me. I get my bag and as I look for my gum, I come across a piece of paper. I take it out and open it.

It read:

Dear Mommy,

I know you are sick but I think you are sad. I hate seeing you sad because it makes me sad too.

I wrote this letter to tell you that I love you very much. You are the best mommy in the whole world. You loved me when no one else did. You always take care of me and you are very beautiful. Thank you for everything you have done for me. I love you.

From your daughter, Lwazi.

I don't know when or how this letter was slipped in my bag.

I'm now sobbing. I don't know why, but I'm sobbing.

Mom: Ziyanda?

I give her the letter and she reads it. She sighs heavily and also wipes her tears.

Mom: I don't know what is going on... I don't know what God is trying to do, but I'm not about to question Him...

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: I'm going to be a grandmother. She sighs loudly and takes my hand.

Mom: Believe it or not, Lwazi has prepared you for this role... You'll make an amazing mother.

Me: I'm not ready.

Mom: We all have to suck it up now. I sigh.

Mom: Now, please find Nkanyezi... I stand and walk out...

INSERT 107

I find Derek standing at the parking lot, leaning against his car.

Me: Derek.

He looks at me.

Me: The doctor is ready...

He nods lightly and follows me as we walk back inside. The doctor leads us into the scanning

room and I sit on the reclining seat while my mom and Derek sit on the chairs close to me.

Doctor: According to the test results, you are 8 weeks pregnant.

I keep quiet.

Mom: One would swear that you two have been in each other's lives forever...

Derek looks at me and I look at the doctor.

Doctor: I'd like us to have a look at the progress of the fetus.

She looks at me intently. Why is staring at me?

Mom: Zizi, vula phela...

Oh...

I recline my seat and expose my belly. It seems the same to me. I'm chubby, so I can't see

anything different.

Anyway, she begins applying the gel thing and I wince at how cold it is.

We wait for a few minutes as the monitor loads. We eventually see the classic black and white

background. She moves the probe carefully.

She smiles.

Doctor: Well, lookie here...

We all stare at the monitor.

There it is...

Doctor: You are on the 8th week of your pregnancy... This week is vital for the brain

development of the fetus. The nerve cells begin to branch out and connect with each other. The spinal cord also continues to develop.

Mom: I can see him growing...

Him?

Doctor: Are you hoping for a boy, ma?

Mom: Definitely. I've been surrounded by too many girls.

They both laugh.

I glance at Derek and he is solely concentrating on the screen.

Doctor: The facial features are also beginning to grow... As you can see here, there's a hint of the upper lip, the tip of the nose, and the eyelids.

She moves the probe and everyone stares at the monitor.

Mom: What about the limbs? I can see that he is forming.

The doctor chuckles.

Doctor: "His" arms and legs are getting longer, with the hands folding at the wrists and elbows.

I zone them out. That's the only way I'm able to not pass out from the anxiety.

I go to my mental quiet and safe space and get lost there.

It must have been a while, because I'm brought back to reality by Derek clearing his throat.

I blink a couple of times and look at him.

Derek: How big is the baby?

Doctor: Around 1.6cm, about the size of a medium raspberry.

Derek: And how is Ziyanda's body adjusting?

She stares at me.

Doctor: At this point, you may have started noticing certain changes in your body. Your body has already started to prepare for breastfeeding, which causes your breasts to appear larger than normal. Your belly may be expanding a little; however, you will not start showing just yet.

Derek nods lightly.

Mom: Her breasts have definitely grown bigger. That's one thing I've observed this past week.

Wow.

Derek: And what are the pregnancy symptoms we should expect at this stage?

The doctor looks at me and smiles.

Doctor: Morning sickness with nausea, headache, vomiting and dizziness are the most

common. Having the symptoms of morning sickness generally indicate a healthy pregnancy.

However, it is also normal not to experience these symptoms.

Derek nods.

Mom: I never got morning sickness.

Doctor: Lucky you!

They laugh happily. Derek seems serious. I can't read him.

Derek: Any other symptoms to look out for?

Doctor: There's the following: fatigue or tiredness, bloating, constipation, frequent urination,

heartburn, breast tenderness, shortness of breath, increased appetite, nasal congestion,

abdominal pains, insomnia, itchy legs, hands and belly, backache.

She sighs.

Doctor: There are emotional changes as well...

She looks at me softly and then focuses on Derek again.

Doctor: Anxiety... Hormonal changes...

She then smiles.

Doctor: Would you like a copy of the ultrasound?

Mom: Of course! I'll create an album for us...

Derek looks at her and smiles lightly.

Doctor: Alright then...

She wipes the gel and I fix my top.

Doctor: In the coming weeks, I'm going to conduct a few tests. These will help determine

whether your child has any worrying conditions. Some are relatively simple blood tests, while

others involve more invasive procedures.

Derek: Are these tests diagnostic?

Doctor: Many of these prenatal tests are for screening, rather than diagnostic purposes.

Screening tests give us a sense of your risk for certain conditions. But only a diagnostic test can tell you accurately whether your baby has a problem.

Derek nods.

Doctor: I'd like to draw some blood... I need to know your blood type.

Additionally, I need to assess your hormone levels and red and white blood cell levels; to be sure you're normal. Your

blood will be screened for STDs, HIV, and certain immunities.

I zone out again.

I can't listen to this woman...

I feel my mom's warm hand on mine.

I snap out of it.

Doctor: I'd like to do a pap smear to check for infections and abnormalities. I'll also need your pee sample. Just so you know, I'll need your pee every time we meet, so your glucose and protein levels can be monitored. I nod absentmindedly.

Doctor: Alright then, let's get to it. She smiles warmly as Derek and my mom walk out...

It's now 12pm, and I feel very lightheaded as we walk out and make our way to the car.

Mom: I have to rush off to work... They need me for something.

Derek: I'll give you a lift.

Mom: No, no, baby. I'll take a taxi.

With that said, she gives me a hug and Derek as well.

Mom: Bye bye.

She winks at Derek.

Derek: Bye.

She walks off.

Well, that was random.

Derek: Are you hungry?

Me: Yes.

We get in the car and he drives off.

Now that I've been told about these symptoms, it seems like I'm more aware of them. I feel

sick. Maybe it's all in the mind...

We get to Mike's Kitchen and get a table.

I look through the menu and feel

conflicted. I want to have a burger, yet I

also want 10 other

things. I'm just a walking, confused, sick zombie.

I settle for a burger and chips.

We sit in silence for a long time, both of us on our phones. I'm too drained to engage in conversation.

Derek excuses himself to go to the bathroom.

My phone rings and it's Nomvuyo. I ignore the call and switch off my phone. He comes back and sits.

Me: Did you tell your friends?

Derek: No.

I nod lightly and we're silent once again. Eventually, our food is brought and I focus on my burger.

After a few bites, I feel disgusted.

I'm confused. Before going to the doctor, I was perfectly fine. What's going on?

Me: I'm not feeling well.

He looks at me sharply.

Derek: What's wrong?

I groan and stand.

Me: Need the bathroom.

I walk away and go to the bathroom. I stand by the window and get some fresh air. Seconds

later, the door opens and Derek steps in.

Derek: Ziyanda, what's wrong?

Me: I don't know. I've never felt like this.

He sighs and looks at me concernedly.

Derek: Do you want to go back to the doctor?

I shake my head.

Me: Just feeling nauseous.

We stand in silence, him staring at me, while I'm just looking out the window.

After a few minutes, I feel better. We walk back to our table and I ask for more water.

He pushes his plate aside and I look at him questioningly.

Derek: Lost my appetite.

I look at both of our plates.

My burger looks disgusting... His chicken looks appealing.

Me: Can I have some?

Before he nods, I'm already pulling his plate and delving in. This seems edible...

Yes, it's most

definitely better than the burger, which Derek has taken and seems to be enjoying.

We look at each other, and end up smiling lightly.

Derek: Better?

I nod.

We eat in silence...

Once we're done, he pays the bill and we make our way out.

We get in the car.

Derek: Am I taking you to Soweto?

I shake my head and lower my seat.

He smiles and starts driving, while I take a nap.

INSERT 108

The following day, I wake up at 10am and go straight to the bathroom to take a shower.

Once I'm done, I find Derek sitting on the bed with his laptop.

He looks at me strangely and questioningly.

Me: I'm seeing Melinda.

Derek: Oh.

I finish getting dressed and walk to the kitchen to get some water.

Derek: Would you like me to drive you there?

Me: My Uber is 3 minutes away.

He doesn't say anything. Instead, he walks away and disappears.

I get my bag and make my way out...

Melinda: You're pregnant?

She looks at me in disbelief and I sigh heavily.

Melinda: Oh, Ziyanda...

I burst out in tears and she gives me my box of tissues. She knows that when I get like this, she

needs to be quiet and let me get the tears out of my system.

After a while, I'm done crying. I wipe my tears and sigh loudly.

Me: I can feel myself sinking... I feel it, this is going to be the worst 7 months of my life, and

once this baby is born, things will never be the same again.

She nods lightly.

Me: I'm not ready! I don't want to have this baby, Melinda!

Melinda: Why are you so adamant?

Me: I'm not ready. I won't make a good mom. I already struggle with dealing with myself, how am I going to take care of someone else for the rest of my life?

She nods.

Me: I won't make a good mother.

Melinda: Why do you say that?

Me: I suffer from depression. Every day, I have to try to convince myself to even get out of bed.

People see me smiling and laughing, but they don't understand what I go through in my mind on

a daily. There are days when I want to curl up and die. 70% of my life consists of such days,

Melinda.

She sighs.

Me: How am I supposed to take care of a baby when I don't fully believe that life is worth living?

I wipe my tears.

Me: I'm not 100% stable. I don't have control of myself. What kind of a life is that?

Melinda: You're being too hard on yourself. You've made a lot of progress, Zi.

Me: But the progress is not enough, Melinda. At this moment, I genuinely don't want to be alive.

She looks at me softly.

Me: And as much as the people in my life say they understand, in all honesty, they don't. They don't know how it's like to constantly feel like shit... To constantly convince myself that life is

worth living. They don't get it. It's easy for them to label me as dramatic or cold-heated, but they don't understand that that's my coping mechanism. They understand, but only to a certain extent.

She nods.

Me: This pregnancy has thrown me off. It has taken me 100 steps back. I'm miserable.

Melinda: How is Derek?

Me: He's happy. He wants this baby.

Melinda: Has he expressed his happiness?

Me: He's hiding it.

Melinda: Because he doesn't want to seem insensitive?

I nod.

Me: I'm just angry that I put myself in this position. I should have been more responsible.

She nods.

Me: Derek's mother hates me. So, this child won't be welcomed by her.

Melinda: And does that affect you?

Me: I don't know why she hates me. I haven't done anything to her. She makes me feel like I'm

some disgusting piece of shit.

Melinda: And Derek knows about this?

I nod.

Me: He's been supportive about that situation.

Melinda: And what about your mental illness?

Me: You know how it goes, Melinda...

People say they understand, but they don't... And it seems

like you're crazy and unfair when you're battling with this shit.

Melinda: It takes time for loved ones to fully get it, but they do after a while.

Me: Derek is doing well so far...

She nods.

Me: Now, this pregnancy is also going to disrupt my moods.

She smiles.

Melinda: It's just going to add on to what is already a chaotic pool of moods...

Me: Exactly...

We sit in silence for a while...

Melinda: You're going through a lot, Ziyanda...

I keep quiet.

Melinda: Our main focus at this point in time should be your mental health.

Thereafter, we'll

deal with Derek... You will not be able to work on your relationship with him if you're not stable. I

want us to go back to the drawing board, to ensure that you live a happy life.

Me: "Happy"

She chuckles.

Melinda: Yes, "Happy."

I sigh.

Melinda: So, now we go back to basics...

We celebrate getting out of bed; we celebrate taking a shower... Every small action is a milestone...

I nod.

Melinda: We need to go back to basics...

Me: Okay.

Melinda: How's mommy?

Me: She's beyond excited.

She smiles.

Me: Thank God she was there when I found out.

I begin telling her how I found out...

Melinda: That's crazy.

Me: Yep.

Melinda: We'll see each other weekly now.

Me: Definitely.

She nods and we continue chatting...

When I get to the apartment, I'm shocked to find the furniture in the lounge rearranged.

Derek is busy doing something electronic-related...

Me: I'm back.

He looks at me and nods lightly.

I then walk to the bedroom and throw myself on the bed...

Just then, my phone rings and it's Dean.
Shit.

The proposal.

I answer it hurriedly.

Me: Hello.

Dean: Wow, how is Nolwazi not my fiance right now?

I try to say something, but I feel defeated.

Dean: I've extended your deadline to next week. Don't fuck with me, Dlamini.

I sigh as he hangs up.

I then go to the bathroom and take a very long shower. I'd appreciate a bath though...

Once I'm done, I get dressed in my pjs, despite it being 2pm.

When I walk to the lounge, Derek seems to be done with whatever he was doing.

He's sitting on

the couch, watching tennis. I get myself some water and then sit. It seems like he was installing a different router...

Me: Dean called.

He looks at me.

Me: Did you tell him to back off?

Derek: I just asked him to postpone.

I nod and we focus on the TV.

We've been sitting here for close to an hour. I'm restless... I stand and go to the kitchen to get

more water. Derek walks to me.

I look at him.

Derek: Come here for a sec.

I take a few steps and get to him, and he wraps his arms around me.

We stand there for a while.

Derek: I don't want to lose you.

I don't say anything.

Derek: Ziyanda, I don't want to lose you.

I try to say something, but words fail me.

He pulls me closer and my body tenses up against his.

Derek: Please let me in...

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: Don't shut me out, please...

He trails kisses down to my lips.

Derek: I love you and I need you. Don't push me away. I want to be here for you.

I look at him.

We are silent for a while. He's looking at me pleadingly.

Derek: I'd like to use one of the tools... The Empathy Tool...

He lowers his head and I feel his lips on my ear. At this point, I'm practically holding on to him for balance.

Derek: If you were in my shoes, what would you do?

He plants a kiss on ear and then looks at me. I get lost in his eyes for a while.

Derek: Baby.

I sigh.

Me: I'd use my Patience Tool.

He smiles and chuckles.

Derek: Touché...

He tightens his hold on me and I feel his lips by my ear again.

Derek: I love you.

He plants a kiss.

I didn't even realise that I was crying at this point.

Me: I love you too, Derek.

He tightens his hold on me even more and buries his head in my neck.

We stand there for the longest time.

Eventually, he looks at me and smiles.

Derek: Movie date?

Me: Gosh, finally.

He laughs quietly and plants a kiss on my lips.

INSERT 109

We're now at a restaurant, having dinner, after watching the movie.

Derek: You've just made me watch a corny movie.

Me: Stop complaining. It was a good movie.

Derek: About a surrogate who ends up being obsessed with the man she's carrying the child for?

Me: Whatever.

We get our food and begin eating.

Derek: So, Dean called you?

I nod.

Me: I completely forgot about the proposal.

Derek: It's been a rough week.

He smiles lightly and I sigh.

Derek: Are you going back to work on Monday?

Me: Why wouldn't I?

Derek: I'm just asking...

I sigh.

Me: I want to go back.

Derek: Are you sure?

Me: Derek.

Derek: Okay.

We focus on our food and eat in silence. I prefer sitting in silence lately.

My dessert arrives and I delve in.

Derek: Can I have some?

Me: No, get your own.

Derek: Wow!

Me: What?

Derek: So, it's okay for you to practically eat all of my food, but I can't do the same?

Me: What's yours is ours, and what's mine is mine.

He chuckles and shakes his head. He calls the waiter and order malva pudding with custard.

Derek: Don't even think of touching my dessert.

Me: Surely you wouldn't want your child to starve...

He tries to say something, but I think I made him speechless.

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't know how to respond to that.

I smile innocently.

Just then, his phone rings and he answers.

Derek: Zimkitha?... Uh-huh... No, we won't be able to make it... Okay...Bye...

He hangs up and looks at me.

Derek: She's hosting brunch tomorrow and she wants us to come.

I sigh.

Derek: We won't go.

Me: Thanks.

The last thing I want is to be around those people. I'd like to stay in bed and get my mind and

body ready for work for the day after tomorrow.

Derek: Zi?

I snap out of it.

Derek: I was asking if you would like some malva.

I didn't even realise that it had arrived. I look at it and it actually looks delicious.

Me: Yes, please.

He pushes the plate towards me and I eat some.

Me: Are you a baker?

Derek: I haven't really mastered baking.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: I'll learn...

Me: Hmm.

My phone rings and I check the caller id. It's Niki. As much as I miss her, I genuinely don't want to talk to her.

Derek: Aren't you going to answer it?

Me: I'll call her when we get back home.

He smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: I love hearing you refer to our place as home.

Me: Corny man.

He chuckles and we finish up his dessert.
Once we're done, we make our way out of
the
restaurant.

Once I'm in bed, I call Niki back and she
answers after a while.

Niki: Wow, 3 hours later?

Me: Sorry, I was out with Derek.

Niki: Oh okay.

Me: What's up?

Niki: Dude, I think I'm in the same
position as you!

Me: In terms of what?

Niki: Dealing with an evil monster-in-law.

Me: What??

Niki: Heyiii! Kwani and I were at his place,
when his mother pitched out of nowhere!

Me: And??

Niki: Zi, that woman is beyond hectic!

I gasp.

Niki: She's huge, first of all!

Me: What did she say?

Niki: She came in there and asked why Kwanele hasn't been checking on her, because yena she is sick.

Me: And then?

Niki: Then I walked in and she saw me. Heyiii! The woman went crazy.

Me: Lies.

Niki: She went on to accuse me of creating the distance between yena and her son.

Me: Wow.

Niki laughs.

Niki: I'm in disbelief, I tell you.

Me: So, uKwanele yena? What did he say or do?

Niki: Thank God he defended me. He kicked her out.

Me: Good for you.

Niki: Hai phela we would have a problem if he didn't feel the need to check her.

Me: Yoh, that's exactly what happened with me. How crazy!

Niki: You have to give me tips. How am I supposed to deal with a psycho future mother-in-law?

Me: Future mother-in-law? Whatchu talkin' 'bout? You're going to marry Kwani?

We both laugh.

Niki: I'm not about to fight a crazy mother for fun. I don't have time to waste.

Me: Hehe! Wena na!

Niki: Anyway, how are you? You sound offish.

Me: Eish it's been a rough week.

Niki: What's wrong?

Me: We'll discuss everything when we meet.

Niki: Yoh, alright then.

Derek walks in and gets in bed.

Me: Shap ke.

Niki: Bye, friend. Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and put my phone aside.

I take my book and read for a while...

Derek: How is Niki?

Me: She's okay, just stressed about Kwanele's mother.

Derek: Really? How is she?

Me: Apparently she's just like Khwezi.

He is quiet for a couple of seconds, and then burst out in laughter.

Derek: Mxm.

Me: I'm serious.

I summarise what Niki told me and he continues laughing.

Derek: So my mother is not the only crazy one?

Me: Clearly.

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: Fucked up...

I put my book aside and switch off my side lamp. Derek then pulls me closer to him till our faces touch.

Derek: I've missed you.

I sigh.

Derek: It's okay, you don't have to say anything. I'll speak to myself until you get better.

I stifle a laugh.

Derek: You were also patient with me after that whole Busi thing... I guess it's my shift.

I chuckle and get comfortable in his arms.

Derek: Good night.

Me: Night.

He kisses my forehead and I eventually drift off into a weird, but peaceful sleep.

The following morning, Derek is not in bed. I'm sure he's working on breakfast as usual...

I doze off again.

When I wake up again and check the time, it's around 11am. Whoa.

I sit on the bed for a while, trying to gather my thoughts. I had such weird dreams and they

made absolutely no sense. Thankfully, I don't feel sick anymore. I feel like myself again. Yes, I'm

not 100% emotionally, but I'm much better... I wonder what changed...

Derek walks in and smiles.

Maybe it's this one's presence.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hey.

He walks to me and plants a kiss on my lips and I groan. I always tell him not to kiss me when I

haven't brushed my teeth. I feel like that's what white people do. It's nasty.

Derek: Want to shower first or have breakfast first?

Me: Brush my teeth.

He laughs and nods.

Derek: Hmkay then.

I stand and walk to the bathroom. Once I'm done, I get his gown and go to the lounge.

Me: And then??

I'm stunned to say the least.

He rearranged the whole space. There's a blanket and cushions in the middle of the space, with

two of those square wooden crates used for picnics as "tables."

Derek: So, remember the gift you made for my birthday with the different dates we should have monthly?

I nod.

Derek: I loved August... The card said we should have an indoor picnic.

He takes my hand and leads me to the set up.

Me: Did you set this up?

Derek: Duuh.

I smile.

Me: This is cute.

Derek: Cute?

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: Divine? Enchanting?

Derek: Much better.

He makes me sit.

Derek: At first I took out a bottle of wine, and then I remembered that... Uhm...

He coughs uncomfortably and I roll my eyes.

Me: Water is fine.

Derek: We also have juice. I know you don't really drink much of it...

Me: It's okay.

He nods and walks off.

I look around in amazement. When did he set this up?

After a while, he comes back with two trays filled with finger foods. He puts them on the table

and walks off again to fetch two more trays that had fruit. He walks off again and comes back

with a jar of water and juice.

He sits opposite me and smiles.

Derek: Dig in.

Me: Derek, this is beautiful.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Anything for you.

Me: Can I get a hug?

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Argh.

I stand and then pull him up and wrap my arms around him.

I bury my face in his chest and take in his scent.

We stand there for a long time.

I'm sobbing.

Why am I sobbing?

Derek holds me tighter and I feel his face on mine.

We stand there for a while. I take a deep breath.

Me: Sorry.

Derek: It's okay.

Me: No, I'm sorry...

I look at him and sigh.

Me: I'm overwhelmed.

Derek: I understand.

Me: Do you, really?

He sighs and stares at me.

Derek: I wouldn't be here if I don't. I understand, and somehow, I love you even more.

I groan and he chuckles.

Derek: I'm here to stay... I know you think no one understands you, but I do. Like I've said before,

getting to know you is complicated. You have a lot of layers... just like me...

He tightens his hold on me and kisses me.

Derek: I guess the reason I'm so patient is because, in a way, you're a reflection of me... I also

have my dark layers and I trust that you will be as patient, when you peel them off bit by bit.

Me: I love you.

Derek: And I love you as well. I'm not going anywhere.

Me: Okay.

He wipes my tears and plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: More.

He chuckles as we kiss again, more intensely. Once we're done, we sit down again and begin to eat.

Me: So... We're having a baby, huh?

He looks at me carefully.

Me: Go ahead...

He smiles broadly and I groan.

Me: I'm surprised you managed to hide your joy for so long...

He laughs.

Me: You're going to be a dad, Star.

Derek: The best fucken dad!

I chuckle as I listen to him continue telling me how excited he is. I try not to give in to the anxiety...

INSERT 111 (Short insert)

It's been a good five minutes.

Dean has been laughing since then...

You know when someone laughs at you till you want to burst out in tears? For a split second,

that's how I felt, but then I remembered that this is Dean, and Dean is a dick.

Derek: What the fuck is wrong with you?

Dean rubs his belly and sighs happily.

Dean: You made my night.

He stands and goes to the kitchen and comes back with a glass of water. He sits and looks at

Ngidi and me.

Dean: So, you're going to be parents, huh?

Derek: And what's so funny about that?

Dean: Nothing... It's just...

He looks at me with a smirk.

Dean: Unexpected.

He chuckles and drinks his water.

Derek: Are you done here? I think it's time you leave.

Dean: Alright Sensitive Susie. Do you need a tampon as well?

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Bye, Catherine.

Catherine smiles and nods.

Catherine: Thank you for having me.

She packs her shit up and walks out.

Dean stands and looks at me.

Dean: Congratulations.

I cross my arms and look at him angrily.

Derek: This stays here.

Dean: You don't want the others to know?

Me: No!

Dean: Relax, tiger.

Derek: We'd like to keep this between us for now.

Dean nods.

Dean: Alright then, I'll see you idiots soon.

He opens up his arms for me and I growl.

Me: Go away.

He chuckles as he walks away.

Dean: Congrats!

He walks out and Derek looks at me amusingly.

Derek: And then?

Me: I didn't mean to blurt it out.

Derek: I'm not complaining. Hearing you say you're pregnant made me feel some type of way.

Me: Really?

He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: Yep.

His face touches mine and he plants a soft kiss. I moan and feel him smile.

Derek: Are you craving me as much I'm craving you?

I nod.

At this point, I want him to help me let out all these crazy emotions in me.

I tighten my hold on him and we find ourselves on that couch.

I guess we don't have to stress about condoms anymore, seeing as that bridge has been burned...

All Derek kept asking me as he pounded in me was for me to let him in... He felt a slight disconnect, and wanted me to let him in. I did let him in, and that resulted in lots and lots of squirting... I'm sure he feels included now... and this damn couch as well...

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek's arms around me.

I feel suffocated.

I break free from his hold and go to the bathroom, where I vomit.

I'm not a vomiter. Why am I suddenly vomiting?

Then it hits me... I'm pregnant.

I sit on the toilet and gather my thoughts. After a while, I brush my teeth and get in the shower.

Minutes later, Derek walks in the shower and yawns.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Hey.

He pulls me for a hug and then kisses my cheek. We clean ourselves up in silence and then he looks at me.

Me: What?

He smiles innocently and shakes his head.

Me: Ohho.

Derek: Can I touch your belly?

Me: It's still the same. Nothing has changed.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Go ahead...

He steps closer and makes me turn around so that my back is on him. He then wraps his arms around me and his hands cover my belly. I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: You're going to make an amazing mother.

Me: Really?

He kisses my ear and we stand there for a while without saying anything.

Derek: You're selfless...

Me: I am?

He nods.

Derek: You're selfless in your own special way.

I giggle.

Me: I feel like you're throwing shade at me.

Derek: I'm not, baby.

Me: So what do you mean?

Derek: Your love is endless in a way...You help people whole-heartedly.

Me: But I'm selfless with certain people.

Derek: And that is why I love you... You know when to draw the line.

He brushes my belly.

Derek: You don't allow anyone to take advantage of you. You know how precious your love is, therefore, you protect yourself.

I try to turn around and face him, but he stops me.

Me: I wanna look at you!

Derek: I'm still telling my baby about his mother.

Me: His?

He chuckles.

Me: Wow.

Derek: Now, as I was saying, you're going to make an amazing mother...

Me: Hmm.

Derek: This child will be treated very well.

Me: And you're going to spoil it.

Derek: Don't refer to my child as "it."

Me: Derek, we don't know the gender.

Stop being dramatic.

Derek: I don't give a shit. My baby is not an object.

Me: Gosh.

He kisses my ear.

Derek: But, I'm sure he'll be stubborn...

Like you...

I chuckle.

Derek: But he'll definitely be a cutie... I mean, look at us.

I laugh.

Me: Derek, we're wasting water.

Derek: Mxm.

He begins planting soft kisses on my shoulders and neck. His hands begin exploring my body...

He massages my breasts and groans.

Derek: I did notice a change here.

Me: Really?

He nods.

I growl as he continues massaging me and making his way down...

Me: Yoh, Derek...

He chuckles.

Derek: Ready for some thrilling shower sex?

Me: Hmm...

As we make our way to work, I receive a message.

I read it.

Dean: Pregnant woman, when are you sending out the invite to my people?

I roll my eyes.

Me: I have a name.

Dean: Pregnant woman?

Me: Dean!

He sends laughing emojis.

Dean: I've been laughing since yesterday...

I need a good 5 minutes with you so I can laugh to

your face properly.

Me: I don't have time for this...

Dean: Have a good day, preggie girl.

Argh, I switch off my phone and grunt.

Derek glances at me.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Ya...

He focuses on the road...

Eventually, we get to school and go our separate ways as usual.

At around 12pm, there's a knock on my door, while I'm teaching.

Some man comes in, carrying a large bouquet of flowers.

My kids all squeal excitedly.

Me: And then?

Man: Hi, Ms Dlamini, I have a delivery for you.

Gosh, this has Derek written all over it, but he knows I'm not into flowers because of my sinuses.

Me: Thanks.

I take the bouquet and sign. He walks out and my kids continue squealing.

Me: Quieten down and finish this activity. They do as they are told and I walk to my desk. I take the card and read it.

Dear Pregnant Woman,

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I told you so.

I fucken told you so!

Oh, Ms Dlamini... Let this be a lesson...

Never EVER doubt my word...

I fucken told you so!

drops mic

Kindest regards,

DR. Hlongwane.

PS: I guess this doctorate is not that lousy,
huh?

Really??

Argh. I tear the card and shove the
flowers in the bin. My kids try to ask me
what's wrong, and I
tell them to shut up and finish their work.

Dean is proving to be a problem in my life, honestly!

INSERT 112 (Short + Unedited)

Derek is now driving me home.

I want to talk to my dad and hear what he thinks about this whole situation.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I think my dad is disappointed in me. He sighs.

Derek: Ziyanda, you're old enough to start having such developments in your life.

Me: But, these developments have to take place in a proper manner.

Derek: Proper manner?

Me: Moving in with you was already shady, now a baby?

He laughs quietly.

Derek: I'd like to think that your dad prioritises your happiness.

Me: Having a baby doesn't make me happy.

He keeps quiet and I also stay silent.
We eventually get to my parents' house
and Derek insists on coming with me. As
we walk in, we
find Lwazi making herself a sandwich.

Me: Hey, baby.

Lwazi: Hey, mommy.

Derek: Hi, love.

Lwazi: Hey, Uncle D.

We walk to the lounge and find my dad
there.

Me: Hey, there.

He smiles and stands.

Okay, I'm glad he's in a good mood.

We share a hug.

Dad: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Dad: A bit exhausted from work, but okay.

He looks at Derek.

Derek: Sibalukhulu.

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Hlomuka.

Uhm, okay... They're having a clan name moment, so does this mean this conversation won't be bad?

Dad: Sit.

He's serious now.

We sit and he clears his throat. Lwazi walks in with a plate and glass of juice.

Lwazi: Here's your sandwich, baba.

Dad: Thank you.

Lwazi then runs off and disappears. My dad takes a bite of his sandwich and then looks at us.

Dad: So nithi you're expecting a baby?

Derek: Yes.

My dad bites more of his sandwich and doesn't say anything. We're silent for a while.

Dad: I don't know what's more dreadful: my one and only daughter having sex, or me being a grandfather.

Really? Why would he say that? That's just weird.

Derek: I'd like to think that Lwazi has given you a taste of grandparenthood.

Dad: And you would know, how?

Yoh.

Derek keeps quiet.

Dad: Ungaphaphi...

Hai! What's going on? How did this conversation turn sour?

Dad: I am very angered by your lack of responsibility.

He stares at me and I look down ashamedly, fidgeting with my fingers.

Dad: You left my house all excited about moving in together kanti you're rushing to go have

endless unprotected sex?

Universe, please come to my rescue!

I'd like to be swallowed by the Earth.

Dad: Why in the world would you be so stupid?

He looks at Derek.

Dad: You're careless and you're stupid.

My dad has never spoken to me like this.

In my 25 years of living, I've never heard him address

anyone like this.

Dad: I'm highly angered, and highly disappointed.

I feel Derek tensing up next to me.

Dad: Ziyanda, first of all, are you even ready to have a child?

I don't respond. I'm holding in my tears.

Dad: Ngiyabuza.

Me: No.

Dad: So, what's this nonsense?

I don't say anything.

Dad: Get out. I want to talk to Derek.
At this point, I'm sobbing quietly. I get that he's angry, but why is he addressing me like this? It's like he's disgusted by the mere sight of me.

As I stand, my mom walks in.

Mom: Hawu kanti nifikile? Hello!

She assesses the scene and realises that we're not having a party.

She stares at me.

Mom: Zizi?

I begin to walk to my room.

Mom: What's going on? What did you say to her?

I hear my dad telling my mom to stay out of it.

Mom: Hai phela, you can't say that to me...
She follows me to my bedroom and as soon as she holds me, I burst out in tears.

Mom: Ziyanda, calm down...

Me: He hates me...

Mom: He doesn't, baby. He's just expressing his anger.

I continue crying for a while until I doze off...

I am awakened by Derek's hand, brushing my cheek.

Derek: Zi...

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Derek: I'm leaving.

Me: Leaving?

I sit up and gather my thoughts. I then remember what happened.

He sees that I'm about to panic. He holds my hands and sits on the edge of my bed.

Derek: Relax...

Me: My dad...

He sighs.

Derek: After an hour of shouting at me, he eventually calmed down.

Me: He did?

Derek: Thanks to your mom.

He brushes my hand and smiles.

Derek: All is well now.

Me: What did he say?

Derek: He's going to come to terms with it... He needs some time...

I sigh.

Derek: I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: No.

Derek: Zi, I'm not about to take you from this house and have your dad thinking we're having endless unprotected sex.

Me: Derek!

He chuckles and I wrap my arms around him. I inhale his scent and relax in his arms.

Me: I've never seen him like that.

Derek: Ya, that was a bit intense.

He kisses my cheek and sighs.

Derek: I should get going... It's getting late.

I hiss and he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: See you tomorrow.

Me: Hmkay.

He lets go of me and we stand. We then make our way out and get to the lounge.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

My dad nods lightly.

Mom: Bye, baby.

Lwazi: Mommy, are you leaving?

Me: No, I'm sleeping over.

Lwazi: Yaay!

We walk out of the house and get to

Derek's car. Instead of saying goodbye, I find myself

getting in the car with him.

We end up chatting for over an hour.

Me: Khwezi is probably going to search for me and kill me.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Or the presence of a grandbaby could change her.

Me: You're funny...

Derek: I'm serious.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Anyway, I should get going.

I groan loudly.

Me: Okay.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss.

Me: Bye.

Derek: I'll request an Uber for you.

Me: You know I can do that myself, right?

Derek: Listen, your dad and I had a very hectic conversation. I'm not about to go against my word.

Me: You still don't want to tell me about this conversation?

Derek: I gave you a brief summary.

Me: Argh.

He brushes my hand.

Derek: Baby, go inside. I don't want to anger your father further.

Me: Whatever. Bye.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too. Facetime me when you get home.

He smiles.

Derek: Okay, love.

I get out of the car and he drives off once I'm in the yard. Once I'm inside, I walk to my bedroom.

Dad: Ziyanda.

I ignore him.

I really don't want to address him. Petty is suddenly up and ready, and I would hate for my dad

to be a victim of her wrath.

As I get ready for bed, my door opens and my dad walks in.

Dad: So, you're ignoring me now?

Me: I'm tired.

Dad: Hmm.

He stares at me softly and then nods.

Dad: Alright then...

He walks out and a minute later, Lwazi walks in.

Lwazi: Mommy, can I sleep with you?

Me: Duuh!

She giggles.

Lwazi: I'm still watching Generations. I'll join you after Uzalo.

I laugh.

Me: Okay, sweetie.

She walks out and I get in my pjs and snuggle in bed.

My phone rings and I'm shocked at who it is. I answer it reluctantly.

Me: Mduduzi?

Mdu: Ya wena.

Me: Watch it now.

He groans.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Mdu: I'm good.

Me: How's Tholi? I miss her.

Mdu: She's been asking me about you.

Me: Really?

Mdu: Mmm.

Me: How is she?

Mdu: She's much better.

Me: That's great.

Mdu: When are you going to visit her?

Me: When I get an invite.

Mdu: Consider yourself invited.

Me: Hmkay. I'll come through this weekend.

Mdu: Okay.

Me: Uhm-

Mdu: We'll talk when I see you.

Me: Okay.

Mdu: Night.

Me: Night.

I hang up and sigh.

Wowzer.

Totes unexpected.

After a while, Derek calls me to tell me he arrived safely.

Me: Nkanyi.

Derek: I'm home.

Me: I can see.

He smiles.

Me: Mdu just called me.

He frowns.

Me: I know!

Derek: What did he say?

I tell him about it and he sighs.

Derek: I guess there's no harm in seeing them at this point, because everything is out in the open.

Me: Will you come with me?

Derek: Absolutely not.

Me: You suck!

He chuckles.

Derek: Want me to watch you sleep?

Me: Duuh!

Derek: Alright then...

I get comfortable and we continue chatting till I fall asleep. I didn't even hear Lwazi come in, but

I felt her snuggle next to me...

INSERT 113

It's now Friday, and I'm in Derek's office, having lunch. I've become quite clingy after my dad

was mean to him, and he is loving it.

Derek: So, is everything sorted for tomorrow?

Me: Yes.

He glances at me and smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: You're an excellent planner.

Me: Aww, silly old me?

We chuckle.

Me: Hopefully, Nolwazi says yes.

He laughs.

Derek: Why wouldn't she?

Me: Dean is a dick.

Derek: They love each other.

I sigh.

Me: He has been teasing me about this pregnancy.

Derek: Me too. I've even blocked his number.

Me: I'll block him too.

Someone knocks on the door and Derek tells them to come in. The door opens and in walks

Lebo, the receptionist who doesn't get along with me.

Lebo: Mr. N, there's a lady who would like to meet with you.

Derek: Who is she?

Lebo: Ms. Mlambo.

Derek's face tightens.

Derek: Tell her I'm busy.

Lebo: She says it's an emergency.

Derek: I'm busy.

Lebo then looks at me.

Lebo: Alright.

She walks out and closes the door.

Me: And then?

Derek: It's Busi.

Me: What??

He nods tightly and drinks some of his water.

Me: What the hell is wrong with her? Why is she suddenly so present?

Derek shrugs.

Me: Mxm.

There's a knock again and Lebo walks in.

Lebo: She says it's an emergency.

Derek: Let her in.

Lebo nods and walks out.

Me: Uhm, I'll go t-

Derek: You're not going anywhere.

Me: But-

Derek: I'm not asking you, Ziyanda.

Whoa.

I sigh and focus on my food.

Me: Shit is about to get real awks.

He's so pissed; I don't even think he heard me.

The door opens and Lebo leads Busi in.

Lebo: There you go...

With that said, Lebo walks out, and closes the door.

Derek: Busisiwe.

Busi looks at Derek very seriously.

Derek: How may I help you?

Busi: I'd like some privacy.

Derek: People who make appointments with me are privileged to demand privacy...

Busi: Damnit, Derek!

Derek doesn't say anything.

Busi: Please excuse us, Ziyanda.

How does she even know my name?

Derek: Ziyanda is not going anywhere.

The tension is a bit too thick right now.

Busi looks at him angrily.

Derek: Let's get one thing clear: you and I are not on speaking terms, and I am absolutely fine

with that.

Busi tries to say something, but Derek stops her.

Derek: I will not have you come into my personal space and try to disrupt my peace. You had your chance and you blew it, so what the fuck do you want from me now?

Busi: Your mother-

Me: You and my mother have your own relationship. Don't involve me.

She keeps quiet.

Derek: I have nothing to say to you. I've said everything I wanted to say the last time I saw you.

Now, please leave and make sure you stay out of my life.

Busi: Why would you address me like this?

Derek: I've been very patient with you. Why would you come to my workplace? What's next?

You're going to come banging on my door at home?

Busi: Wow.

Derek: Just leave.

She stares at me and I swear I would have died if eyes could kill.

I take a bite of my sandwich and chew.

Busi: Mxm.

She storms out and shuts the door loudly. I take a bite of my sandwich again and chuckle.

Me: Wowzer.

Derek: Nxx.

Me: This is the perfect time to use the Garbage Can Tool. Let the little things go, Star.

He sighs.

Derek: Okay.

He stands and walks towards me. He then bends down till his face is close to mine.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He plants a kiss on my cheek and goes back to his seat and sits.

Derek: People are so annoying.

I laugh.

Me: I've gone through so many emotions the past two weeks; I'm too tired to even entertain this

Busi thing.

Derek: Nxx...

Me: Anyway, I feel like going out tonight.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Derek: Out as in?

Me: Out as in great vibes, people, drinks-

Derek: Drinks?

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: Where do you want to go?

I shrug.

Me: I miss Maboneng. Let's sleep over at your loft tonight.

He smiles.

Derek: Where it all started?

I roll my eyes.

Derek: What? Don't you remember how nervous you were when I asked you to sleepover?

Me: See ya later, mate.

I stand and pack my things.

Derek: Leaving already?

Me: My kids will be back in 5 minutes.

He groans.

Derek: Come give me a kiss.

I throw away my takeaway and walk to the door.

Me: You're my boss, filthy man!

He laughs boldly as I walk out of the office and close the door.

It's now around 2pm and we're heading to Dr. Modisa for our appointment. She insisted on

seeing us weekly until she is sure that the pneumonia didn't affect the baby.

We get to a different room and she asks me to lie on the bed.

Dr: We'll do the ultrasound transvaginally.

Me: Huh?

She smiles.

Dr: I'm going to insert a probe into your vagina, because your uterus is still behind your pelvic

bone.

I look at her nervously.

Dr: No, don't stress. This won't hurt. I'd like us to have a clearer view of the fetus.

Derek sighs and nods.

Me: Okay.

Dr: We've reached a great milestone this week. The baby is no longer an embryo; he or she is a fetus.

Derek: What's the difference between an embryo and a fetus?

Dr: The embryonic phase is about forming major organs, including the brain, heart, and lungs,

plus the arms and legs. Once you've got a fetus, those organs and parts are formed and are

now growing and developing. At this point, the baby is developing more distinct facial features.

Derek: What about the heartbeat?

She smiles.

Dr: We'll be able to pick it up today.

He smiles and nods.

Dr: Alright then, let's get to it.

After a few minutes, we're now staring at the screen.

Dr: Look at that... He's as big as a cherry!

Me: He?

Dr: That's what everyone is hoping for, so we'll refer to it as a boy.

Derek is smiling like a lunatic.

Dr: How's the morning sickness?

Derek: It's not that bad, but there are moments where it hits her intensely.

Dr: Hmm.

Derek: Especially when she sleeps late.

She wakes up feeling quite sick.

I look at him in shock and he shrugs.

Derek: I've been observing.

Dr: Cute.

We focus on the screen again and she smiles.

Dr: Everything is okay... Your blood tests also came back and you're healthy.

The heartbeat is also good apparently.

Derek listened to it through some Doppler device... I

opted out...

Dr: You should expect extreme pregnancy fatigue at this point. Making a baby is hard work.

Your body is working overtime preparing for motherhood as it develops the placenta.

Additionally, your body's metabolism and hormone levels have increased

significantly, which

triggers a decrease in blood sugar and blood pressure- a recipe for fatigue.

I sigh heavily and nod.

Me: Okay.

Dr: On the flipside, at this point in your pregnancy, you two should start looking for ways you can budget, so you have extra cash when the baby arrives.

Derek chuckles.

Dr: I think this is the perfect time to start planning your finances.

He continues chuckling. Knowing him, he's probably laughing because he knows that money is not a concern.

Derek: Thanks.

Dr: And, you should consider checking out your company's policy to see how maternity leave is typically handled. That way, when you break the news to your boss, you'll be prepared to discuss your expectations, and begin a potential maternity leave plan.

I look at Derek and he laughs quietly.

Derek: Thank you. We will make sure that she informs her boss.

Dr. Modisa smiles.

Dr: That's it for today...

Me: What about the risk of a miscarriage?

The room is silent for a couple of seconds.

Dr: Vaginal bleeding can occur in the first trimester and it isn't necessarily a cause for alarm,

but it could be a sign of ectopic pregnancy or a miscarriage, so please call me right away if you

experience bleeding. Please...

Derek's jaw is tightens.

Dr: Please don't stress yourself. I cannot emphasise enough how badly stress can affect your

pregnancy.

I nod lightly.

Dr: So, moving forward, I'd like us to have a weekly to-do list. I understand that we won't see each other every single week, so I'll send an email as well with all the information you need and frequently asked questions and answers. She sighs.

Dr: This week's checklist... Week 9...

Derek takes out his phone and begins typing as she speaks.

Dr: 1. Create a baby budget. 2. Make a pre-baby to-do list of all the things you want to accomplish or enjoy before the baby arrives. 3. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. 4. Go for a walk, or do 30 minutes of another moderate exercise, and make it a part of your daily routine.

Me: I'm not thin, so does this mean my weight will affect my baby?

Dr: I don't want you to gain too much weight, which will put the baby in danger.

Me: Okay.

I look at Derek.

Me: I guess I have to join you at the gym.

He smiles.

Dr: You don't have to be a gym junkie. I just want you to remain healthy.

He grins and looks at me mischievously.

Derek: We'll find other ways to exercise...

Me: Wow.

Dr. Modisa laughs.

Dr: Trust me, her sex drive is yet to increase, and you'll have to work very hard, Derek.

Derek: Can't wait.

Me: Eww.

They laugh.

Once we're done, she prints the scan and we make our way out.

Believe it or not, I genuinely zoned out Dr. Modisa for 90% of the time. As soon as I felt like I

was getting too much information, I zoned her out and went to another place...

Derek is the one

who paid all the attention...

Anyway, I miss the vibe in Jozi, not this quietness from the suburbs. We're

heading to his place

in Maboneng and I'm excited.

We get to his loft and I go to the bathroom to pee, something I've been doing a lot for the past

week.

When I walk back to the bedroom, I find him on the bed.

Me: And then?

Derek: I need a power nap. I have a headache.

Me: Oh okay.

Derek: Come join me.

I lie next to him and he kisses me.

Derek: So, this weekend we have to get you maternity bras.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Baby, I love you. However, your breasts are starting to pop out.

Me: Wow!

He chuckles and kisses my nose.

We continue chatting.

Within 5 minutes, I'm seriously dozing off.

Derek: Zi?

Me: Hmm?

Derek: You do realise that I'm the one who needed the nap, right?

Me: Mmm.

I feel his lips on mine and he kisses me.

Derek: We're still going out?

Me: Ya. We're meeting up with Mdu and Tholi.

Derek: What??

Me: Shh...

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Shh... I'm trying to sleep.

He groans.

Derek: Maybe I should also set up a meeting with Busi...

Me: I'm more than willing to raise this child by myself.

Derek: Wow.

Me: Now, hush, I'm trying to sleep...

I turn around and doze off immediately.

INSERT 114

When I wake up, I am in such a good mood- like, extremely good mood. Derek and I take a shower and get dressed. As I'm putting on my jeans, my buttons just refuse to do the things.

Me: Derek!

Derek: Hmm?

Me: My jeans!

Derek: What about them?

Me: They don't fit!

He looks at me and frowns.

Me: Bheka!

I walk to him as he is seated on the edge of the bed, and stand between his legs.

Me: Look!

Derek: Whoa.

Me: Uthi nyoa!

He touches my stomach and rubs it.

Derek: Whoa.

Me: What??

Derek: It's hard.

Me: Argh!

Derek: But, Dr. Modisa mentioned that it will start feeling hard, it's your uterus.

Me: I don't give a flying fuck! My jeans don't fit!

Derek: They do... The buttons are the problem.

Me: Just shut up. Honestly uyabhora.

Derek: Ngenzeni manje mina?

Me: Mxm!

I walk to the closet and take out leggings.

Me: I'm already fat. Now I have to gain more weight and look like a whale?!

Derek doesn't say anything.

Me: So you think I'm a whale?

Derek: Huh? I didn't even say anything.

Me: Which means you agree!

Derek: Zi, you're not a whale, and you'll never look like one.

I groan as he stands and walks to me. He wraps his arms around me and kisses my forehead.

Derek: Stop stressing. You still look the same.

Me: Hmm.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: You'll be my whale.

Me: Derek!

He laughs and I push him away and finish getting dressed.

Me: You're so annoying!

Once we're done, we head out and I insist on walking to the restaurant, considering the fact that

I'm not allowed to gain more weight than I already carry. I may as well use this opportunity to walk this fat out.

We walk to Pata Pata and make our way inside.

Me: I thought we'd find them here.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Did you just roll you eyes at me??

Derek: I don't know why I'm here. Who says I want to have dinner with your ex?
I roll my eyes and he pinches me.

Derek: I need a strong drink.

He orders his whiskey.

Me: If I can't drink, then you can't.

Derek: See, now you're taking it too far.

Me: You made me pregnant. Why are you allowed to drink, but I'm not?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: So you're going to use this pregnancy to your advantage?

Me: I'm just asking...

Just then, I see Mdu and Tholi walk in.

Mdu has become such a sexy thing.

Then I see Tholi... She is beyond cute. I'm so excited to spend some time with her and hear

about her progress.

They're perfect for each other: Mdu with his tall, muscular chocolate self, and Tholi with her

cute, chubby yellow self.

They get to our table and I exclaim.

Me: Tholi!

Her cheeks turn red as she smiles.

Tholi: Hey, Zi.

I stand and we share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Tholi: I'm good, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

She looks at Derek nervously and Derek flashes a sweet smile. I'm glad he's pretending to be

happy. I always pretend I'm stable when I'm around his people, so naye he must suck it up when

it comes to Tholi. I really like the girl.

Tholi: Hi, Derek.

Derek: Hey.

He stands and gives her a hug.

Mdu: Why are you sitting inside? It's quite hot in here.

Me: Derek is recovering from the flu.

Mdu takes off his jacket and I glance at his toned body. He sees this and chuckles.

Mdu: How are you?

Me: I'm good.

He knows he's not allowed to touch me when Derek is around, not even a handshake. Can't be disrespecting Derek like that... Although it doesn't hurt that he's great to look at.

Mdu: Derek.

Derek: Mduduzi.

They shake hands and we all sit.

Mdu: I'm starving.

He looks at Tholi.

Mdu: I didn't get to eat lunch at work.

Tholi: Really?

Mdu: Busy day.

Tholi: I'm sure you'll indulge in a feast shortly...

He leans closer to her and plants a kiss on her cheek, and she turns red again.

Cute.

The waiter takes our orders and brings Derek's drink.

Mdu: So how are you two? My sister tells me you live together...

Really, Nolwazi? She's outchea making it seem like she's above the drama kanti naye she's a gossip girl.

Derek: We're good...

Tholi: I think it's nice that you moved in together. It's a great way to get to know each other.

Me: Definitely.

Mdu: Any annoying habits?

I look at Derek and he raises an eyebrow.

Me: He has major OCD vibes.

Mdu: Hmm... I know...

He looks at Tholi and she exclaims.

Tholi: Hey!

Derek: I see nothing wrong with wanting to live in a clean space that is conducive to safety and health.

Tholi: Yes. There's nothing more frustrating than not knowing where things are.

Derek: Organisation and order are crucial.

Tholi: Definitely.

Me: Wowzers.

Mdu: Bowzers.

Derek: I don't even know why you're judging, because you always leave the lights on...

Me: Excuse me??

Derek: You never switch off the lights. I don't get it.

Tholi: Mdu always fails to close the fridge. It's always slightly open when he is done using it.

Mdu: Really??

Me: I'm sensing a lot of judgement, and I'm not pleased!

Mdu: Unbelievable!

Derek: Tholi, I'm glad I've met someone who understands the importance of tidy spaces.

Tholi giggles.

Mdu: So there are other Tholis in the world? I'm glad I'm not the only victim of constant nagging.

We all laugh and continue chatting. It's safe to say that now I am fully aware of my annoying habits, according to Derek. Naye he knows what annoys me about him...

It's been about 2 hours and the conversation is still flowing. I've never seen Tholi so open and

happy. She seems so much better. I decided that I won't bring up the Nolwazi situation or

Tholi's progress. I feel like she's having a good time and these topics would just take us 10 steps back.

Me: So, I was reading through some self-help and lifestyle books to buy, and I came across one

by Gary Chapman, titled The Five Love Languages.

Mdu and Derek both say, "Here we go" at the same time.

They look at each other and chuckle.

Me: What??

Derek: You sure love these self-help books.

Me: They are life!

Derek smiles.

Derek: Carry on...

Me: So, I ordered the book online, but I'm still waiting for it... But, I went on to research these five love languages.

Tholi: Why are they called love languages?

Me: It basically means that there are five ways that people speak and understand emotional love.

Tholi: Oh... That's interesting. What are these languages?

Me: Okay, so the first one is "Words of Affirmation." This language expresses love through words. So, verbal compliments, or words of appreciation are the communicators of love. You make your partner feel appreciated through words.

They're all listening to me attentively at this point. Lol, I do have a way with words, after-all ;)

Me: The second one is "Quality Time." Giving someone your undivided attention, not just sitting and watching TV together, but sitting there, talking and looking at each other... Undivided attention means there are no distractions like phones and other people... It's just you two... Here, time is important. Spending time together and just drowning in each other's presence fills the love tank.

They're all nodding.

Me: The third one is "Receiving Gifts." Here, gifts are seen as visible symbols of love. A gift is

something tangible that shows you that the person was thinking of you. These gifts don't have to cost money...

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Me: The fourth one is "Acts of Service."

This means doing things you know the person would

like you to do. You please the person by serving them. These services can include cooking,

washing the dishes and many more. They require thought, time and effort, that's why they're a form of expression.

I sigh.

Me: And then there's the last love language, which is "Physical Touch." I think this one explains itself.

We all laugh.

Mdu: Now, that one is powerful...

He looks at Tholi mischievously and she blushes.

Me: It's not just sex, dummy.

He chuckles.

Me: This can be kissing, hugging, holding hands, cuddling, sitting close to each other when

watching a movie, and having sex... just being physically connected...

I look at all of them.

Me: How interesting?

Derek nods slowly and I feel his hand slide between my thighs underneath the table.

Derek: Very interesting...

I giggle.

Mdu: Indeed...

Tholi also giggles.

Me: Okay, you both can stop groping us now.

Mdu and Derek chuckle.

Me: So... I found some cool website with a survey. The results of the survey basically tell you

what your love language is... Not what you do, but what you want your partner to

do... This

basically helps you fill up your partner's love tank.

Mdu: Hmm...

Me: All of us are going to take the survey and see what's up!

Derek: Okay...

Tholi: Sure.

Mdu: Let's do it.

Me: But, first, I think we should guess what we'll get. So, Tholi you'll guess what your love

language is, then Mdu will state if he agrees or disagrees. Subsequently, Mdu will the same as

well. After we take the survey, we'll discuss the results and see how we can meet each other's needs as partners.

I look at them.

Me: Understood?

They all nod.

Me: Let me check for understanding...

I look at Tholi.

Me: What are the five love languages?

Tholi giggles.

Tholi: Words of Affirmation, Quality Time, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, and Physical Touch.

Me: Excellent.

I look at Derek.

Me: What are we about to do now?

Derek: Take a sur-

Me: Heyi, full sentence, Ngidi.

He chuckles.

Derek: We're about to take a survey.

Me: Mdu what's the purpose of this survey?

Mdu: To identify your partner's love language.

Me: Derek, how will this process work?

Derek: So, in our case, my survey will reveal what I would like you to do, in order for me to feel loved.

Me: Well done.

I look at Tholi.

Me: So, what are we going to do before taking the survey?

Tholi: Uhm, we're going to predict what our love languages are. For example, you will state what you think your love language is, and state why. Thereafter, Derek will state if he agrees with you or not.

Me: Yes! And then what happens after we take the survey, Duzi?

Mdu: We discuss how we can meet our partner's love language.

Me: Excellent! Well done, everyone. You are such great listeners!

Mdu: For fuck sake.

Tholi laughs.

Tholi: You are such a teacher.

Me: Can't help it.

Derek: This is what I deal with...She calls this process "Checks for Understanding."

Mdu: We're not your kids.

Me: Hai suka! Anyway, let's discuss this shit...

We go on to have our love language discussion...

Good varbz...

My people,

As we know, I've been in battle against silent readers since 2013/14...

I shall continue fighting these faceless opponents. Call me petty, childish, immature- I am sincerely not touched. Like the legendary icon, Babes Wodumo, once said (her words have been manipulated), "Angeke i-story sakho si-trende, then ama-comment ashode..." This is a very justified battle, my people, and the insults or long paragraphs will never distract me from this deadly battle (war). I will singlehandedly cut out silent readers, till this battle (war) is won. I have done it before with my very first story, and I'm proud to say I was victorious, therefore, I can (will) do it again... So, silent readers, consider yourselves warned. I am coming for you. I beeeen getting ready!

Love and light to you my lovely,
interactive readers. The Universe (my
bestie) knows how
appreciative I am of your constant
opinions and feedback.

The enemies will emerge soon (as soon as
this shit is posted) and they will call me
names, tell
me I'm unfair, and they'll compare me to
other authors (angazi ke ukuthi what
must happen
ngoba I'm not competing with anyone)...
BUT, we are warriors! Their paragraphs
and messages will not affect us. We'll dust
that shit off,
angtihi?

Have yourselves a lovely night/morning.

Aluta continua! ☑

So here's the thing, guys...

My love language when it comes to writing these stories for you, is "Words of Affirmation."

I think you underestimate the significance of your lovely words. I'm not doing this for money or

fame. Heck, I've been approached a few times regarding publishing, but my answer is always

no. My anxiety would never let me flourish. I'd probably faint every time there's a book signing.

I love writing, and my interactions with you are basically the "fuel" that keep my passion going.

This is why comparing me to other writers will never make me feel guilty of bad. We all have our

different reasons for writing, manje if you're going to tell me that your fav writer from Diary of a

Gangster's Aunt does this and that, mina
you've lost me. I won't even bother
reading what you
have to say.

I write for mostly you, and myself. This is
like a personal journal, and I have every
right to run it

how I please ... So, if you're going to be
silent, then you're cancelled, and I'm
unapologetic about

this. Nothing anyone says will ever make
me feel bad for how I do things here.

I'd like to think I've been very fair. Yazi I
never complain about delivering inserts?

The only

people who can shout at me are the ones
who always comment, but are somehow
left out (by

mistake). Please ☒ use your Patience
Tool? ☒

PS: I love you. I've been told that I'm a petty bitch since I was young, guys. This is not news to

me. I'll change next year, I promise.

Let me try to sleep. Ngiyavuka manje...

INSERT 115

We're now going through our survey results.

Mdu: So, Tholi, what do you think I got?

Tholi: You probably got Physical Touch.

Mdu chuckles.

Mdu: That's what I got vele.

They both laugh.

Mdu: I need to be touched 24/7.

Tholi: Euww!

They continue laughing. They're beyond cute. I'm glad that Mdu stopped his whoring ways for

Tholi. Phela mina bengifebelwa to come nice.

Mdu wraps his arm around her shoulders and they kiss.

Me: We're still here, hey.

Tholi giggles shyly as she pushes Mdu away.

Me: So, does Tholi meet your love language?

Mdu: Definitely.

Me: Good.

Mdu: She's definitely more of a Words of Affirmation type. She didn't hear enough encouraging words when she grew up.

Tholi: That's what I got.

Mdu: See? I know you, Chubby Cheeks.

He plants a kiss on her flushed cheeks and she giggles.

Derek: You two seem to be in tune.

Mdu: Definitely. She's my world, this one.

Tholi continues blushing, heck, even I am blushing on her behalf.

Tholi: What about you guys?

I sigh and look at Derek.

Derek: Want to start?

I chuckle.

Me: I think it's either Quality Time or Physical Touch.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

He smiles.

Derek: It's actually a tie.

Me: Really??

He nods.

Derek: I got Quality Time and Physical Touch.

Me: Really?

He shows me his results.

Me: How accurate.

Derek: See, when we spend quality time, I want you close to me.

Me: Of course.

We laugh.

Tholi: You guys are so cute.

I lean closer to him and we share a kiss.
For a second there, I had forgotten about
Mdu and Tholi.

Me: Isn't it weird how we know each
other so well, but we haven't been in each
other's lives for
a long time?

Mdu: It goes to show that time is a
complex concept...

Me: Definitely.

I then look at Derek.

Me: So, what do you think I got?

Derek: Definitely Acts of Service.

Me: Correct!

He chuckles.

Mdu: So, you like having servants, huh?

Me: Hey!

Derek looks at me lovingly.

Derek: You appreciate it when people
help you out...

Me: And it took me a long time to accept help from people.

Derek: Hmm.

I look at all of them and smile.

Me: How amazing was this little exercise, guys?

Tholi: I loved it.

Mdu: Even though it told us shit we already knew. I also liked it.

Derek: I think the point, at the end of the day, is to find a balance. It takes all of these love

languages to make a relationship solid.

Mdu: Definitely...

Me: I totes agree about finding a balance.

We all need the physical contact, the quality time, the

words of encouragement and the service.

We continue chatting...

The following Saturday morning, I wake up at around 6am, feeling so sick. I feel like vomiting, but there's nothing coming out. I sit on the toilet seat and groan.

Derek walks in and yawns.

Derek: Morning, love.

Me: Hey.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I feel sick.

He sighs.

Derek: We slept quite late last night.

Me: Argh, whatever, Mr. Observant.

Derek: Can I pee?

I stand and go back to the bedroom as he pees. I make my way to the kitchen and pour myself

some water, and then I go to the balcony to get some fresh air. After 30 minutes or so, I feel

much better. I walk back inside, to find Derek making breakfast.

I walk to the bedroom to finish off my sleep...

So, everything is set...

I'm suddenly so nervous! If there's one slip-up, I swear I'm going to kill somebody!

Derek: Baby, relax.

I'm even sweating, that's how nervous I am.

We're now driving to Soweto.

Derek: So, you're not even willing to tell me what's happening today?

Me: You'll find out soon. Just zip it!

He laughs in disbelief and leaves me alone.

We then get to a park.

We find Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Malusi, Nandi, Joe and Gabi there.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

Where the hell is Dean and Nolwazi? I explicitly told his ass to be here on time! Nomvuyo looks pregnant. How? Isn't she like 2 days pregnant? Well, she's not showing too much, but seeing her tiny bump is making me uncomfortable.

Anyway, we finish greeting everyone.

Liwa: So, what's going on?

Just then, I see Dean's car, and sigh in relief...He walks out with Nolwazi and they walk to where we are.

Nolwazi: Lookie here!

She's in such high spirits. My heart is genuinely happy for her. This is going to be a great day!

Dean: Why the fuck are we in a dry park? Is it even safe here?

Derek: Hmm. Diana is afraid of the township?

Everyone laughs and Dean hisses.

Dean: Mxm.

Zimkitha: Why are we here kodwa, Zi? Yazi we could easily go to Vilakazi for brunch.

Nomvuyo: I doubt we're dressed appropriately.

They all start adding their two cents, and talk back and forth. Gosh, these people are too much.

I take a deep breath and look at them calmly.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your left ear...

They continue chatting.

Derek is the only one who heard me. He's touching his ear. See why this one is the right one for me?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose.
They continue talking. Derek touches his nose.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your forehead.

Nomvuyo glances at Derek.

Nomvuyo: And then?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose...

Nomvuyo frowns and nudges Liwa. Liwa stops talking and looks at Derek.

The others continue talking.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your bottom lip.

Derek does that, and I'm shocked to see Liwa and Nomvuyo do the same.

Nomvuyo winks at me and I wink back.

Yazi loGabi ngathi uzobayinkinga. She's the one who's making these people talk too much.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your ears.

Zimkitha looks at Liwa, Nomvuyo and Derek. They're all touching their ears. Lol they look ridiculous.

Zimkitha: And then?

Finally!

It is silent!

Me: If you can hear me, touch your knees. Liwa, Nomvuyo and Derek touch their knees.

Dean: Are you serious?

Me: If you can hear me, touch your chin.

Dean: Really?

He starts laughing, and within seconds, Zimkitha is laughing as well. Soon, Gabi, Joe, Malusi, Nandi, Lindelwa and Nolwazi are laughing their lungs out.

I continue... I'm beyond calm right now...

I'm in my teacher zone...

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose.

My diligent students, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Nkanyi, follow my instructions.

After these hooligans are done laughing, they stare at me in shock.

Me: If you can hear, touch your ear.

Malusi: Oh, wow... She's actually serious.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your chin...

They look at each other, as they slowly touch their chins. You'd swear there's someone pointing

a gun at them.

Silence.

Me: If you can hear me, touch your nose...

I watch as they all do as they are told...

Once I'm satisfied, I sigh and smile.

They're staring at me in disbelief. I think they can't believe what just happened.

Me: A great teacher doesn't move on until she's given 100%...

I smile.

Me: Now that I have your undivided attention, I'd like to thank Nkanyezi, Liwa and Nomvuyo for

listening attentively. I appreciate it.

They continue looking at me in shock.

Joe: I think I'm dreaming.

Gabi: I think I'm having an out of body experience...

Dean: She gets like this...

Nolwazi: Wow, Zi. For a second there, I thought I was a child.

I smile.

Me: Thank you.

Dean: That wasn't a compli-

I look at Dean sharply.

Me: We speak only when spoken to...

Liwa: Whoooa!

They all laugh and I look at Dean, sticking my tongue out.

After a while, I clap twice.

Me: Okay, guys, on a serious note, please listen!

They keep quiet.

Me: So, I asked you guys to reserve your Saturday, because I would like us to spend it together.

Lindelwa: How sweet.

She smiles at me and I smile back.

Me: We are going to have a Kasi Scavenger Hunt!

They all look at me weirdly.

Gabi: Yay! I've always wanted to get to know Soweto.

I give them a minute to process what I've just said.

Me: It will be awesome!

Nomvuyo: Hmm... Sounds cool.

Me: So, the starting point is my parents' house... We're all going to drive, and you'll leave your cars there.

Malusi: So, how are we going to get around?

I chuckle.

Me: Look around... There are taxis everywhere!

Gabi: Yay!

Nolwazi: Okay, now I'm definitely excited.

Me: We're going to have an amazing day!
Let's go!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!
He hugs me as everyone starts making their way to their cars.

Liwa: I'll lead everyone, since I know where you leave.

Me: Hey, now... Don't brag!

He laughs as he walks off.

Now, it's just Derek, Dean and I standing there.

Me: Everything is set... You're also set angithi?

Dean smiles and nods.

Me: Great, let's go!

Dean: Oh, by the way, Mdu and Ivy are joining us.

Me: The Devil is a lie. I will not acknowledge any negativity today!

He laughs.

Dean: Behave yourself, okay?

Me: Whatever!

We go our separate ways...

Derek and I are now driving to my house.

Derek: You never cease to amaze me.

I laugh.

Me: Hmm!

He chuckles and focuses on the road.

INSERT 116

We're now at my parents' house. Lol, my neighbours are just shocked. All these scrumptious

cars at my house? Njani? What is happening? Lol.

Liwa: Is it possible for me to get something to eat before we start?

Me: No! We don't have time!

Liwa: With all due respect Dlamini, I'm not leaving this house till I'm fed.

He walks to my dad and asks for chicken.

My dad gladly dishes up for him. He then goes and

sits on the stoep. Malusi and Joe walk to him and he lets them taste.

Before I know it, everyone is now seated on the stoep, eating chicken.

Derek takes me inside the house. He knows I'm about to freak out.

Derek: They'll be done in no time.

Me: They're wasting my time!

Just then, my mom walks in and chuckles.

Mom: At least your dad got new customers!

Me: Ah!

My dad walks in smiling.

Derek: Sawubona.

Dad: Ngidi... I charged your friends 20 rands extra each, because they look and smell like money.

They both laugh. So, they get along now?

Kanti zikhiphani kahle kahle kulendlu?

Derek: You should have charged them 50 rands extra.

Dad: My scamming is not that bad...

They chuckle...

Me: Uphi uLwazi?

Mom: I sent her to the shops.

Me: I guess we won't see her.

Mom: You saw her yesterday, awume tuu.

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It's

Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Baba, this chicken is amazing!

My dad would love it. It's so fresh. Is there a way you

can give me a few pieces? I want to take them back home.

Dad: Of course!

Mom: You must be Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness, how rude of me... I got so excited about the chicken. She introduces herself and hugs my mom.

Mom: How are the babies?

Nolwazi: All grown up!

Mom: Aww, man. Congratulations!

Just then, Dean walks in, and I know he wants us to get moving. Time is of the essence, people!

Me: Give me a minute.

I walk to my bedroom and sit down for a couple of minutes. Once I'm done gathering my thoughts, I walk out and bump into Derek. He pushes me back in the bedroom and shuts the door.

Me: And then??

He chuckles and kisses me. Like, realllly kisses me. Haibo! I quickly stop the Devil.

Derek: I don't know why I'm suddenly turned on.

Me: Bhuti, go to the toilet and let it all out. I'm not about to spread it low and dirty in my parents' house.

He laughs as we walk out and make our way outside. Thankfully, everyone is done eating. My

mom emerges with an envelope.

Mom: Can I have everyone's attention, please?

They all continue chatting. Yazi this crowd talks too damn much!

Mom: Ye nina!

There's silence within a split second.

Zimkitha laughs.

Zimkitha: Saze savelelwa! UMam' Teacher naye is commanding our attention?

Everyone laughs.

Mom: Anyway, I've been instructed to give you this envelope... You have to decide who will read what's in it.

Zimkitha: Okay, because we are getting old, I don't think it's a good idea to participate. Lindelwa and I will stay here.

My mom smiles and nods.

Gabi: I'll read it.

Why am I not surprised? Lol, she's such a bossy lady.

She walks to my mom and takes the envelope. She opens it and clears her throat.

Gabi: Okay... Let's see...

She clears her throat again.

Gabi: Welcome to the Kasi Scavenger Hunt... This adventure will be fun-filled and worthwhile.

You will all cooperate and work as a team to ensure that you reach the finish line...

Buckle up
and have lots of fun!

I smile to myself. Yazi I really am great sometimes.

Gabi: First things first... You need to establish ground rules. Thereafter, you should select two people to be your leaders. We all know that no team is successful without a person who plays the role of a guide. Once you have established your rules and chosen your two leaders, you will receive your second set of instructions. You have 10 minutes to finish this task. She looks at us.

Everyone is quiet for a few seconds.

Mom: The timer has started.

Gabi: I'd like to nominate Ziyanda.

Nomvuyo: You can't nominate Ziyanda, she's the one who planned this.

Gabi: Oh...

Nomvuyo rolls her eyes. I'm sure she thinks Gabi is some dummy. Lol this one hates everyone.

Nolwazi: I'd like to nominate Nandi.

Nandi: Oh, no!

Dean: I second that. I think we need Nandi's calm vibe.

Malusi: Calm vibe, huh?

Nandi punches Malusi lightly and he chuckles.

Derek: What about Nomvuyo?

Dean: Uhm...

Nomvuyo: Uthi nyum. Nyum what?

Dean: You've just proven why you can't lead us. You're too temperamental.

Liwa: But, no one here knows Soweto better than Nomvuyo.

Gabi: Really? How?

Liwa chuckles.

Nomvuyo: We're not all trapped in the suburbs. There's life out there.

Ooops!

Watching all them go back and forth is proving to be quite entertaining.

Joe: Okay, here's a suggestion. How about we go around and discuss the pros and cons for everyone?

They stay silent, thinking about what Joe's just said.

Gabi: There's no time! We're left with 7 minutes!

Liwa: Shit, all in favour of Nandi raise your hand.

Everyone raises a hand.

Liwa: Good. Now who'll be the second leader?

Gabi: Joey?

Dean: Uh-uh we can't have two calm people. We need balance.

Gabi: Gosh.

Malusi: I think Nolwazi should lead with Nandi.

Everyone is quiet.

Liwa: All in favDean:

Why don't you lead, Liwa? You seem to have taken the role already?

Liwa: Silly old me? I mean, it comes naturally.

Dean: All in favour of Liwa?

Everyone raises their hand.

Liwa: Great.

Liwa looks at my mom.

Mom: 5 minutes.

Liwa: Ground rules?

Nandi: When it comes to figuring out our tasks, you cannot speak unless you've been given permission by either me, or Liwa.

Dean: I t-

Nandi looks at Dean and he sighs.

Nandi: Good. Now, what else?

Joe raises a hand.

Nandi: Joe.

Joe: How about we have one basic rule... Everything has to be approved by the leaders?

Liwa: Perfect. So, you can't talk without our approval, you can't make decisions without our approval...

Nandi: If you agree, say aye.

Everyone says aye.

I can tell that Dean is a nervous wreck. I just want to hug him.

Liwa: Okay, so we're sorted...

He looks at my mom.

Liwa: Can we get the next set of instructions?

Mom: Right on time.

She gives it to him and he gives it to Nandi. Nandi opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: Well done! You've now established your rules, and you've chosen your leaders... Below is

a riddle... The answer to this riddle will let you know where your next stop is. Good luck!

She looks at us.

Malusi: This is some serious Amazing Race shit.

They all chuckle.

Nandi: Okay, let me read the riddle.

She sighs as she focuses on the paper.

Nandi: People across the world travel just to come experience my amazing vibe and rich

history. I am home to some phenomenal South African past politicians, but there's one in

particular, that managed to shake the entire world. Where am I?

Nandi looks at us.

Derek: Easy... Orlando...

Everyone agrees. Nandi continues reading.

Nandi: Go to this phenomenal politician's home... Once closely there, you will find something

truly funny, entertaining and shocking...

There, you will find your next clue. You have 20 minutes

max.

Liwa: Let's go, people!

I've never seen a bunch of grown ass people this excited in my life!

Zimkitha: Good luck!

Lindelwa: See you later!

We say goodbye as we walk out of the yard.

Liwa: Zi, we can't use our cars?

I shake my head.

Liwa: Okay. Where do we get taxis?

Nomvuyo: Over there, snobby.

Liwa: I'll punish you later wena...

Nomvuyo chuckles as she leads us to where we can get taxis. Derek is holding my hand...

Gabi: So, how do we point? I've seen people point up on TV.

Nomvuyo points down.

Gabi: Make sure it's one of those minibuses.

Malusi: We don't have time to be picky, Gabi.

Gabi sighs. She definitely looks out of place.

Within minutes, an empty Siyaya stops and we climb in.

Did I mention how funny these people look right now? I keep laughing to myself. Nomvuyo sits at the front with the driver. Gabi and Nandi are on the first row.

Joe and Malusi are behind them.

Nolwazi and Dean are on the third row.

Liwa, Derek and I are on the back seat.

Nomvuyo: Hello, bhuti.

Taxi driver looks at Nomvuyo and smiles.

Driver: Waze wamuhle ntokazi. U-right kodwa?

Nomvuyo: Ngi-right... Please take us to Vilakazi.

Driver: Niyaphi?

Nomvuyo: Mandela's house.

Driver: Anything for wena dali.

Liwa: Ngizonyisa inja...

Me: Liwa, shh...

Liwa: Hai man.

Me: You can't be starting shit with taxi drivers.

He groans as he watching from a distance... Nomvuyo is laughing and giggling away.

Akumnandi pha phambili. Zilekese, ziRice Krispies, snap crackle and pop, I tell you.

Taxi driver

is in heaven with his new woman.

Liwa is just fuming... Poor man... He shall be strong, because it is what it is, it does what it do.

Lol, I look forward to this Scavenger Hunt... Ngathi kuzoba mnandi.

INSERT 117 (Unedited)

Gabi: I love the vibe here!

Nolwazi: It's definitely a great vibe.

Liwa: Okay, so the note says we have to be on the lookout for something funny and

entertaining.

We all look around. I already know what they're supposed to look for, but I'm not going to participate. I watch as they look around trying to figure out the answer.

Nandi: Does it say we should go inside the museum?

Nolwazi: No it said once we're around the area, we'll see it...

Malusi: What the fuck could it be?

Gabi: Maybe it's those girls dancing over there.

Everyone looks at a group of young girls dressed in traditional attire, singing and dancing.

Dean: The note said funny and entertaining...

Joe: Ya, they may be entertaining, but I doubt they're funny.

Derek wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Me: Why aren't you helping your friends?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: They don't deserve me.

He gets closer to my ear.

Derek: I figured it out. I know what they're supposed to spot.

Me: Do you, now?

He smiles and nods.

Derek: I've been here a couple of times...

I've seen this shocking, funny and entertaining thing.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: Derek, we would appreciate your help! Stop holding on to Ziyanda and work with us!

Derek: Dramatic much?

Nomvuyo pulls him away from me.

Nomvuyo: What are you thinking?

Derek: I don't think it is here.

Nomvuyo: What is it?

Nomvuyo: Come on, Vuvu... You know this...

Nomvuyo looks around... She's getting frustrated.

Suddenly, she exclaims.

Nomvuyo: Guys!

Everyone stops talking and looks at her.

Nomvuyo: Let's go down the street.

Gabi: But-

Nomvuyo: Let's go!

Liwa: Do you have an idea?

Nomvuyo nods and leads the way. We all follow her down.

Malusi: Oh shit.

We all stand there.

Gabi: How is this even possible?

We all stare at the guy busy doing stunts with a 1.25 coke bottle.

It's amazing, and I can never get over him. He throws that bottle around and catches it with his

foot, and then he throws it again and it lands on his back, and he balances it with his bum.

We continue staring in shock and amazement.

Nandi: This is it! Or rather, here he is!
They all chuckle. Once he's done, we walk towards him and clap. Liwa take out his wallet, and puts 100 bucks on the guy's money bag.

Gabi: Hi, bhuti, how are you?

Him: Ngi-grand, my sister...

Gabi takes out her purse from her Gucci backpack and takes out 100 bucks and gives it to him.

Gabi: I've never seen such! Well done!

The guy smiles.

Him: I've been doing this for many years now. Thank you, my sister.

Gabi: That was phenomenal!

Liwa: I'm guessing you've been informed about us?

The guy chuckles and nods.

Him: Yes... Here's your envelope.

He takes it out of his pocket and gives it to Liwa.

Liwa: Thanks, buddy.

Nolwazi: Bye!

We all walk away.

Nandi: Ziyanda, you are something!

Joe: How in the world did you even get this guy?

I laugh and shrug.

Nandi: Okay, let's read the next clue.

They all quieten and focus on Nandi as she opens the folded envelope and starts reading.

Nandi: Well done! You have reached your second stop... Now that you're all warmed up, get

ready for the next part of your amazing journey!

Nolwazi: Can we just take a moment to applaud Zizi? This is so creative!

Joe: Impressive.

I smile.

Nandi: Here's your second riddle...

Nandi glances at everyone.

Nandi: Ready?

They all nod.

Nandi: I was opened by the Minister of Bantu Development, MC de Wet Nel, and Ian Maltz, who was then Mayor of Johannesburg.

They all look at each other in confusion.

Dean: Ziyanda, you do know that we're all finance people, right? And we have a bunch of housewives.

Nomvuyo: I don't even have a degree!

Gabi: Gosh, and I hated History!

I giggle and shake my head.

Me: It's very easy! Carry on reading, Nandi.

Nandi nods and they all focus again.

Nandi: On June 16, 1976, thousands of black students marched regarding the education

system and learning in Afrikaans...

They all look at each other awkwardly.

My goodness, these people don't even know their

history! I look at Derek in

disappointment. He smiles slyly and I sigh in relief. Clearly he knows

the answer, but he's pretending not to.

Boy, am I relieved! I was going to get turned off instantly!

Nandi: Guys, does anyone of an idea?

Nomvuyo: Let's retrace our history...

Nomvuyo: When the students protested, where were they supposed to meet?

Malusi: I know there's something about Morris Isaacson.

Gabi: And Hector Pieterse.

Liwa: This is embarrassing...

They all chuckle.

Me: This is very embarrassing. How do you people not know your history??

They look at each other ashamedly.

Me: Sies! I'm going to prepare a lesson and I'll teach you...

Nolwazi: We do know our history, it's just those specific details...

Nomvuyo: Is there another clue, Nandi?

Nandi sighs as she reads.

Nandi: I was originally built for the Johannesburg Bantu Football Association and I have a seating capacity of-

Dean: Fucken Orlando Stadium!

Liwa: Fuck, yes!

Gabi: Wow, I still wouldn't have figured it out.

Me: So, you only get the answer once soccer is mentioned? Sies!

Nandi: Okay, focus!

They keep quiet.

Nandi: More than anything, this race is showing me that we're a bunch of uncultured snobs. I'm so ashamed!

Malusi: Oh, please. It's nothing a few lessons from Dlamini won't fix...

He looks at me with a grin and I look at him blankly. Still don't like him, doubt I ever will.

Nandi: Alright, let's get going, people!

Nomvuyo: We have to go up the road in order to get taxis.

We all make our way to the main road and sure enough, there are taxis.

Gabi: So, where's the Hector Pieterse thingie?

Hector Pieterse thingie? Haibo, guys!

Nomvuyo: Up there...

Gabi: We should come back some time.

Me: Clearly you do. Angithi you don't know your history.

Derek places his arm around my shoulders and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Can't wait for the private history lessons, baby.

I smile.

Me: It's on.

Gabi: There is no time for all of this!

Nomvuyo do the pointing thing so we can go!

Dean: You people are such snobs.

Nolwazi: You people?

Dean: I'm very street smart.

Nolwazi: Okay, bhuti, keep telling yourself that.

Soon, a Quantum stops, and we all get in.

Nolwazi: I hate to admit it, but this is much better than that taxi we got first.

She sits next to Dean and he wraps his arm around her shoulders.

Derek and I are sitting behind them, at the back seat.

Derek: That was entertaining...Turns out my people are dumb.

Me: Your words, not mine.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my lips.

Liwa, who insisted that Nomvuyo sit next to him this time around, looks back at us from the first row.

Liwa: Derek, it's your turn to pay!

Derek: I don't carry cash. Ask the driver if he has a speed point.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Derek: I'm kidding.

He takes out some money from his wallet and gives it to Nolwazi, who gives it to Nandi, who gives it to Liwa, who gives it to the driver.

Me: For a second there, I thought I lost you to the Snob Club.

Derek: Never, baby...

He chuckles.

Derek: Unlike them, I know the struggle.

Me: Hai suka, you struggled for five nyana years.

He laughs.

Derek: Ok'salayo, I struggled.

Eventually, we get to Orlando Stadium.

Gabi: Where exactly are we going?

Malusi: Nandi, read the clue again.

Nandi: Okay.

She takes out the paper and continues reading from where she left off.

Nandi: Once you reach your destination, you should figure out where to get your next clue.

Solve the following easy riddle...

Joe: Hopefully, it's nothing historical!

They all look at me and I shrug.

Nandi: It says... I am a homophone...

Before moving on, discuss what a homophone is.

Thereafter, each of you should give an example. You cannot move on until everyone has given

an example! Good luck!

Nolwazi: Easy. It's two or more words that are pronounced the same, but have different

meanings or spellings.

Derek: Correct.

Dean: Here we go again with the teacher shit. You two need to stop treating us like we're your

students!

Nandi: Hey! Focus!

Everyone keeps quiet.

Liwa: I'll start... Hear and here.

Joe: Buy and by.

Gabi: More like, Joey should BUY Gabi an engagement ring BY the end of the month.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: I'm serious-

Nomvuyo: Back to examples. We don't have time to waste.

I chuckle. Gabi sighs and rolls her eyes.

Gabi: Heal and heel.

Dean: Flower and flour.

Malusi: Hour and our.

Nolwazi: Not and knot.

Wowzer, what a coincidence. She's going to tie the knot soon phela.

Nandi: Whole and hole.

Malusi: Hmm...

Nandi: Don't be naughty wena.

They chuckle.

Liwa: Is that everyone?

Nolwazi: Derek?

Derek: Weigh and way.

Liwa: Perfect!

Me: I also want to give an example!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, not now.

I laugh.

Liwa is such a competitive man! It's funny to watch!

Liwa: Alright, so everyone has given their examples... Nandi, carry on...

Nandi focuses on the paper.

Nandi: Alright, now that you have an understanding of homophones, here's your clue...

She clears her throat.

Nandi: I am somewhere around this area...

Kids love me, because I have everything they like... If

you can't figure me out, think of Muvhango.

They all look at each other.

Liwa: What the fuck?

They all begin to look around.

Nolwazi: What are we even looking for?

Dean: Something kids like...

Gabi: There's a school there with a playground.

Dean: But how does that relate to Muvhango?

Joe: Hmm...

We walk around for a bit. I just want to slap some sense into all of them. The answer is literally around the corner!

5 minutes have gone past.

Derek: Wait a minute...

They all stop walking.

Derek: Remember, what we're looking for has to be a homophone...

They all look at him.

Derek: Meaning, there's a correlation between Muvhango, and whatever this other thing is...

Malusi: What could kids possibly like here?

Just then, two kids run past us. We all stare at them and our eyes follow them.

Nandi: They're going to that woman over there...

There's an old woman selling sweets and chips by the corner.

Malusi: Okay, so the woman is the clue...

Nolwazi: But, how does Muvhango fit into this?

All of a sudden, Derek bursts out laughing, and they all look at him. Seconds later,

Gabi laughs

as well.

Gabi: Oh my goodness!

Liwa: We'd appreciate it if you would share the joke.

Gabi and Derek look at each other.

Derek: Go ahead and tell them, Gabi.

How gentlemanly of him.

Gabi: Guys! What's the main language used in Muvhango??

Nomvuyo: Venda.

There's silence for a few seconds.

Suddenly, they all burst out in laughter.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I join in the laughter.

Malusi: Shit... Venda vs... Vendor... That lady is a street vendor!

They continue laughing.

Nandi: Alright, guys. Let's go get our clue from the street vendor!

We all make our way to the old woman.

Derek places his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Sneaky girl.

Me: I was worried there for a second...

Lol, let the journey continue!

INSERT 118 (Short and Unedited)

They now have their next letter...

Nandi: Congratulations, everyone! Before reading your next clue, please reflect on your journey

thus far... What have you done well? What do you need to work on in order for you to work

effectively as a team?

She then looks at everyone.

Malusi: Should we start with what we have done well?

Everyone nods.

Malusi: I think, in an unexplainable way, our personalities just blend well.

Nolwazi: I agree, we all have very strong personalities, but somehow, we're a good unit.

Derek: The only problem is that we all speak at the same time when we're passionate.

Joe: But, we have Ziyanda now, so she can always do one of her attention grabbing signals.

We all laugh.

These people, man... I think I love them.

More than anything, I admire them. I am surrounded by

black, powerful men and women. The men prioritise their families, work extra hard to ensure

that their families are taken care of, and they are genuinely caring! The women are not just

"decorations." They are strong, confident women and they also prioritise their families. All of

these people are not just intellectually impressive, but their emotional intelligence is astounding. Their love is powerful. They're all vibrating on the same frequency. This shit is rare to find. We're so used to backstabbing friendships and unnecessary drama, but these people defy all of that. To me, they are the epitome of black excellence and I'm beyond grateful that I get to interact with them. I learn and laugh at the same time whenever I'm around them...

Anyway, after a quick reflection session, Nandi continues reading the letter.

Nandi: Now that you have reflected on your journey thus far, you can move on to your clue...

She turns over the paper.

Nandi: I am a 65 000 square-metre development and cost R650 000 000 to build.

They all look at each other thoughtfully.

Nandi: I officially opened in September 2007. I am owned by a South African entrepreneur and property developer, in partnership with Investec and ZenProp property holdings. I am symbolised by an elephant.

Dean: Easy, Maponya Mall.

Nolwazi: Hmm, impressive, Hlongz.

Dean chuckles.

Nomvuyo: I'm not sure if we can get taxis to Maponya from this side, so I suggest we go to Bara.

Nandi: Isn't Bara a hospital?

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: You guys are shameful. Bara is not only hospital, there's a mall and taxi rank.

Gabi: You've clearly been around Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Mmm. Let's get going.

We all cross the road and make our way to the other side. They ask some locals how they're

supposed to point, and minutes later, we're in a taxi, making our way to Bara...

We're now in a taxi to Maponya Mall.

I'm not feeling well.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Just a headache.

He looks at me suspiciously.

I think I've been in the sun for too long. I feel heavy and congested.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I need water.

He nods lightly.

After a while, we arrive at Maponya Mall and make our way to the big elephant.

Derek: Ziyanda and I are going to get water for you guys.

Nandi: Thank you, I'm starting to feel dehydrated.

He takes my hand and we walk in.

Derek: Are you still in pain?

Me: It's nothing deep.

Derek: I don't believe you.

Me: Derek, I'm fine.

We walk to PicknPay and get bottles of water.

Derek: Let's get you something to snack on as well. You haven't eaten since earlier on.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Roll your eyes all you want.

He gets me some biltong and we go to the till and pay. Once we're done, we head back to the elephant statue outside and find everyone there. We give them the plastic and they each take a bottle of water.

Derek: So, what does the next clue say?

Nandi takes the envelope, which I assume they got from the person I organized to be there. She opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: So, you're approaching the end of your journey... Now, it's time for you let loose and have

lots of fun! What you're about to do is going to allow you to step out of your comfort zone!

They all look at me and I laugh.

Me: What?

Nandi continues reading.

Nandi: Below is a list of tasks you are supposed to do. Please note that it is absolutely compulsory for you to complete these tasks!

They look at me again.

Me: What??

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, you better not make us do weird shit.

Me: Whatever!

Nandi: Before you start, please make sure that everything that is done from this point is

recorded. You should decide who will be the one who takes the video.

They all look at each other.

Derek: I volunteer.

Liwa: Perfect.

Nandi focuses on the paper and everyone keeps quiet.

Nandi: The first task is for Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Why me??

Everyone laughs. Derek takes out his phone and begins recording.

Nandi: Nomvuyo, go to 5 strangers and make them tell you you're beautiful, without telling them you're playing a game. You should find creative ways to make them tell you you're beautiful, thereafter, you should get all their numbers.

Nomvuyo: What?!

Everyone laughs loudly.

Gabi: Oh my goodness, this will be interesting!

Malusi: I don't think she can do it...

Dean: She won't.

Liwa: And she doesn't have to. Baby, l-

Nomvuyo: Gosh.

She walks off and Derek follows her, while still recording.

Dean: She's starting to sound just like Dlamini. Childish lingo.

Me: Whatever, idiot!

Nolwazi: You two need to be locked up in one room, so you can beat each other up properly.

Me: I'd love that!

Dean: Oh, ple-

Liwa: I think we should go check on Vuvu.

Malusi: Relax, she won't run off with these strangers.

Liwa groans. We watch, from a distance, as Nomvuyo talks to some guys. After a while, she

comes back with Derek, following her.

When she gets to us, she shows us the five new contacts on her phone.

Nomvuyo: Done and dusted.

We all cheer for her, and Liwa wraps his arm around her and kisses her forehead.

Nomvuyo: Territorial.

Liwa: You know this.

She chuckles and gives him a hug.

Nandi: Alright, let's move on to the next task...

She focuses on the paper.

Nandi: The next task is for Joe.

Gabi: He better not do anything shady! I will not allow that!

Nandi: Joe, you have to walk around and ask for money. You need to collect a total of R50.

Joe: Come on!

We all start laughing boldly.

Gabi: Oh, baby. I think you can be quite persuasive...You can do it.

We continue laughing as we walk inside the mall. Joe approaches a few people, and they ignore him.

After around 20 minutes, he finally manages to convince a few girls to give him money.

Thankfully for him, the money added up to 60 bucks.

Joe: Fuck this shit.

He gives me the money and I laugh.

Dean: I never thought I'd see the day you beg for money.

Joe: Mxm.

Gabi: Baby, at least you know how it feels like to be helpless...

Joe grunts and we continue laughing at him.

Nandi: Okay, let's focus.

We all quieten down.

Nandi: The third task is for Dean and Malusi.

Dean: Hell no.

Malusi: Not happening.

Nandi: You will do whatever is required.
No negotiating!

She focuses on the paper and continues reading.

Nandi: Dean and Malusi, find a clothing store, and try on women's clothing- it should be whole attire.

Dean: WHAT?!

Malusi: Fuck, NO!

Everyone laughs.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness!

Dean: Uyanya wena, Ziyanda. Uyanya.

Malusi: Amasimba!

We continue laughing.

Nandi: Once you have tried on the clothes, you must go to any salesperson in the store and ask

them to take a picture of you both.

Malusi: WHAT?!

We continue laughing. Dean looks at me begrudgingly and I smile mischievously.

This is my

way of getting back to him for making fun of me regarding the pregnancy.

Liwa: Diana and Miranda, stop wasting our time!

Nomvuyo: Let's go to Mr. Price.

Nolwazi: How about Edgars? The sizes there are a bit accommodating.

Liwa: Edgars it is!

We continue laughing at them.

INSERT 119

We're now at Edgars and kushubile to say the least.

Dean is so pissed. I don't think I've ever seen him like this.

Malusi naye is beyond angry, but I don't really care about him.

Nomvuyo: Okay, we've been standing here for 15 minutes!

Joe: Didi and Mimi, let's find your sizes!
We all laugh.

Dean: I'm not doing this shit.

Nolwazi: Langa, phela if you don't do it,
you're not coming home with me.

Dean looks at Nolwazi sharply and she
smiles sweetly.

Nolwazi: You have to do it.

We continue laughing.

Just then, a sales lady approaches us. She
scans the crowd and I can tell that she is
smitten by
all these men. Once again, they manage to
make a space seem very small, just by
their
presence.

Lady: Hi, everyone. My name is Lebo. How
may I help you?

Nandi: Hi, dear. We're looking for nice
elegant dresses.

Nomvuyo: Dresses? Uh-uh we want leggings and nice girlie tops.

Everyone bursts out in laughter.

Dean tries to walk away, but Liwa stops him.

Lebo: Alright, uhm, we have a range of leggings.

Gabi: Dear, I think we'll manage to find what we need. Thank you for your assistance.

Lebo: Oh.

Lebo walks off with her tail between her legs.

Nomvuyo: Thanks for dealing with that...

Gabi: I can spot them from a mile away.

Liwa: Wow.

I look at Derek. I almost forgot about him, because he's the designated video man.

He gets

closer to me and kisses me.

Derek: Miss you.

Me: Right back at ya.

Derek: Thanks for not giving me that task.

Me: I'd never!

He chuckles and continues taking the video. I want them to look back at such moments and

appreciate each other even more.

We all walk to the leggings section and Nolwazi begins going through the sizes.

Nandi: Malusi has always been a grey type of man...

Nolwazi: And Dean is a navy guy.

This is so funny. I'm worried that Dean will never forgive me, but I'll deal with that later.

Gabi: Let me get the tops.

Nomvuyo: I'll help...

Gabi and Nomvuyo walk off.

I look at Dean. He gives me the coldest look and I shiver. I refuse to feel bad! He tortured me

regarding this pregnancy, so he must pay!
Nolwazi and Nandi pick the sizes and
show us.

Nolwazi: There you go, daddy.

She laughs as Dean snatches the navy
leggings.

Nandi: Thatha baba ka Lele.

Malusi snatches the grey leggings.

We continue laughing.

Gabi walks back with two tops.

Gabi: Now, because Malusi has such a
sexy body, I think this white sleeveless
shirtdress is

perfect. It will show off his amazing arms,
you know?

Everyone is just laughing like lunatics.

Nomvuyo: And then, for Dean, I selected a
lovely crop top. Seeing as he as a great
torso, I would

like him to show it off, you know? Also,
it's summer, kuyashisha.

We continue laughing.

Nandi: Alright then, please go to the dressing room and do your thing.

Nolwazi literally had to push Dean in there...

We're now standing by the dressing room.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini, I will never forget this shit.

Nomvuyo: Very special.

Liwa: You literally managed to strip off these idiots' masculinity!

We laugh.

Liwa: I'll always remind them of this day. I check the time and it's now around 1pm. We're behind... Thankfully, we're almost done.

Out of nowhere, Nandi lets out a scream. We all look towards the dressing room entrance and scream as well.

Malusi stands there with leggings and a very tight shirtdress, the buttons are holding on for dear life! Oh my goodness!

Nandi: Lusi!

She has her phone and is busy taking pictures.

Nandi: You better worrrk, baby daddy!

Liwa is literally on the floor, dying from laughter. If I was Malusi, I'd be in tears. I'd be dying from

humiliation. Liwa's laugh is just like Dean's. It's that laugh that makes you feel so small, that you end up doubting your existence.

Malusi looks at everyone blankly. I think the only way he's dealing with this is by drifting off into

another world and zoning us out. Lol, I kinda feel bad for him, because the way these people are

laughing at him? Kuyanyiwa.

After a while, Nolwazi walks in the dressing room. Dean seems to be refusing to come out,

because we waited a long time.

Eventually Nolwazi walks out. She was clearly holding in her laughter.

Nolwazi: Take it easy on him, okay?

We all look at Liwa, who has finally recovered from Malusi's grand entrance.

Liwa: I can't make any promises.

We all keep quiet and look at the entrance.

I am so nervous and excited.

Within a minute, Dianna is standing there.

Dianna has navy leggings and a white crop top

written "I'm sexy and I know it!"

Yhu, I tried to keep it together, but this time around, I was on the floor with Liwa.

I didn't even

realise that Derek was also laughing as hard as as Liwa and I.

I was lost in a world of true raw laughter for such a long time, that when I finally recovered, I was beyond dizzy.

Dean is so angry, he could kill me, and I know it.

Nandi: Alright then, you two need to go to any salesperson and ask for a picture.

Malusi: Can we get this shit over and done with?

Malusi walks off and comes back with Lebo, who is confused and amused.

Malusi: Take a picture of us.

Nandi: Haibo Lusi, not even a “please?”

Malusi: Nandipha, just shut the fuck up. We all laugh.

The salesperson takes Liwa’s phone and takes lots of pictures of Diana and Miranda.

Nolwazi: Langa, you have to smile.

Dean doesn't say anything.

Gabi: I think we should add bagsMalusi:

Don't fuck with me.

Gabi: But, it w-

Diana is already walking back to the dressing room. Miranda follows him and we continue laughing.

Liwa: Shit, man. Fucken shit!

We finally finish up, after many laughs. I don't think I have ever laughed this much in my entire

life. Lebo walks to us with an envelope.

She gives it to Nandi, who reads it.

Nandi: Hopefully, this was a fun activity that you all enjoyed, except for Dean and Malusi.

Liwa: Damn right we enjoyed that shit.

Nandi: Seeing as you're at the mall, it is time to go shopping! The aim is for each of you to shop for a semi-casual outfit. Yes, this is not Saxton or Rosebank, so you will work with what you have here. Seeing as you're all couples, it is important for your outfits to complement each other. Ladies, please get your necessary makeup as well. Go wild, and have fun! You have 30 minutes to shop. Once you've found the perfect outfits, you should gather by the elephant statue outside, where your next clue will be.

Nandi looks at us.

Nandi: Comprendre?

We all nod.

Nandi: It's 13:30 right now. Let's meet by the statue at 13:55?

We all nod.

Nandi: Alright then, people. See ya later...
She looks at Malusi.

Nandi: Are we a couple right now?

Malusi: Mxm.

Konje these two have their issues. I need to find out from Nomvuyo whether Nandi is seeing someone else.

I finally have Derek all to myself! I'm not one to be all touchy feely in public, but right now, I'm doing the most. And as usual, Derek is enjoying it. He seems to like it when I'm clingy.

Derek: What are we going to wear?

Me: How about we start at McD's and get me a McFlurry?

Derek: You want ice-cream?

I nod.

Derek: Okay.

We walk to McD's and get me some ice-cream. Once we're done, we walk around.

Derek: I can't believe you planned this entire day by yourself.

Me: Well, I did get help.

Derek: From whom?

I chuckle.

Me: Jeff.

Derek: Ah... I see... The escort guy?

I laugh.

Me: He's the one who sorted out the people and gave them the clues.

Derek: Hmm... Is this our last task?

Me: Not really, but it's the last crazy activity.

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean neh...

Me: He will never forgive me.

Derek: Hai suka...

It's now 13:55 and we're all here except for Joe and Gabi.

Me: Can someone call them?

Nandi calls her and tells her we're ready to leave. After 10 minutes, they walk to where we are.

Gabi: We couldn't find the perfect outfit for Joey.

Nandi: Did you end up finding something?

Gabi: I guess.

Just then, one of the car guards comes to us and Nandi takes the envelope from him.

Nandi begins reading.

Nandi: Well done on making it this far!

You should all be proud!

Dean hasn't even looked at me. He hates me!

Nandi: A taxi should be pulling up close to where you are right now. Here is the number plate...

Nandi reads the number plate and we all see a Quantum close to where we are.

Nandi: This taxi will take you to a house, where you will all freshen up. Thereafter, you will get your next clue.

Gabi: Whose house is this?

I roll my eyes.

I don't need her snobbish negativity right now. I'm hungry and exhausted.

We all walk to the taxi and get in...

Jeff was kind enough to let me use his Soweto double storey. I'm sure a lot of hoeish activities take place in it, but it is what it is.

At around 3pm, we're all fresh and ready.

Nandi: You look amazing guys!

Liwa: We clean up nicely.

Nandi: Okay, so we're ready now.

Nomvuyo: And hungry.

Liwa rubs her belly.

Liwa: Ziyanda, I hope we're going to eat now.

I shrug.

I'm also starving.

Nandi: Everyone ready?

Nolwazi: Dean is still upstairs.

Me: I'll get him.

Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: And apologize to him, please.

Me: Okay.

I walk up to the bedroom and knock on the door. I walk in and find Dean sitting on the bed.

Me: Is it safe to come in?

He looks at me blankly and I walk in anyway, and close the door. I sit next to him and sigh.

Me: I'm not sorry.

He looks at me and I smile innocently.

Me: You made fun of me as well! I didn't mope around!

Dean: You had a hissy fit.

Me: Argh, fuck off.

He chuckles lightly and I smile.

Me: Are you ready?

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'm nervous.

Dean: I'm shitting my pants.

Me: She doesn't even have a clue!

He groans.

Dean: We had a great day. Thank you.

Me: Anything for you, meanie.

I stand and pull him up.

Me: Let's do this!

I wrap my arms around him and we share a hug.

Me: Asambe.

We walk out and make our way downstairs to everyone.

Nandi finds an envelope in the kitchen and reads it.

Nandi: You're almost there! The finish line is near! Now that you're all fresh, go outside and get in your taxi. It will take you to your next destination.

Gabi: This is a nice house, Zi. Who owns it?

Me: A friend.

Gabi: Hmm, okay.

We all walk out and get in the taxi.

Within 15 minutes, we're driving in eUbuntu Kraal.

Nomvuyo: When last was I here...

Nolwazi: Is this a park?

Nomvuyo: Events take place here.

Nolwazi: Ohh...

Gabi: Is that set up for us?

Nolwazi: Wait, is that my family??

We all walk towards the large round table that is set up. It's absolutely exquisite! I am happy!

Thandeka, Dumakude, Mdu, Zimkitha, Lindelwa, and Xolani are all here!

Nolwazi: Mama, what are you doing here??

Thandeka: Ziyanda invited us for a late lunch.

I look at Nolwazi's dad. Lol, he reminds me so much of my father. However, my father doesn't

look mean. He's kind until you come at him sideways. Nolwazi's father, on the other hand,

seems to be mean 24/7.

Everyone shares hugs and we all sit.

Zimkitha: How was your day?

Nomvuyo: Tiring!

Nolwazi: It was amazing. I've never spent such a long time in Soweto.

Thandeka: It's our fault. We should have gotten a house this side.

Nolwazi: I doubt that Ivy would even agree to live this side.

Me: Hey! What are you trying to say?
They laugh.

We continue chatting for a while.

I'm a nervous mess, but I can't imagine how Dean feels!

INSERT 120 (Unedited)

Gosh, as soon as I see Ivy walking towards us, I feel my whole mood reach a zero.

Ivy: Heyyy!

Everyone greets her back excitedly. I feel Derek's hand brushing my thigh and I look at him. He

gives me an encouraging smile and I sigh. I'll just have to suck it up and ignore her.

Ivy: Dad is even here??

Thandeka: It took a lot of convincing.

Ivy: He likes acting fresh vele.

They all laugh. She then looks at me and doesn't say anything.

Nolwazi: Uhm, Zamo, come sit next to me. She then sits on the empty seat between Joe and Nolwazi.

I'm sitting in between Dean and Derek. I keep glancing at Dean, and I can tell that he is dying from nerves.

After a few minutes, I see Mdu approaching the table. I avoid how good he looks by focusing on Derek.

Me: I need the bathroom. I'll be back.

Derek: Can I go with you?

Me: No. Stay here.

He groans as I stand and walk off...

When I come back, everyone is still chatting and laughing. I look over at Xolani and I can tell that he's not 100% fine. He's not his usual carefree self. I make a mental reminder to check on him as soon as all of this is done.

Just then, one of our waiters gives Nandi an envelope.

Nandi: Thank you, dear.

She opens it and begins reading.

Nandi: Welcome to the last part of your race. Here, you get to relax and have fun with your loved

ones. Your last task is very simple: Use this time to tell your partner how much you love them

and why you value them so much. Take the time to appreciate each other as a group as well.

Nandi puts down the paper and looks at everyone with a smile.

Zimkitha: Clearly this race was great. We should have joined you.

Liwa: It was quite insightful. Dianna and Miranda came out to play.

Everyone laughs for a good 5 minutes.

Dumakude: You'll have to send me these pictures. When Hlongwane troubles me, I'll pull out the big guns.

They continue laughing. I'm out here stressed for Dean.

Zimkitha: Anyway, seeing as I don't have a partner-

Liwa: Don't lie. I'm sure you have a line of old men waiting on you.

Zimkitha laughs sweetly.

Zimkitha: Hai suka wena. I'm too old to date.

Liwa chuckles sarcastically.

Zimkitha: Anyway, I'll start this circle of love.

Everyone focuses on her as she smiles. She really is the foundation of this circle; she brings all of them together.

Zimkitha: So, I am very grateful for having all of you in my life. The love in this circle is

absolutely mind-blowing! We fuss and fight all the time, but we always learn from our mistakes.

It takes a great deal of maturity to put aside your interests just to ensure that the next person is good. We all vibrate on the same frequency.

Nolwazi: Vibrate on the same frequency... I love that!

Zimkitha nods and smiles.

Zimkitha: My hope is that once I'm dead, you'll continue loving each other so deeply.

Thandeka: That's my hope as well. I love how tight you are. Your bond is special.

You push each

other, in a positive way, to reach your goals. Keep it up!

Ivy: Mama, wena why do you love the evil man over there?

Everyone laughs (the guys are laughing a bit nervously).

As much as I don't like this girl, I'm glad she asked this question. I'm very curious about the

Dumakudes. I don't spend much time with them, so I want to know more.

Thandeka: The first thing that attracted me to him was the fact that he had a bright future. Yes,

he wasn't wealthy, but I could tell that he was going to build an empire for himself.

Ivy: Wow, so you were a gold digger?

Thandeka: I was... The gold wasn't there, so I had to dig very deeply.

We all laugh.

Thandeka: I was getting my degrees phela, so there was no way I was going to date an

uneducated man with no vision. With Vusi, I would tell that he was going to be successful. He

had the drive and ambition.

Ivy: Manje wena baba why did you ask mom out?

Dumakude: Because of her beauty.

Nolwazi: Wow, shallow much?

Dumakude: I wanted a pretty woman with no substance.

Nolwazi: Wow!

Sies! This man has no shame!

Dumakude: When I asked her out, she told me she'd never go out with the likes of me.

Ivy: Likes of you?

Thandeka: He was very rural and uncivilised. He was a legitimate farm boy. Everyone laughs.

Dumakude: I have no idea why I was attracted to her feistiness. I had never been with an outspoken girl. I can't explain what made me want her more.

Thandeka: Don't lie. You know very well that I introduced you to some great sexual experiences.

Mdu: REALLY?!

Nolwazi: DISGUSTING!

Ivy: Yaaas mama, yaaas!

Everyone laughs.

Nolwazi: We can stop having this discussion now!

Dumakude chuckles.

Dumakude: Your mother and I are very compatible. What she brings to the table is completely

different to what I bring. We've built a great life for ourselves and I don't think I'd do it with

anyone else. Because we're so different, we find ourselves making a lot of compromises. It's

been said that the greatest trip one can make is to meet other people halfway...

That's basically

how we've made it this far. Relationships aren't daisies and roses. It takes a lot of work. Just

because you're in love with each other, it doesn't mean you won't have days where you want

nothing to do with each other. It takes maturity to work through the lows and leave them behind once you've sorted things out.

Ivy: Preeach!

Thandeka: That was beautiful, baby. She gets closer to Dumakude and kisses his cheek.

Mdu grunts and I look at him. He is definitely a mini version of his father.

Zimkitha: I think the authenticity of the love in this circle can also be seen through Nandi and

Malusi. You two are divorced, but you've maintained a good relationship.

I look at Malusi.

He doesn't seem to agree, but he's sucking it up. That's what you get for breaking up your family. Uzoqina.

I listen to everyone go on and on about why they love each other. I'm genuinely happy in this moment. Love is special! It's great to see people loving each other so openly and sincerely.

After a while, everyone focuses on Nolwazi and Dean.

Nolwazi: Is it our turn?

Zimkitha chuckles.

Zimkitha: You two are so mysterious. Tell us why you love each other!

Nolwazi: We're not mysterious!

Ivy: The only person who's mysterious here is Mdu! I will make it a point to find out who's been

keeping his shady ass busy!

Nolwazi clears her throat as Mdu tightens his jaw.

Nolwazi looks at Dean and smiles.

Nolwazi: Langa is my person, guys. I love this man.

Ivy: I must admit that you're my goals. I'm beyond glad you're done with that fool, Kwanele!

I take a sip of my water.

Nolwazi clears her throat once again. I feel Derek's hand on my thigh again. He knows this girl is intentionally trying to get to me.

Nolwazi: Anyway, Dean reminds me of my dad. Protective and full of love. I got a good one here.

Aww! Surely, this is a good time for Dean to slide in??

I pinch Dean's thigh and he clears his throat.

Nolwazi: You don't have to say anything. I know you're not much of a talker when it comes to such.

Everyone laughs.

Dean: I want to.

Everyone quietens down and listens.

My heart is pounding!

Dean: We've known each other for many years... We started off as interns many years back, and

then we went our separate ways for a few more years... We then got together again, but this

time around I was your boss, and I had a Dr. Title.

Nolwazi: Hey!

He chuckles.

Nolwazi: I'm going to start with my PhD because I am tired of your bragging!

He sighs.

Dean: I won't lie and say your relationship with Kwanele made me happy. Looking back, I've

always wanted to be with you, but it was never the right time. You obviously wouldn't know because you were so in love with Kwanele.

Nolwazi shrugs.

Dean: I've never been one to want serious relationships, but as soon as I heard about that

divorce, I knew I had to make my move.

Nolwazi: But, you were very shy and nervous.

Dean: Who? Don't come for me.

I chuckle.

Ivy: Don't come for me?

Nolwazi: He's been hanging around Ziyanda for too long.

Everyone laughs.

Liwa: Even Nomvuyo speaks like that now.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: I wasn't nervous... I was just careful.

Nolwazi: Hmm.

Dean: Anyway, I've never felt like this about anyone in my life. I've never been filled with so

much love for a person.

Everyone says, "Awww!"

Dean: You are such a phenomenal woman. Your heart generates love so effortlessly, that I feel

the need to protect you even more, because I don't want you to be hurt.

You've exposed me to a part of myself I had no idea existed. I had no idea that I was capable of loving like this. When

I'm with you, the rest of the world is not a factor. You're genuinely the apple of my eye.

Guys, Dean! Dean Hlongwane!

Nolwazi is now teary-eyed.

Dean: When I look at our babies, my love multiplies even more. I can't explain it, Nolwazi. I'm thankful that I get to call you the mother of my children; you and I get to raise children together...

Dean then stands and raises his glass.

Dean: I don't usually do this, but I'd like everyone to stand while I dedicate a toast to the love of my life and the mother of my children.

Everyone stands. I don't know how, but the mood has changed. Everyone is dead quiet and all

emotional. I guess it's because we're not used to this side of Dean.

Dean: Nolwazi, I love you. Thank you for teaching me how to love. I don't see myself being with anyone else.

Nolwazi wipes her tears and smiles.

Thandeka is also sobbing.

Dean: I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I'll never allow you to slip away from me.

He sighs.

Is he crying? He sounds like he's holding back the tears!

Dean: Thank you for loving me regardless of my flaws. I know I'm a flawed man, everyone knows this...

He looks around and we all chuckle.

Dean: But I feel protected in your love. Your heart is my safe place...

Nolwazi: Langa...

He puts down his glass and rubs his eyes.

Dean: Hopefully, this is first and last time I have to do this...

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Express your love for me?

Dean shakes his head lightly and digs in his pocket.

As soon as everyone realises what's happening, they're all screaming.

Dean is now kneeling and looking up at Nolwazi.

Dean: I hope this is the first and last time I ask you to marry me.

I swear I almost fainted!

Nolwazi dropped her glass and is now looking down at Dean with pure shock!

Dean: Nolwazi, I love you with all my heart... My family adores you, and I cannot imagine my life

without you in it. I hope you will say yes and make me the happiest man on Earth...

Everyone is staring in utter shock! The only thing audible is the sobbing.

He reaches for her hand and sighs.

Dean: Will you marry me?

Nolwazi is a sobbing mess and I don't blame her! I'm also crying!

Nolwazi: Yes, Dean. Of course, I'll marry you!

As he slides the ring on her finger, everyone cheers!

I sit down and sigh in relief.

My job is done.

I feel so lightheaded.

INSERT 121

It's been 30 minutes since Nolwazi said yes to Dean. Music is playing and people are dancing and having fun.

I'm exhausted. I've been sitting here, drinking water, because I'm not allowed to have alcohol.

I see Xolani standing a bit far from our setup; he's on the phone. I stand and make my way to

him and find him yelling at whoever he's speaking to.

He ends the call when he sees me.

Me: Xolani.

He smiles lightly and opens up his arms.

We share a hug and he squeezes me.

Xolani: You seem to have forgotten about me.

Me: Don't say that!

He sighs.

Me: Are you okay?

Xolani: I'm going through a midlife crisis.

He chuckles.

Me: Want to talk about it?

Xolani: Brunch tomorrow?

Me: Okay.

He smiles.

Xolani: I've been told that you organised this whole thing.

Me: I tried.

Xolani: Maybe you should start an events business.

Me: Not now. I'd like to go sleep.

He chuckles.

Just then, I feel Derek's arms around me.

Derek: I've been looking for you.

Xolani: I should get going now.

Derek: See you around.

Xolani nods and then looks at me.

Xolani: See you tomorrow.

Me: Yes.

Xolani: Stunning!

He walks off and I turn to look at Derek.

Derek: You look like you're ready to pass out.

Me: I am.

He chuckles.

Derek: Then let's go home.

I nod and yawn. He then takes my hand and we walk back to the table.

Nolwazi hugs me tightly as soon as I get there.

Nolwazi: Thank you!

Me: You're welcome.

She kisses my cheek and smiles.

Nolwazi: I guess I'm indebted to you?

Me: I'll think about that.

She laughs.

She's happy. She's so happy, and I'm happy for her!

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Me: It's a pleasure.

Nolwazi: I love the ring!

Me: Right??

She sighs happily and I smile.

Dean: Can I have a word with Zi?

Nolwazi: Of course. Take your person.

Dean chuckles as he takes my hand and we walk away from the scene.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Hlongz.

He sighs.

Dean: I guess your job is done.

Me: I guess so.

Dean: Thank you.

Me: You're welcome.

Dean: Go and rest. You look like you're ready to drop dead.

Me: Argh, whatever!

He gives me a hug and we walk back to where everyone is.

Derek: Ready to go?

I nod.

Ivy: The planner is leaving us?

I walk to Zimkitha and give her a hug. Ivy is a non-mother-fucken-factor in my life.

I'll continue to

ignore her till she gets the message. I don't need this negativity in my life.

Me: Goodbye everyone.

Thandeka: Bye, baby. Get some rest.

Liwa: So, how are we getting our cars?

Me: The Quantum that brought us here is outside.

Liwa: Perfect. See you around, Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Alright.

Derek and I finish saying our goodbyes and make our way out. We get an Uber that takes us

back to my parents' house. When we get there, Lwazi is excited to see me, as usual.

Lwazi: Mommy, I want to see where you live!

We all look at each in shock. She's so random!

Derek: How about you sleepover sometime during the week?

Lwazi: Perfect!

My mom laughs.

Mom: Uyaphapha kodwa Lwazi!

Lwazi giggles as she walks off to her bedroom.

Mom: Are you heading home now?

Me: Yep.

My dad and I are fine now. I'm no longer mad at him for being mad at me.

Mom: How was the proposal?

Derek: It was amazing. I'm very impressed by Ziyanda's planning.

Mom: My baby always shows up.

Dad: It must have been a great moment for Dean.

Derek: He was very nervous.

Mom: How sweet.

Me: Alright then, I think we should get going.

Mom: You look exhausted.

Me: Am I that bad na? Everyone keeps saying this.

Mom: Hambani.

Me: Bye then.

I call Lwazi and we say goodbye to her. Thereafter, we make our way to the car and drive off.

When we get home, I throw myself on the bed and doze off. I feel Derek taking off my shoes.

Minutes later, he makes me reposition, so I can sleep comfortably. He then begins removing my

makeup and I chuckle sleepily. I've trained him well.

I doze off immediately.

The following morning, I am awakened by Derek's body on me. I feel his face close to mine and

I groan. He plants a kiss on my lips and I feel him smile.

Me: Hmm.

He continues kissing me till I respond and kiss him back. He begins trailing kisses down my neck to my breasts.

How am I naked? When did I take off my clothes?

He kisses my nipples tenderly and I wiggle. He nibbles on them and continues making his way down south. When he gets between my thighs, I'm already ready.

Derek: Want to go back to sleep?

Me: Don't come for me.

He laughs as he continues awakening my body and senses...

When we finally finish that lovely morning round, we make our way to the lounge.

Derek: There was a delivery for you earlier this morning.

Me: Really?

He nods and points to a box on the table. I walk to it and open it.

Me: Who's it from?

Derek: Dean.

Me: Hmm.

I squeal as soon as I see what's inside.

Me: Did he get me this??

Derek: Well, I told him to get that, I guess he went wild...

I exclaim as I take out all the bundles of weaves in there! There are four bundles of straight long hair, four curly bundles and four wavy bundles.

Me: Oh my goodness!

He chuckles.

Me: Stunning! Stunning! Stunning!

I take my phone and video-call Dean. He answers begrudgingly. He's still in bed.

Me: Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

Dean: Hmm.

Me: Thank youuuuu!

Dean: Bye.

He ends the call and I sigh happily.

Me: Hmyghad!

Derek: I didn't know this shit is so expensive.

Me: Yaaas!

My mood went from 100 to 200!

Me: Thank you for suggesting these heavenly bundles.

Derek shakes his head and laughs lightly.

Derek: Come help me make breakfast.

Me: Huh?

He chuckles.

Derek: Woza.

Me: Are you patronising me?

Derek: What? Silly old me?

I stand and follow him to the kitchen.

Derek: What do you feel like eating?

Me: I don't know. I think I want
Cornflakes.

Derek: I'm in the mood to cook up a
storm.

Me: Uhm, okay then, Chef Ngidi.
He laughs as he takes out his ingredients.

Derek: Switch on the stove, baby.

Me: Okay.

I do as I am told.

He then continues throwing orders and I
oblige.

My phone rings, and I walk to the lounge
to answer it without checking the caller
id.

Me: Hello?

Niki: Babe!

Me: Hey!

Niki: What happened to us meeting?

Me: Yoh.

Niki: I'm coming over for lunch. Tell
Derek to cook.

Me: Bu-

She ends the call.

Just then, I remember that I'm supposed to meet up with Xolani. I quickly dial his number and

he answers.

Xolani: Zizi.

Me: Hey!

Xolani: No, you're not cancelling on me.

Me: Uhm.

Xolani: Meet me at Mike's Kitchen at 10.
I sigh.

He ends the call.

Yoh.

All I want is to chill with Derek. Why are people doing this to me?

I go to the kitchen and groan.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: I'm supposed to meet Xolani in an hour.

Derek: Don't involve me, please. I'd like a peaceful day.

Me: Well, too bad, because Niki says she's coming here for lunch.

He sighs and shakes his head.

Derek: You're lucky I love you.

Me: Let me get ready for my date with your brother.

Derek: So, you're not having breakfast with me?

Me: I obviously can't, dummy.

I walk away and get ready for this brunch session with Xolani.

When I get to Mike's Kitchen, I find Xolani there, looking like a snack!

Me: Hey!

He stands and we share a hug.

Xolani: Hey, baby.

We sit and he places an order for drinks.

Me: I'll have water.

He looks at me weirdly.

Xolani: Uyabheda lo. Please get her a Long Island cocktail.

Me: No!

Xolani: I'm not drinking by myself.

I look at the waiter and tell her to get me water. She walks off and I stare at Xolani.

Me: I'm cleansing!

He laughs and shakes his head.

Xolani: Women are strange. You like doing these weird things.

Me: Whatever!

Xolani: Anyway, how are you?

Me: I'm good. Just focusing on work, you know?

He nods.

Me: As I told you yesterday, I moved in with your brother...

Xolani: You two are perfect.

Me: Hmm, not quite.

Xolani: Really?

Me: We're still getting to know each other... We have our moments.

He nods.

Me: How are you? I know you're not fine.

He chuckles.

Xolani: I'm going through relationship drama.

Me: Really??

Xolani: Let me build context for you...

I nod.

Xolani: I'm basically in love with a soon-to-be married man.

Me: Xolani!

He sighs.

Xolani: And he's marrying a woman.

Me: What?!

He rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Xolani: He's gay, unquestionably gay.

Me: But about to get married!

He shrugs.

Me: Xolani, no!

Xolani: Is it wrong that I don't feel bad?

Me: Yes!

He sighs and finishes his drink.

Xolani: He told me about his proposal plan... He's proposing soon.

Me: How did you meet? Were you with him before he was with the girl?

He nods.

Xolani: We dated for a year and then he ended it.

I nod.

Xolani: And then, when we were broken up, he dated this random girl for about 6 months. Now he's planning on proposing.

I look at him in shock.

Me: Manje when did you and him start dating again?

Xolani: Two months ago.

Me: Yoh.

Xolani: I'm going to stop that wedding.

Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd be involved in this type of drama.

Me: So, what's the problem? Do the parents hate the fact that he's gay?

He chuckles.

Xolani: He's white.

Me: Ye??

Xolani: They don't want him to be with me, because I'm black. His undercover sexual

preferences aren't even the issue. Race is the issue here.

Me: Wowzer!

Xolani: So, yes. I'm in love with a white man, who's getting married to a white girl, and whose parents are racist pricks.

I drink my water and sigh heavily.

Xolani: Kunzima.

Me: Damn...

Xolani: Yep...

Our food comes and we begin eating.
Just then, Xolani looks up and smiles.
I turn my head to see what got him
grinning. I see a white guy walking
towards our table.

Me: Xolani, really??

Xolani smiles innocently.

Xolani: What? I'd like you to meet him.
For fuck's sake. When the Universe shows
up, it shows off, huh?

INSERT 122

This white man gets to our table.

Xolani: Hi, baby.

The guy greets back and they share a hug.

Xolani: Zi, this is Leon... Leon, this is Zi, my
brother's future wife.

Leon, who looks 30 something, smiles at
me and opens up his arms.

Am I supposed to hug him?

I stand and we share a hug.

Leon: Hi, Zi.

Me: Hello.

We sit and I drink my water.

Xolani: Zi, isn't he cute?

Uhm, no. He looks like some racist office administrator.

I chuckle awkwardly.

Xolani: So, I wanted you t-

Just then, my phone rings, and boy am I relieved when I see Derek's name.

Me: Sorry, I have to answer this.

I stand and walk away.

Me: Derek!

Derek: I'm meeting up with the guys.

Me: No!

I know he's frowning wherever he is.

Derek: And then?

Me: Derek, I need to leave this place! I want to come back home!

He chuckles.

Derek: What happened?

Me: Dude, Xolani invited his boyfriend here-

Derek: Boyfriend?

Me: Yes!

Derek: I didn't know he had one.

Me: The white guy!

Derek: Excuse me?

Me: The white guy!

Derek: Leon?

Me: Yes!

There's silence for a few seconds.

Derek: What the fuck?

Me: What's wr-

Derek: Xolani is back with Leon? He's with him as we speak?

Me: Uhm... It seems like it... What's happening? I feel like you know something.

Derek: Where are you?

I tell him nervously.

Derek: I'm coming.

Me: Wha-

He ends the call and I'm left standing there, confused as hell.

What the hell is going on?

I eventually walk back to the table and find them chatting. There's something unusual about

them. I've never seen Xolani like this. He looks at Leon like he's his everything, like he's

obsessed with him. It's strange.

I sit and Leon looks at me intently.

Leon: You don't drink?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm cleansing.

He chuckles.

Xolani: Boring, right?

Leon smiles.

Leon: Cleansing is good for one's system...

Xolani would know.

What's that supposed to mean?

Gosh, they are so awkward, and now I can't leave, because Derek told me to stay.

Leon: Where are you from, Zi?

Me: Soweto.

Leon: Nice...

He goes on to interrogate me and I give him one-word answers. Clearly there's something

wrong with this guy, for Derek to have such a reaction after I tell him he's here.

I'm still trying to figure out why I am here.

Why is Xolani trying to involve me in his mess? I'm confused.

After a while, I see Derek's car. He gets out and walks towards the entrance, but I stand and

walk to him, because we're sitting outside.

Me: Ngidi.

He sees me and walks to me.

Me: What the hell is going on?
He has his usual “Don’t fuck with me”
look. In this moment, he looks exactly like
Dean. It’s odd
and scary at the same time. Now, I’m not
sure if the coldness is directed at me or
the situation
at hand.

Anyway, he-yes-he, leads me to the table
where Leon and Xolani are sitting, they
are looking all
lovey dovey. Leon’s cool face changes as
soon as Derek towers over him.

Derek: Really, Xolani?

Xolani looks at Derek.

I’m struggling to read Xolani expression.

Is he scared?

Why is Derek like this? Is it because he
knows that Leon has a wife-to-be
elsewhere? Maybe he
doesn’t want Xolani to get hurt.

Derek: Xolani.

Xolani keeps quiet.

I'm now staring at Derek. Yes, I've seen him pissed here and there, but this is different. I've

never seen him like this. If it were possible, he'd be exhaling fire.

There's a moment of silence.

Leon then smiles.

Leon: Derek-

Before I know it, before everyone knows it, Derek throws a quick and intense punch at Leon.

I think I'm dreaming. I'm frozen.

He doesn't stop.

Leon falls off his chair and Derek continues pounding him.

When I see all the blood, that's when it all sinks in.

There's commotion. These tiny waiters are trying to hold Derek back, but he's too strong. Xolani

is also trying to fight him, but he's unsuccessful.

Me: Derek!

I've lost him. This man is in another zone and I'm sure all he sees is red. It's difficult for one to

come back when they're in such a zone.

Other customers get involved and some big random guy manages to stop Derek.

He holds

Derek from behind, and removes him from the chaos.

Leon's blood is everywhere.

Now, the manager is there, and he is on the phone.

That's when I start to panic. Is he calling the police?

I quickly snap out of it and rush to the manager.

Me: Sir, please don't call the cops!

He looks at me coldly.

Me: Please! This whole thing was a misunderstanding!

I'm panicking now, because I'm worried that these cops will get here, and something bad will happen. We all know how serious they take such incidents (especially if they affect the privileged minority).

I want to go check on Derek, but I need to make sure that this manager doesn't do anything extreme.

I go on to makeup a lie that makes it seem like Derek is the innocent one, and that this whole thing was simply a misunderstanding.

He's aggressive at first, but he eventually gives in and says he won't call the police.

All I need to

do right now is remove all of these people from the property.

I talk to Xolani first, who's catering to Leon.

Me: Xolani, please take him to a pharmacy or someplace where they can do something about all this blood.

Xolani: Where the fuck is Derek?! Fuck h-

Me: Don't you dare cause another scene! Take your things and leave, now!

Xolani: Fu-

Me: Xolani!

He keeps quiet.

Me: This manager has threatened to call the police. Go, now!

He tries to speak, but I give him a deadly look.

Me: Take Leon, and leave!

I watch as he does as he is told and they stagger away.

Derek.

Now, I have to find him.

I walk inside the restaurant and make my way to the bathrooms. I find him there, washing his

hands. The big guy, who removed him from the scene, is standing there, watching him.

The guy looks at me from head to toe.

Guy: You with him?

I nod.

He also nods and then walks out. Derek finishes washing his hands and then pushes past me and walks out.

The fuck?

I sigh heavily and follow him out. We walk to his car and get in. He drives out and focuses on the road.

I feel like I'm going to die from speed. He's driving too fast for my liking.

Me: Please be mindful of your speed.

He ignores me and continues speeding.

I say silent prayer and accept that I'm dying soon.

I soon realise that he's driving to Nomvuyo and Liwa's house.

He parks outside.

Derek: Go in.

Me: Excuse me?

He glances at me, as if I'm annoying him, I'm some nuisance.

Haibo, what did I do? All I want to know is why I'm being told to go in this house.

Why am I not

taken home, and people can go wherever they want to if they need space?

Derek: Ziyanda, I said get the fuck-

Me: Ungalinge wena. Don't even think for a second that you can address to me like that.

He keeps quiet.

Rha!

Me: Nxa.

I take my bag and get out.

I shut that door like there's no tomorrow.

This idiot. Instead of getting out of the car and try to explain himself, he drives off within

seconds. Now I am pissed! Why is he taking out his frustrations on me? I

literally had to save

his ass from going to jail! I should have let that manager call the police, so his

ungrateful ass

can go be someone wife there in Block E.

I dial Nomvuyo's number and tell her I'm outside. Within seconds, the gate is open and I make

my way in. As I'm walking, I type a very heated message to Derek. Ungijwayela kabi lo!

I get to the door and find it open. I walk in and go to the kitchen, Nomvuyo's favourite place.

As soon as she sees me, she squeals.

Unfortunately, I'm not as excited to see her.

Nomvuyo: And then?

Me: I'm so angry!

Nomvuyo: Yini?

Me: I'd like a glass of wine.

Nomvuyo: Hawu, what happened to cleansing?

Me: I'm done.

Nomvuyo: Yoh, okay.

We walk to the cellar and she takes out a random bottle and pours me some red wine.

We walk to the lounge and sit.

Nomvuyo: And then?

As soon as I take a sip of that wine, my whole body switches up on. I vomit right then and there, instantly.

Nomvuyo looks at me in shock.

Nomvuyo: What the fuck is wrong with you?!

I start getting emotional.

Nomvuyo: What's going on?

Me: Derek is busy punching white men and now he's taking out his frustrations on me! My

emotions are all over the place, I'm vomiting like crazy. Now, I can't drink my wine in peace, because of this fucken pregnancy!

Her jaw drops.

I stand and leave her there to go find stuff to clean this vomit with.

When I walk back to the lounge, she's still sitting there with her open mouth.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda!

I proceed to clean up my mess. Once I'm done, I go wash my hands and come back with a glass

of water. I sit down and sigh heavily.

Nomvuyo: You're pregnant?!

I roll my eyes and grunt.

Nomvuyo: Oh my goodness!

She smiles and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: Cong-

Me: No, stop.

She stops.

Me: I want you to tell me everything you know about Derek and Xolani.

She looks at me weirdly.

I begin telling her about the situation.

Once I'm done, she sighs.

Nomvuyo: All I know is that Xolani became a drug addict because of Leon...

Me: Huh??

She shrugs.

Nomvuyo: The guy introduced Xolani to cocaine.

Me: What?? How??

She shrugs again.

Nomvuyo: I thought he stopped communicating with Leon after he came back from rehab...

Clearly not...

I'm speechless!

Nomvuyo: So, I'm sure that's why Derek is pissed.

I finish my water and sink on the couch.

I can't right now.

INSERT 123 (Short Insert)

I don't know when I fell asleep, but I found myself waking up and feeling like I was out of touch with reality.

I stretch and sit up.

Derek is sitting on the opposite couch, staring at me. All the anger I had towards him seems to have evaporated via the nap I took.

Instead, I just want to hold him and sleep some more.

Also, I can tell that he's a bit nervous. He's waiting for me to explode on his ass.

I take a deep breath.

Me: You're too far.

He raises his eyebrow. I stare at him, and he eventually stands and sits next to him.

Me: Do you mind telling me what happened?

He scratches his chin thoughtfully and then sighs.

Derek: Nomvuyo says she told you.

Me: I want to hear it from you.

He is quiet for a while.

Derek: Leon introduced Xolani to cocaine.

Me: When was this?

Derek: About two years ago.

Me: Did he go to rehab?

He nods.

Derek: Leon is a bad influence, Ziyanda.

He introduced my brother to a very toxic world.

Me: How did you get involved?

He shrugs.

Derek: I knew I had to save him. He was close to losing it.

Me: And where was Leon?

Derek: Leon is a piece of shit. He's been trying to tempt him back.

Me: They haven't been in each other's others lives since?

Derek: Clearly not. I knew that something was up with him... I just knew it...

He rubs his eyes and I keep quiet. For once, I don't know what to say.

We sit in silence for a long time.

I eventually get closer to him till I'm in his arms.

Me: I don't know what to say.

He chuckles quietly.

He's not here. He's here physically, but he's not here emotionally or mentally.

Me: I'm sorry.

He keeps quiet.

Me: How can we help him?

His body tenses up and I can tell that he's angry.

Me: Derek, there's no use responding to this situation with anger. You need to be more composed, otherwise you'll push Xolani away.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Are you listening to me?

He nods.

I decide to keep quiet before I ramble and give unsolicited advice.

Me: I'll give you space.

I try to move, but he tightens his hold on me.

Derek: I'm listening.

Me: I'm hungry.

I push and he eventually lets go of me. I don't know why I'm suddenly annoyed at him. I stand

and go to the kitchen. Surely Nomvuyo prepared something here... I dish up for myself and

make my way to the backyard. I sit in the gazebo and have my food.

After a few minutes, my phone beeps.

It's a text message.

Derek: I apologise for snapping at you. It was an impulsive reaction.

I read it again and sigh.

At this point, I don't know why I'm pissed... Actually, I do know.

I'm pissed at the universe. Every time things go well in my life, something emerges and messes the whole thing up. When will I get a break?

I type a message and send it. I've asked him to come join me outside.

Within minutes, he is sitting next to me, watching me eat.

Me: I don't like how you took out your frustration on me. You made me feel like I was part of the problem.

He nods.

Me: That's why I'm angry. You dismissed me and I took it very personally.

He nods and continues to watch me eat.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: The rational side of me understands why you're angry and acknowledges that your actions

were justified. However, the other side is very hurt. I don't like being dismissed by you,

especially in that manner.

Derek: Baby, I hear you. I'm sorry.

Me: I forgive you.

Derek: You don't mean that.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: I don't believe you.

I laugh and look at him.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Ohho.

He smiles.

Derek: I'll never do that again. I just hate that you saw me in that zone.

Me: I was and still am very shocked.

He chuckles.

Me: I didn't think your anger reached such heights.

He shakes his head and sighs.

Derek: If he falls, then I have failed him as a brother. Xolani is my everything... I am all he has...

Me: And what about you?

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: What do you have?

He sighs.

Derek: I may not have biological parents, but I'm surrounded by unquestionable love.

I nod.

Me: As long as you know you're loved...

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't doubt your love, baby.

Me: Hmkay.

I finish eating and stand.

Me: I'm ready to go home and catch up on my work.

He groans as he stands as well.

Derek: It's been a stressful weekend.

I nod.

Me: I'll help you with Xolani... Just don't push me away.

Derek: Thank you.

He pulls me in for a hug and kisses my cheek.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: Ready to go?

I nod.

We then walk back inside the house and find Nomvuyo making herself a cup of tea.

Nomvuyo: You two have been doing as you please in my house.

Me: We're leaving now.

Nomvuyo: Stay for dinner.

Me: Nope. I already cancelled on my best friend... I need to do some work.

Nomvuyo: Boring!

We say goodbye to her and make our way out.

It's now Wednesday, and I have been in my class the whole day...

I get a call from Derek, asking me to come to his office. When my kids go to lunch, I make my way to the office.

Me: Look what the wind blew in!

Dean rolls his eyes.

I go to him and hug him while he's sitting.

Me: How's your new life?

Dean: Nothing much has changed.

Me: Hmm.

Dean: Nolwazi and I are having date night tonight, and her parents are in Dubran...

You're

babysitting.

Me: Excuse me??

He stands.

Dean: You two must be at the house at exactly 17:00.

Derek shakes his head in disbelief.

Dean: See you there... This will prepare you for your new upcoming roles.

With that said, he walks out and closes the door.

Me: What the hell??

Derek: Uyahlanya lo.

Me: Nxa.

I've been avoiding the megabytes at all costs. They're very triggering.

I sit and watch as Derek goes through his emails, something we've identified as one of our

"bonding" moments.

Derek: What the fuck?

Me: Yini?

He stares at his laptop. I can't read his expression. Is he angry?

Me: Derek?

I can sense that this is serious. However, I'm trying to figure out if it's work, or personal.

I stand and walk to his side of the desk. I bend and look at his screen.

It's an email...

Dear Nkanyezi,

I hope this email finds you well.

Please note that you do not know who I am, however, I know you. In fact, I happen to have

valuable information regarding your real parents. I am currently married to your real father, and

he would like to meet you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Vicky Mbhele

I stare at the email.

I'm too shocked to even say anything...

INSERT 124 (Unedited)

I look at Derek in shock.

Me: What the hell is this??

He sighs and closes his laptop.

Derek: I don't know...

Me: Are you going to contact this woman?

He keeps quiet.

Me: This is crazy!

I go back to my seat and sit. I look at him as he shakes his head lightly and groans.

Derek: Anyway, how is your day, baby?

I look at him weirdly. Is he really going to pretend like he didn't just get this email?

Me: Uhm, my day is okay. How's yours?

Derek: Busy.

Just then, there's a knock on the door and he tells the person to come in.

Lebo, the receptionist, walks in, looking bitchy as usual.

Lebo: Mr. N, your 1pm appointment is here.

Derek nods tightly and Lebo walks out.

Derek: Come give me a kiss.

I stand and walk to him.

Me: See you later.

I plant a kiss on his lips and walk out...

I don't know how I feel about this email, but knowing Derek, I think he's going to avoid it and go on with life.

It's now 16:30 and Derek and I are making our way to Dean and Nolwazi's place- Nolwazi's parents' house...

Derek: I don't know why we're even going there.

Me: We weren't given much of a choice.

He chuckles.

Derek: Dean really thinks he's the shit.

Me: Definitely.

We continue chatting till we get to the house. We make our way in and find Dean coddling his

baby girl, Simo.

Me: Hello, Daddy Dean.

Dean: You're on time, for once.

Me: Don't come for me.

Derek: Where's megabyte 2?

We decided that Simosihle, the ultimate diva, will be megabyte 1, and the humble Khulekani will be megabyte 2.

Dean: He's sleeping upstairs.

Derek is beyond excited, he's just hiding it. Mina I'm not looking forward to this at all. I'm an

only child. I've never taken care of kids, so this is a new experience that I'm not excited about.

Derek will have to do all the work.

Dean: Sit down.

Me: I'm getting very tired of you throwing comman-

Dean: Shut up and sit.

I roll me eyes and sit next to Derek, who is chuckling.

Dean: My babies are still very young, so I don't want you playing around with them.

Derek: Mxm.

Just then, we hear Nolwazi coming down the stairs and we all stare at her. She is gorgeous!

Nolwazi: I thought I heard voices!

She smiles warmly as she walks to us.

Nolwazi: Are you ready to babysit?

Me: No.

She laughs and looks at Derek amusingly.

Derek: You look ravishing.

Nolwazi: Date Night is taken very seriously in this household.

Dean: Too seriously, if you ask me.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Anyway, I just want to give you a brief heads up on what to expect...

I sigh heavily as I listen to her tell us the dos and don'ts. I zone out 80% of the time.

Derek: We'll cope, stop stressing.

Nolwazi: I'm still not comfortable with leaving them like this...

Dean: For all we know, you two could be some sick kidnappers.

Me: Dean!

He chuckles and looks at Derek.

Dean: Take care of my kids, idiot.

Derek: Just leave already. You're getting on my nerves.

Dean stands and I'm shocked when he tries to give me Simo.

I freeze and look at him in confusion.

Dean: Yini wena? Take my baby.

Me: UhmDean:

Ziyanda.

I look at Derek nervously and he gives me an assuring smile.

Nolwazi: Sit comfortably Zi.

I do as I'm told and Dean bends and hands over megabyte 1. As soon as Simo senses the

change of arms, she smiles and giggles.

She then stares at me and tries to figure out who I am.

Me: Is she still blind?

Dean: For a smart nerd, you can be quite dumb at times.

Me: Go away, evil man!

Dean then looks at Nolwazi and smiles.

Dean: Umuhle.

Nolwazi: You clean up nicely yourself. They smile at each other and get lost in each other's eyes, all lovey dovey. I roll my eyes.

What am I supposed to do with this baby? Do I shush her? She's busy giggling and angazi why.

I think Derek sees my uncomfotability, because he stands and offers to take Simo.

I quickly

give her to him and sink on the couch.

I need wine. I need vodka. I need sumfin!

It's Wednesday night, I could be at home, watching some ratchet TV, not this nonsense.

Dean and Nolwazi go upstairs and I sit and watch Derek as he kisses Simo.

I don't why he seems sexy right now, but I'm choosing to ignore that. He seems comfortable

and relaxed. Does he have some veza
ndlebe that I don't know about? Has he
done this shit
before?

I stand and make my way to the kitchen
to get myself something to drink. I get
some
non-alcoholic bubbly and drink lots of it.
My alcohol craving subsides and I walk
back to the
lounge to find the second megabyte there.
He's sleeping peacefully on the couch.

Dean: We'll be back at around 22:00.

Me: Why so late??

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: We'll be reachable.

Derek: Bye.

Nolwazi plants a kiss on Simo's forehead
and then Derek and I watch as they walk
out of the

house. You know when Beyonce says,
“Come back... Come back...” at the end of
“Sorry”? That’s
exactly how I felt... I just wanted to hold
on to Nolwazi and cry, “Come back... Come
back...
Come back!”

It’s been 2 hours and I am gatvol!
Simosihle has been crying her lungs out
for the past 30 minutes.
She doesn’t even take breaks. She cries
consistently! I don’t think I’ve ever
disliked someone
like I do that little diva! Sies man!
I take megabyte 2 and walk upstairs.
Derek must stay with his favourite
megabyte. Angithi he
loves dramatic women? He must deal!
I get to the nursery and sit. Khulekani
yawns and smiles.

I don't know why I'm so drawn to him. I think he's calmness is beyond adorable. Unlike his crazy sister, he just smiles and sleeps. I sit there for about 30 minutes, till he falls asleep. I place him in his cot and watch him sleep ever so peacefully. Just then, Derek walks in, carrying a very quiet Simo. I watch as he puts her in her cot and smiles down at her.

Me: You'll find me downstairs.

I walk out and make my way to the kitchen. I begin googling if it's okay to have at least one glass of wine during pregnancy.

I hear Derek's footsteps and I put my phone down and open the fridge.

Derek: I feel like I've just finished a marathon.

Me: Tell me about it!

I take a bottle of water and drink.

Derek: That little girl is a problem.

Me: I don't want to see her again.

He laughs and begins looking around.

Me: Yini?

Derek: I can't find my phone.

He I'll call it.

He unlocks it and frowns.

He then stares at me in shock.

Me: What?

Derek: Are you fucking kidding me?

Me: What?

Derek: You're searching whether it's okay to drink alcohol during pregnancy?

I try to say something but stop. I think I'm in trouble.

I stare at him.

Derek: Don't fuck with me, Ziyanda.

Me: Listen, I'm stressed as fuck right now.

He groans.

Me: I'm not irresponsibleDerek:

Then what the hell am I reading right now?

I sigh.

Me: I won't drink!

Derek: You better not!

I drink my water dramatically and walk away.

Me: If I'm not drinking, then your ass is not as well!

When Dean and Nolwazi arrive, I'm sleeping very deeply. Ngiyab' dontsa. I genuinely don't want to wake up. I don't know if it's because these babies took all of my energy, or Dean and Nolwazi's bed is just extra comfy.

I feel Nolwazi next to me. She's mumbling and giggling.

Dean: She drank too much champagne.

Derek: And Ziyanda is exhausted. She seems to be deep within her sleep.

Dean: She can sleepover.

Derek: Alright then, I'll bring her cl-

Just then, loud cries fill the room through the baby monitor.

It's that piece of work, Simo!

I instantly wake up and get out of bed.

Dean: And then?

Me: Derek, let's go.

Derek laughs.

Dean: Was it that bad?

They both laugh.

Derek: See you later, buddy.

I walk out and Derek eventually follows me.

There's no way I'm sleeping over here... I love myself too damn much.

INSERT 125 (Unedited)

It's been one very quick month...

I've been drowning myself in my work that I've managed to avoid any stress related to the other aspects of my life.

I'm in bed sleeping, when I'm awakened by Derek kissing me.

I push him away and groan. I don't want to have sex; it's the middle of the night for crying out loud!

He continues planting kisses on my face till I open my eyes and look at him angrily. Why is his lamp even on at this time? Argh.

He smiles warmly.

Derek: Someone's getting old.

Me: Huh?

He chuckles.

I'm sleepy and confused. He stops bothering me and I go back to sleep instantly...

When I wake up that morning, he's not in bed with me. I go to the bathroom and get ready for work. It's a Friday, thank goodness. I'd like to spend this weekend in bed, doing absolutely nothing.

Once I'm done showering and lotioning, I go back to the bedroom to get dressed. I walk to the lounge and my eyes pop when I see lots of black and white balloons on the ceiling. Just as I'm about to say something, Derek approaches the lounge area.

Derek: Happy birthday!

I groan.

It's the 20th of March...

Did I really forget about my birthday? I know I'm not a "birthday person" but have I been that

preoccupied?

I sigh loudly as he walks to me and kisses my cheek.

Derek: Happy 26th Birthday, my love.

Me: I forgot.

He smiles.

Derek: I realised yesterday.

I look at the balloons.

Me: 26 balloons?

He nods, with the biggest smile.

Me: Corny man.

Derek: Brighten up!

He wraps his arms around me and pulls me till our bodies touch.

Derek: The gift of life is not afforded to everyone... I don't tolerate sadness on birthdays.

Me: I'm not sad.

Derek: Ya, but you're not excited either.

Me: It's 6am! Why the hell would I be excited?

He chuckles and kisses me.

Derek: Sit down; I prepared a lovely
bacon-filled breakfast.

He makes me sit on the couch and walks
off.

I obviously need to re-evaluate my
mood...

We're now driving to work.

Me: Ngidi, whatever happens, do not
surprise me!

He laughs.

Derek: I'd never!

Me: What are the plans?

Derek: Dinner.

I groan.

I love his people and I love my people, but
I really just want to be with him only, hey.

I haven't

seen his crew that much... I've been focusing on my work, naye he's been focusing on his plans for the new school, seeing as he's last day at our school is fast approaching. I don't know how things will be without him. I already miss our office shenanigans.

Derek: Relax, baby. I'm not throwing you a Great Gatsby event.

I grunt.

We eventually get to school and as expected, my kids go all out!

Lwazi made it a point to outshine everyone. She held on to me till we got to assembly!

My mood is now at 40%. At this point, the baby growing in me is in total control of how I

behave. I try to take charge, but in the end, he/she is running things.

It's now around 10am and I'm busy teaching my kids.

Lebo walks in and tells me there's a delivery for me. I walk with her to the reception area and

I'm given a huge basket. I sign and make my way to class. I've always emphasised that I don't

like doing crazy things on my birthday and I don't want people to do crazy things as well. Derek

is generally a very romantic guy, so I think he's going to hide behind this fact as he spoils me today.

I walk back to my class and my kids get ready to transition to their next class. As they leave, I

open the huge basket and find all of my favourite snacks. I take this opportunity to open the biltong and indulge. My appetite has been doing the most, but the doctor keeps emphasising that I need to watch what I eat, so I've been eating in moderation.

As I'm stuffing my face, I hear a knock on my door and Derek walks in. He smiles.

Derek: I see you got your gift basket.

Me: Hmm...

He chuckles.

Derek: I was planning on sending this vele... It's a coincidence...

Me: You don't say...

He sits on my desk and watches me eat.

Derek: How's your day so far?

Me: It's good.

He chuckles.

Derek: You are such a Debbie Downer.

Me: Whatevs. Go away!

He does as he is told and I focus on my biltong...

It's now lunchtime and my mood is at a solid 60%.

My phone rings and it's Derek. I answer.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: I think we should have lunch somewhere...

Me: Hmm wena na.

He laughs lightly.

Me: Okay.

Derek: Woza ke. I want to give you a kiss.

Me: Gross. You're my boss!

He laughs.

Derek: In ten days you won't be able to say that shit again!

Me: Whatevs!

I end the call and get my phone, and then I walk out...

Derek: I have something for you.

I look at him suspiciously.

Derek: Relax.

He digs through his bag and takes out an envelope.

Derek: This is for you.

I take it and open it.

I chuckle as I read.

Me: To the love of my life,

Birthdays are very special, and it is strange how you don't celebrate yours as much as you

celebrate others'... I guess this shows your selflessness: always willing to go the extra mile for others.

Anyway, before I ramble, I'd like to give you this set of coupons. Because you're such a

simpleton, this is the perfect gift for you...

These coupons can be redeemed
anywhere, anytime...

Happy Birthday, my love.

Regards,

Your Star

I look at him and laugh.

Me: Coupons?

He nods excitedly.

Me: Funny man!

I look through the coupons...

Me: Full-body massage; date of your
choice; private dinner date; recital of a
poem written for
you; printing (in colour) and preparation
of classroom resources; mysterious gift;
Dischem/Clicks date; shopping voucher;
new sex position; mini-vacation; lap
dance.

I am laughing as I read all of these
options.

Me: What are the terms and conditions?

Derek: All of your coupons need to be used at some point.

Me: So, I can just pull them out anytime?

He nods.

Me: Hmm... Anywhere, anytime?

Derek: Yep.

Me: A lap dan-

Derek: Ziyanda!

We both laugh.

Me: You said anywhere, anytime!

Derek: Not in front of people!

I giggle and read the coupons again.

Me: This is amazing!

Derek: I'm glad you like it.

I giggle.

Me: I already know what I want for tonight.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: Full-body massage.

He smiles mischievously and I grin.

Me: Maybe it can lead to the new sex position?

He laughs and nods excitedly.

Derek: Shit will be ready by then, ma'am!

Me: By fire, by force!

My mood has gone up. It's on a solid 80% now, all because of this person of mine.

As we're eating, the waiter brings a slice of caramel cake.

Waiter: Happy birthday, ma'am.

Me: Thank you!

The waiter walks off and I sigh.

Me: You're sneaky.

Derek: I'll take that as a compliment...

We continue chatting...

INSERT 126

Niki sits next to Dean and looks at him in confusion.

Lol, they've never met konje.

Niki: Who are you?

Me: This is Dean.

Niki: Oh... I see...

She looks at Dean, unfazed.

Niki: You dating my man's ex?

Dean: You dating my woman's ex?

Niki chuckles and Dean joins her.

Thank God they get along! Phela I always tell Dean about Niki, and whenever he tries being

shady, I stop him. I always tell him to be nice whenever he meets her. I'm glad he is following

my rules otherwise I was going to kill him! No one comes for Niki as long as I'm still breathing.

Kea: Your name is Dean?

Dean looks at Kea blankly and nods. I'm hoping that he doesn't unleash his cold side, because

that would just make things a bit too tense. Derek, on the other hand, is absolutely quiettypical.

He's just being observant...

Ash: How's the new school, Zi? I'm obsessed with your Instagram posts about your kids.

Me: I'm lovin' it!

She laughs.

Thato: Is it public knowledge that you're dating your boss?

Niki: Is it the public's business?

Yhu!

Can Niki try to cool it down? We haven't even started eating!

Niki: That's the problem with people thinking they are entitled to other people's business...

Kea laughs sarcastically.

Me: Thato, how's your man?

Thato: We broke up about a month ago.

Me: Oh...

She sips her wine and smiles.

Thato: You've been unreachable...

Me: I'm still using the same number mos.

Thato: Well, it's unreachable.

I focus on my water.

Mandi then starts asking Dean about his PhD and that conversation eases the

tension. I look at

Derek and he says, "I'm sorry, baby," with his eyes, and I say, "Fuck you," with my eyes. We have

a back on forth with our eyes, till I look away.

Ash: Nik Nak, who are you dating?

Niki blushes dramatically.

Niki: Some tall, handsome black man.

Ash giggles.

Ash: I sure love them like that too!

Niki: You sure do!

They laugh.

I look over at Thato and Kea, and they're just over everything. They're busy sipping on their wine.

Me: Any update on your love life?

Ash: Well, you know I'm not much of a relationship girl.

Niki: So, you're just dick hopping?

Me: Niki!

Dean: You're into black dick, Ash?

Ash: Yep!

Dean chuckles.

Ash: Mind hooking me up?

Dean: All my people are married.

Kea: So?

Gosh, Kea. The conversation was flowing so nicely. She just had to come in with her shady ways?

Ash: So all your people are married?

Dean nods.

Mandi: Well, that's unfortunate. We're out here scouting!

Dean chuckles.

Thato: Derek, why are you so quiet?

Derek: I only speak when spoken to.

Kea: You people are too tense for my liking, damn!

Dean: Then leave.

Kea grunts as she finishes her wine and storms off.

Thato looks at Dean sharply.

Thato: Really??

Niki: How about you leave as well?

I try to say something, but stop myself. I'm speechless and confused. Everything is transpiring so quickly.

Before I know it, Thato is storming off as well.

I need wine! I need vodka! I need something, now!

Niki: Good riddance!

Mandi sighs.

Mandi: When will you guys get over the past?

Niki: Mxm.

Dean: Those two are bad news. I don't have to know them extensively to infer that they're fucked up.

Ash: A lot has happened...

Mandi sighs again.

I know she wants to go check up on them. She's always been the mediator here.

Me: How about we schedule a lunch date this weekend?

Ash: That sounds perfect.

Mandi: I'm sorry your birthday night is ruined.

Me: It's okay. I'm very happy to see you guys!

I stand and share hugs with them.

Me: I'll call you.

Mandi: Shap.

They say goodbye and we watch as they walk away.

Dean: Ziyanda, I don't want you hanging out with those people.

Me: My father is in Soweto.

Niki: Tell her, Dean.

Dean: They're negative and insincere.

Me: Can we leave this place? Is that too much to ask?

I get my bag.

Me: This is exactly why I don't celebrate birthdays. People do the most and end up fucking everything up!

They all keep quiet and stare at me.

Me: I just want to go home and sleep.

Please take me home.

Derek tries to say something, but stops.

He nods lightly and they all stand. Niki is also quiet,
thank God.

At this point, I'm drained as hell.

We walk out.

Niki: So, like, I need a lift...

Dean: Get an Uber.

Niki: Excuse me? Do you know how expensive it is to come to Sandton?

Dean: Then call your tall and handsome boyfriend.

Niki: Yazini neh? Don't let me punch you in front of all these white people!

Dean laughs.

I leave them there and get in the car. I'm over all of them. I actually just want to go to my

parents' house and sleep in my bed.

5 minutes later, Dean and Derek get in.

Niki: Babe, I'm going to Soweto... Your man got me an Uber.

Me: Okay. Bye.

Niki: Love you.

Me: Hmm.

She closes the door and Derek starts the car.

My mood is somewhere in the negatives. I think this was the worst birthday of my life.

All this unnecessary drama has ruined my day.

We're now driving to Derek's place. It's around 6pm.

Me: I'd like some McDonalds. Please go via the drive through.

Derek: Okay, baby.

Mxm baby wok'nuka.

Dean asks for ice-cream and Derek gets ice tea, while I get a Big Mac.

Once we get our order, we drive to Derek's place.

Derek tries holding my hand and I refuse.

Me: I told you not to plan any surprises.

He sighs in defeat. Dean is also annoying me, because he's busy sucking that ice-cream like

nobody's business. Also, why the hell is he still here? He must go home now.

As soon as I open the door, I'm shocked to find Derek's crew there.

"Surprise!"

For fuck's sake!

I stand there, frozen. I have nothing left in me. I just want to sleep nkos' yami!

Want to know what happened as soon as Nomvuyo wraps her arms around me and I smell her familiar scent?

I lose it.

I lose it, and I cry my lungs out.

Now it's completely silent and I'm sure they're all staring at me, but I don't care.

I cry.

I cry like those women Shaka Zulu forced to cry when his mother, Nandi, passed away.

Ngisikhihle straight.

Now, Nomvuyo is busy comforting me, but Derek is also insisting on holding me. I don't know why I'm crying, but at this moment, it's what my body wants to do, so...

I'm now in the bedroom.

As soon as I'm all covered up, I fall into a very deep sleep...

When I wake up, I am completely shocked to see everyone sitting around the bed.

Derek is next to me on the bed.

Nomvuyo: Baby...

I look at all of them. They're staring at me. I'm humiliated.

I'm so embarrassed.

Nomvuyo gives me a glass of water and I find myself gobbling it all up.

It's silent for a while.

Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Nolwazi, Dean and Derek are here.

Before I can even gather up the courage to say something, Zimkitha starts singing... Seconds later, they're all singing "Happy Birthday."

Now, I'm teary-eyed again, but this time, it's tears of positivity, I don't know what to say.

Dean: Stop crying!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Zimkitha: Happy birthday, sweetheart.

She gives me a warm hug and I relax in her embrace. For a second there, I miss my mom...

Dean: So, I have a story for you all...

I relax in Derek's arms as we all listen to Dean tell everyone about my shady group of friends.

Lol, if only he knew the half of it.

When he's done, everyone is now on my case about my choice of friends. I zone them out.

They obviously don't know me. I'm not naive when it comes to the people I love...

They just

don't understand the dynamic of our friendship...

Liwa: We have a few gifts for you.

He gives me a box.

Liwa: That's from Vuvu and I.

Me: Thank you.

Liwa: You must open it later.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi then gives me an envelope.

Nolwazi: And this is from Langa and I.

I open it and gasp.

Nolwazi: We're the worst when it comes to gifts, so please forgive our lack of creativity.

All I see is 100 and 200 rand notes.

I look at her in shock and she laughs.

Me: I was joking about the money!

Nolwazi: It's the least we could do.

I look at them and sigh.

Me: Wow.

Dean: Expensive whore.

Liwa: Dean!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Mind your own business wena.

I laugh.

Me: Yep, Liwa, mind your own business.

Liwa: Ohho kanti. I'm trying to defend you.

Dean and I chuckle.

Zimkitha: My gift will arrive soon...

Me: It's okay.

Derek sighs.

Derek: I apologise for how the day turned out.

Me: It's okay. You had good intentions.

Dean: You're the planner in this crew, Dlamini. Today is proof that if you're not organizing something, it will fail.

We all laugh.

Me: This is why I asked for an ordinary day.

Liwa: And this fool didn't listen.

Dean: Fucken idiot.

Derek: Fuck off.

Liwa: Fuck you too.

Zimkitha: Heyiii language!

Liwa, Dean and Derek go back and forth until they're satisfied.

Nomvuyo: Are you done?

They keep quiet.

Nolwazi: Niyabhora.

Nomvuyo: Dinner should be ready now...

Let's go.

Everyone gets up and goes to the lounge.

Derek pulls me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Love you too.

He smiles and lets go of me.

At this point, I'm not keeping track of my moods... I'll just let go and see what happens...

INSERT 127 (Very Short Insert)

I am awakened by my phone ringing. I reach out for it and answer sleepily.

Me: Hello?

Mom: Happpy!

I chuckle quietly.

Mom: Aww, my baby is growing up!

I listen to her sing for me.

Me: Hmm, once again, you forgot my birthday.

Mom: I didn't forget!

Me: Hmm. I am yet to receive a call from dad!

She laughs.

Mom: We're too old to remember dates!

Me: I am your only child, woman!

She giggles.

Mom: I'm so proud of the young woman you've become.

Me: It's not over yet.

Mom: Heyi and it's just the beginning.

Phela you're getting ready to be a mother now, and we all

know that you'll be amazing.

I sigh.

Mom: How was your day?

Me: It started off great, and then it just went downhill. Derek invited abo Thato and Kea.

Mom: Heeh! Was Niki there?

Me: Of course.

She laughs.

Mom: Did it end well?

Me: Not really, we ended up leaving.

Mom: Good!

I laugh.

Mom: How's Derek?

Me: He's okay.

Mom: I'm sure he has learnt his lesson.

You hate surprises.

Me: I hope he did.

We laugh.

Mom: Alright then, I'll call you again tomorrow. Sleep tight.

Me: Love you.

Mom: Love you too, baby.

I end the call and check the time. It's now 23:00.

As I turn, Derek pulls me and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too, Star.

He plants a kiss on my nose and dozes off.

I use that last hour of my birthday to reflect and thank God for remaining loyal to me throughout

the years... I know I'm currently an emotional mess, because I'm afraid of what the future holds for me, but I know He'll still be around, guiding and protecting me. I'll hold on to my faith and see where everything goes...

The following day, Derek wakes up early and tells me that he organised a family meeting and they're going to discuss Xolani's issue.

Me: I think that's a bad idea.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: He will instantly feel attacked and he'll be defensive.

He keeps quiet and looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: You and Xolani are very close. Don't involve all these other people in this issue. I suggest

you handle it privately and personally.
Involving your parents will ruin the
whole thing, I
guarantee you.

He sighs.

Me: Think about it.

He nods.

Derek: I think you're right. Knowing
Xolani, he'll probably run off if we gang up
on him.

Me: Yep.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: Anytime.

He continues getting dressed and I go
back to sleep. Once he's done, he wakes
me up and I see
him off. I really hope that everything goes
well for him...

It's now around 11am and Derek has been
gone since 9am.

Just as I am about to give him a call, my phone rings and it's him. I answer it quickly.

Me: Is everything okay?

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: I met up with him, and he has agreed to go to rehab.

I sigh in relief.

Me: How is he?

Derek: He seems fine. Thankfully, the addiction is not full-blown as yet. I just want him to leave this shit permanently.

Me: He needs to cut ties with Leon.

He sighs.

Derek: Hopefully, they'll help him with that as well. He's obsessed with the guy.

Me: Shame.

Derek: What are you doing?

Me: Just finished showering. I really miss taking a bubble bath; this shower business is too much.

Derek: Hmm...

Me: Ubuya nini kanti?

Derek: Come join me for brunch.

Me: Okay. No surprises?

He laughs.

Derek: No surprises, baby.

Me: Okay.

Derek: I'll request an Uber now, get ready.

Me: Shap.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and do as I am told. After about 10 minutes, the Uber arrives and I make my way outside.

I'm now with Derek at some restaurant.

Derek: So, I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Derek: We should move.

Me: Move?

Derek: Move out.

I look at him in disbelief.

Derek: We're living in a bachelor apartment. It's not conducive to pregnancy.

I sigh heavily. He's definitely right.

Derek: We need more space.

Me: So what were you thinking?

He smiles.

Derek: I've invested in a lot of property. The move will be a breeze.

Me: And do I have a say in any of this?

Derek: You can decide which property is best.

I shake my head lightly.

Me: You don't get it.

Derek: What?

Me: I'd like to contribute and actually feel like I own the space.

He looks at me disinterestedly.

Me: Derek, I'm serious!

Derek: I told you that you're welcome to buy consumables.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Derek: I'm a much organised guy, Ziyanda. My life is planned and shit.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: I don't want you living in a bachelor apartment, when I have a pool of property that is appropriate for the phase we're in.

Me: Wowzer.

Our food finally arrives and we begin eating.

Derek: I got a call from my dad asking me to come home, ngoba he needs to tell me something.

Do you mind coming with me?

Me: Ah, and what about Khwezi?

He chuckles.

Derek: She's probably out with her housewife friends.

Me: Okay.

We continue eating...

We're now making our way to Derek's home. I'm dreading it!

We get there and make our way to the lounge.

Senior exclaims as soon as he sees me. I completely forgot how kind he is, compared to his dragon wife.

Senior: Ziyanda!

Me: Hello, sir.

We share a hug and he looks at me amusingly.

Senior: You two look very good together.

Me: Thanks.

Derek: I know how to pick 'em.

Senior: You sure do.

I look at them disapprovingly and they laugh.

We spend the next 10 minutes catching up.

We then go outside and he looks at us seriously.

Senior: I have some bizarre news.

Derek: Regarding?

Senior scratches his head and sighs heavily.

Senior: I'm actually glad you came with Ziyanda, because this affects her as well.

Now my heart is immediately racing.

Derek senses this, and holds my hand.

Derek: What's wrong?

Senior: I'm not supposed to tell you this now, but I can't keep it to myself. Your mother wanted to break the news...

Derek: Baba, khuluma.

Senior sighs heavily and then looks at me. Thereafter, he focuses on Derek.

Senior: It turns out, Busisiwe's child is actually yours, not the man she ran off with...

I don't think I heard him properly.

I must have misheard him, right?

Surely the Universe wouldn't throw such a bomb on me. Not now... it can't be.

INSERT 128

It has been silent for quite some time now. I can't really read Senior's expression, but Derek looks like he is ready to blow up.

Derek: What the fuck are you saying?

Me: Derek-

He looks at me sharply and I keep quiet.

Derek: What the fuck are you saying to me?

Senior: Derek-

Derek lets go of my hand and steps closer to his father. He's making me feel very intimidated.

I'm not used to this side of him. I've only seen him like this the other time when he attacked

Xolani's lover...

I'm not sure what's going through his mind right now, and I think that's what's making my anxiety shoot up.

Senior: Son-

Derek: Are you telling me that Busisiwe has my child?

Senior looks at Derek nervously and nods. It's very clear that he is also intimidated by him.

Derek: When did this come to light?

Senior: I found out a couple of days ago.

Derek: What about Khwezi?

Senior sighs heavily.

Senior: It's been a while, before she had the stroke.

Derek tightens his jaw and glances at me. The fury in his eyes is a bit too much, so I look away and focus on Senior.

Derek: I'm assuming Busisiwe knew from the beginning?

Senior sighs again and scratches his head.

Senior: From my understanding, she has been aware from the beginning.

Derek looks at me again and this time, I stare right back at him.

I eventually break the staring contest, and ask Senior for the bathroom. I then

proceed to make

my way there. I sit on the toilet seat and try to figure out how I'm feeling.

I think I'm numb, because I'm not panicking. However, I'm also angry. I'm angry at the fact that I

seem to attract a lot of drama. I'd like to go back to my peaceful life, where the only thing that stressed me out was my choice of reading books.

Ever since Derek came into my life, everything has been chaotic. His friends have brought so much drama in life, and that can't be denied.

Now, I'm constantly triggered.

My thoughts are interrupted by the door opening.

Derek stands there and stares at me.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

He walks in and closes the door.

Derek: I don't know what to say to you.

Me: There's nothing to say to me. You have a child with Busi.

He scratches his head.

Me: If there's one person you should be talking to, it has to be Busi, not me. What am I going to do?

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: I'm not angry, Derek.

He keeps quiet.

Me: But, what I would like right now is to go to my mother's house and spend time with her.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Because I'm telling you right now, being here and witnessing what's going to take place

next will be enough to send me back to a psychiatric clinic.

He tries to say something, but ends up keeping quiet.

Me: So for my sanity, and this child's health, please let me go home and separate me from this

chaos. I don't want to be put through this
shit.

I stand and look at him.

Derek: I want to talk to my mother, she's
here.

My heart rate immediately increases. The
thought of Khwezi drives me crazy.

There's a special
place in hell for people like her.

Me: I'll leave now.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: Derek, once again, I'm not angry. I
understand that this is not your fault. I
just don't want to
get involved, please.

He sighs and nods.

Me: I'll go home now.

Derek: I'll ask Liwa to pick you up.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't want that. I want to be alone.

He stares at me intently and eventually nods.

Me: Thanks.

He steps closer to me till our bodies are touching. Our foreheads touch, and he pushes my

head up till we're facing each other.

Derek: No matter what happens, don't ever, for even one second, doubt my love for you. Nothing

will come in-between us.

I don't say anything.

I think part of me needs all of this assurance.

Derek: I'm not going to let anyone ruin what we have. Please tell me you believe in us?

I sigh.

Derek: Please assure me that you're not going to run off.

He stares at me pleadingly.

Derek: Ziyanda, please?

Me: I'm not going to run off.

He sighs in relief, as if he expected me to tell him to fuck off.

Me: All I ask is that you sort it out without involving me. I'm already dealing with this pregnancy;

I'm not in the right space to go back and forth with your mother and baby's mother.

I ignore the piercing pain that stems from the realisation that I'm not carrying Derek's first child.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I want to go home.

He kisses my forehead and nods.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I know.

Derek: I'll never forgive myself for not ensuring that your birthday weekend is filled with

positivity.

Me: Your intent is what matters. I'll be fine.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Derek: I'm sorry for all of this.

Me: It's okay.

He plants a kiss on my lips and then sighs.

Me: Let's get going. I'm sure Khwezi is ready for you.

He chuckles. It's a different chuckle. He's clearly angry about this situation, and he has every right to be.

We walk out of the bathroom and make our way downstairs.

Khwezi: What the HELL is she doing in MY HOUSE?!

Derek squeezes my hand.

I zone everything out and continue walking. The door seems so far right now.

Khwezi: I'm asking you a question, Derek!
What the hell is that skank doing here?!

Derek stops walking and I try to continue walking, but he stops me.

Khwezi: DEREK! WHAT IS THAT SKANK DOING IN MY HOUSE?!

Derek immediately turns and walks to her.

Now my heart rate is on another level. He walks to her and gets so close, that he's body is practically pressed against hers.

Senior: Son!

Derek: Call her a skank one more time... He's voice is so low, but authoritative at the same time.

Khwezi breathes heavily.

Me: Derek.

I walk to him and grab his arm.

Khwezi: How dare you disrespect me?!

Derek: Me? Disrespect you?

Me: Derek, let's go, please!

He pushes me lightly so I'm out of the way.

Senior: Son, let's talk-

Derek: Shut up.

Senior: No! You need to calm down!

My anxiety is sky high at this point. I decide that the only logical thing to do is walk out,

because I can feel an attack approaching.

As I begin walking to the door, Senior says my name. I ignore him. I don't want to be part of this!

Senior: Ziyanda!

I continue to walk, and as I get to the door, I hear Derek say my name as well.

I get to the car and, Derek is behind me.

Derek: Baby.

Senior is also here, looking at me in confusion and disbelief.

Why are they looking at me like this? I know my anxiety is triggered, but I haven't had an attack yet. I'm still "sane."

I decide that I'll walk out of the yard all together.

Derek: Zi, wait.

He stops me and looks at me. He looks like he's panicking. His anger seems to have

evaporated.

Me: What? I'm fine.

Derek: His eyes trail down my body.

Me: What?

Senior: Are you okay?

I look at them in confusion.

Me: What's going on?

I also look down and gasp as soon as I realise that I'm bleeding.

I push Derek away and look at all the blood that seems to be covering my grey leggings.

I'm confused.

INSERT 129 (Short Insert)

Derek is now panicking, dialling someone's number.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

He grabs my arm and leads me to the car.

Senior: What's going on??

He's now on the phone.

Derek: I need you to go fetch Ziyanda's mom... No, Dean, go now.

He ends the call and then tries to let me get in the car.

Me: The bleeding is not that bad, relax.

Dean: Get in the fucken car!

I get in and sit, while he goes to his father and speaks to him for a minute. He then gets in the

car and immediately drives off.

Derek: Are you in pain??

I shake my head.

Derek: Are you in fucken pain, Ziyanda?!

Me: No, Derek! No, I'm not in fucken pain!

Now, would you stop shouting at me?!

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He then takes a deep breath and focuses on the road.

Derek: Are you still bleeding?

Me: I don't know...

I open the window and focus on the buildings we're driving past.

I hear him making calls and I instantly zone him out.

I didn't even realise that we had arrived at our doctor's practice.

I feel him shaking me, and I snap out of it. We get out of the car and he leads me inside.

Dr M looks at me, and I can tell that she's shocked and confused.

Dr: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

She glances at Derek.

Derek: There's no time to do all of this.

Why the fuck is she bleeding?

Dr: Let's check you out...

Soon, I'm being taken to a private room and asked to take off my clothes...

Dr: First trimester miscarriages are caused by problems with the chromosomes of the fetus.

Derek: What the fuck do you mean? Did we not come here every fucken week to check on this baby? How did you not identify problems?

Dr: Our last check up was three weeks ago.

Dr sighs heavily and looks at me.

Dr: Chromosomes are blocks of DNA.

They contain a detailed set of instructions that control a

wide range of factors, from how the cells of the body develop, to what colour eyes the baby will

have. Sometimes, something can go wrong at the point of conception and the fetus receives

too many or not enough chromosomes.

The reasons for this are often unclear, but it means the

fetus won't be able to develop normally, resulting in a miscarriage.

As Derek continues questioning Dr M's credibility, I zone out their back and forth...

Now I'm just uncomfortable. I feel dirty.

As I snap out of it, I find Dr M staring at me softly.

Dr: I have to emphasise that it's not your fault... Additionally, this doesn't mean you won't be able to get another baby.

Where is Derek?

I look around.

Dr: He needed some fresh air.

I nod lightly.

Dr: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

Dr: Are you with me?

I nod.

She sighs and nods.

Dr: We've determined that you have a missed miscarriage. Here, the fetus dies, but the body doesn't recognize the pregnancy loss. As a result, the placenta may still continue to release hormones; hence you're still experiencing signs of pregnancy.

I keep quiet.

Dr: Through the ultrasound, we've just determined that there's no heartbeat...

Just then, Derek walks back in.

My mother and Dean walk in after him.

They all sit and look at the doctor. Derek is avoiding my

eyes. My mom looks blank, I can't read her. Dean looks concerned; he's also avoiding my eyes.

Dr: We have 3 options: 1. Expectant Management- wait for the tissue to pass naturally out of your womb. 2 Medical Management- take medication that causes the tissue to pass out of your womb. 3 Surgical Management- have the tissue surgically removed.

Mom: Please explain each option properly.

Dr nods lightly.

Dr: With Expectant Management, you have to wait 7-14 for the pregnancy tissue to pass

naturally. If the pain and bleeding have lessened or stopped completely during this time, this

means the miscarriage has finished.

There's complete silence.

Dr: With Medical Management, you have medication to remove the tissue. This involves taking

tablets that cause the cervix to open, allowing the tissue to pass out. You'll then be sent home

for the miscarriage to complete.

She looks at me.

Dr: In some cases, surgery is used to remove the remaining pregnancy tissue.

We'll have

immediate surgery if: 1 you experience continuous heavy bleeding. 2 There's evidence the pregnancy tissue has become infected. 3 Medication or waiting for the tissue to pass out naturally has been unsuccessful.

Mom: She'll take the expectant option, no medication and surgery.

I close my eyes and zone them out again as they continue having a Q&A session.

After a while, I feel my mom's hand on mine, and I open my eyes...

Dr: You'll experience symptoms similar to a heavy period, such as heavy cramping and heavy

vaginal bleeding for up to three weeks.

Take a pregnancy test after three weeks.

If the test

shows that you're still pregnant, call me immediately, so I can conduct further tests to ensure you don't have a molar pregnancy or ectopic pregnancy.

There's silence.

Dr: Please contact me immediately should your bleeding and pain become particularly heavy, or you develop high temperature.

Additionally, if the bleeding and pain gets worse within the 7-14 days, this could mean that the miscarriage hasn't finished. In this case, we'll do another scan.

After the scan, you may decide to either continue waiting for the miscarriage to occur naturally, or have drug treatment or surgery. If you want to continue to wait it out, I'll check your condition

again up to 14 days later.

My mom nods.

Mom: We will do so.

Dr: I have given you all the information you need, however, please contact me should you have

any concerns. I am always available.

Mom: Thank you.

My mom then looks at me.

Mom: I brought clean clothes.

I stand as the doctor and Dean walk out.

My mom takes out fresh underwear...

She and Derek watch as I place the long sanitary towel on my underwear.

Me: I can't use tampons?

Mom: Hai, Ziyanda.

I sigh as I finish getting dressed...

INSERT 130

We're now driving back to my parents' house.

The ride is completely silent. Dean is not with us now, he went back home after we finished at the clinic.

We eventually get to the house and make our way in. I go straight to the bathroom to take a hot bath. As I lay there, I close my eyes and feel myself doze off. I am eventually awakened by my mother, shaking me lightly.

Mom: Ziyanda.

I blink a couple of times and shiver, because the water is cold now. As soon as I stand, I groan.

The water is now bloody and my back is achy.

Mom: Phuma, so I can drain the water.

I nod lightly as I get up and dry myself.

I leave the bathroom and make my way to my bedroom, where I sit on the bed.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Zama. I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Zama: Hey, friend!

Me: Hey, unjani?

Zama: I'm great! So, I was thinking...

Me: Yes?

Zama: I want you to plan my baby shower!

Me: Isn't a baby shower supposed to be a surprise?

She laughs.

Zama: No! I want you to plan, Zi! Please!

Me: Uhm-

Zama: I'm not taking no for an answer!

You can't show me the pictures of the proposal you planned for Dean and then not agree when I ask you to do the same shit for me! How could I resist??

I sigh.

Me: Okay then.

Zama: Yaas!

Me: Bye then.

Zama: We'll continue this conversation on Monday.

Me: Okay.

Zama: Are you okay?

Me: Yep, just tired.

Zama: Alright then, bye!

Me: Shap.

I hang up and stand as soon as I feel the bleeding. I wipe myself, lotion, and get dressed in my

pyjamas. I walk out of the bedroom and find Derek sitting in the lounge with my mom. She

seems to be comforting him.

I walk to the kitchen and find something to eat. She follows me and stares at me.

Mom: Baby, are you hungry?

Me: I'm sorted.

I walk back to my bedroom and get in bed. My back is suddenly achy and I feel uncomfortable.

It's now Monday, and before I could even get ready for work, my mom walked in and stopped me.

Me: I'm going to work.

Mom: No, you're not, Ziyanda.

Me: I'm not sick, I can function.

She looks at me softly.

Mom: Baby, you've been quiet since Saturday. I know you always need time to think things through, but this is too much...

Me: What's too much?

She keeps quiet.

Me: Stop trying to treat me like I'm disabled.

She tries to say something, but stops herself. She then walks out of the bedroom and I continue where I left off.

Lwazi insisted on traveling to school with me in an Uber, so I obliged.

Lwazi: Mommy, I've been thinking...

Me: Yes?

Lwazi: When are you getting married to Uncle D?

I frown and she giggles.

Lwazi: You guys are always together.

Me: What happened to wanting me all to yourself?

She laughs.

Lwazi: I'm just asking!

Me: So, you want me to get married?

She shakes her head dramatically.

Lwazi: I want you all to myself!

Me: Hmkay then...

Lwazi: Are you sick?

Me: I just have a really bad headache.

Lwazi: You must drink lots of water!

Me: Yes, ma'am...

We eventually get to school and I go straight to my class to prepare for my day.

When it's time

for assembly, Zama fetches me.

Zama: Dean is here, friend!

She goes on to tell me how she can't seem to get over his hotness.

Me: Focus on your pregnancy.

She laughs and we walk out. I see Derek and Dean standing a bit far from

everyone. They seem

to be engaging in a deep conversation, and Dean seems to be reprimanding

Derek.

I stand next to my kids and Zama leads assembly.

After 20 minutes, we're done.

As I walk in with my kids, Dean says my name and I turn to look at him.

Dean: Can I have a word?

Me: I have a class.

Dean: I won't be long.

I tell my kids what to do and they walk in quietly. Thereafter, I follow Dean to Derek's office and

close the door. Derek is sitting down.

I can't even describe how he is, because I've never seen him like this.

Dean: Why the fuck are both of you at work?

Me: Am I supposed to stay at home?

He looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: Are you kidding me?

Me: Dean, I have a class to teach.

He sighs loudly and I look at Derek. He hasn't looked at me.

Dean: Zi, come on...

He sounds defeated.

Just as I'm about to say something, Derek bursts out in loud sobs. Dean immediately rushes to where he's sitting and holds him.

As I'm about to walk to them, Derek stops sobbing and looks at me.

Derek: You must be thrilled.

I don't respond. I'm still processing what he said.

Dean: Dere-

Derek: You never wanted this baby to begin with...

Dean: Derek, stop.

Derek: Am I lying?

Dean groans in defeat.

Derek: You can't even pretend you cared, for my sake... I'm the one who always has to consider how you're feeling. You don't bother meeting me halfway.

Dean looks at me nervously.

I walk out and close the door lightly. I then walk to Camille's office and knock lightly.

I walk in and find her working.

Camille: Hey, Zi!

Me: Hey, how are you?

Camille: I'm well, thanks, and you?

Me: I'm well.

Camille: Have a seat.

I sit opposite her and she looks at me.

Me: I wanted to let you know that I'm resigning.

She blinks a couple of times, before staring at me in shock.

Camille: Excuse me?

Me: I'm resigning, with immediate effect.

Camille: Ziyanda!

I don't say anything.

Camille: What's going on? Are you unhappy? What triggered this sudden decision?

Me: It's not sudden.

She looks at me expectantly.

I don't say anything.

Camille: Have you been offered another job?

I shake my head.

Me: I need time off.

Camille: We're approaching the end of the term. You'll have time to regroup and rest.

I don't say anything.

Camille: I'm not going to let you do this. If you need time off, then I'll give you time off. These

students cannot afford to lose you!

She sighs.

Camille: Think about it...

If you still want to resign after vac, then we'll discuss it.

I don't say anything.

Camille: Please?

Me: Okay.

She smiles lightly.

Camille: Thank you.

Me: Okay.

I make my way to my classroom and find Dean there, my kids are working quietly. He walks to me desk and clears his throat.

Dean: It's not about you...

His voice is low.

Me: Derek is grieving.

Dean: What about you?

Me: What about me?

He sighs.

Me: I'd like to teach, if you don't mind.

He scratches his head and looks at me.

Just then, I feel a sharp pain on my back and I gasp quietly.

Dean: Are you okay?

Me: Ya... Need the bathroom.

I get my bag, walk out and make my way to the bathroom.

I sit there and look at all these bloody clots on the pad... I quickly change it and throw away the used one.

Dean is still in my class, chatting to my kids.

Dean: Your kids are quite smart, Ms Dlamini.

Me: Yep.

He walks to me. He stares at me intently.

Dean: I have to go.

Me: Alright, bye.

He hesitates, but eventually walks out.

I continue teaching...

INSERT 131 (Unedited)

It's now Wednesday and I am making my way to work with Lwazi, when I get a call from

Nomvuyo.

Me: So early in the morning?

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Aren't you tired of these cravings?

Me: Huh?

Nomvuyo: I just woke up now and guess what I'm craving?

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: Pickled fish.

Me: Pickled fish?

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I know!

Me: How random.

Nomvuyo: This pregnancy is getting on my nerves. I need it to end ASAP!

Me: Sorry...

Nomvuyo: Anyway, how are you? I haven't seen you in a while.

Me: I'm alright...

Nomvuyo: How's the pregnancy? Have the cravings started?

Me: I'm alright, hey...

Nomvuyo: Let me get going, Nyami's transport driver is busy giving me problems.

Me: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye, love.

She ends the call and I glance at Lwazi, who is sleeping at the back.

Eventually, we get to school and make our way in...

It's now lunchtime and I feel drained and lethargic. I haven't bled at all and I'm glad, because all

that running up and down to the bathroom is quite tiring.

As I'm making my way back to the classroom, I find Dean there.

Dean: Hey.

He looks at me awkwardly.

Me: Hello.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm well, and you?

Dean: I'm...

He sighs.

Dean: Ziyanda, I need you to-

I sigh.

Me: Is Derek in his office?

He nods.

I then begin walking towards the door.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I walk out and he follows me. I get to Derek's door and knock. I hear him say come in and I walk in, with Dean following me.

Derek looks up from his work and stops what he's doing. He seems shocked.

Dean closes the door.

There's a long silence... Many thoughts are racing through my mind, so I take a deep breath and

try to gather these thoughts.

I take another deep breath and look at Derek.

Me: When I met you, I never, for one second, thought we'd develop a close relationship...

He stares at me.

Me: From the get go, it was very clear, and I mean beyond explicit, that I have mental problems... And just like everyone who comes into my life, you promised me that you would

always have a deep sense of understanding towards the way I behave.

There were many moments where I felt that we shouldn't continue developing this relationship, because I knew that it's not easy.

I stare at both of them.

Me: Unfortunately for me, I am not privileged like any of you to control my emotions. Believe me when I say I have tried to rationalise a lot of them, and do this and that, but unlike you, I am very very far from perfect.

Dean sits down.

Me: When I fell pregnant, I made it clear that I was not ready for a baby, and you, Derek, knew my reasons. We both knew that I was not mentally and emotionally ready to have a child. Heck, I'm still trying to control my own shit, and now I have to take care of another human? You tried to convince me that we'd be able to do it... I fought it for a very long time, but I eventually

started opening up to it... With each passing day, I was able to accept that I was going to have a baby... I wasn't 100% there, but I was slowly making progress. Someone else looking from the outside may think I was being selfish or dramatic, but we both knew what I go through every single day. You're the only person, besides my parents and Niki, who get to see me when I am at my lowest: when I wake up and feel like life is not worth living; when I fuss over tiny mistakes that I make and blame myself; when I have horrible nightmares and hallucinations; or when I just want to shut out everyone and be in my own bubble.

I keep quiet and try to gather my thoughts.

Me: So why would you even bring up the fact that I initially didn't want this baby?

Is this a way

of you finding someone to blame for what happened? What exactly is your purpose

of saying

that?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: So, you're just going to dismiss all the progress that I made?

I sigh.

Me: You say I'm thrilled that this baby died...

I feel a mild pain hitting my back.

Me: You think I'm thrilled that every time I go to the bathroom to pee, I see bloody clots? Do you

really think that it's thrilling to know that as I change a pad and throw away the used one, I'm actually throwing away a fetus? Every pain and every blood clot represents what was supposed to my child; do you honestly think I'm that cold-hearted that I'd find all of this enjoyable?

Dean looks down and I continue staring at Derek.

Me: Just because I'm not curled up in a bed, crying my lungs out, I'm heartless?

Now, I'm forced to grieve a certain way, because that will make you feel better?

I swallow the lump forming in my throat.

Me: More than anything, this shows me just how misunderstood I am. As much as you try, you

will never understand how it's like to be mentally oppressed by an illness you have no control over. Unfortunately, depression is not a switch I can play with, just because I have to accommodate people. Instead, I am the one who's suffering, because I have to accommodate it in my life forever. I don't get to choose when I want to deal with it...

He looks down.

Me: So, I apologise for being selfish, I really do. I apologise for not meeting your standards. I had no idea that you feel like I never meet you halfway... You've always been so vocal about understanding me and being patient with me, so I apologise for overusing all of your patience...

Clearly you've run out of patience and I am here to tell you that you can walk away from me... I

don't want to be with you when all I do is use up all your energy and push you to the edge. I

don't have the right to expect that from you... I'd rather live knowing that my selfishness doesn't

affect other people. I'll continue figuring out how to live with this disease, because it's

obviously not going anywhere...

Thankfully, my parents don't really have a choice to leave me,

so I think they'll be around for a while...

They won't minimise my actions to being dramatic or

selfish... Had I known that today you'd be using my episodes as leverage to make a strong

point, I'd have toned everything down...
Unfortunately, because I don't know
much about you
and your life, I can't really turn around
and use your troubles to make my points.
I am obviously
going to lose here, because I have been
emotionally naked with you, so you have
some great
points to make. Silly me didn't know this
nakedness would come back to hit me like
this.

I sigh.

Me: I have to constantly strengthen
myself, because a child is literally
removing him/herself out
of my system for the next few weeks, so I
apologise that I haven't shed a few tears...
If there's a

universal way of dealing with grief, then I obviously missed it. I apologise for not processing this whole traumatic experience the same way as everyone else in the world. My body is not used to bleeding out children, so please forgive me for not making space for a few tears...

I clear my throat.

Me: But look on the bright side... When God closes the door, He opens a window...

You have lost something this side, but gained something elsewhere... You're fortunate...

He stands.

Me: I am going to be deliberately selfish, and exclude myself from this situation now... Being

numb at this moment, is what's keeping me alive. I can't afford to be an emotional mess, when

I'm already suffering physically, so if you'll excuse me...

I turn and walk out of the door.

I go straight to my classroom, get my bag, and walk out, ignoring the crippling pains that seem

to be approaching.

INSERT 132

It's been a full week since the doctor told us about the miscarriage. The bleeding isn't as crazy

as I thought it would be- which makes me think I still have a long way to go.

As I'm getting ready in my room, my mom walks in and smiles.

Mom: Are you ready?

Me: Almost done.

She nods and walks out, closing the door.

After 15 minutes, I finish up and go to the lounge, where I find Derek sitting. I haven't seen him since that day in the office. I decided I'd stop going to work... Schools close in couple of days, so all should be well.

Me: Hi.

Derek: Hi.

I walk out and they follow shortly after. My dad has been avoiding me at all costs and I'm glad.

We get in the car and drive off to see Dr M.

When we get there, she does the usual tests and tells me that the miscarriage is not done. I still need to wait it out...

Mom: Is the weight loss normal? I'm worried that she's losing too much weight.

Dr M looks at me softly.

Dr M: It's normal... As long as you're still keeping healthy, you should be fine.

My mom looks at me worriedly.

Mom: Alright then.

Dr M: I'll see you again next week.

Mom: Thank you.

We make our way out.

Mom: I have to meet someone close by...

Derek, I'll catch a taxi.

Derek: I don't mind dropping you off.

My mom shakes her head and smiles.

Mom: You can take Zi back home, I'll be back later.

Derek nods lightly and gets in the car.

Mom: See you later, baby.

Me: Okay.

She walks off as I get in the car.

Me: I'd like to get something to eat, if you don't mind.

Derek: Sure.

He drives to Mike's Kitchen and we get a table. We place our order and the waiter walks off.

Derek: How are you?

Me: Could be better.

He nods and keeps quiet.

The waiter brings our drinks and we focus on them for some time.

Derek: I looked for you on Wednesday.

Me: I went home.

Derek: I figured.

Me: How are you?

He scratches his chin thoughtfully.

Derek: Emotional.

I nod and we're silent once again.

Derek: So, where do we stand?

Me: I stand by what I said on Wednesday.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I'd rather we go our separate ways to avoid more misunderstandings and hurt.

He nods and keeps quiet.

Our food eventually comes and we begin eating. His phone rings and I see that it's

Khwezi

calling. He ends the call and focuses on his food. Seconds later, it rings again, and this time it's

Busi.

He switches the phone off.

Me: You can answer it.

He shakes his head and focuses on his food.

After a while, we finish eating.

Derek: Would you like some dessert?

Me: No thanks.

He orders malva pudding for himself.

After a while, the waiter brings it and he focuses on it.

He finishes eating and pays the bill. We then make our way out.

Derek: I need to get something from my loft in Maboneng. Do you mind?

Me: No.

He drives off.

Just then, my phone rings, and I see Niki's name. I answer it.

Niki: Finally!

Me: Sorry.

Niki: What's going on? Why are you ignoring me?

Me: I had a miscarriage.

Derek looks at me sharply and Niki gasps.

Niki: What??

Me: I lost the baby. I started bleeding last Saturday and went to the doctor.

Niki: Zi, no...

She sighs heavily.

Me: Yep.

Niki: So, what's happening now?

Me: I have to wait it out.

Niki: The bleeding?

Me: Yes.

Niki: Why didn't you opt for the surgery?

Me: My mom doesn't want me to do it.

She sighs.

Niki: Where are you? I need to give you a big hug.

Me: I could use one...

Niki: I'm so sorry friend.

I keep quiet.

I don't know what it is that triggers it, but I start sobbing.

Niki: I know it doesn't make sense right now, but God knows what He's doing.

This is not your

fault, Zi. I hope you know that.

I bite my lower lip. I need her to continue, because her voice is really comforting.

Niki: I'm here for you. I don't like speaking to you over the phone, so please let me know when you're at home.

Me: Okay.

Niki: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Niki: Bye, then.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and wipe my tears. Derek speeds off and soon, we arrive at his loft and he insists on me coming in with him. We get there and I sit on the couch, while he goes to the bedroom.

He comes back.

He walks to the couch and sits next to me.

Derek: Do you mind giving me a few minutes of your attention?

Me: Sure.

Derek: I mean your undivided attention, Ziyanda.

I switch off the TV and look at him. I hadn't realised just how bad he looks. Do I also look like

this? He looks like he's carrying the world on his shoulders.

Derek: Let's get one thing clear...

He looks at me sternly.

Derek: I'll never let you walk away from me without fighting.

I try to say something, but he stops me.

Derek: As emotional as I am right now, I'm still rational enough to know that it would be foolish

to not fight for us. We've come a long way, and I'm too invested to give up on you.

He sighs and scratches his head.

Derek: I don't know where I'm at emotionally. I'm a mess. I don't think I've ever been this hurt or

angry.

Me: Angry at whom?

Derek: God, the Universe, my family, Busi, myself, and you...

I keep quiet.

Derek: I'm angry that God would even do such a thing to the people He claims to love and protect. I don't get the logic of this one bit. One minute, we're blessed with something so precious, the next that thing is snatched from us... I don't get it...

He rubs his eyes.

Derek: I had so many plans... I had so many hopes and dreams for our next chapter, and I'm fucken pissed that this shit had to happen. I don't get it, Ziyanda. I don't fucken get it. He sighs.

Derek: And then there's my family and Busi... I will never forgive them for this shit. It turns out

Khwezi knew about this shit for a long time now. I want to cut all of them out of my life, but I obviously can't because of this new development.

He looks down.

Derek: And then there's you...

He looks at me.

Derek: Yes, I'm angry at you... I know it doesn't make sense, but I am... I'm angry that you're

pulling away from me when I need you the most. I'm not sure whether you need me or not, but I

need you. I feel like I'm drowning, and I know for a fact that you're all I need right now.

He sighs heavily and chuckles lightly.

Derek: It's scary how much I love you... I think you underestimate the impact you have, and how much you mean to me. I'm pissed that we're not able to go through this together. I know we deal with shit differently, but surely I'm not selfish in wanting you by my side right now?

We're silent for a while.

Derek: I apologise for being harsh and inconsiderate. Yes, I don't fully understand what you go through, but I'm more than willing to unlearn and relearn. I would never use your troubles as leverage to make strong points in an argument, Ziyanda. I'm sorry if that's the impression I gave you. You also need to understand that I'm grieving, so my rationality is a bit shaky.

He gets closer to me and takes my hands.
Derek: I need you, Ziyanda. Right now, I'm hurt, lonely, confused and pissed as fuck. I'm fucken

emotional and I need you by my side. So, when you start mentioning separating, you're actually making it worse. I don't like this distance between us. There's no way I'm going to let go of you.

If I have to spend the rest of my life fighting and proving how much I love you, then so be it.

I sigh heavily and eventually start sobbing.

He pulls me and wraps his arms around me...

INSERT 133 (Short Insert)

When I wake up, Derek's arms are wrapped around me a bit too tight. I try to remove myself, but

he groans sleepily and continues holding on to me.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: I need to pee.

He groans.

Me: Ngidi.

He opens his eyes and yawns.

Me: I need to pee.

He loosens his grip on me.

Derek: Don't run away.

I get out of the bed and make my way to the bathroom. I pee, and as I wash my hands, I realise

just how drained I look. I'm losing weight, and not in a nice way. My face is pale and I look dry.

I finish up and go back to the bedroom. As soon as I get back in bed, Derek wraps his arms

around me again and I sigh in defeat.

I am awakened by mild pains in my abdomen area. I groan heavily and Derek instantly wakes up.

Derek: Baby.

I curl up and squeeze my tummy.

Derek: Zi.

I begin sobbing quietly as I listen and process this excruciating pain. As it intensifies, I feel myself bleeding.

Derek: Should we go see Dr M?

I shake my head and shut my eyes.

Me: I need a hot water bottle.

He looks around, panicking.

Derek: I don't have one. I'll buy one quick-

Me: Just pour boiling water in an empty bottle.

Derek: Okay.

He rushes out as I continue curling up and groaning.

After a while, he comes back with a bottle and hands it to me.

Me: I need a small towel.

He gets one and I cover the bottle with the towel. He watches as I place the bottle on my abdomen area.

After a few minutes, the pain subsides and I sigh.

Me: I'm okay.

He sits on the edge of the bed and stares down at me.

Me: I'm okay, Derek.

I stand and walk to the lounge to get my bag. I then take out a pad and walk to the bathroom.

He follows me and watches as I change the pad.

As soon as he sees the bloody pad, he takes it.

Me: Derek-

He shakes his head and I leave him alone.

I wipe myself, before putting on the clean one. I wash

my hands and take the pad from him. I roll it and use some tissue to cover it.

Thereafter, I flush it and turn to look at him.

Me: I'm sorry.

I step closer to him and he wraps his arms around me and instantly starts crying. It's not his

usual quiet sobs; he's letting it all out this time around.

I wrap my arms around him and we stand there for what seems like forever. I don't think I have it in me to cry more.

I don't know when or how, but we find ourselves sitting on the ground. The tiles are making my pains worse, but I ignore them.

Derek: This is fucked up.

I sigh.

Derek: I don't know how I'm going to get through this. I've never felt this defeated. I want to speak, but I don't know what to say. I don't have it in me to comfort him, because I'm also confused and defeated.

He then looks at me.

Derek: Thank you for staying.

Me: Well, it's not like you gave me a choice.

He chuckles and looks at me.

Derek: Do you see yourself dating someone else besides me?

I frown.

Derek: I'm just asking.

Me: I don't know...

Derek: Hmm.

We're silent for a while.

Derek: How are your pains?

Me: The tiles are killing me.

He immediately stands and pulls me up.

Derek: Why didn't you say anything?

Me: You were crying your lungs out.

Derek: Mxm.

We walk to the bedroom and I get back in bed.

Derek: You've lost a lot of weight.

Me: I look horrible.

Derek: You do.

Me: Hey!

Derek: You know I love your curves...

Me: Mxm.

I take the hot water bottle and give it to him.

Me: Please massage my back, it hurts.

He nods as I reposition and lie on my tummy. He pulls up my top and begins massaging my back gently. He then places the bottle.
Derek: Does this help?

I nod.

He continues massaging me until I doze off into quite a deep sleep.

When I wake up, I can smell Derek's food. I get out of bed and go to the bathroom and chuckle when I see packets of pads neatly placed next to the toilet rolls. I take one and change the pad I have. I then walk out and make my way to the kitchen, and sure enough, I find him cooking.

Derek: Dinner will be ready in a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

I go to the lounge and sit. I take my phone and see that I have missed calls from Niki and my mother. I text both of them, and let them know that I am okay.

Minutes later, Derek comes with a tray of food.

My stomach instantly grumbles and he chuckles.

Derek: Right on time, huh?

Me: Whatever.

He fetches his plate and we begin eating.

Me: Can I switch on the TV?

He frowns.

Me: Angithi you said you want my undivided attention.

Derek: Very funny.

I switch on the TV and play an episode of Basketball Wives.

It's now around 7pm, and I am full.

Derek: Are you ready to go home?

Me: I'd like to go out for a drink.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I'm not pregnant anymore, Derek. I'm sure I can drink now.

He sighs.

Me: You can stay.

He shakes his head and stands.

Derek: Asambe.

I stand as well.

Derek: So, we're going to go out looking like this?

Me: We can't be that bad...

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Are you trying to charm girls?

Derek: Angithi I'm single.

I leave him there and go to the bathroom, while he laughs.

It's now around 8pm and we're heading to Shakers.

As soon as we get there, we look at each other and shake our heads. It's so packed, that one can't even take 2 steps without bumping into someone. We then walk to Lenins, which is more peaceful. We get a table outside and I order a mojito, while he gets whiskey. As we're chatting, we're interrupted by someone.

The Worm, Siya, stands there.

Siya: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hello, Siya.

He looks at Derek.

Siya: Long time, buddy.

Derek doesn't respond.

Siya: How are you? I thought you didn't like Mabo?

I don't respond.

He then realises that he's unwanted, and eventually walks away.

I look at Derek and roll my eyes.

Derek: You used to fuck that?

Me: Wow.

He shakes his head disapprovingly and I grunt.

Me: Mxm.

After three mojitos, I'm beyond tipsy and Derek is acting strong, but he's also a bit woozy.

As we stagger back to his loft, we almost get mugged, but a security guard intervenes and we literally jog off.

As soon as we get to the loft, we pass out on the couch...

INSERT 134

We're now with Dr M, and Derek is holding my hand.

Dr M: The miscarriage is done.

I sigh and close my eyes.

I don't know how I feel. I'm relieved, but sad at the same time. I'm relieved that I won't go through the intense bleeding and pains, but I'm sad that I've lost a child. I'm sad, because this was a traumatic experience. It's going to take a very long time for me to accept that this happened to me. 90% of me is still in denial. I haven't fully registered what happened. I begin sobbing and my mom stands and wraps her arms around me. I cry for a very long time till I doze off.

When I wake up, I'm still in a private room. I blink a couple of times and find Derek sitting close by.

Derek: Baby.

I yawn and sit up.

Derek: Dr M said you must take these tablets for your headache.

Me: Okay.

He hands them to me, and gives me a glass of water.

Me: Thank you.

I get up from the bed, and as I'm about to put on my shoes, he pulls me till our bodies are

pressed against each other. He wraps his arms around me and our faces touch.

Derek: I'm sorry.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I'm not going anywhere, okay?

I nod and wrap my arms around him. We stand there for a long time, till the door opens and my

mom walks in. He kisses my forehead and lets go of me.

Mom: Sit down; I need to talk to you.

Me: Is everything okay?

She nods as Derek and I sit.

She looks at us sternly.

Mom: I am very proud of how you two have handled yourselves. It may not make sense to other

people, but you seem to know each other very well.

I glance at Derek.

Mom: This is not going to be easy. You still have a very long way to go, but I have faith that you'll be fine.

Why is my mom saying all of this? Has she been observing Derek and me for the last two months?

Mom: The last two months have been challenging, and I'm grateful that Derek is stubborn, and

never backs down when you push him away, Ziyanda.

Derek chuckles and I roll my eyes.

Mom: That makes me feel good as a mother. I'm glad that my one and only daughter is in safe hands.

Derek: Thank you.

She nods lightly.

Mom: Let's go.

We stand and I put on my shoes. We walk out and say goodbye to Dr. M. We make our way to

the car and my mom asks Derek to drop her off somewhere. Once we drop her off, Derek drives to his place.

I've been staying with my parents for the past two months. Even though Derek and I are working

on things, I still want space. I also resigned from the school. Camille tried to convince me otherwise, but I had already made up my mind. I just want to take a couple of months off and find myself again- and that means meeting up with Melinda regularly. Once I'm emotionally stable, I'll get a job somewhere different. Surprisingly, Lwazi didn't take it badly. She has settled in quite nicely and made good friends, so I'm the least of her worries. Derek, on the other hand, also left the school. He's been busy with his school, and now that the property has been bought, he's busy with renovations and all that other shit. I've been helping him...

With regard to Busi and that situation, Derek said he would deal with it once we were fine... He

put everything on pause...

So yes, I'm unemployed; I've been living with my parents, and meeting up with Derek on the weekends. I've also been meeting up with Melinda.

Derek: Do you mind if I drive to Dean's place first?

Me: No.

I haven't seen Dean in a long time. He's been calling and checking up on me, and I'm glad that he respects my space. I decided that I don't want Derek's crew to know about the pregnancy and miscarriage. I'd rather they find out when I've healed properly, that way their sympathy

won't really be triggering.

We get to Dean and Nolwazi's new house, and make our way to the lounge.

Thankfully, the megabytes are with their grandparents, so I won't be listening to Simo's loud

and traumatising cries.

Nolwazi: Zizi!

She walks to me and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: It's been so long!

Me: I know...

Nolwazi: You've lost so much weight.

Me: Hate it.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay...

Derek seems to have disappeared.

Nolwazi: Are you sure?

I sigh.

Me: Well...

She looks at me intently.

Me: I was pregnant and I had a miscarriage.

She looks at me in shock.

I thought Dean may have told her during their pillow talk... So, Dean is also trustworthy?

Nolwazi: What??

I tell her everything and she gasps.

Nolwazi: Oh, Ziyanda. I'm so sorry.

I sigh.

Me: Thanks.

Nolwazi: Shit. That's really fucked up.

I nod and we sit.

Me: I need advice.

Nolwazi: Okay.

She looks at me intently.

Me: How do you suggest I deal with Derek's ex?

She sighs.

Me: You've been in a similar position, where Kwanele's mother hated you, and did all these crazy things to get rid of you... How did you cope?

She sighs and bites her lower lip.

Nolwazi: I think your situation is different, because your man is willing to fight for you. Kwanele didn't even attempt to stop what happened.

I nod.

Nolwazi: So, you're at an advantage, because Derek is on your side, and he has made that absolutely clear.

Me: But still...

She smiles.

Nolwazi: Busi has no power here. She thinks she has power, but she doesn't. You also need to

show her how strong your unit is with noNkanyezi. Don't allow them to come in-between you two.

I sigh.

Nolwazi: Busi is a random ex that is very dizzy. Don't even allow such a non-factor to ruin your life. I know the likes of her.

I chuckle.

Nolwazi: Fight for your relationship. Don't blame Derek for any of this, because just like you, he also had no idea that he has a child with Busi. Khwezi and the minion are using this to get you to run. Mother-in-laws are pathetic yazi... She hisses.

Nolwazi: If I could go back in time, I would gladly slap Thenjiwe a few times.

Me: Kwanele's mother?

She nods.

Me: But, you handled yourself well.

She nods.

Nolwazi: My dignity is important, at the end of the day. Don't go around screaming and trying to

prove your importance. You are important, in fact, you're very important in Derek's eyes, so why

try to prove your importance to anyone else? Don't allow them to control your reactions. Stay

calm at all times, that will terrify them.

I nod thoughtfully.

She opens up her arms and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: I know you can do this. I've seen the feisty side of you.

Me: My feisty side is too extreme.

She laughs.

Me: It's either I'm an emotionless robot, or a crazy person.

We laugh.

Nolwazi: Call me anytime. I've been through my fair share of relationship drama.

Me: Thank you.

Just then, Derek and Dean walk to the lounge.

Before I can even control myself, I'm already rushing to Dean. I didn't realise I missed him this much.

He opens his arms and I squeeze him.

Dean: Look what the wind blew in...

Me: Mxm.

Dean: You've been acting very fresh lately.

Me: Whatever.

Dean: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

He looks at me weirdly.

Me: I'll gain my weight back!

Dean: Please do. Skinny is not for you.

Me: Argh.

He chuckles and hugs me again.

Dean: I missed you.

Me: Of course. Who wouldn't?

Dean: Haike.

I smile.

Dean: Apparently you're unemployed?

Me: Yes.

Dean: So, you've officially become a gold digger?

Me: I guess.

I glance at Derek and he chuckles.

Nolwazi: I was about to dish up lunch.

Want to join us?

Derek looks at me questioningly.

Dean: Of course, they're joining us. Look at Ziyanda... Poor girl looks hungry.

Nolwazi: Langa!

He laughs as he wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: How I've missed The Great Ziyanda of the Dlamini.

Me: Mxm.

We all walk to the kitchen...

INSERT 135

Derek: So, you're not sleeping over?

Me: No.

He sulks.

Me: Derek, you and I are still roaming around with an undefined relationship.

Derek: The fuck??

I chuckle.

Derek: You must be crazy.

Me: Just take me home, please.

He groans as he changes direction.

Nolwazi's food was so delicious, that Dean even packed a skhaftin for me.

Me: I need to gain weight.

Derek: Don't worry about that...

I look at him questioningly.

Derek: The happiness I will bring to your life will bring back your curves.

Me: Wow! Egotistical much?

He laughs.

Derek: Give me 2 weeks. You'll be back to your usual self.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: Dean likes exaggerating. You don't look horrible.

Me: Can you imagine what my neighbours are saying? I'm sure they've concluded that iqhoks has finished me.

Derek: Qhoks?

Me: The three sisters!

Derek: What??

Me: Chive!

Derek: HIV?

Me: Yes!

He bursts out in laughter and looks at me in shock.

Derek: What the fuck?

I sigh in defeat.

Me: I'm sure they've spread so many rumours about me. Futhi they've seen your crew's cars driving in and out of our yard. I'm sure bayasho nje ukuthi I'm a hoe and now my hoe tendencies have caught up with me.

He continues laughing.

Derek: That's why I'd never survive in the township. Too much shit going on.

Me: Mxm.

We eventually get to my parents' house and I say goodbye to him...

It's now Wednesday and Derek insists on meeting up with me. I'm waiting for him to come fetch

me.

My dad and I ended up having a proper conversation about the miscarriage, and it's safe to say

he's deeply affected. He's assured me that he'll be fine though, so I've been giving him space.

I get in Derek's car and he drives off.

Derek: I think it's time I teach you how to drive.

Me: I'm really not interested. I got my Learner's and I think that's enough.

He shakes his head disapprovingly.

Me: Where are you taking me?

Derek: You'll see.

We get to Botanical Garden and I chuckle when I see the set up.

Me: Are picnics our thing now?

Derek: I think so.

Me: This is cute.

Derek: I know.

We sit and he pours us champagne.

Me: Thanks.

I take a sip and pull a face. I'm really not a champagne person yazi. I drink it once in a while...

Derek: So, it's clear that I have to beg you again to be my girlfriend.

Me: Beg?

Derek: Let's just call a spade a spade: you love being begged.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Uthanda ukuncengwa.

Me: Wow!

He looks at me blankly and I roll my eyes.

Derek: So, I'll put in the work...

Me: It will take more than a lousy picnic.

Derek: Lousy? Ouch.

I giggle.

Me: I'm an expensive whore... I keep saying this.

He chuckles.

Derek: I still feel bad for how messed up your birthday weekend was. You did the most for me

when it was my birthday, but I failed to do the same when it was yours.

Me: I even forgot about that.

He sighs.

Derek: I've put you through a lot.

Me: I've also put you through the most.

He pulls me closer to him. I'm now kneeling in-between his legs.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Hmm.

We chuckle.

Derek: Please be my person again?

I look at him thoughtfully.

Derek: Pretty please?

Me: I'll get back to you. Let me think about it.

Derek: Ah yabona ke.

I laugh and he smiles.

Me: What?

Derek: It's been a while since I've seen you smile sincerely.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: I'm serious.

He plants a kiss on my nose and I back off.

Derek: Wow.

Me: I'm a single virgin. Stay away from me, Devil!

I sit down again and take a samoosa.

Me: Melinda wants to meet you.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: What?

Derek: She wants to meet me?

I nod.

Me: She wants to do a few sessions with us.

He sighs.

Me: You don't have tDerek:

Tell me when...

I smile and nod.

Me: Okay.

Derek: As long as she doesn't feed you nonsense.

Me: Nonsense?

Derek: That you and I don't belong together.

I chuckle.

Me: She never tells me what to do. She helps me makes sense of my life.

Derek: Hmm.

I throw an olive at him and he ducks.

Derek: You can't be wasting food!

Me: Gosh, I'll stuff my face, then.

We continue chatting...

About 3 hours later, we're done and making our way to his apartment. He managed to convince me to sleepover at his place.

As we approach his door, we see Khwezi and Busi there.

He immediately takes my hand and holds it.

I want to turn and run away, but the notorious Petty seems to have risen.

Where has she been all this time?

We get to the door.

Khwezi: Wow!

Busi is staring at me. I open the door and walk in. Just as Khwezi is about to follow, Derek

blocks her way.

Derek: Uyaphi?

Khwezi: Ye wena, Nkanyezi!

He looks at her blankly.

Me: Just let them in.

He turns and looks at me in disbelief. I shrug and walk off.

As I'm in the bathroom, I hear Khwezi scolding Derek.

I sit on the toilet seat for a while, gathering my thoughts.

Eventually, I get up and make my way to the lounge, where everyone is.

I find Busi sitting on my usual spot.

Khwezi: When are you going to see your son, Derek?

Me: When it has been confirmed that the child is his.

They all stare at me in shock.

Me: What will not happen is you thinking it's okay to waltz in here as you please. I live here now,

so I have every right to ask you to leave.

Khwezi tries to say something.

Me: No, Khwezi, I'm tired of hearing your voice. You seem to be so involved in other people's

business, that you forget that not all of us are like Busi over here: weak and spineless. I've taken a lot of nonsense from you, Khwezi, and it ends today. The next time you pitch here, it's either

you have the DNA results, or I call the police and they'll escort you out of here.

Khwezi: What?! Derek are yo-

Derek: Shut up.

She looks at him in shock.

Me: I'm tired of this back and forth. Get the DNA done, so we can find a way forward.

I look at Busi.

Me: I just fail to understand how you can raise a child for over 2 years, while lying about he's

true identity. It doesn't even make sense to me, but that's a story for another day.

Busi grunts.

Me: Now, if you don't mind, please leave my space and never come back.

I look at Derek and I see his hidden smile. I then look at Khwezi, who is breathing heavily.

Me: I've been very quiet... I've been disrespected by you, and I'm tired. I still respect you as an adult, so I won't stoop as low as you, when it comes to getting my point across. I then look at Busi.

Me: Get the tests done.

Busi: Derek, why would you allow her to address me like this?

Derek: Busi, in the grand scheme of things, who exactly are you?

There's an awkward silence. Damn, Derek.

Derek: You seem to overestimate your value in my life.

Wait, did he just use my line? I should copyright this shit.

Derek: I don't give a shit about you. I've set up an appointment with my doctor.

We're doing this

DNA, and if the child is mine, I'll do what I have to...

He then stares at both of them.

Derek: And for both your sakes, that child better be mine...

Khwezi: Are you threatening me?!

Derek: Get out.

Busi takes her bag and storms out.

Khwezi looks at me angrily and hisses.

Khwezi: You'll get what's coming to you.

Me: Hmkay.

Khwezi: You couldn't even carry a child for him; do you really think that you'll manage to keep

Derek to yourself forever?

Me: Well, if you could keep your husband for this long, without giving him biological children,

then surely there's hope for me?

Yoh, I almost got killed.

Derek literally had to drag her out of the place.

I sit down and sigh heavily.

Derek comes back after a while and sits next to me.

Derek: Are you okay?

I nod.

Me: I need some wine.

He nods as he walks off and I sink on the couch...

INSERT 136

Two weeks have passed and Derek and I just came back from visiting Xolani. He eventually

agreed to go to rehab, and he seems to be doing fine.

Derek and I are now on our way to meet with Melinda for our fourth session.

Derek seems to like her very much.

Derek: I am looking forward to this session. Melinda said-

Me: Melinda this, Melinda that. Yoh, ngaze ngafa.

He chuckles.

Derek: Melinda said we're going to focus on transparency.

Me: Hmm.

He smiles as he focuses on the road.

Me: You're not transparent though.

He sighs.

Derek: That might change.

Me: Hmm.

We eventually get there, and make our way to Melinda's "office."

Melinda: Hello!

Derek: Hi, Melinda.

Derek smiles warmly and they shake hands.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug.

Derek and I then sit and she also sits opposite us.

Melinda: Today, I'd like you to tell each other how you are, instead of telling me.

Derek chuckles and I try not to roll my eyes.

He seems to admire Melinda. Everything she says is pure gold to Derek.

Melinda: I'll give you two minutes. So, Ziyanda, you'll tell Derek what it's like to be in your body

today. Derek, you will do the same.

We both nod and look at each other.

Derek: Would you like to start?

Me: Why don't you start?

He chuckles and sighs.

Derek: What is it like being in my body today?

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I think it's calming... I'm in a neutral mood.

I nod lightly.

Derek: And you?

Me: I'm also in a neutral mood today.

Derek: What a coincidence.

He chuckles.

Melinda: So, you're both in a similar state of mind today?

Derek and I nod.

Melinda: Today, I want us to focus on a number of things, transparency being one of them...

I look at Derek.

Melinda: Ziyanda?

She looks at me knowingly. She already knows that I have something to say.

Me: I think Derek has double standards.

Melinda: How so?

Me: He expects me to be open and honest, yet he isn't.

Melinda: He's not open and honest?

Me: He's honest. However, he doesn't let me in.

Melinda: Let you in, how?

Me: He knows everything about me. I got into this relationship thinking I'm the one who is

closed off, but that is not the case. I don't know Derek to the core. I don't know his inner

dialogue: what scares him, what ticks him off. He hasn't exposed himself fully to me.

Melinda then looks at Derek.

Melinda: Is this true, Derek?

Derek glances at me before saying yes.

Melinda: Are you closed off?

Derek: Yes.

Melinda: Are you closed off with everyone, or Ziyanda specifically?

Derek: It's mostly everyone.

Melinda: Do you have someone in your life that you've exposed yourself to?

Derek: Yes.

I look at him.

Me: Is it Dean?

Derek: Yes.

I hiss.

Melinda: Is there a problem?

Me: This is what I have told Derek... I will not get back with him unless he's willing to open up. I

don't think it's fair that the transparency is not expected on both sides.

Melinda: Derek?

Derek: It's not that easy.

Melinda: Why do you find it difficult?

Derek: I'm not trusting.

Me: So, you don't trust me?

Derek: It's not that I don't trust you...

Me: Then what's the problem?

He sighs.

He seems defeated.

I always let it slide, but not this time. I want Melinda to come for him. This is unacceptable.

Melinda: I am going to tell you about the Johari Window Model.

She draws a four-square grid.

Melinda: The Johari Window model is a simple and useful tool for illustrating and improving

self-awareness, communication, and mutual understanding between individuals within a group.

It's usually used in businesses, but I'd like to tell you about it, because we can also apply it here.

She points at the grid.

Melinda: As you can see, there are four blocks here. They all represent different things. The top left block represents the arena. Here, we have all the things a person knows about themselves, and what is known by others as well. This block is called the arena, because it is open for all.

This is the information about the person - behaviour, attitude, feelings, emotion, knowledge, experience, skills, views, etc - known by the person ('the self') and known by the group ('others').

She writes all of this on the top left block.

Melinda: Next, we have the blind spot, on the top right block. What do you think it is?

Derek: What's known to others, but not known to self?

Melinda: Yes. This includes things we don't know about ourselves, but are known to other people.

She looks at me.

Melinda: How do you think we can find out what others know about us?

Me: Ask them.

She nods.

Melinda: This is where open and honest communication is vital. The only way we can find out

what others know about us is through feedback, constructive feedback. Asking others will help

you find out some things about yourself.

You might be doing things you don't know, so

communicating with others will enlighten you on people's perceptions of you.

Derek and I nod.

Melinda: Then we have the bottom left block... Ziyanda, what do you think happens here?

Me: Maybe, what I know about myself, that others don't know?

She nods.

Melinda: Spot on. This block is called the facade. This is what is known to ourselves but kept

hidden from, and therefore unknown, to others. This hidden or avoided self represents

information, feelings, etc, anything that a person knows about him/herself, but which is not

revealed or is kept hidden from others.

The hidden area could also include sensitivities, fears,

hidden agendas, manipulative intentions, secrets - anything that a person knows but does not

reveal, for whatever reason.

We nod.

Melinda: Then lastly, we have the unknown in the bottom right block. This block contains

information, feelings, abilities, aptitudes, experiences etc, that are unknown to the person

him/herself and unknown to others in the group. These unknown issues take a variety of forms:

they can be feelings, behaviours, attitudes, capabilities, aptitudes, which can be quite close to

the surface, and which can be positive and useful, or they can be deeper aspects of a person's

personality, influencing his/her behaviour to various degrees.

She writes down all of this.

Melinda: Now, it is very important to note that we should all aim to have more information on the arena block. The “arena” block represents openness. It means what we know about ourselves is also known to others. This leaves little room for misunderstandings about our intentions.

She then stares at us and allows us to process the information.

Melinda: Any questions?

I shake my head and we stare at Derek.

Derek: Does this mean I have a lot of shit under the Facade block?

Melinda nods.

Me: You do. A lot of things are only known by you, and I’m in the dark. I don’t know if you’re

intentionally keeping me in the dark or what.

Derek: It's not intentional.

I sigh in defeat.

Melinda: Why are you so frustrated, Ziyanda?

Me: Our relationship has the potential to be great, but because there's a lot of shit I don't know about him, we're at a standstill.

Melinda nods.

Melinda: It's going to be a long process.

Me: And, until Derek is willing to put in the work, him and I will remain stagnant.

Derek chuckles quietly.

Melinda: Are you giving him an ultimatum?

I nod.

Melinda: So you two haven't been together since the miscarriage?

I nod.

Melinda: How do you feel about what Ziyanda is saying?

Derek: I hear her...

Melinda nods expectantly.

Derek: I'll try.

Melinda nods knowingly.

Melinda: It's important for you to work at your own pace, and not rush things. This is a long process.

She looks at me.

Melinda: The Patience Tool will come in handy.

Me: I've been very patient.

Derek: But, you're making it seem like the patience is running out.

Me: Well...

Melinda: Your patience is running out?
I sigh.

Me: It's also not easy being in a relationship with a person who's closed-off. I don't know him as much I should.

Derek stands and excuses himself. He walks out and I stare at Melinda.

Me: He's angry.

Melinda: How do you know?

Me: I know.

She nods lightly.

Me: But, I think this is the push he needs. I need him to feel uncomfortable. He must be in touch with his feelings. I don't want to end up feeling like I'm sleeping with a robot. I'm a very emotional person, and Derek is the complete opposite. However, because we're in a

relationship, he needs to find a way to broaden his “arena” in order for us to build a deeper connection.

Melinda nods.

Derek eventually comes back and Melinda concludes the session.

I bet he doesn't like Melinda now, huh?

Uzoba strength.

We're now driving.

Derek: Are you hungry?

Me: Not really.

Derek: Well, I am..

He changes direction and drives to one of his favourite restaurants.

We get there and get a table.

Me: So, are you going to be grumpy for the rest of the day?

He groans.

Me: Melinda is just trying to help.

I imitate him.

Me: Melinda is great. Melinda is so different and she-

Derek: Okay, I get it!

I stop and chuckle.

Me: It's all part of the process. There comes a time in your life when you have to face the demons you've spent most of your time avoiding...

He scratches his chin and sighs.

Me: Part of the process...

Derek: And until I've faced these demons, you and I will remain like this?

Me: Yep.

He hisses and I smile.

Me: If you want me, all of me, then you must put in the work. I'm an expensive whore...

He chuckles.

Just then, I hear murmurs.

Out of nowhere, people start singing
Happy Birthday.

I turn around.

Me: The fuck?

Dean, Nolwazi, Nomvuyo, Liwa, Zimkitha,
Niki and my parents are all here.

They walk to the table and finish up
singing.

Dean: Happy Belated Birthday, Dlamini.

I look at them in disbelief.

Nomvuyo: Let's go to our table...

She pulls me and leads me to a huge
circular table that has been set up...

INSERT 137

Me: What's happening?

I look at Derek and he smiles.

Nomvuyo: We know you don't like
surprises, but we don't really care.

Me: Wow.

We all sit.

Mom: I told them you'd go crazy.

I take a deep breath.

Derek touches me hand and brushes it. I glance at him. He knows what's going through my mind.

Me: You're annoying.

Derek: Write Melinda a letter, I'm sure you'll feel better afterwards.

My jaw drops and he chuckles.

He leans closer to me and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Ngeke ngizwe ngawe.

I push him away and he continues chuckling.

I look at my dad.

Me: Did mom drag you here?

Dad: Believe it or not, I was looking forward to this.

I frown.

Dad: It's good to interact with this side of the world once in a while.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Thanks for bringing the chicken.

Me: Chicken?

Mom: Vuvu seems to be obsessed with your dad's chicken. She asked for a delivery.

Me: Gosh.

I listen to them make fun of me for a while.

We're served our first course and we begin eating.

Zimkitha: You've been so MIA, Zi.

Liwa: And you look slimmer.

I try not to roll my eyes.

Derek: She's been busy with work.

Niki, who's sitting next to me, clears her throat.

Niki: Do you mind reintroducing yourselves? I forgot your names.

I chuckle.

I'm glad she's changing this subject, because what am I supposed to say to these people? They don't know what I've been going through...

Dean: You're the one who should be reintroducing yourself.

Niki: I'm certain you know who I am.

Dean chuckles.

Nolwazi: Yes, we do.

Mom: Ungazophaphela uNikiwe, wena Langelihle.

Dean winks at Niki playfully.

Liwa: Well, this is my wife, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo smiles.

Nomvuyo: I'm glad we're finally meeting you. We've heard a lot about you.

Niki: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: And I think it's interesting that you're dating Kwanele.

I just want to go over to her and shut her mouth.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Uhm, this is my mother, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha smiles sweetly.

Liwa: And, I'm Liwa.

Niki: Nice to finally meet you. I've also heard a lot about you all.

Nomvuyo: So, how's-

Liwa: How's the food?

Dad: The food could use more spice...

Gossip Girl is doing the most right now, and I don't want her to be disliked by Niki, but right now,

I think Niki wants to rearrange her pretty face.

My dad goes on to innocently get rid of the awkwardness.

The conversation is now flowing, and I'm also feeling more at ease.

I'm quite shocked at how well Nolwazi and Niki are getting along. They seem to be enjoying each other's company.

Zimkitha: It's now time for gifts!

She seems so excited.

Zimkitha: I didn't get to give you my gift the last time...

She stands and disappears.

A minute later, she comes back, and is followed by one of the waiters, carrying lots of boxes.

Zimkitha: We show up and show out!

She pulls me off my seat and I stand next to her.

Zimkitha: This is from Gabi and Joe, who couldn't join us today.

I take the box and open it.

Me: How lovely...

Of course, Gabi would get me makeup.
Just what a girl needs. She even included a
set of
brushes.

Zimkitha then gives me another box.

Nomvuyo: That's from me.

She winks at me and I smile.

Me: Perfumes?

Nomvuyo: A girl has to have at least 5
bottles of perfume. You can't smell the
same every day.

Me: Wowzer.

She smiles.

Me: Thank you, lover.

Nomvuyo: You're most certainly welcome,
baby.

I then take another box. I open it and
smile.

I glance at Derek, because I know it's from
him.

Derek: 365 reasons why I love you.

Nolwazi: You wrote 365 notes by hand?
He nods.

Niki: That is so cute!
I chuckle.

Dean: These two do some really weird
shit.

Nolwazi: That is so romantic!

Zimkitha: And original!

Derek: I got the idea from The Great
Dlamini.

Me: Thanks, Ngidi.

Derek: You're welcome. You still have a
lot of unused coupons, remember?

I laugh.

Me: We'll get to that some other time...

Derek: I'll be waiting...

I put his gift aside, as Zimkitha gives me
an envelope.

Mom: That's from me and your dad.

Me: Hehe, it's money, neh?

They laugh.

Me: You give me money every year.

Mom: Hai sisi we know how much you love money.

Dad: And we never know what to get you.

Me: Well, I'm not complaining.

Dean: Expensive girl...

Me: Yep.

I continue opening the gifts.

I give all of them hugs.

Me: Thank you, people.

Zimkitha: I know you'll enjoy using that bag I got you.

Me: Certainly. I don't doubt the quality.

Zimkitha: No knock-offs here.

We continue chatting and eating for a couple of more hours.

By 5pm, we're done.

My parents leave with Zimkitha, who invited them to some fundraising event...

My poor parents.

Liwa: We've really missed you, Dlamini.

He wraps his arms around my shoulders and looks down at me.

Liwa: Are you sure everything is okay?

Me: Yes, I promise.

He looks at me suspiciously before nodding.

Nomvuyo: Your pregnancy isn't showing, instead you're just losing weight.

Derek: Uhm we shoul-

Liwa: Wait, what? You're pregnant?

I sigh in defeat, as Liwa exclaims excitedly.

Derek walks away.

Niki: I need the bathroom, where is it?

Nolwazi: I also need it. I'll show you where it is...

Niki and Nolwazi disappear.

Liwa: You're pregnant? Is that why you've been MIA?

Dean looks at Nomvuyo angrily.

Dean: You can't keep your mouth shut, can you?

Nomvuyo: Excuse me?

Dean: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: Heyi, wena. Don't even tr-

Me: I lost the baby.

Liwa and Nomvuyo both look at me as if I'm speaking a foreign language.

Liwa lets go of me.

Me: I had a miscarriage, that's why I've been MIA.

Nomvuyo's eyes water up.

Me: Please don't. I'm really trying to move on.

Liwa: I apologise for...

He sighs in defeat and scratches his head.

Me: It's okay. I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: I'm so sorry.

She steps closer to me and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry.

She lets go of me and wipes her tears. I'm also a bit teary now.

Nomvuyo: Why didn't you tell me? All this time I've been referring to your pregnancy kanti you lost the baby? Ziyanda...

Me: I wasn't ready.

She sighs heavily and nods.

I look at Liwa, who seems traumatised.

Me: I'm fine, guys, really.

Liwa: Did you at least get the support you need?

Me: I guess...

Nomvuyo: Now, I feel like an idiot.

Dean: You shou-

Nomvuyo: Shut the fuck up, Dean. You're really starting to piss me off.

Dean: You're the one who's supposed to shut the fuck up, with your big mouth.

Nomvuyo: DMe:

Guys, come on.

They stop.

Nomvuyo: Mxm.

Liwa: Dean, how the fuck was Nomvuyo supposed to know? Stop being an unreasonable piece of shit.

Dean tries to say something, but Liwa gives him a look.

Liwa: Don't get me started.

Dean walks off.

Now, I'm confused. Why are they being so dramatic? Surely, it's not that deep?

Me: I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: Did you see Melinda?

Me: I've been seeing her.

Liwa: That's good.

He gives me a hug.

Liwa: I know there's nothing much we can say or do, but I hope you know we're here for you.

I nod and smile.

Me: Thank you.

Nomvuyo: Dean knew?

Me: He was there...

She hisses.

Liwa's phone rings, and it's Zimkitha.

Liwa: Mama... Yes, we're still here... Oh, I didn't see it... You're coming back to get it?... Alright,

then...Bye...

He hangs up.

Liwa: She forgot her coat.

Nomvuyo: There it is... She really is getting old...

They both chuckle.

Just then, Nolwazi and Niki come back.

Where's Derek?

Nolwazi: Where's Langa?

Nomvuyo: Probably changing his tampon.

Nolwazi is left speechless.

Dean walks in with Derek.

Dean: Ready to leave, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: Yes.

She looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: See you soon?

Me: Yes.

We share a hug.

Nolwazi: Bye, everyone.

She hugs Liwa and decides to leave
Nomvuyo alone.

Looking at Nomvuyo, I think I'm also
going to be just like her when I grow up: a
petty and

sensitive bitch. Gosh, I need to change my
ways. I can't be this person.

Suddenly, someone clears their throat.

We all turn around, and lo and behold,
Kwanele is standing here, looking at us.

I think there is silence for a good 30
seconds.

Kwanele: Hi.

Another 30 seconds of silence.

I clear my throat.

Me: Hey.

Nolwazi: Hello, Kwanele.

Awks.

I look at Niki, and the hoe looks as cool as a cucumber.

Niki: I should get going. Goodbye, everyone. It was lovely meeting you.

She walks to me, gives me a squeeze, and then walks to her man.

Dean, Lord, Dean... I don't even want to look at him, because I know he has beef with this man.

Liwa: Nice to meet you too, Niki... Good seeing you Kwanele.

Kwanele frowns.

Something weird is going on and angazi yini... Something don't feel right.

Nolwazi: Uhm, we should also get going... Just then, Zimkitha walks in.

Zimkitha: I forgot my coat...

We all stare at her.

Zimkitha assesses the scene.

She glances at Kwanele and Niki.

Liwa: Mama, here's your coat.

She takes it from him.

Zimkitha: See you around.

Me: Where are my parents?

Zimkitha: In the car.

I nod and she walks out.

Niki: Bye, everyone.

Ku-tense nje.

Nolwazi: Bye, Niki.

Liwa: Bye.

Nomvuyo: Bye, dear.

Niki: Bye bye Dean.

She looks at him sweetly.

Dean: Bye.

Niki then looks at Kwanele and smiles.

Niki: Asambe.

Kwanele nods and they walk off...

The tension is as thick as my thighs from
a couple of months ago.

Liwa chuckles quietly and looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: Ready to go?

Nomvuyo: Yes.

She gets her things and hugs me.

Nomvuyo: I'll call you.

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo: Bye.

She walks off with Liwa, hand in hand.

Nolwazi: The things we tolerate...

I look at her in disbelief.

Dean: I'm getting tired of blabbermouth.

Nolwazi: The day I snap...

Hai hai, this can't be happening. Why are these people being so dramatic and unnecessary?

Nolwazi then looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: I hope you enjoyed your day.

Me: I did, thank you.

We share a hug.

I look at Dean, and as much as I try, I end up laughing.

Me: I didn't know you could be this shook in life... Kwanele makes you sweat?

Dean: Don't fuck with me.

Nolwazi and I chuckle.

Me: Wowzer.

Dean: Mxm, asambe, Nolwazi.

He walks off and Nolwazi follows him.

Now, it's just Derek and I...

I look at him softly.

Me: Don't be grumpy.

I step closer to him and give him a hug.

Derek: I'm horny and frustrated.

Me: Shame.

I try to let go of him, but he holds me tighter.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Derek-

Derek: Stop giving me terms and conditions. I want to spend the rest of my life with you.

Me: I know you do.

Derek: Then stop pushing me away.

Me: Let's just leave...

Derek: Are you spending the night at our place?

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Good. You obviously need to be reminded...

Me: Reminded of what?

Derek: You'll see...

I push him away, as I feel my insides churn.

We get my gifts and make our way to the car.

INSERT 138 (Short Insert)

I'm trying my best to keep myself intact, but Derek fucken Ngidi is pounding me so intensely,

that I feel like I'm being introduced to another galaxy. With every pound, the stubbornness trickles away, and he gains more control of my soul, my whole entire soul.

As soon as I reach my climax, I'm a shaking mess.

I lose touch with reality and see stars all around. I'm convinced I'm insane.

After some time, he turns me around and grins.

Derek: You okay?

I grunt and he chuckles.

I eventually doze off, but I'm awakened by his erection...

Heyi, out of nowhere, I'm being flipped like a pancake, and my ass is floating high.

A girl can't even get any sleep. I feel like I'm being rearranged, and I don't even have the chance to catch my breath.

I wake up and my joints pulse.
I check the time and it's around 8am.
As I'm about to get out of bed, Derek pulls me.

Me: Yoh, Derek, I get it, you're great...
He laughs and lets go of me. I go to the bathroom and pee.

I just feel like I'm having an out of body experience. It's very clear that I haven't had sex in a very long time. I sit there for a while, re-evaluating my life.

I eventually walk out and stare at him as he's lying there, naked.

He pats the empty space next to him and I walk to the bed. I get in and he pulls me.

Derek: Morning, baby.

Me: Morning.

He plants a kiss on my nose and I groan.

Derek: Missed you.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Stop being stubborn... Didn't I fuck you enough?

I squeal and try to move away from him, but he holds me tighter, and laughs.

Derek: Stop trying to convince yourself that you don't want to be with me.

Me: Mxm.

He chuckles and kisses me.

Me: Thank you for yesterday.

He nods.

Derek: Anything for you.

Me: Hmm. What was up with Dean and Nomvuyo?

He shrugs.

Derek: Nomvuyo was shocked, and Dean was trying to protect you.

Me: Protect me from what though?

Derek: He didn't want the focus to be on what happened.

Me: Nomvuyo didn't know about the miscarriage. Dean was being dramatic.

Derek: I've never seen Dean like this. You've unleashed the drama queen in him.

I giggle.

Me: As for Nolwazi and Vuvu.

Derek: I can't wait for that to unfold.

There's always been a vibe between them.

Me: Who do you think will win the fight?

Derek: Hmm...

Me: I think Nolwazi is a silent killer.

Derek: Ya, I think she could win.

Me: But, I know Vuvu will not be played.

The bitch is crazy.

We laugh.

Derek: Vuvu is unmatched.

Me: I can't wait. It will be very entertaining.

Derek: I'm sure once the fight is over, the tension will vanish.

Me: I'm going to have to jump in when the fight takes place.

Derek: Whose side are you on?

Me: Vuvu's my girl.

He laughs.

Derek: Hmm...

He pulls me and locks me in his embrace.

Derek: Now let's discuss this fight between you and me.

Me: Nigga, I am not fighting you.

Awungiyeke.

Derek: Then make love to me.

I groan and he repositions...

It's now around 12pm, and Nomvuyo insisted on seeing me.

Derek really rearranged my entire existence. I'm having an existential crisis right now, all because of sex.

Nomvuyo eventually arrives, and I'm very happy to see her pretty face.

She walks in and I glance at her round belly.

Me: This baby is making you more beautiful.

Nomvuyo: You don't say...

She looks at me sadly, before she sits comfortably.

Me: Go on, I'm listening.

Nomvuyo: I can't believe you went through all of that shit by yourself! Why?

Why would you do that to yourself, Ziyanda?

I listen to her give it to me... Once she's done, she starts sobbing.

I get closer to her and hold her.

Nomvuyo: I'm so sorry you had to go through such a traumatising experience. I continue comforting her until she calms down.

Nomvuyo: I feel guilty for being pregnant.

Me: Don't. I'm really fine, Vuvu... The physical aspect of the miscarriage was what traumatised me more than anything.

She nods.

Me: But, I dealt with it. I'm fine now.

Nomvuyo: You're not lying to me?

I shake my head and smile.

Me: I'm fine, I promise.

She nods and we share a hug.

Nomvuyo: I apologise for yesterday.

Me: It's okay, you didn't know.

Just then, Derek clears his throat.

We turn, and he is standing there, with Dean next to him.

Lord, I don't need more drama.

Dean: What are you doing here, blabbermouth?

Nomvuyo stands, and before we all know it, a vase is thrown at Dean. He quickly ducks and we

all stare at Nomvuyo in shock.

Nomvuyo: Don't fuck with me.

She takes a glass and throws it at Dean, who ducks once again.

Me: Vuvu!

I take her hands and she pushes me off.

She walks to Dean and points at him.

Nomvuyo: Don't ever fuck with me.

Dean: Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Don't fuck with me, Dean!

Dean: You're fucken crazy.

Nomvuyo: You don't know the half of it.

I watch as she stands very close to Dean.

I can't help but chuckle, because her round belly is the only thing blocking her from being in

Dean's face.

They stand there for a long time, and eventually start laughing.

Derek and I look at them weirdly.

They hug each other.

What's happening?

The Universe is just doing the most...

Dean: You talk too much.

Nomvuyo: And you have too much estrogen in your system.

I walk to them.

Me: You people are really strange.

Nomvuyo smiles at Dean.

Nomvuyo: He has a problem with my mouth, and I have a problem with him thinking he shits cupcakes.

Dean: Whatever.

Nomvuyo: But, since I can't convince my husband to cut him off permanently, I just have to learn to tolerate him.

Dean: The same way Nolwazi tolerates you?

Nomvuyo: If only I gave an actual shit...

Me: Yoh.

Nomvuyo: I'll call Kwanele, and your arrogant ass will be humbled immediately. Don't come for me.

Nomvuyo then looks at me.

Nomvuyo: I'll see you later, baby.

Me: Shap.

Nomvuyo: Bye, Ngidi.

Derek: Bye, Vuvz.

She hugs us and leaves.

Me: Don't ever come for Vuvu!

Dean: Mxm.

We go to the couch and sit while I laugh at him.

Derek: So, I'm supposed to clean this shit?

Me: My joints are achy...

Dean: No wonder you're so calm... You got fucked?

Me: Euww...

They both laugh.

Me: So, when is the fight taking place?

Dean: What fight?

Me: Between Lwazi and Vuvu.

Dean: What??

He laughs.

Me: When's the Royal Rumble?

He continues laughing.

Me: Who are you betting on?

Dean: You don't know Nolwazi...

Me: Hmm...

He chuckles.

Dean: But, Vuvu's craziness is on another level, so it's a tough one.

Me: We shall see...

We continue chatting...

INSERT 139

I've been unemployed for exactly 3 months now, and I must say, I'm still happy about my decision. I'm not yet ready to be around people. I've also been helping Derek with his school, which he wants to open the following year.

It's been a week since my "surprise" birthday lunch, and Derek managed to convince me not to go back home...

He's busy working on the school's operations plan, when we hear a knock on the door.

We look at each other and frown.

Me: How odd.

I stand and open the door.

I stare at Busi.

Busi: Hello.

Me: Hi.

Busi: The security guard let me in.

I decide not to question her.

Busi: I have the DNA results.

Derek: Baby, who is it?

I step aside, and Busi walks in. I close the door and lead her to the lounge.

Derek looks up from his laptop. His face immediately tightens when he sees her.

Derek: Busisiwe, how did you get in here?

Busi looks at him nervously.

Busi: The security guard recognised me, and let me in.

Wow, I'll have a chat with that unprofessional security guard. So yena he just lets people in

because he recognises them? Nxa.

Derek: Ufunani?

Busi: I have the results.

Derek: And how do I know they're legit?

She sighs.

Busi: Derek, you know me...

He stares at her for a very long time.

Derek: Sit.

She walks to the couch, and decides to sit next to him.

As I'm about to make my way to the bedroom, he says my name.

Derek: Please sit.

He looks at me softly and pleadingly. I nod and sit.

Derek: Firstly, I would like you to explain this whole situation. Why did you lie about your pregnancy? Did you know from the get go that you were carrying my child?

Busi sighs.

Busi: Yes, I knew.

Derek: You were having an affair with Thami.

She sighs again.

Busi: I regret doing that, Derek. That was the biggest mistake of my life. I'm sorry for breaking us up.

I roll my eyes as she wipes her crocodile tears.

Busi: I was so selfish and childish. I was fascinated by a man who abused me.

Derek: Abused you?

Busi: Thami was an abusive person. He abused me physically and emotionally. He managed to convince me that I wouldn't be able to live without him, even when he got married. I was brainwashed.

Somebody call the nywembulance.

Derek seems to be taken aback. His sweet self seems to be taken by this story.

Busi stands.

Busi: Can I use the bathroom?

Derek: Su-

Me: It's blocked.

They both look at me in confusion.

Me: I'll get you tissue.

I stand and walk to the bedroom. I get a box of tissues and give it to her.

Derek is beyond confused.

There is no way Busi is going to go to that bathroom by herself. Next thing, she takes my

underwear, and in three days, I'm paralysed and seeing short men surrounding the bed in the middle of the night. Not happening. I'm not that stupid.

I watch as she wipes her tears.

I get her a bottle of water and give it to her.

Busi: Thanks.

We give her a few minutes to sort herself out.

Derek: Give me the results.

She takes out the envelope from her bag and gives it to him. Derek's rudeness seems to be

deeper when he's around Busi...

It's still sealed.

He opens it and reads the paper.

I don't even have to read it to know what it says.

That child is Derek's.

I ignore the piercing pain that's trying to take over my heart.

I think Derek sees this, because he stands and sits next to me.

Derek: Baby.

I take a deep breath and look at Busi.

Me: How old is he?

Busi: He's turning 3 in two months, ngoAugust.

Me: Derek, have you seen him?

Derek shakes his head.

She takes out her phone and scrolls through it.

She then gives the phone to Derek and he looks at it.

When I take a glance, I'm beyond shocked. This child looks exactly like Derek.

I want to stand and just go, but my body is failing me.

Derek gives back her phone and she looks at me.

Busi: Can I have a word with him privately?

Derek: No, she-

Me: Okay.

I take my phone and walk towards the door.

Derek quickly stands and follows me.

Derek: Zi.

Me: I just need some fresh air.

He tries to say something, but I shake my head.

Me: Go talk to her, I'm fine.

I walk out the door and immediately request an Uber.

I get in and it drives off...

Me: I'd like to see Dean, please...

Dean's PA looks at me weirdly.

Her: Who are you?

Me: A friend.

Her: You have to have an appointment.

She ignores me and continues typing.

I take my phone and dial Dean's number.

It rings for a while, but he eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hey.

Dean: What's up?

Me: Uhm, I'm here, and I don't have an appointment to see you.

Dean: Excuse me?

Me: Please come get me.

Dean: Uhm, okay...

I hang up.

Within a few minutes, Dean is here.

He looks at me in confusion.

Dean: Dlamini?

His assistant tries to explain that I don't have an appointment, but he dismisses her. He leads

me to his office, and as soon as he closes the door, I burst out in tears.

Dean: Ziyanda? What the fuck is going on? He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around me.

Me: Derek has a son...

I feel his body harden, but he continues holding me.

After a long time, I finally calm down.

He leads me to the long couch and makes me sit. He grabs a bottle of water and gives it to me.

Dean: What happened?

I tell him and he sighs.

Dean: Let's call him and let him know you're fine, because I know he's freaking out.

He takes his phone and dials Derek's number.

Dean: Ngidi... I'm with her, she came to my office... Yes... Okay... Bye...

He hangs up and then looks at me.

Dean: So, that child is Derek's?

I nod.

He groans and scratches his chin thoughtfully.

Dean: I don't know what to say.

Me: There's nothing to say. He has a son.

Dean: And are you guys sure about this?

Me: He's literally Derek's replica.

Dean: She came with him?

Me: We saw a picture.

He nods slowly and sighs.

Dean: So, what are you going to do?

Me: What do you mean?

Dean: He thinks you're not coming back.

Me: It's triggering.

He nods.

Dean: You can't separate again.

I keep quiet.

Dean: Work it out.

Me: If you had another child somewhere, you'd expect Nolwazi to stay?

He tightens his jaw.

Dean: If it's not my fault, then yes, I would expect her to stay.

I sigh.

Dean: Derek is also being thrown in the deep end. He didn't put himself in this situation. You

should constantly remind yourself of this fact, before you go running.

Me: It doesn't make it any easier.

Dean: Just work it out. You two are meant to be together.

Me: This relationship is too challenging.

Dean: No one ever said this shit is easy.

Loving someone and accepting their flaws unconditionally is a challenging task.

These experiences will either bring you two closer, or

separate you. I certainly don't want you to go your separate ways, because we've seen how bad

it is for you two. Therefore, you both need to find a way to move on while still preserving your relationship.

I drink some water and we sit in silence.

Just then, there's a knock on the door. It opens and Derek walks in, looking stressed.

He sits between Dean and me.

Me: I'm not walking away, I just needed fresh air.

He sighs heavily and glances at Dean, who smiles lightly.

Dean: I hear you're a father...

Derek grunts.

Dean: Fucked up, this life thing...

He stands and goes to his desk.

Dean: I'm giving you 10 minutes to talk about this, and then I'm going to kick you out... I have an

important meeting soon...

He sits and focuses on his work...

INSERT 140

It's been a month since the DNA results.

I'm still very much affected, but I keep reminding myself that this is it, and there's nothing I can

do to change it. More than anything, I feel like God and the Universe are really testing me this

year. I've faced a lot of shit, and I'm honestly just trying to survive at the point.

I've been locked up in my parents' house, reading The Four Agreements over and over again. I

keep reminding myself to not take any of this personally, because it really isn't about me. None of this is my fault.

As I'm busy reading in the lounge, I hear a knock on the door. I tell the person to come in.

I'm beyond shocked when I see Zimkitha walking in.

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

She gives me a kiss and sits.

Zimkitha: Where are your parents?

Me: My mom is at work, and my dad went to stock more chickens.

She nods and smiles sweetly.

Zimkitha: How are you?

She looks at me intensely, as if she knows everything I'm going through.

Me: I'm surviving.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: You're a very strong young woman. I don't think another person would be able to walk in your shoes.

Me: I'm tired of being strong.

She nods understandingly.

Zimkitha: I was in an arranged marriage... I look at her in disbelief.

Zimkitha: According to my mother, I was a commodity, and I was used to get what the family

wanted... I was never allowed to make choices that made me happy.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: But, that didn't stop me from doing things that made me happy.

She chuckles.

Zimkitha: I won't lie; I broke many hearts in my time...

I gasp and she laughs.

Zimkitha: I didn't have a loving home, so I seeked love elsewhere, and my heart got its fair share of pain.

Me: You had an affair?

Zimkitha: I had multiple affairs... I was quite rebellious. I resented my parents for treating me like a product.

Me: Konje Liwa has a twin?

She nods and chuckles.

Zimkitha: My Princess. She is a firecracker.

I've heard a lot about how this Princess mistreated Nomvuyo, so I don't like her already.

Zimkitha: She and Nomvuyo don't get along. She was always threatened by how close Vuvu was with Liwa.

Me: Where is she now?

Zimkitha: She lives in London.

Me: Is your ex-husband their father?

She laughs and shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I have a complicated life.

Me: Do they know?

Zimkitha: Liwa knows everything about me. He's the only person I truly trust in this world. My son has never judged me.

Me: And Princess?

Zimkitha: She chooses to separate herself, and I understand.

Me: So, who's Liwa and Princess's father?

Zimkitha: He's definitely out there...

Me: Out there?

Zimkitha: My kids have no interest in him, and so I respect their wish.

Me: What about you?

Zimkitha: What about me?

Me: Do you also have no interest in him?

She sighs.

Zimkitha: No.

Me: Have you ever been in love?

Zimkitha: I don't think so. I don't know what love is because I've never witnessed it. My parents

weren't in love, they tolerated each other.

I definitely didn't love Luvuyo, because I was forced to

marry him... Bheki, on the other hand-

She stops herself and I look at her in

confusion. I get the feeling that she wasn't supposed to

say his name. Well, it's not like I'm going to do anything about it, so she must continue spilling

the tea. I'm just genuinely interested in Zimkitha's life. I feel like she has a lot under the "facade" block, and the day that shit comes to light in the "arena" kuzoba yilituation.

Me: Do you think you were in love with him?

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Zimkitha: He loved me. He still worships the ground I walk on... In fact, all the men I come

across worship me.

She laughs to herself.

Me: What about you?

She shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I don't have the capability to love a man. I've had some horrible and traumatic

experiences because of them. The only reason I was attracted to them was to satisfy my physical needs, that's all.

Wowzer.

I look at her in shock and she smiles sweetly, her signature smile. This woman amazes me.

Zimkitha: I've kept my heart safe from these men.

Me: That's smart of you.

Zimkitha: Please pour me a glass of water? I'm dying of thirst.

Me: Okay.

I walk to the kitchen.

I come back and give her the glass of water.

Me: So, you don't want to be in a relationship?

Zimkitha: I'm 58 years, baby.

Me: And that's young!

She giggles.

Zimkitha: I'm playing the field, but nothing serious. People like me aren't meant to settle down.

Me: Don't say that. We all deserve being loved wholeheartedly.

Zimkitha: And that's why you and Derek need to hold on to each other.

She's sleek, changing the subject quickly.

Me: I'm just drained. This year has been draining.

Zimkitha: I've had multiple miscarriages in my life... I can confidently say that there's nothing as emotionally and physically traumatising as that experience, and I've been sexually assaulted quite a few times...

She looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: It's unexplainable.

I nod.

Zimkitha: My heart broke when Derek told me.

Me: He told you?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I was worried when he stopped talking about you.

I sigh.

Me: And then there's this Busi situation.

Zimkitha: Can I tell you the honest truth?

I look at her.

Zimkitha: Busi will never be a threat to your relationship. Derek doesn't love that girl. Yes, she has his child, but that will never make Derek want her over you.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: I assure you, she will never bother you... Not when I'm still around.

Me: You know her?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I know her, and I know her type: pathetic women who think they can use children to trap men.

I don't say anything.

Zimkitha: Focus on yourself and Derek. Focus on healing fully from your miscarriage. Don't even allow yourself to waste your emotions on Busi. I assure you, she is not a threat. Derek is yours. His heart is yours, I assure you.

Me: I just feel bad, because I lost his child.

Zimkitha: Well, life happens... Are you going to dwell on this forever? Free yourself. You deserve to bask in his love and adoration.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: You are the apple of his eye. That man loves you. I have no doubt that he will never

stop fighting for you. Busi is a mere distraction.

I sigh.

Zimkitha: And now that this child is going to be a part of our lives, we all need to open up our hearts and accept him. The poor child was a pawn in Busi's game, and he is innocent. He can't suffer for his mother's sins.

She finishes her water.

Zimkitha: If you refuse to open up your heart, Derek will never be a great father to this boy. I'm convinced he prioritises you over anything. That little boy doesn't deserve to be rejected, he's faultless.

We're silent for a while.

Zimkitha: Relationships aren't perfect. However, we should also distinguish between genuinely horrible and unsolvable problems, and problems that can be solved. The solving process may not be easy, but it's possible. She smiles.

Zimkitha: You're a strong girl, sthandwa sami. You may feel defeated now, but I have no doubt in my mind that you love Derek enough to work on this.

Me: I do love him.

She nods.

Me: Thank you.

Zimkitha: You're my daughter now.

I smile.

Me: I'm surprised Khwezi hasn't pitched to do the most.

Zimkitha: Like I said, they are mere distractions, weak distractions. Brush them off.

I chuckle.

Zimkitha: Khwezi won't be a problem anymore.

Me: Did you talk to her?

She nods.

Zimkitha: She's a bored housewife. I told her to find a stable hobby.

I gasp.

Me: Didn't she want to beat you up?

She laughs.

Zimkitha: She wouldn't dare...

Me: Did Derek tell you about the email he got from some woman claiming to know his real

parents?

Zimkitha: Excuse me?

Me: There was some woman claiming to know who his parents are.

Zimkitha: Hmm, he didn't tell me.

Me: I would have liked him to enquire about the issue.

Zimkitha: Interesting...

She sighs.

Zimkitha: I'll ask him about it.

I nod.

Zimkitha: Alright then, let me get going. I came to check up on you.

Me: Thank you, I appreciate it.

We both stand and share a hug.

Zimkitha: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Zimkitha: Walk me out.

Me: Alrighty.

We walk out.

Me: So, what's up with Nomvuyo and Nolwazi?

She chuckles.

Zimkitha: Nomvuyo doesn't like Nolwazi.

Me: We've already established that.

Zimkitha: And you know what, I've accepted that we won't love everyone we meet...

I chuckle.

Me: I think they should fight.

Zimkitha: Oh, no... Nolwazi is too much of a suburban snob, and Nomvuyo is too street smart...

That fight won't end well.

We both laugh.

Me: Nolwazi is a silent killer.

Zimkitha: With words, I know she'd demolish Vuvu. She also has a lethal tongue like you, but if we're talking a physical fight, then that's a different story... Nomvuyo has too much aggression in her body. I'd hate to be on the receiving end of her blows.

We continue laughing till we get to her car and say goodbye.

I watch her drive off and walk back inside the house.

I feel lighter now.

INSERT 141 (Short Insert)

The following day, I tell Derek that I would like to meet up with him.

Derek: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Should I fetch you?

Me: No, I'll be fine.

Derek: I'm already in my loft.

Me: Alright.

Derek: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and get ready immediately.

When I'm done, I tell my parents that I'm heading out. I get a taxi and make my way to

Maboneng. I'm there within 45 minutes...

When I walk in the loft, I find him busy on his laptop.

Me: Hello.

He looks up and smiles.

Derek: Hey.

He stands and we share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

We sit and he closes his laptop.

Me: Zimkitha came to my house yesterday.

Derek: She told me.

Me: Of course she did.

He chuckles.

Me: I mentioned the email from Vicky.

Derek: I told her not to entertain it.

Me: You don't want to find out?

He shakes his head.

Derek: I'm dealing with a lot right now.

That's the least of my worries.

I nod.

He stares at me and I shift uncomfortably.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Why did you want to meet?

Me: I miss you.

He raises an eyebrow and I sigh.

Me: I haven't seen you in two weeks.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How's the school's operations plan coming along?

Derek: I'm almost done. Do you mind editing it once I'm done?

Me: I don't mind.

He smiles.

Derek: You're looking good.

Me: Really? I'm gaining back the weight.

He chuckles.

Derek: Yes, you are.

Me: Thank God.

Derek: How's Lwazi?

Me: She's great, as usual.

He nods.

Me: She sends her greetings, and says you must call her, so she can update you on their new principal.

He laughs.

Derek: I'll call her later today when she returns from school.

Me: Apparently the new principal is very unapproachable, and they all dislike her.

Derek: Camille told me the same thing...

Me: I'm sure they miss you.

Derek: Who wouldn't miss me? This is me we're talking about...

I roll my eyes.

Me: You and your random egotistical moments.

He chuckles and then looks at me seriously.

He's silent for a few seconds.

Me: What?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: Me too.

We sit in silence for a while.

Me: I'd like some wine.

Derek: Sure.

We both stand and make our way to the kitchen, where he pours me a glass.

Me: Thank you.

He nods.

Me: I haven't had alcohol in a while.

I take a sip and sigh.

Me: So...

He stares at me.

Me: I had a whole speech planned, but now I've forgotten everything.

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: Don't look at me like that...

Derek: Sorry.

I gulp down my wine and look at him.

Me: This time away from you has made me realise a few things...

I look at him seriously.

Me: I keep trying to convince myself that we're not meant to be together.

His face changes, he looks at me nervously.

Me: But, my heart constantly yearns for you. I don't want to be with anyone else, but you.

His face softens and I see a hidden smile.

Me: I've never felt like this about any man. I love you.

He smiles.

Me: And I'm willing to stay and work through the craziness. I think you're worth all the pain and heartache. I love you enough to have the strength and patience to endure the bullshit.

I sigh.

Me: As Beyonce says: I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull

myself up. Nothing real can be threatened.
True love brought salvation back into me.
With every
tear, came redemption and my torturers
became my remedy...
I smile.

Me: So we're gonna heal. We're gonna
start again. You've brought the orchestra,
synchronised
swimmers. You're the magician. Pull me
back together the way you cut me in half.
Make the
woman in doubt disappear. Pull the
sorrow from between my legs like silk...
At this point, he's smiling like a lunatic.

Me: Now I'm in the mood to watch
Lemonade. We should watch it tonight.
He steps closer to me and wraps his arms
around me.

Derek: I don't know what to say.

Me: You can kiss me?

He chuckles as his face touches mine and we share a long tender kiss. That, “Welcome back home, you’ve been missed,” kiss.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: I can’t continue denying that what we have is special. God knows I’ve tried, but I can’t let go of you. You’re my Star.

He kisses me again and squeezes me.

Derek: You’ve left me speechless.

I giggle.

Me: Good. Now, I’d like something to eat. I’m starving.

Derek: In the mood to go out?

Me: No. I want your food.

He nods as he kisses me once again...

The following day, Derek tells me that he has to go back to his apartment in Randburg, because

his son is coming for a visit.

Me: How is he?

He smiles.

Derek: He's cute.

Me: Really? What's his name?

Derek: Mpumelelo.

Me: So, what's going to happen now?

Derek: I'm just getting to know him... I've been seeing him almost every day.

I nod.

We drive to his place.

I don't know how I feel about this, but I'd like to meet him. I may as well face our new reality, as daunting as it is.

When I come back from the bathroom, I hear Zimkitha's voice and a little one's voice as well.

When I get to the lounge, I find Zimkitha picking the boy up and placing him on her lap.

Busi is sitting there, watching with a smile on her face.

I clear my throat and they all turn to look at me.

Zimkitha: Zi!

She smiles widely and I smile lightly.

Me: Hello, Zimi.

I glance at Busi.

Me: Hi.

Busi: Hey.

My eyes finally land on the boy.

He looks like a mini Derek, with his dimpled face.

He stares at me and then at Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Come sit next to me, Zizi.

I do as I'm told. I can't seem to stop staring at the boy, and he is also staring at me, obviously

trying to figure out who I am.

I clear my throat.

Me: Hello.

Mpumelelo: Hello.

He has the sweetest voice and a bit of a lisp.

Me: How are you?

Mpumelelo: How are you?

Zimkitha laughs sweetly and Derek smiles.

Me: How are you?

Mpumelelo: How are you?

He looks at me with a smile.

Me: What's your name?

Mpumelelo: Lelo!

I don't know what it is about his voice, but it's making me feel warm. I smile.

Me: Lelo, how old are you?

Lelo: Lelo is 3!

He shows me 2 fingers and I laugh quietly.

Zimkitha: Lelo, when is your birthday?

Lelo: Happy birthday, Lelo!

Oh my goodness.

We all laugh as he starts singing the birthday song.

Derek walks to Zimkitha and takes Lelo. He kisses Lelo on the cheek and smiles.

Lelo: Hello!

Derek: Hello, Lelo.

He starts wiggling his legs and Derek puts him down. He then runs off and disappears. He is so cute, short and skinny.

Derek: He's going to the bathroom.

Me: The bathroom?

He nods.

Busi: He seems to have a fascination with bathrooms.

Zimkitha: Oh, Lord.

I look at Derek, and realise how happy he is.

Derek: Let me make him a sandwich.

Busi: He doesn't like tomatoes.

Derek nods.

Derek: Just like Zi...

He looks at me amusingly before he walks to the kitchen.

Busi: Let me go check up on him.

She stands and walks off.

Zimkitha looks at me and smiles.

Zimkitha: Unjani?

Me: I'm okay.

Zimkitha: Put your positive pants on.

I nod and stand.

Zimkitha: Uyaphi?

I narrow my eyes and she laughs.

Zimkitha: Heyii ngoba anything is possible!

I chuckle as I make my way to the bathroom...

INSERT 142 (Short Insert)

It's been another month of more growth and healing for me. My sessions with Melinda have

been focused on getting me to let go of the past, and live in the present. I have some horrible

days, where I feel like I'm wasting my time and energy, but I also have days where I'm filled with gratitude and more joy.

My mantra has been, "Put on your positive pants," ever since Zimkitha mentioned it to me.

Every time I feel like I'm overwhelmed, I constantly remind myself to stay positive.

Anyway, I'm officially living with Derek again, and it's been a calm month of growth for him and

us as a unit as well. Seeing him find his feet in his new role as a father is

bittersweet,

considering that the child he's raising isn't mine.

We're now in the apartment, waiting for Lelo.

Me: I think he's opening up to the idea of you being his father.

He smiles.

Derek: It's going to take a while.

Me: I don't think so. He's still very young and impressionable.

He stares at me.

Me: Yini?

Derek: Thank you for sticking around.

Me: You're welcome.

Derek: Lelo seems to like you a lot.

Me: He's quite cute.

He smiles.

Derek: Well, he does have my genes.

Me: Haike uqalile.

He chuckles.

Just then, there's a knock on the door and Derek walks to the door.

A minute there, Lelo comes running in.

Lelo: Hello!

Me: Hello, Lelo.

Lelo: Hello Lelo!

He comes to me and I give him a hug. He has such an innocent and bubbly personality, very lovable boy.

Me: How are you, Lelo?

He smiles and wiggles. I let go of him.

Me: How are you?

Lelo: Good!

He bounces away happily.

Busi sits close to me and looks around. I can tell she wants to say something.

Me: Is everything okay?

Busi: Do you stay here?

Me: Yes.

She nods lightly and I focus on the TV.

Derek joins us...

Derek: Do you mind switching off the TV for a few minutes, baby?

Me: Sure.

I lower the volume and look at him. He clears his throat and looks at Busi seriously.

Derek: Thank you for bringing Lelo.

Busi smiles and nods.

Busi: He loves you.

Derek: He should, I'm his father after-all and I've been MIA.

The smile disappears and is replaced with a smug look.

Derek: Listen, I would really like to spend more time with him.

Busi: That's why I bring him daily.

Derek: I don't think it's necessary for you to be present at all times. I believe I'll manage without you.

She looks at him in disbelief.

Derek: Is there a problem?

Busi: Derek, I'm his mother.

Derek: And?

She looks at me and shifts uncomfortably. It's clear that she wants me to disappear, but Derek

has made it explicitly clear that I'm not a guest in his life...

Busi: I want to be here...

Derek: There's no need for you to be here. I'd like to spend time with my son.

She tries to say something, but seems to be dumbstruck.

Derek: We need to work out a schedule. I want him to start sleeping over, especially now that

I'm currently not working.

Busi: Hai!

Derek: Hai yani? Kanti why did you reveal him after all this time if you're going to be stubborn

for no reason?

She keeps quiet.

Derek: I want him to start sleeping over.
We need a schedule that will work for us.

Busi grunts and looks at us grudgingly.

Derek: I want him to get to know Ziyanda
as well, seeing as she's my partner.

Busi: I don't want my child to be exposed
to different women, Derek.

Derek: Different women?

Busi: How am I supposed to know how
often you change your women?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Derek: One would think you know me...

Ziyanda is not going anywhere.

Mpumelelo has to have a
relationship with her. We live together
permanently.

Busi: And what happens when you
separate? My child must get to know
another stranger?

Derek: Don't worry about irrelevant things... Are you exposing him to different men?

She gasps.

Derek: Because I also don't want my child to be bombarded by strange men...

Busi: No, I'm not exposing him to different men.

Derek: So, all this time, he didn't have a father? Where is Thami?

Busi: I left him.

He nods lightly.

Derek: Anyway, I'd like you to give me more time and space with my son...

Busi: I'll think about it...

Derek: Unfortunately, you don't have much of a choice, seeing as he is mine.

You don't get to

make decisions that don't benefit me.

She keeps quiet.

Derek: Let's start off with weekends.

Busi: Excuse me?

Derek: I'll take him every weekend from now on... We'll see how it goes.

Just then, Lelo comes to the lounge.

Lelo: Zizi, come!

He comes to me and takes my hand.

Lelo: Zizi come!

Me: Okay.

I stand.

Busi: Lelo, yini?

Lelo looks at her innocently, before pulling me. I follow him to the bedroom and he leads me to the closet, where he seems to have unleashed the artist in him. He scribbled all over the door.

Me: Now, why in the world would you do this?

He giggles and I sigh. Where did he even get this pen?

He sits down and continues working on his artwork.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Come see...

He walks in, followed by Busi.

As soon as Busi sees what he's doing, she drags Lelo and spanks him a couple of times on the

arm. At this point, I'm beyond shocked. He is such a tiny child, and she's out here beating him

like he's a grown man.

Lelo immediately bursts out in tears and Derek snatches him from her.

Derek: What the hell is wrong with you??

Busi: Heyi! He knows he's not suppDerek gives her one threatening look and she instantly shuts up.

He then walks out, comforting Lelo.

Busi stares at me and I stare back at her.

Busi: What? What are you looking at?

Me: Nothing.

She storms out and I sit on the edge of the bed, and try to gather my thoughts.

This is obviously going to be a long and complicated journey...

The following day, Dean and Nolwazi invite us to their new house for dinner, everyone is going to be there.

We haven't spent much together since my birthday lunch, so I am really looking forward to it.

As I'm getting dressed, I get a call from Nomvuyo, confirming that they are going to pick us up in 30 minutes...

Once I'm done getting dressed, Derek walks past and goes to the bathroom. Minutes later, he walks out and disappears.

He keeps pacing around.

Me: And then? Everything okay?

He nods dismissively.

He disappears and comes back again, as I'm applying makeup.

Me: Nkanyezi, yini ngawe?

He comes to me, stops, and then walks away.

I finish up and he walks back in.

Me: Derek?

He steps closer to me and holds my hands.

Derek: Will you marry me?

Me: Huh??

The fuck?

What's going on?

INSERT 143 (Unedited- Excuse Any Errors)

I look at him in confusion, more than anything.

Me: Excuse me?

He keeps quiet and looks at me in confusion as well. Why is he confused? What's going on here?

He lets go of my hands and scratches his head. He looks at me doubtfully.

Me: Did you just ask me to marry you? He frowns.

I stare at him, waiting for an answer.

I am so confused right now. Where did this come from? What's going on?

Derek: Uhm...

I keep quiet.

Derek: Uhm...

He sighs heavily.

Derek: Forget I said anything.

Before I can even say anything, he walks out.

I sit on the bed, and process everything. I get my phone and dial Niki's number. It rings, and she

answers after a while.

Niki: Baby boo.

Me: Dude, something strange and random just happened.

Niki: What?

Me: Derek randomly asked me to marry him.

Niki: WHAT?!

Me: Dude!

She gasps.

Niki: What did he do? How did it happen? Spill the tea!

I tell her exactly what happened and she keeps quiet for a few seconds.

Niki: Uhhh I think the fuck not!

Me: Dude!

Niki: Like, what the hell? How are you supposed to respond to such randomness? Couldn't he at least sit you down and ask you properly? Haibo!

Me: Why is he asking me to marry him to begin with?

Niki: Well, you two are perfect for each other. I just have a problem with HOW he did it!

Me: Niki, I'm not ready for marriage!
What the hell??

She laughs.

Niki: You're already living like a married couple, so what's the problem?

Me: Wow!

Niki: Don't be awkward about it, I'm sure he's a nervous wreck.

I sigh.

Niki: Yhu, but naye he's so random!

Me: Dude.

I say goodbye to her just as Derek walks back in the bedroom.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yes.

He nods and walks to the bathroom.

I get my things and wait for him in the lounge. I'll try not to be awkward about this. I don't know what to say. He's obviously feeling embarrassed, because he seems to be avoiding my eyes right now.

We walk out and make our way to the car.

We get to Nolwazi and Dean's house and find everyone in the lounge, sitting and chatting.

Me: Hello.

They all greet back and we share hugs.

Nomvuyo: Zi, can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

We make our way to the backyard.

Me: Is everything okay?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, why?

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: Just checking on you. I know you like your space, hence my lack of communication lately.

I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: I don't want to bombard your space, at the same time, I want to provide sufficient support.

Me: I'm okay, I promise... It's just the Busi thing...

She rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: The best way to deal with baby mama drama is to ignore the bullshit.

Don't take anything personally.

Me: Konje you also have to deal with that.

Nomvuyo: I have to deal with a bitter ex-wife. Kunzima

We laugh.

Nomvuyo: Don't be bothered by Busi.

Me: I'm starting not to... Somehow, she doesn't affect me that much anymore.

She nods.

Nomvuyo: Good.

Me: Do you want a baby shower?

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: I don't have any friends...

I laugh and she smiles.

Me: That sounds sad.

Nomvuyo: Not even, I don't like people vele... Liwa and Zimkitha are my best friends.

Me: Wow! Go on and slice my heart in pieces!

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: And then there's you and Ivy. I'm quite content with my besties.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Don't even come for Ivy.

Me: You don't even like Ivy's sister.

Nomvuyo: So?

I grunt and we walk back inside the house.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

We share a hug and she looks at me.

Nolwazi: You're looking good.

Me: Thank you.

Nolwazi: You're glowing... Are you back with Derek?

Me: He's not the source of my glo-up.

She laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: Hmkay then... Let me go check on the food. Everything should be ready in a few minutes.

Me: Cool.

She walks off and I glance at Nomvuyo, who's busy with her phone.

Nomvuyo: Nyami is going through puberty, yazi.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: The last thing I need is a moody little girl... I'm already dealing with this pregnancy.

Me: Mina Lwazi is still her usual dramatic self. She hasn't bloomed yet.

Nomvuyo: Give it some time... Puberty will hit her hard... Cherish these last moments you have with her innocence.

I laugh.

Me: You're making it sound so horrible.

Nomvuyo: Uzobona.

Me: I think my teaching experience has prepared me for such...

Nomvuyo: Lucky you!

We get to the lounge and Ivy seems to have joined the party.

Ivy: Vuvz, I've been looking for you.

Nomvuyo: Sorry, love, I was with Zi outside.

Ivy glances at me.

I refuse to acknowledge negativity.

I go to Derek and hold his hand. He looks at me and smiles.

Me: Everything okay?

He nods.

So, I guess he's going to pretend nothing happened? Haike I'll also go with the flow.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Derek: Why don't you say hi to your friend?

Me: Don't come for me.

He chuckles.

Me: Where's Dean?

Derek: He has an important work conference call in his study.

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Nolwazi comes back and tells us the table is ready.

Suddenly, we hear Mdu's voice, and I am beyond shocked when I see Tholi right beside him.

Me: Tholi!

I am genuinely excited to see her!

Her cheeks are beyond red at this point. It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that she is

horrified by being here.

I walk to her and hug her. I feel her lips close to my ear.

Tholi: *whispering* I'm scared.

Me: *whispering* They're not bad.

Ivy: What the fuck is going on?!

Before we know it, Mdu drags Ivy out of the room and they disappear.

At this point, Tholi looks like she's ready to burst out in tears. I hold her hand and look at

everyone, who's staring at us.

Me: Guys, as you know, this is Tholi.

Nolwazi walks to her and smiles.

Nolwazi: Hey, Tholi. I'm glad you're joining us.

Tholi clears her throat.

Tholi: Thank you.

Her voice is a mere whisper.

Liwa: Hi, Tholi.

Derek: Hey, Tholi.

Nomvuyo: Hi, dear.

Tholi looks at everyone and they smile warmly.

Liwa walks to her and I step away a bit.

He places his around her shoulders.

Liwa: Tholi Tholz, relax... No one's going to bite you!

Tholi looks at him nervously and he squeezes her.

Liwa: We're not that bad... I know we look horrible, but I promise we're not that bad...

She looks up nervously.

Liwa: Would you like something to drink?

Tholi: I'm okay, thanks.

Liwa looks at me.

Liwa: Get her some champagne.

Me: Okay.

I pour her some champagne and give it to her.

Soon, Mdu comes back, with no Ivy. I wonder how that conversation went.

Phela I was ready to defend Tholi, against that animal, Ivy. Tholi takes a sip and looks at me. She seems less intimidated.

Nolwazi: Dinner is ready!

Everyone follows her, and I stay with Tholi.

Me: Can you just take a deep breath?

She exhales and I smile.

Me: They're not that bad.

Tholi: They're intimidating.

I nod understandingly.

Just then, Dean emerges.

Me: Dean!

He smiles and we share a hug. He then looks at Tholi.

Dean: Hi, Tholi.

Tholi: Hey.

She can't even look at him in the eye.

Dean then looks at me.

Dean: Apparently that idiot proposed to you?

I groan and he chuckles.

Dean: I can't wait to humiliate his dumb ass... I hope you rejected that shit.

Me: He didn't give me the chance to.

He chuckles and walks off.

Tholi looks at me in shock.

Tholi: Derek proposed?

I sigh.

Me: Yes...

She smiles and I shake my head.

Me: If only you knew how he did it...

Just then, Mdu emerges. He looks at Tholi and smiles.

Mdu: Woza phela... No one will bite you.

Tholi: I need the bathroom!

Mdu: You can run, but you can't hide.

Her face goes red.

Mdu: Woza, I'll show you where it is...

They walk away hand in hand, and I make my way to where everyone is.

It's obviously going to be an interesting dinner...

INSERT 144

We're all seated and eating. Malusi and Joe have joined us, but Gabi and Nandi couldn't make

it. It must be strange for Nandi to always be identified as Malusi's +1 even after they've

divorced...

Anyway, Derek has been chatting up a storm with Nolwazi, who's sitting next to him, and now I know for sure that he's avoiding me. I keep talking to Nomvuyo, but I really just want to talk to Derek. He's been avoiding me a bit too much.

I nudge him and he looks at me.

Me: Hi.

He smirks.

Derek: Hi.

Me: Are you avoiding me?

He shakes his head.

Derek: Could never avoid the The Great Ziyanda...

With that said, he focuses on Nolwazi again and I'm ignored.

Nomvuyo: Apparently you rejected his proposal?

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: News travel fast in this group,
I'm not the only gossip monger, babes.
I roll my eyes and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: I'm glad you rejected him. How
dare he ask you like that? Hai phela he
must not
disrespect us.

Me: Disrespect us?

Nomvuyo: Sishade sonke la.

Me: Oh gosh.

Just then, Zimkitha walks in...

Everyone stops talking and stares at her.
She looks like she got beaten really badly.
Before we can even say anything, Liwa
and Nomvuyo are standing and walking
to her.

Liwa: What the fuck happened?

Zimkitha laughs.

Zimkitha: Nothing. I just got mugged on
my way here.

Everyone gasps.

Zimkitha: Please don't be dramatic.

Liwa: Got mugged?

Nomvuyo: What happened?

Nolwazi: Would you like anything?

Zimkitha pushes off Nomvuyo and Liwa and then she smiles, but you can see she's in pain.

Zimkitha: Calm down, I'd like wine, please.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Liwa leads her to her seat and she sits carefully.

I don't think I've seen Liwa like this. It's evident that he is pissed.

Liwa: MamaZimkitha gives him a look, and they stare at each other. He backs away and disappears.

Nomvuyo: What did they take?

Zimkitha sighs and smiles.

Zimkitha: My purse...

Nomvuyo groans.

Zimkitha: Go check on your husband, please. You know he can be over the top...
Nomvuyo nods and walks off after Liwa.
Nolwazi gives her the glass of wine and she takes a sip.

Zimkitha: I think I want something stronger...

Nolwazi: I'll get you whiskey.

Zimkitha: Perfect.

I stare at Zimkitha, analysing her black eye, and she catches me.

Zimkitha: I probably look very bad, but I assure you I'm fine...

She stares at Dean, who also looks pissed as hell.

Zimkitha: You're all taking this too seriously.

Mdu: Well, you do look beaten up...

Zimkitha sighs and smiles.

Zimkitha: I've been through worse, I'm okay.

She then looks at Tholi in slight disbelief.

Zimkitha: Hello, Tholi.

Konje she also knew about Mdu's situation before it blew up.

Tholi: Hi, ma.

Zimkitha: I keep telling you to stop reminding me that I'm old.

Tholi smiles shyly.

Zimkitha: U-right? Are they treating you well so far?

Tholi looks down shyly and doesn't respond.

Mdu: Who would treat her otherwise?

Kunganyiwa phela.

Gosh, the amount of arrogance in this group is quite appalling. These men are too much, even

Derek, with his quiet arrogance, counts.

They really think they shit rainbows. But then again,

when I look at all the men I've dated, it's clear that I attract the arrogant ones.

Ngine-type.

Liwa and Nomvuyo come back and sit.

Liwa still looks pissed, but he's much better now.

Zimkitha: I'd rather not talk about what happened to me.

Nolwazi: Okay, as long as you're okay.

Zimkitha chuckles and nods.

Zimkitha: I'm fine, love.

She looks at Dean intently.

Zimkitha: I'm fine, Langa.

There's an awkward silence for a while.

Liwa: So, Derek, what the fuck?

Derek doesn't respond.

Before we know it, everyone is laughing out loud.

My heart sinks as I look at Derek, who is clearly touched.

Dean: What an idiot!

Nomvuyo: You're so disrespectful. How in the world are you going to propose like that?

They continue laughing. I actually just want to walk away and leave them. This is painful to watch. I'm not even trying to look at Derek at this point.

Malusi: You're the most romantic of this group. What the fuck happened?

Dean: He chickened out.

Joe: Shame, man...

Nolwazi: You're all so evil. I'm sure Derek had his reasons for blurting it out like that...

She chuckles as she looks at Derek.

Derek: Are you all done?

Liwa: Nope. You're going to leave this house crying.

He grunts as they continue laughing.

Zimkitha: Oh, baby... I guess today is your day.

I guess it's true. Everyone has a "day" with this crew. I just don't like it when it's Star. These

people are ruthless when they laugh at you.

After a long time, they finally let go of the topic.

Derek goes to the bathroom.

Nolwazi: I think we went overboard.

All the guys shake their heads.

Liwa: He'll be fine. Derek is more emotional compared to all of us.

Dean: Uzoba-strong.

I sigh.

Mdu: So, you really rejected his proposal?

Me: How about you mind your business?

They all keep quiet.

Me: Niya-bhora...

Mdu: Yoh konje we're dealing with Ziyanda...

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini!

Nomvuyo: Baby, we-

Me: If you continue dragging this out, then we'll have a problem... Stay out of my business.

You're all behaving like suffixes, busy adding your unsolicited opinions.

There's an awkward silence as they stare at me in shock. I don't like how they're drilling this.

I stand and walk off.

I find Derek outside, busy on his phone. I wait for him to finish...

Me: Derek, I don't know what the fuck is going on...

Derek: With what?

Me: You proposed to me...

He doesn't say anything.

Me: You really want to marry me?

Derek: Don't ask me obvious questions.

I keep quiet.

We're silent for a while.

Me: I'll marry you, then...

He looks at me.

Me: If it will make you happy, then I'll do it.

Derek: I said forget it.

Me: Manje how am I supposed to deal with you walking around like you've shat your pants?

Derek: Excuse me?

Me: That was a random moment, and you can't play victim right now, just because I'm not

reacting the way you want me to.

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He looks at me for a few seconds and ends up chuckling.

Me: If you want me to marry you, then I'll marry you.

Derek: Forget it.

I cross my arms and look at him sternly.

Derek: I don't want to marry you if it's something you don't want.

Me: Derek, you know how I am...

Derek: I do.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Can we sit? I'm feeling lightheaded?

Me: Am I making you feel lightheaded?

Derek: That and many other things...

He smiles and I smile back.

We go to the gazebo and sit next to each other.

Derek: Truth?

Me: Truth.

He sighs.

Derek: I was supposed to propose to you after my birthday.

Me: Huh??

He chuckles.

Derek: You know how I feel about you...
It's been love from the beginning.

He sighs.

Derek: I've been postponing it, because
there was never "the right" time.

I keep quiet.

Derek: I have no idea what came over me
today. Being around Busi makes me
realise how
grateful I am that you're in my life.

Me: Are you sure you asked me for the
right reasons?

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: The timing is strange... Are you doing
this because you want to seem legitimate
when you
fight for Lelo?

He keeps quiet.

Me: I won't have a problem with that reasoning... I think it's a logical reason- and valid.

He chuckles.

Derek: Trust you to be logical...

I sigh.

Me: Do you acknowledge that your proposal was random, and lacked substance?

He chuckles and nods.

Me: Can I give you an idea for next time?

Derek: Please.

Me: Sit me down and have a discussion with me.

Derek: No fireworks?

Me: I think you know I'm not tickled by that, especially when it comes to serious aspects of my life.

He looks at me thoughtfully and nods.

Me: Are we good?

Derek: Good.

Me: Will you stop ignoring and avoiding me?

Derek: Have I been doing that?

Me: Yes!

He laughs as he stands and pulls me up. He wraps his arms around me and kisses my nose.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you more.

We share a kiss.

Me: How hectic is Zimkitha's situation? He tightens his jaw and shakes his head.

Derek: We'll get to that later...

He takes my hand and we walk back inside the house.

INSERT 145 (Unedited)

We're now in the house, and the conversation is flowing as usual. This group has mastered the

ability to let go of the little things (even though I'm still pissed at them for coming at Star like that).

Dean: Have you decided what you're going to do with your life Dlamini?

Me: In terms of what?

Dean: You're unemployed.

Me: Can I be unemployed in peace though?

He chuckles and glances at Derek.

Me: I have enough money saved up... I'm not depending on Derek as yet.

Derek grunts and I ignore him. He's been trying his best to be a blesser, but I'm not ready to be

blessed. I don't want to feel like I'm sucking him dry. The time will definitely come soon,

because the way my savings are currently set up... I've been unemployed for too long.

Zimkitha: A man should take care of his family.

She looks at Derek sternly.

Derek: She won't allow me to take care of her.

Nomvuyo: I was also like that at first...

Liwa: Too stubborn.

Nolwazi: I think independent women struggle with letting go.

Me: Definitely, and men think we're being dramatic. Some of us were raised to not depend on

anyone... It's not easy to suddenly stop taking care of yourself and expect a man to do so.

Dean: You know very well that men should take care of their families. It's what we told from

when we're young.

Nolwazi: But we find it difficult to let go.

Mdu: Clearly feminism has flooded some radical thoughts in your minds...

Nolwazi: Listen, I completely understand that men and women have different roles; however, I

don't want my dependency on you to mean you have power over me. I refuse to give away my

power to anyone, more especially the man I'm sleeping with.

Me: Amen!

Nolwazi: I depend on you because I trust and love you, not because I'm trying to be oppressed.

Liwa: So, you believe that men and women are equal?

Dean: She sure does...

Nomvuyo: Liwa, you think men and women are not equal?

Liwa: Oh, baby... My relationship with you has proven that we're on the same frequency.

He rubs her belly and winks at her.

Now I'm interested in what Derek has to say... I look at him.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: Hmm?

Me: What's your take?

We all look at him and he sighs.

Derek: I strongly believe that men are the heads of the family.

Me: What exactly do you mean by heads? They control everything?

Derek: They guide and protect. It's their responsibility to ensure that the family is well taken care of.

Me: And where do I fit in this picture? I cook and clean?

Dean: Well, Dlamini... We've already established that you can't cook.

There's an awkward silence, and before I know it, they're laughing out loud.

I roll my eyes as I wait for them to finish.

Derek knows better than to laugh at me.

Derek: I think it's shallow to have those old school role expectations. I'm a man, and I absolutely

love cooking... Do I sit back and expect you to do all that shit?

Dean: Certainly not. Shit, we don't want you to die.

They laugh once again and I look at Dean. He winks playfully and I grunt.

Derek: Every man needs to take care of his family. There's no sugar-coating it, to be honest.

Dean: So, in other words, Derek wants you to stop acting like you've got your shit together.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I'm sure your savings are dry at this point...

I sigh in defeat.

Derek: Maybe you can knock some sense into her... I've been telling her the same thing.

Me: Can we stop discussing my finances now?

They laugh and we move on to another topic...

They start asking me questions about Busi.

Zimkitha, thankfully, takes over this conversation, and answers all their questions.

Nomvuyo: I wonder what we'll do once you're not around Zimi. Every one of us depends on you.

Zimkitha smiles through the pain.

Zimkitha: You'll be fine... I'd like to think I've raised strong and smart people. They continue expressing themselves about the Busi thing.

Nolwazi: I don't know how I'd react if Langa had another child elsewhere.

Zimkitha: Even if it's not his fault?

Nolwazi: What does that even mean? We're about to get married. Why would he have children elsewhere?

Nomvuyo: Things happen...

Nolwazi chuckles sarcastically.

Nolwazi: That's bullshit.

Mdu: So, we all agree that an illegitimate child is a deal breaker?

Nolwazi: Definitely.

Hawu, wasn't Nolwazi the one advising me to stay with Derek and not feel threatened by Busi?

Now she's the one who's outchea saying illegitimate children are deal breakers? Mihlolo!

Nomvuyo: If the child was conceived before you were in the picture, you have no right to be talking about deal breakers.

Nolwazi: Well, obviously.

Nomvuyo: Manje uthini kahle kahle?

Nolwazi sighs. She seems to be losing her patience just a tad.

Nolwazi: You wouldn't understand...

Nomvuyo: Is it? What's so difficult to understand? I'd like to think I have a fairly good

understanding of the English language.

Boom!

This is it!

At this point, it is dead silent in the room.

We're all staring at these two women.

I've been waiting for this. These bitches better not disappoint.

Nolwazi chuckles quietly and puts down her fork.

She stares at Nomvuyo very oddly.

Nolwazi: You want me to repeat myself?

Nomvuyo: Repeating yourself won't make your point any clearer. I'd rather you explain what you mean differently.

Nolwazi's expression changes.

Nolwazi: Is this the perfect time to discuss how much of a bitch you are?

All our jaws are on the floor.

Heyi, we're all speechless.

Nomvuyo: I'm a bitch? Wow, that's news to me.

The sarcasm in Nomvuyo's voice is also just touching me.

Nolwazi: And while we're at it, let's also discuss how petty and unnecessary you are... Clearly everyone in the table is afraid to tell you this... I don't know why, really, because you're not much of a threat.

Yhuu!

I look at Nomvuyo. How is she going to even respond to such? They're basically telling her that she ain't shit!

Nomvuyo: Let it all out, Nolwazi. Clearly you've been keeping a lot in...

Nolwazi: I will, actually, because unlike you, I discuss my issues with people, instead of acting out like a child. Now, however, I'm starting to doubt that this will be a productive conversation, considering how childish you can get.

I want to get in and help my girl, Vuvz, but she seems too calm, and it's strange. I'd be spitting

fire at Nolwazi, rha!

Nolwazi: You've had a problem with me since I met you...

Nomvuyo doesn't respond, instead she looks at Nolwazi coolly.

I look over at Tholi, and the poor girl is just so confused and traumatised. Heyi naye she'll have to book extra appointments with Melinda. She can't walk around looking constipated 24/7. She really needs to breathe a bit, and enjoy this back and forth that's happening between Nolwazi and Nomvuyo. She should be glad that these people have their own drama, and aren't really focused on her.

Nolwazi: What's wrong? Why are you so bitter? Are you threatened by me? You do know that

universities are open for all, right?

Oh, no... Nolwazi took it way too deep. She took it deep down, there!

Nolwazi: Stop being mad at women who are living the life you secretly desire.

Zimkitha tries to say something, but

Derek stops her. I'm glad he knows that this shit needs to

be said... We need to move on from this unspoken tension.

Nomvuyo suddenly laughs.

We all look at her in confusion. She should be fuming, yet she's outchea laughing.

She finishes laughing and sighs.

Nomvuyo: Stop being mad at women who are living the life I secretly desire?

She continues laughing and we all look at each other in confusion.

She quietens down and then looks at Liwa and Zimkitha.

Nomvuyo: Am I the only one hearing this?
She sighs.

Nomvuyo: So I wish to give birth to my babies and leave them with nannies?

She looks at Nolwazi, who seems pissed at this point.

Now, Vuvu's also taking it deep yonder...
Clearly the gloves are off.

Nomvuyo: In your self-proclaimed higher grade brain, you genuinely think I desire to be like you?

A woman whose babies are more familiar to a bunch of nannies, than the person who gave

birth to them?

Damn.

Nomvuyo's smile has now disappeared.

Nomvuyo: Don't ever get it twisted, dear. I love being a housewife, and if you didn't know, then now you do. I choose to be in this position every single day, and thankfully, it doesn't require a certificate. So while you're prancing around, trying to convince yourself and those around you, that you're doing the right thing by handing over your kids to strangers, don't for one second, think that's what I also desire.

Dean tries to say something, and I look at him sharply.

Nolwazi: Then what's your problem with me?

Nomvuyo: Do I not treat you with respect every time I see you? Am I not cordial?

Dean: You don't like her, Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: I don't have to explain myself to anyone. You, out of all people, should know that

we're not all going to get along with everyone we meet.

I'm not taking sides or anything, but there are certain people I meet that I just don't like- from

the get go. It's just unfortunate that all of this is taking place in this circle.

Nolwazi shakes her head and stands.

Nolwazi: Let me go check on my babies- or rather, my nannies' babies.

Nomvuyo: Good, go do that, and maybe they'll eventually get used to you.

Nolwazi walks away and then there's silence.

Nomvuyo drinks some water.

Mdu: Uhm, does anyone mind filling me in? Why the fuck were you speaking to my sistr like

that? In her house futhi?

Zimkitha: Liste-

Mdu: How fucked up are y-

Liwa: Mduduzi, I suggest you keep quiet.

Mdu looks at Liwa, who's looking at him coolly.

You know, I'm still trying to figure out Liwa. Something ain't right about him nomamakhe. They scare me a bit.

Anyway, I'm outchea sipping my wine, waiting for round 2.

Nobody said the Royal Rumble would be easy. Makunyiwe, then we'll try to clean up people's wounds later.

INSERT 146

The tension is quite deep right now.

Nomvuyo stands and walks away. She seems nonchalant about this whole thing, which I didn't

expect. I want her to go crazy.

Zimkitha: I don't like what's happening right now.

Liwa: Let them be.

Dean: Of course, you'll say that... Your wife is the one being unnecessary.

Liwa ignores Dean and looks at me. I nod and stand.

I make my way outside to the gazebo and find Nomvuyo there.

Me: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Yes?

Me: What the hell?

She grunts as she sits and rubs her belly.

Me: What just happened?

Nomvuyo: Don't act like you're not enjoying this.

I smile guiltily and she chuckles.

Nomvuyo: My feet are so swollen...

She wiggles her toes and I look at her intently.

Me: Are you really going to act like you didn't just have that moment with Nolwazi?

Nomvuyo: Awume man...

She sighs as she drinks her water.

Nomvuyo: My ass needs to go back to school... That's what I learnt today... I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: My uneducated self goes around craving other people's lives...

Me: Gosh, Vuvu.

She laughs quietly and shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: Ya neh...

She rubs her belly and looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: Don't worry about me. I'm really unaffected.

Me: You sure?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: What she said didn't faze me... I've come across a lot of women like her, who think

we all want to be like them. Had it been true, I'd be fazed.

Me: You came for her parenting, Vuvu. She shrugs.

Nomvuyo: If you come for me, I'll also go all out...

I sigh heavily and shake my head.

Me: So, what's going to happen now?

Nomvuyo: You people found me here. I was perfectly fine without all of you. I'll survive without

Nolwazi's presence, trust me.

Me: So, you're not going to apologise?

Nomvuyo: For what? I've never badmouthed Nolwazi, nor have I tried to tarnish her name.

Aningiyeke, please.

I groan as I walk away.

Nomvuyo: Please tell Liwa to bring my bag.

Me: Are you leaving?

She shakes her head and I nod. I walk back inside the house and find everyone at the table

except Nolwazi and Dean.

Zimkitha: Is she okay?

Me: Yes, she's fine... Liwa, she's asked you to bring her bag.

Liwa stands and walks away. Tholi also walks away and makes her way to the bathroom.

Mdu: Clearly we came at the wrong time... I don't have time for this drama.

Me: Just keep quiet, wena... Not so long ago, you were also putting us through the most with

your hidden life. You shouldn't even try to act like you're above the drama.

He looks at me in shock.

I look at Zimkitha, who's chuckling.

Me: Where's Lwazi?

Zimkitha: She's upstairs.

Mdu: I thought you changed...

I roll my eyes as I walk away and make my way up the stairs. I go to the main bedroom and

knock. I open the door and find Nolwazi and Dean sitting on the bed.

Me: Hey.

Nolwazi looks pissed.

I have to admit that I've never seen her like this. Her face says it all.

Nolwazi: Who the fuck does she think she is? How dare she come for my parenting? I listen to her go on and on. In all honesty, I want her to say all these things to Nomvuyo's face.

Sometimes, all we need is the opportunity to let all our anger out, and let the source of the

anger see how pissed they made us.

Otherwise, you'll just feel like you're not heard or

acknowledged and the anger will just remain in the system.

Dean also looks pissed.

Lol, I find it cute that he wants to defend Nolwazi, but he really needs to sit this one out. It's

between Nolwazi and Nomvuyo, and as much as we all want to put our 2 cents, I think it's best to stay out of it.

Me: I think we should go downstairs.

Nolwazi: For what? Why the fuck should I go downstairs to talk to a childish 30 something year old?

Yhu. Now, I'm being attacked.

I take a deep breath, and channel my teacher mode.

Me: Nolwazi, the only way issues are solved is through communication. The process may be

hurtful, angering and hectic, but it's necessary.

She looks at me intently.

Nolwazi: You really care for her, don't you?

Me: I do, and I also care about you. Both of you need to talk in order to move on.

Nolwazi: But, I'm not the one with the problem.

Me: I understand.

Nolwazi: She came for my parenting. I sigh.

Me: And you basically said she's uneducated.

She tries saying something, but stops herself.

Me: You snapped.

Nolwazi: Give me a few minutes.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi: Langa.

Dean nods and stands. We both walk out and close the door.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Dean, I need you to calm down.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: Let Nolwazi fight her own battles.

We get downstairs and find everyone there, including Nomvuyo and Liwa.

Liwa seems to be back to his usual happy self.

Liwa: Where's Nolwazi? She needs to come here, so we can sort this shit out.

Dean hisses and Liwa ignores him.

I look over at Nolmvuyo, who seems fine.

Soon, Nolwazi comes back and sits. We're all very quiet at this point. We've never

had such an

awkward moment. Usually, we move on, but this time, the tension is a bit too much.

Nolwazi sits and drinks some water.

Nolwazi: Now, let's get one think straight...

She looks around the table.

Nolwazi: No one in this room will ever discuss how I choose to raise my kids. I want to raise my hand and say something, but I pull myself towards myself.

Nolwazi: Do not, even for one second, think you have the right to tell me how to raise my babies.

Nomvuyo: But, it's fine for you to point out how people choose not to further their studies like you?

There's an awkward silence.

Nomvuyo: Isn't that hypocritical?

Nolwazi sighs and looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: The last time I checked, we were having a decent conversation and you chose to

change the direction. I didn't throw a stone at you. I was reacting to how you came at me.

Nolwazi: And I was reacting to how you always treat me. Nomvuyo, if you weren't pregnant, I don't know what I would have done to you...

Nomvuyo: Well, let's thank my pregnancy then... I'd like to think we've known each other long before my pregnancy, but if we're running with it as an excuse for you not putting your hands on me, then so be it... I'm also grateful for my pregnancy right now.

Yhu...

Nolwazi takes a deep breath.

Nomvuyo: I don't know how you managed to conclude that I'm threatened by you...
If that

doesn't show how egotistic and delusional you are, then I don't know what will... One simply doesn't go around thinking other people desire to be like them, but clearly you do. Nolwazi: Then what is your problem?

Nomvuyo: Kanti yini inkinga? I've never bad-mouthed you or tried to tarnish your name? Why are you so bothered?

Nolwazi hisses.

Nolwazi: I don't walk around concluding that I don't like people I've never met... That's childish.

Nomvuyo: Then leave me and my childishness. You mature people love announcing how mature and dignified you... If you're so mature, then you'll stop trying to seek validation and keep it moving.

Nolwazi: Wow...

I clear my throat and everyone looks at me.

Okay, I know I said I want these two to fight, but I feel like this is getting out of hand, and it shouldn't. It's painful to watch.

Me: Uhm, I think this is escalating at a very high speed.

Nomvuyo: Ziya-

Me: No, Vuvu.

She drinks her water and looks at me calmly.

Me: We all know that Nolwazi is not your favourite person.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Had it been a random person, I don't think she'd be so bothered.

I continue channeling my inner teacher.

Me: It makes sense for her to be bothered, because this is a close-knit circle. This is an extended family. I'd also be touched if one of you didn't like me, and made me feel unwanted.

Nomvuyo: I've never made her feel unwanted.

Me: You don't know how you've made Nolwazi feel. Just because you think you've been cordial, it doesn't mean that she interpreted your actions that way. Don't disregard her feelings like that.

Gosh, I know she's going to kill me, but I have to reprimand her.

Me: You're all family.

Liwa: Why do you keep saying "you're" and excluding yourself?

I frown.

Liwa: You're also part of the family.

I ignore him and focus on Nomvuyo.

Me: Your silence towards Nolwazi has been very loud... We've all felt it, and in all honesty, it's

unjustified. I'd understand if Nolwazi was a psycho bitch, but the woman is amazing. What's

there not to love? I know I'm probably the pettiest one in this room, but I have to admit that your

dislike towards her is wrong, considering how close you all are in this circle.

There's silence.

I then look at Nolwazi.

Me: No offense, but you also have no right to say someone is threatened by you, and then insult

them for not having qualifications. You don't know why Nomvuyo chose to not continue

pursuing her studies.

I feel strange speaking to Nolwazi like this, but I'm going with the flow right now.

Me: I get that you were reacting to her behaviour, but that was an inappropriate comment. Had you really wanted to know why Nomvuyo was acting like this, you could have easily approached her a very long time ago, and not in this setting. You've never directed your thoughts to her directly.

Dean tries to say something, and I look at him sharply.

Me: This has nothing to do with you...

He hisses.

Me: Nawe Nomvuyo, you have no right commenting on other people's parenting methods. Just

because you're raising Nyami a certain way, it doesn't mean it's the universal way. Don't judge someone for being a working mom.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: With that being said, I'd like to say there's nothing wrong with your parenting. I look up to you. You've done very well for yourself, and I'm sure your megabytes will admire you.

Her face seems to have softened up.

Me: I think the perfect thing to do at this point is give Nomvuyo and Nolwazi some space to

talk... What they do with this time is entirely up to them.

Liwa: I agree.

We all stand and leave them in there...

As soon as I hear Ivy announcing her presence in the lounge, I go straight outside and Derek follows me.

INSERT 147

Derek: That was very noble of you.

He stares at me and we laugh.

Me: As much as I wanted that fight to take place, I realised how damaging it could be. He nods.

Me: Do you think they'll sort it out?

Derek: They will... I think it was a case of misunderstanding.

Me: Nomvuyo will continue being civil, but I don't think she'll form a close relationship with Nolwazi.

Derek: At least their feelings are out in the open now, so there won't be any weird vibes.

Me: True.

Derek: And we can now make fun of them openly.

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: I was just defending your ass, and you're already thinking about making fun of someone else?

He wraps his arms around me and kisses my cheek.

Derek: Thank you for defending me.

Me: Your battles are my battles. I've got you.

We laugh and share a kiss.

Me: I think I'm ready to go now.

Derek: Definitely. The last person I want to see is Ivy.

I look at him in shock and he shrugs.

Derek: I guess your beef rubbed off on me. I laugh at him.

Me: Good.

Just then, someone clears their throat.

What does Malusi want?

Derek and I look at him expectantly.

Malusi smiles.

These men always have this same weird smile when they're about to engage with someone.

Malusi: A word, Dlamini?

I look at him blankly. I don't know what's going on.

I look at Derek, and it seems like he's not going anywhere, because his arm is now on my waist.

Me: Sure.

Malusi: That was a cute speech...

Me: Cute?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Malusi: A bit hypocritical if you ask me.

I keep quiet. I was waiting for such.

Malusi: You judged me without even getting to know me.

Me: I did.

Malusi: You don't even know me, or the reasons behind my actions.

Me: And, I apologise.

Him and Derek look at me in shock.

Malusi: Sorry, what?

Derek: Baby?

I smile.

Malusi: Well, okay then... I was expecting us to have a back and forth, fuck I even had my

arguments ready.

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not there...

Malusi: Hmm...

I look at Derek.

Me: Ready to leave?

Derek: Yes.

Malusi: Leaving already?

Me: Yes.

Malusi: Hmm, alright then.

He walks away and Derek looks at me expectantly.

Derek: And then?

Me: I still don't like him...

He chuckles.

Derek: I was shocked for a second.

We walk back inside and find everyone in the lounge. Nolwazi and Nomvuyo are not here.

Me: Where are they?

Liwa: They're still in there...

I nod.

Ivy seems to have disappeared, and so has Mdu and Tholi. Just then, my phone beeps and it's a

message from Tholi, telling me she's not ready to be in this space, and that Ivy was going to

make things worse, so she asked Mdu to leave.

I completely understand where she's coming from. However, I'm glad that the group has shown her that they don't have a problem with her. I think she needs to interact with these people bit by bit, and not all at once. Ivy, on the other hand, is obviously going to give her a difficult time, so she's a story for another day.

Just then, Nolwazi emerges.

Okay, she seems fine.

Nolwazi: You can come back in...

We all look at her nervously. We follow her and make our way back to our seats.

Nomvuyo is

still sitting, drinking water. She also seems fine, but one can never be too sure with this one.

We all sit and it's silent for a few minutes.

Nolwazi: Dessert should be here now...

There's an awkward vibe. We want to know how the talk went. Sifun' kwazi! Nolwazi looks at us and chuckles.

Nolwazi: You can all breathe... Nomvuyo and I are fine.

We continue staring at them. Why aren't they giving us the details?

Nolwazi: We spoke... We apologised, and we're moving on. You can all stop staring at us.

Liwa: Are you sure you're fine?

Nolwazi smiles sweetly and nods.

Everyone looks at Nomvuyo, who hasn't said anything.

Nomvuyo: We're fine.

She looks at me and I stare right back at her.

Me: That's nice.

Soon, dessert is served.

I want to go home and suffocate in Derek's arms.

Nomvuyo: I won't be joining you for dessert. My bed is calling me.

She yawns as she stands with Liwa. They say their goodbyes and walk out.

Zimkitha: How did the talk really go, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: It was fine. We both apologised. Zimkitha nods.

Zimkitha: Good.

We continue chatting.

Just then, Ivy comes in the room and looks around.

Ivy: Hey, people...

Everyone greets her back.

Ivy: So, you don't invite me?

Nolwazi: I was planning on inviting you, but I decided not to.

Ivy: Why? Is it because Mdu brought that fat skank who caused you emotional turmoil?

Zimkitha: Nomzamo!

Ivy hisses as she walks to the empty seat next to me (Nomvuyo's) and sits.

She looks at me.

Ivy: I hear you played a role in bringing that girl here?

I don't know who she's talking to.

Nolwazi: Ivy, I don't need your energy right now. I'm exhausted.

Ivy: Ziyanda, you come here and try to change these people's lives, huh? First, you befriended

Kwanele, and had the audacity to bring him into this space... Now, you're meddling in my

brother's business as well? Orchestrating a relationship with that bitch that played a role in

Nolwazi's heartbreak?

Nolwazi: Ivy!

Ivy: What? Am I wrong?

She looks at me with obvious disgust.

Ivy: Bitch, am I wr-

Before she can even finish her sentence, I stand, and give her one piercing smack on the face.

At this point, I go completely blank.

This time, I throw a quick and sharp punch, and I don't even know where it lands, because I'm already being snatched away and dragged out.

All I see is red.

I hear Derek saying my name.

I think I've lost it. I haven't been in such a state in a very very long time.

I can also hear Ivy in the other room, screaming and shouting, yelling every insult in the book.

I make my way outside, and allow the fresh breeze to fill me.

Derek: Baby.

I gather my thoughts.

Derek: Baby...

I feel his hands on my arms and I look at him. He looks nervous and concerned.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Are you sure?

Me: I snapped. That girl tests me, Derek. He smiles and nods.

Derek: Those hits were well-deserved. She was antagonizing you.

I sigh.

Me: Hug me.

He wraps his arms around me and I hold on to him. I inhale his scent and relax.

Derek: Are you okay now?

Me: Not yet...

We stand there for a long time until I feel much better.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: We should leave now... I'm tired.

Me: Makes the two of us.

He lets go of me and we walk back inside the house.

As soon as I walk in the door, I'm met by a punch on my face.

My adrenaline instantly switches, and I swing. I'm swinging and making sure that Ivy will think twice the next time she tries to come at me.

Once again, I'm being dragged out.

Dean: Dlamini!

Me: No, leave me alone, Dean!

Dean: Calm the fuck down!

Me: Let go of me!

Dean lets go of me and I walk all the way to the driveway.

Derek follows me and unlocks the door.

We get in the car and he drives off...

Derek: Use your Breathing Tool...

He looks at me with a smile and I end up chuckling.

Me: Mxm... I think she hit my eye.

Derek: Is it painful?

I nod and pat my eye.

Me: Nxx.

Derek: Breathing Tool, baby.

Me: Star, stop!

He laughs and focuses on the road...

Me: I need a break from these people. I'm tired! Ngapha I have to deal with your psycho mom

and her best friend, Busi? I'm tired!

He keeps quiet as I grunt and sink on my seat.

INSERT 148

A month has passed and Derek and I have been doing our own thing. We've been going on dates and lazing around.

We've decided that we won't be around his people for a while. I genuinely feel like being around them brings me stress to a certain extent. They always involve me in their issues, and then I get sucked in deeper, until I can't exclude myself. I need some peace right now. I'm still battling with the aftermath of the miscarriage, and I can't be bumping into the likes of Ivy, whom I've sworn to beat up every time I see... Anyway, Derek and I are at the mall, busy shopping for things for Lelo. He's finally going to sleepover, and Derek has been beyond excited.

Derek: So, when are we moving out?

Me: Next month.

He laughs.

Derek: Don't worry, I'll sort out everything.

Me: I'll help with packing.

We've decided to move out, seeing as we can't really host a child where we're currently staying.

We eventually finish shopping, and make our way back to our place.

We find Busi already there.

As soon as Lelo sees me, he jumps for me and I pick him up.

Me: Lelo!

Lelo: Hello!

I give him a kiss and he giggles.

I've grown to really love the little boy.

He's cuteness is infectious.

Busi: Baby, come give mommy a kiss.

I try to put him down, but Lelo doesn't let go of me.

Lelo: Zizi, let's go play!

Me: Say goodbye to mommy first.

Busi: Mpumelelo!

I let go of him and Busi takes him. She plants a kiss on his lips.

Busi: Bye, baby.

Lelo: Bye bye.

She kisses him again and puts him down.

He then walks to me and takes my hand.

Derek and Busi exchange hellos.

Thereafter, we watch her drive off.

Derek: Lelo, you're not going to say hi to daddy?

Lelo laughs as he lets go of my hand and hold Derek's.

We make our way inside and Lelo goes straight to the lounge, where we've set up a play area

for him. Derek and I begin unpacking all the groceries.

Derek: So, we have a guest this weekend?
I chuckle.

Me: I wonder how we'll sleep.

Derek: Should be interesting...

Me: And Lwazi will be here soon.

Derek: I've missed her.

Just then, my phone rings and it's my mom.

Me: Mama?

Mom: We're outside, baby.

Me: Okay, I'll be there now now.

Mom: Shap.

I hang up and sigh.

Me: They're here.

He smiles excitedly.

Lwazi: Hello, cutie!

Lelo looks up from his lego game. He looks at Lwazi, a bit confused.

Lwazi: I'm your sister!

Lelo: Hello, Lelo.

I chuckle.

The child is really confused. I just find it cute when he has these moments where he greets himself.

Lwazi walks to him and picks him up. Seeing her hold Lelo makes me realise just how grown she is... She's grown into such a beautiful, strong young girl.

Lwazi: My name is Auntie Lwazi.

Lelo: Hello, Lelo!

I chuckle.

Me: Lelo, this is my baby... Her name is Lwazi.

Lwazi: Hai, you can't let him call me by my first name.

Me: Heeh, why?

Lwazi: Mommy, I'm 13 years old now. I'm his aunt.

Me: And what does that make me?

Lwazi: Well, duuh, you're his mom.

Me: Hai wena.

She rolls her eyes and looks at Lelo.

Lwazi: Hello, Lelo.

Lelo: Hello!

He wiggles and she lets go of him. He then focuses on his lego game.

Lwazi: He's so cute!

Me: Too much.

Lwazi: You must bring him home.

Me: Ah ah.

She groans.

My mom walks to us and looks down at Lelo.

Mom: Is this the young man?

Lelo looks up with his big eyes. He's beyond confused.

Mom: Hello, boy.

Lelo: Hello.

Mom: Unjani?

He looks at her in confusion.

Mom: Haike, you'll have to learn isiZulu.

Me: He only speaks English.

Mom: Unacceptable...

She looks down at Lelo.

Mom: Uzofunda ukukhuluma...

Lelo blinks three times and focuses on his lego game again.

Lwazi: I'm famished!

Me: Hehe, look at you...

Mom: She's been flooding us with these big words... Sifile!

I laugh as I listen to Lwazi explain the importance of using powerful English words.

Mom: You look really good... You're back to your usual self.

Me: Aww, thank you.

Lwazi: You look astounding!

Me: Yaas!

Derek walks to us and tells us the food is ready.

We walk to the other side of the lounge and sit.

This place is really starting to feel small. Now, I definitely think moving is a good idea.

Lwazi helps him serve, and we begin eating.

Mom: So, how's fatherhood?

Derek smiles shyly and looks at me.

Derek: I'm still wrapping my head around it.

Mom: You seem to be doing great.

Derek: Your daughter's been by my side.

My mom looks at me and smiles.

Mom: I'm glad.

Derek then looks at Lwazi.

Derek: How's school?

Lwazi: It's great. I just miss you guys.

I sigh heavily. I think I miss being around children, it's been too long.

Anyway, we continue chatting and catching up...

A couple of days have passed, and Lelo has left. I must admit that I miss his adorable self...

In the afternoon, I make my way to Nomvuyo's house. The woman made it explicitly clear that I shouldn't plan a baby shower for her, and I obliged. She's now waiting for the baby to pop out.

I get to their house and find her by the pooling, dipping her feet in there.

Me: Lover.

I bend and give her a kiss.

Nomvuyo: Hey, baby.

She rubs her belly and groans.

Me: Everything okay?

Nomvuyo: Cramps.

Me: Yoh...

Nomvuyo: I'm ready to take him out.

Me: It's a boy??

She nods.

Me: Why didn't you tell me?

Nomvuyo: We found out recently.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sure you've heard about the Ivy thing.

She chuckles and nods.

Nomvuyo: She told me...

Me: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: The girl had a blue eye, what did you do to her?

Me: I don't want to talk about her.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

She rubs her belly and groans lightly.

Me: How are you and Nolwazi?

Nomvuyo: What do you mean?

Me: Have you guys spoken?

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I'm pregnant. All my attention has been on this baby...

Me: Hmm...

Just then, Liwa comes to us and gives us drinks.

Me: Thank you.

Liwa: You're welcome, Ziyanda Dlamini!

He walks off.

Me: By the way, how's Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: She's okay.

Me: What happened that day?

Nomvuyo: You wouldn't understand...

Zimkitha lives a wild life.

Me: Wow.

She rubs her belly again and groans.

Nomvuyo: Please help me stand...

Me: Okay.

I help her stand and we make our way inside.

Nomvuyo: I need some rest... Come massage my feet.

Me: So, you called me here just to make me your slave?

She laughs as she throws herself on the couch...

When I get to our place, I find it locked. I knock and hear Derek saying he's coming.

Seconds later, the door opens.

Me: Really?

He chuckles.

Derek: I don't feel safe when you're not around. You're the fighter, love.

Me: Gosh.

I walk in and he follows me.

Derek: Did Nomvuyo feed you?

Me: Nope.

Derek: Good. Do you want to shower first, or?

Me: Excuse me? Do I stink?

He laughs.

Derek: Angithi you love freshening up before you eat...

Me: I'll be done in 30 minutes.

Derek: Okay, baby.

I walk to the bedroom...

When I come back, he rearranged the entire space.

Me: Yay! Picnic time?

Derek: Yep.

Me: Perfect.

I sit as he dishes up for us.

We begin eating.

Me: I'm convinced food is better than sex.

He laughs.

Derek: Oh, please...

Me: You're an amazing cook, Ngidi.

Derek: I know, baby, but I'm also great in bed.

Me: Gosh.

He chuckles.

Derek: So, I'd like to discuss a few things with you...

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: And, I'd like to redeem myself a bit.

Me: Hmm, I'm listening.

Derek: I've known you for close to ten months now...

Me: Has it only been 10 months?

We laugh as I make fun of how obsessed he was with me at first.

Me: I genuinely thought you were a creep!

Derek: You were so rude to me!

Me: Ngidi, you stalked me!

He laughs and shakes his head.

Derek: See how far we've come?

I nod.

Derek: Do you see yourself with anyone else?

Me: Euww.

He chuckles.

Derek: You and I have a strange level of understanding towards each other.

Me: It's very strange...

Derek: I could spend my days like this forever... You know, the last time I was unemployed, I was ready to blow up banks. I hated it.

Me: Dramatic much?

Derek: So, you're not enjoying yourself?

Me: I mean, it's okay... I'm starting to miss being busy though.

He chuckles.

Me: But, I must admit that I enjoy spending my days lazing around with you. You feed me well, Star.

He smiles.

Derek: Now, with that being said, Ziyanda, don't you think we're soul mates?

Me: Without a doubt.

He smiles.

Derek: How do you feel about taking the next step?

Me: Marriage?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Will you marry me?

Me: Hmm, I think I need a kiss, just to gather my thoughts.

He chuckles as he gets closer to me and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: Of course I'll marry you...

He smiles and kisses me again. __

My Self discovery cont...

INSERT 152

Dean: What the fuck?!

He stares at Derek.

Dean: How the fuck do I not know about this?

Me: Excuse me? Asijoli sonke.

He ignores me and continues staring at Derek.

Derek: We only found out today.

Nolwazi: That's amazing!

Dean stares at me.

Dean: Ukhulelwe?

I don't respond.

He looks at Derek and smiles.

Dean: Congratulations.

Derek: Thank you.

Nolwazi: We'll drink on your behalf, Zi.

I roll my eyes and they laugh.

Dean looks at me intently.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I don't know.

Dean: Well, you're not running around crazy, so that's a good thing.

Me: Mxm.

Nolwazi: What a blessing. I'm really happy for you two!

The waiter brings the bottle of champagne and Nolwazi stands and insists on pouring. I glance at Derek.

Me: What are you doing?

Derek: Drinking.

Me: I think the fuck not. You'll drink once I've given birth.

Dean: Uyanya wena.

Derek: Are you serious, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm as serious as this pregnancy.

He sighs and Nolwazi laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: It's the right thing to do, D.

Derek: But I also want champagne.

Me: Uzoqina.

Nolwazi: My man and I will drink on your behalf.

Nolwazi and Dean laugh as they gobble down the champopo.

Just then, Nolwazi's phone rings and she groans.

Nolwazi: I have to take this, it's work.

Dean: Niqala kanje ukuba nabomakhwapheni.

Nolwazi laughs as she stands and walks away. Derek follows and goes to the bathroom.

Dean: Dlamini.

Me: Hmm?

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: I don't know.

He chuckles.

Dean: How many months?

Me: Almost five.

Dean: So, you've been fucking without protection for five months?

I keep quiet.

Dean: Mxm, uyabheda kanti. What did you expect?

Me: Leave me alone.

He tries to say something and I look at him sharply.

Dean: Lighten up.

I sigh.

Me: How can I? What if I lose the baby again?

He exhales.

Dean: The chances are slimmer at 5 months.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I'm actually glad that you found out now. At least my nephew has been surviving by himself, without your stress.

Me: Excuse me??

He smiles.

Dean: Relax.

I sigh.

Me: I'm shitting my pants here, Dean.

Dean: Focus on taking care of yourself.

Derek comes back and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Dean: I'm telling your person to stop stressing.

Derek looks at me intently.

Dean: I need my nephew to survive.

Derek: Nephew?

I roll my eyes.

Dean: You want a girl?

Derek: I do, actually.

Dean: Why am I not surprised?

I finish up my water and sink in my seat.

Me: Can we change the subject?

Dean: No, you must get used to this. We're not going to hide our excitement this time around. Kuzoqina wena.

Me: Wow!

Derek: Hai man, Dean.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Angeke sizwe ngawe.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: So, are you going to get married first?

Me: Yes.

They both look at me in shock. I'm also shocked at my response.

Derek: Huh?

Me: I'm not trying to have a bastard.

Dean immediately bursts out in laughter and Derek continues to look at me in shock.

Dean: What??

I groan.

Derek: Ziyanda, you want to get married first?

I look at him blankly.

Me: Yes, kanti?

Derek: Before the baby is born?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Are you aware of the time we have left?

I don't say anything.

Me: I'm not thinking about all of that. All I know is that my father will not allow me to get married after the baby.

Derek: Why the fuck not?

Me: Because!

He looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: You never cease to amaze me.

Nolwazi comes back and sits.

Nolwazi: What's up?

Dean fills her in.

Nolwazi: You want to get married first??

Me: Yes.

I look at them blankly. I don't understand what the problem is.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness. How many months?

Me: Almost 5.

Nolwazi: So, you have plus/minus three months to plan a wedding?

Me: What wedding?

All of them look at me in shock once again.

Dean: What the fuck is wrong with you? Who gave birth to you? I shrug.

Dean: You don't want a wedding?

I shrug once again.

I look at Derek. It seems like he is going through the most.

Me: Kanti you don't want us to get married?

Derek: I do.

Me: Manje?

Derek: I want to marry you, but what do you mean you don't want a wedding?

Me: I don't know.

Dean: What exactly do you know?

Me: Angazi.

Nolwazi: I think Ziyanda is overwhelmed and you two aren't helping. You need time to figure things out.

We're silent for a while.

I stand.

Me: Excuse me.

I walk away and make my way outside. I need fresh air. My thoughts are all over the place.

I go to a table outside and sit there.

I'm starting to freak out. I can feel the anxiety building up. I'm starting to feel like I have a lot to figure out about my future, and it's not as simple as I thought. Just as I'm about to lose my breath, Derek comes from out of nowhere with a glass of water. He takes a chair and sits opposite me.

Derek: Ziyanda, drink some water.

I shake my head. I don't want water. I want to stabilise my breathing.

He gets closer to me and stops himself from touching me. He knows I don't want to feel suffocated when I'm anxious.

Derek: I need you to focus on your breathing, Zi.

All these questions are racing through my mind. Dean has made me think about all these things. I wasn't thinking about a wedding. How am I going to have a wedding when I'm 9 months pregnant? On the flipside, how am I going to deal with my father emphasising that I have to get married before I give birth?

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek's warm hands on mine.

I snap out of it.

Derek: Let's do the grounding exercise, okay?

I nod.

Derek: Rate your anxiety on a scale of 1-10.

Me: 7.

Derek: Relax your shoulders and sit up straight.

I sigh and do as I'm told.

Derek: Close your eyes...

I do as I'm told.

Derek: Breathe slowly and deeply...

I focus on my breathing, making sure it's not quick and sharp.

After a while, I feel calmer.

Derek: What colour is my t-shirt?

Me: Grey.

Derek: What does the chair you're on feel like?

Me: It's metal... It's cold and a bit uncomfortable.

He chuckles quietly and stays silent. I continue to focus on my breathing for a while.

Derek: What do you hear?

Me: The harsh breeze...

Derek: Can you feel the harsh breeze on your face?

I nod.

Derek: What can you smell?

I inhale.

Me: You mostly...

He chuckles again.

Derek: Two things you can feel.

Me: The breeze hitting my face, and your warm hand on my left hand.

He's quiet again and I focus on my breathing.

I exhale loudly and open my eyes.

We stare at each other.

Derek: Hello, there.

He smiles and I smile back.

Derek: Better?

Me: Yes, thank you.

Derek: We'll figure it out...

I sigh and nod.

Derek: I don't want you to stress about anything, Ziyanda, do you hear me?

I keep quiet.

Derek: We'll do what's best for us, baby.

He stands and pulls me up.

Derek: And try your best to zone out that idiot, Dean, whenever he opens his mouth.

Me: It's his fault!

Derek: I know, baby.

He pulls me and wraps his arms around me and I relax in his embrace.

Me: Screw him!

He chuckles and kisses my forehead.

Derek: Are you ready to go back?

Me: Yes. I'm hungry.

He laughs as he takes my hand and leads me back inside. When we get to our table, Nolwazi and Dean seem to be having a good time, drinking champagne. Mxm. We sit and I immediately focus on my food.

Dean: Dlamz?

Me: Awungiyeye Dean.

He chuckles and shrugs.

Dean: One can never win with you.

Me: Leave me alone!

Nolwazi: Dean uyahlupha yazi...

Me: Idiot...

It's now Saturday, and I am meeting up with Niki and Kwanele. I haven't seen these two in a while, and I could use their company. I've been hanging around Derek's crew for too long.

Derek was very hesitant to let me go by myself, but I told him to get over it. I'm not going to sit in the house like some zombie.

I get to Kwanele's penthouse and I am immediately relaxed. I'm so glad I'm going to do my own thing a bit. I'd like to forget about my life this afternoon.

Me: Ko ko!

Niki: Ngenaa!

We share a long hug and exclaim.

Me: Missed you!

Niki: Missed you too, heffer!

Me: Hey, Kwanele!

Kwanele smiles.

Kwanele: How are you, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm well, thank you. Unjani?

Kwanele: Great, thanks.

We share a hug and then Niki and I go to the balcony.

Me: Nidla ubusha benu, huh?

Niki: Yoh, friend... Dating rich is great.

I laugh.

Niki: I'm addicted to this opulent life.

Me: You're funny, sisi.

Niki: How are things?

Me: Things are okay.

Niki: Just okay?

Me: We're busy moving.

Niki: Yaas!

I told her about the proposal, but she has no idea that I'm pregnant. I'm going to tell

her later today... Right now, I want to eat
and gossip!

Me: Are we eating here? I love the view!

Niki: Of course!

We laugh and make our way inside.

Me: I'd like some orange juice, please.

Niki: Pregnancy driving you crazy?

Me: Huh?

Niki: Uthi nya, slima!

Me: Niki!

Niki: You really thought you'd get away with hiding a pregnancy? Am I stupid?

I look at her in shock and she rolls her eyes.

Niki: You are one fertile bitch.

I groan.

Kwanele: Congratulations, Ziyanda.

Me: Can we not?

Niki: Are you hiding it?

Me: Not really.

Niki: Do the parentals know?

Me: Dad doesn't know.

Niki: Yoh...

I sigh.

Me: Can we not?

Niki: Okay.

Me: Now pour me that orange juice, bitch.
Just then, there is a loud knock on the door.

Niki: Gosh...

Kwanele tightens his jaw.

Out of nowhere, a large woman budes in and looks around.

Woman: Kwanele? Why aren't you answering my calls??

Her eyes land on me. She stares at me so intensely that I feel uncomfortable.

Woman: Haibo, who is this beautiful girl? She continues staring at me.

I look around.

Is she referring to me?

From Niki's descriptions, I have gathered that this is Kwanele's mother...

I finally get to meet the notorious Thenjiwe Buthelezi.

INSERT 153

Thenjiwe walks to me and I feel myself stepping back. She has an intimidating presence. I don't know if it's because I've heard so much about her or because she is physically intimidating.

Thenjiwe: Who are you?

Me: Uhm, me?

She doesn't say anything.

Me: Ziyanda.

She looks at Kwanele and smiles.

Thenjiwe: Are you telling me you've dumped this one?

She points at Niki dismissively.

Haibo, guys! What's happening??

Me: Excuse me?

Kwanele: Mama, get out.

I look at Niki, and my friend is ready to kill this woman. She is fuming!

How could this woman disrespect Niki like this? What is it with these mothers?

Nami I have Khwezi thinking she can talk to me like I'm some piece of shit.

Kunzima!

Thenjiwe: I came to-

Kwanele: Get out.

He stares at her calmly, yet intensely.

Thenjiwe looks at me and smiles.

Thenjiwe: Beautiful girl...

I keep quiet.

She then looks at Kwanele and smiles sweetly.

Thenjiwe: Your father has asked for a family meeting...

Kwanele looks at her in confusion.

Thenjiwe: I have no idea what it's about.

That man is full of surprises these days.

She hisses as if she's thinking of something that's angering her.

Kwanele: You could have called me.

Thenjiwe: I've missed you... You've been MIA lately.

She stares at Niki disgustingly.

Thenjiwe: Is Ziyanda your second girlfriend?

She laughs boldly and takes her bag.

Thenjiwe: You must come over tomorrow noon. We all can't wait to hear what your father has to say!

With that said, she walks out and it's silent.

I feel awkward. I feel very awkward.

Me: Uhm-

Niki: Kwanele, I've mentioned how uncomfortable your mother makes me. Don't let her in when I'm around... How many times have we had this chat?

Kwanele: Are you kidding me? Am I the only one who was present when she pitched unexpectedly? Did you not see that?

Niki: Why does she have access to your place? Why is it so easy for to just budge in?!

Kwanele: Are you fucken serious right now, Nikiwe?

I listen to them go back and forth.

Heyi, if people think I have drama, then they must meet Niki. The heffer can go from 0-100 in a flash, and her 100 is like 200 to a normal person.

Now, voices are going higher and the tension is getting thicker and thicker.

Kunzima.

Niki: You're an enabler! You enable her to have this much power over you! Grow the fuck up and stop allowing your bully of a mother to control you!

Kwanele: Have you seen her control me?
What the fuck are you on about?!

Niki tries to say something, but Kwanele
shuts her up.

Kwanele: Don't come here with bullshit.
I've defended you since she laid eyes on
you. Uyabheda manje.

Niki storms off and disappears.

Kwanele also storms off and disappears.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, so... Y'all are just gonna leave a
pregnant person unattended?

Silence.

Me: Hmkay then...

I pour more orange juice and dial Derek's
phone. He answers immediately.

Derek: Baby, is everything okay?

Me: What do you think?

He chuckles.

Derek: What happened?

Me: Everything was cool until Kwanele's mom pitched out of-

Derek: What?? Are you okay?? Ziyan-

Me: Whoa, calm down. Why wouldn't I be okay? Geesh, relax, the woman is not a killer.

Derek: You'd be surprised.

Me: So, Niki and Kwanele had a back and forth as soon as she left.

Derek: About what?

Me: Niki feels disrespected and thinks Kwanele is being controlled by Thenjiwe.

Derek: Really?

I chuckle.

Me: You're such a gossipmonger.

Derek: I mean, I like hearing how other men mess up their relationships while mine is thriving.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Me: So, Kwanele was throwing all kinds of swear words, and Niki was also doing the most. Bekunyiwa I tell you! After, they bo-
Just then, Kwanele walks back.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, I'll call you later, ma.

Derek: Ma?

Me: Love you.

Derek laughs.

Derek: Did one of them walk in?

Me: Yes, I'll call you.

Derek: Manje why are you calling me ma?

Hai, Ziyanda...

He laughs.

Me: Bye, ma! Love you!

I quickly hang up and take a sip of my juice.

Kwanele: Ziyanda.

I look at him.

Kwanele: I apologise for how I conducted myself.

Me: You don't have to apologise...

He sighs.

Me: I'll check on Niki now...

He nods as I walk away.

I eventually find her in the main bedroom.

Me: Boo.

She's lying on the bed.

Me: Have you calmed down?

Niki: That woman, Ziyanda! That humongous piece of shit! I swear I'm going to go head to head with her!

Me: It's not worth it... She'll never change... They never change...

She groans and looks at me.

We stare at each other for a few seconds before bursting out in laughter.

We laugh for a good minute.

Me: So, not even one us is blessed with a sweet mother-in-law?

Niki: Fucken bitches.

We continue laughing.

Me: Stop being hard on Kwanele. I'd also avoid fighting with that woman. She's too much.

She sighs.

Me: And he told her to leave... Take your over- the- top- ass back in that kitchen and apologise for being unnecessary. I want to eat, and this fight was pointless.

She rolls her eyes and stands.

Me: I'll wait for you here. Call me once you're done.

She stands and walks away...

After a few hours, I'm full and ready to pass out.

Me: Guys, thanks for the food, but I need to sleep.

Niki: Wow.

Me: I could pop right now, that's how full I am.

As soon as my head hits the pillow, I pass out.

I am suddenly awakened by someone shaking me lightly.

I ignore them.

They shake me again and I groan.

Person: Zi, vuka...

I open my eyes in confusion.

Me: Derek?

He looks at me blankly.

Me: What's happening? I blink a few times, trying to figure out where I am.

I remember. I'm at Kwanele's.

Me: What are you doing here?

Derek: I'm not about to have you sleep at another man's house. Vuka.

He pulls me up and I sit up. I yawn and stretch.

He looks around and shakes his head.

Me: What?

Derek: Nothing... Let's go.

I put on my shoes and we walk out.

Is it weird that I suddenly feel so pregnant?

All this time I've been living happily, but now I'm bloated and aware of the life growing in me. It's crazy.

I just... I don't know, man...

We get to the lounge and find Niki and Kwanele chilling, all cuddled up.

Niki: Your man couldn't even stomach the thought of you sleeping here. I don't know what his problem is.

I look at Derek disapprovingly and he remains silent.

Me: See you two another time.

Kwanele: Bye, Ziyanda.

Niki: Bye, boo.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

Niki chuckles.

Niki: Bye, Star.

Kwanele: Nihambe kahle.

I give them hugs and follow Derek, who's already out. Clearly he has a lot to say...

We get in the car and I look at him.

Me: Go ahead...

Derek: Last time I checked, you had a bed, a very comfortable one at that.

I chuckle.

Me: Your jealousy knows no bounds...

Derek: Can't have you sleeping in another man's bed...

Me: Okay, Star.

Derek: Understood?

Me: Hmkay.

Just then, his phone rings and it's Dean.

He answers it.

It's on loudspeaker.

Derek: Dean? I'm driving.

Dean: Zimkitha's in hospital.

Derek: What??

Me: What happened??

Dean: Get here now.

Derek: Uhm, sure...

Dean: I can't contact Liwa, Derek.

Derek: Does he know?

Dean: Ya.

Derek: Shit.

Dean: Exactly. Exactly what?

Derek: I'll try calling him. Is Zimkitha bad?

Dean: Just get here.

Derek: Okay.

He ends the call.

Me: Oh my goodness!

He dials Liwa's number and it rings for a very long time.

Just as we're about give up, he answers.

But he doesn't say anything.

Derek: Liwa.

He doesn't say anything.

Derek: I'm on my way to the hospital now, Liwa. I need you to meet me there.

Before Derek can continue, the call is ended.

Derek: Shit.

Me: What's wrong??

Out of nowhere, he changes direction, and goes back to where we come from.

Me: And then?

Derek: I don't want you in that environment. I'm taking you back to Niki.

Me: Are you kidding me? Am I a child?

He glances at me.

Me: Turn this car around and drive to the hospital, Nkanyezi.

He contemplates for a few seconds...

He sighs and changes direction once again...

I have no idea what the hell is going on, but I sense that it's huge...

I find myself touching my belly as poor Zimkitha crosses my mind.

INSERT 154

We get to the hospital and Derek stops and looks at me.

Derek: I don't want you to come with me.

Me: Why? Sitting here, by myself, will stress me out even more.

He sighs.

Me: Let's go.

He takes out his phone and calls Dean.

Derek: I'm here... Where's her room?...

Okay...

He hangs up and then looks at me.

Derek: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm nervous.

He nods tightly and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay.

Me: You're not.

He groans.

Just then, Dean emerges and it's safe to say he is not in a good mood.

Dean: What is she doing here?

Me: Excuse me?

He looks at Derek coldly. He eventually looks at me with the same coldness.

Me: You don't have to be a dick.

He ignores me and walks away. We follow him and Derek holds my hand.

I get that everyone is stressed, but can we show some kindness? It's so tense.

We eventually get to the room. As we walk in, we find everyone there:

Nomvuyo, Nolwazi, Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Nandi- except Liwa.

Zimkitha is in the bed. She's unrecognisable due to bruises.

Me: What happened?

They all turn and stare at me. I immediately regret breaking the silence.

Nolwazi: Car accident.

I want more information, but decide to keep my mouth shut. Dean is already looking at me like I'm an invader.

I look over at Nomvuyo, and my heart immediately goes out to her.

She stands and I find myself moving out of her way as she walks out of the door.

As I'm about to follow her, we hear Zimkitha moaning.

All of us immediately go to her bed. She moans louder.

Dean: You all need to get out.

Gabi: Why? Sh-

Zimkitha tries to say something.

Dean: Get the fuck out!

He looks at us and I instantly turn. I'm not about to be eaten and swallowed by Dean.

Derek can stay here with him while I check on Nomvuyo.

Zimkitha: Dean... Liwa...Derek... Vu-

We all walk out and shut the door.

Gabi: I just don't understand why Dean has to be so cold and unnecessary. We're all here because we love Zimkitha. He must stop treating us like some random outsiders.

I decide not to respond to that. I walk around, looking for Nomvuyo, and eventually find her at the parking lot. She's leaning on her car.

Me: Vuvu.

I get to her.

It doesn't take rocket science to see that she's acting strong. Knowing Nomvuyo, she hates being seen as weak.

Me: I'm sorry.

I give her a long hug. I want her to cry, but she remains stone-faced.

Me: Have you spoken to Liwa?

She doesn't respond. I guess that's a no.

We stand in silence for the longest time.

My phone rings and it's Derek.

Me: Hello.

Derek: Zi, ukuphi?

Me: Parking lot.

Derek: With Vuvu?

Me: Yes

Derek: Come back. Zimkitha wants to see her.

Me: Is she up?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Okay.

I hang up and look at Nomvuyo.

Me: Zimkitha wants to see you.

She begins walking and I follow her. I'm really awkward when it comes to comforting people... I feel very uncomfortable right now.

Anyway, we eventually get back inside and find Dean and Derek there.

My stomach growls.

Gosh, this is such an awkward time to be hungry. I imagine myself eating pasta with bits of bacon...

I quickly check myself. Derek looks at me weirdly.

Nomvuyo walks to the bed and touches Zimkitha's hand. Zimkitha is still "sleeping" so now I'm confused. How did she ask for Nomvuyo? Did she moan her name?

Also, this accident was clearly horrific. She looks really bad.

Dean stands and scratches his head lightly. He looks calmer now, for some odd reason. He walks to me, takes my hand, and we walk out. I don't know why he is so adamant about me not being here. He can't even hide it.

Once we're out of the room, he sighs.

Dean: Where's Nolwazi?

Me: They're all downstairs.

He nods lightly and looks at me more softly.

Dean: You shouldn't be here.

Me: But, why?

Dean: You can't be in stressful situations, Ziyanda, you're pregnant.

I keep quiet.

Dean: We need to play our part in ensuring that you have a smooth pregnancy. Being here, where everyone is tense and stressed, is not good for you, especially because you're such an absorber of emotions.

Me: I didn't think about that.

He rolls his eyes.

Dean: Of course you didn't, dummy.

Me: So, you want me to go home?

He nods.

Me: I'll go back to Niki.

Dean: Ungazonya wena. Stop acting like a homeless person.

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: How dare you sleep in another man's bed?

Me: Gosh, not you again.

He looks at me sternly.

Dean: I think you should go to Soweto.

Spend some time with your parents, while we deal with Zimkitha's accident.

Me: Deal? What's there to deal with?

He sighs.

Dean: Logistics.

Me: What happened vele?

Dean: We're still waiting for a report.

Me: From the police?

He nods lightly.

I don't really know these things, so I'm absolutely confused.

Dean: Nolwazi will drive you home.

As I'm about to say something, he shakes his head disapprovingly.

Dean: Stop being stubborn. Ngidi has to stay here.

I look at him angrily and eventually nod.

Me: Okay.

Just then, his face tenses up. I turn to see what the cause is.

It's Liwa.

Liwa is walking towards us.

I find myself stepping back, and getting closer to Dean. I've never seen Liwa like this. I'm genuinely scared.

Dean: Liwa.

Liwa ignores Dean and open the door to Zimkitha's room. We rush in behind him.

Nomvuyo looks up from Zimkitha, and stares at Liwa.

He stands there for a few seconds.

The vibe is intense.

He steps closer to the bed and then walks to the other side, where Nomvuyo is. He

pulls her up and as soon as she is nuzzled in his arms, she burst out in tears.

I stand there, not able to move. I thought I had seen it all, but Nomvuyo being this emotional? Nope.

I find myself feeling extremely sad as her cries fill the room.

Liwa continues comforting her until she eventually calms down. He sits her down and turns to look at us.

He's also emotional.

Derek, Dean and I nod and walk out of the room. Derek closes the door and we stand there in silence.

Dean: I need Nolwazi...

He walks away and leaves Derek and me there...

My stomach growls again and I rub it.

Derek steps closer to me and looks at me worriedly.

Me: I'm fine, just hungry.

Derek: Let's grab something to eat.

Me: Dean wants me to go to Soweto.

Derek: No.

I look at him weirdly.

Me: You don't want me to go?

Derek: Ngizosala nobani?

I chuckle and shake my head.

Me: You don't know what you want wena...

Derek: Right now, I want food.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Woza ke...

It's been a while since we arrived at the hospital. I'm fed and feeling much better.

I'm also relieved that Liwa is here, so

Nomvuyo has a shoulder to cry on.

We're all just rooting for Zimkitha right now.

The doctor has asked us to leave...

Liwa and Nomvuyo refused, so we had to leave them there.

We're now in the parking lot.

Gabi: Can we please go out for dinner? We need to recoup.

Dean: Sure.

Dean looks at Derek and me.

I don't think I want to go with them. I want to sleep.

Derek: We'll join you tomorrow. We need some rest. We're also moving, so it's been taxing.

Gabi: Oh, alright then.

Me: Bye, guys.

We share hugs and they watch as Derek and I drive off...

Me: I've never seen Liwa like that...

He glances at me.

Derek: There's more to this than meets the eye.

He sighs and focuses on the road.

INSERT 155

The following day, I decide that I am not going to the hospital. I woke up feeling exhausted and Derek encouraged me to stay. He was more than happy to leave me.

We're supposed to move today, but Derek postponed it to tomorrow. Because our place is officially empty, Dean and Nolwazi offered us refuge.

It's around 12pm and Derek is getting ready to leave. He's going to drop me off at Dean and Nolwazi's place.

Derek: You need a car...

Me: No, I don't.

He hisses.

Me: Derek, I hate driving and I have no desire to drive.

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Let's go.

I get my things and we make our way out. Just then, his phone rings and he answers it.

Derek: Busi?

I roll my eyes.

This Busi girl is beyond annoying. I need her to disappear.

Derek: I can't talk right now, I'll call you later.

He ends the call and glances at me.

Derek: She says she needs to talk to me.

Me: About?

He shrugs.

Derek: Angazi.

Me: What if it's about Lelo?

Derek: It's not.

I sigh and focus on my phone as he drives off.

We eventually get to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

Nolwazi: I've just finished cooking. You can dish up anytime.

Me: Thanks.

Dean: Don't burn my house down.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: Call me if you need anything.

Me: I think I can take care of myself for a few hours.

Dean and Nolwazi walk out. Derek looks at me worriedly.

Me: I don't understand you sometimes. You want to exclude me from Zimkitha's situation, and now that I'm backing off, you act like a lost puppy. Ufunani kahle kahle?

He smiles shyly and I chuckle.

Me: I'll be fine.

Derek: Love you.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Call me if you need anything.

Me: Even if it's a kiss?

Derek: Especially if it's a kiss.

Me: Yaas!

He chuckles and we share a kiss.

Me: Bye, lover.

Derek: Bye.

I walk him out. Dean has already made himself comfortable in Derek's car.

Derek: So, where am I supposed to sit?

Dean: At the back, where you belong.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry, Ngidi, but I don't sit at the back when Dean's driving.

Me: Haibo, then you two must drive your own car.

Dean: Hai suka wena, blabbermouth.

Derek: The shit I tolerate...

He glances at me.

Derek: See you later.

Me: You must tell me if Dean comes for you.

He chuckles and I watch as he gets in the car and they drive off.

Finally.

I've been craving some quiet time all by myself.

I make my way back inside the house. I decide that I'll chill by the pool and make some virgin cocktails *rolls eyes*.

Bongani, my ex-friend (clears throat) taught me how to make cocktails, so I should be fine.

Anyway, I change into a dress, mix a virgin cocktail, and go to the pool.

I'm trying to imagine myself as a mother...

I can't seem to visualise myself.

At this point, I just hope that I'll miraculously start loving the baby when he/she pops out, because right now, the connection is quite low.

My thoughts are interrupted by my phone ringing- it's Derek.

Me: Lover.

Derek: We just got here.

Me: How's Zimi?

He sighs.

Derek: She's up now.

Me: That's good.

Derek: Ya.

Me: How's Liwa and Vuvu?

Derek: They're much better.

Me: Is that Zimi speaking?

Derek: Yes. She wants to speak to you.

Me: Oh. Okay.

I hear some shuffling.

Zimkitha: Zi?

Me: Hello, Zimi.

Even though her voice is low and strained, she still sounds like her usual positive self.

Zimkitha: How are you, my love?

Me: I should be asking you that.

She chuckles and then groans.

Zimkitha: I'm okay, just a few bruises here and there.

Me: A few?

She sighs.

Me: I'm glad you're up.

Zimkitha: I'll be fine. These kids need to stop stressing.

I sigh.

Zimkitha: How's our baby?

I groan and rub my belly.

Me: Okay, I guess.

Zimkitha: I've never met a person as stubborn as you- you're even worse than Vuvu.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I really need to speak to you.

She sounds serious.

Me: About?

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Please come and visit... by yourself.

Me: Without Derek?

Zimkitha: Yes.

I suddenly feel nervous. Why does she want to speak to me alone?

Zimkitha: Please come as soon as possible.

Me: Uhm, okay.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Alright then, bye.

Me: Is Derek in there?

Zimkitha: He just walked back in.

Me: Can I speak to him?

Zimkitha: Okay, dear. Bye.

Me: Bye, Zimi.

Zimkitha: Don't forget...

I hear some shuffling.

Derek: Baby?

Me: Hey.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes. Ubuya nini?

Derek: You miss me?

Me: I mean, not really...

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll be back soon. Maybe in 30 minutes.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too. Bye.

Derek: Bye.

I end the call and continue chilling...

After a while, I decide to go back inside for a nap.

As I walk in, a phone rings...

It's definitely not mine.

I walk to the lounge, and realise that Dean left his phone. It stops ringing.

After a few seconds, it rings again.

I take the phone and answer it.

Me: Dean's phone, hello.

Person: Dean?

Me: No, this is not Dean. He is currently not here... Can you call again after a while?

Person: Who's this?

This is a woman.

Me: Uhm, a friend...

Person: A friend? He leaves his phone at a friend's now?

Me: Uhm, can I take a message?

Person: Tell him I'm coming for him. Tell him I'm coming for everything he has built. He will pay for what he did to me.

Heyiiii! My heart??

What the hell is going on here??

Just as I'm about to ask more questions, the call is ended.

Who was that?? What does she mean, she's coming for him??

My heart is beating so fast!

I try to dial Derek's number, but quickly stop myself.

What am I going to say to him?

I sit down and take a few breaths. I'm still holding Dean's phone...

I unlock it and find myself browsing through it. I know I'm not supposed to be doing this, but damnit, Petty is busy encouraging this behaviour.

What am I looking for? Why am I doing this?

I am shook.

As I'm about to go to his messages, my phone rings and I quickly put down Dean's phone and clutch my non-existent pearls.

Lord.

It's Derek.

I take a deep breath before answering.

Me: Star?

Derek: Baby, we're on our way back now.

Me: Okay.

Derek: You okay?

Me: I'm about to fall asleep.

Derek: See you soonest.

I cringe.

Dean likes saying that.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and lie comfortably on the couch.

Gosh.

I must have dozed off, because I am awakened by Derek's lips on mine.

I moan as he plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You need to eat, vuka.

I blink a few times and look at him in confusion.

Me: Did you just come back?

Derek: We've been back for over 3 hours now.

Me: Oh.

I sit up and stretch. He bends and plants a kiss on my lips again.

Derek: I missed you.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm hungry.

He pulls me up and we walk to the dining room. The table is set and the food is ready. Nolwazi and Dean are there.

We sit and immediately start eating.

I look over at Dean and he seems fine.

Has he checked his phone?

Nolwazi: I need the bathroom. Please excuse me.

We all nod and she stands and walks off.

I look at Dean sternly.

Dean: And then, wena?

Me: Dean, are you hiding something?

Dean: Huh?

They both look at me weirdly.

Me: I'm not even going to beat around the bush, because I sense that this shit is big, and I'm scared.

Dean: Excuse me?

Me: Are you keeping a big secret?

He glances at Derek and they continue to look at me in confusion.

Me: Some woman called, and she said I must tell you that she's coming for you.

Dean: What?

Me: She said you're going to pay for what you did to her...

There's silence.

An intense moment of silence.

Me: Dean, what the hell is going on??

I look at him pleadingly. I need him to tell me that I'm overreacting.

He drinks his whiskey and looks at me coolly.

Just then, Nolwazi comes back and sits.

Nolwazi: We need to fetch the twins tomorrow. I miss them.

She looks at Dean, with a warm smile on her face.

I clear my throat.

Me: Your mom is really obsessed with them.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: She's taking her grandma role too seriously.

I smile and avoid Dean's eyes.

I don't know what is happening, but I need Dean to tell me, so we can make sure that whoever this woman is doesn't come and ruin things for him and Nolwazi...

Gosh, here I am, involved in something else, once again...

INSERT 156

We're now done eating, and Derek insisted on helping Nolwazi with the dishes. He knows that I want to talk to Dean privately, and nothing will stop me. Dean walks to his study and I follow him.

Me: Dean!

I shut the door and watch as he goes to his table, and sit on the edge. He crosses his arms and looks at me coolly.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Yini, Ziyanda?

Me: Are you kidding me right now?

Answer my question!

Dean: What question?

Me: Who's the woman?!

He continues looking at me
expressionlessly.

Me: Dean, I'm not dumb. Please don't
dismiss me.

Dean: What's the problem? What exactly
did this woman say to you?

I sigh and walk closer to him.

Me: She wanted to talk to you, and I told
her that you're unavailable.

He nods.

Me: Thereafter, she asked if you go
around leaving your phone at your
friends' houses... Then, she mentioned,
very coldly, that she is coming for you and

what you've built. She ended off by saying that you'll pay for what you did to her.

He keeps quiet.

We're silent for a long minute.

He looks at me intently, as if he's lost in thought.

Me: Dean?

Dean: Focus on your pregnancy, Dlamini.

Me: But-

He shakes his head and looks at me threateningly.

I keep quiet. I know not to question him when he gives me that look.

Dean: I know you want to solve everyone's problems, but trust me, I'm a big guy, and I can handle my shit.

Me: What's happening?

He shakes his head.

Dean: Nothing hectic... That woman is my ex, and she's always been crazy and delusional.

Me: Does Nolwazi know her?

Dean: Yes.

I sigh in relief. I don't know why, but I'm relieved that Nolwazi knows this crazy woman. There's nothing worse than being in the dark when your partner's ex is busy trying to make a comeback.

Dean: I'll sort it out, okay?

Me: Okay.

He smiles.

Dean: Now, forget about it and focus on my nephew...

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Dean: I find it funny that you focus on other people's problems as an escape. You don't want to face your shit.

Me: Whatever.

Dean: How are you though? Are you coming to terms with the pregnancy?

Me: Yes, I am... Very slowly...

He smiles.

Dean: Slowly is better than nothing.

I shrug.

Dean: I need to sleep...

Me: I need something sweet.

He sighs.

Dean: I've suffered enough from Nolwazi's pregnancy. It's Derek's turn now.

We walk out of the study and make our way to the lounge, where we find Derek. He looks at us questioningly.

Dean: No worries.

Derek: Hmkay.

I look at Derek, and smile. I really aspire to be like him one day. He legit has mastered the art of minding his own business. He only speaks when spoken to, unlike some of us...

Anyway, I want to have sex with him now, because I'm highly turned on by his calm aura.

I take his hand and lead him to our room.
I'll deal with this here craving first, then
deal with my sweet tooth later...

The following day, I'm up by 5am.

I'm sick, so sick.

Derek finds me in the bathroom, vomiting
my insides out.

Derek: What do you need?

I ignore him and continue vomiting. After
a while, I stand and brush my teeth. I go
back to the bedroom and throw myself on
the bed.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: What do you need?

Me: Just leave me alone, please.

He sighs as he stands.

Me: Uyaphi?

Derek: Leaving you alone.

Me: Mxm.

He walks out and I start sobbing. I hear the door open and he walks back to the bed.

Derek: Zi? What's wrong?

I look at him angrily.

Me: Really? You walked out on me!

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: Just go, Derek.

He tries to say something, but stops himself. He takes a deep breath and gets back in bed. He pulls me closer and I place my head on his chest. I'm glad he did the right thing...

I immediately doze off.

It's around 12pm and I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to go to the hospital without Derek. They all decided that they'd have a gathering, and they'd visit Zimi the following day.

Now, how in the world do I miss the gathering without seeming shady?
I go to Derek, who's getting ready in the bedroom.

Me: Star.

Derek: Yes, baby?

Me: Niki wants to meet up with me.

Derek: Today?

I nod.

Me: She says it's an emergency.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: Is she okay?

Me: I'm not sure.

Derek: Uhm, okay. I'll take you there.

Me: No, it's okay. I'll get an Uber.

Derek: Ziya-

Me: Star, spend time with your friends.

Nami I miss my friend.

He's quiet for a few seconds.

Me: I'll be fine, man.

Derek: Okay.

Me: And, I won't be long.

Derek: Alright then.

Me: Cool.

I walk out quickly, before he notices that I'm lying.

I go to the kitchen and get myself a bottle of water. I find Nolwazi there.

Me: When are you fetching the twins?

Nolwazi: I'm about to leave now.

I smile.

Nolwazi: I know for a fact that your life will change as soon as you meet your baby.

Me: Negatively or positively?

Nolwazi: Positively, of course.

She smiles.

Nolwazi: Nothing beats the love of a child.

Me: Hmkay.

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: You'll see...

I sigh.

Me: See you later. I'm meeting up with Niki.

Nolwazi: Is she still with Kwanele?

Me: Yes.

She nods.

Nolwazi: Good for them.

Me: Do you miss him?

She laughs.

Nolwazi: I have Dean... Why would I even think of another man?

Me: Wena na.

She smiles.

Me: See you later.

Nolwazi: Do you want a lift?

Me: No, thanks.

She nods and I walk away. I go to our bedroom and find Derek finishing up.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Okay.

I walk closer to him and we share a kiss.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

He stares at me and I swear it's like he can see right through me. I let go of him and grab my bag. Me: Shap, the Uber's here. I walk out...

As soon as I get to the hospital, reality sinks in.

I'm nervous.

Why does Zimi want to speak to me alone?

The nurse walks me to her room and I'm relieved when I find Zimkitha by herself. She looks a bit better than the last time I saw her.

Me: Hey, Zimi.

She groans as she smiles.

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

I close the door.

Zimkitha: Come, sit close to me.

I walk to the chair close to the bed and sit.
She tries to sit up, and I stand and help
her. She hisses.

Zimkitha: My left side is killing me.

Me: Is it the most painful?

She nods and moans.

Me: Sorry.

She smiles and looks at me.

Zimkitha: Sit.

I do as I'm told.

We're silent for a while.

Zimkitha: Between you and me, I thought
I was going to die.

Me: Was the accident that bad?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I'd never been so scared in my
life.

She takes a deep breath and closes her
eyes.

Zimkitha: I really thought I was going to
die.

I look at her nervously.

She opens her eyes.

She's crying.

I don't know what to do.

I take some tissue from my bag and wipe her tears gently.

Zimkitha: I just kept thinking of all of you... My children...

She smiles.

Zimkitha: That's what kept me alive...

We're quiet.

I'm scared.

I don't want this conversation to go where I think it's going.

Zimkitha: There are so many things I need to bring to light... Dying right now is not an option for me- it would be the easy way out.

Me: Bring to light?

She nods.

Zimkitha: I trust you, Ziyanda... As young as you are, I trust you. For some odd reason, you remind me of Liwa.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I need your help.

I look at her intently.

We're silent for a while.
Eventually, she begins talking...
I just... I don't know how to feel...
I feel sick.

INSERT 157 (Short and Unedited)

I walk to the backyard and find everyone there. It's evident that they're having a good time, because the laughs are loud and the conversations are flowing. The large round table is filled with food and drinks.

As soon as they see me, they exclaim.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Uhm, okay...

Why is he so cheerful?

Me: Hello, everyone.

Liwa stands and gives me a hug.

I just... Am I the only one who is confused?
The last time I saw him, he was in another
state.

They greet me back.

I feel Derek's eyes on me.

He pats the seat next to him and I sit. He
leans closer to me and I feel his lips on my
ear.

Derek: Missed you.

Me: Missed you too.

I shift and take a glass.

Derek: Water? I nod and he pours me
some.

Derek: How's Niki?

Me: Huh?

What is he talking about?

Derek: Niki... How is she?

Shit, konje I said I'm going to meet with
Niki.

Me: Oh, she's fine yazi. She had a little
argument with Kwanele.

Derek: Really? What's wrong?

Me: Hai, why are you so nosy?

Derek: Hawu, I'm just asking, baby.

I take a sip of my water.

Gabi: Ziyanda, dear, you have a lovely glow.

Me: Excuse me?

Gabi: You're glowing. Derek must be treating you extra nice.

I give her the usual Caucasian smile and drink some of my water.

Gabi: Anyway, Joey and I have an announcement to make.

We all quieten down and look at her.

She smiles sweetly and looks at Joe.

Gabi: Joey and I are expecting our first child!

Nandi: What? Really? Congratulations!

Nolwazi: Yaay!

Liwa: Congrats!

Gabi smiles brightly and blushes. We all congratulate them.

Gabi: I wish Zimi was here. She'd be thrilled.

Everyone keeps quiet.

Suddenly, the mood is sombre.

Joe: Zimkitha would hate to see us this down... She'd want us to continue being positive.

Malusi: And, as we've already seen, she's in a better condition.

We're all quiet.

I want to sleep. I want to allow my mind and body to rest.

Gabi: This is why Joey and I decided to tell you about our pregnancy. We all need some positive vibes right now.

I look over at Nomvuyo and she stares right back at me.

It's clear that she wants to leave this table.
We both stand at the same time and walk
inside the house.

Once we get to the lounge, she sits on the
couch and I sit next to her.

Me: Vuvz.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Hey.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: Drained.

I nod and stare at her. We sit in silence for
a while.

Me: Uhm, how's Zimi?

Nomvuyo: She's much better.

Me: That's good.

She looks at me.

Nomvuyo: And, what about you?

Me: Huh? What about me?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

I groan.

Me: I'm okay, I guess.

She looks at my belly and smiles lightly.

Me: I'm still trying to wrap my head around it.

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: You look good.

Me: Thank you. I can't say the same about you.

She rolls her eyes and we chuckle.

Nomvuyo: It's been a stressful week.

Me: We'll get through it.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Just then, Liwa walks in.

Nomvuyo immediately stands.

Liwa: Baby.

Nomvuyo walks out and disappears.

What the hell just happened? Are they fighting?

Liwa sighs as he walks closer to me.

Me: Uhm... Is everything okay?

Liwa: Not really. We're not seeing eye to eye right now.

Me: Oh.

Liwa: We'll be fine.

He scratches his head and sits. Thereafter, he pats the space next to him. I sit hesitantly.

We're silent. It's not awkward, but I don't particularly enjoy the silence.

Liwa: So, you went to see my mother?
I look at him in shock and he smiles lightly.

Liwa: I know...

His face changes, he's more serious.

Liwa: Everything...

I stare at him, frozen.

The warm smile re-emerges and he stares at me softly.

Liwa: Are you good?

I try to speak, but words fail me.

Liwa: Ziyanda?

I clear my throat.

Liwa: Are you good?

I nod.

Liwa: If you need to get anything off your chest, I'm here.

I don't respond.

Liwa: Okay?

I nod.

Liwa: Good.

He gives me another warm smile and then stands. He walks out and I continue sitting there...

I clearly dozed off, because when I wake up, I am wrapped in a fleece blanket.

I finally get up and as I make my way to the kitchen, to get myself some water, I bump into Dean.

He looks at me blankly.

Dean: Nihamba nini? I don't like this roommate situation.

Me: Fuck off, idiot.

I push him away and get a bottle of water.

Dean: You okay?

Me: Ya.

He looks at me suspiciously.

Dean: You're not still bothered by my ex, right?

Me: I'm bothered by a lot of things right now. Leave me alone.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: Pregnancy.

He chuckles as I walk away and leave him there. I walk up the stairs and make my way to our room. Derek is busy on his laptop.

Me: Hey.

He looks up and smiles.

Derek: Hello, beautiful.

I take my phone from my bag. I have so many missed calls, mostly from Niki.

I see a message from my mom saying she misses me and that she spoke to my dad about the pregnancy. I don't even want to

engage right now, I'll deal with that another time.

Just as I'm about to put down my phone, it rings.

Me: Shit.

Derek: Yini?

Me: It's my dad.

Derek: What's the problem?

Me: My mom says she told him about the pregnancy.

He looks up from his laptop and stares at me.

The phone continues to ring and I answer it.

Me: Hello...

There's silence for a few seconds.

Dad: You finally decide to answer my phone.

I keep quiet.

Dad: I'll be expecting you Derek here, tomorrow morning.

Kodwa... Why?

I groan.

Dad: Bye.

Me: Bye.

He ends the call and I put down my phone.

Derek is staring at me, very seriously.

Derek: What did he say?

Me: He wants to see us tomorrow morning.

Derek: Shit.

I groan loudly.

Derek: Shit.

He stands and walks out.

Me: Uyaphi?? I stand and follow him.

He's already speaking to Dean.

Dean is listening to him very attentively.

After a while, they both look at me.

Dean: Any tips on dealing with your father?

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I'd like to know how we can butter him up.

Me: Dean! You are not going anywhere!

Dean: Of course I am... I need to make sure that your father doesn't blow things out of proportion. You're pregnant, not dying.

Me: Gosh.

I walk away and go to the bedroom. I throw myself on the bed and bury my head on the pillow.

Soon, I feel Derek's arms around me. I reposition and put my head on his chest.

Me: I couldn't read him. I think he's angry.

Derek: Everything will be fine.

I put my head up and look at him.

Derek: The only problem is that we waited a while to tell him. That will definitely piss him off.

Me: I needed time.

He sighs.

We're silent for a while.

Derek: We'll see.

He caresses me till I fall asleep...

My mind is flooded right now.

I don't even know how I managed to fall asleep.

INSERT 158

The following morning, when I wake up, I see Derek getting dressed. I blink a few times and look at him in confusion.

Derek: Morning, love.

He bends and plants a kiss on my lips. I push him away and he laughs.

Derek: I suggest you wake up.

Me: Ang'funi.

Derek: I'm not about to get killed by your father. Vuka.

He pulls me up and his eyes land on my belly, which seems to have grown.

Derek: You're starting to show.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Your father is definitely going to kill me.

Me: Mxm, he must get over it.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: I'm not in the best of moods.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes me.

Derek: Lighten up.

Me: Hmm.

He knows I hate talking before I brush my teeth, yet he continues doing such.

I push him lightly and make my way to the bathroom...

We're now driving to Soweto. I have no idea why Dean decided to involve himself in this. I just want my dad to put him in his place ngoba uphapha too much.

Dean: Dlamini, did you tell your father to prepare some chicken for me?

I ignore him and continue browsing through my phone.

Dean: Ye wena Dlamini.

Me: Dean, for your own sake, shut the fuck up.

Derek chuckles quietly.

Me: Were you this forward when Nolwazi's father cut you to size?

Dean: Wow, low blow.

Me: Tsek.

I continue focusing on my phone and he stops bothering me.

Eventually, we get to my house and my mom is outside, sweeping the yard.

Mom: Heeh, long time, no see!

She walks to us and gives us hugs.

Dean: It's been a very long time.

Mom: Angithi you're all stuck in the suburbs and stole my daughter.

I leave them as they continue doing the most.

I get in the house and go straight to my room. I can hear my dad speaking on his phone. I think he's in their bedroom.

I sit on my bed and say a quick prayer. I'm really not ready to have this conversation.

I just want to go away from everyone. I want to be alone for a very long time. I want to gather my thoughts in peace. Is that too much to ask?

Someone knocks on my door.

Me: Come in.

It's my mom.

Mom: Baby, woza phela. Your father is ready.

I roll my eyes and grunt.

Mom: Haibo, and then?

Me: Nothing.

I stand and follow her to the lounge, where I find my dad, Derek and Dean.

Me: Hello.

My dad stares at me and his eyes obviously land on my belly.

Dad: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: How are you?

Dad: I'm good.

I sit next to Derek. I still can't read my dad's mood.

My dad looks at Dean.

Dean: Sibalukhulu.

Dad: Ya Hlongwane.

Dean: Are you well?

Dad: Yes. Why are you here?

Dean: Uhm...

I look at Dean.

Is the arrogant idiot shaking in his boots?

Now this is worth watching!

Dean: We're here to discuss Ziyanda's pregnancy.

Dad: Did you make her pregnant?

Whoaa!

Dean looks at my dad as if he's speaking Spanglish. Dean: I most definitely didn't impregnate your daughter.

Dad: Then, you can go and wait in the car while we finish up here.

Whoaaaaa!

There's an awkward silence.

Dad: I don't see why you thought your presence would be needed today.

Dean looks like he's just been slapped a few times on the face. In fact, we all look like we've been slapped, including my mother.

Dad: You're a friend. This is not the time and place for your voice to be heard.

Heyiii! My father did not come to play with us! Kuzonyiwa!

We're all staring at my dad, waiting for him to smile and tell us he's joking...

He continues staring at Dean coolly.

Dean stands like a lost puppy and we watch as he walks away. My mom stands and follows him. She must go and comfort him vele. I'm sure uswabe to come nice. So, it's just Derek, my dad and I now...

My dad looks at me.

Dad: Ready to speak?

Me: I'd like some water.

He nods.

I stand and go to the kitchen. I pour myself a glass of water and sigh heavily.

I'm not about to let my dad stress me out.

I walk back, feeling more courageous.

I sit next to Derek and look at my dad.

Hai, all the courage I had built up, fades away.

He's my dad. I respect him, and I'll always be a child to him. This is awkward for me.

Dad: Have you quenched your thirst?

Me: Spicy much?

He keeps quiet and stares at me.

Me: I'm pregnant.

Dad: I can see.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you sooner. I really didn't need the stress.

Dad: Am I the cause of the stress?

I don't respond.

Dad: Don't attach me to your stress.

You're stressed because you know that this is not particularly right.

He looks at Derek.

Dad: And, why did you not tell me?

Derek: I was respecting Ziyanda's request for time.

Dad: You're going to have to start standing your ground.

Haibo! What is he trying to say??

Derek: With all due respect, it's my role as a partner, to respect Ziyanda's wishes. I cannot overlook her needs.

There's silence.

Derek: Yes, we should have told you sooner. However, Ziyanda wasn't ready to tell you.

Dad: Get me some water, Ziyanda.

I do as I'm told.

Dad: So, what's the plan here?

Me: We're going to get married. My dad chuckles.

Dad: Hawu, nini?

Me: Before I give birth.

Dad: Really?

I nod.

Derek scratches his head.

Dad: I'm assuming you're not happy with that?

Derek: I'd rather we worry about that after the baby is born.

Dad: Why is that?

Derek: Firstly, we're too busy stressing about moving. Secondly, there's no time- we have approximately four months left

till the baby is born. Lastly, I don't think all of this stress is good for any of us.

My dad looks at him thoughtfully.

Dad: I agree.

I look at my dad in shock.

He sighs.

Dad: We're already doing things the unconventional way, so we may as well do what's best for you.

Me: But-

Dad: And, what's best for you is to have a quiet pregnancy. I'd like to think you don't want to go through that whole traumatic experience again?

I keep quiet.

Dad: I'd like to speak to Derek privately, please.

Me: I'm really sorry for keeping you in the dark.

Dad: I know. You don't have to explain your intention, because I know it's never malicious. I smile lightly.

Dad: Now, go and comfort Dean. I'm certain he's fuming.

I chuckle.

Me: I wish I recorded that. He's too forward.

My dad laughs.

Dad: Go and dress his wound.

I laugh as I walk out. I find my mom and Dean outside, chilling by Derek's car.

They're laughing.

Argh, why are they laughing? I want Dean to be sad, so I can make of him!

I get to them and my mom looks at me expectantly.

Me: My father is a very strange man.

Mom: Angkeke um-confirm-e.

Me: He wants to speak to Star privately.

Dean hisses and I look at him amusingly.

Dean: Not now. I'm not in the mood.

I begin laughing at him.

Me: Bakuphoxe kancane.

Dean grunts.

Mom: Why are you two behaving like I gave birth to you?

Dean: You have an annoying child.

My mom laughs.

Mom: How cute. You're like brother and sister.

Me: Euww, I am not related to this arrogant man.

My mom looks at us amusingly as Dean and I go back and forth. I exclaim as soon as I see Lwazi approaching. She's with her group of friends. As soon as she sees Derek's car, she sprints to us and is met by my arms.

Me: Hey, baby!

Lwazi: I missed you so much!

Me: Me too!

She squeezes me, but quickly lets go of me a few seconds later.

Me: Yini?

Lwazi: Why is your tummy so hard, mommy?

Me: Err...

Okay, I didn't think about this. Lwazi is too inquisitive and I can't hide anything from her.

All the while, my mom is laughing.

Mom: Ask, baby!

Lwazi looks at me worriedly.

Lwazi: Are you sick, mommy?

Me: In a way.

My mom laughs even more.

Lwazi: What's wrong?

Me: We'll talk later.

She nods and then focuses on Dean, whom she loves. I'm certain she has a crush on him...

So, my dad is chilled.

Why in the world did I think he'd kill me?

The man is amazing!

Derek also seems lighter. I'm not even going to bother to find out what they spoke about.

Right now, I need a drink. But since I can't drink alcohol, I'll have food.

Dean and my mom have been having their own DMC, while Lwazi and I caught up.

I'm not going to tell her about the pregnancy yet...

As we're driving back to Dean's, his phone rings.

Dean: Please answer it for me, Dlamini.

I take his phone.

Me: It's Lwazi.

I answer it.

Me: Hey, Lwazi... Dean's driving.

Nolwazi: Hey... Listen, please tell him to come home.

Me: We're on our way back. Is everything okay?

Nolwazi: I think there was an attempted break-in.

Me: What??

Nolwazi: I came back from my errands, and found my other car's windows damaged. I haven't gotten inside the house, I'm a bit nervous, because I don't know what is going on.

Dean: Everything okay?

Me: Nolwazi says someone broke into the house.

Dean: What? Give me the phone.

He snatches it from me and speaks to Nolwazi.

Once he ends the call, he speeds up.

Derek: Where is she?

Dean: Told her to go to her parents' house.

Derek: Who the fuck would such in broad daylight? I check the time and it's 1pm.

Vele who goes around breaking into people's homes in the afternoon?

Honestly!

Dean: Ntsiki.

Derek: For fuck's sake.

Dean tightens his jaw and focuses on the road.

I know that now is not the right time to be curious, so I'll ask Derek later about Ntsiki.

Is she the infamous ex? Also, why would she do such? Is this her way of getting back at Dean?

So many questions, man...

INSERT 159 (Short Insert)

We get to Dean's house.

Derek: You can't just walk in-

Me: Derek, I love you, but now is not the time to be logical. This psycho needs a good beat-down. Hopefully, she's still in here.

Derek: I doubt she's that dumb.

Dean walks in and I follow him.

Derek: Why can't you be like normal people, who don't like putting themselves in danger?

Me: Zip it.

We get in the house and Dean starts searching.

Derek: She's not in here. She would be really stupid.

Dean: She left.

Me: How do you know for sure it's her?

Dean: I know.

Me: Don't you think it's time you give me more information? You can't have this crazy woman doing such!

Dean looks at Derek and there's silence for a while.

Dean: Ziyanda-

Me: No, I want to help you. I know you'd also want to help if I was in a similar position.

Derek: Let's hope you will never be...

Me: Is it that bad? What's going on? Are you in the wrong? How did you-

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I want to know!

Dean sighs heavily and stares at me.

Dean: I trust you.

Me: As you should.

Dean: But, I don't want to put you in an uncomfortable position.

Me: Just tell me what's going on, and spare me the theatrics.

Dean: Ntsiki is my ex.

Me: We've already established that.

Derek: Ziyanda-

He looks at me seriously.

Me: Derek, I wan-

Derek: No.

As I try to say something, he looks at me tensely and I keep quiet.

Derek: This has nothing to do with you.

You said you want to take a nap- go upstairs.

Whoaa!

Somehow, my stubborn self knows not to question him right now. I want to, but I know I can't. I feel like a school kid.

I look at Dean softly.

Me: Good luck.

He chuckles lightly.

I walk away and leave them there. As soon as I throw myself on the bed, part of me wants to creep out and eavesdrop on the conversation, but I stop myself. I don't Derek to give me that strange look of his.

When I wake up, Derek's head is on my boobs. I wiggle my way out of his embrace and go to the bathroom. Once I'm done, I make my way downstairs to the lounge and I find Nolwazi, watching a cooking show. She seems to love doing this in the middle of the night. I sit next to her and we share a blanket.

Me: How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm good.

Me: How do you feel about the break-in situation?

Nolwazi: I'm very uncomfortable. My dad is going to tighten our security.

Me: How did he react?

Nolwazi: He's pissed, and of course he blames Dean for not securing the house. I sigh.

Me: Our fathers are bit dramatic at times. She chuckles.

Nolwazi: I'm just glad I wasn't here with the twins.

Me: Thank God.

We focus on the TV for a long time.

Me: Has Dean calmed down?

Nolwazi: He's still in his angry zone.

Me: Eish.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: At least no one got hurt.

Me: Hmm... I just wonder who would do such in broad daylight.

I'm channelling my inner Nomvuyo right now. I love me a good goss.

Nolwazi: Probably some randome criminal...

Me: Hmm.

Just then, Dean emerges. Nolwazi looks up at him and smiles.

Nolwazi: Oh, hey. I couldn't sleep.

Dean: Woza.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Dean walks off.

Nolwazi: Love, I'll see you in the morning.

Me: Alright.

She stands and disappears as well.

I get why she likes Dean. I just wouldn't cope with him in a romantic relationship.

We're too similar.

Anyway, I continue watching this food channel, and my taste buds immediately

blossom. I go to the kitchen and make myself muesli and yogurt.

It's now around 2am.

As I'm stuffing my face, Derek walks in the kitchen, yawning.

Derek: Your absence woke me up...

Everything okay?

Me: Uh-huh.

He watches as I finish up my muesli. We walk to the lounge and I switch off the TV. When we get to the bedroom, he pulls me closer and places his head on my boobs once again.

The following Monday, Derek has to attend a meeting with some white guy who wants to be part of the school.

Me: Don't take anything he has to offer. We don't want white people in this project.

He laughs.

Me: You laugh, but I'm serious. This is a black-owned school. We don't need them people.

Derek: I'll keep that in mind.

Me: Good.

Derek: What are your plans for today?

Me: I'm going to take myself out.

Derek: Alright. You must text me.

Me: Yes, sir.

We share a kiss.

Me: Bye, Nkanyi.

Derek: Bye, baby.

He leaves the house...

Gosh, I can finally go see Zimkitha.

When I get to Zimkitha's room, I find her sitting up.

Me: Hello.

She smiles warmly and opens up her arms.

She has made lots of progress. She should be discharged soon.

Zimkitha: Come give me a hug.

I walk closer to her and hug her carefully.

Zimkitha: My left side is still killing me.

I don't say anything.

She looks at me intently as I sit on the chair close to the bed.

Zimkitha: What's wrong?

Me: I want you tell me about Dean's ex.

Zimkitha: Dean's ex?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Why? Is there a problem?

Me: I know you know everything. Who is Ntsiki?

I stare at her, trying to figure out her mood, but as usual, she's calm and collected.

Zimkitha: Ntsiki?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Hmm.

Me: Zimkitha.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: Relax, love. Why don't you have some of my food?

Me: I'm good, thanks.

I continue staring at her.

Zimkitha: How do you know Ntsiki?

Me: She seems to be causing problems for Dean lately.

Zimkitha: Problems? She looks at me more seriously.

I tell her about the call and yesterday's car situation.

She looks at me in slight disbelief.

Zimkitha: Did Dean confirm that she's the one who broke into the house?

I shrug.

She sighs heavily.

Me: What's going on??

Zimkitha: Nothin-

Me: Zimkitha!

She looks at me in shock.

Me: Stop this! These secrets are not good!

They could ruin this entire unit you've managed to build!

She stares at me for a very long time.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Ntsiki was pregnant with Dean's child.

Me: WHAT?!

She sighs once again.

Zimkitha: I'm not going to give you all the details.

I give her a threatening look.

Zimkitha: She had an abortion.

I look at her in shock.

Me: Why??

She keeps quiet.

Me: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: She drugged Dean and basically raped him.

My jaw drops.

Zimkitha: Listen here, Ziyanda. This has nothing to do with you. Nolwazi is still in the dark, therefore, you cannot get involved.

I nod slowly.

Zimkitha: Do you understand me?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Now, if you don't mind, I'd like you to excuse me. I need to sleep and gather my thoughts.

Me: Oh.

I stand.

Zimkitha: I'll see you once I've been discharged.

Me: Okay.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: I trust you.

We stare at each other for a while and I eventually nod.

Me: Bye.

Zimkitha: Bye, love. Take care.

I walk out and request an Uber.

I definitely need this spa day.

INSERT 160 (Unedited)

The past 4 hours have been relaxing. I got pampered, and managed to calm my

overwhelming thoughts. I decide to go to Paul's ice-cream for some homemade ice-cream. My phone rings and it's Derek, who has been calling me every 30 minutes.

Me: Nkanyezi?

Derek: I've just arrived home.

Me: Oh, alright.

Derek: However, I have to go meet a few more investors in Cape Town.

Me: What??

Derek: For a week.

Me: Huh?!

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How the hell am I going to survive 7 days without you??

Derek: You can come with...

Me: Ah, you won't have time for me, so I may as well stay here.

Derek: Come home, so we can talk.

Me: Okay.

I end the call and request an Uber.

When I get home, Nolwazi and Dean are at work. Derek is packing in the bedroom.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Hey, baby.

We share a hug and kiss.

Me: So zikhiphani?

Derek: The white guy-

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: He has connected me with a few more people who want to invest.

Me: Invest? Derek you have enough money to run this school by yourself.

Derek: I know, I just want to hear them out.

I groan.

Me: Manje you're leaving for 7 days?

He nods.

Me: Must be nice.

Derek: Come with me.

I shake my head.

Me: I want to stay here... I could use some personal space.

Derek: You sure?

Me: Yep.

Derek: And, you're not going to cause any trouble?

Me: I won't!

He looks at me suspiciously.

Me: For real.

Derek: Hmkay. You and I will have a big problem if you don't stick to your word.

Me: Wowzer.

Derek: Help me pack.

Me: Alrighty.

I've been asked to babysit the megabytes. Thankfully, they're well-behaved. As they're sleeping in their room, I'm in the lounge, jamming to Lauryn Hill. Derek left, and as much as I love him, I'm more than

happy that he won't be around for a few days. I need some Ziyanda time.

As for this issue with Dean and his ex, I'm not going to say anything. It's definitely a bit awkward, because I know the truth, but Dean will have to handle that by himself.

Just then, my jam session is interrupted by my phone ringing.

It's Dean.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Nolwazi and I have a late meeting. I'm not sure when we'll be back.

Me: Alright. Is it a dinner meeting?

Dean: Yes.

Me: Manje what am I going to eat?

Dean: Make a plan.

I groan.

Me: I'll have last night's leftovers.

Dean: I don't give a shit.

Me: Wow.

Dean: See you later.

Me: Shap.

I hang up.

He's been moody since yesterday. I've been giving him space. He'll come around when he feels better.

It's now around 7pm and I've fed the megabytes. They're chilling with me in the lounge, and we're watching Little Women.

Derek texts me and lets me know that he arrived safely. I think I've been trying to ignore this Dean thing, but it's really been flooding my mind.

How the hell did this Ntsiki woman rape him? Is that why Dean behaves so aggressively? Shit, and this pregnancy... So, she raped Dean and then fell pregnant? Is that what she wanted? But then, if she wanted to be pregnant and get

back with Dean, why the hell would she have an abortion?

I have so many questions.

Beyond all of these questions, is my natural instinct to solve. I can't help but want to solve all of this. I really hope this woman is going through some phase, and won't drag this out. I don't want anyone to get hurt here.

Simo has been well-behaved tonight. She realised that I pay more attention to Khulekani, because he is quiet. So, all in all, we've had a very peaceful night.

Khulekani is asleep on the couch, but Simo still wants me to entertain her.

Me: I need to pee.

She pouts and speaks this language of hers.

Me: I'll be back.

I put her down and she squirms.

I then rush to the bathroom and pee...

Before I leave the bathroom, I get a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I stare at my belly and sigh.

I don't know when I'm going to feel genuinely happy about this pregnancy.

I walk out.

As soon as I get to the lounge, my eyes pop out.

Me: Who the fuck are you?!

This woman is standing over the megabytes.

Woman: Don't you dare come closer!

Fight or flight?

Definitely fight. Till the very end. I rush to her and before she can move, I push her away from the babies.

This has to be Ntsiki.

Who else would it be??

We're now on the floor, tangled in each other's arms. I try to wrap my arm around

her neck, but she is too strong for my liking.

Ntsiki: Leave me the fuck alone!

I try my best to gather all my strength and I manage to wrap my arm around her neck. She tries kicking and moving, but I manage to reposition so that I am on my knees, while she's half-lying on the floor. I don't know how I'm going to get her out of here.

Out of nowhere, I feel the most piercing pain I've ever felt, on my thigh.

I tighten my hold against her neck and she groans. She can't speak now, because she's gasping for air. I continue tightening my hold. I'll strangle her to death if I have to.

Here's that pain again.

As soon as I see blood, my vision gets blurry.

Is it what I think it is?

Am I having another miscarriage?

The pain hits me again, and I try to keep strong, but I'm confused and scared.

For a second, I forget that I'm trying to deal with this psycho.

She senses this, and within a few seconds, she manages to go free. I look down and see the blood on my lap.

As soon as I see her bending over Simo, I quickly stand. I grab the plate on the table and hit her with it- straight on the head.

She lets out a loud scream.

At this point, the twins are screaming and crying for dear life.

Ntsiki: You fucken bitch! She turns around and I punch her as hard as I can- on the stomach. She loses her balance, and almost falls on Khulekani, but I grab her.

Instead of tumbling to the floor, she holds on to me and I lose my balance- we both fall.

Before I can stand, she's already up.

I feel another piecing pain, but this time, on my stomach. I let out a scream.

I try to stand, but I blackout as she throws something and it hits my head.

I blink a few times.

I try to move, but the pain is torturous.

I touch my belly.

The right side seems fine...

The left side is where the pain is.

I take a deep breath and try to sit up. My left thigh is pounding.

I let out a cry, and continue trying to sit up.

My eyes shoot out as I see all the blood.

I begin crying.

I don't think I've ever cried like this in my entire life.

I can't lose another baby, I can't. Why would God allow this to happen to me again?

I drag myself to the couch. I extend my hand and search for my phone.

Khulekani's cries begin to match mine.

I can't stop wailing.

I finally find my phone, and I dial Dean's number.

It rings for a while, and he eventually answers.

Dean: Dlamini, we're on our way-

Me: Dean!

I cry even more.

Dean: Ziyanda? What the fuck is going on?

Me: Come back! Come back, please!

Dean: Ziyanda??

Me: Ntsiki... She was here-

Dean: WHAT?!

I look at the blood.

Me: Blood... There's blood everywhere! I lost my baby!

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: I lost my baby, Dean! I lost my baby! I begin to hyperventilate. I can't breathe. The smell of the blood is making me nauseous.

Why isn't Simo crying?

Where is she?

Me: Simo!

I put down the phone and try to stand, but I can't.

I feel a piercing buzz throughout my body.

I take more deep breaths...

I try to stand, but end up blacking out once again.

INSERT 161 (Unedited)

I feel someone's hand brushing mine. I try to open my eyes, but they're heavy.

I blink a couple of times and the bright light hurts me eyes. I groan and immediately hear people speaking.

My throat is dry. I need water.

Person: Zi...

She repeats my name.

Nomvuyo.

I open my eyes and blink a few more times.

Nomvuyo is staring at me worriedly.

Nomvuyo: Baby.

I groan.

Nomvuyo: What's wrong?

I clear my throat.

Nomvuyo quickly gets water and she helps me drink it with a straw.

I feel much better.

I clear my throat once again.

Me: What's going on?

I try to sit up, but struggle. My body feels heavy.

Nomvuyo: Baby, relax.

Me: What's wrong?

I look around the room.

Liwa is here.

Nomvuyo: You're in hospital.

Me: Hospital? There's silence.

I close my eyes and allow my mind to trace back what happened. I immediately shiver as I recall my fight with Ntsiki.

Nomvuyo: Zi, calm down.

Me: She was in the house! She was in the house!

I start crying as I remember all the blood-the revolting smell.

Nomvuyo: Zi!

I hyperventilate.

Me: My baby! I lost my baby! There was blood!

Before I know it, the doctor is next to me, telling me to calm down.

Me: My baby! I lost my baby!

Doctor: Ziyanda...

I continue crying.

Doctor: Hey, Ziyanda...

She takes my hands.

Me: I can't afford to go through another miscarriage. I haven't recovered, that miscarriage still haunts me.

I continue crying.

Me: I know I didn't want the baby, but losing it? I didn't want to lose it. I don't know how I'm going to get through this. I look at Nomvuyo.

Me: I need Derek! Please get Derek!

At this point, I feel like dying.

I don't even want to touch my belly.

Doctor: Ziyanda.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I need you to focus on my voice.

I shake my head.

Me: I need Derek, please!

Nomvuyo: Zi...

I look at her.

She's teary-eyed.

Me: I can't go through this again, Vuvu. I can't.

Nomvuyo: Zi, you didn't lose the baby.

My heart stops beating as I stare at her.

Nomvuyo: You didn't lose the baby. She didn't stab you deeply on your stomach. However, she did do more damage on your left thigh- she stabbed you twice there.

What is she saying?

She wipes her tears and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Your baby is fine. You are fine.

Me: I didn't lose the baby?

She nods.

Me: The baby is still alive?

She nods and smiles.

Me: My baby didn't die?

Nomvuyo: Your baby is perfectly fine.

I stare at her and there's silence in the room.

As soon as I exhale, I start crying all over again.

I'm overwhelmed.

Nomvuyo: Ah, my love... She wraps her arms around me and I continue crying.

Me: So, I didn't lose my baby?

Nomvuyo: No, you didn't.

Me: My baby is fine?

Nomvuyo: Perfectly fine.

I continue crying, but this time around, I feel like a huge load has been lifted off my shoulders.

She comforts me till I manage to calm down.

Me: I need Derek.

She lets go of me.

Nomvuyo: He's only arriving in the afternoon.

Me: What time is it?

Nomvuyo: It's 6am.

Me: Oh.

I look around.

Liwa looks stone-faced.

He walks to me and smiles lightly.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini.

Me: Hello, Liwa.

Liwa: How are you feeling?

Me: I don't know.

He chuckles.

Me: I'd like to speak to Derek.

Liwa: He's been waiting for you to wake up. He takes out his phone.

Liwa: I need you to reassure him that you're fine. He is freaking the fuck out.

Me: Okay.

He dials his number and then gives it to me.

It rings twice, before he answers.

Derek: Liwa.

I sigh.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

He is silent.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Video call me. I want to see you.

Me: Okay.

He sighs before ending the call.

Liwa: How is he?

Me: I can't read him.

Liwa: Just don't let him think you're in a really bad state. Can you imagine how stressed he is that he's not physically here?

I nod lightly as I call him again.

He answers instantly.

He's in his hotel room.

Me: When are you getting here?

Derek: I should be there around 1pm.

Me: Okay.

He stares at me.

Me: I'm fine.

Derek: Are you in pain?

I shake my head.

Me: Not really. I just woke up now.

Derek: Are you going to do an ultrasound?

Me: Yes.

Derek: And your thigh? How is it?

Me: I can't really feel anything right now.

He doesn't say anything.

I'm really struggling to read him.

However, because I've come to know him,

I know he's trying to be cool. He knows very well that I feed off his energy, and if

he freaks out, I'll absorb that and freak out 10 times more.

Me: I'm okay, Star.

I smile, and he remains unfazed.

He is angry.

He is angry, and there's nothing I can do.
The doctor clears her throat.

Doctor: I'd like to check you now, please.

Me: Oh.

I look at Derek.

Me: I'll call you back.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I love you.

He sighs.

Derek: I love you too.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Bye.

He hangs up and I look at Liwa and
Nomvuyo.

Me: He's pissed.

Liwa: Dean is the last person he needs to
see when he arrives.

Dean.

Shit!

Me: Simo!

My heart begins pounding and I stare at them in shock.

Me: Ntsiki took Simo!

Liwa scratches his head and Nomvuyo sits.

Liwa: Yes, she took Simo.

Me: Where's Dean?? Nolwazi??

Liwa: They left an hour ago.

I groan.

Me: We have to find Simo!

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda, I need you to calm down and focus on yourself right now.

Focus on yourself, and your baby.

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: You need to check yourself right now. Don't allow yourself to stress too much.

She looks at the doctor.

Nomvuyo: Please do the ultrasound.

Doctor: Alright.

Me: I want to stand and take a walk first.
My legs are too numb.

Doctor: 5 minutes.

Me: Okay.

Nomvuyo removes the cover and Liwa gets closer to me. He helps me stand and I wince as my legs tingle.

Me: I think the meds or whatever, are wearing off. I feel achy.

Doctor: Take it easy.

Me: Okay.

I begin taking small steps.

Doctor: How's the thigh?

Me: It's okay.

Doctor: 5 minutes.

She walks out.

I rub my belly and exhale as soon as I feel it. I don't think I've ever been this relieved in my life.

Just then, the door opens, and my mom and dad walk in.

Oh my goodness.

Where do I start with them?

Mom: Zizi!

She walks to me and hugs me carefully.

Me: Hello, ma.

I look at my dad and he smiles.

Dad: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

I share a hug with him.

Me: I'm starting to feel the pain in my thigh.

Mom: Eish kodwa Ziyanda... You need to stop being so careless.

Me: Careless?

Mom: I just don't understand why you would try cooking, when you know you can't function in a kitchen.

Whoa, what's happening?

Nomvuyo: You know how she gets when she's in her zone. I don't know why she started cooking without supervision.

What the hell is going on?

Dad: Well, now that we're sure you're okay, we can leave now...

Me: Oh. Okay.

They give me hugs.

Mom: You are banned from the kitchen, young lady!

I chuckle nervously.

Me: Uhm, goodbye.

They say goodbye and I watch them walk out.

As soon as the door is closed, I stare at Nomvuyo and Liwa.

Me: What the fuck??

Liwa: Your parents do not need to know the truth.

I try to say something, but I'm speechless.

Liwa: You were cooking, you tripped, you fell, and you broke your leg.

Me: What?? That doesn't even make sense!

Liwa: Well, that's what happened. Roll with it.

With that said, he gives me a smile and walks out.

I stare at Nomvuyo in shock and she shrugs.

Seconds later, the doctor walks in and smiles.

Doctor: Ready for the ultrasound?

Me: Uhm, yes.

Doctor: Alright then...

I go back to my bed and Nomvuyo helps me sit.

I need Derek.

My anxiety is brewing...

I'm trying my best not to lose it right now.

INSERT 162 (Unedited)

I spent the rest of the morning sleeping- that was the only way I could deal with the anxiety.

I tried contacting Dean, but he didn't answer my calls, which is understandable. I just feel useless right now. I want to be there for him and Lwazi.

I wake up around 12pm and find Nomvuyo there.

Me: You can go home now, I'm fine.

She rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: Derek would kill me if I left you alone.

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: He says there was a delay with his flight.

Me: Are you serious? She nods.

Me: I'm not even surprised. The Universe does the most when it comes to me.

Nomvuyo: Are you feeling better though?

Me: I'm okay. I'm just worried about Dean and Nolwazi. I can't begin to imagine how they feel right now.

Nomvuyo: We'll find Simo...

There way she says it, makes me believe that we will find her. She seems sure.

Nomvuyo: Stupid woman... Does she think she's going to hide forever?

Me: You knew about her?

Nomvuyo: I decided to exclude myself from the situation. I don't know the full details.

Me: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: There are so many unanswered questions right now. Nolwazi is going crazy. Me: And Dean?

She shrugs.

Me: That bad?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: We'll find Simo...

Me: I hope so.

Nomvuyo: Go clean yourself up.

I walk to the bathroom...

When I walk back in my room, I find Liwa and Zimkitha.

I don't know why I'm shocked to see Zimkitha, but I am...

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

Me: Hi.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

I smile and he smiles back. He is back to his usual bubbly self, and I must admit that I'm finding it weird. Why is he so chirpy, when we're dealing with such a horrible thing?

Zimkitha: How are you, physically?

Me: I'm okay.

Zimkitha: Pains?

I shake my head.

Me: Just aches, nothing hectic.

She smiles.

Zimkitha: Good. How is my grandchild?

Me: The baby is fine.

She stares at me.

Zimkitha: Vuvu tells me you were emotional at the thought of losing the baby.

I keep quiet. How am I supposed to respond to that? Of course I was emotional. That shit was traumatising and triggering.

Zimkitha: I'm glad you're fine...

She smiles sweetly and I sit on my bed.

Zimkitha: So, Ntsiki was there?

Me: I assume it was her... from what I knew.

Liwa: I'm quite appalled that Zimkitha would even let you in on all of this.

Zimkitha: Liwa, she left me no choice!

Have you ever been cornered by this girl?

Liwa looks at me amusingly.

Liwa: You know how to get people to do what you want?

Me: You don't have to phrase it like that.

Liwa: She shouldn't have told you anything.

Me: Well, we can't waste time reminiscing about what could have been, can we?

Liwa: Feisty much?

Me: We need to find that psycho!

Liwa: Don't worry about that. She won't hide forever.

Me: How do you know?! That woman is crazy! No one knows what she's capable of!

Liwa: Ziyanda.

He looks at me seriously.

Liwa: Focus on yourself, and your baby.

Me: Oh, please. Spare me the scare tactics.

Dean and Lwazi's child is missing, and I was there when it happened. I will not sit here and pretend as if none of that happened!

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: We'll find Ntsiki.

Me: How? What are you doing to find her?
Have you contacted the police?

Zimkitha: Trust-

Me: No, Zimkitha, I do not trust any of you. Dean should have dealt with that woman a long time ago. Why would he even hide that fact that she drugged and assaulted him? None of this is his fault, but his dishonesty is what will make him lose Nolwazi! That woman kidnapped their child! Why are you both sitting here as if we're getting a visit from the president??

They stare at me.

Me: Do you understand how crazy it will be once you tell Nolwazi the reasoning behind the kidnap? What the hell is wrong with you people? You keep saying you're a close unit, but what about all these insane secrets?? Who the fuck does that??

They keep quiet.

Me: I don't understand any of you, honestly. This is not healthy. Nolwazi deserves to know the truth. I stare at Zimkitha.

Me: Everyone deserves to know the truth, Zimkitha.

Just then, the door opens.

Dean.

I immediately walk to him.

I know he hates hugs, but I go in for one.

He doesn't hug me back.

I look at him.

I've never seen him like this.

I let go of him.

He stares at Liwa and Zimkitha and they immediately stand. Dean and I move out of the way and I watch as they walk out and close the door.

Dean then stares at me.

I can't read him properly. He's cold.

Me: Dean?

I don't know why I'm getting emotional, but I can't seem to help it. My heart goes out to him.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: My leg is the problem, but it's not that bad.

He looks at my belly.

Me: We're fine.

He lets out a low chuckle.

Me: Yes, you heard me right.

Dean: Sit.

I walk back to my bed and sit, and he follows and sits next to me.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

Dean: Derek is going to kill me.

Me: Definitely.

He looks at me.

Dean: I won't fight back... I'll let him beat me.

I laugh.

Me: Your ego will never let anyone beat you.

We're silent for a while.

Me: Nolwazi?

Dean: With Mdu.

Me: Where are her parents?

Dean: Vacation...

Me: Did you tell them?

He shakes his head.

Me: Dean-

Dean: I'll find Ntsiki.

Me: So, we're supposed to hide this as if we're the ones in the wrong?

He looks at me.

Me: When are you planning on telling Lwazi? She needs to know.

He doesn't say anything. I shake my head and we're silent once again.

Dean: I fucked up.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I'm going to kill Ntsiki.

I look at him sharply. I feel like he means that... But then again, he's an emotional mess.

Dean: She took my child...

He is deep in thought at this point.

Dean: She took my fucken child...

He stands and I also stand. I don't want him to leave. I want all of this to sink in and for him to deal with his emotions accordingly.

Also, I'd rather be with him than those two weirdos, Zimkitha and Liwa.

Dean: She took my fucken child, and almost killed you...

Me: I'm fine, Dean, I promise.

I step closer to him and open my arms.

Me: I know you hate hugs...

He nods and I step even closer till our bodies are touching. I wrap my arms around him and he does the same.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: I'm not angry. I'm worried.

Dean: I'll find Ntsiki.

Out of nowhere, the door bursts open, and before I can even process anything, Dean is no longer in my arms.

I watch in horror as Derek pushes him against the wall and punches him countless times.

I'm frozen.

Zimkitha staggers in and yells for Derek to stop. Where is Liwa? I spot him standing coolly by the door.

Zimkitha: Liwa, stop them!

Liwa: No. Dean deserves this shit.

More than anything, I am traumatised by Derek.

I thought I had seen it all.

Zimkitha: Derek, stop!

Dean is now pressed on the ground, and his face is smashed with punches. He's not doing anything.

Somehow, my senses come back.

I ask Derek to stop, but he continues.

Me: Derek!

Out of nowhere, Dean manages to push Derek away, and stands.

Instead of asking Derek to stop, he throws a punch and it lands on Derek's face.

What the fuck?

This infuriates Derek even more. He throws a punch on Dean's stomach.

Dean staggers and loses his balance.

Before we all know it, Dean's pressed on the floor again and he's being punched like never before.

Me: Liwa, stop this!

Liwa shakes his head.

Me: What the fuck is wrong with you??

I walk closer to Derek, and attempt to touch his shoulder, but he pushes me away, quite intensely, and I stumble.

Me: Derek, what the hell?!

Derek: Ziyanda?

He immediately stops punching Dean.

I thought my leg was fine, but now the pain seems to have risen suddenly.

Just as he is about to come to me, two white security guards rush in.

They go straight to Derek and grab him.

They instantly drag him out and disappear...

There's silence in the room.

I stare at Dean as he gets up. His face is bloody.

He wipes his mouth and nose and looks at Liwa, who is now sitting on my bed.

Liwa shrugs as Dean storms out.

I honestly have no idea how we're going to get through this.

INSERT 163 (Unedited)

Me: Are you fucking kidding me right now, Liwa?!

Liwa looks at me coolly.

Me: What is wrong with you??

I look at Zimkitha, who is sobbing.

Me: You need to sort this out, Zimkitha. She looks at me.

Me: Sort this out!

Liwa: Hey, take it easy.

Me: Mxm. Please get out.

Liwa stands.

Zimkitha: Ziya-

Liwa: Mama.

Zimkitha looks at Liwa.

Liwa: Let's give her space.

He takes her hand and they walk out.

As soon as the door is closed, I sit on my bed and focus on my breathing.

I am ready to leave this place. I want to help find Simo. I want to be there for Nolwazi.

After a few minutes, the door opens and Derek walks in.

Derek: Get your shit. We're leaving.

Did I miss something? What's going on?

Derek: Ziyanda. Get your-

Me: Excuse me? Are you fucking kidding me right now?

He is silent for a while.

I watch him go from being pissed, to being calmer- not fully calm, but better than how he was.

He looks at me softly.

Derek: I don't want to think about what could have happened to you, Ziyanda. My heart can't take that shit.

I sigh.

Me: Please hold me for a sec?

He sighs and steps closer to me. I get off the bed and dive into his arms. As soon as I'm embraced, the tears flow like never before. I cry so intensely, that I forget where I am for a while.

Eventually, I calm down and he continues holding me.

Me: I thought I lost the baby. I feel his body tense up.

I put my face up and look at him.

Me: It took this incident for me to realise the value of our baby. I'm sorry for taking this long to accept our situation.

I see a smile somewhere in there, despite his obvious fury.

Me: The thought of losing the baby almost killed me. I couldn't handle it, Derek.

Derek: The thought of losing you almost killed me.

Me: I wasn't about to go out like that.

He chuckles.

Me: So, you were more worried about me than the baby?

Derek: What kind of a question is that?

You're my world, Ziyanda.

I stare at him.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I love you too. I'm sorry for not being there.

Me: Don't blame yourself, please. No one could have stopped this.

He tightens his jaw and I look at him carefully.

Me: Derek... Come on...

Derek: Dean was supposed to deal with this shit a long time ago. You cannot expect me to hug him right now.

Me: His daughter is missing, Derek... Can't you practise a little empathy?

Derek: I almost lost you and my child, because of someone else's carelessness. I sigh.

Derek: Your parents?

Me: Liwa made up some floozy story about me tripping while attempting to cook.

Derek: And they bought it?

I nod and he shakes his head.

Derek: Do you see how fucked up this is?
Now we have to lie, just to cover up more
lies?

I keep quiet.

Derek: I don't lie, Ziyanda. I hate
dishonesty. I try my best to live a truthful
life, and this right here is fucking
everything up. What will your parents say
when they find out the truth? How the
hell am I supposed to explain all of this to
them?

Me: I understand.

Derek: You don't.

I sigh.

Me: We need to focus on what is
happening right now: I am well, the baby
is well, but Simo has been kidnapped.
Dean needs us right now, he may not
express it, but he needs us.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I need you to calm down, please.

He doesn't say anything.

I get closer to his face, and place my lips on his.

Me: Please?

We share a gentle kiss and I feel his body loosen up. We continue kissing till we're both panting.

Sex is the perfect way for him to get rid of all this anger and drama, but now is not the time, and this hospital room is definitely not the place...

The door opens and Zimkitha walks in.

Derek: Zim-

Zimkitha: Shut up, and sit down.

Yoh.

Derek lets go of me and we both stare at Zimkitha. The tears are gone with the wind, she seems angry. Soon, Liwa and

Dean are in the room, and they're all sitting down.

Zimkitha: Sit down, Derek.

Derek and I sit on the bed.

She sits as well and looks at the guys.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Who'll go first?

Silence.

Liwa: Alright then...

Just like that, they start playing Rock-Paper-Scissors.

What the hell?

I didn't even know that the game could be played by three people, but they do it.

Dean and Derek both play rocks, while

Liwa plays the scissors.

Liwa: Hmkay... So, I go first.

I have no idea what the hell just happened.

Liwa: This is beyond fucked up.

He looks at Dean.

Liwa: What the fuck happened to tightening security?

Dean looks down.

Liwa: You're an idiot. Why the hell would you leave Ziyanda all alone with the kids, knowing very well that you still needed to work on security?

Dean tries to say something.

Liwa: And you...

He looks at Derek.

Liwa: You didn't beat him hard enough. One of his limbs should be broken.

Derek doesn't say anything.

Liwa: Dean, you were careless. Ziyanda could have lost her life and her baby.

I want to speak, but I'm speechless.

I've never seen anything like this.

Liwa: I've said my peace...

Derek and Dean then play their version of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

Dean plays the scissors, and Derek plays the paper.

Derek: Fuck you, Dean.

Dean looks at him.

Derek: Fuck you, for putting my family in danger. And fuck you for putting your family in danger.

I feel like they're being too hard on Dean, but I can't say anything ngoba they'll cut me to size.

Derek: This situation could have ended differently. How many times did I tell you to deal with this woman?

Dean doesn't say anything.

Derek: We've never sugar-coated anything, and we won't start now. Your dumb ass could have prevented all of this.

Liwa: Very dumb ass.

Yhu I feel bad for Dean.

Derek: I don't know what I would have done if Ziyanda was dead.

Liwa: Ya, well, she's okay, so your dramatic ass needs to let this shit go now.

I'm so confused. I've never seen such.

Dean: My daughter is missing...

There's an intense silence.

Dean: My fucken daughter is missing...

Liwa: We'll find her.

Dean: I'll kill that bitch.

Liwa: Of course.

Zimkitha: I gave that rapist a second chance, and she double-crossed me. The only person who has the right to kill her here is me.

Heyi!!

Me: We're all speaking hypothetically, right?

Liwa: Definitely, Ziyanda. None of this is literal.

I look at Derek worriedly.

Dean: I'm sorry for putting your life in danger, Dlamini.

I look at him and smile.

Me: I'm fine. Can we stop focusing on me?

Zimkitha: I have organised a lovely dinner for us... Let's get going.

Me: Dinner?

She looks at me sweetly.

Zimkitha: Would you rather stay here, Zi?

Me: Am I discharged??

She nods.

Me: Oh... Let's go.

She laughs and then looks at Dean.

Zimkitha: I always keep my promises. We will find Simo, and this will never happen again.

With that said, she walks out.

Liwa: Ready to hug it out?

Derek: No, I'm still pissed. Give me a minute.

Dean walks out.

Liwa: Don't drag this out, Ngidi.

Derek: This better be a wake-up call for him. I've warned him too many times about this woman...

Me: Derek, come on...

Derek: I'd like some time with Ziyanda for a sec... We'll meet you for dinner, Liwa.

Liwa nods and walks out.

I'm confused and relieved at the same time.

INSERT 164

We're now making our way to Liwa, Nomvuyo and Zimkitha's house.

To be honest, I'd rather not be around these people (Liwa and Zimkitha), but at the same time, I want to be there for Dean.

Derek: We don't have to go to this dinner.

Me: It's okay. Dean needs us.

He glances at me.

Derek: You're strange.

Me: Why?

Derek: You were attacked. How are you this calm?

Me: I don't have time to freak out right now. It's no longer about me, because I'm safe. We need to find Simo.

Derek: I'm beyond pissed.

Me: You have to get over it, Star.

He shakes his head.

Derek: You don't understand how I felt. I thought I lost you.

Me: Who told you, anyway?

Derek: Liwa.

Me: I'm sure he was blunt.

He chuckles.

Derek: I've told you this before... Liwa is sweet and bubbly, but he has a very cold side.

Me: I've seen a glimpse.

He chuckles.

Me: Him and his mother freak me out.

Derek: They're just overprotective.

Me: But, they have this weird obsession with each other. I mean, I love my parents, but Liwa and Zimkitha's relationship is on another level.

He glances at me.

Me: It better not be incestuous.

Derek: What?? Ziyanda!

Me: What? I'm just saying.

He pulls a face.

Me: Derek, you have to admit that they have a creepy thing going there.

Derek: No, man... They've been through too much together. Zimkitha has never been lucky when it comes to relationships, so Liwa is always there...

Me: Exactly! That's what's creepy about them! Why is Liwa acting like her husband??

Derek laughs quietly.

Derek: It's not like that.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: They've always been close. They confide in each other.

Me: Hai, but they need to let go now. Can you imagine asking my mother to move in with us? Then she stays with us for the rest of our lives? Really?

He smiles.

Derek: I wouldn't mind that. I love your mother.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

We eventually get to the house. I am actually glad that Nolwazi is not here. I don't think I'm ready to see her. What am I going to say? I am the worst liar ever, and knowing me, I'd definitely start spilling the beans.

Zimkitha, Liwa, Nomvuyo and Dean are there.

Thank God the others are not here as well. I'm really not in the mood to listen to Gabi's drama.

A table has been set up.

We sit and we're served our drinks.

The mood is definitely sombre.

Me: So, what is the plan?

They all look at me.

Me: How are you planning on finding Simo, seeing as you're not involving the police?

Liwa: You're not going to let us handle this, are you?

Me: No. It would be foolish of me to sit at home and twiddle my thumbs.

Nomvuyo: They've even excluded me from this whole thing...

Liwa looks at Zimkitha.

I don't know if these people have a plan, but I think I have one.

Just then, Dean's phone rings and he stands and walks away.

Derek takes my hand and kisses it. I look at him and smile.

Zimkitha: So, how was the meeting with Zizi's parents?

Derek: It went well.

Zimkitha: Why couldn't you wait till I was discharged?

Derek: The meeting wasn't meant for anyone else but me.

Zimkitha: Oh.

She sighs.

Zimkitha: Everyone is so tense.

Me: Is Nolwazi still at Mdu's?

Zimkitha: Yes.

Nomvuyo: Let me go check on my baby...

She stands and walks away.

Me: You're not planning on telling her parents?

Zimkitha looks at me softly.

Zimkitha: Can we stop discussing this for just 30 minutes?

She looks at me pleadingly and I nod.

I guess we're supposed to pretend nothing is going on around us. I don't understand why they're so calm.

Me: Let me check on Dean.

Derek nods as I stand and go to the kitchen, where I find Dean.

Me: Everything okay?

Dean: Was speaking to Nolwazi.

He sighs heavily.

Dean: She's pissed at me.

Me: Why?

He shrugs.

Dean: She's just stressed.

Me: I have an idea.

He looks at me.

Me: You have to reach out to Ntsiki.

Dean: You think I haven't tried to?

Me: You have to reach out differently.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: She's doing all of this because deep down, as crazy as it is, she loves you.

Dean: Bullshit.

Me: Believe me, she's crazy about you.

Dean: So, taking my baby will benefit her in what way?

Me: She finally has your attention.

He looks at me intently.

Me: Think about it... She may seem crazy, but I think the obsession stems from her love for you. So, if you reach out to her, less aggressively, she might cool down.

Derek walks in and I look at him.

Me: Ntsiki loves Dean, right?

Derek: Love?

He shakes his head disgustingly.

Me: In a weird and toxic way.

Derek: So?

Me: I think Dean needs to reach out to her, the way she has always wanted him to.

Derek: And how is that?

Me: In a kinder way.

Derek: What are you saying, Ziyanda?

Me: Dean needs to make Ntsiki think he is willing to work things with her.

They both stare at me.

Me: Listen, I watch a lot of crime documentaries. I know that Ntsiki needs attention from Dean specifically.

Dean looks at Derek, who is looking at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I hear what you're saying.

I continue staring at Dean.

Me: Once you're with her, you can convince her to bring back Simo, and then we catch her and send her to prison, where she belongs.

Derek: I don't think it will be that easy. I sigh.

Me: You guys don't get it. Dean has a lot of power over this psycho. Why else would she do such? She wants his attention. Let's give the woman what she wants.

Derek looks at Dean.

Derek: Have you tried contacting her?

Dean nods tightly.

Me: Obviously she won't respond, because she can see that your attitude hasn't changed.

Dean: Ziyanda, you want me to be kind to that whore?

Me: Yes.

Dean: Are you fucking kidding me?

Me: No, this is the only way we can get Simo. I don't want any of you to do things that are out of character. I strongly believe that this can be solved without any bloodshed.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: Bloodshed? Baby, no one is killing anyone here. Stop being paranoid.

I look at them and narrow my eyes.

Me: Those two gangsters outside are dangerous. I know it.

Liwa: Two gangsters? Really, Ziyanda Dlamini?

I squeal and look at Liwa and Zimkitha in shock. When the hell did they even get here?

Zimkitha: You think my son and I are gangsters?

They start laughing and I groan ashamedly. Now that they know how I feel, I kinda feel stupid for even thinking such.

Zimkitha: Oh, wow.

Nomvuyo also walks in with her baby boy, nuzzled in her arms.

Derek: Ziyanda has an idea that could work.

Zimkitha: Really? I'm all ears.

I listen to Derek speak, and I must say I'm glad. His English is better than mine anyway, so he phrased my idea perfectly. It sounds convincing.

Liwa looks at me amusingly.

Liwa: You want Ntsiki to go to prison?

Me: Liwa, where else would she go?

Liwa: I'm just asking.

I shudder.

Liwa: I like your plan. Psychologically, it will work. This woman is definitely obsessed with Dean, and the mere possibility of them getting back with him is enough to bring Simo back home.

We all look at Dean.

Dean: You want me to reach out to this woman and give her the impression that I love her?

Me: Yes.

He shakes his head tightly.

Dean: There has to be another way.

Zimkitha: Yes, there is another way.
However, let's exhaust this way, before
moving on to other ways.

She winks at me and I shudder once
again. I think they're just going to do the
most after overhearing what I said about
them.

Dean sighs heavily and scratches his head.

Nomvuyo: This will definitely work.

Dean looks at me.

Me: You have to do this. I know it sucks,
but you have to do it. Simo needs to come
back home.

Dean: Okay.

I sigh in relief.

Dean: I'll call her now.

He looks at all of us sternly.

Dean: Go eat.

Liwa: You don't want us to judge your
weak flirting skills?

Really? Yazi, this man has a very strange sense of humour, and it pops out of nowhere.

Everyone goes back to the table, except Derek and I.

Dean drinks some water and looks at Derek.

Derek: Let's talk for a sec.

I'm glad Star has come back to his senses.

Dean cannot be stressing about finding his daughter on one hand, and mending his bromance with Derek on the other hand.

Me: I'm hungry...

I look at Dean.

Me: Ntsiki cannot sense pretense. Make her believe every word you say.

Dean nods.

Me: Good luck.

I walk back to the table and immediately start eating...

INSERT 165

It's been 10 minutes, and we're all outchea wondering how it's going with Dean.

Derek is now back, and I'm watching him eat.

Me: I want to check on him.

Zimkitha smiles.

Zimkitha: You are such a caretaker.

Derek: Go, check on him. You know how to get him to open up, anyway.

Me: Hmkay.

I stand and walk to the kitchen.

It's evident that he has been standing there for a while.

Me: Fresh air?

He nods and we walk out and make our way to the backyard.

Dean: I don't like this idea.

Me: Do you have another one?

He sighs.

Dean: Nolwazi is going to kill me.

Me: As long as she kills you after we've found Simo.

He chuckles in defeat.

Me: Let's try it.

Dean: You watch too much TV.

Me: Leave me alone.

He scratches his head.

Dean: What do you want me to say to her?

Me: Uhm, how about we role play?

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: What? I'm tryna get you ready!

Dean: I'm not role playing bullshit.

Me: Then call her. It's 7pm now, I'm sure she's having dinner.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Dean, you need to do whatever it takes to get your daughter back. We will deal with the consequences after.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: What?

Dean: Thank you.

Me: I've got your back.

He nods tightly.

Me: Call this bitch.

Dean: So, you seriously fought her

Me: Pregnant or not, I'm not going to let anyone try me. If she didn't have any weapons, I would have whooped her ass.

He chuckles.

Me: Now, channel your inner Idris Alba and call this bitch.

He exhales.

Me: Actually, jog around the pool, just to get the nerves out of the way.

Dean: Uyahlanya wena.

I begin pushing him.

Me: Go!

Dean: You can't expect me to do stupid shit by myself. Come.

He pulls me and we end up jogging.

Me: Dean, I'm dying...

He laughs.

I'm glad he's laughing at my expense...

Dean: Let's do another round.

Me: Dude, I'm pregnant.

Dean: And you're gaining weight... Woza.

He pulls me and we continue jogging.

I regret suggesting this nonsense. He continues laughing at me until we finish the lap.

Once we're done, we sit by the pool and he continues laughing as I huff and puff.

Me: Ready?

Dean: No.

Me: Ya, well, you have to do this...

He takes out his phone and stares at his wallpaper- Simo and Khulekani.

Me: Should I give you privacy?

He shakes his head as he dials Ntsiki's number.

Dean: You're the only one I trust with my weak flirting skills.

I laugh.

Me: At least you have your charm.

Dean: And money.

I continue laughing.

He glances at me.

Me: Ringing?

He nods.

My heart rate is on another level right now.

Just as I'm about to say something, he clears his throat.

Dean: Ntsiki...

The bitch actually answered!

Dean sighs.

He's silent for a while... I'm not sure if it's because Ntsiki is speaking...

Dean: Please say something.

I stand.

I don't want to hear this conversation. I don't like seeing Dean like this.

I walk away and make my way back inside the house. I get to the dining room and find Derek and Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Everything okay?

Me: He's on the phone with her.

Zimkitha: Hopefully, she falls for it.

She stands and walks away.

I look at Derek.

Me: Do you think she'll fall for it?

Derek: I'm hopeful. I groan.

Me: I need a strong drink.

He smiles.

Derek: Four more months.

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: Where are we going to sleep?

We're homeless.

He sighs heavily.

Derek: We'll stay at Dean's for now.

Me: Why didn't Nolwazi's dad tighten security, as he promised?

Derek: I'm pissed at that old man. He should have sorted this shit before he went to his vacation.

Me: Please don't go off on him. He seems scary.

Derek: Mxm.

He pulls my chair closer and leans closer to me.

Derek: I'll fight anyone who puts you in danger.

Me: You've proven yourself... I get it.

He chuckles and kisses my cheek.

Me: I feel sick, hey.

Derek: Didn't you disagree with me when I said you're an absorber of emotions?

I look at him disapprovingly.

Derek: You're addicted to solving other people's problems.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: It's a blessing and curse. The problem is that you overlook your own problems.

Me: Awungiyeke, Nkanyezi. He plants another kiss on my cheek.

Me: I haven't forgotten how you pushed me when you were attacking Dean.

Derek: Ahh, baby, come on.

Me: Uh-uh.

He's now all pouty.

Me: Hai suka.

Just then, Dean walks in.

Derek and I look at him expectantly.

Dean: She wants us to meet.

Me: When?

Dean: Now.

Zimkitha and Liwa walk back.

Zimkitha: What's up?

Derek: She wants to meet.

Zimkitha: Perfect-

Dean: She wants me to come with Ziyanda.

Me: What?!

Derek: What the fuck do you mean??

Dean: She asked me about Ziyanda.

Me: Why?

Dean: We have to go.

Derek: Are you crazy? Ziyanda is not going anywhere. Tell that fucken lunatic that we'll find her.

Liwa: She's crazy. She can't possibly think we'll do everything she says. What does she think this is? A movie?

Me: Let's go.

Derek: Ziyanda, don't fucken test me.

Me: What? We need to get Simo!

He looks at me threateningly and I keep quiet. I'm so defeated. I want this to be over.

Liwa: How did the conversation go?

Dean: She says I led her to this point, and that I need to fix this.

Zimkitha: Led her to what point?! To kidnap your child?!

I don't think I have seen Zimkitha switch up like this.

She snatches Dean's phone and dials a number.

Dean: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: We will not bend over for her!

Dean snatches the phone from her.

Dean: What the fuck is wrong with you?!

Do you realise that she could hurt my daughter if any of you get involved?!

We all keep quiet.

Dean: I will deal with her. I don't want any of you to handle this. I will go there and I will get my daughter.

He looks at all of us.

Dean: Ntsiki kidnapped my child. She's doing all of this because she's pissed. She was pregnant with my child. We made her have an abortion, and she's going crazy. The common factor is me. She has gone crazy because of--

WHAT?!

Wait, who said that??

We all turn around. Shit.

Nolwazi stands there, eyes wide open.

Nolwazi: WHAT?!

All of us stare at her in complete shock.

Why is she here? When did she-

Nolwazi: NTSIKI DID WHAT?!

Dean: Nolv-

Nolwazi: Ntsiki is the one who kidnapped my child?!

She looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: Uthi you made Ntsiki pregnant?
I feel like I'm about to faint. My heart is
beating too fast!

Out of nowhere, we're all ducking and
diving.

Shit is being thrown at us- vases, glasses,
plates-everything.

Nolwazi: YOU MADE NTSIKI PREGNANT?!

Zimkitha: Nolwazi-

Nolwazi: Shut the fuck up! Shut the fuck
up!

She throws a plate at Dean and he ducks.

Nolwazi: Ntsiki has my child?! You knew
about this all along?!

Dean: No-

Another plate is thrown at him and he
ducks again.

Nolwazi: WHAT, DEAN?! What do you
have to say to me?!

Silence.

Nolwazi: What do you have to say to me, Dean?! What?! She looks at all of us one by one.

Her eyes land on me and I instantly look away.

Nolwazi: You all knew about my baby, and you didn't say anything??

Liwa: Nolw-

Nolwazi: Shut the fuck up!

There's silence once again...

Nomvuyo comes down the stairs.

Nomvuyo: And then? What's with the noi-
She sees Nolwazi and then clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, I'll be right back.

She walks up the stairs and disappears.

Nolwazi: I want my baby! I want my baby now! NOW!

Dean: I'm going to get her now.

Nolwazi looks at him in disgust.

There's silence for a long time.

Nolwazi: Get my baby... Please get my baby... Please...

She collapses on the floor and starts crying. Zimkitha walks to her and just as she's about to comfort her, Nolwazi pushes her away and Zimkitha stumbles and winces.

Just as Liwa is about to defend his mom (as expected) I pull him back and tell him to zip it.

We all look at Nolwazi as she cries painfully. We know not to go to her.

I look over at Dean.

I have to blink a couple of times, just to make sure I'm seeing right.

He's crying as well.

I clear my throat.

Me: Let's go, Dean.

Derek tries to say something and I look at him disapprovingly.

Liwa: We'll follow behind you.

I look at Derek. I know he wants to kill me right now, but I want all of this to be over.

Me: Just make sure you're not too close.

Liwa: Of course.

Nomvuyo comes downstairs and goes straight to Nolwazi. Nolwazi doesn't fight her.

Nomvuyo: They'll get Simo...

Nolwazi sinks in Nomvuyo's arms and cries even more.

Me: Let's go.

Dean is conflicted. It's clear that he wants to comfort Nolwazi, but he can't.

I grab his arm and we start walking...

INSERT 166 (Unedited)

We're now in Dean's car.

We've been sitting here for a few minutes.

Me: Are you ready?

He glances at me.

Dean: Nolwazi will never forgive me.

Me: She will.

I'm lying. From what I've seen, Nolwazi will not let go of this, and to be honest, she has every right to be pissed.

Me: Dean, can you imagine how she's feeling right now? She just found out everything in the worst possible way.

He sighs deeply.

Me: Let's find Simo. We'll deal with Nolwazi when we come back.

Just then, Liwa knocks on my window.

Liwa: Let's go!

Me: Okay.

Dean starts the car and drives off.

Me: Where are we going?

Dean: Her house.

Me: Did you ever live together?

Dean: Not really.

I sigh.

Me: Has she always been crazy?

Dean: Ntsiki knew from the get go that I didn't want a serious relationship. For

fuck's sake, I never saw a future with her, and I always made myself clear.

Me: Really? It wasn't a serious relationship?

Dean: No. Nolwazi always thought I was too cold towards Ntsiki. I didn't have deep feelings for her. She was aware from the beginning. I didn't sell her dreams.

Me: Yoh.

I look at him.

Dean: You can ask me anything.

I sigh.

Me: I'm just thinking about the pregnancy situation.

He looks at me sadly.

Dean: She drugged me.

I keep quiet.

Dean: I went to my doctor for my check up, and he noticed that I had an unfamiliar drug in my system. Ntsiki had already started contacting me, talking

about how good our reunion was. She got into my place, drugged me and proceeded to fuck me. I had no idea, until I went to my doctor.

I process all of this. I feel sick.

Dean: I was furious, Ziyanda. I have never been violated like that.

Me: Is that why you couldn't tell Lwazi? You were humiliated?

He nods tightly.

Dean: It's not easy to accept that you've been taken advantage of...

I nod.

I completely understand what he's saying.

Dean: And then, she told me that she's pregnant.

I hiss.

Dean: Zimkitha convinced her to have an abortion. It was either that, or we'd take her to the cops.

Me: Do you think that was a good decision?

Dean: Ziyanda, why the fuck would I want Ntsiki to have my child without my consent?

Me: I hear you.

Dean: That bitch will get what's coming to her.

Me: Don-

He looks at me and I shudder.

Dean: Don't try to talk me out of killing her.

Me: Dean!

Dean: What?

Me: You will not kill anyone! We will get Simo, and you will rebuild your trust with Nolwazi. You won't be able to do all of that if you're behind bars for murder!

Dean: Mxm.

He speeds up and focuses on the road.

Me: Is this it?

He nods.

Me: Are you going to call to ask her to let us in?

Dean: I have the remote.

Yazi, I'm still wondering why I was asked to come. All I know is that as soon as I get a chance, I'm going to stab her ass as well. Damn bitch.

Derek and Liwa manage to drive in behind us.

We're now in the parking lot.

Derek: Ziyanda, get in my car.

Me: Huh?

Derek: I won't repeat myself.

Me: Derek-

Derek: Don't fuck with me. Get in this car.

I look at Liwa and he shakes his head.

Liwa: You are not going in there.

I look at Dean and he shrugs.

Me: Mxm.

I get in the car and bang the door. I watch as they have a conversation. After a while, Derek gets in the car.

I watch as Dean and Liwa disappear. I don't even know how they're going to get in the house. Is Ntsiki around? Can she see us?

I have so many questions, and I hate not knowing what's going on.

We've been sitting in silence for about 5 minutes now.

Derek: You're crazy if you really thought I'd let you go.

Me: What's going on? What if Ntsiki hurts them?

Derek: She won't.

Me: How do you know? That psycho is dangerous!

He sighs

At this point, everything is sinking in. I feel like this whole plan is stupid. Ntsiki

would have to be really dumb to believe this nonsense.

Me: What if she saw our two cars? She is probably hurting them right now. We should go in!

Derek: You are so strange, Ziyanda.

Me: Huh?

Derek: For someone who suffers from anxiety, you react very boldly to dangerous situations.

Me: I can't help it.

Derek: That's why I need to keep you in check.

Me: Derek, awume kancane. Dean and Liwa are not safe!

I just want to make my way in there.

Out of nowhere, Dean emerges from the house.

He rushes to his car and just as I'm about to open my door, Derek locks it.

Me: Derek!

His phone rings and he answers it.

Derek: Yes?... Alright...

He ends the call and starts the car.

Me: What's going on?

Derek: We're leaving.

Me: Where are we going?

I honestly want to slap the piss out of Derek. Why is he being so unnecessary?

Yeses, man.

A minute later, Liwa walks out of the house and I am beyond glad when he comes to our car. At least he'll spill the tea for me.

Me: Liwa.

Liwa: Ziyanda.

Me: What's happening? Where's Simo?

Liwa: The baby is not here.

Derek starts driving and follows Dean's car.

Me: Was Ntsiki there?

Liwa shakes his head.

I groan heavily.

I decide to keep quiet, because it is very clear that my questions will not be answered fully. If I was with Dean, I know for a fact that he'd tell me everything. I don't know why these two are acting like they're some private investigators.

I must have taken a nap, because when I wake up, we're in an area I'm not familiar with.

Derek: Go back to sleep.

Me: Uyanya.

Liwa chuckles.

Liwa: You really don't want to be left out, hey?

Me: Mxm. We drive into some yard.

Me: Where are we?

Liwa: Ntsiki's sister lives here.

Me: Is this where Simo is?

Liwa: Hopefully.

I sigh.

Once we're parked, Derek unlocks the doors and I glance at him.

Me: Am I allowed to go out, master?

Derek: Mxm.

We all get out of the car and walk to Dean.

He looks at me.

For some reason, he looks calmer.

Me: Is Simo here?

He nods.

Me: What about- Derek: Dean, go and get her. I'd rather we wait-

Me: Uzosala noLiwa. I'm going with Dean.

He tries to say something, and I turn away from him.

Me: Let's go, Dean.

Dean looks at Derek. They do that thing of theirs of communicating nonverbally. At this point, I don't even care. Derek is being a cock-blocker right now.

Dean: Okay, let's go.

I know Derek is fuming, but I just want to turn and stick my tongue out at him-childish, I know.

Anyway, Dean and I make our way to the door, and he rings the bell.

Me: Are you sure she's here? He nods tightly.

As he's about to ring the bell again, the door opens.

A woman stands there.

She looks like she's in her mid-20s. Is she Ntsiki's sister?

Dean: Yoli?

The woman nods.

Yoli: Dean?

Dean nods.

Yoli sighs heavily and looks at me.

Yoli: Nolwazi?

Me: Oh, uhm, no.

Yoli: Oh...

She looks at Dean softly and pitifully.

Yoli: You can come in.

She steps aside and we walk in.

When we get to the lounge, and we see Simo on a stroller, we immediately rush to her and Dean takes her.

As soon as she is nuzzled in Dean's arms, I sink on the floor and sigh. The load is finally off.

I watch as Dean sobs quietly.

I'm sobbing as well.

Why the hell would a person kidnap a child? How is that normal?

After a while, Yoli clears her throat and I look at her.

Yoli: Would you like some water?

I don't say anything. This bitch has some nerve, asking us if we're thirsty!

Yoli: I am so sorry that you had to go through this.

I don't say anything.

I stare at her. She looks like she is also going through her own shit.

Yoli: When she brought the baby here, she didn't even give me any information. She just said I must take care of her. Had I known that...

She swallows her tears.

Yoli: I'm sorry.

I stand.

Me: So, you go around taking in babies you don't know?

She looks at me in shock.

Me: You are just as fucked up as your sister. You either get more information, or you go to the police- that's the normal thing to do.

As I walk to her, she steps back.

I want to slap some sense into her.

Me: What the hell is wrong with you??

Yoli: I didn't know!

Me: Your sister stabbed me!

Yoli: Wha-

Me: Tonight, you'll lear-

Dean: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it and look at Dean.

Dean: Let's go.

He walks towards me and grabs my arm.

We walk out and make our way to the car.

Derek: Thank God.

Liwa: Let's go before Nolwazi dies.

I quickly take Simo from Dean and get in

Dean's car, before Derek can protest.

I need to know how they knew about this

Yoli person, and Dean is the only one

who'll fill me in...

As I kiss Simo, I find myself smiling. As

annoying as she is, I missed her and her

absence made me value my pregnancy...

Now that this part is over, Dean needs to

get his shit together and fix his

relationship with Nolwazi.

INSERT 167

When I wake up and check the time, it's 10am.

I sit up and yawn loudly. Derek is still passed out next to me.

I reach for my phone and dial Dean's number. It rings for a long time, but he eventually answers.

Derek decided that we should sleep at his place (which is furniture-less). He insisted on being away from everything.

Dean: Ziyanda?

Me: Hey.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: How is she?

Dean: She slept at Mdu's.

Me: She took the babies?

Dean: Ya. My heart breaks for him. He's so miserable.

Me: What's your plan?

He sighs.

Me: Are you planning on giving her space?

Dean: No.

Me: Hmkay. I guess space will increase the gap between you guys.

Dean: Can I come over for breakfast?

Me: Uhm, Chef Ngidi is passed out... unless you want me to-

Dean: No, I'll bring breakfast.

Me: Whatever. It's not like cooking is an option. We're literally left with our bed and toiletries here.

Dean: I'll be there soon.

Me: Shap.

I hang up and just as I'm about to get out of bed, Derek pulls me back in.

Me: Dean is bringing breakfast.

Derek: Hmm.

He tries to hold on to me but I escape quickly and make my way to the bathroom.

Dean walks in with a large paper bag.

Me: Morning to you too.

Dean: It's 12pm.

We get to the kitchen and I unpack the food.

Dean: Is he still sleeping?

Me: Yep.

I glance at him.

Me: You look horrible.

Dean: Not as much as you.

Me: Oh please, my melanin is popping, cheeks bright and right. Don't come for me.

He chuckles.

Me: Now, you on the other hand...

Hunny...

Dean: Mxm.

He walks to the bedroom and I dish up for all of us.

After a few minutes, he walks back and looks around.

Dean: Manje we're going to eat standing?

Me: Yep. Everything has been moved.

He shakes his head.

Dean: I don't know why you didn't sleepover last night.

Me: We wanted to give you guys space.

Dean: As if that helped.

I sigh.

Me: You better fix this.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: What happened last night?

He takes a croissant and takes a bite roughly.

Dean: Ukhuluma ngani?

He chews and stares at me.

Me: When you got in that psycho's house!

Just then, Derek walks in and stretches. I try not to roll my eyes. His timing is the

worst- damn cock-blocker. He walks to me and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hey, lover.

He takes his food and eats on the spot.

I groan as I watch them munch away like pigs.

Dean: When exactly are you moving into your new place?

Derek: We're good to go now.

Dean: I need your shit out of my house.

Me: I don't know why you're so ready to get rid of us, because it's not like Nolwazi will be back there anytime soon.

Dean: Fuck off.

Derek: Vele, don't be so quick. Don't come for us.

Dean: Mxm.

Just then, Dean's phone rings and he checks the caller id.

He walks away as he answers it.

Derek: Are you okay with moving today?

Me: Oh, I thought-

Derek: No, you're not going to try play peacemaker.

I sigh.

Derek: We're going to spend some quality time.

Me: Bu-

Derek: Ziyanda, I want some quality time with you.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: Okay.

Derek: I know you thrive in helping others, but right now, I need you to check your priorities. We're having a baby in 4 months, and we haven't had downtime.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Let's focus on us, please?

I sigh and nod.

Me: Okay.

Derek: You're not angry?

Me: I understand and acknowledge how you feel.

Derek: Thank you.

He gives me a kiss on the cheek.

Dean walks back and takes another croissant.

Dean: I have to go... Turns out I have a meeting in an hour.

He takes a bite of his croissant and looks at Derek seriously.

Dean: I need you now more than ever.

Don't try that shit with me.

Did he overhear our conversation?

Derek grunts.

Dean: Suck it up.

He then looks at me and smiles.

Dean: You're a gem.

Me: So I've been told...

He chuckles and walks out.

I look at Derek expectantly.

Derek: Who am I kidding? There's no possible way of excluding ourselves from this shit.

We both sigh heavily.

Derek: Can we at least spend today together, just you and I?

Me: Of course, Star.

I pull him and give him a smooshy kiss.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

I must admit that my downtime with Star was exactly what I needed. We spent the rest of the day at a spa.

It's now around 5pm, and we're going to check out our new place now that all our things are there.

When we get there, I immediately start critiquing the space.

Me: We need new furniture. It doesn't take rocket science to see that our old furniture looks strange here.

Derek: That's something we can work on progressively.

I sigh.

Me: Alright then. So, you want us to move out of Dean's?

He scratches his head.

Derek: He won't let us.

Me: You still think your group of friends is chilled and drama-free?

He laughs lightly.

Derek: Whatever.

Me: I need to meet up with my people. I miss them.

He rolls his eyes.

Me: Heyi, ungalinge.

Derek: Let's get going. We make our way to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

When we get to the house, we find
Zimkitha, Nomvuyo and Liwa there.

Zimkitha: Zizi, hello, my angel.

Me: Hey.

She gives me a hug.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hello, Liwa.

I look around.

Me: Nolwazi is not back?

Zimkitha: She won't come back unless
she's fetched.

Liwa chuckles.

Me: Vuvz, I miss you.

Nomvuyo: I miss you too, love. I need this
chapter to be closed. I'm tired.

Me: Tell me about it...

Dean walks down the stairs and walks to
us.

Nomvuyo: How are you planning on fixing
this?

Dean doesn't respond, instead, he takes his phone and walks away again.

Nomvuyo: Haike.

She walks to the kitchen.

I really don't like this tension. There has to be a solution here, honestly.

As everyone is chatting and eating in the lounge, I make my way to our bedroom, and sit on the bed. I'm trying to come up with ideas to solve this. Once this is solved, we can all move on properly.

There's absolutely no way everyone can go their separate ways right now and live their lives in isolation. This group is close, and they're involved in each other's lives, so it's impossible for them to turn a blind eye when one of them is going through shit. I, on the other hand, hate seeing my loved ones going through shit. If my help is needed, I will genuinely offer my assistance. I've never been able to step

back when I'm needed. If a problem can be solved, then we will work together to solve it- we'll deal with the rest later.

I dial Mdu's number and anxiously wait for him to answer.

Mdu: Ziyanda, ufunani?

Me: Uhm, hey.

Mdu: I don't want to talk to any of you fucken idiots.

Me: Mdu, really?

Mdu: What you did was unforgivable.

Me: You? Who exactly are you talking about?

Mdu: You and your fucken friends.

Me: Listen here wena, you have no right to act righteous right now. You involved me in your bullshit and I supported your ungrateful ass.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Don't even try the honourable act right now.

Mdu: What do you want from me?

Me: I need you to do everything you can to get Nolwazi to be open to having a conversation with Dean.

Mdu: Her child was kidnapped, and Dean knew about it, in fact all of you knew! You cannot compare my situation with this bullshit!

I keep quiet.

Mdu: This is fucked up. Nolwazi thought she had lost her child. Dean knew all along.

Me: The situation is complicated.

Mdu: How? Please, enlighten me!

Me: It's not my place.

Mdu: Well, all of you can fuck off.

He ends the call and I groan.

I lie on the bed and face the ceiling.

Gosh.

How am I going to get him to calm down?

His anger is definitely justified. I get why he's not willing to hear me out.

Tholi.

I think she can get through to him.

Yes, I'll call Tholi.

Surely, he won't allow himself to throw all those "fucks" at his Chubby Cheeks...

INSERT 168

The following day, Derek woke up early for a business meeting. He was supposed to leave the province, but he managed to get the people to come to Jo'burg- for obvious reasons.

I'm glad he's leaving, because I have my own plans.

Derek: So, what are your plans for today?

Me: Plans? I have no plans, none whatsoever.

He looks at me coolly and nods.

Derek: Hmm.

I quickly get out of bed.

Me: Wanna save water today?

He chuckles and smiles.

Derek: Of course.

I walk to the bathroom and get in the shower, and he follows shortly after.

Derek: Our appointment with Doctor Modisa is tomorrow.

Me: I saw the reminder.

Derek: And, we see Melinda right after.

Me: Yep.

Derek: It's been a minute.

Me: Sure has.

Derek: So, what are your plans for today?

Me: Huh?

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: I don't have any.

He continues looking at me with a raised eyebrow.

Me: Gosh.

I huff.

Me: I'm planning on going to Nolwazi.

He shakes his head in defeat.

Me: What?

Derek: You're scaring me.

Me: Huh?

Derek: You're too invested. It's borderline obsessive.

Me: Yes, I am. Once this is solved, we can all move on.

Derek: Let Dean fix this.

Me: I'm helping them.

Derek: There's a big difference between helping and what you're doing.

Me: Really? Care to enlighten me?

Derek: You're in too deep.

Me: Maybe if I didn't get stabbed by this woman, I'd feel out of touch with this situation, but I was involved from the beginning. I don't turn my back against loved ones when they need support.

He sighs.

Derek: You're making it seem like I don't care.

Me: You obviously care less. I don't even understand, because Dean is your brother.

Derek: Wow.

He turns his back on me.

Derek: I'd like you to leave.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Just get the fuck out of the shower.

Me: Excuse me??

He turns and looks at me angrily.

Derek: You don't get it, do you? You were fucken stabbed. You were in danger. Now, I'm the bad guy for wanting to keep you safe?

I keep quiet.

Derek: Yazi Ziyanda, your stubbornness will be the death of you. You always want to be right, and you refuse to listen. Go and do as you please. If this shit backfires, don't expect me to clean up your mess.

Me: So dramatic.

I walk out of the shower and dry myself...
We get dressed in silence.
Once he's done, he packs his bag and his
phone rings.

Derek: I'll be there in 30 minutes... Sure...
Bye...

He takes his bag and walks out.

I hope he leaves the drama wherever he's going.

I finish getting dressed, and my tummy growls. I make my way downstairs and I'm glad to find no sign of Derek. I make myself an egg and cheese sandwich.

Dean: Why are you burning my pots?

Me: Whatever.

I clean up the mess and then sit on one of the high stools.

Dean: Are you okay?

Me: Yep.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: Just tired.

Dean: Then go back to sleep.

I shake my head and continue eating.

Dean: Hmkay then, grumpy...

He walks away.

I get to Mdu's house and call Tholi to let me in.

She meets me at the door.

Tholi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey, Tholi.

We share a hug.

Me: How are you?

Tholi: A bit tired.

Me: You guys have four babies in here?

She looks down and her cheeks turn red.

Me: And then?

Tholi: Nothing.

Me: Are you tired of your new roommates?

She looks at me in shock.

Tholi: Zi!

I chuckle.

Me: Are you scared of kicking Nolwa-

Tholi: Shh!

I continue chuckling as I follow her in.

I am immediately greeted by Simo's giggles. The girl really is an attention seeker. She can sense when a new set of eyes is in the room.

Nolwazi is busy playing with her.

I clear my throat.

She looks up and is legit shocked to see me.

Me: Hey, Lwazi.

She puts down Simo and then stands.

Nolwazi: Hi.

I can't read her. However, I'll take advantage of the joy she feels when she's with her babies.

I walk to Simo and pick her up. At least Lwazi won't attack me if I'm carrying her baby.

Me: I miss you guys.

My sessions with Melinda have taught me a lot when it comes to dealing with people. You have to ease your way into

difficult conversations- works like a charm.

Nolwazi: Khulekani has been grumpy.

Me: Aww, really? He misses our play dates!

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: I guess.

She looks at my belly.

Nolwazi: When are you finding out the gender?

Me: Tomorrow.

Nolwazi: What are you hoping for?

I shrug.

Me: I don't know.

She sighs.

Me: How is this living situation?

She looks around.

Nolwazi: Okay, I guess.

Me: Who would have thought... You, living with your ex-husband's ex-wife?

Nolwazi: Messed up, huh?

Me: I guess it speaks volumes about your forgiving nature.

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: Before you attack me, please lend an ear?

Nolwazi: Ziyand-

Me: Please?

Simo slaps my cheek and I groan. Nolwazi chuckles.

Nolwazi: You two have a love-hate relationship.

Me: Your child is a lot.

Nolwazi: Tell me something I don't know.

She sits and I sit next to her.

Tholi walks in with some juice and two glasses.

Me: Thank you, Tholz.

She smiles as she puts them on the table.

She walks away.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: You are one of the most understanding people I know.

Nolwazi: Stop trying to butter me up and get to the point.

I sigh.

Me: You need to hear him out.

Nolwazi: I'm not ready.

Me: And, I respect that. Dean knows you better so that's why he's giving you space. However, I just wanted to let you know this is more complicated than you think.

Nolwazi: Why didn't you tell me when you found out?

Me: It wasn't my place.

Nolwazi: So, you coming here right now is your place?

I keep quiet.

Nolwazi: I don't know how I'll forgive Dean. This is too much.

Me: As much as I want to tell you what happened, I think Dean should. I'm afraid that too much space will ruin your relationship, especially because you are

not fully informed. I think it's only fair for you to be aware.

Nolwazi: What's so deep, that it can change my whole perspective on all of this?

Just as I'm about to talk, my eyes pop out.

Me: Dean!

Dean looks at me in confusion and shock.

Dean: What the hell are you doing here?

Me: Oh, uhm, I came to see the twins.

Dean: Hmm.

As soon as his eyes land on Nolwazi, his whole face changes. He looks at her softly and pleadingly.

I clear my throat.

Dean: Lwazi.

I look at Nolwazi and she's already sobbing. I want to comfort her, but Simo is also slapping the shit out of me. This little brat wants her dad now.

Dean walks to us. He wants to comfort Nolwazi, but he can't.

The tension is too thick for my liking. I want it to end.

Nolwazi: Why would you lie to me?

She continues sobbing.

Simo is now crying her lungs.

Dean looks at me and I nod.

I quickly stand, and as I walk to the kitchen, I bump into Mdu.

Mdu: Who the hell let you in my house?

Me: Liste-

Mdu: Is that Dean's car outside?

Me: Mdu-

Mdu: Get the fuck-

Tholi: Mdu!

Mdu keeps quiet and looks at Tholi.

Tholi: Will you just shut up and allow people to solve their problems?

Mdu: Tholi-

Tholi: No. Stop being unnecessary.

Ewu.

Kwathi cwaka.

Tholi: Now, if you don't mind, please check what's wrong with the washing machine.

Hehe.

Yes, girl. You better tame your man!

Anyway, I have a good feeling about Dean and Nolwazi. I think a constructive conversation can be had now. I feel lighter and hopeful.

I check my phone and I haven't received any calls or messages from Derek.

Konje.

I sigh heavily and focus on Simo, who is suddenly drooling over Mdu.

Such thot-y behaviour.

INSERT 169

Me: Mdu, you really need to check yourself.

He looks at me coldly.

Me: You don't scare me, so cut the nonsense.

Mdu: At the end of the day, I don't give a shit about others. Family comes first.

I don't say anything.

Mdu: Give me one good reason why I shouldn't go to my lounge and punch that idiot.

Me: He'll beat your dark ass.

Tholi: Ziyanda!

Me: Not literal, Tholz. That would totes be inapprops.

Mdu chuckles.

Me: Those two need to talk and sort it out.

Mdu: Aren't you tired of being involved?

Me: I love how everyone asks me that bullshit as if I wake up and randomly ask to be involved in everyone's nonsense.

Tholi: Shame, everyone trusts you.

Me: It's a blessing and a curse.

Mdu: Manje uthi what exactly happened with Dean?

Me: Not my place to tell you.

Out of nowhere, Nolwazi walks into the kitchen.

She's been crying. Her face is puffy as hell.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda.

I look at her nervously.

She walks away. I guess I'm supposed to follow her?

I walk to the lounge and sit opposite her and Dean.

I stare at Dean.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda.

I look at her.

She takes a deep breath and wipes her tears.

Nolwazi: Ntsiki stabbed you?

Me: Uhm, ya.

Funny enough, I thought she knew. Kanti didn't she come back with Dean after I called that night? She sighs.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay. She didn't really hurt me.

Nolwazi: I'm so sorry.

Me: It's okay, Lwazi, honestly. It's not even your fault.

Nolwazi: It is our fault. All of this could have been prevented.

I shrug.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry.

Me: Please stop apologizing. I'm fine.

She takes a sip of water and looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'm struggling to process this.

Dean: I'll give you space.

She shakes her head.

Nowazi: You'll sleep in another room.

Dean stifles a smile.

Nolwazi: I just...

She exhales and shakes her head.

Nolwazi: I just didn't think Ntsiki was this crazy.

Me: I think everyone underestimated her.

She shakes her head.

Nolwazi: That fucken bitch.

Throughout this conversation, my whole body keeps relaxing even more. Nolwazi is slowly coming around! Mdu walks in with a crying Simo. There she goes crying when no one is paying attention to her.

Sivelelwe la.

Dean stands and takes her from Mdu.

She continues crying, but as soon as Dean showers her with kisses, the crying stops instantly.

Mdu: I'm tired of this child. Please go back to your house now, Lwazi.

Nolwazi: Wow, brother.

Mdu: We cannot live with four kids in one roof. It's too much.

Dean: Watch it...

Mdu then looks at Nolwazi intently.

Mdu: You wanna talk?

Nolwazi shrugs.

Mdu: Come.

She walks to him and they walk out.

I look at Dean, who has managed to calm Simo down.

Me: Dean.

He looks at me.

Me: You okay?

Dean: I've been better.

Me: At least she listened.

He nods.

Me: And she's willing to come back to the house.

Dean: Mmm.

Me: I should get going. I'm sleepy and hungry.

Dean: We'll leave together. I nod as I sink on the couch.

Tholi: Ziyanda...

Me: Hmm?

Tholi: Wakeup.

I open my eyes and blink a couple of times.

Mdu: Vuka wena, and never come back here.

Me: Argh.

I sit up and stretch.

Me: What time is it?

Tholi: 3pm.

Me: Gosh.

Tholi: Nolwazi and Dean have been waiting for you.

Me: I'm glad they didn't wake me up.

Tholi: Apparently you're aggressive when someone interrupts your sleep?

I chuckle.

Me: Don't believe the lies.

I get up and stretch.

Me: Where are they?

Mdu: Upstairs.

Me: Hmkay.

I make my way there and knock on a closed door. When I open it, Dean is on the bed, while Lwazi is packing her clothes.

Nolwazi: Zi, you're awake.

Me: Yep. We can leave now.

Nolwazi: Give me five minutes.

Me: Shap.

It seems like things are much better between Nolwazi and Dean. The tension has been replaced with calmness.

I'm happy for them.

Even my nap felt lighter.

As we make our way inside the house, I'm shocked that there's no sign of Derek. His meeting wasn't supposed to be long.

It feels weird not being able to call or text him.

Dean: You fought with Derek?

Me: Not really.

Dean: I th-

Me: I'm hungry, Dean. I don't have the energy to discuss Derek's drama.

He laughs lightly.

Me: Please make something to eat.

Dean: Uyanya.

Me: Please, man.

Nolwazi: My dad wants to come and make sure you've upgraded our security.

Dean grunts.

Nolwazi: That's what you get for having a crazy ex.

Me: I wonder where Ntsiki is...

Nolwazi looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'd rather not think about her right now.

Just then, Derek walks in.

We all stare at him.

He stares at Nolwazi.

Derek: Hi, Lwazi.

He is definitely not his usual warm self.

Nolwazi: Hey, Ngidi.

They share a hug.

Derek: Good to have you back.

Nolwazi: I can't honestly say it's good to be back.

Derek then looks at me briefly and then focuses on Dean.

Derek: We're moving out today.

We all look at him in shock.

Nolwazi: What? Why?

Derek: I'd like my own space. We've overstayed our welcome.

Dean: Dramatic much?

Nolwazi: I hope you know that you're always welcome.

Derek: I do. I'm happy that you're back. I strongly think you two need space now that you're more informed.

Nolwazi: I'm still pissed at all of you, by the way.

Derek then looks at me.

Derek: Go pack your shit.

My jaw drops.

Surely I'm dreaming? Who in the world is he addressing like this?

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Go upstairs and pack your shit.

Mine is already packed.

I have to take a few breaths. I am speechless.

I try to say something, but I'm dumbfounded.

I walk away, not knowing how exactly I feel.

I get to our bedroom and look around.

I am literally shaking.

This motherfucker really packed his things.

He even put my suitcase on the bed. It's wide open.

I take out my clothes and throw them in the suitcase.

The door opens and Derek stares at me from the door.

Me: Leave me alone. I don't want to hear your lousy apology.

Derek: Apology?

I stop and look at him.

Derek: I'm not here to apologise. I came to tell you to hurry up, I'd like to beat traffic.

My jaw drops to the floor as he closes the door.

What the hell?

Did Petty escape from my body and get into his?

I am shook.

INSERT 170 (Unedited)

As I'm washing my face, Derek walks in the bathroom.

I rinse my face and dry it. I walk out and get dressed.

Once I'm done, I go downstairs and then it hits me. We have no food or snacks in this house. I look around and roll my eyes.

Nxa.

I walk around and check out the rooms.

I just feel like Derek sucked out all the joy from this moving process. His petty ass

better be able to keep this shit up,
because I'm not budging.

I make my way back to the kitchen to
pour myself some water. I'm starving, it's
not even funny. I'm craving a dagwood:
bacon, cheese, pickles and an egg.

I decide to open the fridge and lo and
behold, the damn thing is filled to
capacity.

When did this happen?

I walk to the pantry, it is also filled.

When did Derek do all of this?

Just as I walk out of the pantry, he walks
into the kitchen. I pour myself a glass of
water and leave him there. When I check
my phone, I see a message from Melinda,
confirming our appointment for today. I
want to respond and cancel, but I know
that will not be well-received.

After 20 minutes or so, I walk downstairs
with my bag.

Derek is washing his plate.

He made breakfast.

I watch as he walks upstairs and I rush to the kitchen to see if there are some leftovers. The whole space smells like bacon. My belly growls even more and I rub it. When I check, I realize that he finished the food. There's nothing in the pots.

I let out a low moan. I want to cry. Did he really feed himself and leave me to die? I know he doesn't love me right now, but what about his child? Mxm.

Derek: Let's go.

I snap out of it and before I can confront him, he's already walking out.

We're now in the reception area, waiting for Dr. Modisa.

Receptionist: She's running a bit late.

Derek: How late?

Receptionist: She'll be here soon.

I sigh and go straight to the bathroom to cry my lungs out. I'm starving. I feel like the baby is probably eating its toes right now.

After a few minutes, I walk back to the reception area to get my bag. Derek is now sitting down, busy on his phone.

I'm going to request an Uber and go to the nearest food spot. I can't even see straight anymore.

As I reach for my bag, which is on the empty seat next to Derek, I see a skhaftin.

Me: What's this?

Derek: Your food.

Yoh, I almost collapse. I put my bag aside, sit my big ass down and chow like there's no tomorrow.

Once I'm done, I drink some water and close the skhaftin.

Me: Thanks.

He nods tightly and continues focusing on his phone.

I sit back and listen to my body as it digests the food. In a few minutes, the heartburn kicks in and I rush to the bathroom. I try to keep it in, but I can't. I vomit everything I ate... Mxm, so much for food digestion.

When I walk back to reception, I find Dr. Modisa there, speaking to Derek. She smiles when she sees me, and we share a hug.

Dr: How are you?

Me: Just vomited my breakfast.

Dr: Oh, no. That's not good.

Me: Tell me about it...

Dr: Please give me a few minutes to settle in.

Me: Okay.

I get my bag and take a quick glance at Derek. I know for a fact that he wants to

ask if I'm okay, but his petty-streak won't allow him to.

Dr: Almost six months...

She looks at us and smiles.

Dr: You're approaching the last month of your second trimester.

I sigh

Dr: What's wrong?

Me: I'm tired most of the time, and my feet look like fish.

She laughs.

Dr: These are some of the common concerns when you're at this stage of the pregnancy. Hormonal changes and heartburn make it difficult for you to catch a good night's sleep.

Me: I'm just uncomfortable.

Dr: And the kicks?

Me: I haven't felt any kicks, just little movements.

I look at Derek and he avoids my eyes.

Dr: Eat your dinner at least two hours before bedtime, and don't forget to eat slowly- that will make you sleep better, and prevent heartburn.

I nod.

Dr: As your uterus continues to expand, the aches will leave you fatigued. Ideally, there's nothing to worry about, but if you're too uncomfortable, call me.

Me: Okay.

She continues explaining the symptoms I will experience.

Dr: Now, let's move on to our baby.

She looks at Derek.

Dr: How are you feeling?

Derek: I'm okay...

I roll my eyes.

Dr: Now, as you can see, the baby is growing bigger now.

She goes on to tell us the specific details about the baby's growth.

As overwhelming as it is, I think I'm a bit numb at this point. I don't know, hey.

She then smiles brightly and looks at me.

Dr: Gender time! What are you hoping for?

Me: I don't know. I don't think I want a girl.

Dr: Really? Why?

Me: Girls are too much admin.

Dr: Aww, Derek, what are you hoping for?

Derek: I'm okay with anything.

Dr: That's good.

I look at Derek. He's trying to act tough, but I can tell he's lowkey excited.

Dr: Alright then, let's see...

As she rubs my belly, trying to find the perfect angle, I feel Derek's hand on mine. I glance at him angrily and he looks at me softly.

As much as I want to smack the pettiness out of him, I can't help but smile at him.

Dr: Well, lookie here...

We all stare at the screen. I always struggle to see the baby, hey. Thankfully, this time around, the outline is clear, because it's growing.

Dr: I'll let you figure it yourself...

I turn my head and so does Derek.

Dr: Do you see it?

Me: What?

Derek chuckles.

Derek: It's a boy.

I frown.

Me: Huh? Where's the penis?

They both laugh as I continue staring at the baby.

Derek stands and touches the screen, pointing at something.

Me: Is that it?

He chuckles and nods.

Me: Oh, wow.

Dr: You're having a boy!

I sigh in relief.

I really didn't want a girl. The Universe listened to me.

Melinda: It's good to see you two.

She smiles at us.

Melinda: I believe there's a problem? Your body language says a lot.

Derek: We do have a problem.

Melinda: Alright, let's get into it.

Derek: Ziyanda has a serious problem.

Melinda looks at him intently.

Derek then goes on to tell her how I haven't been taking care of myself, and how invested I am in other people's shit...

The usual...

Once he's done, she sighs.

Melinda: Ziyanda, do you want to say something?

I shrug

Me: I don't think what I have to say will make him happy. I personally do not see anything wrong with what I did. I was being supportive.

Derek hisses.

Me: I don't know why he makes it seem like we have problems. You're telling me you just couldn't put your shit aside for a while just to cater to your friend? Nolwazi and Dean are fine now. Why did you make it seem like the phase would last forever?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I think he's being dramatic, and because I'm not in the mood to fight, I'll leave it at that.

Derek: I'd like a few minutes, please.

Melinda: Sure.

He stands and walks out.

Melinda then looks at me softly.

Melinda: Ziyanda.

Me: Yes?

Melinda: Are you going back to avoidance as a coping mechanism?

I look at her blankly.

Melinda: You know that never ends well for you.

Derek walks back in and sits.

I glance at him and realize that he really is angry. Now, I'm concerned.

Derek looks at Melinda.

Derek: I'd rather we meet another time. I'm not in the right frame of mind.

Melinda: Why?

Derek: Her stubbornness is fucken driving me insane.

Me: Then go. No one is forcing you to be here.

Just as he is about to stand, Melinda intervenes.

Melinda: No one is leaving. We will resolve this.

Me: I don't have time for this.

Derek: But, you have the time for other people's problems?

Me: What the hell is going on here? When did you and I have problems? What are these problems that I don't know about? I am so confused. Last time I checked, we were good.

Derek: Mxm.

Me: You can't just go from 0 to 100 and expect me to take it.

He shakes his head and looks at Melinda.

Me: You can look at Melinda all you want. You're being dramatic. Tone it down a notch if you want us to have a constructive conversation.

He stands.

Derek: I'll be back...

He storms out.

I look at Melinda.

Me: He legit went from 0-100.

Melinda: He's clearly passionate about this.

Me: He's doing the most right now. We'll talk once he's cooled down.

Melinda: Are you open to hearing him out properly?

Me: Sure. I'm just failing to respond properly because he's too angry.

She nods and stands.

Melinda: Let me check on him.

Me: Alright.

She walks out and I look around the office and spot the Empathy Tool... I guess it's time to use it right now, because Derek is def's passionate about this.

INSERT 171 (Unedited)

He walks back in the room and sits.

Melinda: Alright, are we ready to listen to each other?

I look at Derek. He seems calmer.

Melinda: Derek, you mentioned that you think Ziyanda is too invested in other people's problems?

Derek nods.

Melinda: What happened?

Derek: I'm sure if she has told you about the kidnapping situation.

Melinda raises an eyebrow and looks at us questioningly.

Melinda: Kidnapping?

Derek looks at me and I look back at him blankly. He must tell the story, since he's in a talking mood.

He then begins telling her what happened.

Derek: When I got the phone call...

He swallows hard.

Derek: I thought I lost her... I don't know what's happening right now. Is he holding in tears?

Melinda and I stare at him.

Derek: I couldn't even get to her immediately because my flight got delayed... I was going crazy.

Melinda: I'm so sorry to hear that.

Derek shrugs.

Melinda: How did you make sense of the situation?

Derek: I still think it could have been avoided. I blame myself and Dean.

Melinda: Why do you blame yourself?

Derek: I couldn't protect her.

There's silence for a few seconds.

Derek: Just like I couldn't protect her from her miscarriage.

Whoa.

Me: Wait, you blame yourself for the miscarriage?

He continues looking at Melinda. Is he ignoring me?

Melinda: Answer Ziyanda's question.

Derek: The miscarriage happened during the time we discovered that I have a son. My heart rate slowly increases.

Derek: I think Ziyanda was really triggered by the situation. It stressed her out.

Melinda looks at me.

Melinda: Do you blame Derek for the miscarriage?

Me: I don't see why we should go back to it.

Derek finally looks at me.

Melinda: Are you avoiding it?

Me: I've gone through my stages of grieve, but am I ready to sit here and delve deeper into it? No. I don't want to talk about that experience.

Melinda nods.

Me: So, if you feel like you still need to go back and unpack the situation, please do

it in my absence. I don't want to talk about it.

Melinda: I respect that.

Me: What I will say though, is that I don't blame anyone for that miscarriage. I've been through a lot of shit in my life, and I've learnt that blaming others is counterproductive. I may not have accepted the miscarriage, but I don't blame Derek.

Melinda: You don't have to speak in third person, he's right here.

I look at Derek.

Me: I don't blame you.

I look at Melinda.

Me: That's all I'm willing to say regarding that.

Derek: I'm sorry for bringing it up.

Me: Cool.

We sit in silence.

I try not to give in to the sullenness that is threatening to take over. I don't want to deal with that shit right now, because I will die, seriously.

Melinda: Now, why do you think Ziyanda is too invested in other people's lives?

Derek: She was adamant about helping Dean fix his relationship with Nolwazi to the point that she didn't realize that she crossed the line.

Melinda: What line?

Me: Please explain this line to me.

Derek: I get that you were trying to help, but at some point, Dean has to take charge and sort his shit out.

Melinda: So, you think she was facilitating intensively.

Derek: Yes.

Me: Bullshit.

He looks at me.

Me: First of all, don't sit here and make it seem like your circle doesn't have an invasive culture.

Melinda: Invasive?

Me: When I first met them, I had a big problem with how they were in each other's business. They all know what happens in each other's relationships.

Melinda: Oh...

Me: That's their culture. When I raised this issue, Derek said I'll get used to them. That's just how they do things.

I look at him.

Me: I adapted to that culture, to your circle's culture, Derek.

Melinda: What do you have to say about that, Derek?

Derek: Nothing.

Melinda: Is Ziyanda correct?

He tightens his jaw.

Me: He's making it seem like I woke up one day and said, "Hey, I'm about to involve myself in your friends' lives and I don't give a shit about you. Bye."

Melinda: You disagree that you overstepped your boundaries with Dean and his fiancée?

Me: Dean literally looked us in the eye and told us he needs us. What kind of asshole do you think I am?

He looks at me.

Me: When we are fighting, your friends get involved. When Liwa and Vuvu fight, we get involved. When Dean and Nolwazi fight, we all get involved. How is this foreign to you?

Derek: You are fucken pregnant, and you were almost killed! Why don't you get that?

Me: If your concern is that then you say it like that. You don't come at me and make

it seem like I'm some nosy bitch who likes other people's business. That's what pisses me off. You're painting me as a nosy person!

Melinda: Alright, so this is the root of the tension.

We both look at her.

Melinda: Both your intentions are misunderstood.

She looks at Derek.

Melinda: You are trying to protect Ziyanda. Because of the danger she's been exposed to, you want to keep her safe.

That's your main concern.

She then looks at me.

Melinda: Ziyanda, you on the other hand, are not getting this message. You keep hearing him say you're too involved, and it comes across as negative feedback.

Me: Derek has this habit of bottling things up, and when he does finally speak up, he

goes in hard. He'll paint me as a bad person. What I've been getting is that I'm nosy, and I love meddling in other people's business. I haven't been getting this protective perspective.

Melinda: You feel like you're sticking to the group's norm: to be there for someone else when they're at their lowest.

Me: Yes, emphasis on the word "lowest." Yes, we've gone through our own shit, but at that moment, our friends were at their lowest. They needed us. You and I are not at our lowest point right now, because our baby is healthy and all I got from that incident was stab wounds, nothing else. I'm okay.

Derek: But, I'm not okay, Ziyanda. I almost lost you.

I sigh and look at Melinda in defeat.

Me: I don't know, I feel like we're not hearing each other.

Melinda: You're not.

We both look at her.

Melinda: You're both fixated on your point of views.

Me: I need to pee. She chuckles and nods as I stand and walk out.

I need some fresh air.

I come back and drink some water.

I sit again.

I feel better now that I got fresh air.

Melinda looks at us.

Melinda: Can I tell you something?

We look at her.

Melinda: Your stubbornness is unmatched...both of you.

She chuckles.

Melinda: In every relationship, you need common ground. Yes, you'll have different

opinions, but there has to be a point where both of you can meet and accept your differences. That's the only way you can have a healthy relationship. You cannot be fixated on your views- compromise has to be your best friend. She is quiet for a few seconds.

Melinda: I'm going to give you some privacy.

With that said, she stands and walks out.

I don't pay her to leave me with my problems. This white woman better come back here and sort this shit out.

We sit in silence for a very long time.

Derek: I can't bring myself to apologise for wanting to keep you safe.

Me: I can't bring myself to apologise for being a supportive friend.

We sit in silence for a while.

Derek: What can you bring yourself to apologise for? I sigh.

Me: Not finding a proper balance.

Derek: Elaborate.

Me: My area of growth is finding a balance between helping others, and not exhausting myself.

Derek: That's what I want for you.

Me: Then you should have said that.

Derek: Didn't I?

Me: It's not about what you say, it's about how you say it. You know I don't respond well to being told what to do.

He nods.

Me: Your intention was misconstrued.

Derek: Because I didn't communicate in a way that accommodated you, everything I said didn't really reach you.

I keep quiet.

Derek: I'm sorry for that.

Me: I'm sorry for making you feel dismissed.

Derek: It's okay.

Me: Dean needed us.

Derek: Right now, my priority is you and my son.

I sigh.

Derek: But, I hear you. I was too hard on you.

Me: Too much.

He stands.

Derek: Come here for a sec. I stand and he pulls me closer to him, till our bodies touch.

Derek: I hate fighting with you.

Me: Really? It sure has hell didn't look like it when you told me to pack my shit, and then leave me hungry.

Derek: I almost gave in when I saw you crying because of hunger.

Me: Derek!

He laughs.

Me: Can we not fight for the remainder of this pregnancy?

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Okay, baby.

Just as he kisses me again, the opens and Melinda walks in.

Melinda: Well, what do we have here?

She chuckles.

Melinda: Common ground and compromise...

She smiles brightly.

Melinda: You are exceptional learners...

INSERT 172

It's been two months since "the incident." Ever since that session with Melinda, I have stopped asking too many questions. Till this day, I don't know what happened to Ntsiki, and as much as I still want to know, I've managed to avoid asking questions.

Dean and Nolwazi have been working on their relationship. Because Nolwazi is so forgiving, she hasn't been giving Dean a hard time. Also, I think as soon as she found out what happened to Dean, she approached the whole thing differently. Dean, on the other hand, has turned into another version of Derek: super-duper protective and dramatic. He's been working on gaining Nolwazi's trust back. He even agreed to see a therapist with Nolwazi. I definitely support this, because it's always good to have a third neutral person listening to your problems.

Nomvuyo, Liwa and Zimkitha are still obsessed with each other. They're inseparable- nothing new here.

I must say that I'm glad that I'm not working. Dean refers to me as a suburban house-girlfriend. Derek continues to ensure that I'm relaxed and stress-free. Today we're hosting a housewarming brunch. Yes, we've been here for two months, but we're officially settled, and Derek wants his friends to come see his new home. I'm still coming to terms with it.

The past two months have been a rollercoaster, mostly because of my pregnancy. I'm 7 months pregnant, and I'm over it. I don't know who lied and said carrying a child is a great experience. I'm constantly uncomfortable, I can't sleep peacefully because of the kicks and movements, my feet are swollen, I'm

fatter, my boobs are heavy, and did I mention that I can't sleep properly? I feel like people sold me dreams. There's nothing cute about pregnancy. This is a fulltime job.

Anyway, before I digress any further... Today, brunch, private chef, going all out, house-girlfriend vibes, sexy beast who stays doing the most...

Derek walks in the bedroom as I get dressed.

He closes door.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: Everyone's here.

Me: Okay.

He walks to me and helps with my bra.

Me: Can't I just go around braless?

Derek: Baby, you do that every day. We have guests today.

Me: Are you ashamed of my watermelons?

Derek: You know I'm obsessed with them. I put on my dress and he smiles coyly.

Derek: You're beautiful.

Me: Ohho.

He chuckles and pulls me closer, but the belly stands in the way.

Derek: We've come a long way.

Me: Indeed.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: Let me sort out my hair.

Derek: Be quick.

Me: Hmkay.

He walks out.

I must admit that although this pregnancy drives me crazy, I'm in a good space, and Derek contributes greatly to this space. Sexy Beast stays doing the damn thing.

When I walk outside, everyone is there:
Dean, Nolwazi, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha,
Malusi, Nandi, Gabi and Joe.

The large circular table is there, as usual.
They all exclaim when they see me.

Me: Hello, everyone.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Look at you, all
preggies.

Me: Not funny.

I sit between Dean and Nomvuyo.

Nandi: I didn't know you were pregnant,
Ziyanda. Congratulations!

Gabi: None of us knew!

I glance at Derek.

Derek: Thought I mentioned it...

Gabi: So secretive.

I can't help but stare at Gabi in awe. Why
does she look so graceful, while my
pregnancy is killing me? She makes it look
so easy.

Derek pours me water.

I stare at Nandi and Malusi. Are they back together? What's going on with them?

My thoughts are interrupted by Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: How's the new house treating you?

Me: It's a bit big, but I like it.

Gabi: The bigger, the better. No one's trying to live in a small house. We're too rich for that.

This one is goals. You'd swear she's the one who makes all this money she brags about.

Nomvuyo: Nandi, will you have another child?

Nandi coughs and giggles.

Nandi: Not anytime soon.

I look at Malusi and he's staring at her all gooey.

Nandi: I'm still enjoying being single.

Gabi: Weren't you dating that property guy?

Nandi: I was.

Gabi: What happened?

Nandi sips her water. She's clearly uncomfortable.

Malusi: Would you like us to question you on your exes as well, Gabisile?

Gabi: Heyy, I'm just asking!

Malusi grunts.

Nolwazi: I miss being single.

Dean: Uyanya.

Everyone laughs.

Gabi: Lwazi, you moved straight into a serious relationship after your divorce, right?

Nolwazi: Dean didn't give me much of a choice.

Dean: Fuck that... You were swooning over me.

Nolwazi: Excuse me? You were the one shaking when you had to shoot your shot. Don't you dare come for me.

Me: He was shaking??

I begin laughing, as I imagine Dean all nervous while shellaring Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: He took me to a restaurant and started speaking in riddles. It was quite entertaining.

Dean: Mxm.

We all laugh as Nolwazi tells us how Dean approached her.

Liwa: But, he didn't hesitate to fuck.

Nolwazi: Liwa!

Dean chuckles.

Dean: She was going through a rather dry season- quivering and shit.

We continue laughing.

Nolwazi looks at him and smiles.

Nolwazi: Remember how you drove four hours to Dundee, just to bring me food, because I refused to eat my in-laws' food? Dean nods and they smile mischievously. I assume there's some dirty thoughts involved.

It's so good to see them like this. I honestly had my doubts at first, but they are really trying to make it work.

Zimkitha: You have come so far... I'm proud of you.

Nolwazi plants a kiss on Dean's cheek. We all say, "Awww!"

We begin eating and the conversation flows, as usual.

It's now around 2pm, and this brunch has turned into a mini-party. I don't know when or how we got to this point.

Liwa is the DJ and I'm shocked that he's playing such good music.

Gabi is obvs my dancing spirit animal. Nolwazi is also doing the things. Lol, of course the guys and Nomvuyo) are uptight. Come to think of it, I've never been "clubbing" with Derek. Ever since I met him, I gained weight nje because all we do is go to these fancy restaurants. Lol, these men are actually so boring and liveless. I think they're judging us as we dance.

DJ Liwa decides to play Beyonce's Party, one of my all-time favs.

I walk to Derek and put out my hand.

Derek: What?

Me: Let's dance.

He looks at me like I'm crazy.

I glance at Dean and he takes out his phone and shakes his head.

Dean: Angijoli nawe.

Me: Wow!

I look at Derek.

Me: I'm carrying a baby, and I'm still able to dance. What's stopping you?

Derek: Baby, I don't dance. Have you ever seen me dance? Why would I dance?

Dean: I don't even get the logic behind dancing, honestly.

Me: Are you serious??

Dean: You sway from left to right, and then what?

I look at both of them in shock. Nolwazi grabs my arm and laughs.

Nolwazi: Don't bother. They're too stiff!

Me: I'm so shocked!

She laughs and we go back to dancing.

See, Beyonce's Party is the perfect song for me right now- chilled and groovy- not too heavy.

Also, I didn't realise how many things I've stopped doing since I met Derek. Even though I'm not a fan of clubs and crowded parties, I used to love those once in a

while, random nights out- my friends and I would dance our butts off... Now, it's all a myth.

After a few songs, I'm tired.

In fact, we're all tired.

The DJ stops the party and we make our way back to the table.

Nomvuyo gets close to me ear.

Nomvuyo: When I went to the bathroom, I saw Malusi and Nandi kissing in one of the rooms.

Me: What? Really?

She nods.

Me: Clearly the divorce didn't mean anything.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

I look over at Malusi and Nandi, and indeed, they do look lovey dovey.

When Liwa gets to the table, we give him a round of applause and he smiles brightly.

Me: You were amazing!

Liwa: Jack of all trades, people!

Nomvuyo smiles at me.

Nomvuyo: You're so forward... Sit down.

Derek clears his throat and we all look at him. He stands

Derek: I'd like to thank you all for coming. We'll take you on a tour of our home shortly.

They all clap playfully and Derek laughs lightly.

Derek: I'd also like to thank my baby, Ziyanda, for turning it into a warm space. He smiles at me.

Derek: I love you, baby.

Me: Love you too, Star.

Derek: Now that we're home owners, and things have settled, I'd like to give you a well-deserved gift.

I look at him in confusion.

Derek: It's a little token of my love and appreciate.

He takes it out.

I smile and immediately tear up.

I can hear everyone exclaiming excitedly.

Derek: We've already discussed this, but there was no follow-up on my part.

He smiles warmly as he opens the small-squared velvet box.

He kneels and stares at me lovingly.

I was not ready for any of this. My heart is beating fast. My smile is from ear to ear.

Derek: I can't imagine not having you in my life. We've built something solid here, and I'm grateful as fuck...

He smiles.

Derek: Baby, will you please spend the rest of your life with me, and teach me how to dance?

I squeal as I look at the diamond ring.

Me: Of course!

I can't even keep track of what happens next, because there's a lot of screaming and clapping.

INSERT 173

Derek: Baby.

I open my eyes and blink a few times.

Derek: Come to bed.

I groan as I sit up.

Me: What's the time?

Derek: 10pm.

Me: I'm hungry.

Derek: It's late.

Me: Star, I'm really hungry.

Derek: I'll get you grapes.

Me: Hai, I want a sandwich.

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: Don't come for me.

Derek: You can't let your cravings control you, baby.

Me: Awume, let's go make this sandwich.
I stand and then pull him.

Me: Stop being a cock-blocker.

We get to the kitchen and I take out the bread.

Me: Let's make a quick and simple one: egg and bacon.

Derek: I'm going to tell Dr. Modisa.

Me: Snitches get stitches. He chuckles as he takes out the ingredients and I switch on the stove for him.

Me: I miss my peaceful sleep yazi.

Derek: Two more months.

Me: The movements are annoying.

Derek: Maybe your next pregnancy will be better.

Me: Next what?

He smiles slyly.

Me: Uyanya.

Derek: I want at least 4 kids.

Me: U-right phela. You'll carry them yourself.

He laughs.

Me: You think this is an easy job? I'm dying here!

I watch as he makes my sandwich. Once he's done, he hands me the plate.

Me: Thank you, lover.

He grabs another high stool and sits next to me.

Just as I take my first bite, my eyes land on my ring and I squeal.

Me: I forgot!

Derek: What?

Me: I'm engaged, booboo!

He smiles as I wave my left hand.

Me: If you like it then you should have put a ring on it...

He laughs as I continue singing.

Derek: You're not a single lady.

Me: Yaas!

He watches as I eat my sandwich. Me:
Want a bite?

He nods and I shake my head.

Me: Then, make your own sweetie.

Derek: You're such a meanie.

I give him the other half and we eat.

Me: I'm a bit hyper.

Derek: I can see.

Me: Let's have a party of two!

He looks at me in defeat. He looks tired,
but who's business is it? I can't be up by
myself.

Once we're done, I help him clean up and
then we go to the lounge where I put on
one of my playlists.

Me: In the mood to dance!

I turn to look at him, and he yawns.

Me: Don't be a party-pooper.

I play Destiny's Child's (Bey's :p) No No
No.

He watches as I attempt Beyoncé's choreography. I refuse to allow this baby to prevent me from flourishing right now.

Derek: If this is not abuse...

Me: Don't come for me.

After a few Beyoncé songs, I'm huffing and puffing.

Derek: Are you done?

Me: Didn't you say you want dance lessons?

Derek: I'm not dancing to Beyoncé, Ziyanda.

Me: Come on!

Derek: Forget it.

Me: What do you want to dance to?

Derek: The sound of your snoring.

My jaw drops and he laughs.

I throw a cushion at him and he laughs.

Derek: I'm sleepy, baby.

Me: Then go sleep.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: You know I can't sleep without my melons.

Me: Mxm.

I switch off the TV and he smiles.

He switches off the lights and we make our way to the bedroom.

As soon as his head is on my right boob, he's out.

I have no choice but to reflect on the amazing day that I had.

Another month has passed...

I feel like if someone were to push me, I'd fall and never be able to get up. I am literally counting down the days till my due date. I can't take it anymore, I'm exhausted all the time.

Derek is finally done with the nursery and I must admit that I love it. I'm glad he didn't go the obvious route and choose blue as a theme, instead he chose grey with elements of green, yellow and white-very cute and different.

Me: I had no idea that you were an interior designer.

Derek: Well... There's a lot you don't know about me.

Me: Surely that's a bad thing, seeing as we're engaged?

He places his arm on my shoulders and we walk out of the nursery.

Derek: We have the rest of our lives to learn more about each other... That's a lot of time.

Me: Ohho.

When we get downstairs, we find Dean there.

Me: Look what the wind blew in!

Dean: Nolwazi and I are hosting Christmas this year.

Derek: We can't come.

Dean: Uyanya.

Me: Dean, I might be pushing this baby out.

Dean: Shit, is that your due date?

Me: Possibly.

Dean: So, we're going to spend Christmas in a hospital?

I laugh.

Me: We'll see.

Dean shakes his head lightly.

Dean: Nothing surprises me anymore in this group.

Derek: Your mom will be here soon, Zi.

Dean: Did you remind her to bring my chicken?

Me: Yes, how could I possibly forget, with you breathing down my neck every second?

Dean: I'll fetch it later. I have errands to run.

Me: Bye!

My mom is obsessed with the house. Lol, actually, obsessed is an understatement.

Derek: I'm glad you love it. Would you be willing to move in with us once my son is born?

He has been annoying me with this. He wants my mom to move in with us, because he doesn't want strangers to take care of the baby.

Mom: You want me to move in?

Derek: Not permanently. We'll need you for the first few weeks.

My mom laughs and looks at me questioningly.

Mom: Are you sure?

Me: I'm not sure about moving in, but we'll definitely need you.

Mom: Well, it's not like I have experience with children. I only raised one.

Derek: I trust you.

My mom sighs.

Mom: Alright then.

He smiles ever so brightly.

Mom: So, everything is ready for our baby?

Derek: Yes, 100%.

Mom: Unamanga. What about names? Have you decided on any?

Lord. That has honestly been the least of my worries. It completely slipped my mind.

Me: I forgot.

Derek: Wow, I also forgot.

My mom shakes her head.

Mom: Well, your dad and I came up with a few names.

Derek: Really?

She nods.

Mom: What would you two like to name him?

Derek: Hmm...

I take out my phone.

Mom: And then?

Me: I'm going to look for names.

Mom: Haibo, Ziyanda, really??

Me: What? I don't want my child to have a basic name. I'm sure the internet has some nice ones.

Derek chuckles.

Mom: This internet has ruined your generation!

Me: How many names do you want him to have?

I look at Derek. Derek: I don't know.

Mom: Will you give him an English name?

Me: Eueew, no! I won't oppress my baby!

Derek: Wow!

My mom laughs.

Me: Ayikabi, Derek. Apartheid is over, our people can flourish now.

Mom: I agree.

Me: One name I won't compromise on is Nkanyezi. We are definitely naming him Nkanyezi.

Derek tries to hide it, but struggles- he's blushing profusely.

Mom: It's a beautiful name.

Me: Love it. He'll be Star junior.

Derek smiles.

I look at my mom.

Me: Nkanyezi will be his first name.

I look at Derek.

Me: Are you happy with that?

Derek: I'm flattered.

He stifles a smile.

Me: Mom, what are your options?

Mom: First, we have Mphikeleli. He who perseveres.

I begin laughing and they stare at me.

Me: Mphikeleli sounds like a 50-year-old man's name!

Mom: Ziyanda!

Derek tries by all means to smother a laugh. He knows I'm right.

Me: Ngathi my child will pop out with a beard and everything! Uh-uh mama.

Mom: You are unbelievable!

Me: Hai, I love you, but that name is the worst.

Mom: Wow.

She looks at me, clearly offended.

I don't even feel bad. I'm not about to give my baby a shady name. He'll have this name forever; it will be part of his identity. Mphikeleli? Nope.

Derek: Zi, stop being rude.

Me: Okay, I'm sorry.

I keep quiet and look at my mom.

Mom: Wow, I don't even want to do this anymore. You're so rude.

Me: Askies, sthandwa.

Mom: Mxm.

She looks at Derek.

Mom: Can I have some Coke?

Derek: Sure.

He stands and walks away.

Me: Love you.

Mom: Hai suka.

She takes the remote and switches on the TV.

Mom: I can't believe you sometimes...

I laugh quietly.

INSERT 174

It's the 16th of December and I am beyond excited that Niki is coming over. We've been seeing each other a lot lately, like the good old days. I've been in a very good space, despite my physical barriers. I guess that's what happens when you stop trying to solve people's problems, huh?

Derek has also just been doing the most. When I say this man is heaven sent, I be telling the whole truth. He's been catering to my every need in every single way-except sexually. We've stopped having sex. I feel gross and truck-like. There's no way I'm engaging in coitus.

Anyway, just as I walk out of the bathroom, the door opens and Niki walks in.

Niki: Heyiii.

Me: Heyiii.

She throws herself on the bed and I dry myself.

Niki: You're ready to pop.

Me: Tell me something I don't know, fool.

She laughs.

Niki: Are you nervous?

Me: Nervous?

Niki: Wow, sisi, you're going to spread and bust it wide open!

Me: Niki, euww!

Niki: Apparently, when the baby is too big, they cut up the vagina!

Me: I don't need your negativity right now!

She sighs dramatically.

Me: Come put this lotion on me and stop talking nonsense.

I pass the lotion to her and she catches it.

Niki: We're way too close for my liking.

Me: Girl, Star and I may as well make you our sister wife.

We laugh.

Me: How's your future mother-in-law, anyway?

Niki: She's out of the hospital and now she wants to stay with Kwanele.

Me: Hai hai, ngoba?

Niki: She says Kwani's the only one who can take care of her.

Me: Wow, I hope you won't allow that shit!

Niki: Listen, I've made myself clear! That bitter old divorcee will not ruin my life!

Me: Maybe she's lonely.

Niki: Whose business is it? I don't blame Kwanele's father for leaving her ass!

I sigh.

Me: Hopefully, she won't come for you.
From what I've gathered, she doesn't mind being dirty.

Niki: Mxm, I'm ready for anything she throws my way.

Me: As long as you're aware of her tactics.
Derek walks in and stares at us.

Derek: Wow.

Niki: Hey, boo!

Derek: Don't get too comfortable there with touching my fiancé.

Niki: Yoooh ngaze ngavelelwa. If it's not this balloon of yours flashing her ring at me, it's you throwing shots at me!

Me: Niki!

She laughs.

Derek: Baby, Vuvu wants you to come over for lunch.

Me: I can't, I'm with Niki.

Derek: Then, she'll join you.

I look at Niki and she shrugs.

Niki: I don't mind hanging out with Beauty. She's okay.

I chuckle.

Me: Alright, then.

Niki: I'll drive us.

Derek: Uhh, no.

Niki rolls her eyes.

Me: Hai, sisi. You drive like a maniac; I decline your services.

Niki: Mxm.

Derek: I'll drop you off.

Me: Okay.

He gives Niki a stern look.

Derek: You can stop touching her boobs now.

Niki: Fuseeg!

She squeezes them and I smack her hand.

Me: That hurts wena.

Derek walks out and I get dressed.

We're now in the car driving to

Nomvuyo's house.

Niki: Friend, who would have thought we'd end up here? Look at us living our best lives.

Me: I don't feel like I'm living my best life right now.

She laughs.

Me: I've been craving a very potent mojito.

Derek: A few more weeks, baby.

Me: Whatever.

Derek: I also miss my whiskey. You seem to forget that I'm just as thirsty.

Me: Oh please, I know you've been drinking on the DL.

Derek: Me?? Never!

Me: Ohho.

We finally get to Nomvuyo's house and Derek helps me get out of the car.

Derek: I like your dress.

Me: You do?

He nods and looks at me all sappy and mushy.

Me: Staap!

He kisses my forehead.

Me: Walk me in.

Derek: Anything for y-

Niki: Excuse me, I'm hungry! Let's go!

She struts her stuff and we follow her.

Niki: A bitch is starving.

Me: You don't even know this house. Sit down and be humble.

Derek opens the door for us and we walk in.

Me: Vuvuuu!

Nomvuyo: In the kitchen!

Niki rolls her eyes.

Niki: Gosh.

Derek: Niki, is that jealousy I smell?

Niki: Derek, fuck off.

Derek laughs and I join him. I know she's low-key jealous of my friendship with Vuvu, but she always checks herself because she knows there's no reason to be.

We get to the kitchen and sure enough, Nomvuyo is there, looking gorgeous as usual, in her simple dress.

Me: Vuvu, I hate how beautiful you are.

Nomvuyo: Me too. It gets overwhelming sometimes.

Me: Bitch!

She laughs and we share a side hug, because I don't do normal hugs anymore.

Nomvuyo: Look at you in your floral dress! So adorable!

Me: Uhm, I wasn't really going for adorable.

She laughs and then looks at Niki.

Nomvuyo: Hi, Nikiwe.

Niki: Hey, Vuvu.

They share a hug.

Nomvuyo: We're going to eat outside, it's too hot in here.

We walk outside and I'm shocked to find Nolwazi, Nandi and Gabi out there.

I stand there, trying to process everything.

They all yell, "Surprise!"

Me: What's happening?

Nomvuyo: Your baby shower, silly!

I chuckle as I look around at the lovely décor.

Me: This is for me?

Gabi: Yes!

I continue chuckling.

Derek kisses my cheek.

Derek: See you later.

Me: Are you leaving?

Derek: Apparently I'm not allowed to be here.

I sigh and he kisses me again.

Derek: Have fun, okay?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

Derek: Bye, ladies.

They all say bye to him and he jogs away.

Me: This is sweet.

Nomvuyo: You're not angry?

Me: No.

They all laugh and I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Niki came up with the idea. We had already decided that we wouldn't have a baby shower, we'd just give you your gifts, but she insisted on it.

I look at Niki and smile.

Me: Thank you. This is really sweet.

Nomvuyo: This baby is already changing you, huh?

Me: Argh, whatever.

I walk to Nolwazi and we share a hug, I then move to Nandi and she rubs my belly.

Nandi: You're making me want another baby.

Nomvuyo: With Malusi?

Nandi: Hell no.

Nomvuyo: Hmm.

Me: Hey, Gabs.

Gabi: Hey, boo.

She gives me a peck on the cheek and then rubs my belly,

Gabi: Ready to pop?

Me: You have no idea.

Gabi: I am really enjoying this pregnancy, and funny enough, I've had so many men ask me out!

We all laugh.

Gabi: I feel sexier.

Me: Hai, I'm the complete opposite. We all sit.

Gabi: So, we're going to play games throughout the afternoon. The first one will get us all warmed up and in the mood.

Niki: We know how corny you can be, so this baby shower is going to be old school- chilled and fun.

Me: Yay!

I'm beyond excited.

Gabi: The name of the first game is Play-Doh Babies.

She gives each of us gift bags.

Gabi: There's different coloured play-doh in there. The objective of the game is to create the cutest baby you can with the doh. We have pencils, beads and some toys, just to help you get creative with your babies.

Nolwazi: I used to love play-doh when I was young!

Nandi: It reminds me of Lele. She's obsessed with it.

Me: Then, clearly you two have an advantage here.

Gabi: The one with the cutest baby will win something! Are we ready?

We all nod.

Gabi: There goes my manicure...

Nomvuyo: I don't know how you cope with those long nails. I always tell Ziyanda to get rid of them.

Nolwazi: How do you even function with them?

Gabi: You get used to them.

Me: It's not that bad.

Niki: You have to get rid of them, now that you'll be changing diapers.

I sigh heavily.

Niki: Gelish is good for your nails, boo, uzoba strong. We all focus on our play-doh.

Nandi: Are you excited, Zi?

Me: I don't know. Somehow, physically, I'm over it, but emotionally and mentally, I'm at peace. It's so strange.

Nandi: That's good.

Niki: Derek contributes to that peace, neh?

Me: Most definitely. He's awesome.

Niki: All of you have kids?

Nolwazi: Except Gabi- well, she's expecting her first child.

Nomvuyo: Would you have a child with Kwanele right now?

I have to stop myself from choking. Why is Nomvuyo this person? Yeses!

Niki: No, I'm not going to have children anytime soon.

Nomvuyo: Really?

Niki: I'll live vicariously through Zizi.

Gabi: Konje you're dating Lwazi's ex!

Yoh, nkos' yami.

Niki: Yep. Not awkward at all.

Nolwazi laughs sweetly.

Nolwazi: I don't feel awkward. Please don't feel awkward around me?

Niki smiles and nods.

Lwazi is such a sweetheart.

Nolwazi: How is he?

Niki: He's good...

Nolwazi nods.

Nolwazi: That's good.

Nomvuyo: I hope you're dealing with that psycho mother of his.

Niki chuckles.

Niki: That one is a problem.

Nolwazi: Is she still crazy?

Niki: Mxm, she is. I thought being in hospital would change her, but clearly not.

Me: Okaaay, can we not discuss Niki's relationship? It may not be awkward for you, but it sure is for me!

They all laugh.

Gabi: Okay, 5 minutes left!

We all focus on our play-doh and try to finish up.

INSERT 175 (Part 1)

Gabi: Ladies, we're going to play the next game now! This is a nursery rhymes quiz.

Nolwazi: Nursery Rhymes, as in Twinkle Twinkle Little Star?

Gabi giggles and nods.

Gabi: I have made copies of a few nursery rhymes, but there are missing parts. Each of you will get a copy and you have to fill in the missing parts.

Niki: I grew up in the township. We didn't sing these English songs!

We all laugh and I nod.

Me: We really didn't!

Niki: Well, at least you teach kids. I'm sure you've heard these songs!

I continue laughing as Gabi hands out the papers.

Gabi: Alright, the first one to finish is the winner. Go! We all focus on our papers. I'm not that shocked that I know all of them, I've heard them in the Grade R classes.

I quickly fill in the missing parts and squeal.

Me: Done!

Nomvuyo: Argh, what's the last one?

Me: Vuvu, really? Three Blind Mice.

She laughs and shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: I didn't sing these songs to Nyami. She loved jazz, for some odd reason.

Nolwazi: The twins love classical music... Especially Khule.

Me: I'm sure uSimo prefers Beyonce.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Don't come for my baby.

For the next few minutes, we discuss the different nursery rhymes, and I am declared the winner.

Gabi: Alright, it's time for gifts!

Me: Can we eat first? I'm starving!

Niki: Me too.

Gabi looks at Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Okay, I'll get the food.

Niki: Need help?

Nomvuyo: Yep.

Nomvuyo, Niki and Gabi stand and make their way inside the house. Nolwazi looks at me and smiles.

Nolwazi: This pregnancy hasn't been easy, but you seem softer.

I sigh.

Me: The past two months have been a dream,, thanks to Derek.

Nolwazi: These men really go the extra mile.

Me: Are you and Dean okay? I miss his arrogant ass.

Nolwazi: You two are crazy. It hasn't even been a week since you last saw each other, but you're being dramatic. I chuckle.

Nolwazi: To answer your question, Dean and I are in a good space. I prayed very hard for God to open up my heart and allow me to forgive him.

Me: Wow, you really are a great person. I would have tossed his ass.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

She laughs lightly.

Nolwazi: At the end of the day, he was also a victim. There was no way I was going to let him take the blame for everything. Yes, he played a role in the

mess, but he wasn't responsible for everything.

Me: How are the therapy sessions going? Does he open up?

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: Yes, he does, surprisingly. I've learnt so much about him in the past month, and it's all thanks to these sessions.

I smile.

Me: See? There's nothing wrong with having an extra pair of ears.

Nolwazi: I must admit that I was sceptical in the beginning. It's been an interesting experience, a good one. Thank you for basically forcing us to do it.

Me: I've come to realise that talking helps. Through talking, you figure out a lot shit.

Nolwazi: True. You're such a mature young lady, Zi.

Me: Hmm, not everyone would agree with that.

We both laugh. The ladies come back with the food and we immediately dish up for ourselves.

Overall, it was a lovely baby shower.

My circle may be small, but it is definitely filled with powerhouses- women who don't back down when they're faced with challenges. Women who are thriving in all aspects of their lives... This is some deep, inspirational shit, I tell you.

It's now the 24th of December.

Derek has been on me like an STD. I have never seen him this panicky. Every move I make, he's right there, watching and lurking.

Nomvuyo and my mother have also been doing the most. My mom is officially

staying with us and Nomvuyo is also here most of the time.

We're now on our way to the hospital. Is it normal for me to feel this calm? I genuinely don't feel like a person who's about to give birth. Yes, my lower belly is heavy and uncomfortable, but I'm not in pain or anything.

We finally get there.

After a while, Dr Modisa confirms that I'm not ready to give birth.

Derek: What? What do you mean?

Dr: You need to remember that a due date is not concrete, it's an estimation.

Derek groans.

Dr: The next week is going to be her 36th week. Her contractions should intensify then. Right now, the baby is not positioned perfectly.

Derek: Okay.

Mom: We just want him to come out already.

Dr Modisa smiles.

Dr: I understand, even I can't wait to meet little Nkanyezi.

Me: Alright then. See you soon.

Dr: See you soon.

We share a hug and then she walks out. I get up and my mom fixes my top.

Mom: One more week.

Me: Thanks for packing the bag, Vuvz.

Nomvuyo: You're welcome, love.

Me: Can we get something to eat? I'm hungry.

I look at Derek and he nods. I can tell that he's disappointed about having to wait another week.

Uzoba strength.

*** It's been a couple of days since we saw Dr Modisa. Melinda has also been coming to see me, because my biggest concern

right now is Postpartum Depression. We've been openly discussing my anxiety and how I can weather the storm. I don't want to suffer after I give birth, so I'm trying by all means to focus on the positive every single day. I am blessed with an amazing family: my mom and dad are supportive as hell, and they always make it clear that they will never turn their backs on me- that unconditional love makes me feel secure. I am blessed with amazing friends: my circle has my back, these people never fail to stop their agendas just to cater to me. Last but not least, Sexy Beast is the greatest. This man has come into my life and changed my whole outlook on life and love. He loves me deeply, and I don't even doubt it. This man has managed to unpeel every layer of me, and loves me regardless of the mess he has discovered about me along the

way. There is no way I'm going to allow any negativity to fill and cripple me- I refuse. I will fight for my happiness, especially now that I'm about to have another human being who'll basically depend on me with their life.

Anyway, it's now the 30th of December, and Derek has been too excited for my liking.

He is convinced that his son will be born on the 1st of January, his birthday.

Derek: Isn't there a way we can get him ready? He needs to be born on the 1st.

I laugh.

Me: I'm a vegetable right now. I want him to come out more than you.

He smiles mischievously.

Derek: I miss being inside you.

Me: Derek! He shrugs.

Just then, his phone rings and he frowns.

Derek: It's Busi.

Me: What?

He nods as he answers it.

Derek: Busi... You're outside?... Why?...

He listens for a while and then ends the call. I watch as he stands and walks away. I don't even bother asking. I try not to be too vocal about Busi, especially when Lelo is around. The last thing I want is to be that person who paints a bad picture of a child's mother, then ruin their relationship. I do think Busi's parenting is questionable, but I keep that shit to myself.

A few minutes later, Derek walks in, Busi follows him.

Derek: Have a sit.

He sits next to me and she sits on the other couch.

Derek: What brings you here?

Busi glances at me.

Me: Hello, Busi.

Busi: Hi.

Me: Are you well?

She nods and looks at my belly.

I focus on the TV.

Derek takes the remote and lowers the volume. Angazi why ahlupha mina when they can easily go to another room.

Derek: Busisiwe.

Busi: I am moving permanently to PE.

Derek: Okay.

Busi: I'm taking Lelo with me.

Derek: Ukhuluma amasimba.

Yoh.

Busi: Derek!

Derek: What?

Busi: I have been offered a promotion.

Derek: Good for you.

Busi: I am taking Lelo with me.

Derek: Over my dead body.

Busi: Why??

Derek: You have just introduced him to me, now you want to take him away? Are you crazy?

She doesn't say anything.

Derek: You don't have the right to do as you please. I refuse to let you separate me from my son. You can do whatever you want with your life, but I won't allow you to negatively affect my relationship with my son. Forget it.

She looks at him intently.

Busi: You have another child coming. Why are you so bothered?

Derek: The fact that you can even ask me such bullshit shows me how immature you are. This baby will not erase Lelo. She rolls her teary eyes.

Derek: Lelo will stay with your mother, here in Johannesburg. You will not take away my son from me.

Busi: I'll think about it.

Derek: Ungazobheda wena, there's nothing to think about. If you want us to take this to court, then trust me, we will. And, we both know who's more credible here.

Busi: You wouldn't!

Derek: Test me, you'll see.

She stands and looks at him angrily.

Busi: I hate you!

Derek: Hmkay.

Whenever Derek becomes this cold, all I see is Dean and Liwa. They have this cold side that scares the shit out of me.

Busi storms out and then Derek follows her.

He comes back after a few minutes and sits next to me again.

Me: Uhmm, I'm getting Ntsiki vibes right now.

Derek: Me too. She's too angry.

I sigh.

Me: If that bitch touches me, I'll kill her!

Derek: Me too.

Me: At least our security is good.

He nods.

Derek: We have to be vigilant. I doubt she'll try anything though, she's not that crazy.

Me: Hmm, I'm sure that's what Dean said about Ntsiki at first.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'll keep an eye on her.

Me: You better.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Do you think I overreacted?

Me: I think your delivery was too cold.

You know she has the potential to be crazy, so address her like that?

Derek: I couldn't control myself.

Me: Uh-uh, you always tell me to assess situations before I react. Practise what you preach.

He sighs and rubs his chin.

Me: You mustn't fuel her anger more, even though she has no right to be acting all innocent.

Derek: Okay.

Me: You're putting us in danger.

Derek: I hear you.

Me: Good.

He smiles and leans closer to me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too. Now, please dish up for me.

He chuckles and stands.

Derek: Yes, ma'am!

I'm in bed, sleeping ever so peacefully, when I'm awakened by Derek. He shakes me lightly, but I refuse to wake up.

Derek: Ziyanda!

I open my eyes and look at him. Why did he switch on the lights?

Me: What?? Stop annoying me!

Derek: Ziyanda, I think your water broke!

Me: Huh?

Derek: Look!

He removes the cover and as soon as I shift, the wetness hits me. I am really wet. How did I not feel any of this? What's going on??

I look at him in shock and he also stares at me in shock.

Me: My water broke?

Derek: I'm assuming that's the case!

We continue staring at each other in shock.

Derek: Are you in pain?

Me: Not really.

He walks to my side and helps me get up.

We look down at the puddle that has filled almost half of the bed.

Derek: Shit.

Me: Should we go to the hospital?

Suddenly, I'm numb. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel.

Derek: Let me call your mom.

Naye he seems to be paralysed

I watch as he walks away. When he gets to the door, he stops, and turns.

Derek: Should I leave you here? Let's go together.

Me: You want me to come with you to my mother's room?

Derek: I don't want to leave you here by yourself.

I sigh as I start walking and follow him. We get to my mom's room and he knocks.

Mom: Come in!

Why is she still up? It's literally 12am.

We walk in and find her in bed, reading the Bible.

Mom: Hello, my babies. Yazi I struggle to sleep without my husband. I have no choice but to read and reflect.

Derek: Uhm, ma- She looks at us sweetly. She has no clue.

Derek: Ziyanda's water just broke.
Her eyes widen and she quickly gets out of bed.

Mom: What??

She walks to me and immediately starts touching me.

Mom: Are you in pain??

I shake my head.

Mom: Alright, we should go to the hospital. Derek, call Dr Modisa.

Derek: Okay.

Mom: I'll get everything, then we can go.

Derek rushes out.

Mom: Baby, let's pray first.

She closes the door and takes my hands.

We bow our heads and start praying.

Overall, we thanked God for keeping me safe throughout the 9 months. In addition, we asked him to guide and protect me as I'm about to embark on this new journey.

As soon as we're done praying, everything sinks in.

I am going to be a mother.

I am about to give birth.

I immediately start sobbing. I don't know why, or how I feel, I just sob.

My mom makes me sit down and comforts me.

Mom: Calm down.

Me: I'm fine.

She gives me some water.

Derek walks in and rushes to me in panic.

Mom: It's sinking in... Derek kisses my forehead.

Derek: Let's go.

He helps me stand and then we all walk out.

Mom: Did you call Nomvuyo?

Derek: Yes.

Mom: Dean is going to fetch Ziyanda's father.

Derek: Okay.

I zone both of them out. As we get in the car, I start feeling very uncomfortable. I start feeling the way I usually feel when my period pains are about to start... Like my vagina is being pulled and pressed at the same time.

Me: I think I can feel the contractions.

Mom: Oh, baby... This will not be easy.

Please gather up all your strength, because you're about to go through something else...

I don't know if she thought she was helping ngoba now I'm starting to freak out a bit.

I want Derek to hold me, but he's too focused on the road. I settle for my mom, and take her hand.

INSERT 175 (Part 2)- Unedited

By the time we get to the hospital, my contractions have intensified a bit, not too much. Now, I feel like I'm experiencing minor period pains. It's nothing extreme. We get to my room and Derek helps me take off my clothes.

Nurse: Dr Modisa is on her way.

Derek: Can you please check if everything is fine.

The nurse smiles.

Nurse: I'm about to do that, sir.

She looks at me.

Nurse: You're in the first stage of labour. Contractions will make your cervix gradually open up, and the term for this process is dilation. This is usually the longest stage of labour.

Just then, the door opens and Dr Modisa walks in.

Dr: Hello, there!

We all greet her back. I wonder who her husband is. Imagine being married to a doctor? These people's work hours are too crazy for my liking.

Dr: I see Nkanyezi will be born the same day as his dad.

Me: Uhm, it's only 1am right now. Derek's birthday is tomorrow. What are you trying to say??

Haibo, phela it's the 31st!

Dr: Right now, your cervix is starting to soften so it can open. This is called the

early phase, and that's why your contractions are bit irregular.

Me: What?? How many phases are there??

Dr: We spoke about this, remember?

Derek: She zones out a lot.

She chuckles.

Dr: There are three stages. The first stage can be categorised as the Dilation and Effacement of the Cervix. Under this stage we have three phases: early phase, active phase, and transition phase.

Me: I'm still on the first phase?

She nods.

Me: So, I still have two other phases to get through before I even move on to the second stage of labour?

Dr: Yes, dear.

I groan.

Mom: So, she might give birth tomorrow.

Dr: Yes.

Me: Yoh.

Dr: You have to wait it out, there's no other way.

Me: Then how do you explain my water breaking so early?

Dr: If your water breaks, contractions usually follow within 12 to 24 hours. You have to remember that everyone is different.

I sigh heavily.

Dr: So, you can go back home. Your labour is not yet established. Your cervix needs to open up about 10cm for your baby to pass through. That's when you're fully dilated.

Mom: This is going to be a long journey.

Dr: Don't stress. The baby is perfectly fine. He just needs some time, so we have to wait it out. Go home, get some sleep, and make sure you eat, so that you will have the energy when it's time to push.

Me: I have to go back home?

Dr: You'll get bored here, time will move slower than usual.

Me: Okay. So, when should I come back?

Dr: When the contractions are regular and coming about 3 in every 10 minutes.

Me: Right now, I don't think I'm having contractions. I just feel like I'm experiencing minor period pains. The pain is just there.

Dr: Exactly, so your contractions are still irregular. Monitor them.

Me: Okay.

Dr: Take a warm bath as well, okay?

Me: Okay.

She smiles.

Dr: I can't wait! She gives me a hug and then walks out. The door opens again and in walks my dad, Dean and Nomvuyo.

Dad: Are you ready to give birth?

I shake my head.

Derek: We have to go back home.

Nomvuyo: She's still on the early phase.
I let Nomvuyo the Nurse, explain all of
this to my father.

Dean: Manje we woke up for nothing?
Everyone chuckles.

Mom: Asambeni.

They all walk out and close the door.

Derek helps me sit up and holds my
hands.

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

He looks so stressed, I just want to hug
him, but I can't.

Me: I'm good, Star, I promise. I'm not even
in that much pain. My usual period pains
are far worse than what I'm experiencing
right now.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Now, let's go home, take a bath, and
sleep.

Derek: Okay, baby.

He kisses me and then helps me stand.

*** We get to the house.

My dad goes straight to my mom's bedroom to sleep.

Me: Mama, get some rest. We'll be fine.

Mom: Are you sure?

Derek: Yes, I'll run a bath for her.

Mom: Okay, call me if you need anything.

Derek: Okay.

She goes to her bedroom, and then Derek and I go to our bedroom.

Derek: I'll run a bath for you.

Me: Okay.

I watch as he walks to the bathroom.

It's 2:30. I'm still okay. I haven't died.

After a while, Derek walks back and he helps me undress. He's already naked, and as much as I want coitus, it's honestly impossible.

Me: Do you think my vagina will recover?

He laughs.

Derek: What a ridiculous question. Of course it's going to recover.

We walk to the bathroom and he helps me step in the tub. He sits behind me and I relax on him.

Me: When is Busi leaving?

Derek: On the 3rd.

I sigh.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: Nothing.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I'm just wondering how you'll be able to juggle your two sons.

Derek: I think I'll cope.

Me: Hmkay.

We're silent for a long time. When I start dozing off, he kisses my ear and I groan.

Me: I've been craving coitus lately.

He laughs and rubs my belly.

Me: I'm serious.

Derek: I've been trying to initiate, but you always stop me.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Let's get you out of here, the water is cooling down.

Me Okay.

I move so that he can get out, and then he helps me stand. ***

I am awakened by Derek.

Derek: Here's your breakfast, baby.

Me: What time is it?

He chuckles.

Derek: 11am.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm over this!

He plants a kiss on my cheek and I begin eating.

The door opens and Dean walks in. I've missed him a lot.

Dean: Dlamz.

He comes to the bed and sits next to me.

Dean: When are you giving birth kanti?

This is too much.

Me: You have no idea how fed up I am. I can't function right now.

Dean: Our lives have stopped now, because we're waiting for this fucktard to come out!

Derek throws a pillow at him and it lands on his face.

Derek: Fuck you. I laugh.

Me: Why are you calling my child a fucktard? You are so mean.

We continue chatting while I eat. After a while, I take a shower and get ready for my daily walk with Derek around the block.

*** As we're walking back to the house, I stop and look at Derek. Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I think I'm in pain.

He looks at me worriedly.

Me: Not extreme.

He takes my hand and we walk back to the house.

Derek: I'm calling D-

Me: No, she said we must monitor my contractions. I'm still fine.

He tries to say something and I shake my head.

Me: I don't want to go to the hospital right now. I'd rather be in pain here.

Derek: How bad is it?

Me: The pain keeps going and coming back.

He makes me sit on the couch and places my feet on his lap.

Derek: Massage time.

Me: Yaas!

My dad walks to the lounge and sits.

Dad: This is a beautiful home you have here.

I'm still getting used to this whole living situation, especially because I'm not really contributing much. It's nice and all, but I can't help but wonder what will happen when Derek and I have a crazy fight and we decide to separate (extreme, I know). Do I pack my bag and hit the road?

Dad: I wouldn't survive though. It's too quiet in these suburbs of yours.

Me: It gets to me sometimes.

Derek: I wouldn't survive in the township.

Me: You're such a snob. Derek: I won't even deny that.

Me: Your hands are making me sleep.

Dad: Have you eaten?

Me: Yes.

Dad: Alright then, I'll be outside, enjoying the fresh air.

Me: Okay.

He stands and walks away.

Derek: I miss hugging you properly.

Me: Let's not even go there.

He looks at me and smiles.

Derek: Do you realise that we will never have this moment again, where it's just the two of us?

Me: I'm just glad we're having a boy. I don't know how I'd handle a girl.

He groans.

Derek: I really wanted a girl.

Me: Hai, get over it.

He continues massaging me, while we chat.

Eventually, I doze off.

I am awakened by a very sharp pain.

Heyi, I jump up and my eyes pop out.

The pain subsides. What the hell was that?

I sit there, trying to understand.

Before I know it, another one flashes back.

Whoaa!

I close my eyes. Surely I'm dreaming?

The second it comes back again, I let out a scream.

Me: Mama!

Nomvuyo emerges and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love. Derek left with your parents, I don't know where they went.

Me: Vuvu.

I moan loudly and cringe as the sharp pain hits again.

Nomvuyo raises an eyebrow and stares at me softly.

Nomvuyo: Are the contractions kicking in?

I nod and look at her worriedly.

She walks to me and rubs my belly.

After some time, she clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: It seems like they're still spaced farther than 5 minutes apart.

Me: What does that mean?

Nomvuyo: They're still mild.

Me: Yoh.

She stands.

Nomvuyo: I'll be back.

She walks to the kitchen, and comes back after a few minutes with a towel. She places it on my belly, and somehow the warmth makes me feel at ease.

Nomvuyo: The trick to surviving contractions is to stay calm and allow yourself to feel them. Don't fight them.

Me: Is it going to get worse?

Nomvuyo: Yes, but remember we're all different. You could be lucky and not experience anything worse.

She looks at me softly and smiles.

Nomvuyo: You can do this. Don't freak out, okay?

I nod and relax.

She is definitely right, these contractions are intense, but they're spaced out a bit, so I'm not in too much pain. It comes and goes.

Nomvuyo: I'll be right here, don't worry.

Me: Thanks, mother hen.

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

Me: I think it's coming...

Nomvuyo: Relax...

I shut my eyes and groan loudly as the pain rushes through my back.

I feel it for about 10 seconds.

I let out a loud sigh once it's done.

Nomvuyo: Let's take a walk around the yard.

Me: Okay.

She helps me stand and I wobble behind her.

Me: I miss Derek, where is he?

Nomvuyo: Hai suka, forget about him and love meee!

Me: Mxm.

We get outside and walk around the pool.

Me: How is Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: She's fine, why?

Me: She's been MIA, and that unlike her.

Nomvuyo: She's going through her own shit, I guess.

I look at her.

Me: Are you telling me the whole truth?

She laughs lightly.

Nomvuyo: Yep.

Me: Hmkay.

We continue walking.

Me: I don't want to walk anymore. I feel like it's getting worse.

We walk back inside the house and as I sit on the couch, I feel like someone is stabbing me with a blazing sword on my back.

I let out a scream and Nomvuyo rushes to me.

Me: Vuvu, no, what's happening??

Nomvuyo: Baby-

Me: This is painful!

Just then, Derek walks in, all smiles.

Derek: Hey, you're awa-

Heyi, another sharp pain hits me and I let out a scream.

Derek rushes to me.

Derek: What the fuck??

Nomvuyo: Her contractions are intensifying.

Derek: Why didn't you call me??

Nomvuyo: Stop being dramatic, she's fine.

Me: I'm not! I'm in pain!

Derek takes out his phone and dials Dr Modisa's number.

Nomvuyo: Dere-

Derek: Shut up.

Nomvuyo: I won't respond to that.

She pushes Derek aside and then places another warm towel on my belly. I sigh as I feel my muscles relax a bit.

Derek: Doc, we're about to leave the house now... Yes.... I don't care, we're coming...

He ends the call and then pushes Nomvuyo lightly.

Me: Derek, stop the drama.

Nomvuyo: Yazi!

I want to laugh at him, but I don't have the energy.

He helps me stand, and my parents walk in.

Mom: And then?

Derek: We're going to the hospital.

Mom: Yoh, okay. Vuvu, go get our things, baby.

Nomvuyo: Ma, Ziyanda is fine. Derek is being dramatic.

Mom: Yini kanti?

Nomvuyo: Her contractions are still inconsistent.

My mom looks at Derek.

Derek: I don't care. We're going to the hospital.

My mom sighs and nods.

Mom: Alright then, I don't want you to die of stress. Derek rushes up the stairs and we all look at each other.

My mom laughs.

Mom: He's really stressed.

Nomvuyo: More like annoying.

Dad: Mina you'll call me once the baby is ready to come out. I hate hospitals.

Mom: Okay.

He walks to me and smiles.

Dad: Stay strong, okay?

Me: Okay.

He gives me a kiss and then disappears. I check the time and it's almost 5pm.

Derek comes back and looks at me.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Ya.

As I take a step, another pain hits me and I moan. I stand there for about 30 seconds and then look at Nomvuyo.

Me: This shit is not nice.

Nomvuyo: You'll think twice before having unprotected sex.

Me: Argh.

Derek: Nomvuyo, just get our things, and stop talking shit.

Nomvuyo laughs as she walks away.

Derek and I walk to the car and he helps me get in. My mom follows after.

Me: Are you driving?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Nomvuyo can drive.

He stares at me for a few seconds and then nods.

Mom: How cute.

She gets in the front seat. Soon, Nomvuyo walks out with our things and Derek helps her put them in the boot.

Nomvuyo: Am I driving?

Mom: Yebo, Zizi wants to be close to Derek.

Nomvuyo: Hmkay.

They get in, and she starts the car.

I hold Derek's hand.

Derek Are the pains bad?

I nod.

Me: Very sharp.

I rest my head on his shoulder and try not to vomit. The motion sickness is also kicking in now...

0-100.

That's what happened to me.

Things went from 0-100.

I have never, in my 25 years of living, experienced this much pain.

It genuinely feels like my enemy is in my body, playing tug of war with my organs, trying to pull them out, but also trying to pull them back in.

Derek has been by my side, but I can tell that he wants to run and hide.

I've been screaming my lungs out.

I can feel the pains in my lower back, abdomen and thighs.

Dr: The cervix has dilated to 6 centimeters. I'm not even listening to her, I don't care.

These pains come back after 3 minutes or so.

Dr: I'd like you to take a shower. It will help immensely.

I groan as another pain approaches.

My mom has been sobbing for the past hour. I think she is traumatised as well.

Dr: Ziyanda.

I open my eyes and look at her.

Dr: Take a shower.

I nod and Derek helps me get up.

Nomvuyo: Derek, take a break, I'll keep an eye on her.

Derek ignores Nomvuyo and walks with me to the bathroom. He gets in first and then tells me to come in once the water temperature is fine. I get in and he looks at me.

Me: Derek, you can get out.

I know the germaphobe in him is freaking out right now, having to shower here without flip flops. At least Nomvuyo brought my flip flops.

He is being extra stubborn, so I decide to let him be.

We stand there for the longest time. The shower is doing its job, because the pain is no longer extreme.

Derek: If you ever doubt my love for you, think of this moment.

I laugh.

Me: You, barefoot in a bathroom that isn't yours?

He nods tightly and I wrap my arms around his neck.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I hate seeing you like this.

Me: I'll be fine.

He makes me turn around so that my back is on him. He wraps his arms around me and plants a kiss on my neck.

Derek: I don't like whatever this phase is.

Me: Me too. I hate being in pain.

Derek Maybe you shou-

Me: No, Derek. I don't want that epidural what what.

Derek: Ziyanda, you heard Dr Modisa, you still have more hours to get through.

Me: I'm not going to take any medication. What if something happens to my baby?

He sighs and shakes his head.

Me: If all these other women can do it, then nothing will stop me. I will be fine.

Derek: I hate seeing you like this.

Me: You know what Vuvu said?

I turn and look at him.

Me: She said now we'll think before we have unprotected sex.

He chuckles.

Me: Between you and me... you need to calm down a bit. I'm surprised Vuvu hasn't smacked your ass.

He rolls his eyes.

I plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: This shower is really helping.

Derek: I can see...

Me: It's a pity we can't do more than just hold each other like polar bears.

He laughs.

Derek: I'm going to leave now, before you tempt me. He takes my hand and helps me step out.

Once we're dry, he applies lotion on both our bodies and he gets dressed, while I put on my gown.

Before we walk out, he wraps his arms around me again.

Me: What's wrong?

I've never seen him this needy.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

We share a kiss and then walk out.

We find Dean, Liwa and Zimkitha in my room.

I'm actually shocked to see Zimkitha because she has been MIA.

Dean: Aww, look at my fattie...

Zimkitha: Langelihle!

Dean laughs as he attempts to hug me and I push him away.

Me: Your cologne is revolting. Get away from me.

Dean: Hai suka.

He hugs me anyway.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hey, Liwa.

Liwa: I'd hug you, but...

Me: Understood.

I look at Zimkitha.

Is it weird that I don't feel like seeing her?

Somehow, I'm not happy about her presence.

Zimkitha: Hey, sweetie.

Me: Hey, Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: Unjani, love?

Me: I'm okay, I guess...

Liwa: Haibo, why are you being so cold now?

Me: I'd like a moment with Derek, please.

They all look at me in shock.

Even Derek is a bit shocked.

Dean: I'm not going anywhere. Uyahjanya wena. We've been up for 2 days now, because of you. Angeke sizwe ngawe.

Zimkitha stands and smiles.

Zimkitha: I have to make a few calls.

She walks out.

Liwa looks at me intently before following his mother and closing the door.

I look at Derek.

Me: I don't want to be overwhelmed by too many people.

Dean sighs.

Dean: Why do you think no one is here?
We all know how you are about your
privacy.

I keep quiet.

Dean: Zimkitha just wanted to say hello.
You didn't have to do her like that.

I roll my eyes.

Me: How about you also follow her and
disa-fucking-pppear?

Dean: Ye wena Ziyanda.

Asingaphaphelani.

Derek helps me sit.

Me: What happened to Ntsiki? Did you
end up finding her?

I look at Dean intently and he looks at me
blankly.

Dean: Ya.

Me: And?

Dean: And, what?

Me: What happened?

He glances at Derek, who is looking at him seriously.

Dean: Uhm, she's going to stay away for good.

Me: And, you believe her?

He nods casually.

Dean: Can we stop talking about that woman? She won't bother us anymore.

I shrug and look at Derek.

Me: I need water.

Derek: Yes, ma'am.

Dean: You must be enjoying bossing everyone around.

Me: Mxm.

I sit comfortably and sigh heavily as the pain builds up again...

Dr: Ziyanda, I need you to breathe.

Me: No! I can't!

I am kneeling on the bed, crying my lungs out.

Dr: Ziyanda...

I cry hysterically as the pain shoots up again. It feels like a hot pot has been placed on my back. I can't function.

I hear them calling my name, but I can't hear what they're saying.

The contractions are not that spaced out now. It seems like I have less than a minute before the next one comes back.

I scream loudly. I think someone is trying to slice my back into pieces.

I feel like I want to poop, but I can't.

There it is again... I shut my eyes even more and my body literally shakes as the sharp pain rushes through me.

Me: I can't! I can't! Please make it stop!

I shake even more as the after effects of the rush kick in.

As soon as I recover, another one hits me and I let out a loud and long groan.

Derek: Please get the epidural.

Mom: No, she will pull through.

I try to speak, but it hits once again and I scream.

I'm burning. My whole body is on fire, especially my back.

Me: Make it stop! Please!

I take a deep breath and try to change position, but struggle. I want to stand.

Derek helps me stand and then I place my arms on the bed and bury my face on the bed.

It comes at me like lightning.

Me: Nooo!

I start crying hysterically again.

Derek: What can we do??

Dr: She has to go through this...

I can tell he is pained as well.

Me: My back! I try to touch it, but I can't.

Me: My back!

I grit my teeth as the pain crushes me again.

Suddenly, I feel someone's hands on my back.

Nomvuyo: I'm going to put some pressure here, okay?

I nod frantically.

She starts massaging me.

Nomvuyo: You are allowing these pains to contro-

Me: Fuck off!

I push her away.

Me: Derek!

I continue crying as Derek takes over the massaging.

Nomvuyo: Derek, you're the only one who can get through to her.

My whole body is shaking at this point, I can't stand anymore.

Derek helps me get back on the bed. I lie there, feeling so defeated.

I just want to die right now. I don't want this. I hate this. I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy.

Derek: Baby.

I can't even hear him properly.

I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: Baby, you have to take control.

Me: I can't.

Derek: You can, and you will.

I sob quietly, because all my energy is gone, and I can't scream anymore. I don't have it in me.

Derek: Listen to me...

He plants a kiss on my cheek and I continue sobbing.

Derek: I need you to take a deep breath. Focus on your breathing.

I shake my head.

Me: It's too much. Derek, it's too much!

He sighs and steps back.

Nomvuyo: No, don't...

Derek: I can't-

Nomvuyo: You need to be strong for her...

Derek: I can't...

I shut them out and drown in my pain. I drown and hope to die.

Seconds later, I feel Derek's lips on my ear again.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Is this Dean?

Am I hearing things?

Dean: Stop being a pussy and toughen the fuck up.

Nomvuyo: Dean!

What??

Really??

Am I hearing things??

Dean: Get the fuck up and deal with this shit.

I let out a scream and feel my whole body tremble even more.

Dean: Shit, what's happening?

Dr: These pain are serious.

I feel his lips on my ear again.

Dean: Dlamz... I know you can do this...

Come on... please?

I continue sobbing.

Dean: Come on...

He pulls me up and makes me lie on my back.

Dean: Derek, come wipe her face...

Nomvuyo, massage her feet or something...

Derek wipes my face and I finally open my eyes.

Nomvuyo is massaging my feet. My mom is sitting in the corner, clearly traumatised. Dr Modisa is looking at me sympathetically.

Dean: We are going to breathe, okay?
I look at him.

Dean: You have to stop crying.

Derek wipes my face gently and I look up at him. He looks like he has just seen a ghost.

Dean puts the straw in my mouth and I drink some water.

Dean: There you go...

He smiles warmly.

Nomvuyo: Baby, you have to focus on your breathing. I promise you the pains will be tolerable.

I nod and she smiles.

Nomvuyo: Finally.

She stops massaging my feet and then walks to the left side of my bed, where Dean is. She pushes him away and then takes my hand.

Nomvuyo: Derek, hold her hand.

Derek does as he is told.

Nomvuyo: Alright, let's take a very deep breath in.

I do as I am told, but as soon as the pain hits, I squirm.

Nomvuyo: Calm down and allow yourself to feel all of it. Understand the pain, don't try to push it away.

I try by all means to do what she says.

Nomvuyo: Good...

I don't know when my mom got next to Derek...

Nomvuyo: Well done...

Me: Happy Birthday, Star...

He plants a kiss on my lips.

We continue doing breathing exercises, till I feel a bit stable. The uncontrollable shaking has stopped.

Dr: It's time to monitor the heartbeat now...

*** At this point, Nomvuyo's techniques can't even help me.

I have gone crazy.

I genuinely want to poop. Dr Modisa keeps telling me it's because my body is working hard to reach complete dilation and effacement. I just want to push, now! My vagina is also pulsing, and Dr says it's because the baby's head is moving towards my vaginal opening.

I wanted to give up and get the epidural, but my mom insisted that I don't need it, yet she's the most traumatised out of everyone.

I have been told not to push, no matter how "pushy" I feel.

I'm finished.

There's nothing left in me. These pains have chewed me up and swallowed me.

Dr: Let me check...

I don't even have the energy to react to her finger invading my space.

Dr: Hmm... You are fully dilated!

I look at her, lifeless as fuck.

Dr: We are going to start pushing now.

Nomvuyo: Yay!

I look at Nomvuyo, who's recording all of this.

I don't even have the energy to blink.

I close my eyes.

I want to die. Surely death is better than this shit.

Dr: Ziyanda.

I think I'm dying.

I am lifeless.

Derek: Ziyanda!

I can't bring myself to move or open my eyes.

I feel someone placing the oxygen mask on my face.

Derek: Baby, breathe, please... Please breathe...

The desperation in his voice hits me hard.

I open my eyes and look at him. He's a bit blurry... everything is blurry.

Is he crying?

I want to reach out to him, but I can't.

Dean: Ziyanda, breathe...

I look at Dean... or is it Derek?

I close my eyes again... Blinking is taking up too much of my energy.

Derek: Baby, breathe... I don't want to lose you, please...

I gather up the strength to take a breath.

I touch my belly.

I don't know what happens, but something clicks.

I open my eyes and look at everyone.

They look worried.

I take more breaths. I can literally feel the oxygen circulating in my body, igniting something in me.

Dr: And, Ziyanda Dlamini has arrived! Are you ready?

I moan.

I want them to remove this mask, it's suffocating me.

Derek removes it and I exhale deeply.

Dr: Are you ready?

I nod.

Dr: Perfect.

My mom is holding my left hand, and

Derek is holding my right hand. Nomvuyo

is recording and Dean is standing behind Derek.

Me: Where's my dad??

Mom: He's been vomiting. There is no way he is going to survive this.

Dr: Are you happy with everyone who's here?

I look at everyone and nod.

Dr: I normally don't allow this, but I'll make an exception for you.

The nurse keeps telling me about what is about to happen, but I shut her out. I want them to tell me how to push.

Dr: Okay... We're ready...

She nods, and the nurse tells me to start pushing.

I push.

Dr: Okay, stop.

I stop.

Dr: You're pushing the wrong way... Do not restrict yourself. Push the same way you would if you were pooping.

She chuckles.

Dr: Don't be afraid. I've seen it all, okay?

Me: Okay.

They give me some oxygen before telling me to push once again.

Dr: Push harder...

They count me down and then I stop.

Dr: This push will allow the head to come out. We will push longer and harder, okay?

Me: Okay.

I take a very deep breath.

Dr: Alright, push...

I push as hard as I can...

I continue pushing and pushing...

I feel my vagina opening up.

Dr: Yes! The head is coming out... Push harder... harder... harder...

I can't describe the intensity of this moment.

Dr: Push... push... aaand the head is out!
I sigh heavily and Derek kisses my forehead.

Dr: The difficult part is over... Let's do this... Push slower now, okay?

Me: Okay.

Dr: Go.

I do as I'm told...

The rest of the body literally comes out smoothly.

Before I know it, there are loud cries.

I begin crying like I've never cried before.

I don't know how I feel- it's a wave of emotions.

My baby is out and alive!

Dr: Whooa!

I immediately stop crying and put up my head.

Dr: Oh my goodness!

Derek: What??

Nurse: Wow!

Me: What's wrong??

Dr: It turns out little Nkanyezi is a girl!

Me: WHAT?!

Dr: Congratulations!

Before I can even process anything, the baby is on my chest, and I am crying as loud as him/her.

Dr: Now, it's time to push out the placenta...

I continue crying.

INSERT 176

I have a child.

The child is here. The child is a girl...

The child has been crying nonstop and I am annoyed as hell.

Derek: Baby, you need to feed her.

I snap out of it and look at him. He smiles sweetly.

I take her from him, and as soon as she comes in contact with my nipple, she stops crying and sucks on.

Derek: She's obsessed with your breasts.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Derek: Baby, we've had her for two weeks now. When are you going to accept her?

Me: She's always crying! How am I supposed to see how cute she is when she is constantly crying her lungs out?

He laughs and I feel his lips on my ear.

Derek: I love you.

I grunt as he sits next to me and watches as I feed his child.

Me: I also can't get used to the fact that she's a girl. I wanted a boy.

Derek: Too bad...

He gives me a mischievous smile. He has always wanted a girl.

I sigh as I look at little Nkanyezi. She is slowly falling asleep, but because she's so stubborn, she's forcing herself to stay awake. I chuckle as I continue watching this battle. Eventually, she loses and falls asleep.

Me: She's asleep.

Derek stands and carefully takes her from me.

He walks away and I sink on the couch.
Will I ever get used to this? I feel strange.
It's been two weeks, yet I'm not in
mommy mode.

Derek eventually comes back and sits
next to me. He pulls me closer and plants
a kiss on my cheeks.

Me: I'm tired.

I don't think I've ever seen him like this. He is a completely different person. He is smiling 24/7. He is truly happy.

Me on the other hand? I don't know. I feel like I'm just surviving at this point.

Derek: We need to see Melinda soon.

Me: Very soon.

Our biggest concern was me getting Postpartum Depression. Right now, as overwhelmed as I am, I know it's not extreme. I'm okay. However, I'm making it a point to consistently see Melinda. I want to be the best version of myself for this baby...

I can't even say she's my baby. I honestly haven't come to terms with it. However, I'm not outchea trying to kill myself...

Derek: Zi.

I snap out of it and look at him.

Derek: Would you like some ice-cream?

Me: I'm going through the most.

Derek: I can see.

He kisses me again and I sigh.

Derek: Let's go outside.

We both stand and as I walk outside, he walks to the kitchen. I sit by the garden and browse through my phone.

Just then, someone pats my shoulder.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: Argh, go away.

He sits opposite me and chuckles.

Dean: Kuyanyiwa kwa parenthood. You thought it's a party?

Me: I don't need your negativity right now. Derek walls out and hands me a bowl of ice-cream.

Me: Thank you.

Dean: Is my niece sleeping?

Derek: Ya.

Dean: She's stubborn that one, just like her mother.

Me: Dean, don't you have a wife and kids?
What are you doing here?

Dean: I came to have your mother's food.

Me: Mxm.

He comes here everyday, just to annoy the hell out of me.

Little Star is turning one month.

When I wake up, Derek has already decorated the house.

Me: You do realise that she's one month old?

He smiles brightly

Derek: Exactly!

He steps closer to me and wraps his arms around my waist.

Derek: We've been through a lot. I feel blessed. I never thought we'd be here, celebrating our baby's health.

He gives me a kiss.

Me: I just feel bad for not being as excited as you.

Derek: Like Melinda said, take it one day at a time. Putting pressure on yourself will make things worse. As long as you're not negative, then we're on the right track.

Me: You don't hate me?

Derek: Dramatic much?

He chuckles and I smile.

Derek: You'll get there... Patience has always been a huge factor in our relationship.

I place my arms around his neck and kiss him.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I love you too. Now, let's check on Star.

Me: Okay.

He lets go of me and we make our way to Star.

She's already up.

Me: She's awake.

Derek: Yep.

Me: She's not crying.

He chuckles as he reaches down for her.

Derek: She's a big girl now.

He gives her kisses and she smiles.

Derek: Happy Birthday, angel.

He glances at me.

I reach for her, and expect the usual crying, but I see a smile on her face.

Me: I don't think I've ever met such a dramatic baby. Even Dean's child is better.

Derek: I wonder ufuze bani.

I look at him sharply and he laughs.

Uhm, Star hasn't been this happy with me. She's always crying, unless she's sucking on my titty.

I'm shocked and confused to say the least.

Me: Happy Birthday, Star.

Derek: Does this mean you won't call me Star anymore?

I chuckle.

Me: Ya, she's the Star now.

He sulks and I focus on little Star.

She is staring at me. I stare back at her, and catch myself smiling.

Is it weird that this is the first time I actually feel connected to my daughter?

I'm always frustrated when I hold her.
The crying is too much! I always feel like
I'm doing something wrong.

Derek: What's happening?

I look at him and he has a smile on his
face.

Me: I think I've just connected with my
baby.

Derek: You referred to her as your baby...

Whoa!

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm hungry.

Derek: Breakfast will be ready soon.

I nod as I focus on Nkanyi again.

My baby is finally cute. She doesn't look
like a strange mushroom anymore. She
finally looks adorable. My adorable
chubby baby.

Derek walks out and I continue staring at
little Nkanyi. I am quite overwhelmed... I

don't know. I think it's all sinking in. I'm an actual mother. I have a daughter. I plant a kiss on her cheek and she giggles. I continue planting kisses until she starts wiggling.

I eventually go downstairs and find Derek setting the table. There are balloons all over the place.

Me: You stay doing the most.

Derek: She will remember these moments, don't say I didn't tell you.

I chuckle as I sit down and he finishes up.

I feed Star, before I start eating.

Derek: So, when are you going to start being comfortable with having sex with me?

Me: Ngidi!

Derek: We haven't had sex in months. Dr Modisa said you're good to go. It's been months, Ziyanda!

Me: I'd appreciate it if you'd stop saying such in front of your child.

Derek: Ohho, it's not like she's going to remember this shit.

Me: Oh, but she'll remember the birthday decorations?

He laughs.

Star finishes up, and I start eating...

Nomvuyo and Liwa arrive first. They came with Nyami and Nkosinhle.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!
We share a hug.

Me: Hey, guys.

Liwa: I see motherhood is treating you well.

I blush.

Nomvuyo: Hello, baby.

We share a hug.

Nomvuyo: How is my baby, Liyakha?

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Hai phela, just because you're obsessed with the name Nkanyezi, it doesn't mean we're all going crazy over it.

Me: Mxm. Nkanyezi's second name is Liyakha. My dad named her that. I only acknowledge Nkanyezi though.

She hugs Derek.

Nomvuyo: Is Liya sleeping?

Derek: She dozed off minutes ago.

Nomvuyo: You shouldn't let her sleep whenever she wants. You must train her.

Derek: My child is not a dog.

Liwa: You are both such dramatic parents.

I take Nkosi from Nomvuyo and start kissing him.

Me: Hello, Nkosi...

He looks at me. He is such a grumpy baby, not the cute grumpiness- the “get the fuck out my face” grumpiness. But, I still love him. I think it's because deep down, I wish I had a boy. I really wanted a boy.

Derek: Zi, your mom says you must call her back.

Me: Okay.

I go to Ngidi's office with Nkosi and call my mom. It rings for a while, and she answers.

Mom: Baby.

Me: Ma, is everything alright?

Mom: I was busy cleaning up, when some woman who's around your age came here...

Me: Ubani?

Mom: She didn't tell me her name. She said you went to varsity together and she was just passing by. She wanted to check if you still live here, she said she'll come back again.

Me: Uhm, okay...

Mom: Anyway, are you sure you'll be fine without me for the weekend?

Me: We'll be fine.

Mom: Okay sisi.

Me: Uhm, but do you think you can come ksasa to fetch Liya?

Mom: Why?

Me: Derek has been complaining about us not uhm...bonding...

She laughs boldly.

Mom: You don't have to be ashamed. I think that's a good idea.

I sigh.

Mom: I'll come in the morning. Your father has been complaining about not seeing her enough, so this is perfect.

Me: Okay.

Mom: Is she going to sleepover la?

Me: We'll see. I doubt Derek will allow that though.

Mom: Okay, baby. Shap ke.

Me: Shap.

I give Nkosi a kiss and he continues pouting grumpily.

I walk back to the lounge.

Dean and Nolwazi are here.

Nolwazi: Hey, mommy.

I smile.

Me: How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm so excited! Baby Nkanyezi is growing up!

I chuckle.

I look at Dean and he glances at me weirdly.

Me: What?

Dean: Nothing.

I look at him suspiciously and he walks away casually. I continue chatting with Nolwazi.

Nomvuyo: Can someone get the birthday girl?

I actually miss her.

Dean walks up the stairs.

Me: Are we really throwing a party for a month-old baby?

Nomvuyo: This group loves celebrating milestones.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: You roll your eyes a lot lately. Just then, Dean comes back with Star.

Nomvuyo: Liyakha!

Nomvuyo immediately tries taking her from Dean, but he refuses.

Dean: Awume wena.

He plants a kiss on Star's cheek and she giggles. She also likes getting attention from these men, just like Simo.

Nkosi immediately starts crying, and looks at his mother.

Haike. He's not going anywhere. He will learn to love people and stop being obsessed with his mother.

Just then, Star starts crying as well and Nyami runs to Dean.

Nyami: Uncle D, can I hold her?

Dean: How about you comfort your brother first?

Everyone looks at him in shock.

Nolwazi: Langa!

Dean looks at a now teary Nyami and chuckles.

Dean: Just kidding, Nyamz. There you go...
Nyami smiles as she takes Star. Star continues crying.

As much as I try to ignore her, I fail. I give Nomvuyo her son and then reach for Star. I take her from Nyami and walk away from everyone.

I don't know. Something has changed between Nkanyi and I. I feel more connected to her.

I love her.

Me: Nkanyi, I don't blame you for crying. Those people are quite overwhelming... and annoying...

She looks at me with her teary eyes and pouts. She stops crying.

Me: The only way I survive when I'm around them is by zoning them out. She looks at me as if she understands what I'm saying.

I chuckle and give her a kiss.

Me: Your dad is the one who introduced me to them. They're too much neh?

Derek: Why are you feeding my child such negativity?

I quickly turn and look at him guiltily. He smiles and walks to us.

Derek: You calmed her down.

I nod.

Derek: This makes me happy.

He plants a kiss on my lips and I groan.

I feel like I literally just woke up from a dream, and I've realised that I have a child, a fiancé, and I'm actually horny as fuck.

Derek: You okay?

Me: Ya.

I nod tightly and focus on Star.

I have to go big tomorrow. Dean will have to help me organise everything.

Derek: Ready to go back there? The rest of the crew is here.

Me: Okay. Just give me a minute.

He nods and walks away.

I sigh and look at Star.

Me: I love you, but you have to go to your grandparents tomorrow. I'll be nice and fresh when you come back.

I plant a kiss on her lips and walk back to the lounge.

INSERT 177 (Unedited)

It has been a love-filled afternoon.

Niki also joined us and I'm glad we're all over the Kwanele situation. She just won't be able to bring him over, because that's a bit inappropriate.

We're all outside, and they're all having drinks.

I haven't been craving alcohol. I thought as soon as Nkanyezi popped out, I would

be deep within the bottle, but I haven't even touched it.

I pull Dean aside and stare at him.

Me: Something's wrong. You're not fine.

He looks at me blankly.

Me: We can stand here forever.

Dean: Nothing's wrong. I'm just tired from work.

I look at him suspiciously.

Me: I'm watching you.

Dean: Mxm.

He looks at me softly.

Dean: Are you getting used to Liya?

I sigh heavily.

Me: I'm trying.

He nods lightly.

Me: Today is different though.

Dean: I can tell...

He smiles.

Dean: She's cute. I never thought we'd see the day. I love her chubby cheeks.

Me: Are you trying to say my baby was ugly?

Dean: All babies are ugly when they're born.

I hiss and he chuckles.

Dean: I'm glad you're opening up. I was getting worried.

Me: Are you sure you're fine?

He nods.

Dean: If you ask me that question one more time...

I shiver dramatically.

Me: Ohhh I'm so scared!

He laughs and we walk back to where everyone is.

Malusi is holding my child. Why?

Before I can walk to him, Derek is already holding my hand, stopping me.

Me: Argh.

Derek: He won't do anything to her. Relax.

Me: I don't want my child to get a taste of infidelity. He looks at me in shock and I shrug.

Derek: Kodwa Ziyanda...

Dean: She's a bitch this one.

I look at Derek seriously.

Me: Surely you won't allow this imbecile to call me a bitch?

Derek looks at Dean and stifles a laugh.

Me: Ridiculous.

Nandi walks to us and smiles.

Nandi: My daughter is obsessed with your daughter.

I smile.

Me: Where is Lele?

Nandi: She's somewhere in the house with Nyami.

Lele is such a breath of fresh air, just like Nyami. I hope my daughter also turns out like them. However, I don't want my child to be too friendly. She can't be engaging with every Tom, Dick and Harry.

Nandi: Will you ever go back to work?

Derek: She wants to stay home for another year.

Dean looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: Wena?

Me: Ya.

Dean: I'm in shock.

Derek: We don't need your negativity.

Shut up.

Nandi: I thought you're a career woman.

Me: I am. I just want to raise her properly with no added stress.

Nandi: Well... As you know, I was a homemaker for years. I'm totally for it!

Me: Don't you get bored?

Nandi: How? You have a little human keeping you busy.

She smiles.

Dean: Even Nolwazi stopped working after the birth of the twins.

I nod.

I think I'm happy with my decision. We'll see how it goes.

I ask Dean if I can talk to him in private.

Nandi: You two are very close. Are you sure you're not birthed by the same mother?

Dean: Do you not see how attractive I am? At this point, I don't even have the energy to deal with him. He's always taking shots at me.

We walk away from everyone.

Dean: What's up? Me: I need you to take Nkanyezi to Soweto ksasa.

Dean: Why?

Me: My dad misses her.

Dean: You trying to fuck?

Me: Yes. I most definitely would like some time to fuck Derek.

He pulls a face.

Me: I think it will be less admin if you take her instead of my mom coming here.

Dean: Why don't you bring her to my house?

Me: My dad wants to spend time with her as well.

He nods

Dean: Anything for your mom...

Me: You've become such a weak man, filled with too much love.

Dean: Ungazonginyela.

Me: I'm thinking of making tomorrow special. Derek has been doing the most for me... I want him to feel special.

Dean: You want to plan something big?

Me: Nothing hectic. Just something to thank him for being patient.

He nods slowly.

Dean: I'm sure you'll think of something. You always do.

We walk back to everyone. Nkanyezi is now with Gabi. I reach for her.

Gabi: I haven't even held her for a minute. I ignore her and take my baby. Once she's in my arms, she wiggles a bit and opens her eyes. I give her kisses and she smiles.

Derek: I think she's had enough attention. We should take her in.

Me: I agree.

Out of nowhere, Zimkitha emerges and everyone exclaims.

I haven't seen her since I gave birth.

Zimkitha: Hello everyone!

They all share hugs and I walk back inside the house.

I hear her saying my name.

Me: I'll be back. I'm going to put her to sleep.

I walk to the lounge and bump into Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Is she falling asleep?

Me: Yep.

Nomvuyo: Bring her here.

I give her Nkanyezi.

Nomvuyo: She's so cute.
She touches her lips and Nkanyezi pouts
even more.

Nomvuyo: Are you okay?

Me: Ya, I'm fine.

She looks at me closely.

Me: When are you guys leaving kanti?

Nomvuyo: Hai suka wena.

I walk back outside and Zimkitha smiles
at me.

Zimkitha: Hi, Zi. Me: Hello.

She hesitates, but ends up giving me a
hug.

Zimkitha: How have you been? It's been a
while.

Me: I'm good.

Zimkitha: Motherhood treating you right?

I nod and she smiles.

Zimkitha: I came to see Nkanyezi.

Me: She's sleeping.

She nods and smiles.

Zimkitha: I'm happy for you. After all that you've been through...

Me: Thanks.

She tries to say something, but stops herself.

Derek stands next to me.

Zimkitha: Alright then. I guess I'll come back another time.

Derek: You've been scarce. Why haven't you visited vele?

Zimkitha: I've been busy, baby.

Derek: You want to see my daughter?

Zimkitha nods excitedly. She can't even contain herself.

Derek: Woza...

He takes her hand and leads her inside the house.

*** The following morning, I wake up early to make sure that baby Nkanyezi has everything she needs. I pack her bag and bathe her. She's in a very good mood

today, hopefully she'll behave for the rest of the day.

Derek decided to work as soon as everyone left last night. He worked till the early hours of the morning. Right now, he is fast asleep.

I get a message from Dean telling me he has arrived. I go downstairs to open up for him. He's here with Nolwazi as planned.

Me: Morning, guys.

I give them hugs and we make our way to the kitchen.

Nolwazi: Here's the food you asked me to prepare.

I sigh ashamedly then Dean laughs.

Dean: So every time you want to do something for Derek, you're going to ask us to prepare the food?

Me: Last time I checked, you rudely informed me that I am the worst cook you've ever come across.

Dean: Facts only.

I roll my eyes and look at Nolwazi.

Me: Thank you for coming through.

She smiles warmly.

Nokwazi: After the proposal you planned for me, you deserve everything you want.

Dean: So, mina I was just a prop? I am the one who went down on one knee. Why don't I deserve everything I want?

Nolwazi giggles.

Nolwazi: Langa, you have me. I'm the greatest shit you've ever come across. Back off and be humble.

Dean grunts.

I think out of all the couples, these two are my fav. First it was Nomvuyo and Liwa, but after the gangster vibes I got from them and their mother, I don't see them as goals. Dean and Nolwazi are cute.

Me: Let me get Nkanyezi.

Dean: Did you tell big Nkanyezi that small Nkanyezi won't be around today? I shake my head.

Nolwazi: He will freak out.

Me: He'll get over it. Nami I'm the greatest shit he has ever come across, so he must

sit down and be humble that I planned all this shit for him.

Dean chuckles.

Dean: Go get her, so we can leave.

I walk upstairs. Thank God Derek is still sleeping. I get Star and her bag, then walk back to the kitchen. Dean takes her and looks at Nolwazi.

Dean: You'll drive.

Nolwazi: Hmkay.

Me: Thank you so much.

Nolwazi; Okay, Zi. Have a fantastic day.

Me: Thanks.

I give Star a few kisses and try to ignore the separation anxiety that's approaching.

I watch as they walk out. I begin

"preparing" breakfast. Just as I finish up, Derek pitches out of nowhere, panicking.

Derek: Where the fuck is Nkanyezi?!

He genuinely looks confused and scared.

I don't say anything.

Dean: Ziyanda!

I look at him calmly.

Me: Dean and Nolwazi are taking her to my parents as we speak.

Derek: What?? Why??

Me: She's safe.

Derek: What the fuck is wrong with you??

How do you take my daughter somewhere else without letting me know?? I thought-

Me: Yoh, bhuti. Awume. Take a deep breath and calm down.

He looks at me in disbelief. I think he's convinced that I'm crazy.

Me: You've just ruined my surprise.

He looks around and sees the set up.

I watch as he processes everything.

Me: I didn't cook anything, so you can stop trying to come up with an excuse not to eat this food.

He stares at me for a while and eventually softens up.

Me: Go brush your teeth.

He nods slowly as he rushes off...

INSERT 178 (Short and Unedited)

Derek looks at me all love-struck. I'm sure I could tell him to run around the neighbourhood naked, and he would do that without hesitation.

Me: Enjoying the food?

He smiles shyly.

Me: You don't have to pretend. Nolwazi is a great cook...unlike some of us...

Derek: I don't think you're a bad cook.

Me: Don't patronise me.

Derek: I'm serious, baby.

Me: Whatever.

I finish up my omelette and look at him.

He's staring at me.

Me: What?

Derek: Nothing. I'm just admiring my view.

Me: Corny man...

He leans closer to me and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You're beautiful.

Me: Staap! You're making me blush!

He kisses me again, and I pull away. I don't want him to do things to me right now, he must wait.

Me: Finish up your food.

Derek: Okay.

He pulls me in for a very deep kiss and I pull away again.

Me: Star!

He sighs and looks at me innocently.

Derek: But you said I must finish up my food... I laugh and push him lightly.

Me: Stop it!

He laughs as he focuses on his plate.

We continue chatting about random stuff.

It seems like my plan of delaying sex won't work. With every passing second, I'm going crazy. It seems like my body has finally realised how much I've deprived it. Phela Derek and I haven't had sex in months. I refused to have sex with him for the last few months of my pregnancy.

Once he's done eating, I suggest we wash the dishes.

We go to the kitchen and he helps me clean up.

Me: My mom wanted to know if Star will sleepover.

Derek: No.

I laugh and nod.

Me: Thought as much.

Derek: She can spend the day with them, not sleepover.

With that said, he pulls me and wraps his arms around me. He blows me away with a kiss and I find myself holding onto him as I lose balance.

I moan, trying to ask him to stop, but he's not hearing me. I give up and end up finding myself on the counter.

Heyi, the thirst is real.

I am shook.

I didn't even care about how uncomfortable it was being on that counter, because Derek's tongue had taken over and led me to the Pacific Ocean.

After showering, I sit on the bed and look at Derek in defeat.

Me: To think I was planning on teasing you and delaying the sex...

Derek: Uh-uh. I wasn't going to allow that. I was hungry... I still am...

He looks at me playfully and I shake my head assertively.

Me: Uh-uh Derek. I need a moment to recover. I'm still suffering from the cramps from the shower.

He laughs.

Me: Let me breathe...

He continues laughing and I watch him happily.

I'm having one of those many moment when I'm realising how blessed I am. I think I'm at my happiest right now. I have so much love around me!

Derek: Stop staring at me like that.

I snap out of it and find him looking at me amusingly.

Me: I just love you a lot.

Derek: Really?

I nod as he walks to me.

Derek: How much do you love me?

Me: Words will never be enough.

He laughs lightly.

Derek: Then, you must show me...

I chuckle in defeat as he exposes his erection.

Gosh, I think I may have underestimated his sex drive, because it's too much...

We're now outside by the garden, and we're in our gowns. He insisted we don't wear normal clothes, since we've been having spontaneous rounds. He appreciates the easy access that the gowns provide.

Me: So... I thought we'd do some bonding activities, just to bring us even closer.

He smiles sweetly.

Derek: Ziyanda of the Great Dlamini never disappoints...

I roll my eyes as I give him a journal and pen.

Me: As an introduction, we are going to write out the story of our relationship...

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: I won't explain any further. You're a smart man, you should get it.

Derek: You overestimate my intelligence.

Me: The catch is that we should do this in 15 minutes.

He nods thoughtfully.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Ready?

He nods.

I open my journal and look at him.

Me: Go...

Derek: Love you.

I smile.

Me: Love you too.

With that said, we both focus on our journals.

I don't know how I'm going to do this...

I take a deep breath, and allow myself to get lost in my thoughts.

After 15 minutes, my phone beeps and we both finish off. I put down my pen and look at him.

Me: Done?

He smiles and nods.

Me: You wanna go first?

Derek: Ladies first.

Me: Ahh yoh.

We both laugh.

Derek: You know how my crew settles such situations.

Me: Rock Paper Scissors?

He nods gleefully and I roll my eyes.

Me: Okay then...

We put out our hands.

He has scissors and I have paper.

I groan in defeat and he smiles victoriously.

Derek: Go ahead, loser.

He knows how competitive I am and how obsessed I am with winning.

I look at him angrily and he laughs.

Me: I'll dump you and leave you crying here by yourself.

He stops and looks at me in disbelief.

Derek: Baby, you can't make such threats.

I chuckle as I look at my paper.

I take a deep, look at him and he smiles.

Me: Ready?

He nods.

I sigh as I look at what I wrote.

Me: Who would have thought? Who would have thought that an annoying, creepy random man would turn a girl's world upside down? It's true what they say about love- it has the power to restore hope. I was literally done with men. I was convinced that I'd end up all alone, with a few random men here and there net for control. I look at him and he is clearly not happy about that last part.

I continue reading.

Me: I met you at a time when I had just finished picking up the pieces of my broken heart, and was attempting to heal. I was comfortable with where I was emotionally, despite the hurt I had endured in my previous relationship. I

was comfortable with being by myself, and I was in no rush to meet someone new. I wanted to heal by myself, and not depend on someone else to help me. That's why I wasn't even moved when I met you. You weren't a factor. Your persistence annoyed the hell out of me. You disturbed my peace. Little did I know that you'd end up being my source of peace.

I smile at him.

Me: I'm not going to say much, because I'm already planning my vows. All I will say is that our journey is one for the books. For now, all I have to say to you is that because of you, I now know the love that I deserve. Because of your unfiltered love, I have explored parts of myself that I had no idea existed. I have become a better person, because of your love. I love openly, all because of you. I wouldn't

change a thing about our love story. Yes, we've had some extremely low moments, but they've brought us closer. I look at him and he's smiling like an idiot. Derek: Baby... He stands and gives me a kiss. Derek: That was sweet. I chuckle. Me: I didn't go in too deep. I'm saving the depth for my vows. He smiles brightly. Derek: I can't wait! He kisses me again before he sits...

INSERT 179

Derek has been showering me with kisses for 5 minutes now. Me: Ngidi, stop phela! He gives me another kiss and I push him away. Me: Sit down man!

He obliges and looks at me happily.

Dereck: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

He takes a deep breath and then looks at his journal.

Derek: I don't know how I'm going to top that...

Me: Don't even lie. We both know how good you are with words.

He blushes and clears his throat. He focuses on his journal and I stare at him.

Derek: I value your presence in my life. You untie all the knots in my heart. With every touch, kiss, sweet silence, I feel empowered. I feel empowered to take care of you, and ensure that your heart is on the same frequency as mine. You are my home. Throughout my life, I had no idea that a love like this exists. You have exposed me to parts of myself I had no idea existed. I didn't know that I was

capable of inhaling and exhaling a love so deep, complicated, frightening yet beautiful and pure.

Yoh I'm already tearing up.

Derek: Our love is getting drunk together and drunkenly debating about stupid shit. Our love is me getting annoyed every time you forget to close the tap once you're done using it.

I chuckle.

Derek: Our love is you getting annoyed whenever I want to cuddle with you every chance I get. It is us enjoying each other's company... Our love is having dramatic fights that could easily be avoided. It is us trying to understand the intent behind our actions, and communicating effectively to solve our problems. Our love is laughing at how stubborn and dramatic we are when we're too emotional...

I am shook.

Derek: Most importantly, our love is us trusting each other with our hearts. It is coming face to face with each other's fears or darkest sides. It is accepting each other, flaws and all...

He glances at me before carrying on.

Derek: My love for you is me not wanting to be with anyone else but you. My love is me having a stressful day, and immediately cheering up because you've crossed my mind.

He clears his throat as he chokes up.

Derek: Our love has multiplied and literally manifested itself into a very moody, cute and bright Star.

I chuckle.

Derek: I have never been this content in my life. Throughout my life, I didn't feel like I belonged anywhere. As much as I knew I was loved, there was never a sense

of belonging. You've changed all of that. You make me feel safe and genuinely cherished. We may fuss and fight, but I'm confident in our love.

He takes a deep breath and finally looks at me.

Me: I was never ready.

He smiles lightly.

I stand and then pull him up.

Me: That was lovely, Star.

I wrap my arms around him and bury my head on his chest.

Have you ever sobbed, because you are overwhelmed with love and joy? This is me right now.

We stand there for a very long time, processing this love.

I eventually look at him and plant kisses on his lips.

Me: I love you.

Derek: Not as much as I love you.

Me: Argh, you beat me. You are a deep man.

He laughs.

Derek: My vows will be better than yours.

Me: We'll see about that...

We share a kiss and continue holding each other.

It's now around 12pm. After the emotional journaling we did, we ended up taking a nap, which wasn't part of my plan.

We're now in the kitchen, well-rested.

Me: I thought we'd make burgers together.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: Argh, I'll make the cocktails. You will cook.

Derek: Okay.

I roll my eyes.

Me: You may as well stop pretending like you don't agree with your friends about my cooking.

He plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: I plead the fifth.

Me: Mxm!

I watch as he gets ready to cook.

I'm so glad that Derek doesn't expect me to be outchea slaving away in the kitchen.

He genuinely loves and enjoys cooking.

Being in the kitchen makes him happy.

Therefore, there's less pressure on me

We're now in the lounge, eating.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes, Nkanyi.

He looks at me softly.

Derek: What did Zimkitha do to you?

I look at him blankly.

Me: What's happening?

Derek: I've been observing how you interact with her.

Me: What do you mean? It's not like she's here everyday.

He raises an eyebrow and I grunt.

Me: She didn't do anything to me.

Derek: Manje why are you cold whenever she's around?

I shrug.

Me: I didn't realise.

He raises an eyebrow again.

Me: I'll be kind next time.

Derek: Please do. I love Zimkitha. She is like a mother to me. I don't want bad vibes between you two.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Good. How is the burger?

Me: Great. How is the cocktail?

Derek: Great.

Me: Good.

He chuckles.

Derek: I miss Liya.

Me: Me too. He smiles.

Derek: So, when are we having another one?

Me: Another what?

Derek: I want another one.

Me: U-right phela. You'll have it by yourself. He laughs.

Me: Family planning is a thing now. I'm not about to pop random babies.

He continues laughing...

Once we're done eating, we clean up and go outside.

Derek: What's our next activity?

Me: I'd like us to work on vision boards.

He smiles.

Derek: You really planned this shit, huh?
I nod happily.

Me: Sit down. I'll get the magazines and stationery.

After a few minutes, I come back with everything.

Me: This vision board is not limited to our relationship. Include where you see yourself in all aspects of your life in 5 years.

Derek: Yes, ma'am.

We both start working on our vision boards.

This new phase in my life has really made me think about my goals and dreams. I don't want to get so caught up in being a mother or wife, that I lose touch of my personal aspirations. I strongly believe that women can be mothers or wives on one hand, while still pursuing their dreams on the other hand. I don't want to limit myself and get to a point where my life only revolves around my role as a mother or wife. Yes, I value these roles,

but there's more to Ziyanda Dlamini than that...

Me: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Derek sighs thoughtfully.

Derek: Married. 3 kids. Travelling.

Me: Hmm. He looks at me amusingly.

Derek: Do you have a problem with that?

Me: Not really. I'm not sure about the kids though.

Derek: I'm in no rush.

Me: Good.

Derek: Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

I sigh thoughtfully.

Me: I'll be a working mom.

He nods.

Me: I also want to travel, and explore different environments.

Derek: Good.

Me: Most importantly though, I want pursue my Honours in Curriculum

Studies. Maybe I can even squeeze in a Master's degree.

He smiles.

Derek: I'm glad you want to further your studies.

I nod.

Me: I also want to hire a personal driver.

He stares at me for a good second.

Suddenly, he starts laughing, because he can see how serious I am. I genuinely have zero FOMO of owning a car or driving. I want to be driven everywhere, and not stress about unnecessary car drama. This has been the case all my life. People think I'm weird, but it is what it is. I genuinely believe that I deserve a chauffeur in my life. I can't be dealing with shit from taxi drivers and constantly trying to keep my road rage in check. I make a better passenger... Weird, I know.

Derek: I can be your personal driver.

I shake my head.

Me: I need someone who'll be on call 24/7. Wena you're just a bonus. He continues laughing.

Derek: You're really strange.

I sigh.

Me: I also want to build a house for my parents.

He smiles.

Derek: Can I help?

I shake my head.

Me: This will be my project. You will not interfere.

Derek: That's admirable, baby.

Me: That's it so far. You know I can't handle too many goals... I'd go crazy.

Derek: We just have to make sure that all our goals are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely.

Me: Yes, sir.

Derek: I've achieved most of my goals...

Me: Really?

He nods.

Derek: I have a school... I have a family... I am wealthy...

Me: Wena na.

Derek: I've worked hard for all these things. I'm enjoying the fruits of my labour.

Me: Hmm, you don't say...

Derek: So, we agree that you're going to be working at the school when you're ready?

Me: Yep. I can't wait.

Derek: We have to create a position for you. You'll be in charge of the educators, ensuring that they are well-equipped to perform.

Me: I've ghat you.

Derek: Excellent.

Me: We have to discuss my salary.

He grins.

Derek: I thought you were going to work for free...

Me: Udakiwe bhuti. I can't be popping babies, and not get a decent salary.

He laughs and continues joking as we continue working on our vision boards.

Once we were done, we explained our visions to each other.

Overall, this was a great activity, because we both got to understand our personal goals, and set goals together- for our relationship. Somehow, I'm no longer anxious about the future. I'm naturally a planner, so the activity was perfect for me. I should really kiss my brain yazi, I did the damn thing today.

INSERT 180

It's now 4pm. After a very emotional and lovely day, we are now ready for Nkanyezi to come back home. We decided we'd fetch her ourselves.

As we're driving to Soweto, I get a call from Dean.

Me: Langelihle.

Dean: I'm already at your parents' house with Lwazi.

Me: Didn't you get my message?

Dean: I'm only reading it now.

Me: Oh. Star and I are on our way.

Dean: It's okay. Your mom is about to dish up for us.

Me: Gosh. He laughs.

Dean: See you soonest.

Me: Soonest.

I end the call and look at Derek.

Derek: You already know that this is going to be a an event, right?

I sigh.

Me: This is the last thing I need.

We continue chatting and eventually get to Soweto.

When we get there, I go straight to Dean, who is carrying my child and take her from him. I shower Star with kisses and she giggles. She's happy to see me.

Me: Hello, angel.

She continues giggling.

I am suddenly filled with happiness.

Mom: Heeh so you don't even greet your parents first?

I ignore her and continue showering Star with kisses. I missed her so much!

I glance at Derek, and it is clear that he also wants a piece of Nkanyezi. I hand her over to him and he also gets lost in her giggles.

I look at everyone and smile.

Me: Hello, people!

Mom: Hai suka.

I look at my dad.

Me: I've missed you.

He looks so happy. Whenever he's with Nkanyezi, his mood is high.

Dad: Unjani mntanam?

Me: I'm good.

I give him a hug and then look at Nolwazi.

Me: I'm so sorry that you had to come all the way to Soweto, just because your dumb fiance fails to read messages.

Dean: You should be thankful that your parents are here. I respect Mr. Dlamz.

My dad chuckles and shakes his head.

Dad: You two make me feel like your mother might have cheated on me and made a son elsewhere.

Me: Euww!

I look at Dean.

Me: I'm not related to this ugly man!

I go to the kitchen to catch up with my mom. She grins.

Mom: How was your day?

Me: It was nice.

Mom: Nice?

Me: Yes.

I look at her shyly and she laughs.

Me: Mama...

Mom: What? I'm not judging you. You have a child now, so I can't pretend you don't have sex.

Me: Mama!

She continues laughing.

Mom: So, did you make it romantic?

Me: Mama, man.

Mom: Okay, I'll stop. I'm glad you're on contraceptives. We're not ready for another grandchild. Me: Definitely.

Me: Good.

She looks at me mischievously and I blush.

Mom: So, when do you want the wedding to happen?

Me: I don't know...

Mom: Derek better be thankful that we're not too strict when it comes to tradition... Our lobola process has been shady, as you always say.

Me: Well, it's not like he has anyone to represent him.

Mom: Are things still tense between him and his parents?

I nod.

Me: He wants nothing to do with them. She sighs.

Mom: The boy has had a rough life. I'm so happy that he has you. I know you won't disappoint him.

Me: That's a lot of pressure.

Mom: Haibo, do you have a man on the side?

I laugh lightly.

Me: I doubt I'd still be alive.

She laughs.

Me: I'm just worried about Lelo.

Mom: Wasn't he supposed to stay with you?

I nod.

Me: Busi's family managed to convince Derek to not take Lelo.

Mom: Are they a good family though?

Me: Ya, I guess.

Mom: Then, don't fight it. At the end of the day that child is not yours, so you can't involve yourself too much. Support Derek's decisions...

Me: I won't lie, Lelo is not my priority right now. I love him, but we still have a long way to go.

She nods.

Mom: Bond with Liya for now...

Me: Okay.

She gives me a kiss and carries on dishing up.

Mom: When are you going to learn how to cook?

Me: Mama, I just had a baby...

Mom: Heheee!

Nolwazi walks in and starts helping my mom.

Nolwazi: Thank God we came here. I wasn't in the mood to cook.

Mom: Niyavilapha nina!

Nolwazi: Eish ma, it's not easy juggling these roles.

Mom: Hai suka!

They take the food to the lounge and I follow them and sit next to Derek. Star seems very comfortable in Dean's arms.

Me: I'd like to feed her before I eat.

Dean: She's full.

Me: Mxm.

My dad says a prayer and we all start eating.

Mom: Liyakha is such a happy baby.

Dad: Ziyanda was a very mean baby.

Dean: No surprise there.

Just then, Dean's phone rings and I immediately stand and get Nkanyezi.

Me: I'll be in the bedroom feeding her.

I walk to my bedroom and sit on the bed.

I miss being here.

As soon as she is in contact with my titty, she sucks happily, and within minutes, she is dozing off. I lay her carefully on the bed just as Derek walks in.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yep, she just fell asleep.

He wraps his arms around me and our heads touch.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love me too.

He pinches me lightly and I giggle.

We share a kiss before we walk back to the lounge.

Mom: Is she asleep?

Me: Yebo.

Mom: Don't you think she should sleep here?

I glance at Derek and he is tense. Lol, he doesn't agree.

Me: No, we've missed her.

Dad: It's getting late now. You can't be driving with an infant at night.

I glance at Derek again and I can see that he is having a mental debate.

Derek: You're right.

Dean: Wow, you agree?

My mom laughs.

Mom: For a second, he looked like he was ready to kill me.

Dad: He wouldn't dare.

Derek lightens up and we continue eating and chatting.

Overall, it was a lovely evening. As much as Dean annoys me, there's never a dull moment when he's around. I love him and Lwazi.

I was really tempted to sleepover with Little Star, but I was also glad that I was going to spend a peaceful evening with Big Star.

Another month has passed, and I am slaying this mommy thing. Yes, there are moments when Star drives me crazy with her crying, but it's nothing hectic.

I feel good.

There's something about this new phase in life... I don't know how to explain it...

I'm just drowning in love. I'm happy.

Derek has asked me to go with him to work. Apparently, there are a few teachers who are slacking, and he doesn't want to deal with them.

Me: So, you don't want these people to think you're mean?

Derek: I don't want to be involved. I need to hire a principal ASAP. I can't be

running the school behind the scenes and be a principal at the same time. It's strenuous.

Me: Hmkay.

He chuckles.

Derek: Just so you know, they already think you're a bitch.

Me: Who? The teachers?

He nods.

Me: What the hell? I've been nothing but kind to those heffers!

He laughs and continues telling me how his employees think I'm a meanie. Clearly, he wants me to do his dirty work, while he remains the sweet one.

I must say that I am very proud of Derek. He really did the damn thing with this school. It's private and intimate. We didn't even struggle with enrolment (most of the parents from our previous school

followed him because they're loyal and obsessed with him). All our classes are fully enrolled.

We get to the school and make our way to his office.

Me: Where's Andile?

Andile is the Assistant Principal. He's around the same age as Derek. Initially, I was against hiring him, because I wanted a woman, but Andile had the experience and qualifications. He is great for the position.

Derek: He's attending training on curriculum.

I nod.

Me: So, who's giving you problems?

He sighs.

Derek: Tshidi, the grade R English teacher, Danny, the grade 3 Maths teacher, and Tshepo, the Life Skills teacher.

I nod.

Me: How is Yoli?

Derek: She has improved.

Me: Okay then. Let me go observe them.

I get my notebook and make my way to one of the classes. I start with Danny, the grade 3 Maths teacher.

As soon as she sees me, she gives me a weird look. I make my way to the back of the class and sit down. I watch as she gets the attention of the students and starts teaching them.

It's safe to say that my ass is shook. This girl's behaviour management sucks. The students are not fully engaged, some of them are out here running around, while she is standing on one spot, focusing on the "smart" group.

I don't know how many times I had to stop myself from standing up and fixing her mess.

After 15 minutes, I am gatvol. I see two students fighting and Danny doesn't even stop them.

I stand and clap twice. Everyone immediately looks at me. I clap twice again, and they automatically clap twice.

Me: Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?

All of them: Spongebob Squarepants!

It is silent.

Me: When I get to zero, you are seated silently, with your books open on your tables.

I look at one of the students.

Me: What happens when I get to zero?

Student: We are seated.

Me: How are you seated?

Student: Quietly.

Me: No.

I look at another student.

Me: How are you seated?

Student: Silently.

Me: Good. There's a difference between silently and quietly. Silently means no sound, quietly means not very loud.

I look at the student who got it wrong the first time and ask him again.

Me: How are you seated?

Student: Silently.

Me: Excellent... What else are you supposed to do?

I look at a different student.

Student: Open our workbooks.

Me: Excellent.

I glance at Danny and her face is already red and tight.

Me: 10... 9...

The students sort themselves out. They go back to their seats.

Me: 7... 6 ...

I see one girl not doing anything. She's in her own world.

Me: I can see that this group is taking out their books and opening them. Well done. The girl snaps out of it, and I watch as she glances at her group mates (whom are doing the right thing). As a result, she also takes out her book and opens it. She looks at me and I wink at her. She smiles.

Me: 2... 1... 0...

They are all looking at me. Their books are out and open.

Me: Excellent job, everyone. Well done! They look at me happily.

Me: Over to you, Ms Graham.

I give her a serious look and walk out of the class, annoyed as hell!

I was extremely pissed after checking out these people's classrooms. They're a hot mess!

I go to the office and find Derek and Andile there. Derek looks at me and

smiles. I ignore the butterflies in my stomach and grunt.

Me: These people suck! What the hell?!

He sits back and listens as I vent.

Me: You need to address their lack of investment and professionalism!

Derek: I agree.

Me: That white girl is steady chilling while the kids are running the class! She only focuses on the “smart” students! What the fuck is wrong with her?? I put down my notebook.

Me: And then there’s that Tshepo! Wow! He’s busy on his laptop while the students are working! Did you not tell these bitches that laptops are not allowed in the class unless they’re part of the lesson?!

I huff angrily.

Derek: Baby, take a deep breath.

I sigh heavily.

I glance at Andile.

Me: Hey.

He chuckles.

Andile: Imagine working with them everyday...

Me: Why are you letting them get away with it?

He shrugs and smiles.

He has nice dimples.

Andile: We have a staff meeting today. You can address your issues then.

Me: Hmkay.

I sit and drink some water.

Me: We should give them warnings.

Derek: Yes, ma'am.

He chuckles with Andile.

Andile: See you guys later.

Me: What happened to the training session?

Andile: Got cancelled.

Me: People are so unprofessional.

Andile: Let me leave, before I get chowed as well...

Me: Very funny.

He grins and walks out.

Me: Let me check on Yoli.

I stand and walk out. As I make my way to Yoli, I bump into Andile again.

Andile: How's the little one?

Me: She's okay, hey.

He nods.

Andile: Are you here for the day?

Me: Yep. Clearly you and Derek are merely decorations here. I need to fix your mess.

Andile: Yoh.

I get to Yoli's class and find her giving out instructions for transitions. Her students are getting ready to go to another class.

She smiles when she sees me, but continues focusing on her students.

I watch as they do as she says.

She has really come a long way. When she came here, she couldn't even speak up. Now, she's confident. She still has a long way to go, but her progress is admirable. Once her class has left, she walks to me and we share a hug.

Me: Unjani?

Yoli: I'm great, and you?

She smiles sweetly. She has even gained a bit of weight. She looked frail and fragile the last time I saw her.

Me: I'm good.

Yoli: How's your baby?

Me: She's really good yazi. I take out my phone and go to my gallery.

So, I've officially become the mom who goes on and on about her child. Derek's crew always makes fun of me, but I don't even care. I love showing off my Star.

Yoli smiles as I show her pictures of Nkanyezi.

Yoli: She's adorable!

Me: Thank God for that!

She laughs.

We continue chatting and catching up.

After a while, her students line up outside her class, and I walk out. When I get back to the office, I find Danny Graham there. I already know what this is about.

She looks at me.

Me: Hi, Ms Graham.

Danny: Hi. Can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

Derek pretends to be focusing on his laptop, but I know his nosy ass is listening.

Danny: I don't appreciate how you came into my classroom and just took over.

I nod slowly and listen to her whine about me taking her control and running her class- as if her people didn't take over our country.

Me: As much as I would like to empathise with you, I really can't. What I witnessed in your space was shocking. It is evident that you are not maximising your instruction time, and I am more concerned about the students we are serving.

She looks at me, gobsmacked.

Me: Students were running around while you were teaching. Only a few students were engaged, and you didn't seem to care. Danny, there were students fighting right next to you.

Danny: I feel disrespected.

Me: You should. The students definitely do not respect you, and I would like to help you gain their respect. She tries to say something, but stops herself.

Me: Do you not have a class right now?

Danny: I do.

Me: So, who are they left with?

Danny: No one.

I raise an eyebrow. She walks out and closes the door.

Derek's mouth is open. He is staring at me.

Me: Mxm.

I sit and focus on my phone.

Me: You disappoint me. I'm going to tell Dean about your incompetence.

INSERT 181 (Unedited)

Everyone is seated. Derek, Andile and I are standing.

Me: Is everyone here?

Inga, the best teacher here, shakes her head.

Inga: We're missing Danny and Tshepo.

I check my time.

They're five minutes late.

I glance at Derek.

What the hell is wrong with him? I feel like he has become a softie.

Just then, Danny and Tebogo walk in, thinking they're the shit. They really think they're in high school and they're the cool kids. Ngizobanyisa.

They sit and I clear my throat.

Me: Good afternoon, everyone.

They greet back sheepishly.

If I had a choice, I'd get rid of everyone, and only keep Yoli and Inga. The rest of these bitches must go be prostitutes in Hillbrow.

Me: As you may have noticed, I was doing observations the whole day.

I can see the annoyance on some of their faces- the "rebels."

Me: I'm going to be frank with you, because I'd like to think we're all adults.

I look around.

Me: Right now, this whole team is fucked up.

They all look at me in shock.

Me: The level of inconsistency in this place is appalling. We have teachers who do not deal with fighting incidents in their spaces; we have teachers who watch series and YouTube videos during their lessons; we have teachers whose classrooms are literally chaotic- posters are all over the place, chairbags are filled with unnecessary junk, and the classroom layout is not conducive to learning.

I see I have woken them up.

Me: What will not happen, is you coming here every single day to fuck up this school- not only is our reputation at stake, our money is also on the line. Parents bring their kids here, because they trust us. Do you think they'd be comfortable

with seeing their kids engaged in fights while a teacher is there, teaching?

I look at Danny briefly.

Me: It is quite simple, really...

I look around.

Me: If you don't believe in what we're trying to achieve here, then you are free to walk away. These children deserve passionate, positive, and present teachers. They don't deserve teachers who only care about the smart kids in the classroom. They sure as hell do not deserve teachers who dismiss them when they're feeling sad.

I look around again.

Me: If you want to leave, this is your opportunity to... There's an intense silence for a while.

Me: So, I'm assuming we all want to stay? There's silence once again.

Me: Then, we expect all of you to go home, reflect on your actions, and your areas of growth. We will start facilitating regular training sessions that deal with your areas of growth. Please approach everything with positivity.

I look at Derek and Andile.

Andile: Each of you should type out your reflections and send them to me.

Derek: Just so you know, Ziyanda will be the principal as of next month.

I try to hide my shock, but fail.

I keep it together.

Me: That's it for today. Enjoy the rest of your day.

I walk out and we go to Derek's office.

As soon as Andile closes the door, I look at Derek.

Me: Really??

Derek: You're amazing, baby. I can't let you go.

Me: I don't want to lead those idiots.

He laughs lightly.

I look at Andile.

Me: Why don't you take on the role?

Andile shakes his head.

Andile: I'm not ready. Besides, I'm busy with my PhD. I won't be able to juggle the load.

I sigh heavily.

Me: I'll think about it.

Andile: You're going to nail it.

Me: You're doing your PhD?

He nods happily.

Me: You PhD people just love bragging, don't you?

Andile laughs.

Andile: When you get to that level, you'll understand.

Me: Argh.

I look at Derek.

Me: Let's go home.

Derek: Okay, let me finish sending these emails quickly.

Me: Okay.

I walk out with Andile.

Me: Are you also going to open your own school in the long run?

Andile: Yep. However, I want to open a Foundation Phase remedial school.

Me: That's great. There's a market lapho.
He smiles.

Andile: See you tomorrow, then.

Me: Tomorrow? Nah fam. I'll see you people next month.

He chuckles.

Andile: Bye then.

Me: Shap.

I make my way to Yoli's class. She must have left already.

As I make my way back to the office, I bump into Inga, our star teacher.

Inga: Hey, boss lady!

I sigh and she gives me a hug.

Inga: You'll be great! These people need a bit of spice to wake them up!

Me: Now I have to lead people who hate me.

Inga: They really do hate you.

Me: I couldn't care less.

Inga: That's why you're perfect. They need to know that they don't run things. I chuckle.

Me: Hmkay then. Bye, Ings.

Inga: Bye, Mrs Ngidi.

I laugh lightly. If only she knew that I'm not changing my surname once I get married.

I walk back to the office and find Derek packing up.

Me: Are you done, lover?

Derek: Yep.

He finishes up and we make our way out.

When we get to Dean and Nolwazi's house, we find Dean feeding Simo, while Khulekani is busy playing. Star is lying on the couch, kicking happily.

Dean has become our babysitter. Both he and Nolwazi decided to leave their jobs. They are planning on starting their own business, something about business consulting what what. If it's not education-related, honey I'm not interested.

Me: Koko.

Dean: Ya nina.

He looks really good. Him and Derek are sexy daddies.

Dean: How are you, madam principal?

Me: I'm not even surprised that he has told you.

Derek is already focusing on Star.

I take Khulekani and give him a kiss.

Me: How's my favourite twin?

He giggles as I give him kisses.

Simo immediately starts crying and kicking.

We already know what's up. I put Khule down and Dean hands over Simo. She stops crying and looks at me. If she could speak, she would definitely put me in my place. How dare I focus on her twin brother when she's around? Treacherous! I play with her and she goes back to being chirpy.

Me: I'm genuinely worried about this girl. I can see her murdering Khule in the future. She's too self-centred.

Dean: She gets like this only when you're around.

Me: I mean, I know I'm great, but damn...

Dean: Mxm.

Me: Did Derek tell you how soft he has become?

Dean: No, fill me in.

I go on to tell him about the hectic day I had.

Once I'm done, Dean looks at Derek.

Dean: Is it Liyakha? Is she turning you into a softie?

Derek: I don't have the energy to be mean anymore. I have nothing but love.

Dean: Cute.

I roll my eyes.

Me: You're supposed to help me make fun of him, idiot!

Dean: I was also soft after my babies. I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm starting to think you're not on my team anymore.

Dean: I'm Team Love.

Me: Ewww! As I vomit!

He laughs.

Me: Where's Lwazi?

Dean: She's outside with her friends.

Me: Really?

I want to meet Lwazi's friends. They must be gems.

Just then, we hear laughter.

Lwazi walks in first. She's followed by two other women, gorgeous women.

Lwazi: Zizi!

She walks to me and gives me a kiss.

Okay then. Clearly she's tipsy. She then gives Dean a kiss.

Nolwazi: Have you met my friends?

I shake my head.

Nolwazi: This is Sly and this is Nomi.

Nomi is drinking champagne from the bottle.

Sly: Is this the legendary Ziyanda? Fuck, we've heard way too much about you.

These people worship you.

Uhm. Is she joking or is she coming for me?

I smile.

Me: I'll take that as a compliment.

Sly: I was even starting to be jealous.

Nomi: Nice to meet you, Zi.

Nolwazi: They know about you.

Dean: When are you leaving my house?

Sly: Awume Dean. We are sleeping over.

Dean grunts and they laugh.

Sly: And... is this Derek?

She looks at Derek a little too long.

Nolwazi: Yes, this is Derek, Ziyanda's fiancée.

Sly: Hmm, I see.

Derek is not even paying attention. Once he's around Star, best believe his ass won't be fully present.

Sly: Is that your child, Zi?

Me: Yep.

Simo kicks me and I give her a kiss. She smiles.

Nolwazi: See you later. I just came in to get more champagne.

Dean: Hmkay.

I watch as they walk out.

There's an awkward silence. Dean looks at Derek and I.

Derek: We don't like them.

Dean laughs.

Dean: You didn't even talk to them.

Derek: Liyakha allows me to ignore people I don't want to address.

Dean continues to laugh. I think I agree with Derek. I don't like that Sly one...

Something ain't right there.

Me: We should get going.

Dean: Don't you want to take me with?

Me: This is a big house. You'll survive.

He groans.

Derek stands and I put down Simo and take Star.

Me: Hey, baby!

Star snaps her tongue excitedly.

Me: See you soon, Langa.

Dean: Shap.

A week has passed.

I'm in the house with Star, when Zimkitha calls and tells me that she is outside.

I let her in.

Zimkitha: Hey, baby.

Me: Hey.

She gives me a hug and we walk inside.

Me: Would you like something to drink or eat?

Zimkitha: Whiskey.

I get her favourite bottle and a glass.

Zimkitha: Thank you.

She looks at me sadly.

Zimkitha: I miss you, baby.

I look at her blankly.

Zimkitha: Kodwa Ziyanda...

Me: I don't know what to say...

She sighs heavily.

She downs her whiskey and nods slowly.

Zimkitha: I understand...

I stare at her.

Just then, my phone rings and it's an unknown number.

Me: Hello?

Person: Hi, am I speaking to Ziyanda, Nkanyezi's fiance?

Me: Uhm... who's this?

Person: You're speaking to Vicky. I've been trying to contact your fiance for over a year.

Me: Vicky?

I've heard this name before.

Before I can say anything, Zimkitha takes my phone gently and walks away with it, talking to this Vicky person.

I don't even have the energy to follow her.

I take Little Star and give her all my attention.

INSERT 182

The following week, I make my way to Nolwazi's house. She asked to meet with me.

When I get there, she is already within her champagne.

Me: Will you ever quit drinking champagne?

Nolwazi: I'd rather die!

I laugh and we share a hug.

Me: Where are the megabytes?

Nolwazi: Zimkitha took them. I wanted a day off.

Me: Hmkay.

Nolwazi: Have you two sorted out your issues?

Me: I have no issues with Zimkitha.

Nolwazi: If you say so...

Me: Anyway, why am I here?

She laughs as we walk outside and sit by the pool.

Nolwazi: I want to get married next month.

Me: WHAT?!

Nolwazi: I'm serious.

Me: Next month??

She nods and smiles.

Nolwazi: I've been thinking about it a lot lately.

Me: Nolwazi, do you know how much planning and money you need for a wedding?

Nolwazi: Ziyanda, I've been married before. Me: Konje.

She chuckles.

Nolwazi: Exactly. I know what I'm doing.

Me: Does Dean agree?

Nolwazi: Is his opinion really valuable once I've made up my mind?

We laugh.

Nolwazi: Just kidding. He has been nagging me for a while now.

Me: Not surprised.

Nolwazi: We both want an intimate wedding. This time around I'm all about quality over quantity.

Me: Was your first wedding packed?

She sighs dramatically.

Nolwazi: You have no idea! I didn't even know more than half of the people who attended!

Me: Yoh, was it Thenjiwe?

Nolwazi: Of course. That woman invited all her people. That wedding was a show for her.

Me: Did she hate you from the beginning?

Nolwazi: Not really. She started hating me when she thought I couldn't have children.

Me: Thank God for Dean! You done popped kids for the man!

Nolwazi: Indeed!

Me: So, what's your plan?

Nolwazi: Sly has decided that she will be the wedding planner.

Wow... I must say that I'm a bit touched. I know I'm not a professional planner, but I would have loved to help out...

Nolwazi: I would appreciate it if you'd help her though.

Me: Really?

I smile.

Nolwazi: Of course. Sly is a seasoned event planner. However, you're also a great planner. You always add something special and memorable. I think the two of you will be amazing.

I try to hide my disapproval. I didn't really hit it off with Sly.

Just then, I get a call from Derek.

Me: Excuse me.

Nolwazi: Okay.

I answer.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Where are you? I miss you.

Me: I'll be back soon. I'm still at Nolwazi's.

Derek: Oh okay.

Me: How is Star?

Derek: I'm fine.

I giggle.

Me: Not you, dummy.

Derek: She's fine. She just dozed off now.

I'm bored.

Me: Haibo, don't you have work to do?

Derek: I have a lot of work to do, but you know I'm not productive when you're not around. Come back.

Me: Okay, drama queen. I'll be back soon.

Derek: Okay. I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: Soonest.

Me: Soonest.

I end the call and focus on Nolwazi.

Me: So, wedding, next month?

Nolwazi: Yes, wedding, next month!

Me: We're getting married!

Nolwazi: Yaaas!

She pours more champagne and we drink up.

When I get back home, I find Derek cooking.

Me: Whatchu cooking?

He grabs me and presses me against the fridge.

Me: Whooa, relax!

He smiles and gives me a kiss. After a while, he pulls a face as he stares at me.

Derek: You tipsy?

Me: Just a little.

Derek: Without me?

He pouts and I laugh.

Me: Nolwazi kept the champagne flowing.

Derek: She told you about the wedding?

Me: Nigga, you knew??

Derek: Only found out about 10 minutes ago.

Me: They are really getting married next month...

Derek: Aha.

I get a bottle of wine and he watches as I open it and drink from the bottle.

Derek: What's going on?

Me: I'm in a drinking mood.

He focuses on his pots while I drink up. I sit on a high stool and watch as he does his thing.

Me: Her friend is planning the wedding.

Derek: You wanted to plan it?

Me: I mean... I wouldn't mind...

Derek: Sly is Nolwazi's best friend.

Me: Yeah yeah.

Derek: I don't want you caught up in wedding drama. I'm glad you won't be involved.

Me: Well, she sorta asked me to help out.
He shakes his head.

Me: Is this you making a final decision as the man of the house?

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Yes.

Me: Yhu, I swear I just became moist.
He tries to stay serious, but ends up laughing.

Derek: Baby, I'm serious. I don't want you to stress over other people's weddings.

Me: I hear you. I won't involve myself fully.

He nods happily.

Derek: I'm loving your new vibe. You've been minding your business these days.

Me: Liyakha is a handful.

Derek: You hardly use that name.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Ready to admit that it's a beautiful name?

Me: Not better than Nkanyezi.

He blushes.

Me: Want some wine? I'm ready to down this whole thing.

Derek: In the mood for whiskey.

Me: Hmkay.

I get him his whiskey.

Derek: Zimkitha almost finished this bottle mos...

Me: She was in one of her strange moods.

Derek: She's always going through something.

I sigh.

Me: Anyway, let's talk about this principal thing...

He smiles.

Me: I'll do it, but I don't think I want to start anytime soon.

He nods.

Me: What happened to you wanting me to be a housewife?

He chuckles.

Derek: Hai, you're not about that life.

Me: Yaas!

He continues chuckling.

Derek: I sound more like you with each passing day.

Me: Pussy Power is a real thing.

We continue chatting.

I decided to go to school with Derek today.

I want to check up on those heffers.

It's now lunchtime and I've been doing observations since 9am.

Me: I'm ready to go home now.

Derek: Don't leave me.

Me: As much I'd like to be with you, I miss
Star.

He groans and stands.

Derek: I'll be back.

Me: Shap.

He walks out just as Andile walks in.

I look at him for a while...

Me: Are you seeing anyone?

Andile: Excuse me?

Me: Are you seeing anyone, romantically?

He looks at me in slight disbelief.

I'm not even ashamed. I really want to hook him up with someone. I feel like he's one of those guys who live by themselves, and crave companionship.

The problem is that all my friends are taken.

Andile: I'm not seeing anyone romantically.

Me: Not even for entertainment nyana?

He chuckles.

Andile: Well...

Me: Hmkay.

Andile: Are you okay? This is unlike you.

Me: Hai I can't be a dragon 24/7. Also, we'll be working closely together, so we need to get to know each other.

He nods slowly and looks at me weirdly. Just then, the door opens.

I have to catch my breath when I realise that it's Dean. I don't think I'll ever get used to these people's attractiveness.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: Mxm.

Dean glances at Andile.

I'm expecting Andile to greet Dean, because Dean always demands respect nje.

Andile looks back at him calmly.

They stare at each other.

Heyi the testosterone is outchea!

Dean: Andile.

Andile: Dean.

They both nod lightly.

I roll my eyes.

Men are so dramatic to be honest.

Andile looks at me and smiles.

Andile: You leaving soon?

Me: I want to have a quick meeting with you, before I leave, regarding Danny. We need to find interventions for that girl.

He chuckles.

Andile: No problem. I'll be in my office.

Me: Shap.

He glances at Dean briefly before walking out and closing the door.

Dean stares at me.

Me: The drama dramz.

Dean: I don't like that boy.

Me: Which boy? Andile?

He continues staring at me.

Me: Argh, sit down and stop annoying me.
He sits on Derek's chair and starts spinning slowly.

Me: How are the wedding plans going?
He grunts.

Dean: Sly is annoying the shit out of me.
I laugh.

Dean: She thinks this is her wedding.

Me: Isn't she married?

Dean: How, when she prides herself on taking people's men?

I screech.

Me: Dean! The shade!

He hisses.

Me: Damnit!

The door opens and Derek walks in.

I smile.

Derek: Look what the wind blew in.

Me: I have a meeting to attend. I'll give you two time to catch up.

I give Derek a kiss before walking out.

INSERT 183 (Unedited)

Dean and I are driving to his house from school.

Dean: You're really taking this principal position?

Me: I guess.

Dean: You'll be great.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Dean: We just need to fire that Andile oke.

Me: Dean, stop being jealous. You can't be the only alpha male in the world. There are other great men out there.

Dean: You think that boy is great?

I shrug.

Dean: Mxm.

I laugh lightly.

Me: So, uthi Sly is a man stealer?

Dean: You have no idea. She has finished them all.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Dean: She used to date Liwa back in the day.

Me: WHAT?!

I look at him in shock.

Me: Does Vuvu know about this??

Dean: I'm not sure.

Me: Wowzer!

Dean: She loves going for men that are taken. She says so herself.

Me: Nolwazi is comfortable with that?

He glances at me blankly.

Dean: You can't possibly think I'd entertain a woman like Sly.

Me: Yoh.

Dean: She knows I'm not about that life.

I giggle and he looks at me weirdly.

Me: You are all starting to sound like me.

Dean: It's these ghetto reality shows you make us watch.

We continue chatting until we get to his house.

Nolwazi wants me to meet with Sly.

I don't even know how I'm supposed to act now that I have all this tea on her. I mean, I don't have a problem with women who are not into serious relationships and just want to tap and go. However, I do have a problem when a bitch thrives on inserting herself in other people's relationships intentionally.

Anyway when we get to the lounge, we find Nolwazi, Nomi and Sly there.

Why do I get the feeling that this Nomi person is always drunk?

Me: Good afternoon.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

Nolwazi stands and we share a hug.

I look at Nomi and Sly.

Me: Hello.

Nomi: Hey, love.

Nomi takes a sip of her wine and smiles.

I glance at Sly, who is staring at me. I can't really read her expression.

Sly: How are you?

Me: I'm good and you?

Sly: I'm fantastic. Where's Derek?

I try by all means to keep a straight face.

She smiles and takes a sip of her wine.

Just as I'm about to respond, Dean places his arm around my shoulders, and leads me to another room.

I grit my teeth.

Me: Dean.

Dean: I know.

I look at him angrily.

Dean: It's not worth it.

Me: She's testing me... That's the only logical explanation I have right now. The bitch is trying me.

He chuckles as he squeezes me for a few seconds.

I take a deep breath.

Dean: She's really not worth it. She's being childish.

I roll my eyes.

We walk back to the lounge.

Nolwazi looks nervous.

I smile brightly.

Me: So, what's up? Do you need help with anything?

Nolwazi: Oh, uhm... We're trying to figure out where the wedding should be.

Me: Why don't you have it here? You have a huge yard.

Nolwazi: Exactly!

Sly: We can hire a venue. I don't want to be limited.

Me: Isn't there a budget?

Sly: What? A budget? For who?

I look at Nolwazi.

Sly: I don't know where you've been, but we don't do budgets around here.

Me: Well, alright then.

Dean: We do have a budget actually. We have a family now, we can't be irresponsible with our money.

Sly: Hehe!

Me: I'm not a professional planner, but even I know that a budget is the foundation of planning an event. A timeframe also forms part of the foundation.

Dean: Common sense, really.

Sly: Nolwazi, talk to your people. I've been your planner for years now. Angazi kwenzakalani right now.

Nolwazi: Friend, Langa is right.

Nomi: They are absolutely right. There's nothing cute about blowing up money

these days. We're all about financial security and shit.

I could kiss Nomi right now. I don't know what's wrong with this Sly person.

Then it hits me...

Maybe I can hook up Andile with Nomi. I'll sort it out another time.

Nolwazi: Alright. I'm glad you're here Langa. We haven't decided on a budget.

Me: Do you guys want a white wedding, traditional or both?

Nolwazi: Can I be honest with you?

She looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I've done this before. I'd rather you tell me what you want and I'll go along.

Me: That's sweet.

Nomi: Lwa you are such a cutie. Nomi gobbles up her wine and pours some more.

Dean: Lwazi, you know I'm not a flashy person.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Wena?

He spanks her ass and we all sit.

Dean: Listen, I can't say I want a full-on traditional wedding, because I know nothing about those things... I wasn't raised traditionally. I also can't say I want a white wedding, because I'm not that oppressed in life.

Nolwazi giggles and gives him a kiss.

Nolwazi: We'll have a mixture of some sort.

Dean nods.

Me: I think I'm also going to have a mixture. Even our lobola process was shady.

Nolwazi: Girl, tell me about it! That's what happens when you marry a man with limited family.

Dean: Wow, are you coming for me?

Me: You actually raise a good point. These men have some fucked up family dynamics.

Nolwazi: They literally have no fathers!

Dean: Wow!

Nomi: You people are weird.

She drinks some wine and focuses on her phone.

I glance at Sly. She seems to have zoned out, because she is typing away.

Dean: Are you done coming for me?

Me: Askies.

Sly: So, what's your budget?

Nolwazi and Dean look at each other.

Dean: R300 000

I suddenly can't breathe.

I cough like a mad person and Nomi gives me some of her wine.

Nomi: Wait, don't finish it phela.

I recover.

Dean: Yini wena?

Me: Hai nothing.

My poor ass is shook! I was expecting boma 80 tau nyana, kanti umuntu will just do the most.

Nolwazi: Sounds reasonable.

I can't even contain myself at this point- I have to ask.

Me: Lwazi, how much was your first wedding?

Nolwazi: Around two million.

Heyi! I start coughing again and Dean laughs at me.

Dean: Uyislima Ziyanda.

Me: What? I'm genuinely not used to that kind of money. My poor ass is shook!

Nolwazi: R300 000 is reasonable.

Dean: Max 400 000.

Me: Yeses!

I don't even want to start thinking about my wedding. I know for a fact that Derek will want to do the most, but best believe we'll have a low-budget wedding. I'll make sure of it. Where the hell will my ass get 400 000?? My savings are less than half of that.

Dean: We have money, Ziyanda.

Me: Hai brother, it is crystal clear. I'm not going to be a cockblocker.

I wish I had planned and executed my wedding first, so I could show these heffers that it's possible to have a low-budget wedding of excellent quality.

Me: So, when is the wedding?

Nolwazi: In three weeks.

Sly: Okay. I'll come up with some themes so you guys can choose.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Dean: Ziyanda of the Great Dlamini, I also want some theme ideas from you.

Me: Really?

Dean: Yes.

Sly chuckles quietly.

I'm glad that Dean has my back. I want to give him a big hug.

Dean: You're very creative. I want you to be involved.

Me: Cool.

Nomi: You seem cool. We should totes hang out.

Me: Thank you.

We are definitely going to hang out. I'm going set her up with Andile.

Just then, we hear footsteps and Derek emerges.

As usual, I'm excited to see him.

Derek: Good afternoon, people.

Nolwazi: Hey, Star.

Derek: I came to fetch madam over here.

Dean: We can't even get you a car as a gift, because you're so lazy.

Me: Wait, what?

Nolwazi: We've been meaning to collectively get you one, as a push gift, but we decided it would be a waste.

Me: Huh??

Dean chuckles.

Me: But-

Dean: You're not getting it anymore.

Haibo, I feel like they've just dangled a carrot in front of me, and then shared it amongst themselves.

Derek: Ready to go, baby?

Me: Sure.

I stand and get my bag.

Derek: Have a good day further.

Nolwazi: Thanks, you too!

Sly: Bye.

Nomi: Bye, D!

D my ass. She must stick to getting drunk, unless she wants to catch these hands.

We say our goodbyes and Dean walks us out.

Me: Thanks for having my back.

Dean: I've got you.

I give him a hug and then look at Derek.

Me: Have I got some goss-goss for you!
Yhuu!

Derek: Yaas!

We laugh as Derek imitates me.

Dean: If you dare gossip about me-

Me: Byee!

Derek and I get in the car, and he drives out of the yard.

INSERT 184

Liyakha is finally sleeping.

Derek and I get in bed.

Derek: What happened today?

Me: Heyi ngiyalingwa! Sly wants you!

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: She keeps testing me, outchea bringing you up.

Derek: Do you want me to tell her to stop?
I sigh.

Me: No, it's okay. I think she's trying to get me to react.

Derek: Are you planning on reacting?

Me: It's not like I schedule my reactions, dummy.

He laughs.

Me: On a serious note though, I'm not that girl anymore. I'm a woman now.

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: I'm a mother.

He smiles even more.

Me: I can't be out here in the streets doing the most.

Derek: Mmm.

He pulls me closer and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You're a woman now?

Me: I'm not just a woman, or a mother... I'm a fiance, you know? He laughs boldly and I join him.

Me: I'm not going to entertain Sly.

Derek: Good girl.

We share a kiss.

Me: Anyway, so we discussed the wedding.

Derek: And?

Me: Can you believe that Nolwazi's wedding cost them 2 million??

Derek: From my understanding, it was a humongous affair.

Me: It's ridiculous!

He smiles knowingly.

Derek: I'm sure you almost passed out from shock.

Me: You have no idea! I lost it!

Derek: What's the budget for this wedding?

Me: Before I even get to that, can you believe that Sly was busy saying a budget is a waste of time??

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: When I asked them about the budget. She said I obviously not part of the group, because they don't do budgets.

Derek: They? Who?

Me: I guess she was talking about her circle.

He shakes his head.

Derek: Irresponsible behaviour.

Me: She was being unnecessary. Dean had my back though.

Derek: It's not like he had a choice.

Me: Vele. I'd kill him if he sided with other people.

Derek: Even if he has known them longer than he has known you?

Me: I don't give a shit about who has been here before me. The point is that I'm here now.

He laughs.

Derek: Your inflated ego is unmatched.

Me: So, anyway, after Sly tried it with me, Dean and Nolwazi stated that their budget is R300 000 - R400 000!

He looks at me blankly.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Yes?

Me: Did you hear me? Their budget is R300 000 - R400 000!

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: I feel like you've just lost me right now. Do you not see anything wrong with that?

He sighs.

Derek: Not really.

I groan loudly.

Me: I think I'm too poor for you people.

He chuckles.

Derek: You're not poor anymore. My money is yours.

I shake my head.

Me: R400 000 is a lot of money. Why would you want to spend so much money for an event? Where will that money go? Feed strangers and expensive deco?

Derek: It's their money, baby.

Me: True. What do I know? I should just shut up. I'm just a typical no-money having bitch.

I'm annoyed.

He realises this, and plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Dramatic much?

Me: Since we're discussing budgets...

What is our budget?

I sighs and looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: I would like to think that you're a smart and financially responsible man.

He chuckles.

Derek: I am... I am also financially free to do anything I want.

Me: Well, I'm not.

Derek: When are you going to get it through your thick skull that we're a unit now?

I shrug.

Me: I don't wake up everyday, and tell myself that your money is my money, because my ego won't allow me to. I don't want to suck you dry.

He smiles slyly and I roll my eyes. I didn't even intend on throwing out that pun.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: That actually offends me. I always have to tiptoe around you when it comes to finances, because you refuse to spend my money freely.

Me: I'm not used to this.

Derek: So, your previous boyfriends didn't spend money on you?

Me: They sure did, but I didn't move in with them, and get engaged. Our arrangement is different.

He is silent for a minute.

Derek: I think we should speak to a financial counsellor before we get married.

Me: I'm already seeing a psychological therapist. What more do you want from me?

He chuckles lightly.

Me: Why should we see a financial counsellor?

Derek: We need to make sure that we're both on the same page with our finances before we tie the knot.

Me: My money is nothing compared to yours.

Derek: So?

I sigh in defeat. He doesn't understand. I'm really struggling with the gap. I always want to be on top of things, and my finances right now, have put me in last place. I'm literally huffing, puffing and sweating at the back, while Derek is chilling by the finish line. That's how I see it.

Derek: The problem is that you like being in control.

I look at him guiltily.

Derek: We can't get married until we're both on the same page in all spheres of our lives, not just psychologically

Me: I hear you.

Derek: As the man of the house-
I giggle.

Derek: I have decided that we will see someone who will help us.

Me: Okay, man of the house.

He gives me a kiss.

Derek: At some point, you'll have to check your ego. I have money, deal with it.

Me: You have a lot of money.

Derek: I have been preparing for this phase of my life forever. As fucked up as they are, my parents always emphasised the importance of financial security from the get go.

Me: That's good.

Derek: I have an account for my wedding. I've been saving up for it for the longest time.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Derek: I thought Busi was the one...

Me: Yoh, haike.

He chuckles.

Derek: But, clearly Sly is the one.

I punch him lightly and he laughs.

Me: Don't try me.

Derek: On a serious note though, the rest of my life is dedicated to building a home with you. I'm genuinely giving my all. I want the same from you. Yes, we're not on the same level financially, but I'm not going to walk away because of that. I'd be crazy. You are also crazy for letting that prevent you from just relaxing and enjoying the ride.

Me: Okay.

We share a kiss and I rest my head on his chest.

Me: So, what are we going to do?

Derek: With what?

Me: The wedding.

Derek: I'm going to cover everything, because I have the means.

I try to protest, but stop myself, because I know I'd be wasting my time.

Derek: Stop overthinking it.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: As for the budget, it will depend on our vision.

Me: What's our vision?

Derek: How about we dedicate a day for that, the same way we did for our personal goals?

Me: Okay.

Derek: Then, we'll find common ground.

Me: Do you want a big wedding?

Derek: No. I don't have too many people in life.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Good. I also don't think too much money should be spent, unless it's necessary.

I put my head up and look at him.

Me: I want to change how your people see events... I want to show them that it's all about quality, not quantity.

He smiles.

Me: We won't need a lot of money, I guarantee you.

Derek: I know you'll nail it.

Me: When are we going to have the wedding?

Derek: I think we should wait another year. I don't want us to rush.

Me: Thank God you don't want to do it next month!

He laughs boldly and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: I've never been one to rush things.

Me: Good things come to those who wait.

Derek: I've waited long enough for this...

Heyi, when he slides down that hand, I know what time it is.

Me: Yaas!

He laughs lightly.

Little Star is such a cutie. She is a happy baby.

What I am grateful for is that she doesn't like strangers. As soon as she realises that a stranger is trying to hold her, her whole mood changes. She loves her people, just like her mommy.

Anyway, Little Star and I are at Nolwazi's house. It's been a two days since our last meeting. We're here to discuss invitations.

Sly and Nolwazi are already sipping on champagne.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey. How are you?

Nolwazi: Great!

Me: Hi, Sly.

Sly smiles.

Sly: Hey, Zi. You good?

Me: Yep.

Nolwazi: Hey, Star!

I hand over Star to Nolwazi.

Star smiles.

She loves Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: So, invitations...

Sly: Yes... Here are some ideas I researched...

She takes out an A3 book and there are pictures and everything.

She goes on to explain her ideas.

Sly: I like this one more...

She goes on to explain these ideas. I must say that they were good ideas, but they're too common. They also lack the "humanness."

I know my ego won't allow me to accept Sly's ideas. The childishness in me sees this as a competition, and I really can't help it.

I just don't like the woman.

Nolwazi: Alright, Zi, your ideas?

I take out my book as well and start explaining.

Me: This group is filled with love and humour, and I think it would be nice if the invitations also had those elements.

Nolwazi nods.

Me: I thought this family tree idea is really great. So, the invitation starts off with your separate family trees, and then shows how you two joined and became one- leading to this very moment.

Nolwazi: Hmm.

Me: I know my ideas are a bit strange...

Nolwazi giggles.

Nolwazi: I actually like it.

Me: Here's another idea... I saw this somewhere, and actually liked it. The invitation can be a puzzle.

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: I love that. I know it would frustrate some people.

Sly: It's been done before.

Me: Same way the ID/Passport thing is tired, and has been done as well?

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: Also, it doesn't make sense to use that ID/Passport idea, because this is not a destination wedding.

Okay.

I may have snapped just a bit.

Argh, but who cares? The heffer will get over it.

Me: Now, can I continue?

Nolwazi clears her throat uncomfortably and nods.

Nolwazi: Sure.

I continue pitching my ideas, avoiding Sly's stare...

INSERT 185

Little Star and I are now at school, visiting Big Star. I needed to see him after that invitation meeting.

We find his office empty.

The door opens and Andile walks in.

Me: Hey, Andi.

Andile: Hey.

He smiles widely as he steps closer.

I know Nkanyezi's about to cry, because she has no idea who Andile is...

Andile: Can I hold her?

Me: Uhm...

Star is not crying. She's her usual self.

Me: Sure.

He takes her and she stares at him, clearly trying to figure out who he is.

Andile: Hello, cutie.

Star continues staring at him. She seems intrigued.

Andile: She actually looks like you.

Me: Hai don't lie to me.

He chuckles.

Andile: She's adorable.

Me: Thank you.

Star is still staring at him with wide eyes.

Lol, she is really focused.

Derek walks in and smiles.

Derek: You actually came.

Me: I keep my promises.

Derek: Star is in a stranger's arms, and she's not crying?

Me: We serve a living God.

Derek: Indeed.

He steps closer to Andile.

Derek: That's enough now. You can occupy yourself with something else.

He takes her from Andile.

Andile: For a split second there, I had baby fever.

Derek laughs lightly.

Derek: You need to start having kids.

Andile shakes his head.

Andile: Nah, I'm good.

Derek looks at me lovingly.

Derek: You good?

Me: Yep.

He nods and focuses on Little Star.

I look at Andile seriously.

Me: So, how are the teachers doing?

We walk out and leave Derek with Little Star.

Andile: There's some improvement. Yoli, however, seems withdrawn again.

Me: She has gone back to being timid?

He nods.

Me: I'll talk to her.

Andile: Okay. We get to his office and sit.

Me: And, our white girl?

He grunts.

Andile: I don't understand why she doesn't leave. It's clear that she doesn't want to be here.

Me: It's affecting the kids.

Andile: Definitely.

Me: Have you given her a warning?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Really? How do you expect her to wake up if there aren't any sanctions for her actions?

Andile: Derek is the one who's responsible for her.

I sigh heavily.

Derek is not focused these days.

Me: Anyway...

I smile.

Me: I have good news.

He looks at me suspiciously.

Me: Are you keen on a blind date?

Andile: Excuse me?

He stares at me in disbelief.

Me: Relax. She's a great woman!

Andile: Are you serious, Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

He is silent for a while. Eventually, he starts laughing.

Andile: Are you fucken serious?

Me: Yes! I am dead serious!

He continues laughing for a while.

Andile: Wow!

Me: Don't overthink it! I am a great love connector!

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: You can call me The Love Zinconnector.

He laughs once again and I join him.

Me: I'll tell you when we're doing the things.

I stand.

Andile: Do I even have a choice?

Me: No.

He sighs and nods.

Andile: Alright then.

Me: Good. See you later, alligator.

Andile: In a while, crocodile.

I make my way back to Derek's office.

Me: So... My plan is in motion.

Derek: What plan?

Me: Get Andile a Girlfriend.

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: I'm not getting involved.

Me: We're going on a double date.

Derek: Huh?

Me: I'm setting him up with Nomi, Nolwazi's alcoholic friend. It's going to be a blind date.

Derek: Ziyanda-

Me: As the woman of the house, this is my final decision.

Derek: Manje mina ngingenaphi?

Me: Wena you just need to show up. It will be a double date.

He sighs heavily and looks at Little Star.

Derek: I thought your mother had changed her ways... Clearly I was wrong.

Me: Relax, it will be fun!

Derek: You're mixing business with pleasure. That is highly unprofessional.

Me: ...says the man who won't even give his troublesome employees written warnings for their fucked-upness...

Hmkay, I'll take your advice on professionalism, Mr Principal.

His eyes pop out.

Derek: Zi!

Me: Don't come for me.

Derek: That was low, baby.

Me: Don't dish it out, if you can't take it.

I take Little Star and shower her with kisses.

Me: How's my baby?

I continue kissing her till she giggles happily- music to my ears.

Derek: We made a beautiful baby.

Me: Damn right we did. You ain't married to no average bitch, boy...

He laughs.

Me: Anyway, I need to contact Nomi.

Derek: You didn't even tell me how the invitation meeting went.

Me: It went well. Nolwazi obviously chose my idea.

Derek: Really?

I nod and smile.

Me: Ziyanda Dlamini 1- Sly Da Hoe 0.

He laughs.

Me: Petty is out to play. She is ready for anything.

Derek shakes his head.

Derek: You're doing the most.

I laugh.

Me: When are we going home?

Derek: Soon.

Me: Alright then. Star and I will wait for you.

He gives me a kiss and focuses on his work.

So, I managed to get Nomi's number, and I'm meeting up with her for lunch.

When I get to the restaurant, I find her drinking champagne- how shocking.

Nomi: Hey, love.

Me: Hey, Nomi. How are you?

We share a hug.

Nomi: I'm okay.

We sit. I stare at her. She has her natural hair tied into a high bun. She makes me have natural hair fomo, but I know I could

never be part of that movement. I wouldn't be able to take care of it. The waiter takes my order.

Me: Can I just make a quick call? I need to tell Derek that I arrived safely.

Nomi: No problem.

I call Derek and let him know I'm good. Once I'm done, I find Nomi staring at me.

Nomi: I always wonder what it feels like to love a man.

Haibo. Is she lesbian?

Me: You've never been in love?

She shakes her head.

Nomi: I don't want to be vulnerable with men. I don't have the ability.

Me: Are you lesbian?

She chuckles.

Nomi: No. I'm straight.

Me: Oh okay.

Nomi: I don't trust men. I think I'm going to be single for the rest of my life.

Me: I was also like that.

She sips her champagne.

Me: Men are definitely shady.

Nomi: Yet we still want them.

Me: When was the last time you were in a relationship?

She sighs.

Nomi: I've only had one relationship. It was two years ago. I nod understandingly.

Me: Did he hurt you?

Nomi: Not really. I just wasn't feeling the relationship. I don't think I'm meant to be in a relationship.

Me: Why do you say that?

She shrugs.

Nomi: I guess I haven't come across someone who blows me away.

I clear my throat.

Me: Well... I have someone in mind for you.

Nomi: Wait, what?

Me: Uhm, Derek and I would like to set up a blind date for you.

Derek is used to me involving him in my mess. He'll be strong, shame.

Nomi: Huh?

I smile.

I hope she doesn't go crazy on me.

Nomi: You want to hook me up?

Me: Yes. I have already spoken to the guy.

Nomi: Will it be a blind date?

I nod excitedly.

She stares at me for a while.

Nomi: I don't know how to feel.

Me: He's a great man. I have a good feeling about this.

Nomi: You don't even know me that well, Zi.

Me: I know you well enough to know that you need some good loving. She finishes her champagne and groans.

Nomi: Tell me about him.

Me: Well... I won't go into looks, because I don't want to sound shallow.

Nomi: Is he good-looking?

I nod.

Me: You'll see for yourself.

Nomi: Does he work?

I nod.

Me: He is also doing his PhD.

Nomi: He has money, I assume?

I laugh and she finally smiles.

Me: Of course. Why would I hook you up with a no-money-having-ass man?

She laughs.

Nomi: Well, I'm glad we're on the same page. I'm an expensive girlfriend.

Me: Aren't we all?

The waiter brings our food.

Nomi: Alright, I'm game.

Me: Perfect! I won't tell you about him. You'll see for yourself.

Me: Derek, hurry up!

Derek: Baby, I've been done for a while now.

I walk out the bathroom, and find him on the bed, using his laptop.

Me: Oh.

Derek: You're the one who needs to hurry up.

Me: 10 minutes is all I need!

Derek: Hmkay.

I know that he knows that I know that I'm nowhere near done. Beating this face for the Gods is no easy task.

Anyway, tonight is Date Night. Boy, am I excited!

I've briefed Andile and Nomi, they know what's up.

Derek: You look beautiful.

Me: Thank you. You're not too bad yourself.

He chuckles.

Me: You ready?

Derek: Uh-huh.

Me: Alright.

I get my bag and off we go.

We arrive at the restaurant.

The table is booked and ready... but something ain't right.

There are two extra seats.

Me: Star, what's happening? Did you book a table for 6 people?

Derek: Yes.

Me: Who's joining us?

Derek: They've just walked in...

When I turn around, I see Dean and Nolwazi walking towards us.

Me: Are you kidding me?? Dean looks annoyed as hell.

They finally get to us.

Nolwazi: Hey, guys!

Derek: Hey.

Nolwazi: Aww, Zi. I had to tag along. Nomi hates men! I need to see how this goes.

Dean: Mxm.

Dean pushes me out of the way and sits. He then takes out his phone and focuses on it.

Nolwazi: I hope you don't mind.

Really??

I look at Derek and he avoids my eyes.

We all sit.

I need a drink to loosen me up. This was not part of my plan.

Dean: I just don't unders-

Me: Listen here, you motherfucker, if you even think of ruining this date, I will punch your well-constructed face, you understand?

Their jaws drop.

They're all staring at me in shock.

Me: In fact, that goes for all of you.

I call our waiter and order a shot of tequila.

INSERT 186 (Unedited)

I take my shot and look at them.

They're still staring at me in shock.

Dean: You are such a mean person.

Me: You want some tissue, Diana? Want me to breastfeed you as well?

Nolwazi: Ziyanda!

Derek: Yoh.

I look at Dean.

Me: I'll finish you.

Just then, my phone beeps. It's a message from Andile, telling me that he is making his way in.

Me: Andile is here. No bad vibes, please.

Derek: Well, you are the one who's threatening us...

I look over at Dean, and uswabe kab'hlungu.

Me: I still love you, Langa.

Dean: Mxm.

I give him a smile.

Someone clears their throat and we all look up and see Andile.

Yhu, people clean up nicely yazi.

Me: Andi!

I stand and give him a hug.

Andile: Hey.

I can tell that he is confused about Nolwazi and Dean's presence.

Me: Uhm, we have extra guests.

Andile: I can see...

He looks at Dean and then his eyes land on Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Hi, I'm Nomi's friend, Nolwazi.

Andile nods lightly.

Nolwazi: Dean is my husband.

Andile: Nice to meet you.

Argh, I'm so annoyed! Why are these two here? Now they're making this awkward! I have to compensate by being the overly happy one.

Andile looks at Dean.

Dean: How are you?

He gives Andile a smile.

I have to sit, so I don't fall.

Dean just greeted Andile. Dean just smiled.

Haibo!

Andile: I'm well. I wasn't expecting this to be such a big deal.

Me: Listen, Dean and Nolwazi just popped out of nowhere. I'm sorry about this.

I'm going to throw them under the bus.

Andile: It's okay.

Me: Have a seat.

He sits next to me.

Derek: Ya, Andile.

They look at each other and laugh lightly.

Derek: I tried to talk her out of this.

Andile: I was told that I didn't have a choice.

Dean: This one tends to make decisions for us. We are her puppets.

They all laugh.

I decide not to check them. If dissing me means that there won't be tension, then they can go on. I'll deal with them later.

Nolwazi: You are so handsome. How old are you?

Andile: Thank you. I'm 32.

We all agree that old men are not for us. I don't want to date an old citizen. Imagine if Derek was in his 40s. Lord, next thing Little Star turns 10 and her dad is out here getting ready to line-up eShoprite for his pension at the end of every month.

Hell no.

I'm fortunate to be surrounded by young men who are fresh and focused.

I don't find old men attractive. I feel like my depression and anxiety would be too much for them, because they're already stressing about their old age, and their abandoned children whom are roaming around the country searching for their asses, because they were once apartheid comrades who were in exile.

Anyway, back to this date.

Nolwazi: You're the Deputy Principal?

Andile: Yes.

Nolwazi: Nice.

I glance over at Dean. Shame. I can tell that I hurt his feelings.

I take out my phone and send him a text.

Me: I'm sorry.

He checks his phone and I can see him tightening his jaw.

He replies.

Dean: Fuck off. You're cancelled.

Yoh. Haike.

I put down my phone and we continue chatting with Andile.

The vibe is chilled.

Just then, we see Nomi approach the table. Yaaas! She is snatched!

I stare at Andile as he stares at Nomi.

I want to see his reaction!

Nomi gets to us.

Nomi: Hey, guys.

She has the sweetest voice. Akaphaphi uNomi. Akafani nathi.

She looks around the table.

Nomi: Lwazi?

Nolwazi: Girl, I had to see this!

Nolwazi stands and they share a hug.

Nomi is wearing the perfect jumpsuit. It shows off her tight thighs and bum.

Maybe if I go to gym, I'll also have her body. Derek even gave up on me. I just don't know the directions to the gym.

Also, traffic is always hectic, and

apparently, they have electricity problems. Hai, I'll go next year.

Nomi then looks at Andile. Nomi: Hello. Andile stands.

Yaaaas! He better wrap his arms around her and show her that she needs his dick in her life!

Andile: I'm Andile.

Nomi: Nomi.

She smiles lightly. I know her ovaries are prancing around.

Heyiii, he wraps his arms around her.

Hehe!

I am so proud of myself right now.

Andile helps her sit and then he sits. This is a circular table: Nomi is next to Lwazi; Lwazi is next to Dean; Dean is next to Derek; Derek is next to me; I'm next to Andile; Andile is next to Nomi. The waiter comes and takes our orders.

We're on our second bottle of champagne now. Nolwazi is obviously the one who's drinking it the most. Hopefully, Nomi will chill a bit. I want her to stay focused tonight.

Nomi then looks Andile.

I can feel the connection.

Nomi: So, I know nothing about you, Andile.

Andile: You don't say...

Nomi giggles.

Andile: What would you like to know?

Nomi: Everything, really. What do you do for a living? How many kids do you have? How much do you earn... important details, you know?

We all laugh.

Andile starts telling us about himself.

Just then, my phone beeps.

It's a message from Dean.

Dean: Stop smiling like an idiot. You look stupid.

I look at him and he stares right back at me. I stick out my tongue and then focus on the love birds.

I feel Derek's hand on my thigh and I remove it. I glance at him, and he looks at me sheepishly.

Me: Cancelled- that's what you are.

Just as he is about to respond, I look away and focus on Nomi and Andi again.

It's been three hours of absolute bliss.

Nomi: I have a flight to catch in the morning.

Nolwazi: We also have an early morning.

Me: Alright then. We can call it a night.

Nomi: I had a good time, thank you.

Andile: I'll walk you out.

Nomi: Thank you.

They stand.

Nomi: Guys, I'll see you soon.

Nolwazi: Travel safely, friend.

Nomi: Shap.

We say goodbye to her and watch as she walks out with Andile.

Me: Hmyghad!

Nolwazi: That went so well!

Me: Right?!

I look at Dean and Derek.

They don't seem as excited.

Nolwazi: And then, nina?

Dean: You two are so absorbed with the idea of this working out, that you didn't even realise that that shit was one-sided.

Me: Huh??

Derek: Andile is definitely not into Nomi.

Me: WHAT?!

Nolwazi: WHAT?!

Dean rolls his eyes.

Me: What? What do you mean?

Derek: Baby, the "love" is one-sided.

Me: Guys?

I feel like someone just slapped me hard.

Nolwazi is also shook.

Me: How do you know?

Dean: It was very evident. Andile doesn't like Nomi like that.

Yoh.

I don't know what to say.

Ngiswabile.

Dean sees this and immediately starts chuckling. The chuckling turns into straight laughing.

Me: What's so funny?

He ignores me.

I stand.

Derek: Aww, ba-

Nolwazi: You guys are idiots!

Nxa!

I walk away as Nolwazi gives them a piece of her mind.

I make my way outside, and find Andile there. He's having a smoke.

I walk to him and frown.

Me: You smoke?

Andile: Occasionally.

We stand in silence for a while.

Me: So, you don't like her?

He exhales his smoke and I catch a whiff of it.

Me: Please stop. I don't want to smell like cigarettes.

He chuckles as he takes one last drag and gets rid of it.

Me: Answer my question.

Andile: What was your question konje?

Me: You don't like her?

He takes out gum from his pocket.

Andile: She's not my type.

Me: You have a type?

Andile: Hawu, don't you have a type?

I groan.

Me: What's your type?

Andile: Definitely not her.

I am so offended, and I'm trying my best not to act out. He's making it sound like there's something wrong with Nomi.

Me: Mxm. So you faked it?

Andile: I'm not rude, Ziyanda. What did you want me to say? You wanted me to reject her in front of everyone?

Me: Mxm.

Andile: You're being dramatic.

Me: Don't tell me I'm being dramatic!

He looks at me coolly.

Andile: I'm not interested in Nomi. I have nothing against her.

Me: She's a nice person, Andile.

Andile: I'm not disputing that. I'm just not interested in her.

Me: Hmkay.

I'm so touched.

He pats my shoulder.

Andile: You tried...

Me: Mxm.

Andile: Next time, try to find out about my type.

Me: There won't be a next time.

Andile: Come on... You've been called The Great Dlamini. Surely you don't give up that easily?

Me: Allow me to drown in my failure, okay?

He laughs.

Andile: Alright then.

We walk back in. He gets his car keys and wallet.

Andile: Thank you for a lovely evening. I have to go.

They all say goodbye to him.

He looks at me amusingly and I grunt.

As soon as he is out, Dean's laughter has filled the entire restaurant.

Shit.

What did I get myself into?
Dean: Fuck! My stomach!
I.Want.To.Cry.

INSERT 187 (Unedited)

I just feel like my whole world has changed.

For the first time in my life, I was unsuccessful at hooking up people.

Yoh, I'm crushed.

I don't know what to do.

When Derek and I arrive home, I go to the lounge and throw myself on the couch.

I want to cuddle with Little Star, but she's with her grandparents.

I switch on the TV and watch an episode of Love and Hip Hop.

Derek sits next to me, and pulls me closer to him.

Once the episode is finished, he plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: Askies.

Me: I feel like a failure. I don't know what to do with myself.

I know he wants to laugh, but I appreciate that he is entertaining my trauma.

Me: I thought they were perfect for each other.

Just then, my phone rings.

Me: It's Nomi.

Derek: Don't answer it.

I ignore the call. A minute later, I get a text from her.

Nomi: Hey, Zi. Thank you for tonight, I had a good time. I hate to admit it, but you were right. I actually like Andile. Call me, so we can discuss this properly.

Yohh, Maria Josefa!

Derek reads the text.

Derek: Damn.

Me: What am I going to do?

Derek: Yoh. I moan sadly and bury my face in his chest.

Me: This sucks!

He caresses me till I eventually relax.

Derek: You dozing off?

I nod sleepily.

Derek: No sex?

Me: Uh-uh man, Derek.

Ufuna i-sex umuntu kodwa he can see that I'm exhausted.

We get up and I go to the bedroom. I don't even have the energy to take off my clothes. I know Derek will do best...

It's been two days since the date from hell.

I have been avoiding Nomi like a plague. I'm supposed to meet up with Nolwazi and Sly to discuss themes.

When I get there, I find them drinking champagne.

Me: Hey.

They greet back. Sly seems happy for some reason. I don't even have the energy for her.

Nolwazi: Have you spoken to Nomi?

I shake my head.

Nolwazi: I feel so bad!

I sigh heavily.

Sly: Shame, my friend. She'll be strong.

Me: She told me she likes him.

Sly: She'll get over it. You two need to tell her.

Nolwazi: How, friend? You know she rarely likes men! This will crush her.

Sly: We've all been rejected by men. Stop babying her.

Nolwazi groans.

Nolwazi: I can't do it. Zi, will you tell her?

Me: I have to finish what I started.

Sly laughs.

Sly: You two are being dramatic. Nomi is a big girl, she'll be fine.

I want some wine, but I've decided to detox for a month. I need to be one with the universe, maybe then I'll be able to read some of the social clues I've been oblivious to.

Nolwazi: Alright, so the invitations are ready. They're sending them out tomorrow.

Sly: Cool. Now, let's discuss the theme.

Yazi, the way I've been humbled, I don't even have the energy to go head to head with Sly.

It's safe to say that she won this round.

Nolwazi went with her theme. They're going for rose gold. I personally think the colour is too common, but ke it's

Nolwazi's wedding.

I miss my Vuvu.

I need to see her.

As soon as we're done, I leave. I am beyond glad that Dean wasn't around. Gosh, I've also been avoiding his ass. I've blocked him everywhere and haven't spoken to him since that night, even though he has tried to come at me through Derek's phone.

When I get to Nomvuyo's house, I am relieved that Zimkitha is not there. I'm not in the mood to see her naye.

Nomvuyo: Heeh! You still think about me?
I give her the longest hug.

Me: I've missed you so much!

I find myself tearing up a bit. I didn't realise I missed her this much.

Nomvuyo: How are you?

Me: I'm good, bestie boo!

We go outside.

Nomvuyo: It's been so long.

Me: How are you?

Nomvuyo: I'm good.

We spend the next hour catching up.

Nomvuyo: Liwa and I are going through a rough patch.

Me: What? Why?

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: We're not in a good place...

I stare at her, thinking she's going to tell me she's joking. Have I really been that out of touch?

Nomvuyo: We'll be fine.

Me: What's going on?

I can tell that she doesn't want to tell me, but I'm too shocked.

Nomvuyo: We'll be fine, man. We've been through worse.

I sigh heavily.

I don't even know what to say.

Me: Why didn't you call me?

Nomvuyo: You're a new mother. I can't be coming to you with my negativity.

Me: Hai, Vuvu. We're friends.

Nomvuyo: Exactly. What I'm going through is not that deep. Liwa and I will be fine.

Just then, we hear footsteps. It's Liwa. He walks to us.

Liwa: Hey, Zi.

Okay.

Me: Hey, Liwa.

He looks at Nomvuyo.

Liwa: I'm going to the office. I need to meet some investors.

Nomvuyo nods.

Liwa: Bye, Zi.

Me: Bye.

Haibo, guys!

What the hell is going on??

He walks away.

Me: Vuvu!

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Yini?

I look at her in shock and she shrugs.

Nomvuyo: Liwa and his mother can go to hell for all I care...

With that said, she stands and walks away.

What the fuck?

I sit there, trying to process everything. I am so confused and shocked. I don't understand what's going on!

Eventually, I make my way inside the house and find her in the bedroom.

Me: Vuvu?

Nomvuyo: I am tired of this shit.

Me: Of what, Nomvuyo??

She looks at me seriously.

Nomvuyo: I can't tell you.

She stops folding the laundry and steps closer to me.

Nomvuyo: God knows, I want to tell you, but I can't.

Her eyes water up.

Nomvuyo: I'll be fine, okay? Don't stress too much.

I'm speechless.

She takes a deep breath.

Nomvuyo: Would you like something to drink?

Me: No.

Nomvuyo: What do you want?

Me: Cuddles.

She is silent for a few seconds, and eventually giggles.

Nomvuyo: Okay.

We move the laundry and get in bed.

That evening, Derek and I decided to order pizza, because he was tired from work.

Me: Star.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: I went to see Vuvu.

Derek: How is she? Haven't seen them in a while.

Me: They're not fine.

He looks at me.

Me: Something's going on between them.

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: There was a lot of tension. Vuvu says they're going through a rough patch.

I go on to tell him what happened.

Derek: Damn.

Me: I'm worried.

Derek: I haven't been keeping in touch with him. He said he's working on a big project, so he's busy.

I sigh heavily.

Derek: I didn't know.

Me: This has to stay between us.

Nomvuyo doesn't want this to be a group dilemma.

He nods.

Derek: I should check on Liwa.

Me: You should. I'm really worried about them. I've never seen them like that.

We sit in silence for a while.

I've been cracking my skull, trying to figure out what it could be.

Me: Do you think this has to do with Jennifer, Liwa's ex-wife?

He shrugs.

Derek: Angazi. It could be.

Me: Yoh...

The following day, I decide to meet with Nomi. I think it's about time I face the music. I invited her to our place.

When she arrives, she is in such a good mood.

Nomi: Girl, you've been MIA!

Me: Eish, Little Star has been keeping me busy.

Nomi: I understand.

Me: Anything to drink?

Nomi: Champagne, boo.

Me: Of course.

She giggles.

I get her champagne and sit next to her.

Nomi: So, can we talk about that awesome date?

Yoh.

I think the Universe is trying to teach me a lesson. My life is peaceful when I stay out of people's business. The lesson here is to stop behaving like a bored housewife, and mind my own damn business.

Me: Listen, I won't sugarcoat this.

Nomi: What?

I take a deep breath.

Me: Andile says he's not ready for a relationship.

I'm not going to tell her exactly what he said. I don't want her to feel like she is the problem.

Nomi: Really?

I nod.

Me: He still has feelings for his ex.

She nods slowly and takes a sip of her drink.

Nomi: I see...

Me: He only told me this after the date.

I'm actually pissed.

She sighs.

There's silence for a long time.

Nomi: At least he told you now, before we got too involved.

Me: I feel bad.

Nomi: Argh, I'll be fine... I really liked him though... How unfortunate.

I sigh sadly.

Nomi: It's okay. I admire him for being honest.

Nxx, he was honest, alright.

Nomi: Haike, I guess it'll just be me and my champagne!

She takes the bottle and drinks from it.
I feel really bad.

That afternoon, I was so sad about Nomi's situation, that I couldn't wait for Derek to get home. I needed to be in his presence. Ngapha I'm also stressing about Nomvuyo and Liwa.

I make my way to the school and go straight to Derek's office.

I find him there with Andile.

Derek: Baby.

Me: I need a hug.

Derek: What's wrong?

I walk to him and he stands. He wraps his arms around me and I relax in his arms.

Derek: Baby?

I don't say anything. I feel so bad for Nomi, because the poor woman was just fine. I just had to come in and get her hopes high. Now, she's disappointed. I know she'll be fine, but it's still sad. Eventually, Derek and I let go of each other.

He looks at me worriedly.

Andile clears his throat.

Mxm, I had forgotten about him.

I had a speech ready for him, but now that he's here, I don't even have the energy.

Also, I need to respect his decision. I can't be acting childish, even though deep down, I want to smack him.

Just then, someone knocks on the door.

Derek: Come in.

The door opens, and the receptionist walks in.

Receptionist: Mr Ngidi, the property developer is here to see you.

Derek: Oh, okay. I'll be there shortly.

Receptionist: Okay.

She walks out.

Derek: Baby, I need to give this guy a tour of the property.

Me: Okay.

Derek: We'll go home after, okay?

I nod.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and walks out.

I sit on his chair.

Andile: Hey.

Me: Hello.

I look at him.

Andile: Are we cool?

Me: Why wouldn't we?

He shrugs.

Me: Nomi is disappointed, but she'll get over it.

He nods.

Me: I apologise for putting you in that position. It will never happen again.
He tries to say something, but stops himself.

Me: I crossed a line. I'm sorry.

Andile: I'm not mad at you.

Me: Thanks.

He takes his file and laptop.

Andile: I have a meeting to get to... Good seeing you.

Me: Bye.

He walks out and I groan loudly.

Ngiswabile yazi, and I don't know how my ego is going to recover from this, considering that there's an animal out there called Dean, that is out for blood...
Nginyile straight.

INSERT 188 (Short Insert)

A week has passed.

We've all been summoned to Liwa,
Nomvuyo and Zimkitha's house.
I feel very uneasy right now. I've been in
contact with Vuvu, but she keeps saying
she needs space, so I haven't seen her
since she told me that her marriage is a
bit shaky.

Derek and I are in the car, making our way there.

Derek: Liwa has been ignoring my calls.
I sigh heavily.

Me: I don't like this.

We drive in silence for the rest of the way.
I'm so not looking forward to seeing Dean.

We get to the house, and find Nolwazi,
Nandi and Malusi in the lounge.

Nandi and Malusi are all lovey dovey.

Me: Where's Vuvu?

Nolwazi: I haven't seen her. I think she's
upstairs.

I nod as I make my way up the stairs to
find her.

Dean: Well, lookie look!

I hiss as Dean walks towards me on the
passage.

Dean: Look what the wind blew in!

He has the most mischievous smile.

I don't need this right now!

Dean: Our very own Love Zinnector...

He starts chuckling and then the chuckling turns into laughter.

Me: Dean!

He continues laughing.

I stand there and watch as he cracks up.

Dean: You are so stupid. You didn't even realise that your experiment was failing! I sulk.

Me: Your face is stupid.

He continues laughing loudly.

Me: Dean!

His laugh continues for a few more minutes, till Zimkitha emerges from one of the rooms and looks at us in confusion and amusement.

Zimkitha: And then?

Dean: I'm laughing at this fool.

Zimkitha: Don't call Ziyanda a fool!

Dean: She sure is!

I roll my eyes and walk away angrily.
When I get downstairs, I pour myself
some water and sit next to Derek.

Derek: We could hear Dean from here.
I sulk and he chuckles.

Derek: He's not about to let go of this.

Me: Mxm.

Nolwazi: Did you find Vuvu?

Me: I didn't even get the chance to look
for her, because of Dean.

Nolwazi: Askies. You two are very mean
to each other.

Just then, Zimkitha and Dean walk to the
lounge. Zimkitha greets everyone. I can
tell that something is bothering her, but
as usual, she's making it seem like she's
happy 24/7.

Dean tries to squeeze himself next to me,
but I push him away. He laughs as he sits
next to Nolwazi and showers her with
kisses.

Nolwazi: Langa, you're ruining my makeup.

Dean: It's fine. I also want to be gold.

Nolwazi giggles.

Nandi and Malusi are also kissing on the other couch. I look at Derek in disbelief.

Me: Is this an underground orgy?

He chokes and laughs.

Derek: Sies.

I chuckle.

Out of nowhere, someone clears their throat. We all quieten down and look at

Liwa, who is standing next to Zimkitha.

He looks like a bus has run over him.

Everyone looks at him in shock.

Malusi: What the fuck is wrong with you?

Zimkitha touches Liwa's arm and looks at him softly.

Zimkitha: Baby, don't you want to sit do-

Liwa looks at her blankly and she keeps quiet.

I stare at both of them, and their resemblance suddenly makes me sick. I don't know what's going on, but I'm not fine.

I know that something's up.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: This is the only time I'm going to address this...

He looks at everyone and his eyes eventually land on me. He stares at me, and I shudder.

He clears his throat again and rubs his hands.

Liwa: Nomvuyo has filed for divorce.

Everyone: WHAT?!

Our jaws are on the floor. We are silent for the longest time.

I don't know what's going on. I feel like I'm in the sunken place.

Nolwazi: This is heart-wrenching.

Liwa looks at her. I can't read his expression.

I'm not here. I'm thinking about Nomvuyo. Why didn't she tell me? When did she file for divorce? What happened? All these questions are flooding my mind. Dean stands and walks out. I think he's having a moment. Nolwazi follows him. Derek: I'll go check on him as well.

He walks out too.

Zimkitha is staring at me. She is clearly trying not to cry.

Nandi stands and takes Zimkitha's hand. Thereafter, they walk away.

There's only three people left: Malusi, Liwa and I.

There's complete silence.

Malusi: Liwa, talk to me.

Nothing.

Malusi: This shit doesn't make sense.

Liwa: There's nothing to say.

Malusi: What the fuck is this about?

Liwa doesn't say anything.

Yoh, I am so confused and emotional.

I keep thinking about Nomvuyo.

Where is she? How is she?

Malusi: This shit doesn't make sense.

When did she file?

Liwa: Was told this morning.

Malusi: By her lawyer?

Liwa nods lightly and then looks at me.

I'm trying my best not to burst into tears, because I don't want to make this about me, but damnit, it's not easy. I'm flooded by too many emotions.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini.

He smiles faintly.

I look at him, expecting him to tell me that this is all a joke, but I know that won't happen.

Malusi: You're not going to go through with this, right?

Liwa shrugs.

Malusi: Did you cheat?

Just then, Derek walks back in and sits next to me. I relax as soon as I feel his arm around me. He pulls me closer.

Derek: You okay?

I don't say anything. I don't know what to say.

Nolwazi and Dean walk back. Dean steps closer to Liwa.

Dean: Can I have a word with you?

Liwa nods lightly and they both walk out. There's silence for a while.

Nolwazi: Guys, what's going on? Is this a joke?

Malusi: I doubt.

Nolwazi: But, it's so sudden. Did any of you have any idea?

She looks at me and Derek.

Derek shakes his head lightly.

Nolwazi: Why would Nomvuyo file for divorce? This doesn't make sense. It just doesn't make sense.

She huffs in defeat and sits next to Malusi.

Malusi: I had no idea. We haven't been in touch lately.

He looks at Derek.

Derek: We also didn't have much contact. We've been busy.

Nolwazi: We are bad friends!

She starts sobbing.

Nolwazi: I'm gobsmacked. How did this happen? Are that preoccupied with our lives?

Malusi places his arm around her and comforts her.

Nolwazi: Fuck, this is really bad. I had no idea!

Malusi rubs his eyes and we sit in silence. Nandi walks back to the lounge and sighs loudly.

Nandi: Guys, I'm lost and heartbroken.
I've never seen Zimkitha like this.

Nolwazi: Where is she?

Nandi: I took her to her bedroom... She won't stop crying.

Nolwazi: Shame. They are all so close, I'm sure this is hard on her.

Derek: I'll go check on her.

He stands and pulls me up. As I'm about to protest, he looks at me seriously and I look at him in defeat. I guess I have no other choice.

I follow him to Zimkitha's bedroom.

He opens the door and we walk in.

Zimkitha is sitting on the edge of her bed, sobbing.

Derek: Zimi.

Zimkitha: Hey, baby.

He sits next to her and wraps his arm around her. I'm standing by the door. I'm

quite overwhelmed and confused at the moment.

Derek: What the hell is going on?

She continues sobbing.

I need to check on Nomvuyo.

Zimkitha: Liwa...

Derek: What happened?

She says Liwa's name again.

I sigh.

Me: Uhm, I need the bathroom...

I quickly walk out and close the door, before Derek can stop me. I make my way to Nyami's bedroom and close the door.

I take out my phone and dial Nomvuyo's number, but it takes me straight to voicemail.

I groan in defeat...

I'm still waiting for someone to say this is all a prank...

INSERT 189

Nomvuyo has officially disappeared. None of us are able to reach her. She's MIA.

I've been sad for two days straight now. I just need answers from her. I need to know how she's doing.

Zimkitha has been trying to call me, but I'm really not in the mood for her drama, so I'm choosing to ignore her.

I decided to go to work, because I need the distraction. Also, my parents want to spend some time with Little Star, and I don't want to be all alone at home. Derek and I are now on our way to work.

Me: Nolwazi says she's going to pause the wedding until things are chilled.

Derek: Dean told me.

Me: Of course... What was I thinking?

He laughs lightly.

Me: I'm worried about Vuvu.

Derek: She probably just wants to deal with this by herself. You know she loves her personal space.

Me: But, ignoring my calls is not fair. She should at least tell us that she doesn't feel like talking to us. Right now, we know nothing. He sighs.

Derek: We just have to hope that she's fine wherever she is.

Me: I'm sure Nyami misses her dad.

He keeps quiet and focuses on the road.

I type a message.

Me: I know you can see these missed calls and messages. I just need to know that you're okay. I'll respect your space. I just need to know that you're not dying wherever you are.

I send it to Nomvuyo, and hope she'll respond.

Derek: You sure you'll be able to interact with people today?

Me: Let's just say, if those bitches are not doing the right shit, kuzonyiwa.

He laughs and I smile faintly.

When we get to school, and Derek parks the car, my phone rings. It's an unfamiliar number.

I answer it as we get out of the car.

Me: Hello.

Person: Zi...

Me: Vuvu??

Derek looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Yes.

Me: Vuvu, what the hell is wrong with you?? Why would you just disappear without saying anything??

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: I need space.

Me: Last time I checked, we told each other everything- even if all we want is space.

She is quiet for a few seconds.

Nomvuyo: I also need you.

My heart sinks.

Me: Ukuphi?

She tells me.

Me: Is Nyami fine?

Nomvuyo: Ya. When it comes down to it,

Nyami loves me more than her dad.

She chuckles quietly.

I sigh heavily.

Me: I'll be there just now.

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Me: Shap. I love you.

Nomvuyo: I love you too.

She pauses.

Me: Don't worry, I won't tell anyone...

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Don't lie. I'm sure you're going to tell Derek.

Me: Excuse me, don't come for me.

Nomvuyo: Just don't bring that man here.

Me: I won't.

Nomvuyo: I don't trust you when it comes to Derek.

Me: Bitch, bye.

I hang up.

Derek looks at me expectedly.

Me: That was Vuvu.

Derek: I made that inference.

I take my bag from the boot.

Me: I have to go.

Derek: So, you're leaving me in the dark?

Me: I'm afraid I have to. You're not mad, are you?

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I'm glad she reached out to you, I just don't want you to be sucked in their mess.

Me: I'll try not to.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: I promise.

Derek: So, she wants to see you?

Me: Yes. You can't tell your people about this. She doesn't want them to know.

Derek: Okay, Secret Agent Dlamini.

Me: Ha ha, very funny. We share a hug and he plants a kiss on my cheek.

Derek: Be careful.

Me: Shap.

Just then, Andile walks out.

Andile: Hey... I didn't know you were coming in today.

Me: Spontaneous.

Andile: I'm heading to Rosebank for a meeting.

Me: Really? Can you give me a lift? I'm going there as well.

Andile: Uhm, sure.

Derek: I have work to do. Are you going to come back this side?

Me: I'll see.

Derek: Alright.

Me: I'll call you.

Derek: Okay.

He glances at Andile.

Derek: Represent us well. Don't embarrass me.

Andile: This is me we're talking about...

They both chuckle.

We walk to Andile's car and get in.

Me: What meeting is this?

He drives off.

Andile: Some conference on implementing professional development in schools...

Me: Hmkay. I take out my phone and send Nomvuyo a message, letting her know that I'm on my way.

Andile: So, where are you going?

Me: Meeting up with a friend.

Andile: It must be nice...

I look at him.

Me: Excuse me?

Andile: I'm just saying... You get to choose when you want to go to work, and whether you want to or not.

Me: What are you insinuating?

Andile: Nothing.

I feel like he's taking a shot at me. What is he trying to say? That I'm some bored house-fiance, who is benefiting from being the boss' person?

Andile: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

Andile: I didn't mean to offend you.

I keep quiet. I'm not in the mood to talk.

Andile: Are you angry?

Me: Yoh, Andile. I have bigger things to worry about.

Andile: You are quite sensitive...

I look at him sharply, and he's smiling lightly.

Me: You want to get a reaction from me?

Andile: Not at all. I'm merely stating an observation.

Me: How do you expect me to react to you telling me that I'm basically my fiance's sidekick?

Andile: Whoa, how did you get to that conclusion. That's a bit far-fetched, don't you think? I roll my eyes and he chuckles.

Me: Uyahleka.

Andile: See what I mean? You go from 0-100 in a matter of seconds.

Me: Whatever.

He smiles and I chuckle.

Me: I'm stressed, man. I don't need your negativity.

Andile: What's wrong?

Me: My friends are going through a divorce. None of us expected it.

Andile: Yoh.

We are quiet for a while.

Andile: Clearly you didn't know what happened behind closed doors.

Me: Clearly.

Andile: That's why I don't want to get married.

I look at him.

Me: Why?

Andile: It's not easy to just walk away. That divorce process can take many years...

Me: So, wena all you think about when you're with someone, is how you're going to walk away from them in the future?

Andile: You're making me seem like a jerk.

Me: You don't anticipate such when you're in a serious relationship.

Andile: We all have different views. I believe that couples should think about such when they're getting married. You

need to have an exit plan of some sort. The plan is to ensure that you're okay. I keep quiet and think about my relationship with Derek. Do I have an exit plan? I mean, I'm not planning on leaving him, but isn't it a smart move to have a prenup? We all know how messy divorces can be... I just don't want it to seem like I'm already anticipating our separation. At the same time, it would be stupid not to have a prenup, especially nowadays... As soon as I feel my anxiety approaching, I focus on all my senses...

Andile: Zi?

After a few minutes, I feel better.

Nothing triggers my anxiety more than the future. I hate uncertainty. I need to be in the know at all times. As soon as I feel like I have no control over a situation, I lose it.

I look at Andile, and he is clearly confused and a tad worried.

Me: I'm fine. You just got me thinking.

Andile: I'm sure you and Ngidi will be fine. Don't worry about it too much.

Me: It's your fault.

He smiles guiltily.

Andile: I'm sorry.

Me: Let's just drive in silence, okay?

Andile: Cool.

After a while, we finally get to the address I gave him.

Me: Thanks.

Andile: How are you going to get back?

Me: Uber.

Andile: Are you sure you'll be fine?

Me: Dude, it's not like you're going to walk out of an important conference to play chauffeur.

Andile: You'd be surprised.

I chuckle.

Me: Thanks for the lift. See you when I see you.

Andile: Alright. Bye.

Me: Bye.

I walk out and he drives off once I'm in the yard.

I look around in confusion.

Whose house is this? I thought Vuvu had no friends.

Just as I'm about to knock on the door, it opens.

Me: Vuvu!

I squeeze her tightly.

Nomvuyo: I can't breathe!

I let her go once I'm satisfied.

Me: Friend, you look a hot mess.

Nomvuyo: You don't have to remind me!

We walk in.

Me: Whose house is this??

When we walk to the lounge, my jaw drops.

Mdu: Ya wena.

Me: What the hell??

Tholi emerges and smiles.

Tholi: Hey, Zi!

She walks to me and we share a hug.

Tholi: How are you?

Me: Uh...

I look around in confusion.

Mdu: Why does everyone trust you with their shit?

He walks to me and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Last time I spoke to him, he was still pissed that I snitched on him.

Mdu: How are you?

Tholi looks at me worriedly.

Tholi: Do you need something to drink?

You look shaken.

Nomvuyo: Don't worry, she'll be fine.

Nomvuyo takes my hand and leads me to the kitchen...

INSERT 190

Me: Nomvuyo.

I stare at her.

She looks worn out.

She's obviously not okay.

Nomvuyo: I don't know how I'm going to make it.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: I don't know what life is like without Liwa.

Me: Why does it have to be like that?

Nomvuyo: He fucked up.

She stares at me seriously.

Nomvuyo: He really fucked up.

I want to ask her to tell me, but I don't think I'm ready. I feel like it would be too heavy a secret to carry.

Nomvuyo: Would you like anything to drink?

Me: I'm hungry.

Nomvuyo: Tholi has been cooking for me... She's an amazing cook.

Me: Why are you here?

Nomvuyo: Mdu has proven to be a good hide and seek player. No one will even think I'm here.

I don't even know how to respond to that. She smiles lightly.

Nomvuyo: Zee, I need space from everyone. I need to gather my thoughts in peace.

Just then, Mdu walks out.

I have to applaud myself though. I attract some really attractive men. I don't know how, but that's one area I seem to excel in. Angijoli nabomubiza. I hope this doesn't make me shallow...

Mdu: Zi.

I look at him.

Mdu: What's wrong?

Me: Really? What's wrong with me? Are you dumb?

Mdu: What you won't do is disrespect me in my house.

Me: Screw you and your house. I don't give a shi-

Mdu: Fuck you.

We continue going back and forth for a while.

People think Dean and I bump heads?

Mdu drives me insane. Looking back, I don't know how the hell we dated for that long. We argued every five minutes. He talks too much, and uyaphapha... The same could be said about me...

Nomvuyo: Are you done?

Mdu: She's annoying.

Me: Don't you have babies to feed? Go away.

Nomvuyo: Mdu, I don't want you to make my Zizi mad.

Mdu: Mxm.

He gives me the middle finger before walking away.

I grunt.

Nomvuyo: Was that sexual tension?

Me: Sies.

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Tholi would kill you. She's very feisty.

Me: I know...

I stare at her softly.

Me: Talk to me.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Let's feed you first.

I nod.

I've texted Derek, to let him know that I'm safe.

We're now in the lounge, eating while watching TV.

I look at Tholi. It's unquestionable that she's happy.

Tholi: How is your baby, Zi?

Me: She's good.

My heart melts as I picture Little Star smiling.

Me: You want to see her pictures? Tholi nods excitedly as I take out my phone. Like I've said before, as soon as I start talking about my baby, I could go on and on.

Mdu: Uyazama shame. She's cute nyana.

Me: Don't fuck with me.

He chuckles.

Tholi: She's adorable!

I glance at Nomvuyo.

Me: Don't you miss Nkosi?

Her sadness shows even more, and I immediately regret saying anything.

She stands and walks away.

Mdu: You idiot. She's already dealing with this divorce shit, and now you bring up her son? What the fuck is wrong with you?

Me: I didn't thin-

Mdu: You're stupid.

Me: It was a mistake!

Mdu: Idio- I put down my plate, and zone out for a few seconds.

Tholi is looking at me in shock.

Mdu is rubbing his cheek.

Me: Insult me one more time.

Tholi: Ziyanda!

Me: Mdu doesn't know when to shut up.

Tholi: Hitting him won't solve anything!

Yazi I'm overwhelmed right now. I look at Mdu and he chuckles knowingly. He knows I snapped.

Mdu: I'm going to arrest you, you abusive fuck.

I chuckle as I make my way to the stairs. Mdu and I had a very toxic and complex relationship. I'm glad that Tholi has changed him, because I doubt she'd handle all the nonsense I had to deal with... The same could be said about me and Derek. Star is good for me.

I find Nomvuyo in one of the rooms there.

Me: Bestie boo.

I close the door and sit next to her on the bed

Me: Wanna cuddle?

She smiles.

We get in the bed.

We've been silent for a very long time.

Nomvuyo: Remember the first time we spent time together, you almost fainted, because you thought you were pregnant?

I laugh.

Me: Those were some dark days.

Nomvuyo: Look at you now...

Me: I've come a long way...

I glance at her.

Me: And, so have you and Liwa...

Nomvuyo: I want nothing to do with him.

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: His moral compass seems to have stopped functioning.

Me: Did he cheat? She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Did you know that he used to date Sly?

Me: So I've been told...

We are silent for a while.

I'm trying to process what she said.

Me: He cheated with Sly?

I stare at her in shock.

Me: That slut!

I sit up.

Me: She tried it with Derek! She really tried it!

Nomvuyo chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Liwa would never cheat on me.

We worship each other.

I look at her in confusion.

Kanti uthini uNomvuyo?

Nomvuyo: He has been meeting up with her though...

Me: Why??

She shrugs.

Nomvuyo: I told him a long time ago to cut ties with her. He promised that he would never speak to her again...

Me: Yoh.

I lie on my back again.

Me: You can't be divorcing Liwa because of unconfirmed cheating.

Nomvuyo: He's a liar.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: Zimkitha is the cause of all this shit.

I groan.

Nomvuyo: Those two are tiring. I've had to deal with their nonsense for a long time, but this... I will not stand for it.

Me: You're speaking in riddles, Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Am I?

I stare at her.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Those two are extremely close...

I frown and she chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Not in that way, silly.

Me: I find their relationship strange.

Nomvuyo: They love each other deeply.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: Their love is too deep. No one can ever come between them...

Me: Even you?

She laughs quietly.

Nomvuyo: Liwa would choose Zimkitha over anyone... I personally don't have a problem with that. I grew up with them. I

also love Zimi deeply... but I don't dismiss the shit she does.

My heart is beating so fast at this point.

Nomvuyo: Zimi was married to a man named Luvuyo... We all grew up thinking he was Liwa and Princess' father. You know mos, that Zodwa, my mom, used to work as their cleaner?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: We have a very complicated history. We've been through a lot, that's why this is difficult. She sighs.

Nomvuyo: We found out that Zodwa wasn't my mother. Her sister, Zuki, is my biological mother...

I listen attentively and try not to get confused.

Nomvuyo: My family used to live with the Mzinyathis, way before I was born. It was Evelyn (my grandmother), Zodwa and Zuki. Before I was born, Zodwa, Zuki and

Zimkitha used to be the best of friends.

They had a sisterhood...

She continues.

Nomvuyo: Zuki fell in love with Luvuyo...

I listen.

Nomvuyo: She fell pregnant... My grandmother and Zimkitha's parents found out. There was drama. Zimkitha's parents had arranged a marriage for her. She was supposed to marry Luvuyo, for business purposes.

Me: Yoh.

Nomvuyo: She was pregnant and she loved the man that Zimkitha was supposed to marry. It was a mess.

Me: I can imagine.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, they kicked Zuki out...

Zuki resented Zimkitha...

She continues.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, fast forward to Liwa and Princess' birth... Life was normal... I

was now living with Zodwa, in the same cottage she lived in with her mother and sister.

I nod.

Nomvuyo: When Zodwa passed away, the truth came out...

She continues.

Nomvuyo: Zodwa was not my mother, Zuki was... I was not fatherless... Luvuyo was my father...

I am shook.

Nomvuyo: Luvuyo was not Liwa and Princess' father. He was my father, and he knew all along. They all knew.

Me: Even Liwa?

She nods.

She stares at me.

Nomvuyo: Liwa knows everything about Zimkitha. They trust each other.

Me: So, who is Liwa and Princess' father?

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Zimkitha was raped when she was in university. Her parents hid it from everyone, they were ashamed.

Me: Liwa knew all of this? He wasn't mad at Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: He was, but he eventually forgave her. I can never state enough that their love for each other is deep. It's a blessing and a curse.

I sigh heavily.

We sit in silence for a while.

Me: So, Liwa doesn't know his father? Is he okay with being a result of rape?

Nomvuyo: I recently found out more information... There's another layer to this already complicated situation.

We are silent for a long time.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, I just wanted to show you how close they are... Nothing can separate them, no matter how damaging it is...

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: I don't have to explain why I'm divorcing Liwa, Ziyanda. You know.

She stares at me.

My heart is beating so fast.

Nomvuyo: I can tolerate a lot of things, but not this... I don't want to look at her.

Nomvuyo: How have you managed to keep this secret? How do you live with yourself?

I look at her and find her staring at me.
I want to die.

INSERT 191

Derek: How did it go, baby?

I look at him.

Me: Fine.

He looks at me intently.

Derek: Are you okay?

I nod.

Me: I want to go home

He is silent for a few seconds. Thereafter, he clears his throat.

Derek: Do I need to call Nomvuyo? I'm not about to have her involving you in her shit.

I shrug.

Me: I want to go home.

Derek: I have an important meeting in 15 minutes.

Me: Okay.

I take my bag and stand.

Derek: Baby.

Me: I'll take an Uber. He looks at me worriedly.

Me: I'll be fine. I want personal space.

He nods slowly.

Me: Bye.

I walk out...

Where do I want to go?

I need someone to talk to.

I request an Uber, and put my parents' address.

As soon as I get in the house, I go straight to my mother and start crying.

Mom: Haibo, and then??

I let it all out.

She lets me be for a while, until I feel better.

I look at her and sigh.

Mom: Zizi, yini?

Me: This is bad, ma... This is really bad...

She looks at me in shock and confusion.

Mom: What's going on?

We go to my bedroom and sit on the bed.

Me: I don't know how we're going to move past this.

She keeps quiet and I try to gather my thoughts.

I keep thinking about Nomvuyo shouting at me, continuously asking me how I live with myself...

Mom: Ziyanda. I glance at her.

Just then, Baby Nkanyi starts crying. She's all alone in the lounge. I quickly walk there and take her.

She cries for a few minutes, clearly shook that we left her all alone. I comfort her until she feels better. I give her a kiss and walk back to my bedroom.

My mom is still sitting on the bed, looking confused.

Mom: What is going on?

Me: I can't even bring myself to say this.

Mom: Yini?

I sit and look at her.

Me: You're the only person who'll help me.

She nods slowly.

Me: Mama, I have been withholding very crucial and damaging information. Now she is really losing it. Her eyes are wide open.

Mom: Ziyanda! Are you involved in criminal activities?

Me: No, mama.

She sighs in relief.

Mom: Manje kwenzakalani?

I take a deep breath.

Me: When Derek and I were in the early stages of our relationship, we went to Nolwazi's parents' house, I think, for lunch...

She nods slowly. Me: I was in the bathroom when I overheard someone talking on the phone. She kept saying that the person she was talking to should back off, because he might ruin people's lives. She kept saying he mustn't reveal

anything, because he might damage the family she has built.

Mom: Who was the woman?

Me: Take a wild guess...

She shrugs.

Me: It was Zimkitha. I had never met her before.

Mom: Haibo, who was she talking to??

Me: I think the person's name was Zweli.

She processes what I said.

Mom: So, what's the significance of that incident?

Me: You know I've always been on the fence about Zimkitha. She confuses me.

Mom: And, she loves these boys.

I nod.

Me: A couple of months later, she invited me over to her place.

My mom nods.

Me: I wasn't in the mood to meet up with her... But, I did go...

I sigh.

Me: She wanted to get to know me.

Mom: Okay.

Me: She went on to mention how much she loves the boys, and that they're her sons... I freaked out...

Mom: Understandable.

Me: Then, she went on to explain that she has been their lives forever, and she has accepted that they are her babies.

My mom nods.

Me: After my miscarriage, she came to visit me here at home.

I sigh.

Me: She was checking in... She told me about her miscarriages and how she got through them.

Mom: Okay.

Me: She comforted me, and made me realise that it was possible for me to accept Derek's son, Lelo.

She nods.

Me: Then, I asked her about her love life. I asked her if she has ever been in love...

She basically gave me a summary of her life... The woman has been through a lot.

Mom: Hmm.

Me: Then she mentioned some man named Bheki. I think she said she loved him, but couldn't be with him...

Mom: Why?

Me: She didn't go into detail.

She nods.

Me: Fast forward to a few months later, I think, Zimkitha was hospitalised. She then requested to see me. She asked me not to tell anyone about our meeting.

Mom: Why is this woman so shady?

I chuckle.

Mom: What was the meeting about?

I swallow hard and look at Little Star.

Me: Everything.

Mom: Everything?

Me: Everything.

We are silent for a long time.

I breastfeed Star and focus on her for the next 10 minutes. Once she is asleep, I place her carefully on the bed.

Me: Nomvuyo is getting a divorce.

Mom: What??

Me: Nomvuyo has been MIA. She reached out to me and asked to see me.

Mom: How is she?

Me: She's not fine.

She sighs.

Me: She found out about everything...

She stares at me.

Me: I thought I'd force myself to not think about this, but the truth is going to come out soon...

I look at her.

Me: Zimkitha is their real mother...

Zimkitha is Derek's mother, Dean's mother and Liwa and Princess' mother...

My mom doesn't respond.

Me: All his life, Derek grew thinking he was not worthy of love, simply because his biological parents didn't love him enough to keep him...

I look at her, and I get emotional all over again.

Me: Do you understand how messed up this is?? Derek is going to hate me!

I start crying once again.

Me: I knew about this, and didn't tell him. He's going to hate me! Apparently there are more layers to this!

Mom: Zi...

She takes my hand and I continue crying.

Mom: I'm not going to allow anyone to blame you for this. This is bigger than you. Zimkitha is the cause of all of this.

I don't say anything.

Mom: Calm down. The mere thought of Derek finding out is enough to kill me. I don't know how we're going to move past this.

Mom: Let me call Zimkitha... How dare she involve you in her mess? I'll deal with her. Sies!

With that said, she stands and walks out the room.

INSERT 192

Listen, when I say I've been crying for an hour straight, I'm not lying.

I keep thinking about Derek.

I've kept this to myself for one valid reason.

This is not my secret to tell.

Till this day, I refuse to be the one to bring this to light. This would make this easier for Zimkitha. I want Zimkitha to take responsibility for her actions. She is the one who's supposed to tell everyone, not me.

Derek has always been open about not wanting to know his real parents. He has made it clear that he wants nothing to do with them. What was I supposed to do? This was, and still is, not my secret to tell. Just then, my phone rings and it's Derek. I ignore the call.

I know he'll know that I'm crying, and he'll freak out.

Seconds later, I get a text message from him.

Derek: Baby, I know you need your space, and I'm going to respect that. I just need to know where you are. I sigh heavily as I type.

Me: I'm with my mom. I'm safe. Can I sleepover here? Please. Seconds later, my phone vibrates.

Derek: I don't think I'm comfortable with that.

I groan as I feel my tears approaching. I know why he's uncomfortable. We spoke about boundaries. He mentioned that he doesn't want me to run away to my parents' house whenever I need space...

My phone vibrates.

Derek: I miss my daughter. I'm going to come fetch her in an hour or so... You can stay there if that's what you really want.

He's angry.

I type a very long and detailed message... Just as I'm about to send it, my instincts kick in and I quickly delete it.

Me: Okay.

I put down my phone and it vibrates again.

Derek: There's no use trying to convince you otherwise... I'll come get my child. I'm tired of repeating myself regarding your need to involve yourself in other people's business.

I decide not to respond.

Derek doesn't get it

No one gets it.

I didn't have a choice.

I didn't ask for any of this.

My heart beats fast as I think of Zimkitha.

I don't think I've ever hated anyone the way I hate her right now.

If I lose Derek over this...

My heart sinks.

My mom walks in and sits on the bed.

Mom: You need to eat something.

At this point, I'm physically sick. I can't get up.

Mom: Zizi.

I feel crippled. I can't move.

I've been like this before, but this time around, I don't think I'll recover.

I can't lose Derek.

I can't.

I hate Zimkitha. I hate Liwa as well.

Nomvuyo has every right to divorce him.

He knew about this shit, and decided to side with his mother? He grew up with these people. He saw how damaged Derek was because of his absent parents. Liwa grew up with his mother. He knows what it's like to be loved by someone who gave birth to you. He was aware that Dean's life was lie as well, and didn't feel the need to say anything? These people are his brothers!

I feel the need to vomit, and I do so.

My mom pulls me up and leads me to the bathroom, to vomit even more.

I cry even more at the thought of Derek suffering all his life, not knowing that his real mother was a phone call away. His mother was right next to him, hosting lavish dinners every week, and comforting him whenever he was lonely. I don't know how I'm going to recover from this.

I don't know how Derek and Dean are going to recover from this.

Dean? How is he going react when he finds out that he's been living a lie?

Lindelwa is not his mother. God, no.

I feel my mom's hands on my face.

Mom: Ziyanda, you are stronger than this.

Stop.

She looks at me intently, clearly trying to keep her emotions intact.

Mom: I can't afford to lose you over this.

You're going to kill me.

I stare at her for a while. I need to get it together.

My child needs me. I can't let this kill me, even though it really has the potential to. I take a deep breath, and my mom helps me get up.

Mom: I'm going to run a bath for you.

I nod lightly as I take off my clothes and wash my face.

Derek can't find me like this.

After taking a very long bath, I get dressed in my pyjamas and put on a charcoal mask.

If Derek gets here, he can't see me like this. This mask will help conceal the horror that is my face.

When I hear his voice, my whole body tenses up.

I say a prayer and make my way to the lounge.

I'm glad that my dad is not around, because this would have been handled differently.

Derek is laughing with my mom.

I clear my throat and he immediately looks up.

Me: Hey.

I try by all means not to behave suspiciously.

Derek: Hello.

I sit in the opposite sofa.

Mom: Yazi I can never get over this mask of yours. You look like a witch!

She laughs and Derek joins her.

Derek: It's ridiculous.

I smile.

Me: Came to fetch Star? He nods tightly. I know he's still angry about our interaction earlier, but he doesn't want my mom to see that.

Mom: I'm sorry for taking Zizi today. I miss her, and she obviously needs some of my love.

Derek: Hmm...

Me: Uhm, I'll get Star.

I hope he stays on that sofa.

Derek: I'll come with.

Yoh.

He follows me to my bedroom.

Little Star is already up and kicking.

She hates being left alone. I'm sure she heard her father's voice.

I take her and plant a kiss.

She immediately starts crying.

Derek takes her from me. She stops crying.

I'm offended.

Then, I remember that my entire face is black. That's what freaked her out.

Derek: So, you asked your mom to lie for you?

I try to say something, but decide to keep quiet.

Derek: Like I said, there's no use having a back and forth with you once you've made up your mind.

I don't want to fight with him, but right now, I don't have the energy to beg him to understand.

I want him to leave, because I'm five minutes to breaking down again.

Derek: I'll see you when you decide to come back...

With that said, he walks out.

Mom: Are you leaving already? I was about to dish up for you.

Derek: I don't want to drive late. I should get going.

Mom: Oh.

Derek: It was good seeing you.

My mom and I watch as he walks out.

We stand in silence for a while.

Mom: Shit.

I groan.

Mom: Derek is not going to take this well...

We go to the lounge and sit.

Mom: I don't know how this will be solved...

We sit in silence, and I eventually start crying again.

I curse the day I met Zimkitha.

I hate that woman with every bone in my body.

INSERT 193

The level of tossing and turning that is happening tonight is driving me insane.

As soon as I think of Derek's possible reaction to this mess, I spazz out.

My mom walks in.

Mom: I think you should take your sleeping pills.

I nod and she goes to my medication drawer and takes them out.

Mom: I've been praying like crazy. I'm going crazy. I sigh.

Mom: That Zimkitha will get what's coming to her. I'm disgusted!

She gives me one pill.

Mom: I've never been this stressed. I'm glad your father is not here.

I look at her.

I have a horrible headache, and my body is not cooperating.

Derek is probably thinking about me, convinced that I'm a selfish person. I know he's angry.

Mom: What are we going to do?

Me: I can't tell him.

Mom: You won't. Zimkitha will. She will take responsibility for her nonsense.

I sigh heavily.

Mom: Get some rest.

Me: When is Lwazi coming back from camp?

Mom: Ksasa.

Me: I miss her.

She smiles.

Mom: We could use her positive aura right now.

After chatting for a while, I manage to doze off into a very deep and uncomfortable sleep.

I'm awakened by someone showering me with kisses.

Lwazi: Wakey wakey!

I groan.

Lwazi: Mommy! I open my eyes and find her staring at me with the biggest smile on her face.

Lwazi: Are you back for good?!

Me: Maybe.

Lwazi: Really?? What happened to Uncle D??

I sit up and rub my eyes.

Me: I'm just joking.

Lwazi: Oh! You guys are goals! I was worried!

I look at her weirdly.

Me: Just stop.

She giggles.

She's growing up too fast.

Lwazi: Why are your eyes so red? Were you crying?

I sigh.

I had forgotten about my life. Now, reality is sinking in.

Lwazi: Mommy, what's wrong?

Me: Nothing. I'm just sick.

Lwazi: You look really bad.

She walks out and disappears.

A few minutes, she's back, and she's calling someone. Lwazi is really growing up...

Lwazi: Hey, Uncle D.

My eyes shoot up.

What is she doing??

Lwazi: Mama told me that you were here yesterday. Why didn't you stay with mommy, so you could see me? I look at her in shock.

Lwazi: Okay, I forgive you. Are you going to come check on mommy today? She looks really bad.

Shit, I want to jump on her.

Lwazi: Her eyes are very swollen, her voice is gone, and her face is all puffy. She also looks like she won't be able to get out of bed.

I want to die.

Lwazi has no filter.

Lwazi: Okay.

She walks closer to me and hands me her phone.

Lwazi: Daddy D wants to talk to you.

I take a deep breath as I put the phone on my ear.

Me: Hello.

Derek: What the fuck is going on?

He sounds angry.

Me: Nothing.

Derek: Ziyanda, why do you like stressing me? Do you understand how invested I am in you? How am I supposed to react to such stunts?

My heart breaks a little.

Me: I'm not trying to stress you.

Derek: What's wrong with you?

I keep quiet.

Derek: I'm not going to run after you. Only you know what the fuck is going on. You'll come back when you're ready.

Why is he being so cold?

Derek: Just remember that you have a daughter now, so all your childish stunts are a waste of time.

With that said, he ends the call.

I sit there, gobsmacked.

Derek's words always get to me. He goes from 0-100.

How did we get here? Now he's saying all these cruel things about me.

What is he going to say when he finds out why I'm behaving like this?

My anxiety immediately kicks off.

I feel like I'm invading my body, but I'm also trapped in it, and I can't escape.

Lwazi: Mommy?

I want to rip my body apart and escape.

Just then, I feel my mother holding me.

Mom: Ziyanda, I'm taking you to Dr.

Melinda. This is getting out of hand!

Me: No. I'll be fine.

She looks at me worriedly.

I try by all means to get it together, but I know there's no avoiding it.

This has got to be one of my fiercest episodes.

I can't shake it off, or take a few deep breaths. I know it's going to last longer.

I ask my mom to leave and then sink deeper into my bed and cover myself.

Hopefully, I'll wake up feeling better.

A few hours later, I'm still in a bad space, but at least I'm able to get out of bed. I don't want to talk to anyone.

I get out of bed and go to the bathroom to wash my face and brush my teeth. When I go to the lounge, I find Nomvuyo there.

She looks as miserable as the last time I saw her.

She stares at me.

The last time I saw her, she was shouting at me. My guilt was definitely triggered by her.

Nomvuyo: You weren't answering my calls.

My mom walks in and sits next to Vuvu.

Mom: Sit, Ziyanda.

I sit.

Nomvuyo: Things went out of hand.

I don't say anything.

Mom: This is a very complicated situation.

Nomvuyo sighs heavily.

Mom: So, you're really divorcing Liwa?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: How can he live with himself knowing that his so called best friends are actually his brothers? While he was living a great life, filled with love, his brothers were out there trying to figure out their identities, with very little success. He helped Zimkitha keep this secret. How am

I supposed to sleep comfortably next to a man who doesn't see anything wrong with that?

I always get shocked when I see Nomvuyo emotional.

Nomvuyo: I love Liwa. We've been through a lot together, but this? This is heart-wrenching. As someone who grew up thinking her life was a certain way and actually finding out that my whole life was a lie, I know how damaging this is.

One doesn't recover from such.

She swallows hard and takes a deep breath.

Nomvuyo: Liwa knew that Luvuyo was my father. He knew, but did he tell me?

No. I forgave him and told myself I'd look past it because we were young... But, this? How are you okay with keeping up such a lie?

She looks at my mother.

Nomvuyo: I have to sleep next to him, and dismiss all of this? Really?

We are silent for a while.

Nomvuyo: I hate both of them. I can't believe he went along with this. I thought he was an honourable man. Do you understand how hurtful this is? They both laughed and smiled with Dean and Derek, knowing very well that they are biologically related. I am so sick.

Mom: Yehlisa umoya sthandwa sami.

Nomvuyo shakes her head furiously and wipes her tears.

Nomvuyo: Derek would come to us, crying his lungs out, feeling like he doesn't belong anywhere. He didn't believe in himself. He couldn't live himself, because he felt like his parents hated him. He would come to us... Do you understand what I'm saying?

She looks at my mother pleadingly.

Nomvuyo: Derek would come to us...

She looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Kanti all along the people who comforted him knew the truth...

She sits back and sobs quietly.

My mom wraps her arm around her and comforts her.

After a long time, she calms down and then looks at me.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry for blaming you.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Zimkitha's obviously manipulative. She had her reasons for confiding in you.

She stands and then sits next to me.

Nomvuyo: We have to fix this, Ziyanda. I can't live with this secret. I will never be able to look at Dean and Derek, and pretend like I don't know anything.

She stares at me.

Nomvuyo: At this point, I don't care about Liwa. I'm so angry at him. I can't believe he's part of this mess. Maybe it will take losing me to realise that Zimkitha is not the be all and end all. In fact, she's a toxic and selfish woman. And the fact that Liwa is still there, licking her ass, says a lot about the type of person he is.

I rub my eyes.

My mom walks out, looking defeated.

I stand and make my way to my bedroom.

I get in bed.

A few minutes later, Nomvuyo is next to me.

I just need to sleep the stress off.

I know there's nothing I can do about this episode right now. I'm already drowning.

INSERT 194

The following day, I wake up at around 10am.

I find Nomvuyo getting dressed.

Nomvuyo: Morning.

Me: Hi.

Nomvuyo: Will you be able to get up today?

I don't say anything.

She sits next to me and looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: Believe me when I say I know what you're going through. Depression is always ready to suck all the positivity and your will to live. I can't even tell you to get over it, because that's impossible.

I sigh heavily.

Nomvuyo: Think about Liyakha. She needs you.

Me: I feel guilty.

Nomvuyo: Stop fussing about the past. We have to find a way forward, instead of sitting here.

Me: Are you really willing to divorce Liwa?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: We are bystanders in this situation. Liwa's position is different.

Me: I'm going to see Melinda today. I need to clear my mind.

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Me: Hopefully, she doesn't admit me, because I've never felt this low.

Nomvuyo: The fact that you can identify that you need help, is a good thing. Do what you have to...

She stands and finishes up.

Me: Where are you going?

Nomvuyo: I'm tired of looking ugly. I'm going shopping.

Me: Wow.

Nomvuyo: I may as well blow up the Mzinyathis money while I still have a chance.

I get out of bed and make my way to the bathroom.

In all my years of being around Melinda, it is safe to say that I've never seen her this shook.

I told her everything.

Melinda: Why would Zimkitha tell you this?

Me: She thought she was dying.

Melinda: So?

I shrug.

Melinda: This is concerning. When is she planning on telling them?

Me: I don't know.

I sigh.

Me: I feel guilty. When she told me this, I immediately shut it out.

Melinda: Throughout the years, we've established that that is your coping mechanism.

Me: I think I'm in a depression fog right now. I'm going through life at a very slow pace, I'm not responding as desired, and as a result, the people around me are getting frustrated.

Melinda: Depressed individuals will attest to going through a brain fog of some sort whenever they're having episodes. That it is like driving through fog so thick it feels like you are alone in the world. In a way, all sound and color are jumbled up and your reflexes are slow due to the limited visibility. Your emotions and thoughts are going through this fog.

Me: I'm struggling to process what is happening, I really am. I don't know, I feel like my emotions are not functioning properly, and I'm disconnected. I'm really not doing it on purpose.

Melinda: Unfortunately, it is not easy explaining this to someone who has not

gone through it, or people who are not educated on it. From the outside looking in, it seems like you're doing this intentionally.

I keep quiet.

Melinda: Like we've discussed before, coming out of the fog tends to feel like blunt force trauma. You have to deal with all the consequences at once. You have no choice but to try and let people around you know when that you are struggling. This fog experience will never be avoided, unfortunately. However, you can always find positive ways to deal with it.

Me: Derek is going to hate me. I don't think he'll understand why I didn't tell him.

Melinda: You can't feel guilty for a sin you didn't commit.

I look at her. I feel like she doesn't understand. She's frustrating me.

Melinda: You can't take someone else's load and make it yours. It is not your responsibility to fix someone else's mistakes. You have your reasons for your actions, and your reasons are valid.

I rub my eyes.

Melinda: Ziyanda, at the end of the day, you have Depression. Whether you like it or not, your thought and emotions function differently. You experience things differently.

Me: I feel guilty. I hear you, but I don't want Derek to feel like I'm justifying my actions.

Melinda: Sweetie, your actions are absolutely justifiable.

She gives me her usual, "I'm always right," smile.

Melinda: This is not your mess, it really isn't. As humans, well most of us, our first instinct is usually to help out and solve.

Empathy drives our actions. However, this particular battle is not yours to fight.

Me: Realistically, you know that's bullshit, right? I should have done something when I found out.

Melinda: You will never get over the anxiety if you keep thinking like that. Stop thinking about what could have been, and what will be. That is out of your control.

Start thinking about what you can do now. Fussing over the past and future will not help you in any way.

I sigh heavily.

I know she's right, that's why I'm annoyed at her.

She looks at me softly.

Melinda: What do you want to do?

Me: I want to speak to Liwa.

Melinda: Why?

Me: I want to hear his side of the story.

Melinda: So you can solve the problem yourself?

Me: Eish, Melinda.

She sighs lightly.

Melinda: As soon as you try to find all these sides and call meetings, you are setting yourself up for possible failure. You are now removing yourself as some form of bystander, to the center of the problem.

I grunt.

Melinda: Your actions now should not revolve around you taking responsibility for someone else's actions.

Me: I can't sit and cry all day.

Melinda: Let the relevant parties handle this. You didn't force Zimkitha to tell you this secret.

Me: I didn't stop her either.

Melinda: It's not like you were anticipating what she was going to say. I keep quiet.

Melinda: I cannot emphasize this enough—you are not the cause of any of this. You weren't even around when all of this took place. You should not feel guilty. Yes, the secret is weighing heavily on you, but you did what was good for you at the time, shutting it out. The only thing you can be responsible for is how you handled it. Yes, Derek might not be happy with that, but you can't beat yourself up for that. You strongly feel like this is not your secret to tell, and I happen to agree with you. This is an internal family issue that started way before you were in the picture. Own your part in all of this, and don't feel the need to take it on as if you are the cause. I nod.

She is getting through to me.

Melinda: You also can't assume that Derek will be angry with you. Yes, there's a possibility, but you can't be certain. I think he's a reasonable man. He might be angry at first, understandably, however, he might recover. All of this is unconfirmed, therefore there's no use dwelling on the future. There are too many possible outcomes.

Me: I hear you.

Melinda: It was unfair for Zimkitha to put you in such a position. I wonder why she did that.

Me: She thought she was dying.

Melinda: She knows that you handle things differently, so I am struggling to understand the reasoning behind her actions.

Me: I hate her.

She nods slowly and listens as I vent about my hatred for Zimkitha.

Melinda: My experience in this job has really taught me not to judge people... I always try to unpack people's actions, and I'm always amazed by the results. I've dealt with some people whom society considers "outcasts" and their version of events always blow my mind. You think you've figured something out, then something else comes up. It's a complicated web...

Me: Mxm.

She smiles lightly.

Melinda: I'm certain that Zimkitha has her reasons... It's unfortunate that her actions will have damaging consequences (possibly).

Me: In a perfect world, when everyone finds out, they are all happy and they unite as one big happy family.

She chuckles.

Me: But, I know these people. Shit is going to get real.

She sighs.

Me: Even my mom knew about this... She actually suspected a long time ago, but dismissed it. I think I was in denial.

Melinda: That's normal.

Me: I didn't tell you about Derek... His words really hit me.

I tell him about Derek stating that I'm pulling one of my "childish stunts."

Melinda: Don't take it personally. Just like you, when he is emotional, his tongue is quick.

Me: True.

We continue chatting for a while...

When I get back home, I am shocked to find Liwa in the lounge.

Liwa: Ziyanda.

I just came back from Melinda.

I'm fine.

Well, I think I am.

Me: Hello.

He looks just like Nomvuyo, fucked all the way up.

I put down my bag and sit opposite him.

Liwa: I need Nomvuyo. Please tell me where she is.

Me: I don't know where she is. He swallows hard and rubs his chin.

Liwa: How are you?

Me: How do you think I am?

I want to jump on him and throw fists.

We are silent for a very long time.

Me: So, you're willing to lose Nomvuyo over this?

He looks at me, clearly defeated. For a second, I feel sorry for him, but I don't have it in me to feel anything at this point. Being numb is the only way I will survive.

Liwa: Just tell her I need her.

Me: I don't know where she is.

Liwa: You expect me to believe that?

I keep quiet.

My mom walks in and looks at Liwa.

Me: Wena, call that sneaky mother of yours, and tell her we don't have time for hide and seek. The last thing she needs is me taking a taxi to go fetch her in that mansion of hers... Now, go dish up for yourself.

She then looks at me.

Mom: Are you back?

I nod.

She walks out and Liwa stands and goes to the kitchen.

INSERT 195

I watch as Liwa eats my mom's food like a vulture. He obviously hasn't been eating.

After 10 minutes, he is done.

Me: Where is Zimkitha? He shrugs.

Liwa: I don't know.

Me: You expect me to believe that?

Liwa: I really don't know where she is.

We stare at each other for a while.

My mom walks back and sits next to me.

Mom: Uphi umamakho, Liwa?

Liwa: Angazi, ma.

My mom stares at him.

Mom: Are you still hungry?

He nods lightly.

Mom: Go dish up.

He stands like a little boy and goes to the kitchen.

My mom and I look at each other.

Mom: He looks like he's about to die.

I'm not even about to come for her, because I'm used to her. She doesn't attack immediately.

A few minutes later, Liwa comes back and finishes his food in five minutes.

Liwa: Thank you.

Mom: Are you ready to talk?

He takes a deep breath and looks at my mom.

Liwa: I don't know where my mother is.

Mom: That's like Ziyanda saying she doesn't know where Nomvuyo is.

He keeps quiet.

Liwa: I need to talk to Vuvu.

Mom: Why now? You were obviously comfortable with letting her walk away.

He rubs his eyes.

Liwa: Ziyanda, I'd like to talk to Vuvu first.

Mom: Hai phela you need to remember where you are. You can't make demands.

He looks down ashamedly.

Liwa: I fucke-

He stops himself.

Liwa: I messed up. I really messed up.

We look at him as he battles to speak.

Liwa: I want to talk to Nomvuyo first. I need her.

He groans.

Mom: Why would you drag this out for so long, Liwa?

He doesn't speak.

Mom: Actually, I don't even want to address you first. I want to speak to Zimkitha, because she is responsible for this mess.

He looks like he's about to break down.

Mom: She's the adult here.

She stands up.

Mom: You're not leaving this house until you tell your mother to come here.

She walk out.

He then stares at me.

Liwa: Are you mad at me?

He smiles faintly and I look at him blankly. He really has time for jokes right now? He takes out his phone and focuses on it. I'm sure he's texting his mother, telling her to hide, where she is.

I allow myself to think about Derek.

I miss him. I miss my daughter.

I hear footsteps.

Nomvuyo emerges, and as depressed as I am, I have to stop myself from squealing.

She stands there, looking like a transformed woman. Did she go to a spa without me? She looks refreshed- back to the Nomvuyo we all know and secretly hate.

She assesses the scene.

Liwa is frozen, I think.

Nomvuyo: I brought you a burger, Zi.

I nod.

I want to sleep.

Sleep is the only logical thing to do right now.

Liwa: Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Yes, Liwa.

He stands and steps closer to her. They stare at each other for the longest time.

Liwa: Can we talk?

Nomvuyo: I'm listening.

Liwa: Uhm, priva-

She shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: Everything is out in the open now. Why are you still trying to talk behind closed doors?

He looks at her pleadingly and she shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: I'm over the secrecy. She comes and sits next to me.

Liwa hesitates, before sitting down again.

Nomvuyo stares at him expectantly.

I stand.

Nomvuyo: Uyaphi?

Me: Bedroom.

I honestly don't have the energy to deal with the tension between the two of them. I make my way to the bedroom, and get in bed.

When I wake up, it's around 4pm. I walk to the lounge and find my mom there.

Mom: Hey, baby.

Me: Hey.

Mom: How are you feeling?

Me: Okay.

She smiles.

Me: I'm going back.

Mom: To your place?

She looks at me in shock.

I nod.

Mom: Will you be fine?

I shrug.

I don't care at this point.

Mom: Zimkitha seems to have vanished.

Me: I don't know what needs to happen.

Mom: We'll have to tell Derek and Dean.

I stare at her. What does she mean?

Mom: Nomvuyo and I have agreed that we should tell them. Zimkitha is clearly running away.

I sigh.

Mom: Go spend time with Derek. I don't want you to stress about fixing this.

Me: What should I say to him?

Mom: Just don't say anything about this.

Me: Am I supposed to pretend like I don't know?

She smiles lightly. Mom: If you were able to shut this thing out for over a year, I'm sure you can hold on for a couple of days.

I take a deep breath.

Mom: I'm sorry.

She looks at me sadly.

Mom: I must admit that I'm starting to feel like your life was far too peaceful before you met these people.

Me: Don't you think I know that?

She sighs.

Mom: I'm sorry.

We're silent for a while.

Me: Are those two still here?

She shakes her head.

Mom: I don't know where they disappeared to. I roll my eyes angrily. I really hope that Nomvuyo hasn't been influenced by Liwa.

Me: I should get going.

Just then, Lwazi walks in.

Lwazi: Hey!

Me: Pack your bags, we're leaving.

Lwazi: To your place??

I nod and she squeals excitedly.

My mom looks at me knowingly and chuckles.

Lwazi might think that this is for her, but I'm really doing this for me.

Derek won't kill me if Lwazi is around.

Lwazi: I am so excited to see Baby Liya! She goes on to tell me about how she always brags about her cute baby sister at school.

I'm trying my best to listen attentively, but my heart is beating too fast.

I haven't seen Derek in a couple of days.

I know he's pissed, that's why he didn't even bother reaching out.

After a while, we finally get to the house.

I follow Lwazi to the door.

I want to run back outside and ask the Uber driver to take me somewhere else.

I don't think I've ever been this nervous.

I'm struggling to breathe.

When we walk in, we find Derek and Dean in the lounge, watching a soccer match.

Lwazi: Double Ds!

When they both turn their heads and stare at us, my whole body tenses up. I refuse to even look at Derek, because his stare will kill me.

Lwazi: Daddy D and Uncle D!

She puts down her bag and runs to them. She hugs Dean first and then focuses on Derek. While she's asking Derek questions and telling him about her life, Dean walks towards me.

I step back.

I may have forgotten about him.

He is also part of this mess.

His life is going to be ruined as well.

Dean: You brought Lwazi?

I look at him nervously.

Dean: You're smart.

He chuckles as he finally gets to me and wraps his arms around me. I don't have the strength to resist at this point.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I glance at him.

Dean: What's wrong?

Just then, I feel someone by my legs.

Dean lets go of me, and I am shocked to see Lelo, Derek's son, standing there, looking up at me excitedly.

Lelo: Zizi!

What is he doing here?

Dean: Ziyanda. The child is greeting you, for heaven's sake.

I try to snap out of it and smile lightly.

Me: Hi, Lelo. Dean steps back and I reach down to Lelo and pick him up. He smiles happily.

I look at him closely and suddenly feel very weird.

He gives me a kiss and within seconds, he is running off somewhere else.

Dean: You're looking ugly. Uphumaphi?

I look at him.

Dean: Yini wena? You're acting strange.

Lwazi: Mommy has been very sick!

I feel Derek's eyes on me.

Lwazi: She's been in bed for two days straight! She was crying day an-

Me: Lwazi, go to your bedroom.

She realises that I'm not too thrilled about her update session, and quickly walks away.

I clear my throat and eventually find the courage to look at Derek.

He walks towards me.

Derek: You were sick?

Me: Technically.

He glances at Dean for a few seconds and then looks at me again.

Derek: What was wrong?

Me: Had an episode.

He stares at me for what feels like forever.

I think he's trying to figure out if I'm lying or not. Thankfully, I am telling the truth, just not the whole truth.

Also, I look a hot mess- he can see for himself.

Dean: So... When were you planning on updating us?

I look at Derek.

Me: I'm sorry.

Dean: Did you go to your mental what what?

I nod lightly.

Dean: Did she help you?

I nod again.

They both stare at me.

Me: I'm sorry for disappeari-

Derek: What triggered the episode?

I take a deep breath.

I look at him pleadingly.

This is the last thing I want to discuss. I

don't know where to begin.

He realizes this, and steps closer to me.

As soon as he wraps his arms around me,

I immediately start crying.

Derek: Baby...

Hearing him call me that is also adding

fuel to the fire.

After the longest time, I eventually calm down.

He lets go of me and Dean gives me a box of tissues.

Dean: Uhm, I should probably dish up for you... You look malnourished.

Me: Not funny.

He chuckles as he walks to the kitchen.

Derek leads me to the couch and we sit next to each other. He takes the remote and goes to all my saved episodes of the Real Housewives.

Me: Thanks.

Derek: Nkanyezi is sleeping upstairs. I nod lightly.

I'm too emotional right now, I don't think I want her to take in all of my negative emotions.

We sit and watch an episode of RHONY as Dean complains about something in the kitchen...

INSERT 196

I feel Derek's arms around me, and I open my eyes.

Did I doze off?

Derek: Baby.

I glance at him.

My stomach growls.

Derek: Here's your food.

I blink a few times.

I remember that I'm back at home.

Derek hasn't killed me. I sit up and he gives me my plate.

Me: Where's Dean?

Derek: He left an hour ago.

I nod lightly as I focus on my food. I know he's staring at me.

Derek: How are you?

I look at him.

Me: I can't describe it.

He looks at me intently as he nods.

Derek: I'm sorry I wasn't there.

I put down my plate and look at him pleadingly.

Me: Please don't blame yourself.

Derek: How can I not? I was not there for you, period.

Me: It's not like I opened the door for you. I shut you out.

He sighs heavily and rubs his eyes.

Derek: This is a lot. I can tell that this was a bad episode.

Me: It wasn't that bad.

I try to smile.

Derek: Eat.

I take my plate and focus on eating.

Derek: Star is awake. Should I fetch her?

Me: Yes, please.

He stands and disappears.

I take a deep breath. My heart is really heavy.

A few minutes later, he comes back with Star. I put down my plate and take her from him.

Me: Hello, baby!

As soon as she smiles and giggles, I start sobbing quietly.

I really missed her.

It's really crazy how you fail to think about the amount of love you have in your life when you're drowning in misery. Your rationality goes out the window. You fail to remember that you are worthy of love.

As I hold Little Star, my whole body warms up. I feel a sense of relief.

I shower her with kisses and she continues giggling.

After a while, I feel much better, a bit lighter.

I look at Derek and find him smiling.

Me: Depression is annoying.

He chuckles and I smile lightly.

Me: I'm sorry that you have to deal with such.

Derek: I wouldn't have it any other way.
He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: Thank you.

I continue playing with Little Star, till
Lwazi comes down.

Lwazi: Mommy, I want to play with Baby
Liya!

She takes her from me before I can even
say anything.

Me: Yoh.

She walks away to her room.

Derek: Are you full? I nod.

He pulls me closer and I relax in his arms.

Derek: How bad was it?

I sigh.

Me: It made it to my top 5.

I feel his lips on my forehead. He plants a
kiss.

Derek: I can't apologise enough.

I shift and look at him.

Me: This isn't your fault. Derek: I don't know about that...

Me: I'm not going to listen to you blame yourself.

He looks at me guiltily.

We sit in silence for a while.

It's around 9pm now.

Me: When did Lelo get here?

Derek: Yesterday.

I nod.

Derek: You don't have a problem, right?

I shake my head.

Lelo is the least of my worries.

Derek: Ready to go to bed?

Me: Yes.

We eventually get up and get ready for bed. Thankfully, Lwazi is around, so she's been entertaining Liyakha.

I thought I'd sleep peacefully, but I am struggling.

I keep tossing and turning.

I make my way to Little Star's nursery, and find her sleeping peacefully. She has really strange sleeping patterns this one.

I'm not complaining though, as long she rests and doesn't cry the whole night.

After standing there for a while, I'm consumed by my thoughts.

I'm scared.

I'm afraid that I'm going to lose Derek. I feel like he won't be himself again after he finds out the truth.

Derek: Baby.

I quickly turn and find him standing by the door.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Can't sleep?

I shake my head.

Derek: Me too.

We walk back to our bedroom and get in bed.

Derek: Dean was actually planning on going to Soweto.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Derek: He was planning on snatching you. I chuckle.

Me: Did you stop him?

He nods.

Derek: I was angry at you, Ziyanda I don't say anything.

Derek: Please tell me what happened?

I keep quiet and he stares at me pleadingly.

Derek: Please talk to me. What triggered your episode?

Me: I'm scared.

Derek: Scared of what?

He looks at me worriedly.

Derek: Zi.

I look at him nervously.

Derek: Baby, what are you scared of?

Me: Losing you.

My heart immediately starts beating fast.

Derek: What do you mean?

I take a deep breath and look at him.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I sigh.

Me: I can't do this anymore- I really can't.

I can tell that he wants to say something, but he's speechless.

He stares at me expectantly.

Me: I don't know where to start.

He's worried.

My heart rate is intense.

I'm breathing heavily.

Me: Some time after we started dating, you invited me to lunch with your friends...

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I went to the bathroom, and I
overhead a woman taking a call... She
kept saying that she didn't want to ruin
what she had built and that the person
she was speaking to must stay away.

I avoid his eyes.

Derek: Who was it?

Me: It was Zimkitha.

Derek: What?

He looks confused, genuinely puzzled.

Derek: What was she talking about?

I shrug and he chuckles.

Derek: Zimkitha is a mystery.

I look at him.

Derek: So, how is this going to ruin our
relationship? You are so dramatic, Zi.

I sigh.

Me: I'm not done.

He keeps quiet.

Me: A few months later, when she was in
hospital, because of that mysterious car

accident, she asked me to visit her without telling you.

Derek: Really? Why?

I swallow hard and start tearing up.

Me: I didn't know at first, but she told me something...

His expression changes.

He can sense that this is serious.

Me: Derek, please promise me that you won't run off.

Derek: Why would I run off?

I try to keep in the tears, but fail.

Derek: Baby, what's going on? You're scaring me.

Me: You have to promise that you will hear me out before you react, please.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Derek, please. Please promise me you won't run off.

Derek: I promise.

He swallows hard as he stares at me intensely.

We're silent for a long time.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Zimkitha told me that she is your mother.

He stares at me for a while.

His expression doesn't change.

He clears his throat, and I see him relax a bit.

Derek: Ya, she's my mother, she's our mother, we all know this.

I shake my head and let out a quiet sob.

Me: No, she told me that she's your biological mother- you, Liwa and Dean are biological siblings.

I feel like I'm going to pass out, but I can't allow myself to.

I'm staring at him.

He hasn't moved, and his expression hasn't changed.

It's been over a minute.

Me: Derek? Nothing.

Me: Derek.

He blinks.

Derek: What?

I take a deep breath.

Me: Zimkitha is your biological mother.

I want to hold him, but I know I shouldn't.

My heart sinks as soon as I see his eyes watering.

Derek: What?

I decide to keep quiet and let him process this.

I want to tell him everything, but I know he won't be listening attentively.

Before I can say or do anything, he stands.

Me: Dere-

He shoots me a look and I immediately keep quiet and tense up.

My whole body gets cold.

He has never looked at me like this.

I watch as he puts on his gown and walks out of the room...

INSERT 197

I sit there for the longest time.

I'm suddenly overcome by the need to sleep.

Like, I want to close my eyes and just sleep. But, my heart won't allow me to. I know I have to look for him and check where his head is at.

I get off the bed and look for him.

I go downstairs and he is nowhere to be found.

I go back to the bedroom and take my phone and dial my mom's number.

It rings for a while, and she finally answers.

Mom: Sthandwa sami.

I sigh heavily.

Me: I told him.

Mom: You did?

I don't say anything.

Mom: How is he? How did he take it?

She is quite calm. She knows that if she panics, then I'll panic as well.

Mom: I know it wasn't easy. Try to explain everything to him.

Me: Okay.

Mom: Do you want me to come over?

Me: It's late. You can come tomorrow.

Mom: Okay, baby. I love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and take a deep breath.

Thereafter, I walk out and make my way to Little Star's nursery.

I find him there.

He's standing next to her cot, looking down at her.

Me: Star.

He doesn't turn to look at me.

Me: Star.

I know he wants space, but I can't allow myself to give it to him. I'm scared that he'll get other ideas and never come back to me.

I'm sure this is how he feels when I have my moments and just want to be alone.

I feel helpless.

I walk to him and stand next to him.

One thing I will say about Derek is that his Emotional Intelligence is very high. His ability to process information is far better than most people I know. Because of his high EQ, in most situations, he thinks before he reacts.

However, this time around, I'm not sure. I'm scared.

We stand there for the longest time, and he walks away.

I watch him.

Me: Derek, you promised to hear me out.
He stops by the door.

Me: You promised.

There's a huge lump in my throat, but I'm not going to let it win. I need Derek to understand this whole situation.

I need to at least know what's going through his mind.

I walk to him and make him turn.

Me: You promised to hear me out

He looks at him.

He's hurting, it's written all over his face.

I take his hand and lead him back to our bedroom.

I don't know what has happened, but something has clicked in me. My instinct to protect Derek has heightened and I feel energized. I don't know if this is normal, but that's what's happening right now.

I rush downstairs and get him water.

When I get back, he is still sitting on the edge of the bed.

Me: Please have some water.

I try to give him the bottle, but he doesn't take it.

Me: Derek, thatha.

He glances at me before taking the bottle and drinking some water.

I take the bottle and throw it on the bed.

I take a deep breath and look at him.

Me: Tell me how you feel.

I don't know what I'm doing, but what I do know is that I'm not going to let Derek walk away. My relationship went be ruined by this.

Derek: You said you'd explain yourself, not focus on me.

Me: Okay.

I sigh.

Me: I don't know why Zimkitha told me this. I was angry and confused. That's why I have distanced myself from her.

He doesn't say anything.

I may as well tell him everything.

Me: My interaction with Nomvuyo is what triggered the episode. The reason she's divorcing Liwa is because she found out about this, and also found out that Liwa knew.

Derek: Knew what?

I look at him nervously.

Me: He knew that Zimkitha is your mother.

Derek: Zimkitha is my mother? I nod lightly.

I want to share his pain, but I know that he has to go through this his own way.

We sit in silence for a long time.

Derek: Liwa knew?

I nod.

Derek: You knew for over a year?

I look down ashamedly.

Me: She said she'd tell the truth.

He finally stares at me and my stomach churns.

My heart sinks deeper.

He's in pain.

Derek: Is that all?

I sigh.

He stands.

Me: Uyaphi?

He stares at me tensely, and I shiver

Me: I'll give you your space. I just need to know that you're safe.

Derek: Did you do that when you left me?

Me: I told you where I was going.

He takes his car keys and just as he storms off, I grab his arm roughly.

I don't know what has come over me.

Me: You want your space? I will give you your space. What you will not do is

disappear in the middle of the night not knowing where you're going. I'm not going to let you do that.

Derek: Get out of my way.

Me: No.

He gives me a threatening look and as much as I'm terrified right now, I don't give in.

Me: No. Where are you going?

He continues staring at me and I let go of him. I'm not used to seeing Derek like this. This side of him scares me.

Derek: Suka.

I look at him pleadingly and I feel my eyes water up.

I understand that he's angry, but I don't want to lose him. I just want to know where he's going.

Me: Please... I won't bother you...

We stand there for a very long time...

Eventually, he sighs quietly.

Derek: I'm going to my parent's house.
I process what he says and then nod
lightly.

Me: Will you come back?

He pushes me lightly and I watch as he
walks away.

I feel defeated.

A few minutes later, I know he has left.
I throw myself on the bed and bury my
head on the pillow. I scream as loud as I
can...

Once I feel a bit better, I sit up.

I take my phone...

It rings for a very long time.

She finally answers.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda?

Me: If I lose Derek over this...

I hear her breathe.

Me: Fix this.

I hang up before she can even say anything.

I'm filled with rage- indescribable rage. Zimkitha will be on the receiving end of this rage the moment I see her.

I don't even know how we're going to recover from this.

Part of me feels like this is the beginning of the end...

INSERT 198 (Unedited)

I've been in bed, tossing and turning since Derek left.

It's now 6am.

I decide to take a shower and then go to Little Star. She is already awake, kicking and moaning.

I take her with me to the bedroom and put her on the bed while I get dressed. I quickly check on Lwazi and Lelo, and they are fast asleep.

I feed Star and try to distract myself with her.

I haven't called Derek, because I know he won't take my calls.

Just then, my phone rings, and it's Nomvuyo.

I answer it.

Me: Hello?

Nomvuyo: Baby, your mom told me.

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Did he leave?

Me: He left in the middle of the night.

Nomvuyo: Where did he say he was going?

Me: His parents' house.

Nomvuyo: Oh...

She sighs heavily.

Me: Are you with Liwa?

She doesn't respond.

I guess she's back with him.

Nomvuyo: I'm still divorcing him.

I don't even care. My mind is occupied by Derek. I don't care what Nomvuyo and her husband are doing.

Nomvuyo: Zi?

Me: I have to go.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, okay.

I end the call and continue focusing on Liya.

At around 10am, my mom lets me know that she is on her way. I clean up the house, and check my phone to see if Derek has responded to any of my messages.

Nothing.

After 30 minutes, I open the door for her and she gives me a hug.

Mom: Baby, did you even sleep?

I shake my head.

Mom: Udlile?

Me: I can't. I'm stressed.

She sighs as we make our way to the lounge.

Mom: Let me make you something to eat while you take a bath.

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not hungry. I showered earlier.

Mom: Let me call him.

She takes out her phone and dials Derek's number. I watch as she waits for him to answer. After a while, she breathes heavily and ends the call.

Mom: Not picking up.

Me: Maybe I should go to his parents' house.

Mom: That's where he went?

I nod.

Mom: You want to go?

Me: I can't sit here. It's stressing me out.

Mom: Okay.

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Mom: Okay, let's go.

Me: What about the kids?

Mom: I can't let you go by yourself.

Me: Let's go with them.

She shakes her head.

Mom: Nomvuyo will have to come and babysit.

She walks away as she makes the call.

Nomvuyo: Hey.

She looks at me softly.

Me: Hi. I don't understand why she's behaving like someone who's guilty.

Nomvuyo: So, you'd like me to babysit?

Mom: Yes, baby. We have to find Derek.

Nomvuyo: Are you sure you'll find him there?

Mom: We'll see...

Nomvuyo nods.

Lwazi comes downstairs and greets

Nomvuyo.

Lwazi: Mommy, where's Daddy D? He said we'd work on my homework today.

Me: He'll be back soon.

Lwazi: Okay.

Mom: Baby, we have to buy a few things...

Sis Vuvu is going to stay with you.

Lwazi: Alright.

She walks up the stairs.

Nomvuyo: Nihambe kahle.

Mom: Hopefully, we will find him there.

Nomvuyo looks at me.

Nomvuyo: We'll talk when you come back.

My mom and I make our way out and get in the Uber.

When we arrive at Khwezi and Senior's house, my heart is already beating fast. I don't know what to expect.

Part of me feels like Derek is not here. I'm sure he came here at night and then left.

Why would he be here for so long?

After a few minutes, the gate opens and the helper greets us. Thereafter, she leads us to the front door.

Senior: Ziyanda!

He looks at me in utter shock.

Me: Hi, sir.

Senior: Come in...

He moves out of the way and we walk in.

Me: This is my mother.

Senior introduces himself and they shake hands.

Mom: I think you know why we're here.

Senior genuinely looks like he has seen a ghost.

Senior: Have a seat. Would you like something to drink? To eat?

Mom: We're okay.

He sits opposite us and rubs his chin thoughtfully.

Senior: Uhm... Derek came here last night.

We stare at him.

So, this means Derek is not here now.

Where is he?

Mom: What happened?

Senior shivers.

Senior: When he got here, I knew... I just knew...

He sighs deeply.

Senior: I've never seen him like that...

We sit in silence for a long time.

Senior: I don't know what to do... I've never seen him like that...

Me: Stop acting like this is all a shock to you. Did you really think Derek would never find out?

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: I'm not going to sit here and listen to you drown in self-pity.

My mom touches my hand, and I stand.

Me: Where is Derek?

Senior: He storme-

Out of nowhere, we hear a scream.

We turn- Khwezi is standing by the lounge entrance, looking at us angrily.

Khwezi: Get out!

My mom stands.

Khwezi: Why did you allow these people to come in?!

Senior: Khwe-

Khwezi: Out! Get ou-

Mom: Heyi wena, ungalinge!

Khwezi stares at my mom.

Mom: I haven't put my hands on a person in a very long time, don't push me!

Senior: Let's cal-

Mom: Where is Derek? We didn't come here to fight with you.

Khwezi: Fuck o-

Senior rushes to Khwezi and stops her from talking.

Senior: We don't know where he is.

Mom: Alright.

She takes my hand.

Mom: Let's go, before I do other things here.

We walk out of the house...

We decide to have lunch, because my mom has been complaining about being hungry.

We go to Mike's Kitchen.

Mom: These people are twisted yazi. So, all of them are involved in this?

I sigh heavily as I also think about it.

Mom: Zimkitha planned this whole thing out. She made sure that she gave these boys away, but was still able to keep track of them.

She shakes her head in shock and claps once.

Mom: Hai ngiyam' saba uZimkitha!

Me: I hate her.

Mom: I'm trying my best not to judge her. I want to hear her side of the story first.

Me: Mxm.

Mom: I really hope she had valid reasons, because none of this makes sense.

I don't say anything.

Our food eventually arrives and we start eating.

Mom: As for uLiwa noVuvu...

Me: I don't care about them.

Mom: Zizi, you need to calm down.

Me: How am I supposed to be calm when Derek is out there? What is he thinking? Where is he?

I take a deep breath.

Me: I just want him to come back.

Mom: He will come back. We continue eating...

When we come back to the house, we find Nomvuyo in the kitchen, preparing lunch.

Nomvuyo: You're back?

She looks at us strangely.

Mom: And then wena?

Nomvuyo: Uhm...

Just then, Dean walks to the kitchen.

Dean: I'm starving. Hurry up.

My whole body tenses up as he walks towards me.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I clear my throat.

Before I can respond, he focuses on my mother and smiles.

Dean: I've missed you.

Mom: Hai suka, you don't visit us anymore.

Dean: I've been busy, ma.

Mom: Ohho!

They share a hug.

Dean then focuses on me again.

Dean: Dlamz.

I clear my throat once more.

Me: Hi.

Dean: A word?

Me: Uh-

He takes my hand and leads me to the lounge.

Before I can even react to Liwa's presence, he continues leading me out the slide door.

When we get outside, he turns and stares at me seriously.

Dean: How are you?

I frown.

What's happening?

Dean: I don't appreciate this distance between us lately.

My heart sinks.

He looks at me softly.

Dean: I know you think I don't understand what you're going through, but I kinda do...

I continue staring at him.

Dean: I think I've also been depressed at some point in my life. I just dismissed it.

Okay.

Dean: I don't want you to think the people around you don't understand. I don't want you to suffer alone.

Me: I'm fine, Dean.

I don't know why he's making me emotional.

Dean: I love you. You're my sister, and seeing you like this breaks my heart.

He sees how emotional I'm getting, and pulls me for a hug.

I sob quietly as he tightens his hold on me.

I feel horrible.

After a while, I stop crying and he wipes my tears.

Dean: What's wrong?

Me: A lot.

Dean: Okay. You're not being specific.

Me: I need to tell you someth-

Out of nowhere, Nolwazi emerges from the house.

When did she get here?

What's going on? First it was Liwa, then Dean, now Nolwazi?

Nolwazi: Dean! You need to come in!

Dean: What's wrong?

Nolwazi: Come!

Dean lets go of me and we both rush back to the house.

Once we're inside, I stand there, confused and frightened.

Derek is beating Liwa to a pulp!

Mom: Nkanyezi!

Derek drags Liwa across the floor and kicks his face furiously.

Nolwazi: Dean, you have to stop them!

Dean seems to be assessing the situation.

Also, he seems cool.

Nolwazi: Dean!

Dean: Liwa is not beating him back,
because he knows he is wrong.

We all stare at him in shock.

What the hell does he mean??

Nomvuyo: They don't intervene in each
other's fights.

Dean: Liwa must have done something
shitty. He knows he's not supposed to hit
back. I can't take this anymore.

Just as I'm about to stop them, Dean grabs
my hand roughly.

Dean: Stay out of it.

Me: No!

Nolwazi: Are you fucken crazy?!

Nolwazi tries to stop them, but Nomvuyo
pulls her back.

How is she okay with this? I know Liwa
messed up, but this is crazy.

What are we supposed to do? Stand here
and watch Derek kill Liwa?

Also, it is clear that Dean doesn't know why Liwa is being beaten, because he wouldn't be this chilled. All he knows is that they made a stupid pact, that if someone does something really bad, he can't defend himself when he's being beaten.

That's what happened when Ntsiki almost killed me, and Derek blamed Dean...Liwa didn't intervene, and he told us to stay out of it.

Liwa looks like he's about to die.

Me: Derek.

Derek continues punching him.

Me: Derek, please stop!

Nolwazi: You're going to kill him!

Dean: No one dies from being punched.

He'll be unconscious for a while.

What?

Within seconds, Liwa stops moving.

Derek throws him to the ground and
Nomvuyo rushes to him.

I want to vomit.

Why is Derek like this? Why is he so
violent? How is he able to tame this side
of him?

I feel sick. Derek looks at Dean.

They stare at each other for a long time.

Dean: Mind telling me what this is about,
buddy?

Derek: I'm sure Zimkitha is here to tell
you...

We all turn.

Zimkitha is standing by the entrance of
the lounge, looking like she is about to
die.

Dean: Zimkitha.

Just then, Lwazi comes downstairs, and
before she can process what is happening,
my mom rushes to her and takes her back
upstairs.

A few seconds later, Liyakha's cries and screams fill the entire house.

Derek and I stare at each for a few seconds, before I rush up the stairs and make my way to the bedroom...

INSERT 199

As I breastfeed Liyakha, I'm trying by all means not to let my emotions drive me crazy. I don't want to transfer all these negative emotions to my child, I don't want that.

I keep taking deep breaths as she sucks on happily.

As much as I understand Derek's anger, I don't agree with how he is dealing with this. What if he killed Liwa?

I focus on Liyakha until she dozes off. I place her carefully on the bed and watch her sleep.

Derek's violent side scares me.

There are kids in the house, why would he bring all that energy in here? What if they saw him beat up Liwa?

I take a deep breath and sit on the edge of the bed.

I don't want to go downstairs. I don't want to deal with this.

Like I said, I feel like this is the beginning of the end. I feel like we won't recover from this.

My heart is truly broken.

Eventually, I make my way downstairs and find everyone standing around Liwa, except Derek. He's not around.

Nolwazi: We should take him to the hospital.

Nomvuyo shakes her head lightly.

Nomvuyo: He'll be fine.

She looks at Dean.

Nomvuyo: Help me put him on the couch.

Dean grunts as he bends and lifts Liwa like he's a piece of paper. He then places him on the couch and Nomvuyo takes care of him. I'm not sure whether he's still unconscious or he's just weak.

Dean: What's going on? I'm too hungry for this shi-

He quickly looks at my mom and smiles.

Mom: You must check yourself. You know how I feel about bad language.

Dean wraps his arm around her.

Mom: Are you hungry?

Dean: I'm famished, ma.

Mom: Let's dish up then.

They walk to the kitchen.

Nolwazi and I stare at each other. Nolwazi is clearly shook and lost. She doesn't know what's going on.

Nolwazi: Zi, what's going on?

I just look at her. I don't have anything to say to her.

Where is Zimkitha? I look around.

Nolwazi: She left with Derek.

My heart starts racing.

What is he going to do to her?

He is clearly irrational at this point.

After a while, Dean and my mom walk back.

Dean: Food, anyone?

He looks at Nolwazi softly.

Dean: Baby, would you like me to dish up for you?

Nolwazi: Are you serious right now, Dean?!

Dean doesn't say anything.

Nolwazi: Liwa is lying here, struggling!

Derek is not thinking and behaving straight! And, you are here asking me if I want food?!

Dean keeps quiet. He seems nonchalant.

Nolwazi: Wow!

Mom: Sthandwa sami, you need to calm down.

Nolwazi: How, mama? How do you expect me to calm down after what we've just witnessed?!

My mom walks closer to Nolwazi and takes her hands.

Mom: Sit down, Lwazi.

She looks at my mom as if she's about to break down and cry.

Mom: Come, baby.

My mom leads her to a chair and makes her sit.

Mom: I'll dish up for you.

She nods absentmindedly and my mom walks back to the kitchen.

Dean: Where did those two go?

Nolwazi: Don't talk to me.

Dean: What did I do, now?

Nolwazi hisses.

Dean walks to her and plants a kiss on her forehead.

Dean: I mind my own business. We'll soon find out what the heck is happening with these two.

He then looks at me.

Dean: Are you okay?

I don't say anything.

Dean: You guys need to relax. This is how we handle things. We understand each other.

Nolwazi: Stop making it seem like this is okay.

Dean: It's our way of dealing with the anger we have towards each other. It's not like we go around beating up random people.

Nolwazi: Are you hearing yourself?
Dean shakes his head and chuckles.
Just then, Liwa starts moaning.
Nolwazi quickly stands and walks to the
couch.

Liwa: Vuvu...

Nomvuyo: I'm here.

He groans.

Dean walks towards him as well and
looks down at him.

Dean: What did you do, you idiot? You
know Derek is the last person you want to
mess with...

What does he mean?

Is Derek naturally a violent person? What
are his triggers?

My mom emerges and smiles.

Mom: Come get your food.

Dean is the first one to go to the kitchen.

He comes back with his plate and sits next
to Liwa, who is now sitting up.

Dean: He fucked you up.
Liwa doesn't say anything.
We watch in silence as Dean eats his food.
Liwa stares at Nomvuyo.
Nomvuyo: I'll dish up for you.
She stands and walks away.
Mom: Lwazi, your food is ready.
Nolwazi walks away as well.
Dean: You people are dramatic. You need
to calm down.
Me: Dean, just stop talking.
He looks at me in disbelief.
Me: Just shut up.
Dean: Haike.
I look at my mom.
Me: Let's go home.
She also looks at me in disbelief.
This whole thing is literally making me
sick. I'm not fine.
I'm physically sick.
I walk out and my mom follows me.

Mom: Baby-

Me: No, mama. What Derek did is stupid and inconsiderate!

She keeps quiet.

Me: How dare he come here and behave like an animal?!

She doesn't respond.

Me: What if Lelo and Lwazi saw him?!

Mom: Lwazi kept asking me questions.

She heard the commotion.

Me: I'm against his actions. I'm angry at him!

Mom: He's not thinking straight, Zi.

Me: Then, he should have stayed wherever he was!

My mom stares at something behind me.

I turn and see Derek standing a few feet away from us.

Derek: That's easy coming from you...

I freeze for a few seconds.

When he steps closer to me, my whole body tenses up and I freeze.

Derek: You think my actions are bad?
As soon as his body is touching mine, I want to scream from fear.

Me: Are you going to beat me up as well?
He stares at me.

Me: I'm not scared of you.

Mom: Ziya-

Me: How dare you come here and behave like an animal with the kids in the house?

Derek: Why am I not surprised that you're acting righteous? I keep quiet.

Derek: There's nothing righteous about you.

Mom: Dere-

Derek: There's nothing honourable about you...

My heart...

Derek: You are just as sinful as the people you constantly judge.

He steps even closer to me, and I try not to fall.

Derek: You disgust me.

I want to vomit.

Derek: You slept with me day and night, knowing very well that my whole life was a lie.

I try to speak, but words fail me.

Derek: What? This wasn't your secret to tell?

I don't say anything.

Derek: You always have excuses for your actions, don't you?

Why is he saying all these things?

Derek: Don't you, Ms Righteous?

He breathes heavily and I shiver.

Me: You don't scare me.

Derek: Fuck you, Ziyanda.

I keep quiet.

Derek: You kept this secret, because you are just as wicked as the people who knew before you.

I look at him pleadingly. I need him to stop.

Derek: I regret the day I met you... You've done nothing but-

Me: You regret the day you met me?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: My life has spiralled out of control because of you and your family.

He tries to say something, but I continue.

Me: Yes, YOUR family, Derek.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I've done nothing but try to be there and love you and your family... I've put my own needs aside, for you and your family...

He keeps quiet.

Me: But, do I bring that shit up every chance I get?

I push him.

Me: You're hurt?

I stare at him.

Me: Be hurt.

I step closer and push him again.

Me: You're angry?

I step closer again.

Me: Be angry.

I push him harder.

Me: But, don't you dare paint me in a negative light!

I step closer to him and feel my whole body heat up.

Me: I will not sit back and allow you to use my mistakes or troubles as leverage!

It seems like everyone is now standing outside.

Me: The one person you should be directing your anger to is that mother of yours, not me! I am not the one who gave you away, Derek!

I push him, but this time I'm an emotional mess.

Me: I am not the one who gave you away and put you in an orphanage!

I look around, hoping to see Zimkitha here, but she's not.

Me: Your anger is misdirected!

I stare at him.

Me: And, I won't sit here and allow you to make me the scapegoat.

I continue looking at him.

Me: You regret the day you met me? Who the hell do you think you are?! I also regret the day I met you!

He doesn't say anything.

Me: You suddenly hate me? All because your own mother lied to you? Did you also tell her that you regret the day that you met her? Or am I the only one who's at fault here?

Dean: What is go-

Me: I'm leaving... I don't want Lwazi and Lelo to be around when you're throwing insults at me.

Dean walks to us and looks at us in utter shock.

Dean: What the fuc-

Mom: Heyi! Stop this nonsense!

We all look at her.

Mom: I am tired of this shit! Zimkitha has lost all my respect. I am disgusted!

Dean: What is going on? Also, ma, you actually swear?

Mom: Ziyanda, go get the kids...

She doesn't have to tell me twice. As I start walking, Dean grabs my arm.

I look at him, and I am shocked by his expression. He is looking at me insistently.

Dean: Zi, don't do this.

I don't say anything.

Dean: Don't leave.

Me: What am I supposed to do?

Dean: Talk to me like a normal person.

I look at my mother.

Mom: Zimkitha is your mother,
Langelihle.

Dean: Ya, so?

My mom shakes her head lightly.

Dean: Of course she's my mother. That's a
no-brain-

Derek: She's our biological mother...

Derek walks away.

Dean lets go of me and looks over at
Nolwazi, whose jaw is on the floor.

Dean: Huh?

Me: She's your biological mother. You,
Derek, Liwa and Princess are siblings.

He looks at me.

We are completely silent.

Dean: Zimkitha is my biological mother?

I nod sadly.

Dean: Zimkitha Mzinyathi?

Mom: Yes... Dean looks around again.
Liwa and Nomvuyo are also standing at a distance.

Dean: Derek and I are related biologically?

I nod.

Dean: Lindelwa is not my mother?

I stare at him.

He steps back and looks at me.

There is complete silence.

Within seconds, Dean's laughter has filled the space.

We watch as he laughs loudly.

We all stare at each other in confusion.

Dean continues laughing...

INSERT 200

Dean: What are you people saying to me?

We all stare at him, not saying anything.

Dean: Nithi Zimkitha is my mother?

We remain silent.

He continues laughing and then chuckles lightly.

Nolwazi walks closer to him and takes his hand.

Nolwazi: Baby...

He looks at her with a smile on his face.

Nolwazi: Are you hearing them?

He nods lightly.

Nolwazi: Okay...

She swallows hard and looks at him carefully.

Nolwazi: What's going through your mind?

Dean: I'd like to finish my meal in peace...

Nolwazi: Okay... Do you want to leave?

He shakes his head and starts walking.

Nolwazi: I'll warm up your food.

Dean: Thanks.

Dean glances at Liwa.

Dean: You knew?

Liwa doesn't respond.

Dean: That's why Derek beat your ass?
He chuckles and walks inside the house.

Dean: Ya neh...

He disappears.

My mom comes to me and takes my hand.

Mom: That was uncalled for.

I don't say anything.

Mom: But, he's angry. Please don't take anything he said and will say personally.

Me: He meant every word.

She shakes her head.

Mom: He's angry. He didn't mean those words.

Me: He always does this when he's angry.

When I had the miscarriage, he blamed me, and brought up my mental illness.

She looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Maybe his anger allows him to say what he truly feels.

Mom: Don't make assumptions.

I shake my head.

Me: He regrets the day he met me...

I'm trying not to take this personally, but I'm struggling. Being rational right now is proving to be very difficult.

Mom: What do you want to do?

Sleep.

Mom: Do you want to talk to him?

I shake my head.

Me: I can't take his insults. I feel attacked, and I can't rationalize his words.

She nods lightly.

Mom: I don't think I've ever left like this about anyone. Zimkitha is awakening feelings I had no idea I possessed. I'm overwhelmed right now.

I shrug.

Mom: Let me check on Langa.

We walk back inside and find Dean and Nolwazi in the dining room.

Nolwazi is not fine. She's also struggling.

Mom: Langa...

Dean looks at my mom calmly.

Mom: Unjani? Dean chuckles.

Dean: I'm fine... I just didn't know that you had it in you to swear. I'm shocked.

Mom: Hai suka wena.

He laughs and looks at me.

Dean: Aren't you going to eat?

I look at him worriedly.

I don't know why, but he's making me want to cry.

He's not fine. I'm scared of what will happen once everything sinks in. He's in denial right now.

Dean: Dlamz?

I snap out of it.

Me: Hmm?

Dean: Aren't you going to eat?

I shake my head.

Dean: Hmkay.

I walk away.

I really just need to sleep.

I make my way upstairs and go to the bedroom.

As I'm about to get in bed, the door opens and my body tenses up.

Derek: I don't want you here.

I turn to look at him.

He doesn't seem as enraged as he was earlier. He looks defeated.

Me: You don't mean that.

Derek: Get the fuck out of my house.

Me: Derek?

My heart can't take this. I feel like I'm going to pass out.

He goes to the bathroom and closes the door.

I sit on the edge of the bed.

Yoh, I'm trying my best not to let these punches kill me, but I can't. Why is Derek so vile towards me? I never treat him like

this whenever I have episodes, instead I walk away and deal with my shit somewhere else, because I know how hurtful my words can be. I never attack him like this. He always hits below the belt, and a huge part of me is starting to think these are his true feelings...

I must have gotten lost in my thoughts, because when I snap out of it, I find him getting dressed.

I stand and go to the closet.

I take out an overnight bag and start packing my things.

Derek: Do me a favour, and pack all your shit.

I look at him.

Me: You don't have to be a dick.

Derek: I'm sure Andile will be very happy to comfort you, seeing as you always want a lapdog...

I have to take a few seconds to process what I've just heard.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: Get the fuck out of here.

I walk towards me.

Me: I've been trying to be very patient with you, but I'm failing.

He looks at me coldly.

Me: What's happening to you is fucked up...

I stare at him.

Me: I'll take your punches, Derek... As hurtful as they are, I'll take them. He hisses and continues getting dressed.

Me: However, keep in mind that these words you keep shooting will have an effect on me... Bear that in mind as you drag my character through the mud.

I go back to packing my things.

Me: I don't even recall ever claiming to be perfect. In fact, I'm obsessed with my

imperfections to the point of craziness. I don't know when I ever claimed to be righteous. Clearly that's how you see me. I'm not going to challenge your perceptions.

After a while, I finish up.

Me: I don't even know how Andile fits into all of this. Fuck you, actually, for insinuating that I'm a slut.

Derek: Get the fuck out of my house.

Me: I will gladly get out of your house.

Thank you for reminding me that none of this is mine...

I've tried to be understanding, but this?

No, I can't.

I'm leaving Derek.

I walk out of the bedroom and make my way to the nursery.

I find Lelo, Lwazi and Liyakha there.

Lwazi: Mommy, something's not right.

What's going on?

Me: Nothing, baby. Derek and I are just going through something right now.

Lwazi: Are you fighting?

I shrug.

Lwazi: Don't worry. You two are perfect for each other. You always work things out.

I don't respond.

Me: Go pack up your things.

She nods and as she walks out, my mom walks in.

Mom: Zizi?

Me: We're leaving.

My mom doesn't say anything.

Me: The kids can't be here when he's like this. He's not thinking straight.

Mom: Uphi?

Me: Bedroom.

She walks out and I follow her.

I'm not about to let anyone talk to her sideways.

She opens our bedroom door and walks in.

Mom: Derek.

He ignores her.

He's busy doing something in the closet.

Mom: Derek, I'm talking to you.

He continues with whatever he's doing.

Mom: Nkanyezi! Stop what you are doing and look at me!

He instantly stops and turns like a little boy. He's still angry, but he obviously knows not to come at my mother sideways.

Mom: Sit down.

Derek: With all due respect, I need to be alone.

Mom: That is what you should have said from the beginning... What's the point of saying all these hurtful things if you're going to regret them in the end?

He doesn't say anything.

Mom: I'm not going to abandon you. You may not want me here, but I'm not going to discard you. You are my son, and I mean that sincerely. You're not ready to talk about this, so I'm going to respect that.

She stares at me softly.

Mom: You and Ziyanda shouldn't be in the same space. I don't want you to dig a deeper hole for yourselves. I know that both of you are hurt and that you don't mean any of the things you're saying. I'm not going to judge you for your actions right now, because you have every right to be angry. I just don't want you to tear each other up.

She sighs heavily.

Mom: We're taking the kids. This is not a healthy space to be in.

She swallows her tears

Mom: You may not receive what I'm saying, Nkanyezi, but I want you to know that we love you, and we won't abandon you. I can't even put myself in your shoes...

She looks at me softly.

Mom: Go take the kids.

Me: I'll stay...

My mom looks at me worriedly.

Me: Take the kids...

She nods and then walks out.

I look at Derek for the longest time and then walk out and close the door.

I make my way downstairs and find Dean alone.

I sit next to him as he focuses on the TV.

Me: Hlongz.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Can I be honest with you?

He looks at me coolly.

Me: You're scaring me.

Dean: Stop being dramatic and get me some whiskey.

I sigh.

Me: Okay.

I stand and pour him some.

After a while, my mom comes down with Lwazi, Lelo and Liyakha.

Nolwazi emerges.

Nolwazi: I'll drop you off, ma.

Mom: Thank you, baby.

Nolwazi: Langa, I'm dropping off Zi's mom.

Dean: I'll come with. I need to speak to Zi's father anyway.

Nolwazi: Let's go then.

Where is Liwa and Nomvuyo?

I look around.

Nolwazi: They left.

I nod lightly.

Dean stands and takes Liyakha from Lwazi, who complains.

Dean: See you soonest, Dlamz.

Me: Okay.

I give Lwazi a hug and then kiss Lelo, who is not even affected by the tension.

Thereafter, I kiss Liyakha and walk them out

Mom: I'll call when we arrive.

Me: Okay.

I watch as they drive off, and then make my way back in the house, locking up...

INSERT 201

I am awakened by my phone ringing. I sit up and look around in confusion...

I remember where I am. I dozed off while watching TV in the lounge.

I take my phone and answer it.

Me: Mama?

Mom: Hey, baby. We arrived safely. Sorry for calling you manje, I had to cook for the kids.

Me: It's okay, I dozed off nami.

Mom: How are you?

Me: I could be better.

She sighs.

Mom: Derek?

Me: I don't know. I haven't spoken to him.

Mom: Are you keeping your distance?

Me: I guess.

I'm numb. This is the only way I can survive at this point. I can't allow myself to be consumed by hurt, because it's paralysing. I've never experienced such. I've decided to lock away my emotions and just go with the flow.

Mom: I love you, baby.

Me: I know.

Mom: I personally don't think you should be there, because I know what this will do

to you. However, I know there's a reason you chose to stay. Just know that I'll come fetch you if it gets too much.

Me: Hmkay.

She takes a deep breath.

I want to ask about Dean, but I don't have the energy to. I also want to ask about Liyakha, but I don't have energy to. I just don't have any energy left in me.

Me: Bye.

Mom: Bye bye sisi.

I end the call and browse through my phone. I have a lot of missed calls from Nikiwe. I'll talk to her another time.

I hear footsteps

Derek walks down the stairs and goes to the bar. After a few minutes, he goes back upstairs.

I sit there and continue watching TV.

When I wake up, it feels like I was in a brawl- my whole body is in pain. My feet are even swollen. If I wasn't on contraceptives, one would swear I'm pregnant.

It's around 10pm now.

I make my way to the bedroom and find it empty. Derek must be in his office.

I get in the bathroom and take the longest shower. I thought I'd cry and let it out, but I don't have it in me.

Once I'm done, I lotion up and put on my pyjamas. I think I've lost track of the days. Tomorrow is Monday...

As I'm moisturizing my face, the bedroom door opens, and Derek staggers to the bed. He throws himself there and passes out.

I make my way to one of the guestrooms and get in bed...

Three days have passed.
Things haven't changed.
Derek stays in his office the whole day.
I watch TV the whole day.
At night, I take a shower.
Derek staggers in the bedroom.
He passes out. I go to the guest room and
sleep there.
With each passing day, the aura changes.
I can't put it into words.

It's now Thursday.
I get a call from Nomvuyo, and don't
bother answering it.
She calls me again and I answer it.
Nomvuyo: Zizi.
I don't say anything.
Nomvuyo: Please open. I'm outside.
I end the call and continue watching TV
Minutes later, it rings again.
I don't answer.

For the next few minutes, she continues calling me back to back. I stand and buzz her in.

After a while, the door opens and she walks in.

Nomvuyo: Zi!

She draws open the curtains and comes to sit next to me.

Nomvuyo: Zi.

I focus on the TV.

Nomvuyo: Zizi.

Me: What?

She looks at me worriedly.

I focus on the TV again.

Nomvuyo: How are you?

I don't respond.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I'm talking to you.

Me: What do you want me to say?

Nomvuyo: How are you?

Me: I'm fine.

Nomvuyo: You're not.

Me: So, why did you ask me if you know me so well?

She sighs.

Me: Where have you been? You didn't think I needed you the past few days?

She tries to speak, but ends up saying nothing.

Me: I see the type of people you are...

When you are going through shit, you want people by your side, but when you have to support others, you don't pitch.

Nomvuyo: Zi...

She sighs.

Me: Thankfully, I've always been independent. I don't rely on people. I'll get through this shit by myself. I don't understand why I'm suddenly the one who has been held responsible for all of this.

She keeps quiet.

Me: So, do me a favour and leave me alone. You people aren't as solid as you think. I've had to endure a lot over the past few days. Derek is using me as his punching bag. He releases all his anger and hurt on me. I'm absorbing every single word that comes out of his mouth, because no one is here to help me support him. When you get divorces, you want people to be there. When you're in hospitals, you want people to be there. When you're keeping secrets, you want people to be there. But when it's time to show up for others, you are nowhere to be found.

I finally look at her.

Me: Just do me a favour and get out of Derek's house. Leave me alone, please. I don't know how the fuck I'm going to get through this, but I will. Hopefully, I won't have to deal with any of you in the future.

Nomvuyo: Zi... I'm sorry.

I focus on the TV and completely shut her off. She'll leave eventually.

When I wake up, I realise that I'm hungry. I haven't eaten in two days. I'm famished. What am I going to eat?

I go to the kitchen and look around.

Nothing is cooked. Also, we've run out of snacks.

I decide to make boiled eggs, seeing as they are less admin. After boiling them for a while, I eat them with bread.

It's now around 8pm.

I go to the bedroom.

Derek is not there.

I sit on the edge of the bed absentmindedly.

A short while later, the door opens and Derek staggers in as usual. He throws himself on the bed.

Me: I don't think I can do this anymore.
He's silent.

Me: It's clear that you don't want me here,
and I don't know how to support you.

I'm sure he has passed out.

I stand and go to the closet.

Derek: You're going to abandon me as
well?

I turn and look at him.

Me: It feels like you don't want me here.

Derek: Don't make this about you.

Me: How can I not when all I've been to
you is a punching bag? I'm struggling to
rationalize your actions. The blows are
too much.

He doesn't say anything for a long time.

Derek: I've been betrayed...

He mumbles and stops.

I go to the bathroom as my emotions
threaten to wild out. I sit on the toilet seat

for a while. Eventually, I get out again and find him passed out.

Me: Derek?

Nothing.

I go back to the bathroom and take a bath...

At around 2am, I am awakened by weird sounds.

I get out of bed, and walk out. When I reach Derek's bedroom, I find him curled up in a ball, crying.

This is not even normal crying.

It's as if the cries are coming from his gut.

I rush to his bed and shake him. I'm not sure if he's awake or he's having some form nightmare.

My heart rate is on another level.

Me: Derek.

I shake him, but he continues weeping.

Me: Derek...

I pull towards him, till my arms are wrapped around him.

My heart can't take seeing him like this. What will it take for him to see the light? He cries for the longest time, till he ends up passing out again. His quiet moans don't stop, but he seems to be hibernating.

INSERT 202

When I wake up in the morning, Derek is literally covering me. I'm struggling to breathe.

I try to move, but he's proving to be too heavy.

I groan and he shifts lightly.

Me: I need to pee.

He repositions and I get out of bed and go to the bathroom. Once I'm done peeing,

I go back to the bedroom and sit on the edge of the bed.

I check my phone and see a few missed calls from my mother.

I send her a message, telling her I'm fine. She responds instantly, telling me that she will come see me today. I tell her not to come.

I don't want people to talk to me.

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek pulling me in. I get back in bed and he wraps his arms around me and passes out again.

I don't know how I feel.

His aura seems to have changed.

I don't know how I feel.

I am awakened by Derek getting out of bed.

I close my eyes and fall back to sleep instantly.

Two more days have passed.

Yes, we've been in bed.

No showering, bathing or even eating. I don't have the energy to even lift up a finger.

I get up to pee and find him in the bathroom, sitting on the toilet seat.

Me: Can I pee?

He stands and watches me pee.

Thereafter, he locks the bathroom door and I watch as he gets in the shower and opens the water. I take off my clothes and get in a few minutes later.

We stand there for the longest time not doing anything, but let the water do its job. Eventually, we clean ourselves up and get out.

I can't really explain the vibe- it's silent. It's a hushed vibe.

As we're lotioning ourselves, my phone rings. I ignore it and let it ring.

He finishes up before me and walks out.

I make the bed and regret it instantly, because I know I'm going to go back anyway.

I check my phone and find a missed call from an unknown number. I put down my phone and lie on the bed.

I am awakened by Derek's presence on the bed. I turn, and find a plate of food on my bedside table. My stomach immediately growls and I sit up and take the plate. When I look at him, he seems to be sleeping. I get up and go to the kitchen to warm up the food. Thereafter, I sit on a high stool and finish the food in a few minutes. I put the plate in the sink alongside Derek's plate, which he left on the counter.

I walk back to the bedroom and get in bed.

It's now 6pm, and my body feels like it's going to explode, I'm burning up. I don't know why.

I push away the duvet and lie facing up.

Derek: You can leave if you want to...

Me: No.

Derek: My own mother and father abandoned me. Why wouldn't you?

I look at him, dumbstruck. Does he not understand that I'm here, because I love him? The reason I'm taking in all the blows he keeps throwing at me is because I love him. There's no other reason, besides the fact that I love him.

We lie there in silence for a long time.

Me: Derek, I don't know how to support you.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm caught between a rock and a hard place. I'm dealing with my depression on one hand, and trying to stay strong for you on the other hand. I don't know what to do.

I glance at him.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you earlier. I guess there's no excuse for not telling you.

I keep quiet.

He gets out of bed and walks out of the bedroom.

I guess he's still not ready to talk.

Just as I'm about to doze off, the door opens and he walks to the bed and hands me an old A5 hardcover book.

He sits next to me and I look at him in confusion.

Derek: Open it.

I take a deep breath as I open it.

I can see his handwriting.

I browse through the pages.

This is his journal. However the handwriting looks a tad neater compared to his current handwriting.

I go to the first page.

My heart rate increases as I read the many paragraphs...

I go to other pages. "I find it strange that I'm now being referred to as Derek... I

don't understand why they have to change my name. I was okay with

Nkanyezi... Part of me feels like they're trying to erase the identity I've built for myself before they came to the picture...

I'm 16 years old now. Why would they suddenly want to change my name?...

I didn't even realise that I was crying.

"I've been thinking a lot about my parents lately... My friends keep talking about all the fun things they do with their parents.

Where are my parents? Why would they

drop me off at an orphanage at 6 months? Why did they decide to throw me away after 6 months? What did I do to them? I'm confused. Do I even know what real love feels like? What if I've bumped into my parents, but they didn't even recognise me? How do they even sleep at night knowing that they have a son out there who's asking himself if he can ever receive or give true love?..."

I continue going through the entries.

"I've been trying to convince myself that I'm happy. I'm not happy. Something is wrong with me. I always have a sinking feeling, I feel like I'm not present, I'm floating. Will they even notice if I disappear? Khwezi doesn't love me. She looks at me strangely. I'm not comfortable around her, but that's a story for another day..."

I close it for a minute, while I try to gather myself.

I open it again.

“I was with Mam’Thuli today and she asked me how I was. She wants to know how my new home is. She wants to know how life is like now that I’ve left Twilight. I felt a huge lump in my throat as images of Khwezi filled my mind. I almost told Mam’Thuli, but I know she’ll make it a big deal. I was scared... Maybe if my mother was here, she’d protect me... I wonder what she’s doing right now... Does she also love cooking like me?”

I immediately close the book and stare at him.

INSERT 203 (Short Insert)

“So, today I met a lady called Zimkitha. Boy, is she something... She’s my parents’ friend. I don't think I've ever met someone like her. She has a very positive vibe to her. For a second there, I found myself missing someone I've never met-my mother. Xolani says I need to stop hoping that one day my parents will pop out and reveal themselves... Maybe he's right. I need to let go. My parents gave me away for a reason. I still wonder what I did to them...”

I continue going through the pages.

“There's definitely something wrong with me. A huge part of me feels like what's happening to me is not what other people are experiencing. Why do I feel like I'm dying a slow internal death? I can't explain what's going through my mind and soul. I don't feel like I'm alive. I really feel like I'm invading my body, that I'm

not meant to be in this body. It's strange. I find myself lost in thought most of the time, even when I'm around people. What's happening to me? I can't explain what's going on. My father keeps saying I'm going through puberty... I don't understand. I'm sure I hit puberty a long time ago... This is different... strange... I can't describe it... I'm overwhelmed with sadness. I feel like I'm suffocating.”

My heart sinks.

“I feel like no one would understand what I'm going through. How do I even begin to explain that I'm being haunted by sadness? I guess it's just a phase. I'll get over it. I have to get over it if I want to be successful and build my own life outside of my parents...”

I look at Derek. His eyes are closed and he's now lying next to me.

I focus on the book again.

“Today, I feel slightly better. We're busy packing my things, I'm getting ready to go to university. I'm nervous and excited about this new journey. Nervous, because I don't know what to expect. Will I survive without my parents being around 24/7? Excited, because I'm finally going to be independent. I'm a bit annoyed that my father wants me to do Accounting. I don't want to be stuck in an office forever. I want to make a difference in the world. We'll see how it goes...”

“Zimkitha is helping me find a place to stay... I'm moving out of res, and I'm graduating next year. I'm not happy with Accounting. My parents insist that I won't regret it, but I don't feel the same way... I want to change paths, but where do I begin? Zimkhitha mentioned something that stuck with me. She's said I must prioritize my happiness, and stop

stressing about what other people want for me. I should do what makes me happy. For someone who's always putting others first, those words really blew me away. Zimkitha has really helped me over the past few years. We've become close. I feel safe around her. I feel like she cares about me. She's always checking on me. I've even grown a bit close to her son, Liwa. I find it strange that I'm more comfortable around them than I am with my family. Zimkhitha says I'm her family. I actually believe her. She doesn't make me feel like an orphan. People even say I look like Liwa a bit... I always laugh, it really doesn't get better than that. They always get shocked when Dean and I are together. It's been like that for a few years. Apparently I look like the fool. If only they knew how much we hate each other. He's too obnoxious. I get along with

Liwa more. Liwa and I did get into a fight once though... He found me hugging Nomvuyo and freaked out. I think something is going on between those two- they are too close, it's weird. I had to punch him a few times, because I can't have him thinking he can mess around with me. I think he has learnt a lesson- don't start fights with me. Vuvu is beautiful and all, but she's not my type... She's too cold for my liking- always angry and ready to fight.”

I look at him. I think he's asleep.

I continue reading through the pages.

“So... Dean and I had a breakthrough. I don't really know what happened. We were having lunch and something switched. We just started laughing. He says I'm stubborn. I told him he's too arrogant. Thereafter, we talked for hours... Felt oddly good...”

I can't help but chuckle quietly.

“I've finally accepted that this is my life. I can't keep on praying and hoping that my parents will come back. I'm letting go. I don't want to be defined by other people's decisions. I have a family now. They may not be my biological family, but I know I can count on them... I am going to start living the life I know I deserve. I'm going to stop trying to please others and just do what makes me happy... that means I have to come to terms with all my experiences, more especially the horrible ones.”

I put down the journal and go to the bathroom.

I sit on the toilet seat for a long time, trying to process everything I've read. I feel like the pages I've managed to read have made me see Derek in a different

way, a more informed way. I clearly don't know him as much as I think I do.

He's dealing with significant hurt and betrayal. Everything makes sense now.

Once I'm better, I walk back to the bedroom and sit on the bed.

Before I can take the book, he pulls me closer to him and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: Please don't leave me.

Me: I won't.

I relax in his arms and doze off after a while.

INSERT 204 (Unedited)

I wake him up.

I want us to talk, but I don't know where to start. I don't want to overwhelm him with questions, because I have a lot of

them. I also don't want to breakdown,
when he clearly needs me.

He stretches and glances at me.

Derek: Stinky.

I roll my eyes and he chuckles quietly.

Derek: I haven't seen you roll your eyes in
ages, because of your swollen eyes.

Me: I haven't heard you speak in ages.

He looks at me without saying anything.

Me: I've just remembered that we have a
child.

He shakes his head lightly and groans.

He gets up and then pulls me out of bed.

He leads me to the bathroom...

Once we're done taking a shower, we go
back to the bedroom. To be honest, I want
the bed to swallow me. My heart is too
heavy, I'm struggling.

I watch as he gets dressed.

Where is he going? He looks like he is
getting ready to leave the house.

Once he's done, he looks at me expectantly.

I shake my head. I want to go back to sleep.

He takes my lotion, makes me stand, sits on the edge of the bed, and then pulls me so I am standing in between his legs.

I watch as he lotions me up.

Once he's done, he helps me get dressed.

Me: Why?

He doesn't say anything, but I know we're going out.

Me: I don't want to.

He ignores me.

After a while, we make our way out.

Once we're in the car, I take a deep breath and look at him.

Me: Derek.

He looks at me.

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you earlier.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I don't know if you'll ever forgive me, but I hope you know that my intentions were never malicious.

He starts the car and drives off.

When we get to the restaurant, he speaks to one of the waiters and he leads us to our table.

We go through the menu for the longest time. I don't know what I want to eat.

When I look up, I find him staring at me. I focus on the menu again.

Derek: How are you?

I look up again.

Me: I should be asking you that.

He looks at me intently.

Me: I'm indifferent.

He nods lightly.

Derek: Even towards me?

I sigh.

Me: I don't know where we stand.

However, that's not going to stop me from supporting you.

Derek: Did my words contribute to that?

I nod lightly. I've been trying my best not to think about all the cruel things he said to me. I've made up my mind regarding our relationship, but now is not the time to have that discussion. In the meantime, I'll just suck it up and see how everything goes.

Derek: Zi?

I snap out of it and look at him.

Me: I'd rather we not talk about that.

He is silent for a few seconds.

The waiter comes and takes our orders, then he walks off.

I look at Derek, and he is still staring at me.

Me: What?

Derek: Nothing.

I nod and we sit in silence till our food arrives. We continue eating in silence. My phone suddenly rings, and it's an unknown number. I end the call and switch off the phone. I'm really not in the mood to talk to people right now.

My thoughts drift off, and I start thinking about Dean. I know I have to check on him. I know I have to, but I'm scared. I'll call Nolwazi first.

Once we're done eating, I give the waiter my card and pay before Derek can do anything.

I can feel his eyes on me, but I avoid them. The payment goes through, then I stand.

Me: Let's go.

He stands and I lead the way to the car. Part of me wants to go home to Liyakha, but I know this is not the right time. Once again, I don't want to transfer all my negative emotions to her.

When we get back, I put on my pyjamas and go to the lounge. I don't want to read Derek's journal, but I know I have to. It's been insightful.

As I'm watching TV, he comes and sits next to me on the couch.

He takes the remote and lowers the volume.

He looks at me.

Derek: You still haven't answered my question.

Me: What question?

Derek: Did my words contribute to your indifference?

Me: I'd like you to use your empathy. If you were in my shoes, how would you feel?

Derek: I can't be empathetic right now. I don't have it in me.

I keep quiet.

Derek: You still haven't answered my question.

Me: Yes, Derek. I'm indifferent.

Derek: About me?

I keep quiet and look at him.

He looks at me expectantly.

Me: I don't want to fight with you.

Derek: I'm not fighting.

I sigh.

Me: You said some hurtful things. I feel like you meant every word.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Because of your words, I've had to question the legitimacy of our relationship.

I sigh.

Me: I don't want to make this about me.

Derek: Do you think I meant what I said?

I nod.

Me: I stayed because I love you. Despite everything you said, I'm still here. That should count for something.

Derek: You're still not answering my question.

Me: I've answered your question. I love you, that's why I'm here. He nods lightly and keeps quiet for a while.

We sit in silence.

Derek: I'm sorry.

I look at him.

Derek: I didn't mean anything I said.

I don't say anything.

Derek: You don't believe me?

Me: It felt real. You meant those words.

We sit in silence for a while.

He stands and walks away.

I guess he's angry.

I increase the volume and focus on the TV.

I don't know where my relationship with Derek lies right now. I think we need

space once everything is fine. I know for a fact that I need space. I'm not sure if the space will be temporary or permanent, I guess time will tell...

My thoughts are interrupted by Derek sitting next to me again.

I glance at him.

Derek: Take this.

He gives me what seems to be a fancier journal compared to the ordinary A5 book he gave to me earlier.

I take the leather journal and look at him in confusion.

Derek: Go ahead...

I open the journal.

“How could she betray me like this? How could she look me in the eye and tell me she loves another man, and that he is the father of our baby? Words can't describe the hurt I feel. I'm trying my best not to tap into my abandonment issues, but it's

not easy. When will I have a happy ending? It seems like my life is filled with too many curveballs. I don't even have the strength to write about Busi. I feel betrayed. I'm hurt. I'm angry..." I glance at Derek, and he's focusing on the TV.

"I'm learning the art of letting go. It's not easy, but I'm really trying. I find myself thinking about the plans I had with Busi. It pains me to think people have the guts to hurt others to this extent. I gave her my all, yet it clearly wasn't enough. Note to self: Try not to lose yourself in your journey of love. Don't become a slave for love, because life is truly unpredictable. Just because you're ready to give your all, it doesn't mean everyone else is. Sometimes, people won't meet you halfway, and that's something you have to live with..."

I sigh.

“I've been single for a while now... It's been an interesting journey. Dean says we're going to die alone, but I strongly disagree. I'm truly a sucker for love. I admire how strong and forgiving my heart is. I've had my fair share of heartbreak, but it's all in the past now. Dean on the other hand, is not even interested in falling in love. However, I know he's trying to pretend not to like his coworker. He's always talking about her and how intelligent and impressive she is. Yawn fest. I'll wait for him to tell me he has fallen in love with her. For now, I'll act dumb.”

My heart aches as I think of Dean. I miss him so much.

I continue reading the journal.

“Life has a funny way of letting me know that it has my back... Today was quite interesting, and I can't help but laugh...”

We were in a school network meeting, and as I was leaving, I went to check on a friend of mine who works in the recruitment department. He told me there's a few teachers he's going to interview the following day, and that a couple of them stood out for him. He showed me some of their online profiles, and bam- there she was! I laughed for a good five minutes... He asked me what was so funny and I told him that I knew one of them, and that she would be a great asset to my school specifically..." My eyes pop out as I continue reading. I look at Derek and he is hiding a grin. I continue reading.

"Ziyanda Dlamini. She doesn't know it yet, but something good will definitely grow here..."

I'm speechless.

“She's sleeping in my bed... I still can't believe that she chose to sleepover. When I say I've never met such a stubborn person in my life, I'm not exaggerating. She has nothing on Nomvuyo, who's already too much for us. Ziyanda is always ready to fight. She's feisty. I like her. I like her a lot. My father and Xolani also like her, despite knowing her for 10 minutes. She looked like she wasn't breathing throughout my father's visit. If only she knew that she has nothing to worry about. She has this habit of biting her thumb. I personally find it strange, seeing as hands are probably the dirtiest parts of our bodies... Anyway, she agreed to sleepover and she has passed out. Also, she drinks a lot... maybe she was nervous...”

Me: Derek, really?

He looks at me innocently.

I don't know what's happening to me right now. There's a shift.

“I told her I love her. I know I freaked her out, but I couldn't help it- I genuinely love her. I love her loud laugh, her soft giggles, her gentle hands, her squeaky voice... It's the little things she does. I don't know if she's aware that she likes playing with my fingers... She always starts off nervous then she eventually relaxes in my presence. I love analyzing her expressions and behaviour. When she's confused, she looks angry- like she's mad at herself for not comprehending something. When she's listening to someone, she looks at them directly and doesn't even nod- it's like she's concentrating very hard on what is being said. I could go on and on... I love Ziyanda...”

I am sobbing.

I look at him.

I continue reading.

“I see myself in Ziyanda. I see so much of myself in her. She is a bruised individual. She has went through some horrific experiences. She's a work in progress. She's a fighter. She loves deeply. However, unlike me, she has faced her demons. She had the courage to look them in the eye and tackle them one by one. I'm a coward compared to her, but being around her gives me the courage to slowly break out. It doesn't get better than this. She's a positive influence in my life. I love her. I've never been this motivated to tackle my issues... We relate to each other in deep ways, ways that even she doesn't know. I'm struggling to let her in... I'll try to work on myself, I have to. She deserves someone who'll love her sincerely. I'm up for it.”

How did he know that one day I'd doubt his love for me, and I'd need him to reassure me?

I am not okay right now.

INSERT 205 (Short and Unedited)

I put down the journal and look at him.

Me: I didn't know you journalled to this extent. He looks at me.

Me: I thought you hated journalling.

He shrugs.

Derek: I usually do it when you're sleeping.

I sigh.

Me: You make me look like an amatuer.

He chuckles.

Me: So, why did you give me this specific journal?

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: You've mentioned that you think that I meant the words I said to you...

I nod.

Derek: I don't remember anything I said.

Me: You don't?

He shakes his head.

Me: Well, I do.

Derek: What did I say?

As much as I'm trying to be too hard on him, I know I can't, because I am exactly like him. When I'm angry, I go all out, and regret it later. I just don't think I go to such great lengths.

Derek: Zi.

I snap out of it.

Derek: What did I say?

Me: You said a lot.

Derek: How about we deal with one thing at a time?

I stare at him.

Me: Why are you doing this? Do you want to turn around and say I'm making this about me?

Now, I feel a bit angry.

Me: I'm not going to sit here and allow you to manipulate me. I know you'll turn around and say I'm selfish, and I think the world revolves around me.

He looks at me intently without saying anything.

Me: I'll stop talking.

I huff as I reposition and focus on the TV.

Derek: Ziyanda, I asked you a question.

Me: You've already said enough. I don't want to be insulted again.

Derek: Please answer the question.

He continues looks at me softly.

I take a deep breath.

Me: You said you regret the day you met me.

Derek: Did I?

Me: Ya.

He sighs quietly and looks at me thoughtfully.

Derek: I may regret many things in my life...

He stares at me intensely.

Derek: But, meeting you is definitely not one of them.

He sighs again.

Derek: I'm not going to try to justify what I said. I'm also not going to try to explain myself. I know that you know what goes through one's mind when they are not themselves, and what the mental confusion leads to.

Me: It's a pattern with you.

Derek: What else did I say?

Me: You wanted me out of the house. You continuously made it clear that this is your house.

He keeps quiet, because he knows I have more to say.

Me: I don't appreciate how you addressed me. You said some unforgivable things. You are the one who wanted me to move in with you. So, every time we fight, you're just going to remind me that the house is owned by you?

He doesn't say anything.

I didn't realise I needed to say this, but now that I've started, I'm finding it very difficult to stop.

Me: I'm not going to stay with you anymore. I'm moving out. You always say we're in this together and that what's yours is mine... Do you now understand why I didn't want to let go of my financial independence? Part of me knew that one day you'd remind me that this is all yours... I promise that will never happen again.

I huff angrily.

Me: You disrespected me. In that moment, you really put me down. Yes, I understand that when we're hurt, we say a lot of shit, but you took it to another level. You always take it to another level. When I had the miscarriage, you blamed me and basically dragged my name through the mud. You brought in my mental illness and said that I always get away with shit. I forgave you, Derek... So, what am I supposed to do now? Forgive you again? I have a lot of episodes, but you don't see me cursing you out and saying hurtful things. Because I'm used to my episodes, I walk away and go to my mother, since she knows how to deal with me. My behaviour doesn't offend her.

He listens as I vent.

After a long time, I stop.

Derek: Are you done?

Me: Don't patronise me, Derek. You've insulted me. I've never been this angry at you. I've never been so disrespected in my life!

I go on again.

After a while, I keep quiet.

He's been staring at me since I started talking.

We sit in silence for a long time.

I sit there and try to analyse the way I'm feeling.

Somehow, now that I got everything off my chest, I feel lighter.

Now, I focus on all the anger... Is it still there? Definitely. Why am I angry? I feel like Derek meant those words, consequently, our relationship isn't what I thought it was...

Derek: Zi.

I look at him.

Derek: I'd like you to use your empathy right now. Are you in a position to do that?

I don't say anything.

Derek: I just found out that Zimkitha is my mother. She's been in my life for years. She watched me go through shit, because of my lack of parents. She knew that I needed my parents, she was there, holding me, comforting me... She was my fucken mother. The same person who gave me away, gave Dean away and then

kept two kids... What was so special about Liwa and Princess? What could a 6 month baby possibly do to you that you'd want to give it away? As if that was not enough, she found a way to insert herself in my life for her own selfishness. She was able to sleep at night knowing that she got to spend time with all her sons, while Dean and I were just trying to survive. In fact, Dean also had it easy. Do you understand the shit I had to deal with? The abuse I had to endure in Khwezi's house?

My heart starts racing.

His emotions are rising again.

I'm nervous.

Derek: I was fucken molested for years, and my mother was in my life, giving me hugs and kisses... Do you understand how fucked up that is?

I want to get closer to him, but I'm scared.

Derek: Every time I think about this shit, I swear I want to kill someone. I can't believe this woman did this to me. I keep thinking about all my suffering, and my whole body goes cold.

I sigh.

Derek: And for her to hide the fact that I had a twin is beyond fucked up.

Me: Huh??

My eyes pop out.

Derek: She didn't tell you that Dean is my twin? I swear everything stops moving.

INSERT 206 (Unedited)

When I wake up, I feel like I'm out of place. The TV is now off. I look for my phone and check the time. I've really lost track of everything.

It's 3am.

I get up and go to the kitchen, and I find Derek cooking. He doesn't even sense my presence.

I clear my throat and he snaps out of it. He smiles lightly as I walk closer to him.

Me: At this time?

Derek: I was bored.

I wrap my arms around him and bury my head on his chest. When I feel his arms around me, I relax.

We stand there for the longest time.

Me: I'm sorry for freaking out.

Derek: It's okay.

I sigh.

I had a panic attack after Derek told me all those things. I couldn't help it, I was so shocked and horrified. I still feel a bit traumatised.

Derek: Baby, my food is going to burn.

Me: You just called me baby.

He chuckles.

Me: I don't care about your food. This is the first time in a very long time that I feel close to Star. A huge part of me is glad that I stayed, because I wouldn't have discovered all these things, and I wouldn't have reached such emotional developments. A small part of me is scared. I've never had to support someone who has gone through so much. I don't know what to do.

Derek: Zi...

I snap out of it.

Derek: Did you even hear me?

I shake my head.

Derek: I'm sorry for attacking you.

I look up at him.

Derek: I didn't mean to-

He sighs.

Derek: Actually, I'm not going to lie and justify my behaviour. In that moment, I needed to lash out, and you were the

closest person. I shouldn't have lashed out on you. I'm sorry.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I didn't mean anything I said. I wouldn't have stayed with you if that's how I felt. You're the most important person in my life, I'm not even joking. I don't regret the day I met you, that's blasphemous.

He smiles lightly.

Derek: You make me happy. Because of you, I now have my own family. I'm able to build a life for my kids that I was not afforded. You're a blessing, and I apologise for attacking you.

We stare at each other for a while.

Derek: I've been thinking about the things I said... I spoke to Melinda.

Me: Huh??

He chuckles.

Derek: I called her and told her everything.

Me: Really?

Derek: I mentioned what I said to you, and in true Melinda style, she analysed my words and read between the lines.

Me: Utheni?

Derek: Can I focus on my food first?

I grunt and he plants a kiss on my forehead before letting go of me.

He focuses on his pots and I make my way to the lounge to get my phone. I miss my mom and Little Star.

I dial her number and she answers after a long time.

Mom: Zizi.

Me: Hey. How are you?

Mom: I'm good, love. Is everything okay?

Me: I don't know... but things are not too bad, I guess.

Mom: How is he?

Me: Calmer. He's opening up.

Mom: That's good. How are you?

Me: I'm fine. I miss Liya.

Mom: Haike and your father has been very attached to her. I can't even hold her for five minutes.

I chuckle.

Me: I've been thinking about Dean.

Mom: I don't know how I feel about his reaction.

Me: Have you seen him?

Mom: He comes here every single day.

Me: Really??

Mom: Ya. He stays here for hours and leaves at night. I'm shocked.

Me: How is he behaving?

Mom: He hasn't changed. I think he's trying to process this without any disturbances. He sits with your father outside and then helps Lwazi with her homework. It's quite strange.

Me: I'll call him today.

Mom: Please do. He's been saying ukuthi he misses you, but he knows you're probably busy.

I sigh.

Mom: He's still his usual self.

Me: Did he speak to to your husband?

Mom: Ya, they've been talking about this for a while. I think Dean has been asking for advice.

Me: Kanti don't you ask him what they talk about?

Mom: I don't want to interfere. I think your father is guiding him.

Me: Okay.

Mom: Your dad doesn't answer my questions. He tells me to focus on you for now. I know he's helping Dean figure it out, I'm glad. I don't know where I'd begin. This is such a big thing.

My mom and I continue chatting for close to an hour.

I end up giving her a brief summary of what has happened between Derek and I. The conversation comes to an end when Derek comes back with a tray.

Me: Uhm, bye bye, ma.

Mom: Bye, baby. I'll see you later on namhlanje.

Me: Love you.

Mom: Love you too.

Me: Shap.

I end the call and look at Derek.

Derek: I'm assuming that you're hungry.

He puts the tray on the table. It's a big scrumptious burger.

My stomach growls on cue.

Me: Thank you.

I take the tray and dig in. My whole body lightens up with each bite.

I look up at him and find him staring at me.

Me: What did Melinda say?

Derek: She says she's going to come here tomorrow.

Me: Really? She does housevisits?

He chuckles.

Me: I'm sure if we were in Soweto, she wouldn't pitch.

He continues chuckling.

Me: You don't want to talk anymore?

Derek: I'd rather not talk about my life right now...

Me: Okay. We'll hear from Melinda.

I focus on my food and finish the burger very quickly.

Me: One more thing...

I look at him.

Me: We're going to Soweto today.

He tries to say something, but I shake my head.

Me: I miss my child.

Derek: I wasn't protesting.

Me: Oh. Once I'm done eating, he takes the tray and goes to the kitchen for a long time.

It's now around 4:30.

Me: I'm not sleepy.

Derek: I am...

We go to the bedroom and get in bed. The house is too quiet without Little Star.

She's always screaming, crying or giggling. I really miss her. Part of me actually wants to go home now.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Hmm?

Me: I'm sorry for not telling you.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Still don't want to talk about it?

He shakes his head and gets closer to me.

Derek: I'm tired.

Me: Okay.

He rests his head on my chest.
He passes out within minutes...

We're now on our way to Soweto. I'm so excited to see Little Star! I feel like I've abandoned her for way too long!

Derek: I miss kissing her.

Me: Right? She's also getting chubby now.
I miss kissing her neck.

We both smile as we continue talking about her.

Eventually, we get to my house.

Oh no. Dean is sitting outside with my dad.

Derek parks the car and we get out.

Dad: My daughter! She's alive after all!

I didn't even realise how much I've missed my father. As soon as I hug him, I feel emotional, in a good way.

Once I'm done hugging him, I look at Dean.

Nothing seems to have changed.

He smiles and opens up his arms.

Me: Dean.

Dean: Dlamz.

He wraps his arms around me and I do the same. We hug for a long minute.

Me: Dean...

I feel like I'm dreaming. I've missed him so much. Part of me is beyond relieved that he's his usual self, because I don't think I'd be able to handle another episode of Zimkitha Fucked Up.

I feel Dean's lips on my ear.

Dean: You can stop whispering my name like I'm fucking you...

Me: Dean!

I let go of him and punch him lightly.

He laughs happily. I stare at him, trying to see if he's just pretending, but there are no signs of such. He is his usual self.

He looks at Derek and smiles.

Dean: Ya wena...

They share a hug and then Derek focuses on my dad, who is happy to see him.

Me: Where is my child?

Dean: She is sleeping. She's also getting fat.

Me: Are you body-shaming my baby??
He places his arm on my shoulders and
we walk inside the house.

Dean: I've missed you.

Me: How are you?

I look at him intently once we're in the
lounge.

Dean: I'm okay...

He smiles warmly.

Dean: Your father is a wise man...

I look at him weirdly and he chuckles.

Dean: I'm okay, I really am, Dlamz.

I sigh.

Just then, Lwazi walks in the house and
gives me a hug.

Me: Aren't you supposed to be in school?

Lwazi: Uncle D is taking me shopping!

Me: Haibo.

I look at Dean seriously.

Dean: Relax. The child needs a break.

Lwazi: Let's go!

Dean: Give me a few minutes with Zizi.

Lwazi: Okay!

She runs out of the house.

Me: What's happening in this house?

Where's Lelo?

Dean: Your mom went with him to the mall.

Me: She didn't tell me this!

Dean: Welcome to the club...

He chuckles and sits.

Just as I'm about to sit, he looks at me seriously.

Dean: We're not going to focus on me right now. Not now, okay?

I sit and look at him.

Me: How are you though?

Dean: I'm okay.

Me: Okay.

Dean: Okay.

He sighs.

Dean: How is my brother?

At this point I don't think he knows that Derek is not just his brother, but his twin...

Me: He's not fine.

He nods slowly.

Me: We're going to see Melinda today...well she's coming to us.

Dean: Good, so you're not ending things with him?

I shrug.

Dean: He said some fucked up shit.

I don't say anything.

Dean: You'll work it out... maybe you need space...

I look at him in shock.

Me: Are you telling me to get space? Is this you?

He chuckles.

Dean: Sometimes, space is good.

I sigh.

Me: We'll see...

Dean: I really missed you.

Me: Me too.

We share another hug.

Me: I have a bone to pick with you...

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: When Derek was shouting at me, he mentioned Andile. He said I must run to him for comfort...

Dean: Who the fuck is Andile?

Me: The Deputy Princip-

Dean: Oh... That motherfucker...

Me: Dean!

Dean: I'm the one who warned Derek about the idiot.

Me: What do you mean??

Dean: Don't be stupid. The guy has a thing for you.

Just as I'm about to respond, he stands.
Dean: I have places to be, and a girl to
spoil... Bye.
With that said, he walks out and leaves
me there, gobsmacked.

INSERT 207

Melinda stares at Derek coolly.

Derek: So, Ziyanda told you?

She keeps quiet.

Me: Ya, I told her.

He chuckles quietly.

Melinda: Derek, what was going through
your mind when you found out?

Derek: I was angry.

She nods lightly.

Derek: I didn't know I had it in me to be
that angry.

Melinda: Now that you've calmed down, and thought about your actions, what do you think made you so angry?

Derek: I'm still angry.

She nods lightly.

Derek: I feel betrayed. Zimkitha has always been in my life. She was there every step of the way. I fail to understand why she remained in my life if she didn't want me.

Melinda: Have you spoken to her since?

He shakes his head.

Melinda: You've expressed that you would like to start individual sessions with me.

He nods.

Derek: I have a lot of childhood trauma. I'm shocked. I can't believe he wants to do this. He's finally acknowledging that he's not okay, and he hasn't been okay for the longest time.

Melinda: It won't be an easy journey, but I'm proud that you are taking this step.

Me: Well done.

He looks at me.

Derek: You make me want to become a better version of myself.

Melinda smiles. I think she secretly thinks she's my mother. I mean, she has definitely seen me through some crazy shit.

Melinda: That is admirable.

Derek touches my hand and brushes my knuckles.

Melinda: Why are you here today?

Derek: I want to fix my relationship with Zi. I've lost her trust.

Melinda: Is this true, Ziyanda?

Me: I guess...

Melinda focuses on Derek again.

Melinda: What makes you say that you've lost her trust?

Derek: I said hurtful things to her.

Melinda nods.

Derek: I didn't mean any of the things I said, but I also don't want it to seem like I'm making excuses for myself.

Melinda: What did you say to her?

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Baby?

Me: Go ahead.

He sighs.

Derek: I said I regret the day I met her.

Melinda nods.

Derek: I think that's what hurt her the most.

Melinda: Is this true, Ziyanda?

Me: Yes.

Derek: I showed her my journals from when I was young to now... I write a lot. Journaling helps me make sense of my feelings. It's also a good way to just let everything out.

Melinda: Very good... Why did you show her your journals?

Derek: I wanted to give her more context about myself. I also wanted to show her how real my feelings towards her were back then, and reassure her that nothing has changed, besides the fact that my love for her has grown.

He glances at me.

Derek: I apologise for attacking you.

Melinda: Ziyanda, do you believe that he regrets the day he met you?

Me: Yes.

Derek sighs lightly.

Me: I understand that he was angry, but those words cut deep.

Melinda: Do you truly believe that he regrets the day he met you?

Me: In that moment, I did.

She nods and focuses on Derek again.

Melinda: What else did you say to her?

Derek: I kept telling her to leave my house.

Melinda: Your house?

He looks down ashamedly.

She sighs.

Melinda: The psychology of ownership is not fictitious. It definitely applies to you, Derek.

I look at her.

I know she's about to drop bombs on us.

Melinda: Jean Piaget- a founding father of child psychology- revealed something profound about human nature. After witnessing the “violent rage” shown by babies whenever they are deprived of an object they consider to be their own, Piaget discovered that we develop a sense of ownership in the early stages of life. By the age of two, children already understand what possessions are.

She looks at Derek softly.

Melinda: Along with the transition from adolescence to adulthood, comes the need to solidify our identity. The first car we buy or the first house we purchase often reflects our sense of self. Psychologist, Karen Lollar, was able to put this into perspective. She said: “The house is not merely a possession or a structure of unfeeling walls. It is an extension of my

physical body and my sense of self that reflects who I was, am, and want to be.”

She continues looking at Derek.

Melinda: You are attached to your possessions. They make you feel accomplished.

Derek doesn't say anything.

Melinda: Your traumatic past and abandonment issues have led you to have a dysfunctional relationship with your possessions. Growing up, you didn't feel like you owned your life. You had no control over many things, things that made you who you are today. As a result, you developed an unhealthy relationship with your belongings. They formed part of your identity. You worked hard, just to ensure that no one had control over you.

Melinda looks at me.

Melinda: Derek's breakdown had nothing to do with you.

I don't say anything.

Melinda: He was triggered. In that moment, he felt like he had no control over his existence. He realised that, in a way, Zimkitha was the puppet master. She made a lot of decisions that had an impact on his life.

She looks at me softly.

Melinda: That outburst was a result of emotional and mental distress. He realised that he was living a lie. His life was shaped by other people's decisions. We sit in silence for a while. She usually does this when she wants us to process what she has said.

Melinda: I think I need to speak to Derek more. I also need some background knowledge, so I can make an informed hypothesis. However, the psychology of ownership explains why he suddenly felt the need to remind you and himself that

the house belonged to him. His possessions are the only things he has control over.

Me: I'm not going to stay in that house.
Derek looks at me sharply.

Me: I hear you telling me all these things about ownership, but I'll never feel comfortable in that house ever again. He doesn't have to tell me again that the house belongs to him. I fully get it.

Derek: I didn't mean it, Zi.
I shake my head.

Me: What happens when we fight again? You will remind me again that everything belongs to you? I'm not having that. I refuse.

Melinda: That's understandable, however, I want to emphasize that it was not about you.

I shrug.

Me: I personally think that once this whole thing has settled, we should get some space.

Melinda: You want space?

Me: I do. I need the space. I just want to be alone somewhere for a while. I want to take time away to truly process what has happened. I need the space.

Melinda: What is the status of your relationship?

Me: I love Derek, that hasn't changed. I'm here because I love him. I'll never stop supporting him.

Derek: You want to end things with me?

Melinda: She says she needs space to process what has happened.

Derek keeps quiet.

Melinda: How do you feel about this?

Derek: I'm hurt. She obviously doesn't want to be with me anymore.

I look at him and instantly feel like he's going to start attacking me. I shouldn't have said all these things. I should have waited for him to be in a more stable state.

Derek: If I'm able to look past the fact that she knew about this shit, what's stopping her from doing the same?

My heart rate increases.

Derek: She knew that Zimkitha was my mother. She knew for over a year, yet she didn't tell me anything. How am I supposed to trust her?

Melinda: Are you angry that she didn't tell you?

Derek: Of course I'm angry. She was supposed to tell me. I don't understand how she was able to pretend as if she didn't know.

Melinda nods.

Derek: I don't trust her.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: But, I'm willing to move past all of that. Part of me is still able to rationalize her actions. I know that her intention wasn't malicious. I'm willing to move on, and work on rebuilding our trust. Why can't you do the same? Do you really believe that I regret the day I met you, Ziyanda? Really?

I don't say anything.

Derek: I'm also angry at you. You should have told me as soon as you found out. As much as you say it wasn't your secret to tell, it also wasn't your secret to keep.

He looks at me.

Derek: But here I am, willing to look past it, because I understand you. I understand that you were caught between a rock and a hard place. If I'm able to rationalize all of this, why can't you? Why can't you understand that in that moment, my

world came crashing down and I lost track of everything?

He sighs.

Derek: I love you. If you need space, then you can do as you please. I don't want you to leave me, but I'm also not going to hold you captive.

We sit in silence for a long time.

Melinda: Space doesn't have to be a negative thing. Taking space is not the same as running away. Running away is cutting the cord of the relationship. It's a form of emotional disconnection, whereas taking space is a way of connecting through the distance. She looks at us.

Melinda: Space includes the element of privacy. People want time for themselves. When one of you says you need some space, what type of space are you asking for? Creative space? Quiet space?

Working space? Emotional space? Fun space? Away space? Financial space? She looks at Derek.

Melinda: It is always good to have time for yourself, to think things through, have conversations with yourself, and re-energize. Wanting or needing space in your relationship is okay. It doesn't mean that your relationship is in trouble.

She looks at me.

Melinda: Do you still want to be with Derek?

I nod.

Melinda: Define what type of space you need. Be specific and be honest.

Me: I need some time away from him and everyone. I just want to process all of this by myself. I'm drained right now.

Melinda: And, I always tell you that you can't fill up other people's cups if your cup is empty. I'm glad that you

acknowledge that you're running low on strength and energy.

She looks at Derek.

Melinda: Just like you don't want Ziyanda to take any of the things you said personally, you also shouldn't take her need for space personally. She still wants to be with you. She has identified that she can't support you right now, because she is drained. Are you acknowledging this?

He sighs and nods lightly.

Me: I just want to alienate myself until I'm fine. Derek: You don't want to leave me?

I shake my head.

I know he'll be triggered if I don't reassure him.

Melinda must tackle his abandonment issues very soon.

Melinda: How do you feel, Derek?

Derek: I respect her decision. I sigh in relief.

Derek: But, I need you right now. I can't go through this by myself.

Me: That's why I'm here, Ngidi. I'm not going to leave you while you're down. I'm not that fucked up.

He smiles lightly and looks at me shyly.

Melinda: It's going to be a long journey...

However, I'm hopeful.

INSERT 208

Derek: How is Dean?

Me: He says he's fine, but he's not.

He nods lightly.

Me: Are you avoiding him?

Derek: I'm not ready to interact with him. I'm also giving him space to deal with this his own way.

Me: You seem to be more comfortable with giving other people space...

Derek: Ziyanda...

Me: I'm just saying...

We continue chatting as he drives back to the house. We decided to go to Melinda instead of her coming over. I'm used to having my sessions at her practice, not these house visits.

When we get home, we take a shower and go straight to bed.

Derek: So, where are you planning on going?

Me: Cape Town.

He nods.

Derek: Once again, I'm sorry for the result of my words. I really am sorry. Before I can speak, he gets closer to me and plants a kiss on my lips. My whole body tenses up. I haven't been intimate with Derek in a long time, my body is puzzled.

He smiles as he continues kissing me. As much as I try not to do this, I fail dismally. My body seems to be responding.

He gets on top of me and looks at me.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

He sighs lightly.

Me: We've done enough talking.

He smiles as he kisses me again and I respond.

I think there's definitely a disconnect between Derek and I, an emotional and physical disconnection. It's going to take a lot for us to go back to how we used to be, that's why I need space. I want to re-evaluate our relationship, and rediscover my love for him. This whole experience has really traumatised me. I've never been through such with another person. My mind, body and soul is in a state of

shock. I just want to lick my wounds in peace.

Now, the physical disconnection is from a lack of intimacy. Derek and I love having sex with each other. We enjoy the proximity of it. Ever since I left the house and had my episode, we haven't been physically intimate.

Derek: Zi...

As usual, I'm crying.

It's always a big deal when I'm this close to Derek. I'm physically attracted to him, so whenever I experience physical distance and we eventually reconnect, it's always a deep moment. My body switches on. It always feels at home when it's close to Derek.

Derek: Baby...

I eventually calm down and rest my head on his chest.

He already knows the drill. He caresses me and allows me to drown in my feelings.

After a while, I put up my head and look at him.

Me: I really do love you, Derek.

Derek: I know.

Me: I'm not running away from you.

He nods lightly.

I rest my head on his chest again and he continues caressing me while planting kisses on my forehead once in a while.

It's been a few days since Derek and I went to see Melinda. Derek has been seeing her daily.

As I'm cleaning the house, my phone rings.

It's Nomvuyo.

I answer it.

Me: Hello.

Nomvuyo: Oh, hi...

Me: Hi.

Nomvuyo: How are you?

Me: Fine.

Nomvuyo: I can't take this! Stop being mad at me!

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Open the gate or else I'll jump in!

I end the call and buzz her in.

Thank God Derek is not here.

After a while, she walks in.

Before I can even say anything, she's already throwing herself at me.

Nomvuyo: I can't take this! I'm sorry!

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: I'm so sorry for abandoning you! Liwa had a breakdown and I had to take him to hospital!

Me: Breakdown?

She lets go me.

Nomvuyo: You have to forgive me!

I stare at him.

Me: Cook for me first.

She smiles and hugs me again.

Nomvuyo: On it!

She goes to the kitchen and does her thing, while I clean up around the house.

After a while, she comes back.

Me: Liwa had a breakdown?

She nods.

Nomvuyo: He's been in a psychiatric clinic for over a week now.

Me: What??

She nods sadly.

Nomvuyo: I may have underestimated the magnitude of this whole thing.

I sigh.

Nomvuyo: He's getting the help he needs.

Me: Where is Zimkitha?

She looks at me nervously.

Me: Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: In the house... well she's always with Liwa...

Me: Wow.

Nomvuyo: Zi-

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not even surprised.

Nomvuyo: Zi, I'm the one who's been telling her to keep the distance for now.

Me: What??

Before I can continue, she takes my hand and makes me sit.

Nomvuyo: Believe me, I'm doing this for everyone.

Me: She is supposed to take responsibility for her actions! Hiding won't solve anything!

She shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: She needs to give them space to process the truth, even though she's not the one who told them and she's the cause of it all.

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: Things would have been worse if she was around. Dean and Derek need to process this their own way, before they address her.

Me: Why are you protecting this woman?
She sighs.

Me: She is the adult here. She mustn't act like a child. Derek and Dean have every right to be pissed at her.

Nomvuyo: I know. However, I'm trying to prevent an explosive situation.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: I know her actions seem selfish right now. I'm also pissed at her.

However, she had her reasons.

Me: I can't believe this.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda-

Me: Listen, I'm not angry. I'm shocked more than anything. She looks at me.

Me: I don't have the energy to be angry. I'm also not going to make this my issue anymore. People must take responsibility for their actions. I've already done that with Derek, and that's all that matters to me. I'm going to support him and Dean. I'm not going to run after Zimkitha, telling her what to do. I won't do that. You are her daughter. You know her more than us. Do as you please.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: She'll reach out to them. She wants to reach out to them.

I shrug.

Me: Do you, Nomvuyo.

Just then, we hear footsteps.

I hope it's not Derek. I can't have him going off on Nomvuyo.

Whoa.

It's Dean.

I forgot he has access to this house.

Dean: It smells good in here.

Nomvuyo is a nervous mess.

Dean: Vuvu, you've been MIA.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, hi...

Dean: I'm starving.

Nomvuyo: The food is not ready yet.

He nods and looks at me.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: Ya nawe.

He chuckles.

Dean: Nomvuyo, where is my mother?

Nomvuyo and I look at him in shock.

Dean: Hello? Anybody home?

Nomvuyo clears her throat.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, she around.

Dean laughs and sits opposite me.

Dean: Around?

Nomvuyo: Liwa's in a psychiatric clinic.

Dean: Hmm... We have a lot of crazies in this family, don't we?

We don't say anything.

Nomvuyo stands.

Nomvuyo: Let me check the food.

As she's walking, Dean clears his throat.

Dean: I'm hosting lunch tomorrow... As usual, everyone should be there.

Nomvuyo turns to look at him.

Dean: Everyone.

With that said, he takes the remote and switches on the TV coolly.

Nomvuyo and I look at him, flabbergasted.

INSERT 209 (Unedited)

It's now around 6pm.

Derek just got back from his session with Melinda.

Derek: What are you doing?

Me: I'm trying to bake.

He laughs.

Me: I'm craving a carrot cake.

Derek: Manje why didn't you tell me? I would have bought it for you.

I shake my head.

Me: I want to bake it!

Derek: Okay, I won't distur-

Me: Don't leave me here! I need your help!

He continues laughing.

Derek: Let me take a quick shower.

Me: Hmkay.

He gives me a kiss before he walks away.

While the cake is in the oven, we go to the bar.

Me: Langa was here.

Derek: Really?

Me: And Nomvuyo.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: Nomvuyo was apologising for disappearing.

Derek: You forgive her?

I shrug.

Derek: What did Dean say?

Me: He is hosting lunch tomorrow.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: He wants everyone there.

He laughs quietly.

Me: Nomvuyo says Liwa is in a psychiatric clinic.

He keeps quiet and I stare at him. He takes a sip of his whiskey.

Me: How do you feel about this whole thing?

He takes a deep breath.

Derek: Melinda says I shouldn't force myself to understand this situation.

Me: You're not in that space?

He shrugs.

Derek: I just want to work on myself-that's my main focus.

Me: I don't expect you to have it all figured out right now. This is going to take time.

Derek: But, I'm interested in this lunch that Dean is hosting. We'll see how it goes.

Me: We're going?

Derek: We have to be there for Dean. I don't know what's going through his mind. He's way too calm.

Me: I thought you were the one who was going to react calmly. You two never cease to amaze me.

Derek: Really? I'm a firecracker, Ziyanda.

Me: Hai, I always praise your EQ.

He chuckles.

Derek: I also thought I had a high EQ, but this shit threw me off. I wasn't ready for this. He pours himself more whiskey and pours me more wine.

Derek: You know, I've always been ashamed of my experiences...

Me: Anything specific?

Derek: The sexual assault...

Me: Was it a one-time thing?

He chuckles.

Derek: I was basically Khwezi's toy.

I swear I want to vomit.

Derek: How did you move past your sexual assault?

I sigh.

Me: Melinda made me realise that I'm not a victim, I'm a survivor. I accepted that it happened, and I prayed about it. It took everything in me to not blame myself. I realised that none of it was my fault. I couldn't carry it anymore, because it was killing me. I cried, I tried committing suicide, I laughed, I yelled, then I accepted it. I accepted every single thing about my assault. I fully accepted it.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Me: I understand what you're going through. Society tends to alienate people like us. People don't understand us. On the one hand, they have these campaigns to support us, and on the other hand, they silence us and make us feel bad for being open about our struggles. It's not easy. I think it's worse for you, because you're a man. There aren't any campaigns supporting or educating us about men who are abused.

Derek: It's a struggle. It's a real struggle. As a man, I'm supposed to be strong. I can't be seen weak or vulnerable, otherwise my manhood is questioned. I nod.

Derek: I've had to suck it up and suppress it.

Me: You don't have to anymore. You need to live your truth. Stop assuming that the people around you are going to judge you.

If you do come across judgemental people, then it's not a You Problem.

He smiles lightly.

Derek: I never thought I'd be having such a conversation with anyone.

Me: Like you wrote in your journal, you and I have a lot in common. We are similar in many ways. We're able to practise empathy, because we've been through a shitload. I'll never judge you.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: And you think I regret meeting you?

He smiles warmly and I smile back at him.

Me: Stop trying to butter me up.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

Derek: I understand why you worship Melinda.

Me: She is amazing! I don't like white people, but that woman is the shit.

He laughs.

Derek: Have you forgotten about your cake?

Me: Derek!

I let go of him and rush to the kitchen. As soon as I open the oven, the smoke escapes. I open the windows and door.

My cake is now pitch black. It looks like a brick.

Me: Derek, fuck you!

He laughs loudly.

Derek: What did I do??

Me: You distracted me!

I groan as I look at my cake.

Derek: I'll go buy you a carrot cake. He walks away and I clean up the mess.

As we're driving to Dean's place, I keep praying that everything goes well. I can't handle more breakdowns.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: I'm going back to work next week.

Me: Do you feel ready?

He nods.

Me: Okay.

Derek: You can leave next week... I've booked your flights and accommodation.

Me: Huh?

Derek: You said you want to go to Cape Town.

Me: I was going to do that myself.

Derek: I beat you to it.

Me: Der-

Derek: I'm not going to have an argument with you. I told you I didn't mean all that shit I said. What do you want me to do? Stop taking care of you?

I don't even know what to say.

Derek: Your flights are booked. Your accommodation is sorted.

Me: Thanks.

Derek: It's always a pleasure.

He flashes a smile before focusing on the road.

Me: I guess I have to find another job, seeing as Andile is a problem.

Derek: Dean is the one that told me that nonsense. I don't see Andile as a threat. I look at him in disbelief.

Derek: I'm not that insecure. Andile doesn't affect me. He also knows not to mess with me, so I doubt he'd make a move.

I am speechless.

Me: Yazi you are just like Hulk.

He laughs.

Me: You cause destruction then you snap out of it and don't remember a thing.

Dean: Great comparison. Hulk is a good guy. I'm a good guy.

I shake my head and he continues laughing.

We finally get to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

I want to talk to Nolwazi. I want to find out what she thinks about all of this.

Dean: Look what the wind blew in...

Derek: We need to talk.

Dean: You don't say...

Derek leads the way to Dean's study.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: What the hell is going on with him?

Nolwazi: I thought he was in denial at first, but I'm starting to realise that he is genuinely fine.

Me: Really??

She nods.

Nolwazi: Your father has been helping him out.

I shake my head. He's too calm.

It's a bit strange.

Nolwazi: He invited everyone.

Me: Even Gabi and them?

She shakes her head.

Nolwazi: Liwa, Vuvu and Zimkitha.

I sigh heavily.

Me: I don't think this is a good idea. We need someone professional to mediate.

Nolwazi: I agree with you.

Me: Also, how is Liwa going to come? Isn't he in a clinic?

Nolwazi: Dean made it clear that he wants everyone here.

Nolwazi goes to the kitchen and I decide to play with the megabytes.

After a long time, Dean and Derek come back.

Now that I know that they're twins, I get creeped out by them.

I stare at them as they stand there, looking at me.

They look so much alike.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it.

Dean: I need you to do me a favour.

Me: What?

Dean: Don't beat up anyone.

Me: You mean Zimkitha? I can't make any promises.

He laughs. Derek shakes his head lightly.

Just then, we hear footsteps.

Nomvuyo and Liwa walk in.

Liwa looks sick. He looks fragile.

Dean: Yaas!

Really?? And, I'm supposed to be convinced that this person is fine??

Dean: You know where the bar is.... You both look like you need strong drinks.

Liwa's eyes land on me and I look away.
Derek sits next to me and picks up Simo.
A few minutes later, we hear footsteps
again.

Zimkitha.

She's alive after all.

As I'm processing her presence, Lindelwa
walks in, and she is followed by Khwezi
and Senior.

Why do I want to run away?

Dean: Zi, call your parents and find out
how far they are.

Me: Huh??

He looks at me softly.

Dean: Call your mother.

I find myself doing as I'm told.

My stomach is in knots.

INSERT 210 (Unedited)

I am shitting my pants.

I don't know how I feel, it's a mixture of emotions.

I feel Derek's hand on mine and I snap out of it.

Derek: Let's go outside.

We walk out of the house and make our way to the empty side of the yard.

We hold hands.

Me: How are you?

Derek: Indifferent. You?

I look at him.

Me: I don't think I'm ready to face these women.

He chuckles.

Derek: The old lady gang.

I think of Khwezi and I feel my heart rate increase.

Derek: Baby.

I feel his warm hands on my face.

Derek: Breathe...

I look at him.

Me: I hate them.

Derek: This is where my EQ will come in handy. Let's not allow our emotions to take over.

Me: I never claimed to have a high EQ.
He smiles and plants a kiss on my lips.
Our faces touch for a long time.

Me: Can't we go back home?

Derek: You want to leave? He looks at me seriously.

I shrug.

Me: I'm suddenly constipated.

He kisses me again

Derek: We can leave if you want to.

Me: Like you always say, it's not about me.

He wraps his arms around me and I relax in his arms.

Derek: You said you want to go home...

I look at him in confusion.

Derek: You didn't refer to it as my house.

I roll my eyes and he laughs.

Derek: You can roll them all you want...

I nuzzle my head on his neck.

Me: What did you say to Dean?

Derek: I was checking in.

I keep quiet.

Derek: He assured me that he's fine.

Me: Do you believe him?

He shrugs.

Derek: The Dean that I know would first punch a few people before settling down.

Me: Well, he can't exactly punch the old lady gang.

He laughs

Derek: They really fucked up.

Me: Are you willing to hear them out?

Derek: I'm numb.

I kiss his neck and look at him.

Me: I'm here.

Derek: I know.

He smiles and we share a kiss.

Derek: You mean the world to me.

I smile.

Me: I tend to have that effect on people.

Derek: Haike.

I kiss him.

Someone clears their throat and we stop.

It's Nomvuyo.

She looks at Derek nervously.

Nomvuyo: Hey.

Derek: Hi.

Nomvuyo: Uhm, we're about to start.

Derek and I look at her and don't say anything.

She walks away like a little girl.

We laugh lightly.

Me: Everyone is scared of you.

Derek: As they should.

Nolwazi rushes to us.

Nolwazi: Guys, I don't think I've ever been this unsettled in my entire life!

She looks at me.

Nolwazi: How am I supposed to act??

Me: I don't know.

Derek: None of this is about you. All you need to do is hold us back when things get heated.

I look at him in shock and he laughs.

Derek: I'm just joking. I also don't know what the agenda is. Dean better have a plan.

Nolwazi: Zizi, your parents have arrived.

Me: Even my dad?

She nods.

I immediately relax.

I feel safer. I trust them.

Nolwazi: Let's go.

Derek leads the way and Nolwazi takes my hand.

Nolwazi: You see why I didn't like Vuvu?
Shady motherfuckers.

Me: Lwazi!

She pouts and eyes me.

Nolwazi: My heart is beating so fast.

Derek stops and we catch up to him. He takes my hand and we walk to the other side of the yard.

A very big circular table has been set up by the pool.

People are already sitting down.

Nomvuyo is sitting next to Liwa. Liwa is sitting next to Khwezi. Khwezi is sitting next to Senior. Senior is sitting next to Lindelwa. Lindelwa is sitting next to my mother. My mother is sitting next to my father. The seat next to my father is empty. My mom smiles when she sees us.

Mom: Hello, Yanda.

She stands and we share a warm hug. She kisses me.

Dad: You're losing weight...

Me: Hello to you too.

We share a hug.

Mom: Nkanyezi sthandwa sami.

Nkanyezi smiles warmly as he hugs my mother, looking like a little boy.

Just as I'm about to sit next to my father, someone stops me.

Dean: Sisi there's plenty of space. Don't come for me.

Dad: Hai kabi, Zi. Dean is my long lost son...

Really?

Is this an appropriate thing to say considering why we are all here?

Dean laughs as he sits next to my father.

I don't think this sitting arrangement is going to work.

There are four seats left.

Nolwazi is going to sit next to Dean obviously.

Derek is already seated. If I sit here, then that means the empty seat next to me is Zimkitha's (who's going to sit next to Nomvuyo).

Why do I have to be next to Zimkitha?

She emerges and walks to the table.

She looks like she's mourning.

Nomvuyo quickly stands and makes her sit next to Liwa. Nomvuyo then sits next to me.

That's better.

Dean is looking at me amusingly. The idiot is finding this funny.

I look at Lindelwa.

I haven't really hung out with her, but I do know that she's one of those sweet, quiet and humble women.

Right now, she can't even look up. She's busy fidgeting with her fingers.

I look over at Khwezi, and the old bitch is staring at me. I swear Petty pops out of nowhere and grabs a chair.

Khwezi, as usual, looks like she wants to kill me.

Senior looks disappointed.

Liwa... I've ever seen him like this... How did they even get him admitted?

I refuse to look at Zimkitha.

Nolwazi brings herself a bottle of champagne and sits next to Dean.

Everyone is here.

Derek rests his arm on my chair.

I glance at him, and he's expressionless. It is clear that he doesn't want anyone to address him.

His Resting Bitch Face is out to play.

Nolwazi pours herself some champagne and glances at me. I nod and she pours me some as well.

Dean clears his throat and stands.

Dean: Good afternoon, everyone.

No one responds.

He rubs his chin thoughtfully and smiles.

Dean: I knew you'd all be rigid...

He looks around and smiles.

Dean: I don't know if you've seen Derek and Ziyanda in action, but whenever they're about to teach, they usually do icebreakers with the kids... I'm struggling to breathe.

What's happening?

Dean: So, we'll also have our special icebreaker... We're going to have a very

educational and long afternoon, so we have to wake our brains up.

He looks around.

Dean: Ziyanda loves quizzes, so we'll also have a quiz...

What is Dean up to?

Dean: I only have one rule.

He stares at us.

Dean: You all have to participate...

He glances at us one by one very seriously.

Dean: Otherwise, there'll be consequences.

He smiles warmly.

Dean: We all understand?

The tension.

The fucken tension.

Dean: Hmkay... First question.

He smiles.

Dean: How do you define family?

There's silence as we all stare at him.

I finish my champagne and try to catch
my breath.

Fuck shit.

INSERT 211

We are all staring at Dean, hoping that this is all a joke.

Dean: I asked a question.

He looks around.

His eyes land on me.

Dean: Ziyanda?

No, he can't be picking on me right now! I feel Derek's hand on my thigh and I look at him. I find him staring at me calmly. I look back at Dean.

Dean: Ziyanda, answer my question.

Nolwazi gives me more champagne.

Dean stares at me softly.

I clear my throat and look at my parents.

They also look calm.

Me: I think the definition of family is subjective.

Dean: Elaborate.

Me: We all have different definitions.

I don't know what he wants me to say. I don't want to be the focus here. I want to be excluded from everything.

He stares at me, and I hope he can get a sense of what I'm thinking.

Dean: We all have different definitions?
I nod.

Dean: Then, we should go around the table and get an idea of how everyone defines family.

I groan quietly.

The tension is too much. I finally gather up the courage to look around the table. You would swear that someone died.

Lindelwa clears her throat and we all stare at her.

Lindelwa: I define family as someone that loves you and wants the best for you at all times. This person doesn't have to be biologically related to you.

Dean looks at her. I'm trying to see if he'll break, but he's still the same.

Dean: Next.

There's silence for close to five minutes.

My mom clears her throat.

Mom: Can I?

Dean smiles.

Dean: Of course, ma.

I look at Lindelwa, and she's staring at my mother. I think she's trying to figure out who the hell she is, and why Dean seems to like her so much.

Mom: Well, I happen to agree with your mother, Langelihle.

Lindelwa's expression changes. She looks at my mother a bit softer.

Mom: Family is a person or people you call home. A home is not a house, it's the people we love, the people we trust and depend on.

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: That's my definition of family.

Dad: I couldn't agree more.

Dean looks at my father like he idolizes him.

Dad: I think we should approach this matter maturely.

My dad looks at him knowingly. He knows that Dean is trying to be petty.

My dad looks around.

Dad: There's no use trying to beat around the bush. We all know why everyone is her-

Khwezi: Who the hell are you?

Just as I'm about say something, my dad looks at Khwezi warmly.

Dad: My apologies for not introducing myself.

Dean: You don't need to introduce yourself. All the relevant people know you.

Yoh.

My dad looks at Dean sharply, he clearly disagrees with Dean's approach right now.

Dad: I am Ziyanda's father.

Khwezi looks at my father disgustingly.

Mom: How about you introduce yourself as well, because my husband hasn't had the pleasure of meeting you.

Is my mom being petty? She knows Khwezi can't refer to herself as Derek's mother right now. Khwezi will be tongue-tied.

Khwezi grunts.

Dad: Now, as I was saying, we need to approach this maturely.

Nolwazi pours water for Dean.

Dad: I personally do not think that this is the right way to unpack everything, but now that we are here, we should try by all means to remember that we are all human, and we have a lot of imperfections.

There's silence once again.

Dad: Zimkitha, do you have anything to say?

There's silence. Zimkitha has been looking down since she got here.

Dad: I think you are all here, because you want to find a way forward. It took

courage for all of you to come here and face your demons.

There's silence.

Dean: Mama.

Lindelwa: Yes, son.

Dean: What's going on?

We all look at Dean.

He seems down.

Lindelwa: I would have loved to have a private conversation with you, but I understand that this is the way you want it.

Dean: Private conversations will enable people to not tell the whole truth.

Lindelwa nods.

Lindelwa: I understand.

She takes a deep breath and looks at Dean softly.

Lindelwa: It's true that I'm not your biological mother.

Dean looks at her expressionlessly.

Lindelwa: Zimkitha gave birth to you. You are her first born.

I glance at Derek.

Lindelwa: Derek was born a minute later, then Li-

Dean: What?

Lindelwa looks at him strangely. She is obviously under the impression that Dean knows everything.

Dean: Derek was born a minute later?

What does that mean?

Lindelwa: I- I thought you knew...

Dean looks at Derek.

Dean: Are we twins?

Nolwazi's eyes are wide open.

Dean: We're twins?

Lindelwa: Yes.

Dean looks around.

It's silent.

Within a minute, his loud laugh has filled the space.

My heart breaks for him.

I've come to accept that this is his way of taking in information.

We all watch as he laughs for a few minutes.

Once he's done, he stands and looks at everyone.

Dean: Wow...

He chuckles.

Dean: Excuse me...

He continues chuckling as he makes his way inside the house.

We sit in silence.

Nolwazi: I'm worried about him...

Mom: Go check on him.

Nolwazi stands and walks away.
I look at Derek and he nods.
I also stand and walk away.
When I walk in the bar area, I find
Nolwazi standing a few steps from Dean,
who's sitting on a high stool, drinking
whiskey from the bottle.
Nolwazi is scared of stepping closer.
We look at each other nervously.
I take a deep breath and step closer to
him.
Me: Dean...
He doesn't say anything.
I sit on the high stool next to him.
Me: Look on the bright side, you and
Derek can finally explain your weird
connection...
He glances at me.
I can't read him.

Me: I must say though that despite being twins, Star is still the most attractive one between the two of you.

God, I know my jokes are dry right now, but what else can I do? I don't want Dean to act crazy. I won't be able to handle that. He chuckles quietly.

Me: Come on, I know your life is fucked up right now, but you can't let it bring you down...

Dean: Do you know what I want to do right now?

I shake my head.

Me: Tell me.

I thought I knew Dean, but this whole experience has shown me another layer of him. I have deep respect for Dean. His self-control is super saiyan.

He finishes his whiskey.

Dean: I don't want to traumatise you. You seem to be handling your mess quite badly. You look a hot mess.

Me: Dean!

He chuckles.

Dean: You look sick.

I huff as he continues making fun of me.

Listen, if this makes him feel better, then so be it. He can diss me all day, I'll take it.

He turns and looks at Nolwazi.

She really is nervous.

I think the realest thing she has had to deal with in life is Kwanele's epileptic attacks, otherwise she has lived a sheltered life.

Dean: I won't bite.

Nolwazi: I don't know what to do.

She genuinely looks defeated.

Dean: Well, you can start by giving me a hug...

She steps closer to him and once she's standing between his legs, he wraps his arms around her waist and she does the same around his neck.

I find myself smiling.

I rarely get to see the vulnerable side of Dean.

Nolwazi: I'm worried about you. I feel like you're trying to convince yourself that you're fine.

Dean: I am fine.

He plants a kiss on her lips.

Dean: I don't want to be consumed by anger. I won't be able to leave that mental state, if I allow myself to go there. I just want to understand why this happened. I want them to explain why they did this. I must admit that a part of me wishes Derek had reacted this way. Nolwazi is out here getting hugs, while I was verbally attacked left, right and centre.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it.

He looks at me seriously.

Dean: I didn't go through what Derek went through. I grew up being loved by my mother. You can't compare our reactions.

Me: What? I didn't say anything.

Dean: I've figured out how your mind works.

I roll my eyes.

Nolwazi: Are you ready to go back?

Dean shrugs.

Me: I'd rather stay here.

I mean that with every part of me.

I feel like I'm on the brink of fainting- I'm lightheaded.

Nolwazi: Zi.

Me: You can go, guys. I need a few more minutes away from the tension.

We hear footsteps and I immediately know it's Derek. His cologne has filled the space.

Derek: Everything okay?

I feel his hand on my shoulder.

Derek: Baby?

Dean: I think she's about to have one of her freaking out moments.

Me: Not funny.

I look at Derek and see the concern in his face.

Me: I just need a few minutes.

He removes his hand from me. He knows I need literal space when my anxiety starts.

Dean: What is goi-

Derek: Just get the fuck out of here. The last thing she needs to deal with is your loud mouth.

Dean: Is that how you talk to your older brother? Is that what people do nowadays?

Derek doesn't respond.

Dean: You seem to have forgotten what one of punches can do to you...

Derek: Likewise...

I don't know if they're joking or they're being serious.

This is a lot.

Derek: Baby. Let's go home.

I look at him sharply.

Derek: I don't want to be here. I don't want to talk to these people. This was Dean's stupid idea.

Me: No, you have to stay.

Derek: No, I don't. I don't owe them anything.

Me: You owe it to yourself to know the whole truth.

I take a deep breath and look at them.

Me: Let's go.

I'm not going to lie, I can't wait for all of this to be over, so I can leave... I need to leave...

Derek wants to hold me, but he knows he can't. I don't want to feel suffocated.

We all walk out again and everyone looks at us as we sit.

Dean: Alright, let's cut the bullshit.

Zimkitha, start speaking.

He tightens his jaw.

Dean: Before I act out of character...

INSERT 212

Something tells me that this is deeper than I thought.

Zimkitha is always so open to talk, but this whole thing has pulled her towards herself- it's so strange to witness.

I'm trying to wrap my head around her silence. When she clears her throat, we all stare at her.

Zimkitha: I'd like to talk to the boys privately.

I sigh.

I'm glad I won't be part of that conversation.

Dad: You have every right to ask for privacy. We will excuse you-

Dean: Privacy for what?

Dad: Langelihle.

Dean looks at my dad.

Dad: Remember what we spoke about...

Dean stands.

Dean: Let's go inside.

Zimkitha takes Liwa's hand and they stand.

Dean: Derek.

Derek shakes his head.

I look at Derek pleadingly.

Now is not the time for him to shut down, and I'm not ready to deal with his cold side again.

Zimkitha: Dere-

He shoots her a look and she immediately keeps quiet.

Dean: Let's go.

He leads the way, Zimkitha and Liwa follow him. Liwa looks like he is ready to pass out, and it seems like the only reason he's still present is Zimkitha. Their codependency is on steroids.

Mom: Nkanyezi.

Derek: I'm fine, ma.

My mom stands and sits next to him. She looks at him softly.

Mom: Baby... You need to hear her out.
He shakes his head and tightens his jaw.
My mom takes his hand.
I think we all sit there for around 30
minutes.

It's completely silent.

Out of nowhere, Khwezi grimaces.

We all look at her.

What is wrong with this woman? Who
hurt her? Why is she so vile?

I'm losing patience.

Khwezi: Everyone here is very disr-

Nolwazi: Yoh, haibo Khwezi. Don't you get
tired of being so foul?

Khwezi: Excuse me??

Nolwazi: Hai phela this is too much. You
know very well that you're in the wrong,
but you're behaving like someone who is
not remorseful.

Khwezi: How dare-

Nolwazi: This is my house. You will not disrespect me in my house. You shouldn't have come here if spitting venom is the only thing you have to offer.

Just as Khwezi is about to stand and do God knows what, Senior stops her and makes her sit.

Nolwazi: I have tried, but dammit, you're a piece of work! You are supposed to sit there and account for your actions, not act like you are the victim!

Go off, Nolwazi!

Nolwazi: I would do anything to get you off my property...

Senior takes Khwezi aggressively and they walk to the other side of the yard.

Nolwazi looks at my parents and Lindelwa.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry for being rude. I couldn't take it.

Mom: WENZE kahle sisi. Mina I would have done more than shout... You did well, baby.

My mother is my spirit animal. At this point in time, I have no words for any of these people. Khwezi deserves to be beaten...

Nolwazi takes a deep breath and sips her champagne.

Nolwazi: I just don't understand why she's like this.

Lindelwa: She has always been like this.

Derek stands and walks away.

I follow him.

I'm scared.

I feel like he's going to lash out again.

I'm on defense mode.

I eventually get to him.

We stand in silence for a long time.

Derek: Do you see why I'm like this?

He looks at me.

I can't read his expression.

Derek: Khwezi has the power to turn me into something I'm not. She evokes emotions I am not familiar with.

Me: She doesn't have to have power over you.

Derek: Really?

I keep quiet.

Derek: The same woman who took my childhood from me?

I don't say anything.

This is why I was against this lunch. We need someone professional to mediate the situation. How am I supposed to bring Derek back to his senses all by myself? Melinda would be able to keep him calm. What happens when he gets angrier and comes for me again?

Derek: Zi.

I snap out of it.

I look at him nervously.

Derek: I'm not going to attack you.

I sigh.

Derek: I've learnt my lesson. I'm not going to lose you over this.

He puts his hands in his pockets and sighs heavily.

Derek: But, I'm okay with walking away from this.

Me: What do you mean?

Derek: I don't need these people in my life.

He looks at me.

Derek: We can walk away and continue building our life.

Me: Run away?

He shakes his head lightly.

Derek: I want to work on myself in isolation.

Me: I resp-

Just then, Nolwazi walks to us.

Nolwazi: Zi... Your phone has been ringing non stop since you left. I answered it, and this woman insists on talking to you.

Me: Who is she?

Nolwazi: Vicky.

I frown. I take my phone.

Me: Hello.

Vicky: Am I speaking to Ziyanda?

Me: Uhm... Yes...

Vicky: I have been trying to conta-
I hear shuffling.

Suddenly, I hear a man's voice.

Me: Hello?

I am so confused.

Person: Hai man, Ziyanda. What is wrong with you people?

I am lost.

Me: Excuse me? Who am I speaking to?

Person: It has come to my attention that you are shacking up with one of my twins?

Me: What??

My eyes pop out as I stare at Derek and Nolwazi in shock.

Person: I've been on your tail for months now! I am a sick man, and I need to see my offspring!

He chuckles.

I don't know what to do.

Also, why does he sound so arrogant?

I look at Derek in panic.

Me: He says he's your father.

Derek looks at me strangely.

Person: I am Zweli... You should never refer to me as a random person, young girl.

I'm not even hearing him properly.

Derek snatches the phone from me.

Derek: Hi...

I look at Nolwazi and her eyes are popping out as well.

Nolwazi: He says he's who's father??

Me: Derek's.

She continues looking at me in disbelief.

We both stare at Derek.

He's listening to this Zweli person.

Out of nowhere, we see Dean walking towards us.

What is happening right now? Why does he look like he is about to fall and never wake up?

He gets to us.

Dean: Derek, come.

Ngapha Derek is on the phone.

Nolwazi: Baby-

Dean: Not now, Lwazi.

Nolwazi: He's speaking to your father.

Dean tilts his head and looks at Nolwazi, ngathi he didn't hear her properly.

Dean: Excuse me?

Nolwazi: This man named Zweli, called Ziyanda. He says he's your father.

Dean looks at Derek, who is not speaking, but is still listening to Zweli.

Dean: Zweli?

Nolwazi: Yes.

Dean looks at me expectantly and I nod. He steps closer to Derek and takes the phone from him, thereafter, he ends the call.

Dean: You have to come in.

They stare at each other coldly.

I'm not sure if they're going to beat each other up, or embrace.

Dean turns and starts walking.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Come.

Me: No.

Derek: Ziyanda.

He starts walking and I follow him hesitantly.

Nolwazi also follows, but instead of walking in the house with us, she goes back to the table on the other side of the yard.

When we get in, Zimkitha is crying so loud and painfully, that I have to stop walking and process her cries.

It sounds and feels like she is being tortured.

I take a few steps forward, till I'm in the lounge.

She's on the floor and Liwa is holding her. Nomvuyo is also here, holding her as well. Derek stares down at them blankly.

Dean sits and stares at Zimkitha too.

The crying goes on for a while.

I can't take it.

I find myself tearing up as well.

I've never heard someone cry like this. It's as if her heart is being ripped apart.

Suddenly, she stops.

There's silence.

Did she pass out?

Dean take a deep breath and looks at Derek.

Derek: Sit.

Derek surprisingly obliges. He sits on the couch and continues staring down at Zimkitha, who seems to have passed out.

What is happening?

Dean rubs his eyes and sits back on the couch.

His eyes are red.

He's crying.

INSERT 213

Evelyn: Rose, where is Zimkitha?! She must come here this instant!

Rose looks at Evelyn softly.

Rose: You need to stop being too hard on that young girl.

Evelyn: No, you need to stop being soft on her! Why are you so weak when it comes to Zimkitha??

Rose takes a deep breath.

Rose: She's a good girl, you know...

Evelyn hisses.

Evelyn: ZIMKITHA! Zimkitha runs down the stairs and walks to her mother, who is sitting on her reclining couch.

Evelyn: I have been calling you for five minutes straight now!

Zimkitha: I'm sorry, I was helping Zodwa with her Accounting homework.

Evelyn: Where is Zukiswa?

Zimkitha shrugs. She didn't speak to Zukiswa unless she had to. They just

never got along. However, she was closer to Zodwa, Zuki's sister (both of them were Rose's daughters)

Evelyn: You have a very important meeting this evening. Get ready!

Zimkitha: Meeting?

Evelyn: Stop asking me stupid questions and go get ready!

Zimkitha glances at Rosemary, who gives her a sweet smile.

She walks away and makes her way to her bedroom upstairs. When she gets there, she slams the door and throws herself on the bed.

Zodwa, who is busy with her homework, looks at Zimkitha.

Zodwa: And then?

Zimkitha: She says we have guests coming in today and I should get ready.

Zodwa: Yoh, hai I don't want to be you.

Zimkitha rolls her eyes and sits up.

Just then, Rose comes knocking on the door. She opens it and walks in.

Rose: Zimi, here is your dress. I've ironed it for you.

Zimkitha: Thanks, ma.

Rose looks at Zodwa.

Rose: Ufunani la?

Zodwa: Zimi is help-

Rose: Out!

Zodwa: Kodw-

Rose gives Zodwa a threatening look.

Rose: You seem to forget that this is not your house. Go back to the cottage and prepare dinner.

Zodwa: But, Mam'Evelyn said I shouldn't cook today, because there-

Rose: Ntombizodwa! I will slap you so hard, you will forget your name!

Zimi: She really doesn't have to cook, ma. My mom hired a private chef for tonight.

Rose: I'm not going to eat leaves! Wena Zodwa, phuma la.

Zodwa stands and starts packing her books roughly.

Out of nowhere, there's a loud smack that shakes the entire room.

Zodwa screeches as she touches her face.

Zimi: Mam'Rose!

Rose: I said, out! Don't you dare give me an attitude!

Zodwa finishes packing up and storms out of the room.

Rose: Rhaa!

She hangs Zimkitha's dress and looks at her softly.

Zimi: You know I don't like it when you hit her.

Rose: Do you want me to hit you too?

Zimkitha shakes her head quickly.

Rose: Thought as much.

With that said, Rose walks out of the room.

Zimkitha takes out her phone and dials a number. It rings for a long time.

Zimkitha: Bheki?

Bheki: Hey, I'm still painting, can I call you back?

Zimkitha: No, I want to talk now.

Bheki sighs.

He knew that whenever Zimkitha got like this, he had to stop whatever he was

doing, and focus on her. He was madly in love with her, despite her spoiled brat tendencies.

Bheki: Is everything okay?

Zimkitha: My mom has started with her dinners. I don't like how she parades me. I feel like I'm a prize of some sort.

Bheki: You are definitely a prize... My prize...

Zimkitha: Bheki!

He chuckles.

Bheki: I'm sorry. Just do what you always do at these dinners, ignore everyone and shut them out.

Zimkitha: She always shouts at me afterwards. I'm really tired of this!

Bheki: What do you want to do?

Zimkitha: Run away!

Bheki: You want to run away?

Zimkitha: Let's run away! We could go anywhere in the world!

Bheki: Uh... How about we talk about this later? My father is getting impatient with me.

Zimkitha: Okay. Bye.

Bheki: I love you, okay?

Zimkitha smiles.

Zimkitha: I love you too.

She hangs up and lies on her bed, thinking about Bheki.

Bheki's family moved to Johannesburg about two years ago. They hit it off immediately when Bheki sat next to her in class. They went from being good friends, to being in a serious relationship. They're also planning on attending the same university the following year...

Zimkitha's thoughts are interrupted by a piercing pain that shoots right through her back.

She snaps out it and tightens her whole body as Evelyn whips her with a thick leather belt.

Evelyn: Didn't I tell you to get ready?!
Zimkitha keeps quiet as Evelyn continues whipping her.

Evelyn: I am sick and tired of your uselessness!

Once Evelyn is done, she walks out and slams the door.

Zimkitha lies there for a few minutes, allowing her body to process the pain. She shivers as the heat of the blows radiates throughout her body.

After a while, she gets up and goes to the bathroom to take a bath...

Zimkitha's legs tighten as she feels a hand caressing her right thigh.

She looks at Zweli in disbelief and he ignores her.

She looks over at her mother, on the other side of the table, and Evelyn simply gives her threatening look, daring her to even utter a word.

She presses her lips together as Zweli's hand continues exploring her thighs.

Meanwhile, everyone at the table is laughing loudly. The men are talking about office politics, while the women are giggling at other things.

Zimkitha and Zweli are the only young people here. Everyone else is old.

She continues eating, and tries shutting out the fact that her personal space is being invaded, as usual.

Rose looks at Zimkitha in horror.

Rose: You are pregnant?!

Zimkitha cries hysterically.

Zimkitha You can't tell my parents! You can't tell them, Mam'Rose! Rose stares at Zimkitha.

She is speechless.

Rose: What happened??

Zimkitha: Zweli forced himself on me.

She struggles to breathe as she continues crying.

Rose reaches out for her and comforts her till she passes out.

When she wakes up, she's in Rose's cottage.

She groans.

Rose: Zimi.

She blinks and sits up.

Rose: What are you going to do?

Zimkitha: My parents have always wanted grandchildren. My mother will want to

keep this child, and everyone will abuse him/her. I don't want that!

Rose: Zweli raped you?

Zimkitha looks down ashamedly.

Rose starts crying.

The crying turns into heavy wailing.

Rose: Kodwa Zimkitha...

Zimkitha keeps quiet.

Rose continues crying.

After a long time, she calms down.

Rose: What did he do to you?

Zimkitha: He said I must accompany him to his car, then he started touching me. When I refused, he said he would call my father.

Rose hisses.

They sit in silence for a long time.

Rose: How long has it been since your father has...

Rose swallows her words and sighs sadly.

Zimkitha: He's been busy with the company this whole month.

Rose nods lightly.

Zimkitha: This baby can't be raised in this house. No one can find out.

Rose: You want to keep it??

Zimkitha: I'm not going to kill an innocent child.

Rose: That child is not innocent! That child is a demon!

Zimkitha: Mama, calm down.

Rose starts crying all over again.

Zimkitha stands and gets Rose a glass of water.

Rose: What do you want to do?

Zimkitha: You have to convince my mother to send me to boarding school. Tell her that I have to get used to being independent.

Rose: Kanjani, Zimi, because you are in Grade 12 now?

Zimkitha shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I will fail.

Rose: What??

Zimkitha: I don't have a choice. I will repeat Grade 12, that way they will never see the pregnancy.

Rose: Do you really think that your parents will let you go that easily??

Zimkitha: Mama, I have to do this. I'm not going to kill a child. I won't be able to live with myself knowing that I played God.

Rose: This thing is a product of rape! Why would you be so concerned?

Zimkitha looks at her pleadingly.

Rose stares at her for a long time.

Rose: What will you do once the baby is here? How will you take care of it?

Zimkitha: I haven't thought about that...

They sit in silence for a very long time.

Rose: I think I have an idea.

Zimkitha stares at her.

Rose: There's a family friend of ours that just got married and just found out that she can't have children.

Zimkitha: Really??

Rose: Lindelwa is a very sweet girl. She's 20 something.

Zimkitha: Why did she get married at such a young age?

Rose: Haibo, kanti when are you getting married?

She sighs as she thinks about Bheki.

Zimkitha: We both know that if I had a choice, I would be with Bheki...

Rose takes a deep breath.

Zimkitha: But, my life is already planned out.

Rose: I'm sure we will find a way...

They both sigh heavily and sit in silence...

INSERT 214

Zimkitha: Twins??

The doctor nods lightly.

Rose: Yoh, nkos' yami.

They stare at each other.

Zimkitha starts crying.

Zimkitha: What are we going to do??

Rose: Calm down, we'll talk about this later.

The doctor finishes telling them about the condition of the twins.

Doctor: You should give birth in a month.

Zimkitha and Rose make their way to Lindelwa's house.

She's been staying here since she started showing. She decided to repeat Grade 12, because she was buying time. Her parents are under the impression that she is still in boarding school. It took time convincing them, but they eventually agreed to take her there. Once Zimkitha

started showing, Rose asked Lindelwa to let her stay with them.

Lindelwa smiles as Zimkhitha walks in.

Lindelwa's husband, Muzi, welcomed them. At first, Zimkitha was afraid of him, because he was different from the men he was used to. He was raised in the township, he was street-smart, and Zimkitha was not familiar with such men. However, he proved to be okay.

Lindelwa: Can I get you something to drink?

Zimkitha shakes her head.

Zimkitha: I just want to sleep.

Rose: She's having twins.

Lindelwa: Really??

Muzi: So, what are you going to do with the other twin?

Rose: Heyi, we'll see.

Muzi: We won't be able to take both of them.

Lindelwa: We also can't separate them.

Muzi: Lindelwa, how are you going to take care of two kids?

She keeps quiet.

Muzi looks at Zimkitha.

Muzi: I agreed to one child, not two.

Rose: Don't worry, we'll make a plan.

Zimkitha: I'm not going to separate my kids! How could you expect me to do that??

Rose: What are you going to do?? Take them to your parents??

Zimkitha walks to the bedroom, crying.

Muzi: I'm not trying to be difficult, but we're not going to have 2 kids.

Rose: I understand. At least we know where one of them will be, and I know you'll raise him properly...

I have no words to describe what is going through my mind, and how I feel.

Zimkitha looks at me and I look back at her.

Zimkitha: I didn't have a choice.

She looks at Dean.

Zimkitha: I had to let go of you.

I don't even know when my parents got to the lounge.

Zimkitha: I couldn't abort you. I couldn't allow myself to do it.

We are all silent. I have so many unanswered questions.

Rose carefully places one of the boys in Zimi's arms.

She has been crying ever since she had to push.

Rose was the one who delivered the twins. She had to take over, because they wouldn't have made it to the hospital on time. Thankfully, she had experience with such, because she was a midwife (with no formal qualification though).

Rose: Zimi, you have to calm down, sthandwa sami...

Zimkitha can't seem to keep the tears in.

Zimkitha: I don't want to give them away.

How am I going to live with myself?

Rose looks at her seriously.

Rose: You do not have a choice. You have to make sure that they are safe.

Zimkitha keeps quiet and focuses on the boy she is carrying.

Lindelwa walks in and sobs when she sees the twins.

Lindelwa: Can I hold him?

She looks at the one Zimkitha is holding.

Zimkitha shakes her head and focuses on the tiny bundle.

Rose: You can hold this one. He looks very grumpy.

Lindelwa takes the boy from Rose and continues sobbing quietly.

Rose: What will you name this grumpy one?

Lindelwa: I was thi-

Zimkitha: Langelihle.

Rose and Lindelwa stare at her.

Zimkitha: This one will be Nkanyezi...

Langelihle and Nkanyezi...

Lindelwa: Those are beautiful names.

Rose: They also need English names.

Zimkitha: No, they don't.

Rose: Hai, Zimkitha. They need to have English names.

Zimkitha groans and focuses on Nkanyezi.

Rose: This one will be Dean and Nkanyezi will be Derek.

Lindelwa laughs lightly.

Rose: We grew up with English names. That's how it's supposed to be.

Zimkitha sighs.

Rose: Dean and Derek. Langelihle and Nkanyezi.

Lindelwa: Langelihle came out first?

Rose nods and smiles.

Rose: He's the stubborn one.

Lindelwa plants a kiss on Langelihle's forehead.

Lindelwa: Langelihle... I love him already.

Zimkitha shuts all of them out and focuses on the baby she is holding.

She wasn't ready to let them go...

Derek stands and walks out.

I want to stand and follow him, but I'm failing.

I look at Zimkitha.

My heart is in pieces.

I look at my dad, and he also seems shaken. I think the last time I saw him like this was when I was going through my darkest days.

I have so many questions. God knows I have so many questions, but words fail me right now.

Where is Dean?

I look at Zimkitha, and she looks like a completely different person. She is evidently in pain and ashamed.

I find myself clearing my throat.

Everyone looks at me.

Me: Uhm, I think we should give her privacy.

Dad: I agree.

My mom nods sadly and walks out with my dad. Nomvuyo doesn't want to leave, but she eventually stands and walks away with Lindelwa, leaving Liwa and Zimkitha. Zimkitha looks at him.

Zimkitha: Let me talk to Ziyanda.

Liwa nods lightly and walks out.

I stand and sit next to her.

She takes my hand.

Zimkitha: You have to understand that I wasn't being malicious.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: I didn't know how to solve this... I still don't know how to solve it... I'm speechless.

I empathise with her, I really do.

However, I have so many questions.

She looks at me pleadingly.

Me: I don't judge you.

She keeps quiet.

Me: I just... I'm conflicted...

Zimkitha: I was sexually abused all my life, Ziyanda... I was a prisoner. I didn't know what love was... I'm still recovering from the trauma I went through... I was trying to protect them. Please believe me when I say I was protecting them. They would have been completely different people had they stayed with me...

I look at her.

Zimkitha: I didn't want them to grow up in that house.

Her face changes. She looks like she's being flooded by memories- horrible memories.

Me: I understand.

She starts sobbing.

Zimkitha: I wanted them to live a better life. I didn't want them to suffer like I did. The sobbing continues and I feel like I'm going to pass out from the emotional rollercoaster.

Suddenly, Dean walks in.

Zimkitha can't see him.

Zimkitha: My own parents prostituted me... I was protecting them... I swear, I was protecting them...

I don't know how to comfort her.

At this point, it feels like she's not even addressing me. She's in her own head.

Zimkitha: There was no way they were going to live in that house.

She continues trying to reassure me.

When Dean steps closer to us, my heart stops beating, because I'm scared of what he'll do next.

He bends and gets closer to Zimkitha.

Zimkitha: I loved them... I love them. I didn't want them to grow up like me.

Dean: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha shakes her head and continues sobbing.

Dean: Zimkitha.

Zimkitha looks at him.

Zimkitha: You don't understand. You wouldn't have survived.

Dean doesn't say anything.

Zimkitha: I wanted a better life for you.

Dean continues listening to her.

Zimkitha: I love you. I couldn't let go of you.

She sobs.

Dean stands and I'm shocked when he pulls her up.

She collapses on him and he wraps his arms around her.

She cries painfully.

I stare at them and my heart suddenly feels too heavy.

Zimkitha: I love you. I didn't mean to hurt you.

Dean: I know.

Zimkitha looks at him.

Dean: I know.

She rests her head on his chest and he continues holding her.

I find myself staring at Dean.

Is it possible for one to be this open-minded?

I walk out and try to find Derek.

I spot him standing by the pool.

Just as I'm about to go to him, my dad stops me.

Dad: Give him space.

I sigh heavily and nod.

INSERT 215

I walk to Derek.

Me: D-

He looks at me coldly and I immediately turn and walk back inside the house.

I know that look. He doesn't want anyone near him.

When I get to the lounge, Zimkitha and Dean are sitting next to each other.

Zimkitha is drinking water. I sit opposite them.

Zimkitha looks at me and smiles lightly.

Zimkitha: How are you?

I shrug.

We sit in silence for a while.

I look at Dean.

My heart goes out to him.

More than anything though, I admire him.

Yes, he may have had it easier than Derek, but his life was still a lie. I don't know how I would react if I was in the same position.

I don't even want to delve into Zimkitha's situation. The thought of what she went through is enough to send me out.

Suddenly, my stomach growls loudly and I rub it. What bad timing.

Dean: You hungry?

I don't want to make this about me, but a bitch is really hungry.

Dean looks at Zimkitha.

Dean: Hungry?

She shakes her head and stares at me.

Me: He's outside.

She glances at Dean, who shakes his head.

Dean: He needs space.

Zimkitha tries to speak, but stops herself.

Dean: I'll dish up for you, Zi.

Me: No, it-

He stands and walks away before I can even protest.

I stare at Zimkitha.

Me: How did you survive all that abuse?

Zimkitha: I raised Derek for 6 months, while I was staying with Lindelwa and her

husband, Muzi. Muzi eventually got tired of me, and basically kicked me out.

Me: Is that how Derek ended up in an orphanage?

She nods.

Zimkitha: Mam'Rose knew Mam'Thuli, who owns the orphanage. It took a long time for them to get me to give Derek away. I was already attached to him.

Me: Is that why you decided to stay in their lives?

Zimkitha: I already knew that I was going to be in Dean's life. Lindelwa didn't want me to walk away for good. She wanted me to stay in his life. I didn't want to give Derek away. I was more attached to him. She sighs.

Zimkitha: Unfortunately, I couldn't be there for them as much as I wanted to... Liwa and Princess's birth was another obstacle I had to deal with. My parents-

Dean walks in with a plate of food.

Dean: Bamba.

I take the plate.

Me: Thank you.

I focus on my food for the next 5 minutes.

Dean: Are you sure you're not pregnant?

Me: Euww, I'm on contraceptives.

Dean chuckles.

Zimkitha: You think she's pregnant?

Dean nods and I put my plate on the couch.

Me: Let's not do this again.

Zimkitha: Langa, stop bullying, Zi.

Dean looks at Zimkitha.

Dean: So, you really allowed that old woman to give us English names?

Zimkitha looks down.

I don't think she's ready to joke about this.

Dean: What the hell does Dean even mean?

I smile lightly.

Dean never ceases to amaze me.

Me: I'll go check on Derek.

I stand and make my way outside.

My mom and dad are sitting together on the one side of the yard, Khwezi and Senior are together on the other side...

Everyone is scattered.

I walk to where Derek is.

Me: Derek.

He doesn't say anything.

I decide to keep quiet and let him be.

We stand there for a long time.

Derek: I need space.

Me: Okay. I walk away.

I'm glad that he's not lashing out on me.

However, I would like to know what's going through his mind.

I go to my mom and dad.

Mom: How is Zimi?

I shake my head.

Me: She is not fine.

Dad: I wasn't expecting things to turn out like this.

Mom: I am so shocked. The poor woman...

Dad: Generational trauma is a real thing...

My mom sighs heavily.

Mom: This is really heavy...

She looks at me.

Mom: How do you feel?

I shrug.

Me: I'm not judging her.

Mom: She thought she was protecting her children. In that moment, she did what was best for them.

Dad: It's just too complicated...

Me: Only a professional will help them move past this...

My mom nods.

Me: Dean seems okay though.

Dad: Dean is a sensible man... He'll be fine.

I groan. Derek, on the other hand, will not move on easily.

Just then, we watch as Derek walks to the house.

We look at each other nervously and follow him.

My dad has to find a way to stop him from going crazy.

We get to the lounge.

Everyone is here: Zimkitha, Dean, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Lindelwa, Khwezi and Senior.

Derek: I'm trying not to lash out... I've been told that I say hurtful things once I'm in that zone.

We all stare at him.

Derek: I'm not going to go back and forth with any of you...

He looks at Zimkitha.

Derek: I don't know how I feel about you right now...

Zimkitha looks down.

Derek: You have no idea what I've been through.

He glances at Khwezi, who is staring at him intensely. I can't read her expression, but I think she looks angry.

Derek: You thought you were protecting me, but you actually put me in more danger. If I was abused in your household, at least I'd have you and Dean... I wouldn't suffer alone. Pain shared is pain divided, right?

Zimkitha keeps quiet.

Derek: Instead I had to endure some fucked up shit for many years...

Dean: What are you talking about?

I'm confused.

Why is Dean asking this? Doesn't he know what happened in Khwezi's house?

Dean: Derek...

Me: Why don't you ask Khwezi?

Everyone stares at me.

Me: Khwezi should know what Derek is talking about.

Zimkitha looks up.

Dean: What's happening?

Me: Zimkitha, you thought you were protecting Derek, but you actually exposed him to some inexplicable trauma.

Dean and Zimkitha stand slowly, simultaneously.

Everyone's looking at me- my blood is boiling.

Dean: Ziyanda?

Me: Derek had to deal with sexual abuse from these two for many years...

Lindelwa: What?!

Zimkitha: Excuse me?

Me: Khwezi, now is the perfect time to open that big mouth of yours...

INSERT 216 (Unedited)

Lindelwa: What??

I stare at Zimkitha.

Me: Why do you think Derek is so angry?

Zimkitha looks like she's not hearing me.

She doesn't understand what I'm saying.

Dean takes a step closer to me, and I try to step back, but my body fails me.

His body touches mine.

Dean: What are you saying?

Me: Why don't you ask Khwezi?

He turns and looks at Khwezi, who is expressionless.

My dad clears his throat and walks to Dean.

Dad: Dean, go outside, please.

Dean tries pushing my dad, but Liwa miraculously gains strength and grabs

Dean's arms.

Dean: Liwa.

Liwa doesn't say anything. He continues holding Dean's arms.

Dean: Liwa, let me go.

Dad: Dean, go outside.

Dean looks at Derek.

Dean: What did these people do to you?

Derek doesn't say anything.

Dean: For fuck's sake, Derek, what did these people do to you?

My mom walks to Dean and tries touching him, but he backs away.

Liwa is still gripping Dean's arms.

Dean is now laughing lightly.

My dad looks at Khwezi.

Dad: I think you should-

Me: She is not going anywhere. Both of them should stay here and finally be held accountable for their actions.

Dad: Ziya-

Me: Stop. Just stop.

My dad keeps quiet.

Me: I'm sick of this woman thinking she has power over Derek. She is disgusting. She walks around with her head up high, thinking she's untouchable. That all ends today.

Dean: Ziyanda, what the fuck are you saying?

Me: Khwezi abused Derek. Senior knew about it, and didn't do anything, so he is just as guilty. They are not going to get away with it while I'm still alive. Derek has been under her spell for too long. It all ends today.

My mom is in a state of shock. She's trying to act like she's fine, but I can tell that she's freaking out.

Before Dean can say anything, Liwa is already pushing him out of the house. Zimkitha is still staring at us a bit absentmindedly.

Derek looks at me.

He is genuinely sad. It's written all over his face.

Me: Khwezi, you better start speaking, before I catch a case.

Mom: Zi-

Me: No. You all need to know how twisted these people are. I'm tired of pretending.

Khwezi: Are you going to allow this girl to speak to me like this, Derek?

I think we are all stunned at this point.

We stare at her, gobsmacked.

Khwezi looks at Derek.

Khwezi: I clothed you. I fed you. I took care of you. Are you going to allow these people to treat me like this?

Derek doesn't say anything.

Khwezi: I am your mother! I am-

The next few seconds are a blur.

All I hear is Zimkitha's screams.

Next thing, Khwezi is on the floor, and she's bleeding. Zimkitha attacked her with a glass.

I blackout.

Now, I'm being dragged out.

I want to strangle her and make sure that she never lives.

In that moment, I genuinely wanted to kill this woman.

I wanted to watch her die.

Dad: Ziyanda!

I am struggling to breathe, and everyone is surrounding me.

Mom: Baby-

Suddenly, my mom, dad, Nolwazi and Nomvuyo are being pushed away.

Derek: Give her space.

I want to go back in there. I need to make sure that that woman doesn't make it out alive.

I start crying.

Images of a young Derek fill my mind. He had no other place to run to. He was all alone. He had to face these people every day, and suck up the abuse on a daily basis.

I can't stop thinking about the torment he went through.

I find myself feeling the very same emotions he described in his journals...

He had no one in his corner. He suffered. He suffered for many years.

I feel someone holding me, but all I can do is cry. I feel horrible. I don't know how Nkanyezi is going to heal from all the years filled with horror and darkness. His childhood was taken from him. He had to internalize every single experience, and pretend it didn't happen, but all those experiences haunted him... they still haunt him...

I can't let Khwezi live.

Her presence is a serious problem.
How is Derek going to rebuild his life,
while she's still around, thinking she's
untouchable?

I am losing my mind. I am struggling to
breathe.

I am literally losing my mind.
I find myself drifting off...

When I wake up, I groan.

My body is stiff.

Just as I'm about to sit up, Derek stops me.

Me: No, I wa-

Derek: Be quiet.

I keep quiet and look at him.

Derek: You've said enough.

I think back to what happened, and my
heart immediately starts beating fast.

Me: Are you mad at me? I couldn't control
myself.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: If you want to leave me, then that's fine... I don't regret exposing-

Derek: I said be quiet.

I keep quiet.

I'm on the couch.

It's very quiet.

Where is everyone else?

I look around.

Derek: Zimkitha is in hospital. She had an attack.

Me: Heart attack? He shakes his head.

Derek: Panic.

I keep quiet.

Derek: They are with her.

Me: Khwezi?

Derek: Zimkitha knocked her out. She's also in hospital.

I tighten my jaw.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I look at him.

Derek: Don't... Just don't...

Me: Why? Why shouldn't I? I'm pissed.

He keeps quiet as I vent.

Me: I don't understand why she's still alive.

He stares at me till I keep quiet.

It is silent for a very long time.

Derek: Were you really going to kill her?

Me: I don't see why she should be alive.

He takes a deep breath and looks at me softly.

Me: Do you hate me?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Are you going to leave me? I'm sure you hate me.

Derek: I've never had anyone stand up for me.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I mean it- I've never had anyone stand up for me.

Me: I don't know what got over me. I kept thinking about you when you were younger... My heart couldn't take it.

Derek: While you passed out, and everyone went to the hospital, I got some alone time...

I look at him.

Derek: I don't think I would have exposed Khwezi.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I'm still in denial about what I went through... I didn't have the courage to even face her.

Me: How do you feel now?

Derek: At first I was shocked, then I was pissed... However, when I saw you having that attack, I strangely felt at peace... I knew that you were genuinely impacted by this. You wanted to protect me.

I sigh a very huge sigh of relief.

Derek: In that moment, I forgot about everything, and just allowed myself to appreciate your efforts to defend and protect me.

I suddenly want to cry and hold him.

I reposition, and he lies next to me on the couch. I relax in his arms and rest my head on his chest.

Derek: I don't want to shut you out...

You're a good person, Zi. I refuse to lose you because of my fucked up past. You represent hope. Because of you, I'm able to see a brighter future for myself.

I nuzzle my head on his neck.

Derek: No need to cry.

Me: I want you to heal, that's all I want for you.

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: I know... Only time will tell...

I'm suddenly overcome by exhaustion.
Within minutes, I'm dozing off.

Dean: Why didn't you tell me?

Derek doesn't say anything.

I don't move.

They obviously think I'm still sleeping.

Dean: I want you to tell me how I should react...

Derek still doesn't say anything.

Dean: Why didn't you tell me?

Derek: How was I supposed to tell you?

There's silence for a while.

Dean: I thought we told each other everything...

Silence once again.

Dean: Are you surprised that we're biologically related?

Derek: Not really.

Dean: Hmm.

Silence again.

Dean: I'm disappointed that you didn't feel like you could open up with me... In fact, I'm hurt.

Derek: This is not about you.

Dean: Fuck that. I should have known.

Derek sighs heavily.

Dean: So, what's the way forward? I'm going to rely on you to tell me, because my way won't be nice at all...

Derek doesn't say anything.

Dean: I want to get rid of Khwezi. I want her to die a slow and painful death...

I sit up quickly.

Me: Vele. Her presence is no longer needed!

Both of them look at me in shock.

I groan.

I forgot that I wasn't part of this conversation.

Dean: Uvukile umalambane.

I roll my eyes as my stomach continues to growl.

The hunger has been doing the most throughout the day. The tension affected my appetite.

Derek stands and pulls me up from the couch.

Derek: I don't want to talk right now.

He takes my hand and leads me to the kitchen.

Dean: You can run, but you can't hide...especially from me.

My stomach continues growling as Derek warms up some food for me...

INSERT 217 (Unedited)

Dean, Derek and I are still in the lounge, and they're both watching me eat.

Dean: Are you sure you're not pregnant?

Me: Derek, please tell him to stop bullying me.

Derek: Pregnant??

Dean: She has been eating like a pig. Her emotions are all over the place.

Me: So, that means I'm pregnant? It's been a rough month. Derek looks at me in disbelief.

Derek: You think she's pregnant?

Dean: Definitely.

Me: I don't need this negativity in my life.

Derek: Do you think it's possible?

Me: Hai, I'm on contraceptives. Please leave me alone.

Dean: One of my many, and I mean many, special qualities in life is that I'm always right...

Me: Derek, tell him to stop!

Derek chuckles lightly and shrugs.

Derek: I don't know...

Me: Don't be stupid. Star hasn't even turned a year.

Dean: Don't say I didn't tell you.

Me: Mxm.

Just then, Nolwazi emerges.

Nolwazi: Zi, can I have a word with you?

Me: Sure.

I put down my plate and follow her out of the lounge into the kitchen.

Me: Is everything okay?

Nolwazi: Not really.

I look at her.

Nolwazi: I feel like Dean is shutting me out.

I keep quiet.

Nolwazi: I don't know how to support him. She looks at me sadly.

Nolwazi: You two are quite close. I just want to know how he's doing, especially after this afternoon.

Me: The situation with Derek shook him, but I think he's taking it maturely.

She sighs heavily.

Nolwazi: How is Derek?

Me: He's not fine. It's going to take time for him to be okay.

Nolwazi: I want to suggest that we go home, but I'm not sure if Langa will want to.

I keep quiet.

I really don't have the energy to be the middleman. I also want to go back home,

but I'll let Derek decide. For all I know, he might want to go see Zimkitha.

Nolwazi: Anyway, let me prepare Zimkitha's room. Your mom just called me, uthi Zimkitha refuses to stay in hospital, so they're on their way back.

Me: Oh okay.

She walks away and I go back to the lounge.

Dean: Is she okay?

Me: Not really. She feels like you're shutting her out.

He sighs.

Dean: I'll be back...

Me: By the way, Zimkitha is coming back.

Dean: We know...

He stands.

Me: Don't shut out Lwazi. She shouldn't be questioning whether you need her or not.

Dean: You think I'm going to take advice from a loony?

Me: Wow. He laughs as he walks away. I look at Derek.

Me: You want to be here when Zimkitha comes back?

Derek: Dean doesn't want me to leave. I nod.

This is progress. The fact that he agreed to stay means something.

Derek: How are you?

I shake my head.

Me: I should be asking you that.

Derek: I think I'm numb.

Me: Are you doing it on purpose?

He shakes his head.

Derek: You haven't answered my question.

Me: Well, I'm exhausted more than anything. I feel like I'm trapped in an unfamiliar body, and it's draining.

He smiles.

Derek: Even in hectic situations, your drama prevails.

Me: Ohho.

Derek: Come closer.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arm around me.

Derek: Thank you for being here.

Me: You're welcome.

Derek: You think you're pregnant?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not.

Derek: Don't be snappy.

He chuckles as I grunt.

Me: What are your current thoughts on Zimkitha?

He takes a deep breath.

Derek: I had no idea she went through all of that.

Me: I'm still shook...

He keeps quiet.

Me: I thought she knew about what you went through.

He shakes his head.

Derek: I couldn't tell her. I couldn't tell anyone.

Me: I think she's taking it badly.

He nods lightly.

Me: Do you hate her?

He exhales loudly.

Derek: I don't know...

Me: I thought you were going to end things with me and tell me to fuck off.

Derek: For a second, that's exactly what I was going to do.

I look at him disbelief.

Me: You didn't even lash out.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'm still being punished for shit I said the last time. You think I'm going to do that shit again?

I giggle.

Me: I'm glad you managed to hold on to your sanity.

Derek: Gimme a kiss.

Our faces touch and we share a kiss.

Yoh, my body suddenly does strange things.

A bitch hasn't had sex in a minute.

We reposition and I find myself on top of him.

I am hungry- for him.

We both moan as the kissing intensifies.
The exhaustion is gone with the wind.
I can hear someone clearing their throat,
but I'm not interested.

Dean: Hai sies, man!

We stop kissing and look up.

Shit.

As soon as I spot my mother and
Zimkitha, I immediately reposition and
fall to the ground.

Dean: You have no shame...

Derek pulls me from the ground and I sit
next to him.

Mom: Heeh!

Zimkitha is smiling mischievously.

Dean: Sies.

I look at Dean angrily.

Mom: Anyway, we're back.

Derek and I don't say anything.

Dean: Zimkitha, sit...

Zimkitha: Okay.

Dean is such a bossy man.

Zimkitha sits opposite us and she looks at Derek.

She still looks fragile.

Dean: It's getting late. I'm going to drop off Zi's parents. I'll be back soon.

Zimkitha nods.

Mom: We'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Please bring Nkanyezi with you.

Mom: Shap. I'm sure Nolwazi's mom had a hectic day with all the kids there.

Dean: Nandi was with her.

Mom: Oh okay. We'll fetch Star first.

Dean: Alright, let's get going.

My dad walks in and looks around.

Dad: We will see you tomorrow.

Zimkitha nods.

Derek and I stand and we walk outside with my parents.

Dad: How are you feeling, Derek?

Derek sighs.

Derek: I'm fine.

Dad: Kuzolunga. Don't get too caught up in the misery. You have a very bright future. Don't let what you're currently going through determine how things will be in the future. It is possible to move past this.

Derek: Thank you.

Mom: Manje nizolala la?

Derek: No, we'll go back home as well.

Mom: Okay, baby.

My mom gives Derek a long hug.

Mom: Derek, we love you. I hope you know that.

Derek: I do...

Mom: Good...

Dean walks out with Nolwazi.

Dean: Ready?

Dad: Yes, son.

Me: Son yani? Haibo, Derek is your only son. Angazi ungenaphi uDean.

Mom: Kodwa, Zi.

Me: Hai he's not your son.

Dean: I always take what I know I deserve. Your father is what I deserve, so he's mine.

My dad laughs.

Dad: I never thought I'd have children fighting over me.

Dean: Being fatherless will do that to a person.

Dad: I'm glad you're still finding humour in this...

Dean: Sizothini...

Mom: Let's go.

My parents and Nolwazi get in the car.

Me: Langa.

Dean: Ya?

Me: Take Nolwazi out for ice-cream after dropping off my parents.

Dean: I will.

Me: Good.

He gets in the car and we watch as they drive off. Derek wraps his arms around me.

Derek: Where were we?

Me: Now is not the time...

I take his hand and we make our way back inside the house.

Zimkitha is in the lounge.

Zimkitha: Can I have a word with you, Nkanyezi?

I don't know why, but hearing her say 'Nkanyezi' this time around feels different...

Derek: Okay.

Me: I'll give you two space.

Zimkitha: You can stay.

I shake my head.

I know I'm here to support Derek, but I'm not strong enough to have another deep conversation.

I walk upstairs and bump into Liwa.

Me: Hey.

Liwa: Hey.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, how are you?

Liwa: Okay, and yourself?

Me: Okay.

He nods and continues walking down the stairs.

Me: Uhm, Liwa, can we talk?

Liwa: Sure.

I turn and follow him down. We make our way to his office and he pours himself some whiskey before sitting on the couch.

I sit next to him.

I clear my throat.

Me: Uhm, I wanted to apologise for how I dealt with everything.

He looks at me.

I can't read his expression. I think he's tired.

Me: I should have been more empathetic towards you.

Liwa: You can't exactly empathise with someone if you don't know what they are going through.

I keep quiet.

Liwa: You were in the dark.

I sigh.

Me: So, you knew everything?

He nods.

Liwa: Zimkitha has been through a shitload. I witnessed some of the shit my grandparents did to her. From a very young age, I dedicated myself to being there for her and not judging her. She was all alone.

Me: You didn't see anything wrong with keeping this secret?

Liwa: I did. However, it also wasn't my secret to tell. I respected her wishes. She was convinced that they would hate her if they found out that she was their mother. Also, there was no way she was going to tell them, because she is just as bruised, if not more, as Derek. She might seem like a rational person, but Zimkitha is not wired like normal adults. All the years of abuse damaged her. She was conditioned to think she is not worthy of true love. Unfortunately, we are a product of our environment. All Zimkitha wanted was for Dean and Derek to have better lives. She could have aborted them, but she didn't. I don't know, but I think that's a selfless act, considering how fucked up her life was at the time. She didn't want them to grow up feeling inferior, because they are products of rape. She didn't want them to have that stigma.

Me: I hear you.

Liwa: She is a good woman. Yes, her choices and actions are questionable, but Zimkitha is a good person. She wanted to change their paths and ensure that they have better lives. Had she known that Khwezi was a monster, do you really think she would still allow her to take Derek?

I keep quiet.

Liwa: Do you really think she's that evil?

Me: I didn't know that she was in the dark about Derek's experiences.

Liwa: We didn't know. None of us knew.

Me: I get it now.

He nods.

Liwa: I don't know if Dean and Derek will ever forgive me. However, I hope they understand that Zimkitha is not the bad guy here. She is also a victim of circumstance. She has suffered ill

consequences because of factors that were out of her control. I'm terribly sorry that Derek's life was the complete opposite of what Zimi wanted for him. I feel horrible that he went through the exact shit that Zimi thought she was protecting him from... It's a tragedy, really.

Me: Derek will take time to heal.

He nods.

Me: However, I think you all need to see someone. You need to see someone who will deal with you individually and as a group.

Liwa: We'll see... I'm just giving people the space they need. I know I'm the last person they want to interact with.

Me: How is Zimi?

He shakes his head.

Liwa: She was just telling me on our way back that she will never forgive herself... I don't think she'll ever get over it.

Me: I'm hopeful. It is possible for all of you to rebuild your bond.

He sighs and finishes his whiskey.

Liwa: We'll see...

Me: So, are we good?

Liwa: Of course, Ziyanda Dlamini.

We share a hug.

Liwa: Go talk to Nomvuyo as well. She's been meaning to talk to you, but you saw how things turned out.

Me: Okay.

I leave him there and go back to the lounge.

Derek and Zimkitha are still talking.

I'm shocked to see Derek sitting next to her.

Zimkitha is not crying, but she's clearly emotional.

Zimkitha: Please sit, Zi.

I sigh and sit opposite them.

Zimkitha looks at me.

Zimkitha: I want to apologise for causing this mess. It's my fault.

I don't say anything.

Zimkitha: You may not be ready to receive what I have to say, but I'm truly sorry.

I keep quiet.

Zimkitha: One thing I have taught the boys is that when they apologise to someone, they should own up to their actions and not make excuses. I'm not going to try and justify my actions. I just want you to know that I'm sorry.

She looks at Derek.

Zimkitha: Once you're ready, we'll talk properly and I will explain everything to you. I will also answer any questions you may have.

Me: You should also take the verbal punches he'll throw at you.

Derek looks at me and I hide a smile.

Me: I forgive you. I think with this specific situation, it's unrealistic to not justify your actions. You had reasons for what you did. I think it's only fair for Dean and Derek to hear you out.

She starts sobbing quietly.

Zimkitha: I'm really sorry, Derek. I didn't know that Khwezi...

She doesn't complete her sentence.

We watch as she wipes her tears and takes a deep breath.

Zimkitha: I just want you to know that I'm going to kill her...

I shiver a bit.

Somehow, I know she means it.

Derek: That would be an easy way out.

Zimkitha and I stare at him.

Derek: Leave Khwezi, for now...

Zimkitha shakes her head and grunts.

INSERT 218

It's been two weeks since the "incident." I referred all of them to Melinda's clinic. If she could help me make it out alive years ago, then I know she'll do the same with this family. I've been meeting with her individually, and she has encouraged me to take some time away from everyone. I'm waiting on her to give me a discount for my sessions. Phela I gave her clients. I'm now back in the house, packing.

Derek: I can't believe you're leaving...

Me: I'll be back.

Derek: You promise? I nod.

At first, I planned this trip, because I was going to leave Derek permanently, but I was obviously lying to myself. There's no

way I'm going to leave this man. I love him, and I want to be with him.

Right now, however, I need some alone time. I need to take some time away and gather my thoughts.

Derek: Zi...

I snap out of it.

Me: Yes?

Derek: Thank you.

He smiles sincerely and my heart stops for a few seconds.

Me: I love you.

Derek: I know.

He plants a kiss on my lips and continues to help me pack.

I am thrilled to go to Cape Town for a short while...

I almost missed my flight, but I made it safely.

I've checked in and I'm now in my room.

Just as I'm about to text Derek, my phone rings and I laugh.

Me: Ngidi.

Derek: Have you checked in?

Me: The whole point of getting space is to isolate myself, you know?

Derek: I miss you.

Me: Derek, I arrived safely. We'll talk later.

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

Me: Shap.

Derek: Bye.

I hang up.

It's time for me to zone out and do me for now...

I'm one of those people you'll find at a restaurant, sitting by themselves, reading and looking very comfortable.

I don't find it awkward at all. I enjoy going out by myself. Also, I haven't done it in a while. I don't want to become too concerned about my relationship with Derek, that I forget to take care of myself and do the little things that make me happy...

Day 1 has been absolutely amazing. I read throughout the day, drank champagne (I'm starting to really like it) and ate delicious food.

I must admit that I miss Derek and Little Star, but I'm not about to dwell on that.

I've been in Cape Town for four days. As I'm having brunch, I get a video call from Dean.

Dean: Ya wena.

Me: I don't talk to peasants!

Dean: Fuck off!

I laugh happily.

Me: What do you want? My food is getting cold.

Dean: Your future husband has been very unproductive and sheepish since you left. He shows me Derek, who's lying on the couch, watching the Real Housewives. I laugh.

Me: Derek needs to cut the drama.

Dean: He's not used to you being away.

Me: He has to be strong, because I've decided to extend my stay. I'll be back in two weeks.

Derek quickly stands and grabs Dean's phone. Dean is now laughing.

Derek: What??

Me: Oh, hello there.

Derek: What do you mean??

Me: I'm extending my stay.

Derek: Zi, no!

He looks at me in horror.

I laugh at him.

Derek: Don't laugh!

Me: Relax, I'll be back!

Derek: Can't I join you??

Me: No, I'm still enjoying my own company.

He groans and Dean takes the phone from him.

Dean: So, when are you coming back?

Me: In two weeks.

Dean: Do you need money?

Me: Are you blessing me?

Dean: You're poor.

Me: Bless me! I receive! He chuckles and nods.

Dean: Hmkay. Have fun.

Me: Bye! Love you, Star!

Derek: Argh.

I end the call and continue eating.

I've been here for exactly one week.

As usual, I'm exploring different restaurants and interacting with racist caucasians. There's something fierce about the racists in Cape Town. Their racism is not expressed via whispers, they show you s'nine nine ukuthi you ain't shit as a black person. The ones from Joburg are not as courageous.

Anyway, today is dedicated to journaling. I want to reflect on everything that has happened recently.

I think there's hope for this family.

More than anything, their love is genuine.

I think they'll make it.

Also, Melinda does the damn thing.

Someone clears their throat and I look up.

And then what?

Me: Andile?

He seems shocked to see me. I'm also shook. What is he doing here?

Andile: What are you doing here?

Me: A lady never tells.

He chuckles and looks at my table.

Andile: You here alone? I nod.

Andile: You've been MIA.

Me: I've been busy.

He nods lightly.

Me: What are you doing here?

Andile: I have a conference tomorrow...

Me: Work trip.

He nods and smiles.

Me: Oh okay.

Andile: Can I join you?

Me: Sure.

He sits opposite me and I close my journal.

Andile: I'm assuming you're on vacation?

Me: Yep. I was in need of fresh air.

Andile: Joburg does tend to get congested.

Me: Definitely.

Andile: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, hey. It's been a rough couple of weeks.

Andile: Really?

I nod.

Me: Been dealing with some personal issues, but all is well now.

He looks at me thoughtfully.

Andile: That's good to hear.

Me: So, you still haven't told me what your type is.

He coughs.

Andile: Excuse me?

Me: You heard me.

I stare at him.

In case you haven't noticed, verbal diarrhea is a serious problem in my life.

The waiter comes and takes Andile's order. Thereafter, he leaves.

Andile: My type?

I nod.

Andile: Why?

Me: I don't like failing, and the blind date was clearly a failure. I'd like to redeem myself.

I smile.

Andile: No more blind dates.

Me: Why? Phela I hate failing.

He laughs.

Me: The problem is that we didn't have a discussion about your preference, prior to the date.

Andile: Are you going to back down?

I shake my head.

I personally don't think that Andile has a thing for me. The guy is just kind nje.

However, if he does have a thing for me, then I'll find him someone to distract him, because it's not like he'll achieve me. Not only will Derek slaughter him alive, Dean will also do the things.

I stare at him.

I don't think he's my type.

Derek is my type- my only type. I smile as my thoughts drift back to seeing him on that couch, watching the Real Housewives. That was totes adorable and dramatic.

Andile: Ziyanda.

I shake my head lightly, trying to focus.

Me: You were about to describe your ideal woman.

Andile: I don't require a lot, really. As long as she is smart, funny, hardworking, loyal, kind and attractive.

Me: Looks matter?

Andile: Yes and no.

Me: Elaborate. Phela I need to get this right.

Andile: I'm not going to lie and say I don't look at one's looks... Kodwa they're not that important, hence attractiveness is the last requirement.

I nod.

Me: So, looks wise, what type of woman do you want? Are you into petite girls? Thick girls? Big girls? Are you into light skinned girls or dark skinned ones?

Ufunani?

He chuckles.

Andile: I don't have a particular type.
However, I would like the person to be attractive.

Me: Hmkay...

He keeps laughing ngathi I'm joking kanti I'm dead serious. I can't have Andile crushing on me (that's if he is). How are we going to work together? Haibo he must get a distraction.

Andile: I care more about their character. I want to be with a good person, someone who has substance, you know?

Me: Yaas!

If only Niki wasn't in a relationship...

Eish, this thing of not having friends is a problem...

Andile: When should I expect to meet my future person?

Me: Soon! Don't you worry.

His food arrives.

Andile: When are you coming back to work?

Me: As soon as I'm back in Joburg.

Andile: You sure you're good?

Me: I'm much better, hey. This trip has helped me.

Just then, his phone rings.

He answers.

Andile: Derek?

Wow.

Andile: Yes, I arrived safely... Ya, I just need to meet with him first and see what's up... Ya...

He looks at me and smiles.

Andile: You won't guess who I bumped into... I'm with Ziyanda...

After a while, he gives me his phone and I clear my throat.

Me: Star.

Derek: Wena na... Why didn't you tell me that you're living your best life?

Me: I thought I did yazi.

He chuckles.

Derek: Andile must feel blessed. Some of us are deprived of your presence while he gets to drown in it.

Me: It's a small world...

Derek: Indeed...

Me: I'll call you later. Should I give Andile the phone?

Derek: No, it's okay. I'm watching the reunion of the Real Housewives.

Me: Without me?

Derek: Hai phela, angithi you're having fun with Andile-

Just then, I hear shuffling.

Dean: Ye wena, Ziyanda.

Me: Yoh, I can't hear you. You're breaking.

Dean: Ungazonya wena. What the hell is wrong with you?

Me: Tell Star I love him.

I end the call and hand over the phone to Andile.

Me: So, as soon as I'm in Joburg, I'll see what I can do for you.

Andile: Noted.

We go on to talk about work, and he fills me in on everything I missed.

INSERT 219

Andile and I have been at it for a few hours.

Andile: What are you doing tonight?

Me: Tonight?

He nods.

Me: Sleeping and watching TV.

He nods.

Me: Why? Do you have plans?

Andile: I'm going out with a few friends.

Me: Really? What do you mean? Like clubbing?

He chuckles and shakes his head.

Me: I've been living in a bubble for the past two years.

Andile: Would you like to join us?

Me: I'm tired now. I'll let you know once I've taken my nap.

Andile: Okay, grandma.

Me: Don't come for me.

Andile: You convinced me to come to a blind date that didn't work out. You owe me.

Me: Tell me about your friends.

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: I don't hang around random people. I need to have an idea of your people.

He laughs.

Me: Tell me...

Andile: Well, there's two guys and one girl.

I nod.

Andile: I don't hang around kids, Ziyanda.

Me: I don't want to be around dramatic and petty people.

Andile: You don't say...

Me: I'll call you later.

Andile: Sure.

He pays for the bill.

Me: Such a gentleman.

Andile: I try...

We go our separate ways. As soon as I get to the hotel, I pass out.

When I wake up, it's around 6pm.

I go through my phone.

I'm shocked that Derek hasn't called or sent messages.

I call my mom first.

Mom: Baby!

Me: Hello, sthandwa.

Mom: How are you?

Me: I'm relaxed.

Mom: I'm glad. Ubuya nini? Little Star misses you, it's very clear now. She's very restless.

Me: Soon.

I love Little Star, but she needs to understand that her mother almost died. She must be patient kancane.

Me: How are things that side?

Mom: Everyone is calm. Kuzolunga.

Me: That's good.

We continue chatting for a while.

Me: Shap ke.

Mom: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and video call Derek.

He answers after a while.

He looks like he's busy cleaning his closet, something he does weekly.

Me: Heey!

Derek: Hey.

Me: Shame, you don't have to be so grumpy!

He looks at me.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay.

Me: I just woke up from an amazing nap...

Derek: I can see.

Me: Derek, come on.

Derek: I'm not used to being away from you.

I try not to roll my eyes.

I won't tell him that I've decided that moving forward, I'm going to dedicate one weekend (monthly) to self-care. I'm going to use that weekend to do me. This thing of being around him and his people everyday is what drives me crazy.

Derek: I'm glad you're good.

Me: I just wanted to check in and let you know that I'm going out tonight.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Derek: For dinner?

Me: Ya...

Derek: Alone? I know you're a loner, but isn't that extreme?

Me: Andile asked me to join him and his friends.

Derek: Is it?

Me: Aha. I watch him closely, trying to analyse his expression, but he's not giving me anything. He is still looking at me blankly.

Derek: Alright. I'm sure you'll have a good time.

Me: Do you mind?

Derek: Not at all. You are not a prisoner, baby.

He smiles.

That's that fake smile.

Me: Okay then. I won't stay out till late though.

Derek: Bye. I love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call and chuckle.

If Dean was around, I know I wouldn't be allowed to go.

It's around 8pm and I'm waiting for Andile to fetch me.

He eventually calls to let me know that he has arrived.

I get in the car.

Andile: Hey.

Me: Hey.

Andile: Are you well-rested?

I nod.

I am quite excited.

I think it's because I'm planning on drinking Smirnoff Storm waya waya. I'm tired of champagne. Phela mina I gobble down the tshwal quick fast. I can't be refilling that tiny flute every minute.

We get to the restaurant and we are led to our table outside.

Andile's friends are already there.

They greet him happily.

Andile: This is Ziyanda.

The girl looks at me excitedly.

Andile: Zinzi, relax...

Zinzi: You finally have a woman!

Me: Whoaa!

Andile: No, no, no. Ziyanda is a colleague.

Me: And, Ziyanda is getting married soon.

Zinzi laughs.

Zinzi: I'm sorry!

She takes my hand and touches my ring.

Zinzi: Yhu, I'm sorry.

Me: It's okay.

Andile: Geesh, anyway, Ziyanda, this is

Zinzi... This is Thokozani and this is

Tebogo.

Me: Nice to meet you.

Zinzi: Nice to meet you too!

We all sit and get our drinks.

Zinzi: You from Joburg?

Me: Yep. Are you from here?

Zinzi: Not really, but we're studying full-time at UCT.

Me: Master's?

Zinzi shakes her head. Zinzi: PhD.
Lord.

Am I the only bitch that stopped going to school after doing their Honours?

They go on to tell me about what they are studying.

Zinzi: How is Andile? We are worried about him.

Me: Why?

Zinzi: He has been single for too long. I chuckle.

Me: Don't be too hard on him. There's nothing wrong with being single.

Tebogo: Hai, he must find someone.

Me: Don't worry, I'll hook him up.

Tebogo: Keep us posted, please.

Me: Will do.

We continue chatting for a while until our drinks are served.

They seem like good people.

It's now around 10pm and I'm tipsy.

I go to the bathroom to pee. As I'm washing my hands, someone squeals and I look at them weirdly.

Me: Nomi??

Nomi: Zizi!

We share a hug.

She is also very tipsy.

Me: What are you doing here??

Nomi: I don't have a job. All I do is spend my parents' money- that's what I do for a living!

I am shook.

Also, she looks great!

Nomi: What are you doing here??

Me: Needed a break from everything.

Nomi: Girl, you don't even need to explain!

She hugs me again excitedly.

Nomi: Are you here alone??

I shake my head.

Me: I'm here with Andile's friends.

Nomi: Andile?

I nod.

Nomi: The idiot that tossed me?

I clear my throat and she laughs happily.

Nomi: Fuck him!

She washes her hands and we walk out.

Nomi: Let's go!

Me: Uhm-

She shakes her head.

Nomi: We are young! We are alive! Let's do the most!

How old is she? I'm not trying to judge her, but she's behaving like a varsity student.

Nomi: Ditch that hot motherfucker! Let's paint the town red!

We get to the table and Andile looks shocked. I clear my throat.

Nomi: Take your bag, Zi.

Lord.

Zinzi: And then?

Me: This is my friend, Nomi.

She's not really my friend, but I don't want to be rude.

Nomi: Hi, everyone.

She looks at me.

Nomi: Your bag.

Andile looks at me.

Me: Uhm, Nomi wants to go out.

Zinzi: That was part of our plan. We can go together.

Nomi: Hai, we're okay. You guys can carry on eating your chicken wings. Zizi, let's go.

She takes my bag.

Nomi: Were you drinking Storm?

I nod.

Nomi: Sies, Ziyanda.

I feel like everything is happening too fast right now!

What's happening?

Also, ndi-woozy, man.

I'm not following.

Andile: Where are you going?

Nomi: We'll see. She takes my Storm.

Nomi: I'm sure Andile will pay the bill.

Phela we covered his bill when he rejected me and stormed off.

I look at her in disbelief.

Nomi: Get it? Stormed off?

She shows me my unfinished Storm and giggles.

Is this real?

I find myself laughing in shock.

Andile: Zi, will you be fine?

Nomi: Hai suka, asijoli nawe wena.

She takes my arm and leads me out of the restaurant.

Me: Nomi!

Nomi: Hai suka!

We get in a car.

Me: Whose car is this?

Nomi: My uncle. That's his driver.

I look at the man and greet him. He greets me back with a smile and then glances at Nomi expectantly.

Nomi tells him where to go, then he drives off.

Me: I am shook.

She giggles and grabs a bottle of champagne from God knows where.

Yazi, Nomi's life is a movie.

Nomi: We're going to have lots of fun!

We get to a club and go to our table. Yazi, I'm from the township. I'm ghetto. Yes, I fool people with my great English, but I'm ghetto. You will never find me in such

spaces. These clubs are not for me. I don't see why I should book a table for two grand and be surrounded by people who are constantly taking videos for their followers on Instagram, showing off big ass shiny champagne bottles. I'm too ghetto for such people. I can't stand being around wealthy young people.

Iyabahlanyisa imali.

Nomi is right at home ke yena, because the bitch is filthy rich. Mina, the only way I can survive this is by getting drunk.

Nomi pours me champagne and I gobble it down.

Me: I need something stronger. This is not working for me.

She laughs as she orders gin.

Nomi: I make mean cocktails!

Heyi, Nomi can party!

I judged her too soon.

We are both sweating from all the dancing.

I'm drunk, but I'm still aware of what is going on.

Nomi reminds me of Niki- she knows how to have a good time, and that shit is contagious.

As we're dancing, I feel someone wrap their arms around me.

I turn around and push the person.

A girl can't even go out in peace without a horny man thinking he can claim.

Nomi slaps him and we continue dancing and drinking.

I've lost track of time.

Nomi and I make our way outside.

We're laughing and giggling about nothing in particular.

Me: Where's your driver?

Nomi: Argh.

She takes out her phone and dials his number. I think that whole process took her 10 minutes.

Out of nowhere, Nomi and I are pushed roughly.

Nomi falls to the ground.

This man walks to us and I immediately recognise him.

He's the guy who wrapped his arms around me and was slapped by Nomi.

Nomi is busy screaming.

Me: What the hell?

Guy: Who the fuck do you think you are?
How dare you put your hands on me?

Me: What the hell! You-

I feel my whole body shiver as he throws a punch at me.

I don't know where I got the strength from, but I fight him.

I throw fists as well.

Thankfully, he's also drunk, so he's not that strong.

Nomi hits him with her bag while I continue punching him back to back.

Suddenly, he regains his strength and throws another punch.

I lose it.

Uyanya lo.

Out of nowhere, people are intervening.

Person: Ziyanda!

Two guys hold the idiot.

Andile: Ziyanda??

Me: He attacked us! Andile pushes me away and goes on to beat up the guy.

I also attempt to continue punching him, but someone else stops me.

The bouncers intervene and stop the fight.

Andile explains what happened.

Tebogo, Andile's friend, takes Nomi and I to the car.

Nomi: I want to know his name! My dad will deal with him!

She keeps screaming and I slap her.

Me: Shut up.

She looks at me in shock.

Me: Get in the car.

She gets in the car.

Andile walks to us.

Andile: Get in.

I get in the car.

Andile drives off.

Andile: You okay?

Me: Ya.

It's silent for the rest of the way.

After a while, we finally get to the hotel.

Andile: Will you be okay, or should I accompany you?

Me: We'll be fine.

Nomi: Ziyanda is not your girlfriend wena.

With that said, she walks out of the car.
Lord.

Me: I'm sorry about that.

Andile: Genuinely don't give a fuck.

I sigh.

Andile: Shap.

Me: Thanks.

I get out of the car and that's when I realise that I'm actually quite drunk.

Nomi and I walk in.

We approach the reception.

Haibo!

Nomi laughs.

Nomi: Yhuu I'm so drunk! For a second there I thought I saw Lwazi!

Me: It's them!

Derek, Dean and Nolwazi are standing there...

Nomi: Really?

Me: Let's go to your place-

Nomi: Lwazi!

Me: Nomi, really??

Nolwazi turns and looks back.

Nomi: Yaaas! Friend!

Fuck.

Dean and Derek turn.

Nomi: Zi, your man is here too! I groan as all three of them walk to us like Charlie's Angels.

INSERT 220

Nomi throws herself at Nolwazi.

Nomi: Friend!

I feel like I'm dreaming.

I just want to sleep.

Derek walks to me.

The look on his face?

He looks like he is struggling to grasp what is happening.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I wanna sleep! Sleeeep!

Dean: You're making noise, you hooligan.

Me: Ngifuna ukulalaaa!

Nomi: Let's go out, guys!

Nomi and I laugh.

Dean: Ziyand-

Me: Heyiii, in the words of Nomi,
ANGIJOLI NAWE!

They all stare at me in shock, then Nomi starts laughing all over again and I join her.

Me: Who invited you here? Who asked you to come??

Nomi: Nobaaady baybaay!

Me: Nomi, let's go sleep in MY room! She grabs my arm and we stagger to my room. I don't know what happened thereafter.

When I wake up, the first thing I do is vomit.

Seconds later, someone else vomits.

I vomit even more.

Who put this ice bucket here?

I continue vomiting.

After a while, I groan.

I'm in pain.

I am in excruciating pain!

As soon as I stand up, I fall.

I sit there staring at nothing.

I'm still drunk.

Nomi: Friend.

Me: Hmm.

I try to stand again and wince.

Nomi: Shit, this hangover is bad. I feel like

I'm dying!

I make my way to the bathroom.

I feel someone shaking me and I groan loudly.

I open my eyes and see Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Zi... I look at her.

Nolwazi: You have to get up.

I look around. I'm in the bathroom.

I'm in the bathtub.

My clothes are still on. How did I end up sleeping here?

Nolwazi helps me get out of the bathtub.

Nolwazi: Did you really pass out here?

I shrug.

Nolwazi: I'll fill it up with water this time.

She smiles sweetly.

I go to my bed and throw myself there next to Nomi.

I pass out immediately.

I don't know why I keep struggling to wake up. I just want to be in bed till I feel better.

I'm awakened by the need to pee. I get up and go to the bathroom.

As soon as I see my face in the mirror, I let out a scream.

I rush out and find Nomi lying on the bed, naked.

Me: Nomi!

I shake her.

Nomi: Hmm?

Me: What happened to my face??

She opens her eyes and groans.

Nomi: You got into a fight. I sit on the edge of the bed and allow my mind to refresh. I remember everything that happened.

I got into a fight with a drunk man.

I walk back to the bathroom and stare at my reflection.

My left eye is badly swollen and it's purplish. I try to touch it, and squeal.

The pain is too much.

Then, I remember the last part of our night.

Derek is here.

Why?

Who invited him here?

I'm not thrilled about this one bit. He needs to respect my need for space.

I take a shower.

I don't care that I'm in a 100 star hotel, I just struggle with using other people's bathtubs. I can't stop think about strangers' butt cracks marinating in there...

I'd rather use the shower, and put on my flip flops.

I hiss as I think about Derek, Dean and Nolwazi.

I know Dean is the one who suggested they come here.

I wince as the water splashes on my left eye.

How dare they?

Why would Derek agree to coming, when he knows that I want to be left alone for some time? I'm not happy about this.

There's nothing funny about them showing up unexpectedly and not asking for permission.

Petty is upset. She is not happy.

After a while, I finish up. Nomi walks in the bathroom.

Nomi: Please fill up the tub for me.

Me: Hai I'm not your maid.

Nomi: Moody much?

I walk out and get dressed. I'm actually quite annoyed by these people.

Can't a person get personal space in peace?

Ngapha my eye is doing the most.

Rha.

It's around 1pm and I haven't eaten. I've decided that I'm not going to have lunch here. I'll go somewhere else, hopefully no one will follow me.

Just then, there's a knock on the door.

The door opens and Dean and Derek walk in. I don't know. I feel like now that the truth is out, they look even more alike. It's creepy.

Dean: She's alive...

They sit on the bed and look at me.

Derek still looks confused, I don't know what his problem is.

Dean: Where are you off to?

Me: I don't know.

Dean: You're not joining us for lunch?

Me: No.

I look at Derek.

Me: Why are you here?

Dean: Take off those sunglasses, you know I hate that shit indoors.

Me: No. You all need to leave me the fuck alone. Do you not understand what personal space means?

I look at Derek.

Derek: Hello to you too.

I take a deep breath.

Me: Derek, why are you here?

Derek: I'm here for a work conference.

Me: Oh, really?

He nods coolly.

Me: And, out of all the hotels in this city, you chose this one? And you dragged your sidekick as well?

Dean: Ungazonya wena. Who is-

Me: Shut up. I'll deal with you next.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Derek, I feel disrespected.

Derek: Have I bothered you since I got here?

I cross my arms.

Derek: I'm here for work.

Me: Andile said the conference is today.

Derek: Starts today and ends on Friday.

Me: When were you planning on telling me about this conference?

Derek: You've obviously been busy.

He thinks I'm stupid. He also thinks I can't see the smile he's trying to hide.

I focus on Dean.

Me: And, you just had to tag along, didn't you?

Dean: Heyi, do-

Me: Shut up.

Dean: For your information, Nolwazi wanted a break from Joburg as well. She's the one who suggested this hotel. How was I supposed to know that you're here?

Me: Bullshit.

Derek: This is all a coincidence, baby.

Me: Mxm.

He stands and steps closer to me, but I step back.

Me: Don't touch me, Satan!

He chuckles.

Derek: Baby, I'm here for work, I promise.

Me: Then get out and do you! Can't a bitch get a break from you people??

Dean: Futsek wena. You're making it seem like we are bad news.

Me: Argh.

I get my bag and Derek grabs me before I can escape.

Derek: Not even a hug?

Me: No, you don't deserve shit from me. I'm going to leave this hotel.

Derek: Baby, stop.

Just then, Nomi emerges.

We all stare at her in shock.

Our jaws are on the floor.

The bitch is naked.

Nomi: Oh... I didn't know we had guests. She casually takes the towel I was using, and wraps it around her body.

Nomi: Hey, guys.

She smiles.

Dean: Nomi, why unje ye?

Nomi: I didn't know you guys were in here.

Dean: So is that what you do with Ziyanda?

Nomi: Hawu, don't you get naked around your friends?

I quickly push Derek away.

Me: I'm hungry. I'm leaving.

Derek: Ziyanda come on.

Nomi: Zi, how's your eye?

Derek: Eye?

Nomi looks at me sadly.

Nomi: She has the biggest blue eye I've ever seen.

Derek: What?

Me: Damn it, Nomcebo!

Derek takes my arm and pulls me closer to him.

I try to fight him off, but he has already snatched off my shades.

Derek: What the fuck?

I look at him angrily.

I'm hungry!

Dean: Ziyanda, what the hell happened??

Derek presses himself against me and stares at my eye.

Nomi: We got into a fight with some guy who wanted to fuck Zi.

Me: Really, Nomi? Can't you shut up for just a minute?

Nomi: Yoh, I'm sor-

Me: Hai man. Go get dressed and get out of my room.

Nomi walks to the bathroom.

Me: Derek, let go of me.

He lets go of me and I sit on the edge of the bed next to Dean.

Dean: What happened?

Me: Got into a fight with a drunk guy.

Nothing deep.

Derek: Nothing deep? Do you not see how your eye is?

I try to roll my eyes, but end up wincing from the pain.

Dean: She was with Andile.

Me: No, I wasn't.

I look at Derek.

Me: I was with Nomi.

Dean: Unamanga. You're doing that stupid thing of yours where you try to protect idiots.

Me: You don't know me wena.

I stand and look at both of them.

Me: Don't you have therapy sessions to attend? Don't you have trauma to get over?

They look at me in disbelief.

Me: I want to be left alone. Go away.

I take my shades from the floor and put them on.

Just as I'm about to take my bag, Dean quickly rushes to it and grabs it before I can.

Me: Dean.

Dean: You're not going anywhere until you tell us what happened and who punched you.

Me: Dean, give me my bag!

Dean: No.

Me: Dean-

Dean: No.

Me: Give me my bag!

Dean: No-

I push him hard and he backs off. I push him again and he loses balance a bit.

I snatch my bag from him, and hit him with it twice.

Me: Futsek!

I throw another hit and then walk to the door.

Me: Leave me alone!

I walk out and shut the door.

INSERT 221

I get to the restaurant and place my order.

I'm still drunk.

I'm hungry.

I'm tired.

The last people I want to see are currently forcing themselves on me.

I'm annoyed.

I don't care how much you miss me. We had an agreement. I made it clear that I want to be alone. I made it crystal clear that I need some time away from the toxicity. Yet here you are, making it seem like I'm the crazy one for being angry? I want to be left alone.

I don't want a vacation family vacation.
Had I wanted one, I would have requested
one.

I am beyond annoyed.

I don't find this cute or funny at all.

He must take his sidekicks and stay very
far from me.

I call Melinda.

She answers after a while.

Melinda: Zi?

She knows I need to vent.

Me: Derek decided to come here with
Dean and Nolwazi.

Melinda: Really?

Me: Yes. They didn't even let me know, let
alone ask for permission.

She listens.

Me: I'm frustrated. I feel like he thinks my
need for space is a joke. None of them are
taking it seriously.

Melinda: I thought Derek understood your need for space.

Me: Apparently not! I'm really angry, Melinda. I just want to be left alone, is that too much to ask?

Melinda: Not at all.

I groan.

Melinda: Did you remove yourself from the situation?

Me: Ya.

Melinda: Is this the only reason you're upset?

Me: Not really.

Melinda: I'm listening.

Me: I got into a fight with a drunk man last night. I was in a club, and he started grabbing me inappropriately... As we were about to leave, he attacked me. I got into a fist fight with him. My eye is fucked up.

Melinda: Oh, no...

I groan angrily.

Me: I just don't understand why a woman can't go out freely. We always have to stress about these animals who don't respect us.

Melinda: It's angering.

Me: This man triggered me. For a moment there, it felt like I was trying to defend myself from that abusive ex of mine.

I continue venting for a while.

Melinda: Sit Derek down and explain how you feel.

Me: He won't listen.

Melinda: You have to tell him.

Me: Hmkay.

Melinda: Let me know how it goes.

Me: Hmkay. Bye.

Melinda: Bye.

I end the call and my order arrives after some time.

I take out my journal and begin reflecting on last night.

I hate the way that stranger made me feel. I think that's what pisses me off more than anything.

The Derek thing is the cherry on top...

It's now around 4pm.

I've just paid my bill.

My phone rings and I answer it.

Me: Hello, Andile.

Andile: Hi, how are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Andile: I'm good. I was just checking in.

Me: My eye is fucked up.

Andile: I can't believe that idiot actually put his hands on you two.

I sigh.

Andile: Well, I'm glad you're okay.

Me: When are you going back to Joburg?

Andile: I'm here for the whole week. The conference ends on Friday.

Mxm.

Andile: Derek called me just now, telling me that he's going to join me.

Me: Is it?

Andile: Yep.

Me: Hmkay. Bye.

Andile: You sure you're good?

Me: Ya, just tired from yesterday.

Andile: You guys were wasted.

Me: I may have underestimated Nomi.

He chuckles.

Me: Bye.

Andile: Shap. I hang up.

When I get to my room, it's locked.

For fuck's sake.

I left my key in there when I stormed off.

Who has my key now?

I dial Nolwazi's number.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey. Can I have my room key?

Nolwazi: Dean and I are not around. You can go to Derek's room, he has your key.

She tells me his room number.

Me: Bye.

Nolwazi: Bye, love.

I hang up and make my way to Derek's room on the other side.

I knock.

No answer.

I knock again.

The door opens after 5 minutes.

Derek: Hey.

Me: Hey.

He steps back.

Me: Can I have my key?

Derek: Come in.

I walk in. He locks the door.

Me: I just want my key, Derek.

Derek: Dean has your key.

Me: Nolwazi says you have it.

He shakes his head.

Derek: Dean took it.

Me: So, what must happen now?

Derek: Isn't he in his room?

Me: Derek! I don't have time for this. Give me my key!

Derek: Baby, Dean has it.

Me: Damn it.

I walk to the bedroom and take off my shoes and my dress, then I get in bed. I'm too tipsy and hungover for this shit.

When I wake up, I find Derek sleeping next to me.

Before I turn, he pulls me closer to him and our faces almost touch.

Derek: Baby.

I don't say anything.

Derek: I don't want you to be mad at me.

Me: How do you expect me to react? You dismissed my wishes.

He sighs.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Why? You're telling me you couldn't wait another two weeks?

Derek: No, Ziyanda, I was suffering from separation anxiety.

I hiss.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: I don't accept your apology.

Derek: You want me to leave?

Me: Yes.

Derek: Yoh, okay.

He places his lips on mine.

Derek: You don't forgive me?

I shake my head.

He kisses me.

Derek: Who punched you?

Me: I don't know.

Derek: You sure?

Me: Ya.

Derek: It looks painful.

Me: It is.

He plants a kiss on my lips and repositions so he's on top.

I'm trying my best to hold on to my anger, but he's making it very difficult.

Sex with Derek is something else. When we're in the moment, I lose all sense of reality. He could easily ask me to take out

a loan for him, and I'd run to Capfin, naked.

He cums a short while after me, and we continue holding on to each other.

Derek: I'm sorry, okay?

Me: You think one quick round is going to tame me? He smiles brightly.

Me: You still have a long way to go.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You still want me to leave?

Me: We'll see...

He laughs quietly.

Derek: I haven't eaten all day.

Me: Why?

Derek: When The Great Dlamini is mad at you, your appetite perishes.

I giggle.

Just then, there's a knock on the door.

He puts on his gown and gets out of bed.

A minute later, I can hear Dean and Nomi.

Dean: Did she come to you?

Derek: Yep.

Dean: I guess you're smart after all...

Dean walks in and looks at me.

Dean: All that anger stemmed from being horny?

I don't say anything.

Dean: Umubi kanjani with that blue eye.

Me: I refuse to acknowledge your negativity.

Nomi sits on the bed and looks at me.

How does she manage to look so great, while I'm out here looking like the ugly swollen stepsister?

Nomi: By the way, my uncle found the idiot who attacked us, Zi. The situation is being dealt with as we speak.

Me: Huh??

Dean: For fuck's sake, Nomi. Why can't you keep your mouth shut?

Me: How did you find him??

Nomi: Derek called the club and asked them to check the camera footage. My uncle then found him. It really wasn't too complicated.

I look at Derek.

Derek: What?

I sigh.

Me: Can you all excuse me. I'd like to get dressed.

Dean: Don't worry, we're leaving. We just came to make sure that you were here.

Me: Nomcebo, do you have my room key?

Nomi looks at me weirdly.

Nomi: Nomcebo? Who's that?

Kanti what's her name?

Dean starts laughing.

Dean: You're both such idiots.

Nomi: Nomthandazo.

I don't say anything.

All this time I thought she was Nomcebo.

Nomi: Anyway, Zi, are you keen on going out tonight?

Dean: No-

Me: Actually, I would love to.

Nomi looks at me excitedly.

Nomi: Are you serious??

Me: Yep.

Dean and Derek stare at each other.

Nomi: You must invite Andile. I refuse to believe that he doesn't want me. I'll fuck him and change his entire life.

Whoa.

Nomi: Let's have dinner first. I'll go home to freshen up properly, so I can woo Andile.

With that said, she walks out.

Derek: You're going out again?

I look at him blankly.

Dean: I swear I'm being tested.

Me: Dean, who invited you here?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Futsek, man. Angijoli nawe.

Dean: The day you decided to include yourself in my brother's life is the day you signed up for me as well.

Me: Mxm!

Dean: Ngobubi.

Me: Derek!

Derek stifles a laugh.

Derek: Just go, Dean.

Dean: Now we have to babysit you.

Me: You weren't invi-

Derek: Baby, you can't possibly think that getting drunk with Nomi is safe.

I look at Derek in disbelief

Derek: I'm not crazy. I won't allow that.

Me: Just go have your damn dinner, and leave me alone!

Derek chuckles as he walks to the bathroom.

Dean: Thankfully, your ugly face is enough to chase stray dogs away.

Me: Out!

Dean laughs as he walks out and closes the door.

Nxa.

INSERT 222 (Unedited)

I'm now in my room.

I'm applying makeup on my ugly face.

I need to make sure that this black eye doesn't show. The swelling has went down a bit, but the eye is still not fully open.

I look at myself.

I'm not as ugly as I was earlier. At least I am lookable.

Just then, there's a knock on the door, and I ignore it.

I want Derek to reevaluate his life today.
I'll be a sexy swollen-faced bitch.

My phone rings.

I answer.

Me: Yes.

Derek: I've been knocking for 20 minutes
now.

Me: Ufunani?

Derek: Baby, please open the door.

I walk to the door and open it.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: What?

Derek: Umuhle.

Me: I know.

I walk back to the bathroom and leave
him there.

I finish up and when I walk out, Dean,
Nolwazi and Nomi are there.

I'm actually glad that I'm not the only one
who put in effort. We all look great! Well,

my face is not 100% right now, but fuck that, I look good!

I like Nomi a lot. She's cool. I think she's officially my party girl.

Derek: Ladies, you look beautiful.

Nolwazi: I don't go out a lot, so I'm very excited.

Nomi: Friend, Zizi and I had a great time. Tonight will be even better! Our table is booked and ready.

Just then, there's a knock on the door.

Nolwazi: I'll get that.

She walks to the door.

She comes back with a bottle of champagne.

Dean: You know I don't drink that shit.

Derek also shakes his head disapprovingly.

Nolwazi: Party Poopers!

Nomi: We need to make a toast!

Nolwazi pops the bottle and pours some for all of us.

Nomi: To a fun night with real-ass friends!

Nolwazi: Yaas!

I don't know why Dean and Derek are tagging along. They're still in the doghouse.

Nomi, Nolwazi and I finish the bottle in 10 minutes.

It's now around 7pm.

The plan is have dinner first and then go to the club.

Never in my life did I think I'd willingly go to a club. Phela I hate clubbing, but Nomi is such a fun person to be around, that I don't mind!

We get to the restaurant and go to our table.

Nolwazi: I don't like that waitress.

Nomi laughs.

I also don't like her, there's something shady about her.

The waitress comes back.

Waitress: My name is Anele.

Nomi: Hey, Anele.

Nomi orders champagne for us and Derek orders whiskey for him and Dean.

Anele then takes our food orders.

She looks at Derek and smiles too brightly for my liking.

Anele: Would you like to try our steak?

Everyone loves it.

Me: He doesn't eat meat.

Anele looks at me sharply, while everyone looks at me in shock. I look at Derek.

Me: He's vegetarian.

Dean suddenly laughs loudly.

Me: Right, Star?

Derek: Uhm, ya. I'm vegetarian.

He then looks at the waitress.

Derek: I don't eat meat

Anele: Well, we have a great selection of-

Me: Bring him a green salad. He doesn't eat a lot.

Anele glances at Derek, hoping he'll disagree, but the nigga knows better.

Derek: Yes...

I look at her.

Me: Thanks, that will be all.

She walks away and I huff.

Dean is still laughing.

Nolwazi: You did well, Zi. I was also thinking about checking her!

Nomi: Yhu, I can't relate.

Derek looks at me. It's clear that he's trying not to laugh at me.

Nolwazi: Friend, kanti when is Andile arriving?

Nomi: Don't ask me. Zi is the middleman.

Nolwazi looks at me and I take out my phone.

I see a message from Andile.

Me: He says he'll meet us at the club.

Nolwazi: Alright.

Nomi: He better come.

Nolwazi: I've never seen you this interested in someone.

Nomi: He seems cool. He's just a little stuck up.

Nolwazi: He'll open up.

Nomi: Hopefully, he'll open up my legs.

Nolwazi: Nomi!

Yhu, Nomi is being very aggressive right now, and I'm nervous. Andile made it clear that he doesn't want her. I don't know what will happen tonight, but I'm nervous for Nomi.

Nomi: Let me go to the bathroom.

She walks away.

Dean: Is anyone going to tell her that Andile is in love with Ziyanda?

I take a napkin and throw it at him.

Me: Derek, tell him to stop!

Derek looks at Dean and they chuckle.

Derek: Andile is not in love with Ziyanda.

Me: Is that all??

Derek: What do you want me to say, baby?

Me: Tell him to stop annoying me!

Nolwazi: Kodwa, Langa, you're doing the most.

Dean continues chuckling.

Me: It won't be nice when I shut you out.

Dean: Okay, I'm sorry...

I grunt.

Dean: But, Nomi needs to stop chasing him. He made it clear that she's not his type.

Nolwazi: I'll talk to her.

Nomi walks back and sits.

Minutes later, the waitress comes back with our drinks.

Nomi: Thanks, Anele.

Anele smiles as she looks at Derek.

When she looks at me, she switches up. I look at her coldly.

Nomi: More champagne!

Nolwazi: Yaaas!

At this point, I have decided that I will not eat or drink anything from here. I know what these waitresses are capable of when they don't like you. For all I know, my burger patty will be stuffed in her tired vagina before it is served, and my water will be mixed with her semen-infested spit.

I'm not having that.

Me: Can I please have bottled water.

Anele: Sure.

She walks off.

Nomi: Water?? Really??

Me: Ya, I'll drink later.

I feel Derek's hand on my thigh. I look at him and he winks.

Me: What?

He plants a kiss on cheek and I feel his lips by my ear.

Derek: I'm finding you very cute right now.

I roll my eyes and wince.

Derek: Is it still painful?

Me: Ya.

Derek: That bastard is lucky I wasn't there.

Me: You would have beat him up?

Derek: Of course.

Me: Andile beat him up.

Derek: Really?

I nod.

Me: Didn't even know that he was in the same club.

Derek: I'll thank him personally.

He plants another kiss on my cheek and I find myself smiling.

Derek: Is that a smile I see?

Me: Don't come for me.

He laughs as he drinks his whiskey.

When the food comes, I stick to eating the fries. As scrumptious as the burger looks, I avoid it.

Derek on the other hand, looks miserable as he chews his green salad.

Dean: How's it going there, Mr. Vegetarian?

Nolwazi and Nomi laugh.

Nolwazi: That's what you get for entertaining random bitches.

Derek: I didn't even do anything!

Nomi: You're attractive. That's what you get for being a chick magnet.

Dean: What exactly are you saying? You do know that we're twins, right?

Nomi: What?! Really??

She stares at them in shock.

Nomi: Okay, but I'm not really surprised.

Nolwazi: Manje wena why are you touched about Star being chick magnet?

Dean: I'm more attractive than Derek.
That makes me laugh.

Dean: Why are you laughing?

Me: Sweetie, you have nothing on Derek.

Dean: Uyanya.

Derek: I find it laughable that you think you're more good-looking.

We listen to them debate for the next 10 minutes.

It's now around 10pm.

We're heading to the club.

Me: Please go to a McDonald's drive through.

Nomi: What??

Me: I'm hungry. I don't want to drink on an empty stomach.

Dean: Are you serious?

Derek: Listen, I'm also hungry. Dean, go to McDonald's.

Dean: You people chose not to eat. Now, you're making it our problem...

Me: Just drive to McDonald's and stop annoying me!

Dean: Mxm.

My stomach growls. I feel like my insides are eating each other.

INSERT 223

We get to the club.

Nomi leads us to our table and immediately orders drinks.

Nomi: Are you having gin, Zi?

I shake my head.

Me: The McDonald's hasn't digested. I'll stick to water for now.

Nolwazi pours herself some champagne and drinks happily.

Minutes later, I get a text from Andile, telling me that he is outside.

Me: I'll go fetch him.

Derek nods lightly as I walk away. I find him outside.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug.

Andile: When did you get here?

Me: Maybe 20 minutes ago.

He nods and we walk in.

When we get to our area, we find Nomi dancing with Nolwazi.

These two are already tipsy. They drank two bottles of champagne at the restaurant. Now, they're attacking another bottle. I don't know how Nomi does it, but the bitch can consume alcohol. I'm out here still recovering from last night's mess.

Andile goes to Derek first.

Derek: What's up?

They share a hug.

Andile: You good?

Derek: Yep. Andile then looks at Dean, who's sitting.

They stare at each other for a few seconds, and eventually nod at the same time.

Nolwazi: Hey, Andile!

Nolwazi gives him a hug.

Nomi straight up ignores him.

Andile glances around.

He doesn't seem bothered by Nomi ignoring him.

Derek: What are you drinking?

Andile: Water for now...

Dean pours himself some whiskey.

Dean: D, you'll drive. The only way I'll survive this shit is if I drink.

Derek laughs and nods.

Me: You're not drinking?

Derek: WE are not drinking.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: I magically became a vegetarian today. You owe me. I'm not going to be sober alone.

Me: You must be mistaken. You seem to have forgotten that this is MY vacation, and none of you were invited.

He looks at me disapprovingly.

Me: I'm just waiting for this Big Mac to digest properly and then ngizobuhlaba.

He grunts.

Andile sits next to me.

Me: How did the conference go?

Andile: Boring. I was sleepy the whole time.

Me: Derek will be joining you tomorrow.

Derek: Hai hai.

Me: Hai phela, you said you came here for this conference.

Derek: I've changed my mind.

Andile chuckles.

Andile: You're not missing out on much.
That shit is boring.

Derek: I wasn't planning on coming
anyway.

I excuse myself and go to Nomi and
Nolwazi.

Derek is starting to piss me off. He's
clearly not taking my need for space
seriously. He thinks it's a joke.

Nomi: He didn't greet me.

I pour myself some champagne and don't
say anything.

Nomi: That motherfucker.

Nolwazi: Friend, there are plenty of men
out there. You can't be chasing after
someone who doesn't want you.

Nomi: We'll see about that.

As soon as I take a sip of the champagne,
my insides twist and turn. I shake my
head and put down the flute.

Nolwazi: And then?

Nomi: She hasn't recovered from last night.

Me: It's the food. I'm too full.

I feel someone nudge me and I turn.

I squeal as soon as I see Niki.

Niki: No, bitch. Don't you dare touch me!

Me: Friend!

Niki: What the hell is wrong with you??

You've been MIA for weeks.

I try to hug her and she pushes me away.

Me: Friend, we'll talk later... Things have been hectic.

She stares at me angrily.

I hug her.

Me: Trust me.

Niki: Mxm.

Nolwazi: Niki!

Niki smiles at Nolwazi.

Niki: Hey, Lwazi. How are you?

Nolwazi: I'm great, and you?

Niki: I'm a bit pissed.

She gives me a look.

Niki: But, I'm alright.

They share a hug and then Niki looks at me again.

Niki: What are you even doing here?

Me: I was taking a break, then my space was invaded.

Niki: Derek couldn't stay away?

I roll my eyes.

Me: Why are you here?

Niki: Kwanele and I have been traveling a lot...

Me: Hehe, must be nice.

Nolwazi: You're here with Kwani? I look at Nolwazi weirdly.

Me: Kwani?

Nolwazi: Force of habit.

She chuckles.

Niki: Ya, I'm here with him...

Nolwazi: Haike, that's unfortunate. Dean is here, and there's no one he hates more

than Kwanele. I would have loved to dance the night away with you.

Niki: Nah, we're good. I'm not trying to check your aggressive man.

Nolwazi: Watch it now.

They smile at each other.

Me: When are you leaving CPT?

Niki: Next week. We got here yesterday. We just came back from Mpumalanga.

Me: Haibo, Nikiwe. You're living your best life mos.

Niki: Definitely. I'm with an established man. He's exposing me to some great shit. I stare at her in amazement. Her glo up is on another level. When am I going to glo up permanently? Every time I get to that point, life comes at me fast, and I'm left looking fucked up. I'm starting to think I'll never experience a proper glo up.

Niki: Anyway, enjoy your night guys.

Nolwazi: We can meet up tomorrow.

Niki: Cool.

Nomi: You're seriously dating Kwani?

Niki looks at Nomi blankly.

Nomi: Can I come with you? I'd like to say hi to him.

Niki: Uhm, sure.

Nomi takes Niki's arm and they walk off. I don't even want to go to Dean and Derek's side, because I know Dean is going to annoy me.

Nolwazi: Don't even think of going there. I'm not in the mood to deal with Dean's craziness. Let's drink.

She pours herself some champagne and drinks happily.

Seconds later, my phone vibrates.

Gosh.

It's a message.

Dean: I hope you told your friend not to bring that son of a bitch here.

I ignore the message.

Seconds later, I get a message from Derek.

Derek: I miss you. Come back.

I groan.

Nolwazi is now dancing with some girl who came out of nowhere. Part of me thinks she's here for our drinks. Phela you can't trust these hoes.

I stand and go to Derek's side. I sit between him and Andile.

He places his hand on my thigh.

Derek: That's more like it...

He looks at me.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I'm not feeling well.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: I'll be fine.

I look at Andile.

Me: I think Nomi didn't take your rejection well. He smirks.

Andile: Really?

I nod.

Andile: I tend to have that effect of women.

Me: Ewww, no. You're not a stuck up man. Stop it.

He chuckles.

Andile: I'm ready to drink now.

He stands.

Andile: I'll be back soon.

He walks away.

Yesterday was so much fun. Today is different.

I genuinely feel like Dean, Nolwazi and Derek are cockblocking me. I love them, but I'm really not happy to see them, not now.

We've been here for around two hours now.

Nolwazi is proper drunk.

Dean is tipsy. I've learnt that he becomes invisible when he is drinking. He doesn't talk at all.

Nomi and Nolwazi have been dancing like lunatics with that random girl. They seem to be having fun.

Me: I'd like to check on Niki.

Derek nods.

I stand and go to where Niki is.

When I get there, she's laughing with Kwanele.

I squeeze myself between them.

Me: Hey, lovebirds.

Kwanele: Hey, Zi.

Me: Why didn't you come say hi to me?

He laughs.

Niki: This one likes unity, even when it's not necessary.

Kwanele: I see...

Niki: What's wrong with you? You don't look like yourself.

I sigh.

Me: Life has been nyising me.

Kwanele stands.

Kwanele: Excuse me... Need the bathroom.

He walks away.

I look at Niki.

Me: Derek and Dean are twins.

Niki: Whoaa.

I give her a brief summary of what happened, leaving out Derek's private experiences.

Niki: Yoh!

I shake my head.

Me: It's been rough. I'm exhausted.

Niki: Is that why you came here?

I nod.

Niki: Manje why are they all here? I shrug.

Me: I'm really unhappy about this. They seem to think it's a joke.

Niki: That's unfair though.

Me: They don't care.

I take her glass and finish her drink.

Me: I'm too sober for this nonsense.

Niki: Let me mix you a proper drink.

I stay with Niki and Kwanele for a while.

As much as I'm trying to drink like I did yesterday, I'm really struggling. My system seems to have shut down.

Niki: Are you sure you're okay?

I groan.

Niki: Drink some water.

Me: Let me go pee first.

As I go to the bathroom, I legit feel like I'm about to pass out. I get to the bathroom and it's packed.

I turn and make my way back to the party scene, which is suddenly making me even more sick.

I bump into Derek, who looks angry.
He walks past me and walks out of the
place.

I follow him and find him standing by the
car outside.

Me: Derek, what happened?

Derek: I'm leaving.

I look at him in confusion, completely
ignoring how fucked up I feel.

Derek: You've made it clear that you want
your space.

Me: Excuse me?

Derek: It is clear that you don't want me
here.

Me: I thought it wasn't clear enough.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Me: I'm not going to allow you to make
me feel guilty for needing space.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I asked for a few weeks... A few
weeks, Derek. Is that too much to ask? Do

you not understand that as we speak, I'm not functioning properly. I want to allow myself to relax in the absence of everything that has stressed me out over the last few weeks... Do you not understand this?

He tightens his jaw.

Me: You should have asked to come, not pop out of nowhere and expect me to welcome you. You're interrupting my healing process. You agreed to this, so why are you suddenly angry? You have no right to be angry, and I refuse to take the bl-

I groan.

Derek: What's wrong?

Me: I'm not feeling well.

As I step closer to him, I collapse in his arms.

Derek: Ziyanda??

Me: Something's happening...

He looks at me worriedly and takes out his phone.

Derek: Dean, come out... Bring the car keys... Dean, Ziyanda is not feeling well, I want to take her to hospital...

He hangs up and tightens his hold on me.

Derek: Zi...

Me: I feel dizzy.

Minutes later, Dean walks out and jogs to us.

Dean: What's happening?

Derek: I'm taking her to the hospital.

Dean looks at me worriedly.

Derek: Stay with Lwazi and Nomi.

Dean: No, we'll go together.

Derek: Dean, there's no time for that.

Nomi is not even ready to leave.

I groan.

Derek opens the car and helps me get in.

Derek: Hurry up.

Dean goes back inside.

The drive to the hospital is a blur.

I don't even remember how we got there...

Nurse: It's alcohol poisoning.

I groan painfully.

Dean: I thought she was pregnant.

Nurse: No, the test is negative. She's on contraceptives.

As sick as I am, I am relieved.

Pregnancy is the last thing I need right now.

Nurse: She has to stay here. We have to monitor her until she's in a better state.

Derek sighs.

Nurse: She could be worse...

Nomi: It's really alcohol poisoning?

Nurse: Yes. We have to put her on a drip to top up her body's water, blood sugar and vitamin levels.

At this point, I zone them out and pass out.

I wake up.

Derek stands and steps closer to the bed.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: When can I leave?

Derek: The nurse said you'll wake up feeling better. You were given oxygen and some fluids for the dehydration.

Me: What's the time?

Derek: 12pm.

He helps me sit up.

Derek: Thankfully, your case wasn't extreme. People die from this shit.

He says that coldly.

The nurse walks in and goes on to give me a lecture about alcohol poisoning.

As we're driving to the hotel, it doesn't take rocket science to figure out that Derek is angry.

He hasn't said one word to me.

We finally get to the hotel.

Before getting out of the car, he looks at me with a tightened jaw.

Derek: You still want your space?

I look at him.

I've just recovered from a deadly disease,
and he's out here being extra.

He gets out and I get out as well.

He locks the car and walks in, leaving me
behind.

Mxm.

INSERT 224

I go to my room, and take a long shower.

Every part of me wants to get in the
bathtub, but I know I won't be
comfortable.

Once I'm done showering, I lie on the bed
naked.

I'm still weak.

However, my system, in general, feels
much better.

I didn't know that people can die from alcohol poisoning. I always thought it was a random curable thing that tarven people get.

I browse through my phone and see missed calls from Niki and Andile.

I dial Niki's number first.

Niki: Why would you leave without telling me??

Me: Hawu, I was in hospital.

Niki: What??

I tell her what happened.

Niki: Yoh, Ziyanda. How are you now?

Ukuphi?

Me: I'm fine. I'm in my hotel room.

I tell her about Derek's behaviour.

Niki: I get that he's still dealing with his shit, but he needs to get it together. You asked for space, it's not like you ended the relationship.

Me: I'm learning new things about him.

Niki: The not so nice things.

I groan.

Niki: Do you still want to marry him?

Me: Right now, I'm very angry at him, so marriage is the last thing on my mind.

Niki: Well, it's good that you didn't rush things.

Me: Me wanting space doesn't mean that I want to leave him.

Niki: I feel like you're not telling me the whole truth. What really happened?

Me: I can't tell you everything. All you need to know is that what he went through was extreme.

Niki: How are you, really?

I sigh.

Me: That's why I needed this break, Niki. I wanted to figure out exactly that...

She listens as I vent.

Me: These people don't know anything about personal space. They want to be

together 24/7 and it's starting to drive me crazy! I love them, but right now, I just want to be left alone. I want to zone out a bit and regain my strength.

Niki: He's clearly not thinking about all of that.

Me: It's so frustrating, because they keep saying I'm being dramatic. That pisses me off even more.

I continue venting for a while.

Me: What's worse is that he didn't just come alone. I think I would have accepted that... He brought Dean and Nolwazi.

Really? Dean is a lot. I can't handle him when I'm this drained.

We continue chatting until I feel a bit better.

Once I'm done talking to her, I call Andile.

Andile: Hi.

Yoh he also sounds cold.

Why are people mad at me?

I don't need this in my life.

Me: Hello. What's with the coldness?

Andile: You invite me somewhere and then disappear without informing me. Is that how you-

Me: Hai hai, I can't be dealing with more male tears right now! Get the fuck over it! I end the call and put my phone away.

People are so sensitive.

I lie facing up.

I get away from drama, and then it follows me.

Is this my life?

Now, I'm starting to think Derek and his people are not good for me.

Surely, this rollercoaster of emotions is not normal. Do other people go through such? Are their relationships like this?

Maybe it's time to reevaluate my relationship with Derek.

Do I see myself going through this in 5 years?

How has this relationship affected my mental state?

My thoughts are interrupted by a knock on my door.

I ignore it.

If these people refuse to understand the concept of space, I'll lock myself in here until they leave.

I wake up feeling cold.

I switch on the air conditioner and get in bed properly...

I am awakened by my phone ringing.

I check the number and answer.

Me: Nomi.

Nomi: Hey, love. Was just checking on you.

Me: I'm fine.

Nomi: You sound horrible.

I don't say anything.

Nomi: I'm going out-

Me: Nomi, bye.

What the hell is wrong with her??

Nomi: Relax! I was just-

I hang up.

I want nothing to do with these people!

I check my messages and see one from

Andile, saying he doesn't understand why

I'm angry when he was the one who was

left confused and worried...

As pissed as I want to be, I know he

deserved an explanation, considering the

fact that I'm the one who invited him.

I call him.

Andile: Hello.

I explain what happened and apologise.

Andile: Alcohol poisoning?

I groan.

Andile: Are you fine now?

Me: Ya.

Andile: But, why didn't Derek answer my calls?

Me: He was quite stressed.

As mad as I am at Derek, I know not to sell his ass out.

Andile: I hope you feel better. Hit me up if you need anything.

Me: I'm good. See you around.

Andile: Sure... I apologize for my coldness, I was just confused and a tad offended.

Me: It wasn't your fault.

Andile: Shap ke.

Me: Bye.

I hang up.

I'm starving.

I check the time and it's around 7pm.

I get out of bed and try to decide what I'm going to do. I eventually decide that I'll go to a restaurant. I've also decided that I'm going to stop drinking for a little while. I

never thought I'd be a victim of alcohol poisoning. The nurse told me to take it seriously.

Anyway, I get dressed.

I'm not even going to bother covering this black eye. People will just have to suck it up.

I finish up and head out.

When I get to the reception area, I'm shocked to find Dean and Nolwazi there with their suitcases.

Nolwazi is sleeping on the couch, clearly dealing with last night's hangover.

Dean stands and walks to me.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I shake my head.

Me: I don't have it in me to go back and forth with you.

He realizes that I'm serious.

Dean: What's going on?

Me: I need space, Dean. I want to be alone.

I feel myself getting emotional.

Me: I'm getting frustrated, because none of you are really hearing me. None of you. He stares at me intently as if he's having an aha moment.

Me: I understand that you value quality time, but I'm not able to be my true self right now, because I'm drained. I'm genuinely drained.

He tries to give me a hug, but I shake my head.

I've never had to fight this much for my personal space. If this is what marriage is like, then I want no part of it. I shouldn't have to go to such great lengths to demand time off.

Me: I was with Derek 24/7 as he went through different emotional phases for weeks. I was there. I didn't walk away. I've never done that for a person. I have no energy left in me. For fuck sake, I have

a mental illness and I'm not able to fight it if I'm this weak. I'm not functioning right now. Is it too much to ask for some time off?

Dean looks like I've just hit him with a brick.

Me: I'm not doing this because I'm trying to be mean. I genuinely want to work on myself. Why can't you understand this? Just because you thrive on constant quality time, it doesn't mean the rest of the world is like that. I can't even be a mother right now. I can't take care of Liyakha, because I'm tired. I wanted to use this time to reboot. Why am I suddenly the bad guy? I'm not out here cheating on anyone. Believe it or not, I'm loyal to Derek and I'd never fuck around, Dean. I don't know why you keep filling his head with bullshit. Do you really think I'd mess around with Andile? Have I not

proven myself to you? I'm quite hurt that you don't trust me... Maybe I need to reevaluate our relationship as well...

He doesn't say anything.

I didn't even realise that Derek is here.

Me: Whether you like it or not, I live with Depression. I am diagnosed with Depression. Depression is a real thing. I'm tired of having to explain myself and the reasons behind my actions, and then deal with your passive aggression or persistent ignorance. Honestly, if you're going to struggle to come to terms with it, then I'm walking away... I don't want to burden you with my drama.

I sigh.

Me: I'm going to say this one more time, and this is going to be the last time I say it. I look at them.

Me: I want space. If you have a problem with that, then you obviously don't give a

shit about my wellbeing. If you have a problem, then maybe it's time we all think about this right here, because I'll never jeopardize my mental health, just to impress people. Maybe it's time we checked if we're really as compatible as we think we are...

They both look at me in disbelief.

INSERT 225

They're looking at me in shock.

Dean: Ziyanda.

I shake my head.

Me: I'm not doing this anymore.

They don't say anything.

Me: We keep going around in circles.
There's always something happening. I'm
tired.

They are silent.

Me: We had an agreement.

I look at Derek.

Me: You agreed to this. You said you
respect this. Why are you making it seem
like I'm a bad person?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I don't want to continue doing this
with you.

Derek: What are you saying?

I shrug.

I also don't know what I'm saying, but I'm
glad I'm finally saying it.

Me: I think if we're being real, You and I
have had more hectic times than we've
had calm times. Is that really normal? I
don't think our relationship is healthy. I
think it's toxic for a number of reasons:

*Firstly, my mental illness is a lot. I have some really low moments, and when I'm in that pit, I feel like dying. I can't explain what I go through. The only person who'll understand me is someone who is going through the exact thing. I'm struggling to juggle my mental health, my relationship, and motherhood. I'm struggling.

*Secondly, you have many unresolved traumas. You are struggling to handle my shit, because you are already bombarded by your own shit. You have gone through some traumatic things, and you haven't dealt with them or healed. There's no way we're going to build a solid relationship until you tackle every single thing that haunts you. You don't realise that you also need your personal space to deal with your past. You can't revolve your healing process around me. Not only is it unfair to me, it's highly unhealthy. As seen

now, you end up expecting me to be around 24/7 and you get disappointed when I take a step back.

*Now, you tell me... Is this a healthy relationship? We are toxic for each other at the moment. We have a toxic codependency. We're both broken individuals. How can we build a healthy relationship when we both have so much baggage? I think it's time to be real with ourselves.

Dean tries to say something, but stops. He looks like someone who has been beaten to a pulp.

Derek, on the other hand, is blank. I can't read him.

Me: You know, I would have understood your anger if I had walked away without informing you, if I randomly decided that I needed space and then did my own thing... But you knew everything. You

approved. You told me you understood.
So, why am I the dramatic one now? The
insensitive one?

He doesn't speak.

Me: I'm going to be selfish right now. I'm
choosing to walk away from our
relationship. Maybe it will work out in the
future, but right now, I don't think I can
be what you need or want me to be. If
being married means I can't take time off
once in a while, then I don't want to get
married.

Derek: You ending this?

I nod. He stares at me for a long time.

He nods lightly and walks away...

Dean: Ziyanda, you don't mean that.

Me: I do. I've never claimed to be perfect. I
know I've messed up as well. I just don't
think this is healthy. I don't think I'm
meant to be in a long term relationship...

Derek needs to deal with his demons first,

and he shouldn't depend on me to heal...
It's too much pressure. As fucked up as it
is, I'm admitting that I can't handle the
pressure. Maybe I'm not emotionally
mature to handle such a relationship.

Dean: Ziyanda... Come on...

He looks at me pleadingly.

I shake my head.

Me: It's over, Dean.

Dean: Come on...

He continues staring at me.

I sigh.

I don't even want to go out anymore.

Me: Travel safely...

I walk back to my room.

I don't think everything has sunk in.

I've been in bed for hours now.

I get a call from Niki.

Niki: Hey, friend.

Me: Hey.

Niki: How did it go?

Me: I think I ended things.

Niki: Are you serious??

Me: Ya.

Niki: Aww, baby...

I start sobbing.

I cry for the longest time.

Niki: Do you want me to come over?

Me: No.

She listens to me cry for a long time...

Me: Bye.

Niki: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I put down my phone and bury myself in bed.

The following day, I decide to go to the beach.

I need some fresh air.

I know that if I allow myself to stay indoors, I'll never recover. I need to fight the heavy waves of sadness.

Once I'm done getting ready, I hear a knock on the door.

When I open, I find Dean standing there. He looks worn out.

Dean: Can I come in?

I move out of the way and he walks in. I close the door and follow him.

He sits on the bed and sighs heavily.

Dean: We're leaving.

I nod.

Dean: Ziyanda, let's go home.

He looks like he's about to cry.

Dean: Don't do this.

I don't say anything.

Dean: Let's go home.

He stares at me.

Dean: Manje what's the way forward? I don't understand what the fuck is supposed to happen right now.

He looks at me expectantly.

Dean: What's supposed to happen now, Ziyanda?

He sighs and scratches his head.

Dean: Please use this time to really think about this... You don't want this, Ziyanda...

I don't say anything.

He stands and gives me a hug.

Dean: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I walk him out and close the door...

INSERT 226 (Unedited)

It's been a week since the incident with Derek. I'm now checking out of the hotel and heading home.

As miserable as I am, being alone allowed me to drown properly in my emotions. I got the chance to feel every single emotion that rushed through me. It was difficult, but I had to do it, because I told myself that as soon as I leave Cape Town, I'm not going to carry over the craziness.

When I get to the house, I find my parents outside, chatting away happily.

My mom squeals when she sees me.

Mom: Haibo! I thought Cape Town had swallowed you!

I sigh.

Me: I ended the relationship with Derek. They look at me knowingly.

Why am I not surprised? I'm sure Dean has briefed them.

Dad: Derek told us.

Me: He did?

Mom: Ya, when he came to fetch Nkanyezi.

Me: Hmkay.

I make my way inside the house. I should have known that he would fetch Liyakha. I didn't really think about how we'll manage that...

My parents walk in after me.

Dad: Ziyanda, come sit.

I go to the lounge and sit.

Dad: What happened?

I tell him everything.

I also tell him about my frustrations. They both sigh once I'm done.

Dad: That's a lot...

My mom keeps quiet and looks at me intently.

Dad: I can tell that you have made up your mind. I thought you'd come back with a different mindset.

I shake my head.

Me: I genuinely think it's best for us to deal with ourselves separately. I can't be what Derek wants me to be.

Dad: What exactly does he want you to be?

Me: His everything.

They both keep quiet.

Me: It's too much pressure.

My dad nods slowly.

Dad: We support your decision.

Mom: Yes, we do. You seem to have made up your mind.

Me: Can I go now?

They nod and I walk to my bedroom to unpack.

I read my "Worm Journal."

When I broke up with Siya, I decided to keep a journal that focuses on that phase. I wrote on it religiously... That was the first time I felt like a boy ended my life. I didn't think life after him was possible. However, I vowed that I'd never allow myself to go through that again. I should never depend on another person to a point where I feel like I'll never survive without them. I told myself I'd never give someone that much power. I had to relearn being by myself. I had to understand the importance of being alone and the power that comes with it. I don't want to be sad forever. I made this choice, so it's my responsibility to suck it up and live with it. I can't expect the world to stop just so I can marinate in these heavy feelings. I have to find a way to live with my decision.

I used the past week to be sad and miserable.

Now, I have to fight the sadness and keep it moving.

I broke up with Derek. I chose this. No one forced me to do it...

I feel a huge lump in my throat as I recall his expression as I was confirming the breakup...

I don't know how I'm going to move past this, but it must happen now.

I miss my daughter.

I miss her terribly, and now I can't sit at home and pretend like I'm okay with not being around her.

I've been at home for three days now.

My parents were shook when I told them about the black eye incident.

Anyway, I'm done getting dressed.

As I'm eating, my mom walks in.

Mom: Baby, would you like me to come with you?

I shake my head.

Me: I'll be fine.

She looks at me sadly.

Mom: I feel like I'm the one who's going through the breakup...

I chuckle.

Me: You'll get used to it.

Mom: Have you thought about how you're going to manage Little Star? I shake my head.

Me: I haven't thought about that... I've started looking for jobs. My housewife lifestyle has come to an end.

Mom: Try to talk to him and find out how he thinks you should co-parent.

I nod.

Mom: You're not going to work at the school anymore?

Me: Hawu mama. How am I going to work at his school?

She shrugs.

Mom: I don't see how you two are going to live separate lives. It just doesn't make sense.

Me: Well, it must make sense soon, because I'm sticking to my decision.

She looks at me thoughtfully.

Mom: Don't be stubborn... Not with this...

I shake my head.

Me: I have to go.

Mom: Just don't be too cold when you get there... I know you.

I go to the kitchen and leave her there.

I thought I would be nervous when I got here, but I'm surprisingly numb.

I open the door and walk in.

The house is spotless as usual.

When I get to the lounge, I find him sitting there with Liyakha on his lap. He's watching soccer.

I walk to the couch and he looks at me.

Me: Hi.

Derek: Hi. I take Liya and she cries when she's in my arms.

Me: Hey, baby.

I'd like to think she's happy to see me, because she's resting her head on my chest now and squeezing my finger.

I give her lots of kisses until she cheers up.

She stares at me in amazement. Maybe the black her freaked her out. The swelling has gone down. What's left is the persistent blackness around the eye.

Liya: Mama...

She continues mumbling and I shower her with my kisses.

My whole body relaxes as her scent fills me. The numbness goes away and I'm left with outpouring love for her.

I seem to have lost track of time, because once I snap out of it, Derek is no longer in the lounge.

Me: Where's your dad?

She stares at me innocently.

I go to his office and find him there.

He's on his laptop.

Me: Can I have a word with you?

He glances at me before closing the laptop.

I sit opposite him and place Liya on my lap.

Me: I'd like to discuss how we're going to do this.

Derek: What?

I look at Liya and then look at him.

Me: I've decided that I'm going to start a tutoring thing... That will be my job for now...

He looks at me.

Me: I'm not ready to go to work full time. I'll tutor kids around the neighbourhood and charge them a fee. A lot of parents have asked me to do it. Once I'm fine, I'll go back to teaching full-time.

Derek: You'll do this at your house?

Me: Yes.

He nods lightly.

Me: How would you like to do this?

I look at Liya again.

Derek: I'm going back to work full-time... I'll have to take on the principal role permanently.

I nod.

Me: So, she'll stay at my house?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Derek?

He clears his throat and nods.

Me: You can take her anytime you want.

He nods.

We sit in silence for a while.

Derek: Is that it?

Me: Uhm, yes...

He opens his laptop.

Me: I'll fetch my things sometime this week.

Derek: Noted.

I stand.

Me: Can I take her? I've missed her. He looks at Liya, who's busy mumbling and minding her own business.

Derek: Sure.

He stands and walks around the desk.

When he gets to me, I hand over Liya.

She giggles as Derek showers her with kisses.

Me: I'll pack some of my stuff.

I go to the bedroom and take out a suitcase.

I pack some of my things and look around to see if I haven't left something I need.

After a while, I finish up.

As I make my way downstairs, I hear Dean's voice. He's on the phone.

Dean: Zi?

He looks like he has seen a ghost.

He ends the call.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug.

Dean: Uhm, are you back?

I shake my head and he looks at me disappointedly.

Dean: How are you?

Me: Fine.

He sighs.

Dean: He seems to have zoned out. I've never seen him like this.

I don't say anything.

Dean: I know he's pissed at me. I obviously played a role in this mess.

Me: Dean-

Dean: I get it, you don't want to talk.

Derek walks downstairs with Liya.

Dean: Are you going home?

Me: Yes.

Dean: I'll drop you off... I need to see your dad...

He looks at me hesitantly.

I've never seen Dean look this confused and tired.

Dean: Unless I'm not allowed to see him...

He keeps quiet.

Me: My Uber is outside already.

Dean: Oh... okay...

Derek gives me Liya and then Dean takes my suitcase and walks out.

Me: Bye, Derek.

Derek: Bye.

I walk out and make my way to the car.

INSERT 227

It's been two days.

I've been in the house with Liya.

Mom: Baby, Dean called. He says he's coming.

I look at her blankly.

She sits on the bed and stares at me.

Mom: I'd like to discuss this with you.

I don't say anything.

Mom: It's no secret that we've formed deep relationships with Dean and Derek.

She sighs.

Mom: I want to know what you want your father and I to do.

Me: What do you mean?

Mom: I don't want you to ever feel like I'm betraying you by being in contact with people you are trying to distance yourself

from. You are my child. I support you, and my loyalty is to you.

Me: I know you're loyal to me.

Mom: Do you want me to cut ties with them?

I shrug.

Me: It's your choice. As long as my decision is respected...

Mom: Umdala, sthandwa sami. This is your journey.

I nod lightly and focus on Liya.

After a few minutes, we hear my dad and Dean's laughter. My mom stands and walks out of my room.

After a while, there's a knock on my door.

Dean walks in and sits on the bed.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Hey.

He smiles at me.

Dean: I miss you so much. I'm not used to this shit.

I sigh.

Me: I miss you too.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

Dean: How are you?

He stares at me seriously.

Me: I'll be fine.

He sighs.

Dean: I won't be able to change your mind?

I look at him.

Me: Dean, I'd appreciate it if you'd stop pestering me.

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'm coming to terms with my decision. I don't need what you keep bringing to me.

He groans.

Dean: Nolwazi has finalised the wedding.

Apparently it's in two weeks.

I nod lightly.

Dean: I don't want to get married right now.

Me: Why not?

Dean: The timing is off. I don't think now is the perfect time to flaunt our union.

He sighs.

Dean: I'm just going to be honest with you...

He looks down.

Dean: She doesn't think it's a good idea for you to come.

Me: Is it?

He nods and finally looks at me.

Dean: She think there might be some drama.

Me: Because I'm the root of all drama...

Dean: That's not true.

Me: Well, you can tell Lwazi that I won't be at her wedding.

Dean: Bullshit.

He shakes his head before I can speak.

Dean: You're my sister. Why the fuck would she even say such?

I stay silent.

Dean: We've been fighting about this for a week... I can't believe it.

Me: What can't you believe? That she doesn't want me at her wedding?

Dean: She knows how much I care about you.

Me: I'm going to cause drama... She's the smart bitch after all.

He looks at me in defeat and I chuckle.

Me: You must tell her to stop being such a wimp. She bumped into me a few days ago and pretended to be excited to see me... Why didn't she tell me all this shit?

Dean: Zi-

I shake my head.

Me: I thought she was better than that. What a coward.

Dean: Ziyanda, come on.

Me: I won't come to your wedding, Dean. I wasn't planning on coming anyway.

He looks at me sharply.

Dean: Don't fuck with me.

Me: Don't you know me? If I come to your wedding, I'm going to do a few things: dress in white so I'll steal Nolwazi's spotlight, demand to sit next to Derek and then bring my new boyfriend, thereafter, when you're saying your vows, I'll stand and start shouting that I hate Derek with all my heart...

He looks at me in shock and seconds later, he laughs.

Dean: That would be amazing to watch.

I chuckle.

Me: I cause drama everywhere I go.

Dean: We both know that's not true.

Me: Then, what the hell is up with Nolwazi?

He sighs.

Dean: I think she's going through her own things.

Me: Then, she mustn't come for me. I'll read her to filth.

Dean: I'm assuming that means dragging someone?

Me: Both verbally and physically.

Angangiphapheli. She doesn't want to be on the receiving end of my wrath right now. I'm not sane.

Dean: She's just stressed.

Me: It's cute how you people make excuses for each other's bullshit, but as soon as I come in the picture, what comes out of my mouth is magically inexcusable. You're a funny bunch.

Dean: I don't want to lose you. I feel like you're distancing yourself from me.

Me: I am. I am definitely distancing myself from you. We're not going to sit here and pretend you weren't part of the crap.

Dean: My intentions weren't bad.

Me: I'm just trying to gather myself...

Maybe I would have been fine had I gotten the initial space I asked for... Who knows...

He sighs heavily.

Me: I have nothing against you...

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I hope your wedding day is a success.

I'm sure your fiance is going to put my overly dramatic ideas to good use. Ngoba that's what you're all quite good at.

Constantly asking people for help and then turn around and call them dramatic and childish when they're not having a good day...

Dean: Come on...

He looks hurt.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: You're coming to my wedding.

Me: Dean, go catch up with my dad, I'm busy.

He looks at me sadly.

Dean: I hope you know that I'm not going to sit back and watch this shit. I know for a fact that you wouldn't allow me to randomly walk away from Nolvazi...

You'd try to make me see the positive... I know you wouldn't watch me drown in negative emotions. I always appreciate your help. You have your moments, but I don't think you're a selfish person. In fact, you may just be the most selfless person in the group.

He continues staring at me.

Dean: What Would Ziyanda Do? WWZD is the motto these days. I'll use that shit to sort this mess out. You have your own way of solving shit and I'm going to channel that...

I try to keep a straight face, but end up laughing.

Dean: You think I'm joking?

Me: Dude, go away.

Dean: No, I miss you.

Me: You know, I genuinely don't give a fuck at this point.

Dean: Stop lying to yourself. You know very well that Derek is your soulmate. I look at him blankly.

Dean: I know we didn't give you space, and I'm sorry for that. It's just that I was struggling to be there for him by myself.

Me: That's the problem. You depend on me too much. I was tired and I needed a break. You both didn't take that seriously, and that clearly means you don't care about my wellbeing. There's no need to over analyse the situation. You invaded my space.

Dean sighs.

Dean: Are you happier now that we've backed off?

Me: Have you really? You're here every other day.

He groans.

Dean: Ziyanda, you were out drinking. You were-

Me: See now you're pissing me off. I can do what the fuck I want with my time. When you all have boys night and get drunk, who complains? Ungalinge, Dean. Don't test me.

Dean: Yoh, okay.

Me: That's the problem... You all do these things, but when I do them, it's a problem. Why am I held to different standards? How dare you mention that was out drinking? You wanted me sit around and meditate every day?

He keeps quiet.

Me: I'll say this again... If getting married means I'll be called dramatic for needing personal space, then andizi. I don't give a shit.

Dean: Are you okay with Derek being with someone else?

Me: I broke up with him. That means he can do whatever he wants with his life.

Dean: You're stubborn. Both of you are fucken stubborn.

I focus on Liya.

Dean; You're going to ignore me?

I don't say anything.

He sighs and stands.

Dean: See you around... I love you.

He walks out.

It's Friday afternoon.

I'm expecting Derek to come fetch Liya for the weekend, because I had her for the whole week.

My mom and I are busy cleaning the kitchen when we hear a knock on the door.

Mom: Come in!

The door opens and a woman walks in first. She looks like she's in her 40s.

Mom: Hai sisi we don't want to be Wash Towers. You can go and advertise your church somewhere else.

The woman looks at my mom in confusion.

Thereafter, a man walks in.

My insides turn.

The man looks around the kitchen and laughs.

Man: Wow, I haven't been in Soweto in years...

Mom: Who the hell are you??

My mom already has a knife on her hand. The man looks at me and smirks.

Man: Ziyanda, you have to lead me to one of my sons...

I stare at him in disbelief.

It's like I'm looking at an older version of both Dean and Derek...

INSERT 228 (Unedited)

Mom: What?!

Why is my dad not here? We need him.

My mom and I are both unstable right now, and I fear for this man and woman.

Man: Aren't you going to offer me something to drink?

My mom looks like she is ready to pounce on these people.

I clear my throat.

Me: Are you Zweli?

Zweli stares at me.

Zweli: I don't need introductions. I need to see my sons.

Mom: Uyanya wena! Futsek! Phuma!

I quickly stand in front of my mom and block her from attacking anyone.

Zweli: You are a feisty woman, aren't you?

Me: Can you stop antagonizing us?

He smirks.

Woman: I am Vicky. This is my husband, Zweli. We apologise for coming unexpe-

Mom: Heyii! Get out!

Me: Mama, calm down.

Mom: Why the hell should I be calm? How dare you come here and make demands?

My dad naye doesn't have timing. He shouldn't have went to his places now.

Also, Derek will be here soon. What will happen then? Zweli: Can we sit and have a chat?

Me: No, you're not welcome here.

He looks at me in shock.

Me: If you were able to find me, I'm sure you can find your sons.

Zweli: I have tried... Their mother always finds a way to stop me. So, I thought I'd try a different angle.

Me: Are you even hearing yourself?

He chuckles.

He reeks of arrogance.

Me: If you want your sons, find them.

I look at Vicky.

Me: Take your husband and leave us alone.

Vicky: I apolo-

Mom: Heyi wena Wash Tower ndini, phuma!

I don't even have the energy to laugh at my mom's commentary.

Vicky: Okay-

Zweli: Don't you want him to reunite with his father?

Me: Who's the father here? A rapist? A coward that targeted a weak girl and consciously chose to force himself on her and then run? Surely that's not what a decent father does.

The smile immediately disappears from his face.

Me: For your own sake, please leave. The last thing you want is to be caught up between my mother and I.

He looks at Vicky, whose eyes are wide from shock.

Me: You didn't know that you married a rapist?

Zweli: Vicky, get out.

Vicky: How? Wha-

Mom: Heyi, aniphumeni. My house is not the Bold and the Beautiful. Go have your moment outside.

With that said, Vicky storms out.

Zweli stares at me.

Before he can say anything, my mom is already pushing him out.

She shuts the door and locks it.

Mom: The nerve!

We stare at each other.

Mom: How is one supposed to handle such?? Drama literally comes knocking on your door!

Me: At least Derek was not around.

Mom: Thank God.

We walk to the lounge.

Mom: That arrogant rapist!

She takes her phone and dials a number.

Mom: I'm calling Zimkitha...

I look at her.

Mom: Zimi... Hello, sisi, unjani?... I'm not good... Yazi I was busy cleaning noZizi, then out of nowhere, there's a knock on the door... In comes a strange woman...

Seconds later a man walks in, smiling and

saying he wants Zizi to lead him to his sons...

She listens.

Mom: Hai, sisi... We kicked him out... He is so arrogant... No, Derek wasn't here...

Ya...

She listens.

I walk to my room and find Liya awake.

Me: Wena ngathi you're the only one who's having fun right now. Izinto zihectic and you're out here giggling and pouting.

I pick her up and kiss her.

I sit on the bed and play with her.

When I'm with her, I genuinely lose track of time. I hear a knock on the door.

Me: Ngena mama.

The door opens and the room is immediately filled with Derek's cologne.

I look up, and sure enough, it's him.

I haven't seen him in formal clothes in a while.

Me: You look good.

He clears his throat.

Derek: Thank you.

Me: Did my mother tell you?

Derek: What?

Me: Your biological father was here not so long ago.

He doesn't say anything.

Me: We kicked him out.

He still doesn't say anything.

Liya looks over at Derek and starts mumbling happily.

Liya: Dadada!

We listen as she screams.

She then wiggles.

Derek walks to the bed and takes her. She looks at him and smiles.

Derek: Hi, baby.

He gives her kisses and she squeals happily.

I decide to give them time to catch up and walk out of the room. My heart is a bit heavy at the moment. I'm trying to process the fact that Derek and Dean's father was here and he showed no signs of remorse. The way he walked in here shows how fucked up he is... After a while, Derek comes to the lounge with Liya still in his arms.

Mom: Are you leaving now?

Derek: Yes.

Mom: I dished up for you... The container is in the fridge.

Derek: Thank you.

We look at him.

Derek: Bye.

Mom: Bye.

The second he steps out of the lounge, Liyakha bursts into the loudest tears.

Mom: And then?

She screeches.

We stand and go to the kitchen.

I take her from him and she quietens down.

Me: Yini manje?

She sobs more quietly.

Derek: I need the bathroom... I'll be back...

As soon as Derek steps out of the kitchen, Liya starts crying loudly all over again.

Haike.

Derek comes back.

Me: Yini kanti?

I try to comfort her, but she continues crying.

Derek takes her and she quietens.

This child.

Mom: Heeh! What a manipulative child!

My mom laughs.

She nuzzles her head on Derek's chest and then looks at me innocently.

She mumbles.

Mom: This child!

Me: So, what is supposed to happen now?

Mom: Clearly Nkanyezi should stay until she falls asleep. She doesn't want to be separated from both of you.

We walk back to the lounge...

I think Liya eventually fell asleep 4 hours later.

Derek left very late.

I randomly got a call from Nomvuyo asking to meet with me.

I haven't spoken to her in weeks.

I always think about her, but things changed after the Zimkitha thing...

I don't really know where we stand.

Anyway, I told her to come to my house, because I am in no position to go out to

expensive restaurants. I'm back to saving religiously.

I'm standing outside with my father, when we see her car approaching.

Dad: Nomvuyo is still alive kanti?

He chuckles.

Dad: Things have been all over the place recently... We even forget that some people exist...

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo parks the car and steps out. My dad whistles and Nomvuyo smiles.

Nomvuyo: Sanibonani.

Dad: Hai sisi ngiyakuvuma.

Nomvuyo: Don't make me blush!

She looks at me softly and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Hey, love.

Me: Hey.

As soon as we hug, I start crying.

I have no idea where that came from.

Well, I do know... I missed her... I still miss her...

Nomvuyo: Aww, baby...

I continue sobbing.

Dad: My child has had a rough time.

Nomvuyo wipes my tears.

Nomvuyo: Should we take a drive?

I nod.

Dad: Go and get some fresh air.

Nomvuyo: I'll bring her back later.

Dad: Okay, sisi.

We get in the car and she drives off.

We get to an estate.

Me: And then?

Nomvuyo: This is where I live.

I look at her in shock.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: We have a lot of catching up...

We get in and she pours me some juice.

Nomvuyo: Should I go first?

Me: No, I'll go first.

She nods.

I go on to tell her everything.

Once I'm done, she groans.

Nomvuyo: I'm suddenly constipated.

Me: Tell me about it...

Nomvuyo: Before I get to my shit, I just want to apologise for not focusing on our friendship.

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: I underestimated the craziness.

Me: Me too.

Nomvuyo: You know I love you. You're probably the only true friend I have at the moment.

Me: Ivy?

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: We're okay, but she's busy with her own things. She's not even in the country.

Me: Good riddance.

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I value your support. I may not tell you all the time, but I really do appreciate you. Me: I know.

Nomvuyo: I'm sorry for disappearing.

Me: I'm sorry for cancelling you.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: You have some great cancelling skills.

Me: I try.

We chuckle.

Me: So, what's happening with you?

Nomvuyo: Well, Liwa and I are not really together.

Me: Really? I thought you got back with him.

She shakes her head.

Nomvuyo: He has a lot going on right now. I want him to face his demons head on.

I look at her in disbelief.

Nomvuyo: He always off-loaded on me, Zimkitha as well. It was getting too much. I couldn't handle both of them at the same time. I really felt like I was drowning, yet they expected me to be their life guard. It was too much.

Me: He agreed to separate?

Nomvuyo: Of course not. However, our therapist was honest with him. He said Liwa cannot build healthy relationships until he deals with his problems. Liwa copes through shutting things out and never addressing them. He is constantly happy and never shows other emotions, because happiness is the easiest way he can hide his real feelings.

Me: Yoh.

Nomvuyo: The therapist really went in on all of us. He mentioned that out of all the boys, Liwa was the one who carried a lot of baggage, because Zimkitha piled on his

plate, using him as a substitute husband. He became Zimkitha's loyal soldier, because she manipulated him.

Me: So, he blamed Zimkitha?

Nomvuyo: He went in on all of us, before he sympathised with us. It was quite intense.

Me: Manje how is Liwa and Zimkitha? Are they okay?

Nomvuyo: Those two love each other. This won't ruin their relationship.

Me: So, you really separated?

Nomvuyo: He needs to tackle every single problem of his. It's going to be a long process, but the therapist says he is the one who is in charge of his life, now that the truth is out, and he cannot rely on anyone else but himself to build a better life.

Me: He encouraged the separation?
She nods.

Nomvuyo: He said we shouldn't see it as a negative thing. We should work on ourselves individually before we can attempt to fix our relationship. Also, we're still in contact. Liwa is the love of my life. There is no way I'm going to be with another man. The thought of that even makes me sick.

Me: That's good. Good for you.

Nomvuyo: I think you and Derek are going through the same thing.

Me: You and Liwa are on the same page about space.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: Why did you stop talking to Melinda? Her team is excellent!

Me: I'm tired.

Nomvuyo: No, baby. You can't get tired and just zone out forever. Human beings are a lot to deal with, especially if you love and fuck them.

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: Take it from me, who is going through something similar...

I look at her.

Nomvuyo: You and Derek are perfect for each other. You're good for each other.

Don't get consumed by the bullshit. I personally think you've grown as individuals and a couple.

She looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: I've been with Liwa for years...

I've known him all my life... Even when we go through our lows, I know that we'll end up together, because we just love each other. I'm not distancing myself simply because I don't want to deal with his crap, I just want to push him to work harder on bettering himself. I want him to be a better version of himself. I don't want him to rely too much on me. I think the

results will be more glorious if he does it himself, you know?

Me: Derek doesn't understand that.

She sighs.

Nomvuyo: That's why crazy people like us need mediators. We are highly broken and emotional. We can't deal with our shit by ourselves.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: I've learnt a lot over the past few weeks.

She stares at me.

Nomvuyo: Space is not abandonment.

She smiles knowingly.

The smile that Melinda has whenever she knows that she's dragging me.

Nomvuyo: Liwa and I are giving each other space, but that doesn't mean we are not together.

I keep quiet.

Nomvuyo: There's a clash of communication between you and Derek. A love language clash... Derek's love language is Quality Time, right?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: And your love language is Acts of Kindness?

I nod.

Nomvuyo: This is what we fail to understand about love languages- how people give it is not how others would like to receive it. Derek is acting this way, because he values quality time. He doesn't understand that your love language is not quality time. He is giving you what he loves receiving.

She continues looking at me softly.

Nomvuyo: There's a disconnect. The whole point of languages is to communicate. I can't address someone in English if they don't understand English.

It's my responsibility to learn a few words and sentences in that person's language, so they can receive the message I'm trying to convey. However, it has to be a fair interaction. That person also has the responsibility to learn my language, so I can receive their message...

She keeps quiet.

I stand and go to the balcony.

She follows me.

Nomvuyo: There is so much power in personal space... It's great, because Liwa and I are on the same page. We both understand why the space is necessary.

Thankfully, we understand each other.

Just like Derek, Liwa values quality time, but that's not my love language. Because of this, we meet up on Sundays,

Wednesdays, and Fridays... I give him my undivided attention for these three days, and then I come here and do my own

thing on Saturdays, Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. At first I saw him once a week, but now I'm comfortable with adding more days. He knows that my love language is Physical Touch, so he fucks me senselessly and holds me as much as he can when we're together.

I am gobsmacked.

Nomvuyo: I know what you're going through. You're confused, you're hurt, you're frustrated, but you are also stubborn. You're struggling to admit to yourself that there's still a part of you that wants to make it work with Derek...

She smiles.

Nomvuyo: Don't be too hard on yourself... It's okay to admit that you still want him. It's also okay to admit that you need time away from him. Just remember that space is not synonymous with abandonment. Derek is just finding it difficult to hear

you, because he's not really okay right now. He's going through a lot... That's why you need a mediator.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: I think I'd make an excellent relationship therapist, don't you?

Me: Eeuw, no. You'd end up putting your hands on them!

She laughs and pulls closer to her. She gives me a hug.

Nomvuyo: I'm here now. I'm not going to let you make stupid decisions.

I groan.

INSERT 229

Nomvuyo looks at me.

Nomvuyo: What do you think?

Me: I hear you.

She smiles.

Me: I've already said these things...

Nomvuyo: It's not about what you say, it's about how you say it. You know that.

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: Take your break, baby.

Me: Derek and I are over. Maybe you should go tell him this so he can implement this shit on his next girlfriend.

Nomvuyo: Mxm, you know very well that you'd be paralysed if Derek moved on.

She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: Well, it's not like he'll ever move on... The man is obsessed.

Me: You'll never know. Angeke um-confirme umuntu.

Nomvuyo: Listen, if Liwa were to be with someone else, you'd find both of them hanging somewhere.

Me: Yhu, such violence.

Nomvuyo: Says the girl who gets into fights in clubs.

Me: Nope, I'm not about to let a random man come for me.

We walk back inside and go to the kitchen.

Nomvuyo: Hungry?

Me: Ya. She opens the fridge.

Me: You won't believe what Dean told me.

Nomvuyo: Utheni loyo?

I chuckle.

Me: Apparently, Nolwazi doesn't want me at her wedding.

She looks at me in shock and then laughs.

Nomvuyo: Wait, what?

She continues laughing.

Me: Don't laugh wena. She says I'll cause drama.

Nomvuyo: Yoh, Zizi. You are a drama magnet.

Me: Heyi wena. Phela my plan was to get there and do the absolute most. I was going to arrive with my new man, and tell everyone that he's Liya's stepfather.

Nomvuyo: I'm picturing you running to the altar, declaring your hatred for everyone... After, you faint and an ambulance arrives and takes you to hospital. And because Dean is also obsessed with you, he cancels the wedding and goes with you to hospital and leaves Nolwazi crying her lungs out...

We laugh.

Nomvuyo: Were you even planning on going to the wedding?

I shake my head.

Me: I was actually trying to figure out how I was going to tell Dean, because you know how dramatic he can be.

Nomvuyo: Kodwa uDean uyaphapha. Why would he expose Nolwazi like that? Pillow

Talk stays in the bedroom. I'd be so furious at Liwa if he did that shit.

Me: Dean is like an untrained dog.

Nomvuyo: Manje now that you know Nolwazi's deep secret, what are you going to do?

Me: I'm not going hawu. I don't want to make her uncomfortable on her wedding day. She chuckles.

Nomvuyo: I'm not going to badmouth her... I'm trying my best to keep my mouth shut.

I raise an eyebrow and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: Uh-uh.

Me: Are you going to the wedding?

Nomvuyo: Hai I'm dealing with a lot of shit right now. Also, I know I'm not on top of her list.

I chuckle.

Nomvuyo: She hates me.

Me: You guys made up... You're besties now.

She pouts and looks at me disinterestedly.

Nomvuyo: Don't tempt me.

I laugh.

Nomvuyo: It's not like I'm sitting here, waiting impatiently for their invitation.

I've got a lot on my plate...

She looks at me and smiles innocently.

Nomvuyo: If you're not going, I'm not...

Me: Hai, Vuvu.

Nomvuyo: Phela I'm loyal to you. You're my bitch.

I raise an eyebrow and she laughs.

Nomvuyo: Yoh, I'm joking. Listen, I'm going. I'll be her maid of honour... Lwazi and I are close. Wena nje you're a problem in our lives.

She smiles mischievously.

Nomvuyo: Don't worry though, I'll send you pictures and videos.

She laughs and I end up joining her.

Me: We're too childish for these people.

Nomvuyo: Thankfully mina I've established my position as the bitchy one. They're not going to go hard on me if I decide not to pitch. I'll be called petty, which I'm okay with... Now, you on the other hand? Unyile.

I groan.

She dishes up for me and we go back to the balcony.

Nomvuyo: On a serious note, are you comfortable with your decision?

I shrug.

Nomvuyo: Take your break... However, I think you should talk to him.

Me: About what?

Nomvuyo: Heffer, did you not hear me? Did you not take in my wisdom?

Me: I did... Give me time to process it.

Nomvuyo: Maybe I should go to Derek as well...

Me: To do what?

Nomvuyo: Talk to him...

I hiss.

Nomvuyo: I'm not trying to get you back together. I just want both of you to understand the concept of space.

I roll my eyes.

Nomvuyo: Derek needs to understand that just because you need space, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with him. He mustn't suffocate you. Yes, he loves spending time with you, but he must give you breaks from time to time, because you value your time alone.

I don't say anything.

Nomvuyo: You, on the other hand, need to understand that being in a long term relationship requires immense patience.

Me: Vuvu, can we talk about something else? She looks at me softly and nods.

Nomvuyo: Okay, baby.

Me: I'm not in the mood.

Nomvuyo: Okay.

Me: Thanks.

Nomvuyo: Wanna trash-talk Nolwazi?

I end up laughing...

*** Niki is hosting a housewarming shindig, and she has asked me to come, obviously.

I'm proud of her.

She has done what I always tell myself I'll do, but end up delaying... I'm still attached to my parents, I don't think I'll ever leave them.

As I'm packing my bags, my mom walks in.

Mom: I'm so glad you're going out!

Me: Wow, do I annoy you that much?

She giggles.

Mom: Your dad and I would like some alone time. We're not used to you being here.

Me: Maybe I'll also get my own place.

Mom: Who will cook for you?

I sigh.

Me: I'll get a helper.

She laughs.

Mom: Haike, we'll see.

She walks out. I finish up packing and browse through my phone for a long time. When I go to the lounge, I find Derek there.

Okay.

Me: Hi.

Why is he here? Liyakha is with him mos.

Derek: She is with Dean...

I nod.

Mom: Are you leaving?

Me: Not yet.

I put down my bag and go to the kitchen. I get myself something to eat quickly.

I come back to the lounge and sit.

We sit in silence for a long time.

Mom: Eish, I forgot my laundry...

She stands and walks out of the house.

I focus on the TV and finish up my food.

I don't really know what's going on right now.

I stand and go to the kitchen.

My mom comes in and looks at me. I stare at her expectantly.

Mom: *whispering* I don't think he's fine...

I don't say anything.

Mom: *whispering* You can't leave me alone with him...

Me: Why not? He's your son, isn't he?

She sighs.

We walk back to the lounge.

Me: I'm leaving.

Mom: Alright, baby. I'll see you tomorrow.
Tell Niki ukuthi I'll come soon. She must
bake for me.

Me: Will do.

I get my phone and request an Uber.

Derek: I'll give you a lift.

I look at him.

He stares at me blankly.

Me: It's okay. I'll requ-

Mom: Thank you, Star. I was actually
uncomfortable with her using these Ubers
so late.

Me: It's 4pm.

She looks at me and smiles.

Mom: Exactly.

She looks at Derek.

Mom: Take her, please, baby. She's going
very far!

She takes my bag.

Mom: I'll walk you out...

Me: Are you trying to get rid of me?

She walks out while I'm still speaking.
Derek stands and walks out as well.
I lock up and make my way out to Derek's car.

My mom puts my bag in the boot and then smiles.

Mom: Nihambe kahle. Zi, call me when you arrive.

I feel like everything is moving too fast for my liking. She avoids my eyes and then steps closer to Derek.

Mom: I love you, baby. Thank you.

Derek: I love you too.

They share a hug.

Mom: See you around.

Derek nods and then gets in the car.

Mom: Ngena wena.

She pushed me lightly.

I get in the car and she waves.

Derek starts the car.

Derek: Where am I taking you?

Me: Midrand.

He tries to hide his disbelief.

Me: Niki's housewarming.

He nods lightly as I enter the location...

He drives off.

After about 10 minutes of silence, my phone rings- it's Niki.

My phone is still connected to Derek's car. I answer.

Me: Niki.

Niki: Boo, everything is ready. I am so excited!

Me: Can't wait to see you.

Niki: You don't sound too excited.

Me: I am.

Niki: Listen, I want us to avoid you getting too sad about this breakup... I don't want us to go back to the days of the worm...

We agreed that our next breakups won't turn us into wet puppies.

Me: Niki-

Niki: I invited a few guys I know from work... We'll have lots of fun.

Me: Uh-

Niki: One of them has great potential wena my friend. Futhi he's perfect for your transition to singlehood. He'll dry those tears and wet that va-

I quickly end the call and switch off my phone.

I focus on the road ahead...

Yoh.

INSERT 230

I wasn't ready for the awkwardness.

I haven't even looked at him.

Man, Niki really caught me off guard. She just wouldn't let me speak.

Derek is now speeding a bit too much for my liking.

Me: Please slow down.

He looks at me briefly. Thereafter, he focuses on the road again.

Me: Derek, slow down.

Derek: You have a party to get to, and guests waiting for you.

Whoa.

I decide to keep quiet. I switch on my phone again and text Niki.

Me: Idiot, I'm in Derek's car... He heard everything you said.

I wait for her response.

She responds after a few minutes.

Niki: I'm confused. What are you doing in his car?

Me: He came to my house randomly. He offered me a lift.

Niki: Why? Ufunani?

Me: I don't know. Also, can we address your big ass mouth??

Niki: Hai hai, how was I supposed to know that you're with him? You should have given me a signal.

Me: He's speeding like crazy.

Niki: Manje he's coming with you??

Me: No. He's angry though.

She sends laughing emojis.

Niki: Awkward much? Hai mina I'm not at fault here. You should have given me a signal.

I send her the middle finger.

Me: There's your signal, idiot.

Niki: Friend, why did you accept his lift? You know that's not how things are done, right?

Me: My mom literally forced me into the car.

Niki: I hope you know that this is not going to make things easier. You were slowly letting go of him.

Me: You really want this to be over, neh?

Niki: I'm respecting your wishes. I'm not going to tell you what to do. You know how I am with men... Once I'm done, I'm done. You explained why you want to move on from him, I understand you, and I respect that.

Me: Hmkay.

Niki: Anyway, everything is ready.

Tonight will be awesome. Just waiting for people to get here.

Me: Don't try to hook me up with anyone, please.

She sends laughing emojis.

Niki: Girl, I've got the perfect man for you! He will rearrange your organs!

Me: Niki, stop being disgusting!

She sends laughing emojis.

Niki: I'll see you soon, boo.

Me: Shap.

I put down my phone and zone out...

After a while, Derek stops at the garage.

Derek: I'll be back.

He walks out and I watch as he goes inside the shop.

Minutes later, he comes back, drinking water.

He starts the car and drives off.

I want some water too, but I guess I'll get some at Niki's place.

He continues driving like a crazy person.

Eventually, we get to Niki's place.

I really hope that she has furniture, because I've heard some shady things about Midrand people. I don't even understand why she'd want to live so far. Visiting her is going to be admin...

Anyway, I call Niki and tell her I've arrived.

Derek drives in.

I spot Niki and she shows him where he should park.

Me: Thanks for the lift.

He ignores me.

Haike.

I get out of the car.

Niki: Heeeyy!

We share a long hug.

Niki: *whispering* I thought you were joking.

I hiss.

We both tense up when Derek gets out of the car.

Niki lets go of me and smiles at Derek.

Niki: Derek!

Derek walks to our side.

Derek: Hi, Nikiwe.

They share a hug.

Derek: Congratulations on your new place.

Niki: Thank you! My mom is still touched that I left her...

Derek: Give her some time...

Niki: Hopefully, she'll get used to the distance.

She shivers and looks at me awkwardly.

Niki: Ready?

Me: Ya.

She looks at Derek awkwardly as well, but he continues looking at her coolly.

She turns and starts walking. Derek walks behind her.

What's going on?

I find myself walking behind him.

We eventually get to Niki's place.

Niki: This won't be a ratchet gathering.

We are within white people.

She looks at us excitedly.

Niki: Let me show you around...

There are already three guys here.
They're busy discussing marriage. I don't really know what they're saying, but it seems like a heated discussion.

Niki clears her throat and smiles.

Niki: Guys, this is Ziyanda, my best friend... and Derek...

She avoids Derek's eyes..

Niki: These are my colleagues... This is Jay... Muzi... and this is Owami...

They give me hugs and then shake hands with Derek, whom I haven't looked at directly. Just like Niki, I'm avoiding his eyes.

Niki: Anyway, let me show you around, guys.

She leads us around the apartment.

Me: Where's Kwani?

Niki: He'll be joining us soon.

I nod.

Me: This is a cute place.

Niki: Right? Very cozy.

Derek: Can I use the bathroom?

Niki: Sure.

He walks to the bathroom. Niki and I walk out of the bedroom.

Niki: I am shook!

Me: I don't know what's going on.

Niki: He obviously doesn't want your vagina to be touched by other men.

Me: Niki, sies.

She laughs.

Niki: I'm trying not to be awkward, but naye he's all quiet and tense... he even looks sexier than before.

I groan.

The door opens and Derek walks out.

Niki: Would you like anything to eat or drink, Derek?

Derek nods.

We walk back to the lounge and Niki disappears. The three guys are still discussing marriage.

They're now seated in the lounge.

Derek and I sit next to each other.

Muzi: I don't want to get married... That shit is too much. Getting a divorce is more difficult and time-consuming than getting a marriage certificate.

Jay: Why are you getting married with the end in mind? That doesn't make sense.

Muzi: I don't believe that humans are capable of staying in monogamous relationships forever. That shit is unrealistic.

Niki comes back with a plate filled with finger foods.

Derek: Thank you.

The guys continue having this discussion.

Jay: Derek, what do you think? Derek look at them coolly.

Jay: Do you think marriage is a scam?

Derek shakes his head.

Derek: Marriage is not a scam. It's quite simple, really. Some people are meant for marriage, and others aren't.

Jay: That's my point. If two people come together, and have joint goals, then they'll make it. My parents have been married for 20 years now. They're still madly in love with each other.

I'm not really interested in this discussion.

I look at Derek as I stand.

Me: I left my bag in your boot. I'd like to get it...

He takes out his keys and stands.

Me: I'll go. You can stay.

He looks at me calmly.

What is going on? I'm actually getting annoyed now. Why is he here?

I walk out first and he walks behind me.

When we get to the car, I turn and look at him sharply.

Me: Why are you here?

He looks at me calmly.

Me: Derek, why are you here?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: Mxm.

I try to open the boot and he locks it.

I look at him angrily.

Me: Why are you doing this? He stares at me. His expression changes. He's now looking at me sadly.

Derek: I didn't think you'd leave me...

I try to say something, but end up keeping quiet.

He stares at me intensely.

Derek: You know I'd never hurt you intentionally.

I don't say anything.

Derek: Do you think I'd hurt you on purpose?

He stares at me expectantly.

I keep quiet.

He unlocks the boot and I take my bag.

As I close it, he steps closer to me.

Derek: I'm sorry for pushing you away.

I'm sorry for not respecting your space.

He looks at me pleadingly.

Derek: I didn't mean to make you angry.

He continues staring at me.

Derek: I don't even know why I'm here...

Once again, I'm invading your space...

He sighs heavily and scratches his head.

Derek: I'll leave you alone...

He looks at me regretfully and gets in the car.

I sigh heavily as I open the door and get in as well. I put my bag on the backseat.

He looks at me, as if he's expecting me to speak.

Me: I'm not in the mood to talk.

He nods.

Derek: Ice cream?

I nod and he starts the car...

INSERT 231

We're now seated at a random
McDonald's, having ice cream.

We haven't spoken.

He's staring at me.

I stare back at him.

I genuinely don't want to talk, and I'm
glad he respects that.

After a while, we finish up and go back to
the car.

He drives back to Niki's place. When we
walk in, we hear laughter. It seems like
more people arrived in our absence.

Niki walks to me and pulls me away.

Niki: I thought he kidnapped you.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Really?

Niki: Yes!

Me: Well, he didn't.

Niki: What's happening here?

Me: He apologised.

Niki: For what?

Me: Everything.

She shakes her head.

Niki: I love Derek, but he really needs to check himself. Yet again, he failed to understand the concept of space. Don't be fooled by his sexiness and sobbiness.

Me: I don't want a lecture right now. I didn't come here for that.

Niki: Hmkay.

Me: When did Kwanele get here?

Niki: Not so long ago.

I walk away from her and go to Kwanele, who's standing with Derek.

He smiles when he sees me.

Kwanele: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug.

Kwanele: How are you?

Me: I'm okay and you?

Kwanele: Okay is not really a feeling.

I grunt.

Can he also not annoy me. Out here behaving like a therapist.

He chuckles when he sees that I'm not happy about his question.

Me: You and your girlfriend are living your best lives.

He smiles.

Kwanele: We're in a very good place. She loves travelling, so I enjoy taking her to new places.

He smiles lovingly and I can't help but smile as well. I'm happy for them.

Me: That's really sweet. You guys are cute together.

Kwanele: Thank you... You and Derek have set quite a high standard for the rest of us...

Haike. I can feel Derek's eyes on me. Just then, Niki comes through and asks for our attention. We look at her.

Niki: We're about to play 30 Seconds. Everyone exclaims.

Niki: I've added your names in this jar. We're going to split into two teams.

Derek nudges me and I look at him. He smiles knowingly and I chuckle.

He knows that 30 Seconds unleashes the competitive beast in me.

Niki goes on to take out names...

I don't like this. I don't know these people. What if I'm in a team full of idiots that don't have general knowledge? We will have a problem.

Derek and I not in the same team.

I groan.

Derek: Good luck.

He smiles as he walks to his team. He's with Niki and Kwanele and a few others...

How unfair...

We eventually start playing...

I am pissed.

My team sucks.

These people just look at me like I'm speaking a different language when I give them clues.

What's worse is that their clues are also shady. I find it difficult to infer.

The other team is leading.

Derek, Niki and Kwanele are out here acting like they're Destiny's Child.

I am so annoyed. Brenda, Niki's colleague, is the one who annoys me the most. She throws out random guesses and then laughs when it's her turn to give clues.

Derek's team wins and they yell excitedly.

I hiss.

Brenda: Chomi, relax. It's just a game weitsi.

I ignore her.

Brenda: Woo drama! Bathong!

I walk away from her and go to the kitchen, because if I stay here I'll end up slapping her dumb ass.

Soon, Niki comes laughing.

I look at her angrily and she continues to laugh.

Niki: Fuck, we messed you up! We didn't give you a chance!

I hiss.

Derek walks to the kitchen and looks at me.

Niki: Don't be a sore loser, friend.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: Let's get some fresh air.

I push Niki out of my way and she continues laughing. Part of me thinks she

put me in that team on purpose, because she knows I hate losing.

I walk out and Derek follows me.

Me: How dare she put me with those idiots??

Derek looks at me, he's obviously trying big all means not laugh.

Derek: Sorry.

Me: Nxx, did you see that girl laughing when she was supposed to give us clues? She stood there the entire time, laughing and giggling!

He nods lightly and listens as I vent.

Me: I don't need this negativity in my life.

He eventually smiles and laughs quietly.

Me: It's not funny, Derek.

Derek: I'm sorry, baby.

I groan.

Me: I wanted to be in your team...

Derek: Me too... Askies...

I groan.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arms around me.

Me: Then, the other one stutters. Why are you playing 30 Seconds if uyangingiza?

He ends up laughing.

Derek: It wasn't your fault.

Our bodies touch and I look at him.

We stand there for a while.

Before I can say anything, his face is already pressed against mine.

He gives me a kiss, and I try not to get lost in it.

He stops and looks at me.

Derek: Baby, please give me a chance...

I look at him.

Derek: I'll do better, I promise.

Me: You won't screw me over like that bitch, Brenda?

He laughs and shakes his head sternly.

Derek: I won't.

He squeezes me and places his lips on mine.

Derek: You know I'll always fight for you, right?

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: I'm not going to lose you over something that can be rectified.

I sigh.

Me: I'm assuming Nomvuyo met up with you?

He chuckles and nods.

I back up and stare at him seriously.

Me: What did you take from that conversation?

Derek: That space is not abandonment. I continue looking at him.

Derek: She said some harsh truths. I don't say anything.

Derek: She made me realise that I was expecting too much from you... In a twisted way, according to her, I expected you to be my mother as well...

I frown.

I didn't think about it like that.

Clearly Nomvuyo went in on him.

He wraps his arms around me again.

Derek: I have a lot of work to do. I am nowhere near mental and emotional stability. However, having you in my life motivates me. I want to be better not only for myself, but for you and Little Star.

He places his lips on mine again.

Derek: I know you don't want to talk...

He kisses me and I respond.

Derek: Please forgive me... I'll do whatever it takes to fix our relationship. I'm not going to make excuses for the shit I've done.

He stares at me for a while.

Derek: Unlike Brenda, I won't let you down. I'll keep trying.

I giggle and he smiles.

Derek: I miss you.

Me: Me too.

Derek: Do you, really?

I nod.

He gives me a hug and we stand there for the longest time.

Me: I felt cornered. I didn't want to end things, but I felt like that was my only choice, because you weren't listening to me.

Derek: I'm all ears now, baby.

I stare at him.

Derek: I'm serious.

Me: I've never claimed to be perfect, you know that.

He nods lightly.

Me: Sometimes, I get scared. I get scared that we depend too much on each other. I don't want us to lose ourselves and our sense of individuality. There are times when I feel like things are moving too fast, and I just need to slow down and chill... by myself...

I sigh.

Me: I could never hate you. I don't even know what hating you feels like. You just love taking things personal. My need for space doesn't mean that there's something wrong with you.

Derek: I didn't understand that.

Me: Those were some intense weeks. I felt like I was suffocating. I don't regret being

your shoulder to cry on. However, I just needed some time to recuperate.

Derek: I get it now. I have had a lot of time to process what you said the last time I saw you in Cape Town.

I look at him.

He is being sincere.

Derek: Like I've said, I'm not going to make excuses. I handled things wrong. I led you to your breaking point.

We are silent for a while.

Derek: I love you. Every moment I'm away from you, I feel lonely. And this is not because I'm obsessed with you, or I'm scared of being alone. I just love being with you. I decided a long time ago that you'll be my life partner, so losing you because of shit that can be fixed is not acceptable. I could never live with myself knowing that you're out there hurt, because of me.

Me: No, don't make me cry...

He smiles and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: You're special. You're the most selfless person I know. You put other people's needs first. You never hesitate to help people. Like I always tell you, that's an admirable trait, even though it's frustrating at times.

He stares at me.

Derek: That breakup was the first time I actually witnessed you choose yourself over others. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but it truly woke me up. I also need to start prioritizing my mental and emotional health. I can't give you the best version of myself, because I haven't unlocked my potential. And you're absolutely right, that shit all depends on me.

Me: That's all I want for you.

Derek: I wasn't hearing you.

I nod.

Derek: You're a blessing. As soon as I get used to having you in my life, somehow, I get reminded of your greatness, and I'm smitten all over again. It's just an endless cycle of undying love. I could never hate you. Yes, I you piss me off and you make me sad, but all of those negative emotions never last, because my love for you overshadows everything.

Me: Can't a bitch break up with you in peace?

He laughs.

Me: You always manage to warm up this cold heart of mine.

Derek: I aim to please, Miss Dlamini.

I smile and we share a kiss.

Derek: Anyway, I have a question for you...

I look at him in confusion as he smiles brightly.

Derek: Will you be my person again?

I giggle.

Me: No. I was just about to meet new guys. You're cock blocking me. Go away!

Derek: You and Niki sure know how to fuck me up. I don't even know how I managed to drive here safely.

Me: You almost killed me!

Derek: So, you don't want to be my person again?

I shake my head.

Derek: Hmkay...

He smiles mischievously.

Derek: I have my persuasive ways...

He spanks my bum and I laugh.

Me: Let's go back inside. Niki is going to think you kidnapped me again.

Derek: I can't believe she was ready to let go of me like that.

Me: Niki is very good at cutting people off.
She wastes no time.

Derek: I'm kinda hurt.

Me: Angizingeni. We walk back inside.
We bump into Brenda.

Brenda: Chomi, you're back. We're
playing 30 Seconds again.

Derek laughs as I walk away and leave
him and Brenda there.

This time around, I'm choosing my team.

INSERT 232

Yes, I chose my team this time around.

Best believe we won.

Niki was with Brenda.

By the time we are done, she is pissed,
just like me. Now, she understands why I

was so angry. Brenda is literally the worst!

Niki: Brenda, you must never play 30 Seconds!

Brenda: Aww chomi, askies!

Derek, Kwanele and I laugh at her.

Niki: Hai man! You're the worst!

We follow her to the kitchen and I continue laughing at her.

Me: Chomi, why you mad doe?

She looks at me angrily.

Derek: Don't be angry, chomi.

Niki: Kwanele, tell them to stop!

Kwanele: Baby, I'm sorry, but that shit was hilarious.

She huffs. We continue making fun of her.

It's now around 23:00 and the vibe is still nice.

Derek looks like he is ready to leave.

Me: You can go.

Derek: You're not coming with me?

I shake my head.

Me: Niki asked me to sleepover. I haven't spent time with her in a while.

He looks at me like a lost puppy.

Derek: I thought you were going to come with me...

Me: No.

He sulks.

Derek: Okay then. Will I see you tomorrow?

Me: I'll let you know.

Derek: Okay.

He looks at me sadly.

Derek: Are you going to walk me out?

Me: Sure.

He says goodbye to Niki and Kwanele.

Kwanele: I should also get ready to leave.

Niki: You can't leave now. We need to make sure that all these people leave.

Derek: Once again, congratulations on your new place.

Niki: Thank you. They share a hug.

Derek: Good seeing you, Shenge.

Kwanele: Likewise, Hlomuka.

Me: I'll be back.

Niki: Shap.

Derek and I walk out and we get to his car.

He is sulking. He knows that my cold heart eases up when I see him sulk.

We get in the car.

Me: How's work?

Derek: Same old...

I nod lightly.

Derek: Your position is still available.

I shake my head.

Me: Space, remember?

He sighs and nods.

Derek: Are you going to move back in?

Me: I didn't say we're back together.

He tries sulking, but I shake my head.

Me: Not yet.

Derek: You're not going to get to know Niki's people, right?

He tightens his jaw. I assume he's thinking about what Niki said earlier over the phone.

I chuckle.

Me: I'm not even focused on other people right now, Derek. I want to go back to my old sane self. Derek: You've been sane before?

Me: Very funny.

He chuckles.

Me: Niki is not running a brothel here. Also, can you stop thinking I'm a horny irrational person? First it was Andile, now-

Derek: I never thought you'd cheat on me...

Me: Hawu?

He looks at me guiltily.

Me: The fact that you invited yourself to this party, shows how shady you are.

Derek: I just didn't want...

He groans.

Derek: Would you not do the same thing if you were me?

Me: You seem to underestimate my pride. I would have dropped you off and walked away.

Derek: You're prideful.

I sigh.

Me: How is Dean?

Derek: He's not fine.

Me: Why?

Derek: I think he's taking this breakup worse than me.

Me: Did he tell you what Nolwazi said?

Derek: What?

Me: She doesn't want me at her wedding- I'll cause drama.

He raises an eyebrow.

Derek: Dean told you that? I nod.

He chuckles.

Derek: Why is he snitching on his fiancee?

I shrug.

Derek: Maybe that's why there's so much tension between them. He mentioned that he told Nolwazi about his fuck up, and she went in on him. I wasn't interested in the details, so I didn't bother asking what he was talking about.

Me: It's not like I was planning on going to the wedding.

He looks at me sharply.

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: Can you stop being naive?

He doesn't say anything.

Me: We are not in a good space.

Derek: You still think we're not in a good space?

I keep quiet.

Derek: See, now you're just out to kill me... I thought we-

Me: We're better.

Derek: Exactly.

He sighs.

Derek: So, Nolwazi doesn't want you there?

I nod.

Derek: I'm sure she'll change her mind once she sees that things are better.

Me: I'm not going to parade myself around Nolwazi, so she can make judgements. She's not that vital in my life.

Derek: Yoh.

Me: I wasn't going to go to the wedding anyway. Dean snitched on her. I'm not even going to bother questioning why he told me, because I'm not married to Lwazi. Dean will deal with his consequences.

Derek doesn't say anything.

Me: I will respect her wishes and stay very far from her drama-free world. What I won't do though, is go to her and try to convince her that I'm good and we're good. Hai phela I don't worship Nolwazi. Let's not overestimate our value in other people's lives...

Derek: I'm actually surprised that she, out of all people, would say such... She's making it seem like you are the root of all our drama. If she's doesn't want drama in her wedding, then every single one of us should be disinvited. Truly speaking, we're all fucked up in different ways. Each

of us has caused drama at some point in time...

He sighs.

Derek: Dean shouldn't have told you...

Now, this shit is going to change how we see her. Right now, she is looking quite shady.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: I'll talk to her. I don't think she meant it in a malicious way.

I don't say anything. I'm not even interested at this point.

Derek: Does she really think I'm going to go to her wedding by myself?

He looks at me in confusion.

Derek: Also, does she not understand that cutting you off means she's also cutting me off?

Me: Haike, stop the drama. I broke up with you.

Derek: I'm not sure if you've noticed, but my circle doesn't really take breakups as a real thing... We fight for the people we love. If something can be fixed, we don't dismiss it. If it means we swallow our pride, then so be it.

I think back...

Apparently Gabi reversed her divorce with Jay.

Malusi never let go of Nandi. He always made it clear that he would get her back and change his ways. They're back together now. Dean done fucked up with the Ntsiki situation, but managed to reestablish his relationship with Nolwazi (with my help of course).

Liwa didn't accept the divorce. He met Nomvuyo halfway. They're in a better space now.

Now, Derek is out here with me...

I look at him.

Derek: Exactly.

I sigh.

Derek: I think Dean has been an emotional mess over the past few weeks... He has been seeing a therapist as well... I'm not trying to make excuses for his behaviour, but I don't think he snitched on her on purpose.

Me: My focus is not on the messenger, it is on the message. Like I said, Dean will deal with his consequences and manage to soften her up.

I sigh.

Me: Anyway, this is not main thing in my life. I'm trying to get back to a stable place, and this is the least of my worries.

Derek: Am I also the least of your worries?

He looks at me all sadly.

Me: You've mastered the art of sulking.

He smiles mischievously.

Derek: I know the effect it has on you.

I sigh.

Me: I don't know. We need to go back to Melinda...

He nods.

Derek: Anything to have you back in my life.

He leans closer to me and we share a kiss.

Me: It's late. I need to sleep.

Derek: How are you going to sleep with all those people in there?

Me: I'm not coming with you, Ngidi.

He sighs.

Me: See you around.

Derek: I love you.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Unganginyeli, Ziyanda.

I giggle.

Me: I love you too.

We kiss again.

Me: Shap.

Derek: Bye, baby. Thank you for not cussing me out.

I chuckle as I get out of the car and watch him drive off...

INSERT 233

Spending time with Niki has lifted my spirits. There's never a dull moment with her. She understands me, truly, and doesn't want to sit around and talk about deep shit 24/7. I love that I don't have to explain myself to her. I also love that she knows when to back off. I already have more than enough people right now who are convinced that they know what's good for me, and while I appreciate their investment, their constant follow-ups can get overwhelming.

Niki has been there from day 1, I'm genuinely care-free when I'm around her...

Anyway, today is our last day together and we are meeting up with Jeff and Ziggy.

I haven't seen those two in a long time. Jeff suggested we come to his house... We were hesitant... Niki and I don't get along with Luyanda, his fiance. She has never liked us, nathi ke it's not like she's our favourite person.

Niki: I asked Ziggy if he's still dating Nolwazi's sister. Uthi she left him for a white man in the UK.

I laugh.

Me: Yhu.

We eventually get to Jeff's place.

Jeff is the most chilled person I know. He is always on 40%. Akaphaphi like some of us. Well, he's high 70% of the time, so...

Jeff: You two sure know how to disappear...

Niki: What about you? You've been MIA!

Jeff: I'm always chilling with Kwanele. I don't understand why you never join us.

Niki: Hai, I'm busy.

We share hugs.

Jeff: Zi...

Me: Ya wena.

He smiles.

Jeff: It's been a minute.

Me: Eish, I know.

Jeff: Lu is visiting her father...

Niki: Excellent! Jeff chuckles.

Me: Where is Ziggy? I want to laugh at him. I heard his ass got dumped for a colonizer.

Jeff laughs.

Jeff: He's been a sloppy mess for months. He actually loved Ivy.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'm hungry. Feed me.

We go to the dining room, and he has already set up the table.

We dish up for ourselves.

Jeff: How are the things with the mean man?

Ever since Jeff and Ziggy met Derek in Maboneng that other time, they call him a meanie. Apparently he wasn't kind...

Me: He's good.

Jeff: Is he still mean?

Me: He's far from mean yazi.

Niki: They are rekindling their relationship. This bitch broke up with him.

Jeff: Really? What happened?

Me: Hai hai... Can we not focus on my dramatic life?

Jeff chuckles.

Jeff: So, he's nothing like the worm?

Me: Euw no.

Jeff: Hmkay. If he's a problem, then you know what to do.

Niki: Heyi, Jeff. You're convinced you're the shit.

Jeff: I am...

We continue chatting for a while...

As we're eating, Ziggy emerges.

Me: Zig!

Zig: Hey, guys.

Niki and I hug him at the same time.

Me: They dumped you? He groans.

Me: Askies...

Zig: Mxm.

He pushes us away as we stifle laughs.

Zig: Yazi I'm heartbroken and you idiots think this is a joke.

Jeff: We didn't know that you are capable of being in love.

Zig: Mxm.

Niki dishes up for him and plants a kiss on his cheek.

Niki: Zoba strong, boo.

He groans...

Niki and I left that house high as hell...

Jeff's weed takes you to other places.

I'm out here craving Derek's dick.

Me: I don't want to go to your place. Tell the driver to drop me off at Derek's place.

Niki: This bitch...

Me: You're not capable of giving me what I currently want.

Niki: Mxm.

She adds Derek's address and the Uber driver chuckles as we argue about me wanting Derek's dick.

Me: If you had a dick, then maybe I'd want yours.

Niki: Manje I must magically grow a dick?

Me: Hai, it wouldn't be good enough actually. I want Star's dick.

The Uber driver ends up laughing loudly.

We eventually get to Derek's place.

Me: Wait, I'm not sure if he's here. I need to call him.

Niki: Out!

Me: Niki, futsek.

I call Derek and he answers.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Ukuphi?

Derek: I'm at home.

Me: Great. I'm outside.

Derek: Uh?

Me: Woza.

I end the call.

Me: He's coming.

The Uber driver continues laughing as

Niki and I continue arguing.

After a few minutes, Derek walks to the gate. Heyi, those sweatpants will be ripped off.

Me: Bye!!!

The Uber driver chuckles.

I open the front door and bend to give Niki a kiss.

Me: I love you.

Niki: I love you too.

Me: I just want this dick, friend. It's been close to two months.

She laughs and I kiss her again.

Me: I love you.

Niki: Just go, you whore.

I kiss her again and close the door. I walk towards the open gate. I legit feel like I'm walking on clouds.

Derek looks confused and happy.

Me: Heyiii!

He looks at me in shock as I plant a kiss on his lips.

Derek: What's happening?

Me: Let's go inside. Yabona it's about to rain.

He watches as I walk inside.

I'm already planning on what I'm going to do. I genuinely hope that he's ready...

I open my eyes and blink a few times.

I sit up.

Derek: Finally.

I snap out of it.

He's standing by the door, with a wide smile on his face.

He walks to the bed and sits next to me. I cover myself with a towel that evidently served its purpose, judging by its dampness.

Derek: Hey.

Me: Hi.

I clear my throat as I recall everything that happened.

Derek: You okay?

I look down. I suddenly feel shy. Haibo, the things I did? I'm shook.

Derek: What did you drink?

I groan.

Me: Smoked weed.

He chuckles.

Derek: I thought you were a freak, but now I'm convinced you're hiding another side of yourself.

Me: Derek!

I stand and cover myself with the towel properly.

Derek: Don't be embarrassed, baby.

I walk to the bathroom and he follows me.

Me: I'd like to shower in peace, please.

I want to wash away my sins.

Derek laughs as he walks out of the bathroom and closes the door.

Once I'm done showering, I go to the lounge and find Derek with Liya.

She immediately smiles when she sees me.

Me: Mama.

Liya: Mamama...

I smile as I take her from Derek and shower her with kisses.

Me: Hey, sugar.

She giggles.

Me: Missed you.

Liya: Mamama!

Me: Yaaas!

She giggles. Derek, as usual, is already snapping pics and taking videos.

Me: I look crusty. Awume kancane.

Derek: You and crusty in the same sentence doesn't make sense.

Me: Flattery won't get you far.

Derek: You'd be surprised.

He smiles mischievously.

Me: Argh, I don't need your negativity in my life!

He laughs.

Me: I have to go.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: If you think I'm going to let you out of this house when the weather is this bad, then you obviously don't know me. I sigh.

Derek: Go put on your pajamas. I'll dish up for you.

Me: Hmkay...

I go upstairs with Little Star.

When I come back downstairs, he's already playing the Real Housewives and my food is on the table.

Me: Look at you...

Derek: I aim to please...

Me: Hmkay.

I sit and he takes Little Star as I start eating.

Derek: So, are we going to forget the things you said and did?

Me: Yes, if you know what's good for you.

He laughs and kisses Little Star.

Derek: Your mother showed me flames to today...

Liya: Mamama!

Derek chuckles.

INSERT 234 (Unedited)

Derek and I have been in the house for two days straight.

This cold heart of mine is slowly warming up.

Derek has been feeding me... in many ways...

Derek: I missed cooking for you.

Me: I can see.

Derek: When are you going to admit that you missed me too?

Me: I thought I did...

He smiles.

Derek: Not enough.

Me: I missed you.

Derek: You're even calling my daughter Little Star again.

Me: Huh?

Derek: I've noticed that when you detach yourself from me, you call her Liyakha.

Me: Really? I didn't notice.

He chuckles.

Derek: I'm observant, especially when it comes to you.

Me: Asim'shayeleni izandla, bazalwane.

He laughs.

Derek: Don't mock me.

Just then, my phone rings and Derek gives it to me.

I check the caller ID.

Derek: Answer it, baby.

I answer.

Me: Hello.

Nolwazi: Hi, Zi, how are you?

Me: Good, thanks.

She clears her throat.

Nolwazi: It has come to my attention that something I said to Dean managed to get to you... I would like to meet with you to clear up any misunderstandings.

Me: What misunderstandings?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: Come on, Zi.

Me: What's there to explain?

Nolwazi: Can we meet?

Me: I'd rather not meet, seeing as I'm keeping to myself for now.

Nolwazi: I didn't mean it in a negative way. I was and still am concerned about you and Derek. I don't want to put you in an uncomfortable position.

I don't say anything.

I really don't want to engage with people.

I want to be forgotten for a while.

Nolwazi: Ivy, is going to be there. The last time you saw each other, you got into a physical fight. I don't want to put you in a space filled with triggers.

Me: Okay, Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: I hope you understand. I just...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I just want a peaceful wedding.

Me: Okay.

Nolwazi: I apologize for offending you.

Me: It's okay.

She sighs again

Nolwazi: Bye.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and give Derek the phone.

Derek: What did she say?

Me: She wants a peaceful wedding. She brought up Ivy. She's worried that I'll get into a fight with her.

Derek: I thin-

Me: I don't have the energy for this. Can we please drop it?

He shakes his head.

Derek: Dean loves you, Ziyanda. He truly loves you. I'm sure he'd be with you if I wasn't around.

He laughs.

Me: Euww!

Derek: Nolwazi probably feels a little jealous. It's understandable though. Dean does the most when it comes to you.

Me: I can't be punished for that. It's not my fault that Dean cares for me. Also, I've never given Nolwazi a reason to feel some type of way about my relationship with Dean.

Derek: I don't think she's being malicious.

Me: Okay, can we drop it?

Derek: Zi-

Me: No, Derek. I don't want this to be a "thing" that needs to be fixed. Leave it.

He sighs.

Me: This is what gets me frustrated... I don't want to be in the middle of any shit.

I've been keeping my distance, and I want it to stay that way.

Derek: You think Dean will be okay with you not coming to his wedding?

Me: Yoh, nkos' yami.

Derek: You two have built a very deep relationship. He wants you to be there...

Just then, his phone rings.

Dean: Speaking of the devil...

Derek answers the phone.

Derek: Dean... Ya... Okay...

He ends the call and stands.

Derek: He's here.

He walks away and I groan.

I really hope that Dean is his usual happy self, and this Nolwazi thing won't be dragged out, because once again, my head will be on the block.

This time, I refuse. I'm not going to be involved in this shit.

Minutes later, Dean comes in.

He looks at me in disbelief.

Dean: What's happening?

Derek chuckles as he sits next to me.

Me: Hey.

I cover myself with a blanket.

Dean sits and looks at me.

Dean: Are you back?

I shake my head.

Me: Weed led me here.

He looks at Derek, who's smiling like a kid.

Dean: So, you don't bother calling me when you two fix things?

Me: How are you?

He groans.

Dean: Nolwazi says she called you... She called me on my way here.

I nod lightly.

Derek: Kahle kahle, why would you tell Ziyanda that shit?

Dean: I don't know. It just came out.

Derek chuckles.

Derek: So, you snitched on Lwazi and then snitched on yourself after that?

Dean groans.

Derek: How are things between you two?

Dean: She is pissed.

Derek: As she should. It would have been better if you told me... Why would you tell Ziyanda? You're quite dumb.

Dean: Mxm.

Dean looks like a big baby that needs a teddy bear and a warm hug. Clearly, Nolwazi is dealing with him thoroughly.

Dean: Manje wena why don't you want to talk to Nolwazi?

Me: There's nothing to talk about.

Derek: Kanti what's Nolwazi's problem?

Dean: She wants a peaceful wedding.

Derek: You need to elaborate.

Dean: You and Ziyanda aren't together.

Your vibe is tense...

He looks at us.

Dean: Obviously that's no longer the case.

Derek: She specifically said she doesn't want Ziyanda there?

He nods.

Dean: Things are not good between us right now...

Me: I hope you're not going to blame me for this.

Dean: Of course not, idiot.

He looks at me begrudgingly.

Dean: Nolwazi thinks this wedding is hers only. She seems to forget that I'm also part of this shit, and it's not about what she wants only.

Yhu.

Dean: I had to remind her, and she didn't take it well... She knows I care about you, so why would she even say that you shouldn't come to the wedding? I believe that Ivy is a drama magnet, but am I against her coming to the wedding? No. I don't want Sly to come, because she's Liwa's ex and Nomvuyo hates her guts, and I know she's going to do some

annoying shit, but am I requesting that she doesn't come to the wedding? No, because I know that Nolwazi loves her, and if she does try to cause drama, then we'll deal with that shit.

We keep quiet as he vents.

Dean: Do you know who Mdu is bringing to the wedding? Tholi. Do you know who the fuck hates Tholi? Ivy! How the fuck is she okay with that combination, but she's suddenly above Ziyanda's drama? If I told her that Ivy shouldn't come, she would cancel the wedding and probably dump me. Can we not forget that Ivy loves antagonizing people. She's not innocent. She loves bothering people. She's going to freak out when she sees Mdu and Tholi. I sigh when I think of poor Tholi. I'm sure she's freaking out about going to the wedding. I should call her...

Dean: I shouldn't have told you what she said, but I was pissed. I'm still pissed.

Derek exhales loudly.

Derek: What did she say when you mentioned this?

Dean: She apologised, but she's not willing to meet me halfway.

Dean stares at Derek.

Dean: Would you go to my wedding without Ziyanda?

Derek shakes his head.

Derek: That wouldn't make sense.

Dean: So, it's okay for me to get married in the absence of my loved ones while she is drowning in her loved ones' presence?

Whoa.

Dean is angry mos. I may have underestimated this.

Dean: I know our wedding will have drama- with or without you. I just think it's hypocritical to pick and choose which

drama you're willing to deal with. I don't want to deal with Mdu, Tholi and Ivy. That shit drains me, but am I going to expect her to not invite them? Fuck, no.

I stand and go sit next to him.

Dean: You two have become my pillars of strength, genuinely. Am I wrong for wanting you to celebrate this shit with me? You're my family. Why should I be okay with eliminating you from my special day, and then deal with the drama from Nolwazi's people?

Me: I didn't know you felt so strongly about this.

Dean: Nolwazi has no reason to feel threatened by anyone. For fuck sake, I've never loved anyone as much as I love her. We shouldn't be fighting about such petty bullshit. I have bigger shit to worry about. I don't need this shit right now. I look at him sadly.

Dean: I'm supposed to be happy as fuck right now, instead I'm fighting and explaining myself over some bullshit.
Derek comes and sits next to him as well.

Derek: I'll talk to Lwazi.

Dean doesn't say anything. He looks at me.

Dean: Don't take this shit personally.
None of this is your fault.

Me: Don't worry, I wasn't blaming myself.
He chuckles.

Dean: Of course...

He sighs heavily.

Dean: I love Nolwazi. I've always been loyal to her. However, I disagree with her this time around. I don't want to fight over such pettiness.

He keeps quiet for a while and then looks at me.

Dean: You're really back with my brother?

Me: Not really.

Dean: You're coming to my wedding.

Me: No, I'm not.

Dean: I'll drag you there.

Derek: I'll help you.

I stand as Little Star wakes up and looks at us

Me: I have a child to take care of.

Dean: Derek, pour me some whiskey. My heart needs some electricity.

Derek: On it.

Dean: Bring my niece wena.

Me: You know, I was starting to feel sorry for you, but now you're back to being an idiot.

I give him Liya. He gives her a kiss and she smiles.

Dean: Ya wena, Depression.

Me: Dean!

He laughs.

Dean: Yini? That should be her second name.

Me: I really hope Nolwazi leaves your ass.
He chuckles.

Dean: That won't happen...

I watch as he continues playing with a very happy Star...

INSERT 235

Dean: Let's get one thing clear- you are coming to my wedding.

Me: Let's get one thing clear- I am not coming to your wedding.

He looks at me seriously.

Dean: I've never been one to hold grudges, but trust me, if you don't come to my wedding, I will never forgive you.

I keep quiet.

Part of me feels like he means that.

Derek: Don't make her feel bad. Your fiance doesn't want her there.

Dean: And as for you... If you're not there...

Dean looks at him seriously.

Derek: I'll come to your wedding, Dean.

Dean: Good.

Derek: However, I'm not going to force Zi.

Dean doesn't say anything.

Me: Anyway, uhambe kahle. See you around.

I give him a hug and Derek walks him out.

I love Dean, but I'm not going to that wedding. Imagine inviting yourself to a wedding you were asked not to attend.

Andizi. Bazongi-draw-a.

After a while, Derek comes back.

Derek: The wedding is next week Saturday.

Me: Nice.

Derek: You really aren't going?

Me: Nope.

He sighs.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I'll chill with Jeff and Ziggy.

Derek: Excuse me?

I look at him.

Derek: You're going to chill with those drug addicts?

Me: They are not drug addicts!

He hisses.

Me: Futhi you should be very thankful, because if it wasn't for Jeff's weed, I wouldn't be here.

Derek: You're not taking my daughter there.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I'll go home then.

Derek: Good.

Me: Speaking of home... I miss my parents.

He looks at me sadly.

Me: I should get going. I've been here for too long. I was supposed to go back home.

He sulks and I shake my head.

Me: Not falling for it.

Derek: I called Melinda. She says we should come on Wednesday.

Me: Cool. I'll see you then.

He sighs.

Derek: I'll take you to Soweto.

Me: As you should. I don't have money for Uber.

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: I'm broke.

Derek: I thought there was money in the card I gave you.

Me: I'm trying not to depend too much on you, Derek. Also, angijoli nawe.

Derek: Then you'll stay broke. I give you money every month. If you don't use it, then that's your problem.

Me: Just take me home!

Derek: I'd like to shower first.

Me: Make it snappy!

Derek: Ungangiphapheli.

Clearly Dean's bossy vibes are rubbing off on him.

We finally get home.

My mom is beyond excited to see me.

Mom: Baby girl!

I chuckle and hug her.

Me: Hello, sthandwa.

Mom: I've missed you. I initially wanted to get rid of you, but I really missed you.

I smile.

Mom: You seem lighter and happier.

Me: Really? Hehe I wonder why.

Just then, Derek walks in with Little Star, and my mom looks at him in shock.

Derek: Sawubona, ma.

Mom: Haibo, Nkanyisi. I wasn't expecting to see you.

Derek: She was with me for the past two days.

Mom: Really??

Derek nods and smiles.

Mom: Oh... Okay!

She looks at me amusingly.

Little Star starts screeching and my mom takes her from Derek.

Mom: Hello, baby!

Liya giggles.

Mom: I've missed your noise.

She stares at my mom.

Mom: Unjani?

She starts mumbling and speaking to her imaginary friends.

Mom: How are you, Nkanyezisi?

Derek: I'm good, ma. How are you?

Mom: I'm also good.

We go to the lounge and catch up.

Mom: Dean tells us that Nolwazi doesn't want you to come to the wedding...

Hai, not this again.

Me: Please don't make it a big deal.

Mom: Oh, I'm not. I told Dean that I'm not going as well.

Both Derek and I look at her in shock.

Mom: Hai phela, why should I go if you won't?

We continue looking at her in shock as she kisses Little Star.

Mom: This whole thing seems very strange to me. I don't understand why you're being singled out. I won't enjoy that wedding knowing that you were not invited.

Me: What did Dean say?

Mom: He got emotional... Your father said he will go. Mina angiyi lapho. Let's not forget that this dramatic girl that is being singled out is my child.

Me: You should go, for Dean's sake.

She stares at me.

Me: He thinks highly of you. I know it will hurt him if you don't go.

My mom shakes her head.

Mom: I'll think about it. I think at some point we should draw the line. You're my child, and I'm going to stand by you.

I groan.

Dean must be all over the place. I'm starting to feel bad for him.

Derek: Okay, I need to speak to Nolwazi. This is getting out of hand. I genuinely don't think she is trying to be malicious. She's not that type of person.

Mom: Go talk to her. We're still not going to that wedding.

I feel like Petty have left my body and decided to torture my mom.

Derek: This is being blown out of proportion.

Mom: Ziyanda is not going to that wedding. Haibo my child is not a wedding beggar. She'll survive if she doesn't attend.

Me: What did your husband say?

Mom: You know how he is. He thinks Dean should have spoken to him first before he brought the issue to you.

Derek: That's true though.

Mom: Hai I don't care about all of that. She stands.

Mom: Let's go get some fresh air, baby girl.

Little Star smiles as she is showered with kisses.

My mom walks out.

Derek and I look at each other.

Derek: We need to speak to-

Me: We?

Derek: Yes.

Me: No.

Derek: Zi, come on.

I shake my head.

Me: No. I'm not going to insert myself in this. Angithi you always say I'm must stop trying to solve other people's problems? That's exactly what I'm doing.

Derek: I don't want this to be dragged out.

Me: U-right phela. I'm not getting involved. Nolwazi has her reasons and I'm going to back off and respect those reasons.

Derek sighs.

Me: If Nolwazi has a problem with me, and she doesn't bring it to me directly, then that is her problem. I'm not going to take responsibility for something that has not been brought to me.

Derek: Zi, we can't let them fight over such. This shit is petty.

Me: Haike, I've taken off my Iyanla hat. You can fix their life bhuti. Angizingeni.

Derek: Are you doing this to try prove a point?

Me: I'm doing what you have always asked me to do- stay in my corner and not get involved. You are the ones who are making it a big deal.

Derek groans.

Me: Would you like something to drink?

He hisses.

Me: Hmkay.

I go to the kitchen and pour myself some water.

The door opens and my dad walks in.

I'm shocked to see Liwa come in right after my dad. Nomvuyo also comes in.

Nomvuyo: Koko endlini!

Me: Ngena!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Whoa.

Is Liwa back? Like, is this the Liwa we all know and love?

Me: Liwa!

We share a hug.

Me: How are you??

Liwa: I must say that Melinda and her people are the shit.

Dad: Liwa.

Liwa: Oh, sorry. They're amazing!

We share another hug.

Nomvuyo: Hey, you.

She smiles slyly.

Me: Hey.

We share a hug and she kisses me.

Nomvuyo: You're looking good...

She looks at me mischievously and I roll my eyes.

We walk to the lounge.

Nomvuyo: Oh... Hi, Derek.

Derek: Hello, Vuvu.

Nomvuyo bends and kisses his cheek.

She sits next to him.

Liwa clears his throat.

Liwa: Derek.

Derek: Liwa.

Okay. I guess they still have a long way to go.

Liwa and my dad sit.

Dad: Ziyanda, we need to discuss something.

Me: Uhm, I'll be back.

Nomvuyo: Uyaphi?

Me: My mom is calling me outside.

Derek: Zi-

Me: I'll be back.

I turn and walk out of the house. I find my mom by the gate.

Me: Let's go.

Mom: Yhu, I thought you'd never ask. I'm tired mina.

I laugh.

We walk out of the yard.

Me: What's gotten into you? You seem snappy.

Mom: Angazi. I'm just tired.

Me: Siyafana. Your husband has started.

Mom: You know your father... He's not going to let this go.

I groan.

Mom: I'm just not in the mood right now.

I'm tired of being an adult.

I laugh as she continues complaining.

INSERT 236

My mom and I literally took an Uber and went to Maponya Mall with Little Star.

We're now having ice cream at Steers.

Mom: Yazi I'm trying to understand what Nolwazi is saying, but I'm struggling.

Me: It's okay. I don't think she should be punished for not wanting me there. It's her wedding.

Mom: Haibo phela she's not the only one involved. Why would you intentionally ask someone your husband cares about to not come to the wedding?

I shrug.

Mom: I think there's some envy involved here. I don't say anything.

Mom: You and Dean are close. She might be feeling left out.

Me: I'd rather you say that, so I can alter my behavior to ensure that I don't make you feel excluded. She's being passive aggressive.

She nods.

Mom: Either way, you're not going to that wedding. I didn't raise you to go around involving yourself where you're not needed.

Me: Calm down. I'm really not that emotional about it. I'm fine.

Mom: Good, because I'm not fine. I don't know why, but I'm quite angry. I don't understand why she would single you out like that. Everyone in this group has drama.

I sigh.

Me: That's why I want to take a step back.

Mom: Hai nawe, Ziyanda. Couldn't you pick a different man? Yazi ever since they came into our lives, there's always

something going on. I miss the peaceful life we had before they came.

I laugh.

Me: It's not like I had a choice.

Mom: Yhoo hai shame! I'm sure you could have settled with someone else, and live a quiet life.

I continue laughing.

Mom: Kodwa there's nothing we can do.

Bheka manje we have grown to love all of them. I only signed up for one child, but now I'm dealing with all these other children... Kunzima.

Just then, my phone rings.

Me: It's Derek.

Mom: Hai he must wait. I let it ring and we laugh.

Mom: You know, every group has different dynamics... I believe that every person in the group has a role. It may be an unspoken rule, but I think for every

group to function, people should have different roles. This group is no different. We continue chatting for a while. Little Star keeps wanting my ice cream. She's busy sticking her little tongue out...

After about an hour, my mom and I get back to the house.

As the Uber driver arrives, we see that all the cars are still outside. Now, there's another unfamiliar one.

Mom: Yoh! Bhut' Uber Driver don't stop. Just drive!

I laugh.

Mom: Hai hai kanti bahamba nini??

I continue laughing. My mom is cracking me up today. I don't know what has gotten into her.

Mom: Just drive, Mr Uber.

Driver: I can't. I've already accepted the next trip.

Mom: Ziyanda, what is this person saying?
Tell him that we can't afford to get in this house.

Me: We have to...

She groans as she gets out of the car.

I get out as well and we stand by the gate.

Mom: Whatever happens, I want you to shut your mouth, you hear me?

Me: Okay.

We walk in the yard and then she opens the door and walks in.

Yhu.

Everyone is here now. Derek, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Zimkitha, Dean and Nolwazi. Lord.

All because my ass wasn't invited to a wedding?

Mom: And then?

They all stare at us.

Little Star starting laughing.

I take her from my mom and she rests her head on my neck and keeps quiet... such an attention seeker.

Dad: Please sit.

These people's presence makes my house seem too small.

My mom sits.

They even got chairs for us.

Me: I'm going to put Liya-

Derek: Sit, Ziyanda.

Haibo.

I look at him. He's not even smiling.

I sit next to my mom.

Nolwazi is looking at me.

She's expressionless.

I hope she knows that I'm not the one who called this meeting. Next thing she says I caused this shit.

Nomvuyo clears her throat.

We all look at her.

Nomvuyo: Liwa and I didn't know that this would happen. We just came to say hi...

Liwa: Uhm... Ya. We're going to leave now.

As they're about to stand, my dad looks at them sharply.

Dad: Sit.

They sit back. Baswabile.

Dad: I'm getting tired of the back and forth, and childishness that takes place in this group. Lately, you have all been acting like uncultured fools.

Whoa.

We all look at him in shock.

Dad: What happened to the positivity that radiated here? What happened to the open communication?

No one responds.

Dad: I'm sick and tired of this. I know for a fact that you all love and care for each other, so what is all this nonsense? You talk behind each others backs, you

badmouth each other, and you shut each other out... What is happening?

We keep quiet.

Dad: If you want to see me angry, then you will continue staring at me like idiots.

Derek clears his throat and we all look at him.

Derek: We don't seem to trust each other anymore.

Dad: Why? None of you act from maliciousness, so why would you lose trust?

Derek shrugs.

Zimkitha: I know that my situation contributed to the loss of trust.

My dad looks at Zimkitha.

Dad: We're not going to deal with your situation right now. It's a different story that needs proper analysis.

Zimkitha nods. I'm sorry, but that almost cracks me up. I try my best not to laugh.

My dad doesn't have the energy to deal with Zimkitha. That issue needs Melinda.
Dad: You all need to wake up and realise that your pettiness is not benefiting this group.

He looks at Nomvuyo.

Dad: You still haven't figured out why you're not kind to others?

Whoaaa!

Nomvuyo looks at my dad in shock.

Yes, boo. He done came for your ass!

My dad looks at Derek.

Dad: You still blaming anger for some of the cruel things you say?

Haiii!

Derek looks like he just got slapped.

My dad then looks at Liwa.

Dad: You still choosing to isolate yourself instead of fighting for your brothers' love?

Yhu.

My dad then looks at me.

Dad: Wena are you still hiding behind your pride and making excuses just so you can isolate yourself?

I don't say anything.

He looks at Dean.

Dad: Are you still lying to yourself about being emotionally okay?

Yoh.

He finally looks at Nolwazi.

Dad: And, are you still pretending to be okay with things and not voicing out what you truly feel to the relevant people?

We are all gobsmacked.

Dad: You're not leaving this house until you solve every single one of your issues. You always say you're married to each other, so nothing is off the table...

He sits back and stares at us coolly.

Little Star looks up and starts giggling loudly.

Part of me feels like this child is a grown ass drama queen trapped in a baby's body.

INSERT 237

We all stare at him.

Dad: I'm waiting.

I'm going to follow my mom's advice, and not say a word! I'm not going to open my mouth.

Derek clears his throat and we all look at him.

Derek: Well, I think we have all identified that I can get angry at times...

He sighs and looks at my father.

Derek: I'm dealing with it though. I'm getting professional help.

My dad nods slowly.

Derek: I'm dealing with all the things I've kept buried. It's not easy, but I think I'll get there in time.

Dad: That's admirable, Hlomuka. I'm glad that you're getting help. You cannot allow your emotions to control your actions.

You need to get to a place where you reflect before you react.

Derek nods.

Dad: We'll continue supporting you.

Derek smiles.

Mxm, he's off the hook.

Derek: I appreciate your support.

He looks at me.

Derek: I know I have dismissed your needs before, but I can assure you that I've learnt from this breakup. I'd like to apologise in front of everyone as well. I'm sorry for not giving you space when you needed it, and dismissing your needs at that time.

I try not to roll my eyes.

He's doing the most right now.

My father is busy smiling, and Derek knows he has won him over, as always.

Derek: I'll continue fighting for you...

Liya starts mumbling loudly.

Liya: Dadadada!

Yhu, bayafana nje. They know when to do the most.

He stands and takes Little Star from me.

Liya: Dadada!

Derek kisses her and sits.

Dad: I hear you, Ngidi.

My dad glances at me.

Dad: All you need to do is give Ziyanda her space when she needs it. Don't overwhelm my child.

Derek nods lightly.

There is silence once again.

Liwa clears his throat as well.

Liwa: I'd rather not delve deeper into my issue... All you need to know is that I'm also getting the help I need.

Dad: So, getting help means backing away from your brothers?

Liwa: I'm giving them space.

Dad: Did they ask for space?

Liwa tries speaking, but ends up keeping quiet. He doesn't have an answer.

Dad: The problem is that you all love making assumptions.

He looks at us.

Dad: You assume that you know what the next person needs. You assume that you

know what the next person is thinking. As a result, you end up messing up, because it turns out that you misinterpreted everything.

Heyi.

There's silence again.

Mom: Kahle kahle, I have a problem with everyone here...

Oh no.

My mom sits properly.

Mom: Yazi, I don't know if you're aware, but every group has different dynamics. These dynamics can be functional or dysfunctional...

Everyone is staring at her.

Mom: Let's look at this group's dynamic... You all have different personalities, and somehow, everyone's personality contributes to the group's uniqueness.

She looks at Derek.

Mom: Derek is the brains of the group...

Dean: He's really not that smart.

Derek: Don't come for me.

I chuckle to myself.

Mom: He's not out there like everyone.

He's more quiet. However, he's the thinker and always has great ideas for improving things... He is also a fighter...

Dean: Literally.

Mom: Langelihle. Dean looks down.

Derek: Thank you.

My mom ignores him and looks at Nomvuyo.

Mom: Nomvuyo may be unfriendly, but she's actually the mother of the group.

She takes care of everyone and ensures that they're safe. She enjoys mothering you people. You all need her strictness, because you'd go wild without her.

Nomvuyo doesn't say anything, but she smiles slightly.

My mom then looks at Liwa.

Mom: You, Liwa, represent optimism. Everyone comes to you when they need good vibes. You always find ways to lighten the mood. Your bubbly personality is contagious, and you bring out the child in everyone in this group. You may be going through a rough patch right now, but you will be okay...

Liwa: Thank you.

She looks at Dean.

Mom: You are just the honest one. You value honesty over everything. You love holding people accountable, and that is a good trait. You hate whispers. You want everything to be out in the open. You understand the importance of communication...

My mom seems to have figured out everyone. I didn't really think about people's contribution to the functionality of the group, hey.

She looks at Nolwazi.

Mom: You represent focus and achievement. You're a goal oriented, independent woman, and you want everyone to build solid lives for themselves. You always encourage people to set goals and action plans in every aspect of their lives...

Nolwazi doesn't say anything.

Mom: And finally, there's Ziyanda... Do I really need to explain what she brings to the table?

Liwa: She's the problem-solver.

Mom: Exactly. Ziyanda is a mixture of her father and myself. She loves tackling problems, mediating and she's feisty. Some of you still don't understand her feistiness. It really doesn't come from a bad place. She hates it when people are not getting along. She wants to deal with issues head on... She looks at everyone.

Mom: I have a problem with how Ziyanda is treated here... Whenever you're going through low moments, she's usually the first person you call. Because she's who she is, she obviously will not end your call and move on with her life as if nothing is happening. She's going to drop everything and focus on helping you out- the same way her father is doing now.

She looks at everyone.

Mom: Please don't get confused. Ziyanda's father and I do have a life. We don't sit here and twiddle our thumbs, waiting for you to come run to us... We're doing all this mediating, because that's how we are. We are not comfortable with unsolved situations.

She continues looking at everyone.

Mom: You all call Ziyanda when things aren't going well... I know Ziyanda. She will never ignore a problem that she feels

she can solve in some way. She loves every single one of you in this room, and she hates it when your relationships take a dip...

She sighs.

Mom: My issue is that none of you are acknowledging that this is not an easy role. Somehow, she's always left feeling drained, and when she shuts down, you don't empathise with her...

Derek and Dean look down.

Mom: This whole thing of minimising her to a childish drama queen needs to stop, because believe it or not, some of you managed to solve your shit because of her.

Heyi.

I look at her.

Is she getting angry?

Mom: And now Liwa is suddenly left out. She looks at Dean and Derek.

Mom: What have you two done to make sure that he is okay? You can't blame this boy for Zimkitha's actions... Also, we can't even blame Zimkitha for her actions, because she didn't have any other choice...

Dean and Derek don't say anything.

Mom: Liwa has been isolated for many weeks now. Have you even checked in on him? Yes, you're all going for therapy separately, but have you called to see how he is doing? Do you not realise that you need what he brings to the table? Look at how miserable you all are. Liwa is not around, and you have all shut him out. She's going off on us.

Mom: As for Dean... Have you also checked on him? I'd like to think you're not stupid. It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that this boy is pretending to be fine with this whole Zimkitha thing. He

thinks it would be selfish for him to get emotional, because Derek is the one who had more challenging experiences. He doesn't want the focus to be on him, but have you ever stopped to think about how he is? Yes, he has a better upbringing, but the boy still found out that his life was a lie...

She looks at us.

Mom: The problem is that none of you are practising empathy. You don't put yourself in other people's shoes.

She shakes her head.

Mom: And I am telling you... You can have all the love in the world, but if you can't put yourself in the next person's shoes, you will never be able to maintain a proper relationship with them. You will all go through some tough times, but if you can't be empathetic and give yourself time to understand what the person is

going through from their perspective, you will not go anywhere. All your love is wasted.

Everyone looks down.

Mom: I'm not happy with all of you right now.

There's silence for a while.

Dad: Thank you, my love.

I try not to gag.

Mom: Now that we have gotten this out of the way. Let's address the specific situation that is currently troubling a few of you...

My mom looks at Nolwazi.

Mom: You're going to have to be honest.

We will deal with Dean later.

Dean: I've apologi-

Mom: Shut up. Uyaphapha wena. Thula.

Dean keeps quiet.

Dad: I thi-

My mom shakes her head.

Mom: This group deals with things very strangely, so let's not change, because we want to stroke people's egos.

Me: I'd rather we not discuss this. This sho-

Mom: Shut up. Uyaphapha nawe.

Yoh, I keep quiet.

Now she has turned on me.

My mom looks at Nolwazi.

Mom: Like I said, we'll deal with Dean later for how he handled this... Into every life some rain must fall. Everyone has had a rainy day in this group. Today is your day...

She stares at Nolwazi.

Mom: There's been a lot of whispers lately, and I think it's only fair for you to clear up any misunderstandings we might have. Don't talk about Dean, because like I've said, we will deal with him later...

Nolwazi looks at my mom.

Mom: We are listening...

INSERT 238

Derek clears his throat.

We all stare at him.

Derek: Uhm, with all due respect, I don't think we all need to be here for this conversation. My mom looks at Derek.

Mom: Would you like to take over this meeting?

Yhu.

Derek looks down.

My mother sighs.

Mom: Everyone can leave except Ziyanda, Nolwazi and Dean.

They all stand and walk out within a minute. Derek goes to the bedroom and

puts Liya to sleep. After, he walks out as well.

I also want to leave!

Zimkitha stays.

Mom: I'd like you to be honest, Nolwazi. I really don't want you to feel attacked.

Nolwazi: I feel very attacked right now.

Dad: That's not our intention.

Just as she's about to speak, we hear footsteps.

Liwa walks in and clears his throat. We look at him.

Liwa: Uhm...

He looks down.

Mom: Liwa, khuluma. We don't have time.

Liwa: Uhm, we wanted to ask for permission to go out...

Mom: Go out where?

Liwa shrugs.

Liwa: Uhm, one of the places at Vilakazi.

Mom: So, you want to go and get drunk?

Liwa: No, no, ma. We just... He sighs in defeat.

Mom: Just go.

Liwa quickly walks out.

Hai hai, I also want to go to Vilakazi! Why should I be subjected to this??

My mom looks at Nolwazi.

Dad: What is the problem? I don't want you and Ziyanda to end up fighting over this.

Me: I'm not fighting with anyone.

Mom: Zi-

Me: No, mama. I'm not going to sit here and have a deep conversation about someone not wanting me in their space. Nolwazi expressed why she doesn't want me there and I'm not going to have a back and forth with her about it.

I look at Nolwazi.

Me: You don't have to explain yourself.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry for offending you.

Me: I'm not offended.

Mom: Well, I'm offended on her behalf.
What did she do to you?

Nolwazi: She didn't do anything... I just want a peaceful wedding. Ziyanda and Derek are still dealing with their breakup. I know how explosive things can get between them. My wedding is too soon. I'm not sure if things will be better between them.

We all stare at her.

Mom: Were you planning on telling Ziyanda?

Nolwazi: Yes, I was.

Dad: But, Dean beat you to it.

She nods.

My dad sighs and nods.

Dad: I hear you...

Zimkitha: You need to be honest, Nolwazi. You're not being honest right now.

Nolwazi looks down.

Mom: I'm also not buying this drama thing you're sticking to. There's an underlying issue here.

Nolwazi's eyes water up and she continues looking down.

We sit in silence for a long time.

We watch as she wipes her tears.

Zimkitha: Just speak your mind, baby.

I think we've been sitting in silence for about five minutes now.

Nolwazi eventually looks up. She looks at me.

Nolwazi: My first marriage was honestly a nightmare. I was with a man that prioritised other people's needs before mine. Kwanele never put me first. It was always about his mother.

I don't say anything.

I already know where this is going.

Nolwazi: Dean came along and changed my life, really. For the first time, I had

someone in my corner. I was the center of his world. I struggled at first, but once I was used it, my love grew for him, and my perspective on love changed. I was finally with a man that fought for me at all times. She sighs.

Nolwazi: Please note that I'm not blaming you for anything, Ziyanda. I've never said this to you, because I don't want you to think I'm against you.

She sighs again.

Nolwazi: I feel like Dean has been prioritizing you quite a lot lately. I feel like you two are inseparable and I can't help but feel jealous. I've always known him as a cold person, but you seem to unlock that side of him that he rarely shows to people.

She keeps quiet.

My mother takes a deep breath and looks at my dad. My dad doesn't say anything.

We sit in silence for a while.

I look at Dean.

I can't read his expression.

Zimkitha clears her throat.

Zimkitha: You know, I relate to you,

Lwazi.

Zimkitha relates to everyone.

Zimkitha: Liwa and I have always been inseparable.

She smiles lightly.

Zimkitha: When the truth came out about him and Nomvuyo, I was beyond shocked.

After the truth came out, they became inseparable, they could now love each other openly.

She looks at Nolwazi.

Zimkitha: I wanted Liwa to myself, and I don't mean this in a weird incestuous way. He was my baby, and I wanted him to myself. Suddenly, his life revolved

around Nomvuyo. I was envious. I couldn't take it.

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: I felt like Nomvuyo was providing something I couldn't give him, which she definitely was. I mean, I'm just his mother. The boy needed a life partner that would meet all of his needs.

Nomvuyo did just that. She made him happier. As envious as I was, I had to accept their relationship, and be happy for Liwa, because he was getting love from another source- genuine deep love. My child was happy.

She looks at Nolwazi softly.

Zimkitha: Yes, our situations are different. However, I understand what you're feeling. You feel insecure. You feel like Ziyanda is taking Dean away from you. I'm gobsmacked.

I'm taking Dean away from her? What the fuck?

We sit in silence for a while.

Zimkitha: You should be happy that Ziyanda unleashes the good side of Dean. No one wants to be married to a cold and mean person. You should be happy that he is being loved. You can't be everything to Dean. Just because you're his lover, it doesn't mean you'll be his everything, or you'll be the only person he needs in this world.

Dad: Dean is the one who needs to find a balance...

Zimkitha: Exactly. You have every right to feel jealous, but you can't let it consume you. You need to express it, and Dean has to make sure that he is mindful of how he juggles his friendships and his relationship with you.

Dean clears his throat.

Dean: I try to include her, but she doesn't particularly enjoy being around my group of friends.

Dad: There's nothing wrong with that. Nolwazi isn't forced to be friends with your friends.

Mom: But, she also shouldn't be threatened by them, especially if they're not out to get her.

My mom looks at Nolwazi.

Mom: No one is out to get you.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda, what do you have to say?

I feel like being quiet is the best thing right now. I don't want to end up saying something that might offend anyone.

Dean: Nolwazi will always be the apple of my eye.

He sighs.

Dean: Ziyanda has exposed me to a completely different world. I was clueless

when it came to Depression. I thought it was an illness for weak people. She educated me. Being around her has made me more aware of mental illnesses. The reason I'm suddenly so open and soft, is because I've realised that my coldness comes from a place of unresolved issues... She made me realise that maybe I'm not as good as I think I am. She has helped me do a lot of introspection.

He looks at Nolwazi.

Dean: That's not to say you're not good enough for me. You can't compare yourself to Ziyanda, because you both have different experiences. I can't expect you to educate me on mental illnesses, because you don't have one, and your family dynamic is different.

Nolwazi looks at him.

Dean: Ziyanda's parents have treated me like their son. How can I resist that? I've

never experienced a father's love. My so called father died when I was young, and that man wasn't invested in me.

Nolwazi doesn't say anything.

Dean: And, you can't expect me to be this close with your father, because the man is always on my case. Because he is so overprotective when it comes to you, he doesn't seem that interested in forming a genuine father-son relationship.

He states at her.

Dean: Am I lying?

Nolwazi shakes her head.

Dean: That's why I don't spend a lot of time with your father. That relationship is based mostly on fear. I respect him. I just wouldn't go to the guy to tell him about my bad day. He's not open like that.

Nolwazi keeps quiet.

Dean: You will always have my heart, Nolwazi. I don't give a shit who I meet

along the way, but you will always be my priority. Just because I've formed a deep friendship with Ziyanda, it doesn't mean I think less of you. You've opened up my heart and enabled me to love. You know how I was when we first met. I wouldn't have committed myself to you if I felt like you're not good enough for me. However, like Zimkitha said, I can't expect you to be my everything. That's unrealistic. That's what I also learnt from Ziyanda and Derek. You can't be someone's everything- it is impossible. There are some things I can't fulfill for you, but there are other people in your life who can fulfill those things.

Nolwazi sighs

Nolwazi: I'd like a minute with Dean and Ziyanda, if you don't mind.

Dad: It's okay.

Zimkitha and my parents stand.

Mom: Maybe we should also go to Vilakazi.

Zimkitha laughs as they walk out.

Nolwazi takes a deep breath and looks at me.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry. I don't say anything. She then looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'm not happy with how you put me under the bus.

Dean: I fucked up. I'm not going to make excuses. I fucked up, and I'm sorry.

Nolwazi sighs heavily and looks at me

Nolwazi: I think I was too consumed by envy, that I dismissed the positive impact you've had on Dean.

She continues looking at me.

Nolwazi: I know you're not a malicious person. However, my jealousy consumed me.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I'm actually glad that it's out in the open, because I don't know what I would have done in the future. It's clear that I was on a path of destruction. I didn't even think about how hurtful it would be to suddenly exclude you from my wedding.

She looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: I'm owning my insecurity. A lot of elements have contributed to it, but I'm owning it. I don't want to be consumed by jealousy. It's a negative emotion that can drive one crazy. I was even starting to make up theories in my head...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I know you would never hurt me intentionally. You love me, I know this... I just need to learn that we can't be each other's everything, like you've said.

Dean: I'm sorry for exposing you. I fucked up.

Nolwazi: I know how you get when you're passionate about something. I know you weren't trying to sell me out.

Dean: I'd never do such. I love you.

Nolwazi smiles lightly.

Dean: Do you forgive me?

She nods.

Dean: I'll try to find a balance. I'll find a way to make all the people in my life feel valued, especially you.

Nolwazi nods.

Dean leans closer to her and they share a kiss.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry for not being truthful. I was scared of how it would be received.

Dean: You did good. See why I love this side of the world? These people are on another level.

She chuckles and nods.

They eventually remember that I'm in the room.

They stare at me.

Nolwazi: I'm not expecting you to understand or be best friends with me. I apologize for not being honest, and for punishing you for my insecurities.

I nod.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: You're more than welcome to come to the wedding...

She stands.

Nolwazi: I need the bathroom. I'm pressed.

She walks away.

Dean stares at me.

Dean: I hope you're telling that little evil spirit that lives in you to back off. I know it's probably telling you to stay angry and not forgive Lwazi.

I don't say anything.

Dean: Ziyanda, I'm talking to you.

Just then, we hear footsteps and my parents and Zimkitha walk in.

Dad: Are we all good?

Dean: No. Ziyanda has started. She's all quiet again.

Mom: Leave my child alone.

Nolwazi comes back and sits.

Dad: How are you, Lwazi?

Nolwazi: I'm okay. I think the appropriate thing to do at this point is give Ziyanda her space. I'm truly sorry for being indirect.

Dad: Alright, sisi. We all make mistakes. I'm happy that everyone is starting to acknowledge their role in the mess.

Thank you for coming.

Nolwazi smiles.

Nolwazi: Nisale kahle.

Mom: Bye, sisi.

Zimkitha: You should drop me off at home. I'm sure Liwa and Vuvu are having a good time.

Nolwazi: No problem.

Dad: I'll walk you out...

My dad, Nolwazi and Zimkitha walk out.

Dean stands.

Dean: Bye, ma.

Mom: Bye bye, Dean.

He looks at me.

Dean: Bye, Zi.

Me: Shap.

He walks out and we hear the door close.

My mom stands and sighs.

Mom: Let's put back these chairs, baby.

I stand and help her tidy up the place.

INSERT 239

It's now Wednesday.

Derek and I are supposed to see Melinda. To be honest, I'm not in the mood, especially after the unnecessary meeting that took place a few days ago.

I get a video call from Derek.

Me: Derek.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Can't we postpone?

Derek: Hai, why?

Me: I feel like I've had enough deep conversations for now.

Derek: Yazi, you're testing me.

I sulk.

Me: I'm tired. I think we should postpone it, so I can be nice and fresh when we meet with her.

Derek: Kodwa Ziyanda...

Me: Please, D... I'm really exhausted. There's been too much talking lately.

Derek: You want space?

Me: No, actually.

He looks at me in shock.

Derek: I don't think I heard you properly.

I chuckle.

Me: I don't want space. I just don't want to talk about deep stuff.

Derek: Uhm... I'm in the office right now.

Me: I'll come to you..

He smiles.

Derek: Are you serious?

Me: Yes, Derek.

Derek: Yaaas!

I laugh.

Me: See you soon.

Derek: Love you.

Me: That's sweet.

Derek: Ye wena Ziyanda.

I chuckle.

Me: I love you too.

I hang up and get ready.

My parents have given me more than enough personal space. I'm so glad that they're not on my case right now. Anyway, I get ready to leave...

I make my way to Derek's office, and find him talking to Andile.

Andile looks at me in disbelief.

Me: Hello, good people.

Andile: It's been a while.

Me: How are you?

We share a hug.

Andile: Good and you?

Me: I'm okay, thanks.

Andile: Ok-

Me: Don't tell me that okay is not a feeling.

He chuckles.

I look at Derek and he is smiling.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Don't I get a hug?

I shake my head.

Me: You have to work for it.

Andile: That's my cue to leave...

He walks out and closes the door.

Derek stands and walks towards me with a grin on his face.

Derek: Hug, please?

I shake my head.

Derek: Baby, come on.

I open up my arms and we share a long hug.

Derek: I've missed you.

Me: Thanks.

Derek: Ngathi uzongidina.

I laugh and we sit.

Me: How are you?

Derek: I'm okay.

He looks at me carefully.

Me: And then?

Derek: How are you?

Me: I'm also okay.

He clears his throat.

Derek: Dean told me what happened after we left.

Me: Okay.

He continues looking at me carefully.

Derek: How are you, really?

Me: I'm really not in the mood.

Derek: Are you shutting that situation out?

I shake my head.

Me: I just don't want to make it a thing.

Nolwazi stated her case and she apologised. I'm keeping it moving.

Derek: Are you, really?

I nod.

Me: Derek, I don't have the energy to take this shit personally. I'm letting it go.

Derek: Something tells me you don't mean that.

Me: Haike, that's none of my business.

Derek: Have you spoken to Dean?

Me: About what?

Derek: Ziyanda, come on.

Me: There's nothing to talk about. What needs to happen is a reevaluation of our relationship. I can't have people blaming me for the downfalls of their relationships.

Derek: Can I give you some advice? I roll my eyes.

Derek: I'm being serious, Ziyanda.

He stares at me seriously.

Derek: Don't blame yourself for the way Nolwazi is feeling. Her insecurity has nothing to do with you. She obviously has shit she needs to deal with. I hope you didn't take her words personally.

I don't say anything, I just look at him blankly.

Derek: Okay. You're really not in the mood to discuss this.

Me: Exactly!

He chuckles.

Derek: Anyway, the wedding venue has been confirmed. Zimkitha offered her mansion.

Me: That's nice.

Derek: You are going to the wedding, right?

Me: Sorry... I suddenly can't hear you.
He laughs.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Derek, you're doing the most right now.

He groans.

Just then, I get a call from Nomvuyo.

I answer the call.

Me: Vuvz.

Nomvuyo: Lover, ukuphi? Let's do lunch.

Me: Isn't it Liwa's Day today? She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Futsek wena.

Me: I'm with Derek.

Nomvuyo: Is it Derek's Day today?

Me: He's annoying me...

I look at him and he pouts.

Mee: But, yes, it's Derek's Day today.

Nomvuyo: Argh, I shouldn't have gotten you two back together.

I laugh.

Me: It's not like your work is done. We still have a long way to go.

Nomvuyo: Hai suka.

Me: We can meet tomorrow.

Nomvuyo: I can't.

Me: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: Nolwazi is hosting a luncheon and she asked me to come. She literally invited me yesterday, athi she wasn't planning on doing a get together, but her friends changed her mind. I'm about to call her now to decline.

Me: Haibo, Vuvu, why?

Nomvuyo: She thinks she's obliged to invite me, that time I'm okay with not being invited. It's not like we're best friends.

Me: Yoh.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, Liwa and I have a therapy session tomorrow, and it can get quite draining. I don't think I'll be good company if I pitch.

Me: Hmm.

Nomvuyo: I'm sure you're going.

Me: Kuphi? She laughs.

Nomvuyo: You weren't invited?

Me: No.

She continues laughing.

Me: Angazi uhlekani.

Nomvuyo: I'm finding this little drama very cute.

Me: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: I find it ironic that the person who was trying to avoid drama by all means is finding herself knee-deep in drama. Ku-tough emhlabeni.

Me: You're too spicy for my liking.

Nomvuyo: Heyii futhi I should keep my mouth shut! Next thing you decide to Dean me, and expose our goss-goss.

Me: Vuvu!

She laughs.

Me: Is Deaning a thing now?

Nomvuyo: Definitely. Deaning is a real thing! If you look up Dean in the dictionary, you'll see that it's synonyms include snitch, rat and informant.

I find myself laughing.

Me: You're stupid.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, enjoy your afternoon with that sulky baby of yours. Tell him I love him.

Me: Shap.

Nomvuyo: Actually, don't tell him I love him. Next thing he professes his love for me and we spend some time together, and I snatch him from you, bestie boo.

Me: Nomvuyo Mzinyathi!

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: I kid. I kid.

She continues laughing.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, I'll see you around.

Me: Shap.

Nomvuyo: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

I end the call and sigh in defeat.

Me: You think I'm shady? Nomvuyo is on another level.

Derek: I can only imagine what she was saying...

I look at him seriously.

Me: Are you threatened by my relationship with Dean?

Derek: Nope.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: I've never felt like he was taking you away from me. I'm actually glad that you're close with him, because he's my person as well... I don't see your relationship as a negative thing.

I nod lightly.

Derek: I'm not insecure when it comes to other men being around you. I trust you when it comes to such. My insecurity stems from me feeling like I'm losing you because of my actions. It has nothing to do with other people.

Me: Interesting... So, you trust me?

Derek: Definitely.

He chuckles.

Derek: Also, you and Dean would never make a good couple. You're too much alike. There would be no balance there. At least we complement each other.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Dean really loves Nolwazi. He's just excited about your friendship right now. You two are in the honeymoon phase... a very long honeymoon phase...
I chuckle.

Me: Hmm, I don't know why my heart just skipped a beat when you mentioned that you trust me...

He smiles.

Derek: If we started dating when I was younger, I would have been on your case about other men. However, I grew up and realised that those insecurities had nothing to do with other people. They had to do with how I saw myself...

He sighs.

Derek: I may be fucked up right now, but I think highly of myself and I don't allow myself, anymore, to feel inadequate when I'm in a relationship.

I nod.

Me: So, right now, your insecurity stems from feeling like you're losing me because you can't get through to me?

He nods.

Derek: My issue is not the fact that you have other friendships outside our relationship. I know I'm good enough for you. I just get frustrated when we bump heads, because of our stubbornness.

I nod.

Me: Interesting.

Derek: Are you insecure about our relationship?

Me: I have my moments, but I also think I'm good enough for you. But, let a bitch try me though...

He laughs.

Derek: Don't you think Nolwazi also feels like that?

I shrug.

Me: Her issue is clearly deeper. I'm not going to analyse her situation.

Derek: But, can you empathise with her? I mean, you also don't want women throwing themselves at me.

Me: So, are you saying that I throw myself at Dean?

Derek: No. Hyperbole, baby. Google it.
He chuckles.

Me: My issue is not with Nolwazi being insecure. My issue is with Nolwazi not telling me from the get go that she is uncomfortable with my relationship with Dean. Had she told me, I would definitely be mindful. You think every time I'm with Dean, at the back of mind, I'm trying to make Nolwazi feel jealous?

He shakes his head.

Me: I'm all about speaking my mind. Had it been me in her shoes, I would have opened up earlier, instead of letting it get to this point.

He nods lightly.

Me: I'm a woman. I know how isolating it feels to be with someone you think you're not good enough for. However, I've never

been one to keep quiet. I was very honest about my insecurities when I was with the worm. It annoyed him. I ended up realising that he's just a piece of shit, because really didn't he care about me. He did it on purpose, whereas Dean and I are not out to get Nolwazi. We all know that Dean loves Nolwazi. He wouldn't hurt her intentionally, none of us would.

I sigh.

Me: That whole thing with Nolwazi just left a bitter taste in my mouth. I'm still trying to figure out how I feel... I don't appreciate how she made me look, all because she was hiding her true feelings. I'm actually quite hurt by her actions. I thought we were cool. I just don't understand why she was all close and personal with me while she was harbouring all these feelings. She could have easily talked to me, and made me

understand her situation. How the heck was I supposed to know the true damage her previous marriage caused? So, on top of being a drama queen, I'm a sangoma now? I must predict what people are feeling?

He chuckles.

Me: I don't want to talk about this. The reason I was quiet throughout that meeting was because I didn't want to seem insensitive. I'm really hurt by Nolwazi. I didn't expect this from her.

Derek: You should talk to her, baby.

Me: Not now. I'm still trying to gather my thoughts. I don't want to talk to her when I'm emotional, because I know I'll end up saying something I'll regret.

Derek: Well, that's a mature thing to do. I chuckle.

Me: Like I said, I'm trying to go back to the sane version of myself...

Derek: Is it an appropriate time to be turned on?

Me: Euww!

Just then, my phone rings.

Me: Speak of the devil...

I answer.

Me: Hello.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hi.

Nolwazi: Uhm, how are you?

Me: I'm okay, thanks.

She clears her throat.

Nolwazi: I would like to invite you to my luncheon tomorrow.

I don't say anything.

She also keeps quiet.

Me: I have a session with Melinda tomorrow afternoon.

Nolwazi: Oh... alright then.

Me: Thanks.

Nolwazi: Zi, listen...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I'd like to meet with you. I'd like to speak to you alone.

Me: Hmkay.

Nolwazi: Please text me when you're free...

Me: Cool.

Nolwazi: Bye then.

Me: Bye.

I end the call.

I look at Derek.

Me: I don't know about you, but I need Jeff's weed right now...

INSERT 240

The following day, Nomvuyo, Niki and I decide to have dinner. I was supposed

meet up with Niki, but Nomvuyo decided to join us.

Niki: Manje everyone in your circle is seeing a therapist?

Nomvuyo: Heyi, kunzima. We're out here struggling.

Niki: You guys are a weird bunch.

Nomvuyo: Have you told Niki about your drama with Nolwazi?

Me: You're just enjoying this, aren't you?
She laughs.

Nomvuyo: My life is boring. It's not like I have something better to do.

Niki: Is this about the wedding thing?

Nomvuyo: Yep.

Niki: Zi shouldn't go to that wedding. In fact, she should stay away from everyone, ngoba there's always something happening. Your group is weird. I roll my eyes.

Niki: Futhi you mustn't invite Nolwazi to your wedding nawe. Phela I'll be there with Kwanele. Nathi we don't want her to bring drama. Angithi she seems to think exes can't be amicable. So, wena noDerek you're stupid nje according to her. You are going to get to that wedding and just act like little kids, fight while the priest is speaking...

Me: Stop being ridiculous.

Niki: I find it laughable that you'd ask the person you're secretly against to plan your wedding, and then turn around and not invite them. Like, where is the consistency?

I groan.

Niki: You shouldn't go to that wedding. She doesn't want you there. Futhi Mdu's annoying ass will be there as well.

Nomvuyo: Hai phela don't come for Mdu. That's my baby.

Niki: Nawe you're an inconsistent bitch. You're best friends with Mdu and Ivy, yet you don't like Nolwazi. Are you dizzy?

Nomvuyo: Nolwazi is best friends with my husband's ex, and she knows what Sly has been doing...

I look at her in shock.

Me: What has Sly been doing?

Nomvuyo: She has been calling Liwa, trying to meet up with him. She's been doing this for a very long time...

Me: What??

Nomvuyo: Nolwazi is loyal to her home wrecking friend, so why should I even bother being friends with her? She knows Sly's shady motives. She loves acting like she values principles, yet she condones her friend's nonsense. How do I build a friendship with someone like that? Futhi ku-worse ngoba it's clear that Sly is still trying to get Liwa.

Me: Whoa.

Nomvuyo: We are all fucked up individuals, but at least we own up to our nonsense. She must also stop using her previous marriage as a crutch. At least we are all getting help for our nonsense...

Yena she's going to be a bruised divorcee till when? That narrative is getting old. She must get help, and stop making excuses for her insecurities. I'm speechless.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, you shouldn't feel guilty wena Zi. She loves preaching ukuthi yena she's a straight talker and she keeps it real, but her pretentious ass smiled to your face, let you plan her wedding, and then turned around and said you're taking her husband away from her? Why didn't her straight talking self be honest from the get go? Hai suka.

Niki: I'm sure nami uyangizonda.

She sighs.

Niki: Anyway, I'm not going to allow you to take blame for Dean loving you. You can't change who you are just to accommodate insecure people. If she told you earlier, nathi we wouldn't be this hostile and insensitive. I'm finding it very difficult to be empathetic.

I sigh.

Me: I love you two, but right now, I don't need this negativity. Nani you're giving me stress. Can we drop this topic and stop being gossip mongers? I don't have the energy.

Niki: Okay, Miss Goody.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, let's talk about your wedding, Zi... Can I be your planner? I promise I won't cause drama.

Me: Argh.

They laugh.

These two are very naughty.

I know they're trying to have my back, but they're doing the most.

So, I'm done getting dressed.

I didn't tell anyone where I'm going.

Derek doesn't know.

Nomvuyo doesn't know.

Nikki doesn't know.

My mom doesn't know. ... I'm going to Nolwazi's luncheon...

Petty seems to have resurfaced.

I texted Nolwazi, telling her that Derek cancelled our session, so I was available...

As I get out of room, my mom looks at me in shock.

Mom: And then?

Me: I have a date.

She looks at me in shock.

Me: Just kidding. I'm meeting up with Vuvz.

Mom: Oh, alright.

Me: Shap. My Uber is here.

Mom: Bye, baby.

I make my way out.

Thankfully, as I get out of the Uber,
another car is driving in. I walk in while
the gate is open.

I guess this is one of Nolwazi's friends.

I don't know her.

I decide to just walk to the front door.

I ring the bell for a while, but no one
answers.

I open the door and get in.

It's clear that everyone is on the other
side of the yard.

As I walk in the house, I can hear laughter
coming from outside.

I snap out of it.

Lol, what am I doing here? Haibo, Petty,
what are you doing to me?

Let me go back home.

I turn and start walking.

Nomi: Ziiiiii!

Damn shit.

I turn and look at Nomi as she runs to me.
She gives me a tight hug and giggles.

Nomi: What the hell are you doing here??
You're like the number one enemy. You
have some guts coming here.

Me: I am?

She laughs.

She's tipsy, as usual.

Nomi: I've missed you so much! I miss our
fun nights out!

She giggles as she stares at my eye.

Nomi: Remember that idiot that punched
you?

Me: How could I forget...

She laughs and grabs my arm.

Nomi: Let's go!

Me: Uhm, I was actually here for De-

Nomi: No, silly!

She's awfully strong for a drunkard.

Me: Nomi-

Nomi: Don't worry. I'll have your back. I feel like everything is moving too fast. I was never ready for this. Next thing I know, we're outside, and everyone is staring at us.

I have no idea who these people are. The only people I recognize are Sly, Nandi and Nolwazi.

Nomi: Guess who finally decided to join us! The Great Ziyanda!

Something about the way she says that... I honestly can't help but chuckle in disbelief. I surprise myself sometimes.

Nomi has also given me some insight, as tipsy as she is.

But, I'm here on a mission.

A very petty and necessary mission.

INSERT 241

Nomi leads me to the table.

The tension is shocking.

Nomi: The Great Ziyanda is here!

Nandi: Ziyanda!

She stands and smiles very warmly, but at this point, I'm not even sure if it's sincere.

We share a hug.

Nandi: How are you? It's been so long!

Me: I'm good.

Nolwazi clears her throat and smiles.

She's clearly confused and shocked, but trying her best to hide it.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

Me: Hello, Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: Are you good?

Me: I'm surviving.

Nolwazi: Uhm, alright... I'll get you an extra ch-

Nomi: She can sit next to me. There's space.

Me: I sent you a message letting you know that I was coming.

Nolwazi: I must have missed it.

I don't say anything.

I look around. Lol, if eyes could kill, my ass would be dead.

Nomi: Guys, this is Ziyanda. I love calling her Zi.

There are about 8 women sitting, and I only know 2 of them, Sly and Nandi.

Nomi: Zi, these are Nolwazi's friends. You know Sly angithi? She's my friend as well.

I look at Sly.

She looks at me with a smirk.

Sly: Unjani, Ziyanda?

Me: I'm okay.

I smile lightly.

I don't understand why there's so much tension. Surely these people don't hate me that much?

Nomi: You can sit. What would you like to drink? Champ-champ?

Me: I'll have water, thanks.

I need to stay sober here. I can't have people catching me while I weak from alcohol.

I sit.

I'm sitting next to someone I don't know. She looks at me softly.

Her: Hi, I'm Thuli.

Me: Hey.

She isn't giving me bad vibes, like the others, who have started having their own conversations.

Thuli: We've heard a lot about you.

Me: Really? I hope it's nothing bad.

She laughs sweetly.

Thuli: No, nothing bad.

Me: Hmkay.

Nomi gives me a glass of water.

Nomi: I want to sit next to her. Thuli, go sit next to Sly!

Thuli tightens her jaw.

Nomi: I know you hate each other... I just want to sit next to Zi. We have a lot of catching up!

Nolwazi: Kodwa, Nomi, leave Thuli alone.

Thuli: I'm going to end up slapping her again. Tell her to back off.

Oh okay then. Thuli is my typa girl.

Nomi: I don't understand why you have to be so mean.

How old is Nomi?

Thuli grunts and looks at me.

Thuli: She is the baby of the group. She gets whatever she wants.

Me: Hmm, sounds like me.

Thuli chuckles and stands.

Thuli: Come sit, Nomthandazo.

Nomi comes and sits next to me. I kinda wanted to get to know Thuli more, but Nomi's fine. At least she'll Dean on her friends.

Nomi: So, how have you been?

Me: I've been okay, Nomz. How are you?

Nomi: Did I tell you that I met up with Andile?

I raise an eyebrow.

Me: Really??

She nods.

Nomi: I wanted to know what he's problem is.

Lord.

Nomi: I don't take rejection well. I always get what I want.

Me: Manje what happened?

Nomi: He said he's into someone else...

Me: Really?

She nods.

Nomi: He got all dramatic and aggressive when I asked him about the girl. I wanted to know what she has that I don't.

Me: Nomi, that's a bit intense.

She giggles.

Nomi: I just wanted to know.

Me: Did he tell you?

She shrugs.

Nomi: He ended up leaving me there- the son of a bitch.

She laughs and drinks her champagne.

Nomi: I don't like him anymore.

Me: Really?

She sighs.

Nomi: You have to hook me up with someone else, Zi.

Me: You want a man?

Nomi: I mean, I'm not into commitment. I just want someone who'll take care of me

when I'm drunk, and fuck me on a regular basis, you know?

I laugh.

Nomi: I don't want something as serious as what you and Nolwazi have. I don't want to deal with all your drama.

Me: Drama? We don't have drama.

Nomi: Hai, there's too much drama when you're in love.

I sigh.

Me: You're right.

Nomi: I mean, look, Nolwazi and you are beefing over her man loving you too much. It's just a lot.

Lord.

Me: Who says we're beefing?

Nomi: Well...

She looks around the table...

Haike.

She pours herself more champagne.

I need to pee.

Just then, Dean walks towards the table.

Dean: Lwazi, your mom says you should call her...

Nolwazi: Oh, is everything okay?

Dean: I think she wants to ask about the reception.

Sly: I told her we're sorted mos. Dean shrugs.

Nomi: What's wrong? Is it the decor lady?

Dean looks at Nomi and his eyes land on me.

Dean: Hawu...

He stares at me. I haven't seen or spoken to him since the meeting.

Dean: Ziyanda?

Me: Hello, Dean.

Now, everyone is staring at me. Mxm, these people are legit making me feel like a mistress now.

Kanti what did Nolwazi tell them?

Dean looks at Nolwazi.

Dean: I thought you said she's not coming.
Nolwazi doesn't say anything.

Dean looks at me again.

Dean: How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

Nomi: This is awk-

Nolwazi: I'll go call my mom.

She stands and walks away.

Yazi, Nolwazi has changed in my eyes.

She's no longer the person I thought I
knew.

Dean is still staring at me, and I feel like
he has a lot to say.

I clear my throat and stand.

Me: Excuse me...

A bitch needs to pee.

Sly: Uyaphi, Ziyanda?

Me: I didn't know I had to ask for your
permission to go pee, Sly... Would you like
to show me the bathroom as well?

I don't even look at her.

I go inside the house and make my way to the bathroom.

I pee and sit there for a while.

So, it's clear that Nolwazi has told her friends about me. Listen, I don't have a problem with that, because that's what friends are for- they listen to us. My only issue at this point is that people seem to think I want Dean to myself. Nolwazi has made it seem like I'm a bad person. It's either she's the one who's feeding her friends this nonsense, or she has allowed her friends to feed her this nonsense.

Either way, Nolwazi is looking very shady right now.

I make my way out.

Thank God Dean is not here anymore.

One of the women is staring at me very intensely.

Lol, you know when you're loyal to your friend, and you're just ready to fight for

her? That's what's going on right now.
People are ready to handle me.

I sit.

Nomi is no longer next to me, I have no
idea where she is.

Nolwazi eventually comes back.

Nolwazi: I'd like to thank everyone for
coming. The food is ready...

She smiles.

Sly: Friend, you must be so excited that
you're finally marrying the man of your
drea-

I literally squeal when I see Nomvuyo
walking towards us with Dean.

Nolwazi is so shook. I can't help but laugh
to myself.

Why did she invite us if she didn't want us
here?

Nomvuyo: Sanibonani. My apologies for
being tardy. She gives Nolwazi a gift bag.

Lol, I could kiss her beautiful ass right now. These uptight bitches were starting to annoy me.

Nolwazi: Thank you.

Nomvuyo: You're welcome. I hope I didn't miss anything.

She looks at Dean.

Nomvuyo: You can go back to work wena.
Dean chuckles and walks back in the house.

Nomvuyo looks at me and smiles. She then walks to where I am and sits next to me. Nomi tries to say something, but stops herself.

I stare at Sly.

She looks like she's ready to vomit.

Nomvuyo: Sly, you can continue speaking... I apologize for disturbing your speech.

Sly: It wasn't a speech.

Nomvuyo nudges me under the table and I chuckle quietly.

Sly: Anyway, Lwazi... I'm sure I speak for everyone here when I say you deserve all the love you're getting from Dean.

Nolwazi is trying by all means to hide how uncomfortable she is, but I see right through her.

Nolwazi: Thank you, friend.

Sly: We all have speeches. I hope no one will be weeping, because you know I hate cry babies.

They all laugh.

Nomvuyo and I glance at each other.

She takes me glass of water and chuckles.

Nolwazi: The food is ready now. I've asked them to set up inside the house.

Everyone stands and they all make their way inside the house.

Nomvuyo: And then? What the hell are you doing here?

Me: The Universe led me here.

She laughs.

Me: Nomi has already Deaned on all of them.

She continues laughing.

Nomvuyo: Let's go get our food and have some fun.

We stand and make our way inside as well.

INSERT 242

We're now back outside, eating.

Everyone is chatting.

Thuli: Nomthandazo, you haven't told me about this guy you've been pursuing.

Everyone looks at Nomi.

Nomi: He doesn't want me.

Nomi decided to ask the other woman who was sitting next to me to move, so she could sit next to me. I'm between a tipsy Nomi and a very spicy Vuvu.

Thuli: What do you mean he doesn't want you? He must be crazy!

Nomi: Zi tried to hook us up.

Thuli looks at me.

Thuli: Why doesn't he want my friend?

Me: He doesn't want to be in a relationship.

Thuli: Hawu, Nomi doesn't want a relationship as well. Maybe I should meet this guy and slap some sense into him.

Nomi giggles.

Sly: Mxm, Nomi is better off without him. I'm sure he wasn't that great anyway.

Me: He is quite the catch actually-
educated, financially stable, great
personality.

Sly: You seem to know quite a lot about
him.

Me: Why would I hook Nomi up with
someone I don't know?

Sly: Kuyafana, I'm sure you didn't miss
out on anything wena Nomz.

Nomvuyo: You don't have to discredit the
guy just to make Nomi feel better.

Nomvuyo glances at Nomi softly.

Nomvuyo: I'm sure we've all been
rejected by men. It's not the end of the
world... You'll find someone who will
want to be with you.

Nomi smiles.

Nomi: Thank you.

Sly probably wants to do things to
Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: That's the problem with some women. You think you're entitled to someone's love and adoration.

Whoa. I feel like she's shaking the table.

Thuli: We all think we're special. We all think we're better than the next woman.

Nomvuyo: But, in reality, no one is that special. Siyafana sonke. You can't really brag about your degrees, because there's another woman around the corner who is doing her PhD. You can't even brag about your beauty, because I guarantee you that your beauty will not stop time, and there are other beautiful women. You can't brag about your sense of humor, because there's another funny bitch close by.

Whoa.

Everyone is staring at her.

Thuli: You don't have to be so honest.

Nomvuyo chuckles and Thuli joins her.

Nomvuyo: I'm just saying...

Thuli: You are absolutely right.

I think I like Thuli.

Nomvuyo: Wena Nomi, don't worry. You'll find someone. You don't have to badmouth the guy just because he's not into you.

Nomi: Thanks, Vuvz.

Nolwazi is not fine. It's clear that she's uncomfortable. Now, as petty as I am, I'm still quite hurt by this whole thing.

I watch as she stands and walks away.

I excuse myself and follow her.

I walk in the house and find her in the sitting room.

Me: Lwazi?

She looks at me and doesn't say anything.

I walk in.

She takes a deep breath and looks away.

She's tearing up.

Nolwazi: I need a moment.

I nod and keep quiet.

We stand there for a long time in silence. Eventually, she clears her throat and looks at me.

Me: I know we're not super close, but I considered you a friend.

She doesn't say anything.

Me: I'm very honest when it comes to my feelings. I came here thinking I'd be petty, but I can't allow myself to, because I thought we formed a good friendship...

Nolwazi: We did.

Me: So, why didn't you tell me that my relationship with Dean affected you?

When did this start? She sighs.

Me: I am confused.

Nolwazi: I don't know...

Me: Do you really think I'm a bad person, and that I was trying to hurt you by being friends with Dean?

She looks at me pleadingly.

Me: I just want to know. Right now, you and your friends look shady to me. You look like you've never liked me... Were you pretending this whole time?

Nolwazi: No.

I keep quiet.

Nolwazi: Zi, this whole thing has gotten out of control.

I don't say anything.

Nolwazi: I feel like it has been blown out of proportion, and now I can't fix it.

Me: Has it really been blown out of proportion, or you just can't handle the fact that your true feelings are out there?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: A bit of both...

I don't say anything.

Nolwazi: I don't hate you, Zi. I've never hated you.

Me: I don't like the vibe I'm getting here.

She groans.

Just then, someone clears their throat and we turn.

Sly: Is everything okay?

Nolwazi: Yes, Slindile.

Sly stares at me.

Nolwazi: Just give us some privacy.

Sly walks away.

Nolwazi looks at me.

Me: What did you say to your friends?

Nolwazi: I told them how I felt... They just took it badly.

Me: They think I'm a homewrecker. It doesn't take rocket science to figure that out.

She groans.

Nolwazi: They made their own conclusions.

Me: Manje why didn't you clarify?

She sighs.

Nolwazi: This was never my goal. I'm not a spiteful person, Ziyanda. I know I look bad, but I'm not cruel.

I sigh.

Me: How are we going to move forward? I don't want any awkwardness between us, because I think we both know that Dean won't take it well.

Nolwazi: You're his little sister. I can't expect you to vanish. I don't want you to vanish.

Me: I feel like things will never be the same now. I just want to make sure that we're not disrespecting each other.

Nolwazi: I'll talk to my friends.

I nod lightly.

Nolwazi: Zi, I appreciate everything you've done for me. I hope you know that.

Me: Right now, I'm not too sure. I'm not even going to lie and say I'm not hurt.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry.

Me: Let's go back outside, before your friends come looking for you.

Nolwazi nods lightly. We walk out.

When we get to the table, all eyes are on us.

I sit between Nomi and Vuvu.

Nomvuyo looks at me softly.

Nomvuyo: You good?

I nod.

Nomi gets closer to my ear.

Nomi: I think I like Vuvu. I was scared of her at first.

Me: She's really cool.

She nods excitedly as she sips her champagne.

Sly: I just feel like some women overestimate their value in their men's lives.

Okay, they are obviously having a deep conversation.

Thuli: What do you mean?

Sly: It goes back to what Nomvuyo said. A woman will think she's special just because she is married.

Nomvuyo: If a man chooses to marry you, then as a woman, you have every right to think you're important in his life, after all you chose each other. Marriage is a completely different story, but you obviously wouldn't know, Slindile.

Nomvuyo is on another level.

Sly: I can get any man I want.

Nomvuyo: That's where you're mistaken. Not every man is looking for a whore to bang.

Sly stands and everyone exclaims.

Sly: I am getting tired of your subliminal shots!

Nomvuyo: Really? What are you going to do about it?

Nomvuyo looks at Sly coolly, and pours herself some champagne.

Nomvuyo: I find it funny that you walk around with your head held high, stating that you can get any man that you want, yet none of these men actually stay with you... You're a whore, that's what you are.

Sly: You think you're better than me??

Nomvuyo: Of course, I'm better than you. I don't pride myself in intentionally hurting other women by inserting myself in their relationships. I may be a lot of things, but I'm no call girl.

I don't know what's happening.

How did we get here??

Nomvuyo: Don't be fooled. You don't scare me one bit.

Nomvuyo looks around the table.

Nomvuyo: You are all so stupid. You're busy crucifying a girl you don't know for being friends with Dean, while you're busy entertaining your friend, who's the

shadiest person here. I'm sure she has fucked all your men.

Sly storms off and they all follow her expect for Thuli, Nomi and Nandi.

Nomvuyo looks at Nolwazi.

Nomvuyo: You really need to reevaluate your friends. Why would you allow them to influence you to this extent?

Nolwazi sighs.

Nomvuyo: This whole thing could have been resolved a long time ago, but clearly your friends filled your head with nonsense. Why would you even take advice from a homewrecker? She used your insecurities against you.

Thuli: Thank you! I have been saying the same thing for years now!

Nandi: Sly is a homewrecker??

Thuli: She sees nothing wrong with taking other people's men.

Nomi: Guys, are we turning against Sly now? I thought Zi was the enemy?

Nomi though.

I try not to laugh.

Thuli: Listen, Zi, we don't know what the hell is going on with you and Nolwazi. All we know is that you're a bad person...

Nomi: Zi is not a bad person.

Thuli: Sly painted a very different picture of her.

Nomvuyo: Nolwazi, you allowed your friend to drag Ziyanda's name?

Thuli: No one can stop Slindile.

Nomvuyo shakes her head and continues looking at Nolwazi.

Nomvuyo: The same Ziyanda that risked her own relationship just to save yours? Surely we're talking about a different person, because Ziyanda has never tried to hurt you. I don't care how insecure you are, but you cannot crucify innocent

people just because you think the world is against you. Just like the rest of us, do some introspection and work on yourself...

Nolwazi looks like she's going through the most,

Thuli: Maybe it's time to see Sly for what she truly is... She did the same thing with me when Nolwazi got her divorce. She made it seem like I was shady for being friends with Kwanele. Suddenly, I also contributed to their divorce. She made me look like a fucked up friend, and she filled Nolwazi's head with nonsense.

Nolwazi doesn't say anything.

Thuli: Maybe it's time to really think about how we influence each other as friends. We're supposed to support each other, listen to each other, and tell each other when we fuck up. We haven't been doing that...

Nomvuyo stands.

Nomvuyo: That's something you have to figure out as friends. Zi and I are not involved.

Nomvuyo looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Let's go, baby.

She takes our bags.

Nomi: Guys, where are you going?

Nomvuyo gives me my bag and looks at Nolwazi.

Nomvuyo: Stop acting like a bruised puppy, and do the right thing. We are too old to be dealing with friends that don't want the best for us.

She walks away.

Thuli: Is that Liwa's wife?

I nod.

Thuli: I think I have a crush on her

I chuckle.

Thuli sighs.

I suddenly feel sorry for Nolwazi.

It's very clear that she was influenced. Sly planted a seed in her mind and that shit grew, until Nolwazi couldn't control it.

Me: Bye, guys.

Nomi: So, no drinks tonight?

Me: I'm taking a break from alcohol,

Nomz.

She sulks.

Me: Shap.

Nomi: Bye.

I walk away, and as I get in the house, I bump into Derek.

He looks at me in shock.

Gosh.

Me: I'll see you later.

Derek: Excuse me?

Me: I'm going to have a drink with Vuvu.

Derek: What are you doing here? I sigh.

Dean emerges.

Me: See you later.

I walk out and get in Nomvuyo's car.

Nomvuyo: I was about to fetch your ass.
I chuckle.

Me: I need a drink.

Nomvuyo: I've got you...

She starts the car...

INSERT 243 (Last insert for a while)

I call Derek and ask him to come fetch
Nomvuyo and I, because we're drunkish.

Derek: Manje who's going to drive
Nomvuyo's car?

Me: Ask Liwa to come with you. She can't
drive.

Derek sighs.

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Bye.

I hang up and look at Nomvuyo, who is
ordering another bottle of wine.

Nomvuyo: Being a housewife has its perks!

She laughs happily.

Me: You're something else.

After a long time, Derek and Liwa arrive.

They sit and look at us.

Me: Hey, Liwa!

Liwa chuckles.

Liwa: What's happening here?

Nomvuyo: Had a hectic day, needed to unwind a bit.

Liwa: Hectic day? How did the luncheon go?

Nomvuyo: Mxm. We were dealing with a bunch of bitches.

Liwa looks at me and I shrug.

Derek: Are you and Lwazi okay?

Me: I don't know.

Liwa: You're still not going to the wedding?

Me: I don't want to talk about this right now. I'd like to finish this wine in peace.

Liwa: Alright then.

Liwa and Derek look at each other and laugh quietly.

It's now Friday.

Derek: Baby, what are you going to wear?

I groan.

Derek: At this point, I'm not giving you a choice. You're going to be my date.

Me: I had other plans, you know?

Derek: I don't care.

I look at him blankly.

Derek: We have to get something to wear.

I sigh.

Just then, his phone rings and he answers.

Derek: Dean... Ya... Hold on...

He looks at me and puts out his phone.

I take the phone.

Me: Hello?

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

Dean: You good?

Me: Ya.

Dean: I'm good. Thanks for asking.

Me: Stop being a baby bitch.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: What do you want?

Dean: Have you figured out what you're going to wear?

Me: No.

Dean: I've organised for someone to come there.

Me: Huh?

Dean: He should be there soon.

Me: How do you expect someone to make something in less than 24 hours?

Dean: Money does wonders.

Me: Dean, I'm not su-

Dean: Have to go. Bye.

He ends the call.

Derek is grinning.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: The guy should be here now.

He walks away...

Minutes later, Derek walks back in with a very tall and skinny guy. I'm so confused, because he already has dresses and shit.

Me: Who are you?

Guy: Muzi. I own a boutique. I brought a few dresses that are aligned to Derek's outfit. You'll choose one that you like and then I'll alter it.

He stares at me from head to toe.

Muzi: At least I brought a variety of sizes... I pride myself in accommodating all body shapes.

Me: Would you like a round of applause?

Derek: Ziyanda.

I sigh.

Muzi: I was told about your attitude. I came ready.

He takes out a bottle of champagne and asks for a flute.

Derek and I look at him in disbelief.

Then, he takes out the dresses.

Muzi: Which one speaks to your soul?

He looks at Derek.

Muzi: I'd like to have some champagne.

Please bring me a flute.

Derek: Uhm, alright...

Derek walks away.

Muzi spansks my butt and I look at him in shock.

Muzi: Hurry up. I don't have the whole day. I have to alter this shit. Derek comes back and gives him the flute.

Muzi: Thanks.

He pours himself some champagne and lays out the dresses.

I look at them.

Derek: I like this one...

He points to one that will obviously hug my body.

Muzi: You love her hips, huh?

Derek: Very much so.

Muzi: I like this one...

He points to the long flowy one.

Derek: That looks like a maternity dress.

Muzi: Wow, what do you know about fashion?

I chuckle as they go back and forth.

Derek finally looks at me.

Derek: Baby, which one do you like?

Me: I like the one that you like.

Derek looks at Muzi proudly.

Muzi: Couples... You're all the same...

He takes the dress and gives it to me.

Muzi: Please put it on.

Me: Hmkay...

I go to the bedroom to change. I'm really not in the mood for this, but I know I don't have a choice at this point.

I put on the dress and make my way
downstairs.

Derek: See? It's perfect!

Muzi: Hmm...

Muzi grabs my arm, pulls me closer to him and next thing I know, he's running his hands all over my body.

I'm too stunned!

He is legit touching every part of my hips and butt.

Derek steps closer and pulls me away.

Derek: Is there a problem?

Muzi: I'm just trying to make sure that it fits well.

Derek: Do that shit again, and I'll make sure that my fist fits well on your face.

I laugh.

I can't even take any of this seriously.

Muzi: Relax, buddy. I'm into you more than I am into her.

I laugh even more.

The guy winks, and Derek looks at him uncomfortably.

Me: I think the dress need a slit. I'd like to walk comfortably.

Muzi: Shh... I know what I'm doing.

I keep quiet as he makes me turn around and starts assessing the dress.

After a while, he tells me to change again...

It's now around 11am.

Derek: Dean needs me. Are you going to be fine?

Me: Yep.

Derek: Are you sure?

Me: Yes, Star.

He looks at me and smiles.

Derek: I have a bone to pick with you, but I shall do that later.

Me: Hmm, I wonder.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

We share a kiss and he leaves.

I get my phone and dial Nolwazi's number. It rings for a while, but she eventually answers.

Nolwazi: Hello?

Me: Hi, Lwazi, it's Zi.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi. How are you?

Me: I'm okay, and you?

Nolwazi: Could be better.

Me: Uhm, can you come to Derek's house?

Nolwazi: Uh...

Me: You know I can't drive there...

Nolwazi: Is everything okay?

Me: Yes.

She sighs.

Me: Just come.

Nolwazi: Okay.

Me: Bye, see you soonest.

Nolwazi: Alright.

I end the call and get ready.

When I open the door for Nolwazi, I'm not shocked to see a very tired and defeated person staring at me.

She looks like she's carrying the world.

Me: Come in.

I move out of the way and she walks in.

Me: Hey.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi.

We go to the lounge and sit.

I sigh.

Me: A few weeks ago, I planned a spa day for us.

She raises an eyebrow.

Me: I was planning on inviting all your friends... In fact, I paid for all of them...

I sigh.

Me: However, after yesterday, I think you need some alone time...

Nolwazi: Zi...

She sighs deeply.

Me: I think you need to spend some time away from everyone for just a few hours. You'll feel good.

Her eyes water up.

Me: I didn't mean to make you cry...

She sighs and wipes her tears.

Nolwazi: I just didn't anticipate any of this.

I nod.

Nolwazi: I feel like everything is going badly. I didn't think the days before my wedding would be this stressful.

Me: I know I contributed to that.

She shakes her head.

Nolwazi: Let's not dwell on the past. I don't want to fight with you. I don't want to fight with anyone.

Me: I feel bad for how things have turned out.

She shrugs and wipes her tears again.

Nolwazi: I guess all of this had to happen, because I've come to realise that I still carry a lot of baggage from my previous marriage.

I nod lightly.

Nolwazi: Nomvuyo's words hit me hard. I keep quiet.

Nolwazi: I don't want to blame anyone, even Sly. I'm just going to take responsibility for everything and find a way forward.

Me: None of us are perfect. I'm not judging you.

She nods.

Nolwazi: I'm starting to realise that that's why you are so loved. You don't judge your loved ones. You try to understand a situation in a deeper way than most of us. It's a great thing, Zi. Never change.

Me: Thank you.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I have a lot to work on...

Me: That's why we're all so close. We're a bunch of fucked up individuals that are just trying to be better.

Nolwazi: I guess I was refusing to come to terms with my faults.

Me: There's nothing wrong with being imperfect. We all make mistakes, hurtful mistakes. Our mistakes hurt a lot of people. However, we love each other regardless, and we try to make it work.

She nods.

Me: I'd like you to open up more and let us in... Being around this group has taught me a lot about myself and humans in general.

Nolwazi: I don't think I'm better than any you. I just find it difficult to build solid relationships.

Me: I understand.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: Will you join me? I think we both deserve some pampering.

Me: I thought you would never ask.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: I'll tell Sly that I'm going to be MIA for a few hours.

I try not to roll my eyes.

Nolwazi: Don't worry. Sly and I will have a talk.

Me: Cool.

She looks at me seriously.

Nolwazi: Thank you, Zi.

Me: I may be a bitch most of the time, but I'm a sensitive bitch. I hate conflict, especially if it affects the people I care about.

We stand and share a hug.

Me: Now, let's go zone out for a few hours. I can't believe the wedding is tomorrow!

Nolwazi laughs.

Nolwazi: Dean has been stressing more than me. I'm just happy that it's going to be intimate. She looks at me softly.

Nolwazi: Once again, I apologise for shutting you out like that.

Me: It's okay.

Nolwazi: You're coming, right?

Me: Yes, as Derek's plus one.

Nolwazi: Damn it! I will never get rid of you, will I?

We laugh.

Me: Too soon, Lwazi!

She continues laughing.

Me: Let's go.

I get my shit and we head out...

Listen, if there's any drama in that wedding, best believe it will not revolve around me.

I'm a born-again bitch right now- I'm sane as fuck. I don't expect anyone to even look my direction.

INSERT 244

When I get back to the house, I'm beyond glad that Derek is not there. I'm sure he's still with Dean, busying doing wedding stuff. I guess my "beef" with Nolwazi has put me in a great place, because I'm not all stressed about their wedding, trying to sort out last minute things. Phela mina I'm going there as a plus one, so angizingeni.

My spa day with Nolwazi went well. I'm still touched by her trying to shut me out just like that, but I have to let it go for my own sanity... and Dean's... His dramatic ass would never forgive me if I decided to ghost on him.

Anyway, I'm home now, it's around 4pm, and I think Derek will be back later.

As I'm about to pour myself a glass of wine, I get a call from Dean.
Should I ignore it? Should I answer it?
Ignore.

A bitch needs some personal space. I just want to prepare myself for tomorrow. We haven't really hung out as a group in a while, so I know things will be strange-ish.

It rings again, and I answer.

Me: Dean.

Dean: Don't fuck with me.

Me: What do you want?

Dean: I need your help. Woza.

Me: Uthi woza kubani? Am I Snoopy?

Dean: Just come.

He ends the call and I grunt.

See what happens the moment I do me?
It's like they can sense when I'm at peace.

I request an Uber and pour myself some wine. After a while, the Uber arrives and I make my way out.

When I get to the house, I find Dean and Derek there.

Dean: Took you long enough.

Me: What's happening? I was about to Netflix and chill.

Dean: How was your date with Lwazi?

Me: It went well. We're good now.

He looks at me seriously.

Me: I'm serious, Dean. We talked, and she apologised.

Dean: Did you also apologise for being obsessed with me?

Me: Euww! Screw you! You're the obsessed one! He chuckles.

Dean: I'm glad you're good.

Me: Why am I here?

Derek: Hello to you too, baby.

I look at Star's cute ass and then look at Dean.

Me: Ufunani?

Dean: I need you to deliver a few things to Nolwazi.

He points to a medium nyana box.

Dean: Derek will take you to her parents' house.

Me: Have we finally figured out why the bride and the groom can't see each other before the wedding day?

Derek: I did my research. Apparently in the olden days, a lot of marriages were arranged. As a result, the families didn't want the bride and groom to see each other before the wedding, because they were scared that they might change their minds. Typically, the bride's family wanted their daughter to marry into a rich family, and the groom's family wanted their son to marry a beautiful

woman. They feared that if they saw each other before the day, they wouldn't be happy with what they saw... that's why the woman wore a veil... so the groom wouldn't find out what the bride looked like till the last possible minute.

Dean and I look at him in shock and he chuckles.

Derek: What? You guys kept asking this question, so I did my research.

Dean: Such a nerd.

Me: Sies, so all of this stems from arranged marriages?

Derek: Apparently.

Me: Haike, Dean you won't be killed by lightning if you see Lwazi now, so you can deliver your box yourself.

Dean: Ungangiphapheli wena.

I grunt. Derek: Let's go, baby.

Derek stands and takes the box.

Me: How are you feeling?

Dean: I'm okay. Nolwazi and I have been living like a married couple anyway.

I chuckle.

Dean: I'm more excited than nervous. I'm glad that she gets to experience a wedding that she wants...

Me: Hmkay.

Dean: Have you really forgiven her?

Me: Ya.

Dean: Hmkay. I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Manje you're going to be all alone?

Don't you want to come to our place?

Dean: I need some alone-time. I'll be fine.

Me: Hmkay. Bye then.

We share a hug.

Me: Love you.

Dean: Love you too, kiddo.

Derek: See you tomorrow.

Dean: Shap.

Derek and I walk out and get in the car.

Me: Hey, you.

He smiles.

Derek: I was starting to think I'm invisible.

Me: Angithi your twin stays doing the most. He leans closer to me and we share a kiss.

Derek: I missed you.

Me: I'm sure you did.

He laughs.

Derek: Ziyanda, at least pretend you missed me too.

He starts the car and drives off.

Derek: How did the spa day go?

Me: It went well.

Derek: Are you really cool with Lwazi?

Me: Are you going to Dean on me?

He laughs.

Derek: No, baby, you know I'm not a snitch.

I groan.

Me: I have forgiven her, but I'm still touched that she thought so negatively of me.

Derek: We all have our insecurities. Nolwazi is not perfect. She made a mistake, I don't think she should be singled out.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Try to let it go.

I nod.

Me: What about you and Zimkitha? Are you willing to let everything go?

He sighs heavily.

Derek: It's a complex situation. But I'm not as angry as I was last week or a few days ago... I think I need to give myself time.

I nod.

Derek: Look at you changing the subject. We both laugh and continue chatting.

When we arrive at Nolwazi's parents' house, we find them (Nolwazi and her parents) having dinner. Mdu and Ivy are not present.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda, hey!

She looks shocked and nervous to see me, probably because that sister of hers is somewhere in this house, and Nolwazi knows I won't hesitate to give the brat a few smacks if she breathes too heavily.

Derek: Good evening, everyone.

Everyone greets back.

Me: Dean has asked us to give you this...

Derek hands over the box.

Nolwazi: Is it? How is he?

Derek: He's okay.

Dumakude looks at Derek seriously and I try not to roll my eyes. He mustn't even try to pull that cold father-in-law vibe with Derek and I. I genuinely don't understand in-laws that aren't

welcoming. If your child is in love with someone, you need to ease up and welcome that person. I get being strict initially, but once the person is part of the family, and they've basically pounded your child to the point of giving you grandchildren, then you must just reevaluate your attitude.

Thandeka: What's in the box?

Nolwazi opens it and smiles.

Thandeka: Aww, this is so sweet!

We watch as she takes out all of the gifts.

Nolwazi is already teary.

The first gift is a personalised leather watch that is written, "I'm excited to spend the rest of my time with you. Love, Dean." Cute and corny.

The second gift is a pair of cute warm socks with a note saying, "These should keep you warm tonight, just in case you get cold feet..."

Very funny.

The third gift is a jar filled with notes.

Dean wrote about all his favourite memories with Nolwazi.

Thoughtful.

Nolwazi: Oh my goodness!

She sobs.

Thandeka: I didn't know that Langa is this romantic. This is so sweet!

The last gift is set of personalised champagne glasses. They're all written, "Mrs Dumakude- Hlongwane."

Dean has made it clear that he is not changing his surname to Mzinyathi.

Nolwazi wipes her tears.

Nolwazi: Thank you for delivering these.

Derek: You're welcome. He really outdid himself.

Nolwazi: I'll see you guys tomorrow.

Me: Nisale kahle.

They all say goodbye, and then Derek and I make our way to the car.

Derek: If only she knew that you did all of that.

Me: Angithi she thinks I want Dean to myself...

He chuckles.

Me: I need new friends. I'm tired of your people.

He drives off.

We're going to my parents' house to fetch Little Star and Lwazi. When we arrive, Lwazi runs to me and we share a very long hug.

Lwazi: Mommy!

Me: Hey, baby.

This one is really growing up. She's getting so tall now, and the level of maturity is very high.

Little Star on the other hand, is still chubby and cute. She looks like me more

than she looks like Derek. My mom says she'll probably start looking like Derek when she grows up. I don't care. As long as people can tell that she's mine.

Anyway, we catch up with my parents...

As I'm sleeping, I'm awakened by Derek's absence in bed.

I sigh heavily.

He hasn't been sleeping properly since everything came to light.

I go to his study, and find him journaling.

Me: Nkanyezi.

He looks up and smiles.

Derek: Hey, baby.

I sigh in relief.

Thank God he's fine.

Me: Everything okay?

Derek: Just journaling.

I nod.

Derek: Come in.

I walk to the couch and sit next to him.

Derek: I've been thinking... I look at him.

Derek: I know I always put pressure on you...

I look at him in confusion.

Derek: I just want you to know that I'm not going to rush things. I'd like us to work on ourselves first before getting married. I think it's too easy to convince ourselves that our love is enough to make things work, but the past few weeks have shown me that that is not the case...

Me: Interesting...

He smiles.

Derek: I want to be the best version of myself...

Me: Me too.

Derek: Then we should start being deliberate about bettering ourselves. I've been taking my sessions with Melinda seriously.

Me: I'm happy to hear that.

Derek: I know we're not 100% fine, considering all the shit that has taken place, but I want you to know that you're the best thing that ever happened to me. I don't take our relationship for granted.

Me: Star, what's happening? Are you trying to make me have another baby?

He laughs and shakes his head.

Derek: I've just been thinking... Our fights always give me something to reflect on... Let's not rush to get married...

I smile and kiss him.

Me: I know things are not always perfect, but you are also the highlight of my life. I may not be expressive at times, but you should never doubt my love for you.

We share another kiss and I yawn.

Me: Now, can we go to sleep? Tomorrow is going to be a long day.

Derek: Definitely. Let me finish up here, I'll be up soon.

Me: Shap. I go to Lwazi's bedroom, and find her sleeping. I switch off the lamp and go to the Star's room, and find her sleeping as well. I know she's going to be up soon, crying her lungs out, so I need to get a few hours of sleep.

I finally get to our bedroom and take my phone.

I dial Dean's number.

He answers.

Me: I thought you'd be sleeping.

Dean: The nervousness is kicking in.

Me: You scared that she'll leave you hanging?

Dean: Mxm, did she love the gifts?

Me: Of course she did.

Dean: Thank you for helping me.

Me: It's always a pleasure.

He sighs.

Me: Dean.

Dean: Yes?

I sigh.

Me: How are you?

Dean: I'm fine.

Me: No, I mean, how are you? Like, honestly.

He is silent.

Me: I think the past few weeks have been emotionally draining. In addition, the focus has been on Derek, because he really struggled to process this whole thing... You didn't go crazy like him, but I know you're not really fine.

He sighs.

Dean: I can't afford to be miserable right now.

Me: You don't want Derek to see you like that?

Dean: I don't even want to see myself like that. I understand that what Zimkitha did

was fucked up. I'm pissed and hurt that my whole life was a lie... However, now that I know what really happened, I'm not that angry anymore. I understand that sometimes life will present you with difficult options... I'm rational enough to understand Zimkitha's actions...

Me: I don't want you to postpone your reaction. If you're pissed, be pissed. If you're sad, be sad...

Dean: I'm fine, Zi. I really am... There's a small part of me that is really hurt, but I can't focus on it right now, because I'm highly blessed. Everything is going well in my life at the moment. I'm filled with love and gratitude.

Me: That's good to hear.

Dean: I have my days, but overall, I'm happy. This Zimkitha thing was a curveball, but I'm okay...

Me: You promise?

Dean: Yes. Melinda ran a few tests...

Apparently my EQ is high.

Me: Oh, gosh.

He chuckles.

Dean: I'm an emotionally mature man,

Ziyanda Dlamini.

I chuckle.

Me: Argh, whatever.

Dean: Thank you for checking in... How are you?

Me: I'm okay.

Dean: Shit has been rough, hasn't it?

Me: Yoh, tell me about it.

Dean: Such is bound to happen... Like we

always say... We're a bunch of fucked up

individuals that love each other

immensely. We are constantly trying to

balance our individual shit with the crap

that comes with being associated with a

group... We'll survive this little set back.

Me: Okay, Dr Hlongz.

He chuckles.

Dean: I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Shap. I love you.

Dean: I love you too.

Me: Shap.

Dean: Bye, Dlamz.

I hang up just as Derek walks in.

Me: Was checking on Dean.

Derek: Is he okay?

I nod.

Me: He was bragging about his high EQ.

Derek laughs as he gets in bed and pulls me closer to him.

Me: Thina abanye our EQs are very concerning.

He continues laughing.

Derek: I thought mine was high, but Melinda says I have a lot of areas of growth... One of them being the way I process anger... Emotionally mature

people don't react impulsively... I need to work on that.

Me: I'm glad Melinda is now doing my sessions for free. Phela I really gave her customers.

He chuckles.

Me: Good night, Star.

Derek: Night, baby. Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He plants a kiss on my forehead. All I remember is passing out, and having to wake up around two hours later, because Little Star was crying her lungs out.

INSERT 245 (Unedited)

It's now 6am, and I haven't slept properly. I'm running on 3 hours of sleep, because of Liyakha. I'm really going through the

most with this one. Her sleeping patterns drive me insane.

Derek has also been up. Whenever I'm up with Star, he also stays up with us. I'm quite grateful that he is as invested as me in this parenthood thing, if not more... I think everyday presents a challenge. At this point, I'd take a promoting gig from Choice condoms, that's how much I'm against having more children... Don't have kids, people. It's too much.

Me: I'm glad Nolwazi is not having a jam-packed weekend. Can you imagine if we had to go up and down these family houses, exchanging blankets left right and centre?

Derek: Dumakude wanted a proper traditional wedding, but Nolwazi refused, because her first wedding was quite traditional, and she didn't really have a say in the planning.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Also, it's not like our family dynamic allows us to throw deep traditional weddings. We have no family besides each other, and we weren't even raised with traditional beliefs, so we're clueless.

We both chuckle.

Me: I don't even want a traditional or white wedding. I think we should just host a dinner- eat, say our vows and finish up.

Derek: Uh... I'm not sure about that.

Me: You want a big wedding?

Derek: Not a big wedding, I just want something intimate and meaningful.

Me: Like a dinner?

Derek: Ziyanda.

I laugh.

Derek: Maybe I should plan our wedding. Just then, my phone rings, and I answer.

Me: Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Hello, baby. How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Nomvuyo: I'm okay... Are we going to this wedding?

Me: Vuvu, yes. Don't be mean.

Nomvuyo: What? I believe in going to places where we're genuinely wanted. I chuckle.

Me: Vuvu, I'm all about positivity.

Nomvuyo: Argh, I thought we'd be petty and not pitch. Sometimes it's nice to shake the table.

Me: No! Vuvu, the wedding is taking place at your house!

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Liwa and I had to go to a hotel. There was a lot happening.

I laugh.

I'm surprised Nolwazi actually agreed to have her wedding there. I mean, the place

is a castle, but can Lwazi be a consistent Petty Betty?

Me: I'll see you soon.

Nomvuyo: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I hang up and Derek shakes his head.

Derek: You two are a bad combination.

Me: Don't even come for Vuvu. I'm sure you'd still be in the doghouse if it weren't for her.

He sulks and I laugh at him.

Me: When are supposed to be there?

Derek: Earlier than everyone.

I sigh.

Derek: Just remember that this is all for Dean. We will not be the centre of any drama today. We'll help where needed, and back off when other shit takes place.

Me: Hmkay.

Little Star starts mumbling and kicking. She can sense that she is no longer the

centre of attention, and she has a problem with that.

Derek takes her from me and showers her with kisses while she giggles away.

Me: She's getting out of hand. I thought Dean's megabyte was bad, but Liya is worse. Her need for attention is starting to worry me.

Derek: I wonder who she gets it from.

Me: Definitely not me. You and your brothers love being the centre of attention. You're all needy.

He looks at me begrudgingly and I chuckle.

Me: Anyway, let me get ready...

I stand and make my way to the bathroom.

The planner and control freak in me wants to be more involved right now. Unfortunately, Derek has me on a leash.

He has made it clear that I should remain invisible in this wedding... invisible for Nolwazi's sake specifically. I'm finding it a bit difficult to be in the shadows just because I'm nursing someone's insecurities. I keep having to remind myself that I am forgiving Nolwazi, therefore, I can't be all bitter.

Anyway, I'm mainly here for Dean. I'm excited on his behalf.

We're now in his house, helping him get ready. Muzi, the flamboyant designer is here to make sure that all goes well.

Lol, Derek doesn't particularly like Muzi. I quite enjoy their little dynamic.

Muzi: Ziyanda, babe, pour more champagne for me.

Me: Haibo, what happened to the magic word? He rolls his eyes. Uyadelela lo. I'll tolerate him because he is good at what

he does. He has managed to make all of us look great.

I pour champagne for him and he takes a sip. Thereafter, he focuses on Dean.

Dean: You do know that I have hands, and I can get dressed all my myself, right?

Muzi: Dean, be quiet. You have a long day ahead of you, and I'm just making things easier for you.

Dean chuckles.

Muzi: Besides, this is what you've paid me to do.

Dean: And you're fucken expensive.

Muzi laughs.

I'm surprised that Dean gets along with him. Muzi's personality is very "in your face." Even I get overwhelmed by him.

Anyway, once we're all good, Muzi's assistant packs his things. Listen, Muzi even did my makeup. He did not come to play.

Muzi: Please take good quality photos. I'm going to use them to promote my brand.

Me: Bye, Muzi. Thanks for everything.

Muzi: You're welcome, dear.

I try not to roll my eyes. Nothing annoys me more than being called "dear." I find it condescending, but I know Muzi means well.

We say goodbye to Muzi and he leaves.

Dean looks at us and smiles.

Dean: I have something for you two.

Me: Is it money?

He laughs as he leads us to his study.

When we get there, he points to gift bags.

I open the one with my name and smile.

Me: You are the cutest! First, I take out the very expensive-looking journal that comes with a very expensive-looking pen.

It even has a note on it and it reads:

"You probably have a pile of journals, but none of them are from me, so they're

useless. This specific journal should be used to write about what you're grateful for. I know you're a master of journaling, but I also know you don't pay attention to the little things that make you happy. Use this to jot down all the positive things you come across on a daily basis. Hopefully, the positive vibes will spread and keep you sane even when you think life is fucked up. Love, Dean."

I look at him.

Yhu, ndi-dizzy.

Me: This is really sweet.

I suddenly feel like crying.

Dean: No tears, please. It's too early.

Me: Thank you.

He nods.

I take out the second gift and chuckle.

It's a Dischem gift voucher.

Me: You know me too well!

I take out the third gift, which is a jar filled with notes. I absolutely love that this has become a thing now. We give each other these notes on a regular basis... Derek and I even have a wall dedicated to putting up these notes.

Me: Dean, this is great. Thank you. I step closer to him and give him a squeeze.

Me: Thank you!

Dean: You're welcome.

He looks at Derek and smiles.

Dean: Your turn. Derek's gift takes me out. I don't think I have ever laughed like this before.

Derek is shook.

Dean legit gave Derek "Nothing." It's a transparent plastic sphere filled with nothing.

The package states, "Congratulations! You have received the gift of nothing."

Absolutely nothing. This is the ultimate in minimalism. Less is more, more or less. Nothing is precious. Nothing is simple. Nothing is sacred. Open the pack and be enthralled when nothing happens. Allow nothing to flow through your mind and calm your soul. Savour the moment. Soon, you'll discover that nothing is so much better than something. The gift of nothing is yours to discover.”

Yhu, I have never laughed like this.

Derek: What the fuck?

Dean: You have everything. I didn't know what to get you. Also, Ziyanda gives you gifts every week manje I ran out of options.

I continue laughing.

Me: This is the best gift I've ever seen. So, it's nothing?

Dean Nothing is more... It's better than something...

Dean and I laugh.

Derek is still confused.

Derek: I've never been disrespected like this.

He eventually laughs.

Derek: Thanks for nothing.

Dean: You're welcome.

Me: Less is more.

Derek: I'll steal your voucher.

Me: Ohho. Let me check on Star. I'm sure she's up now.

I walk out and my phone rings downstairs. I rush down and get it.

Me: Hello?

Liwa: Ziyanda, hey.

Me: Liwa... Hello.

It doesn't take rocket science to figure out that he's not okay.

Liwa: Are you with Dean and Derek?

Me: Yes.

Liwa: How's Dean?

Me: He's okay. Why aren't you here?

He sighs.

Me: I know they would appreciate your presence.

Liwa: Things are not the same anymore.

Me: Are you going to hide forever?

Liwa groans.

Me: Just come to Dean and Nolwazi's house.

Liwa: Alright.

Me: I'm giving you 15 minutes. Vuvu told me you're in the neighbourhood.

He chuckles.

Liwa: See you soon.

This is going to be such a strange wedding.

Had it been mine, I would have postponed it. People's relationships are strained right now, and I wouldn't want such heavy vibes when everyone is supposed to be happy and united.

Anyway, I decide to call all the relevant people and hope for the best.

Dean, Derek and I are watching TV.

Random, I know, considering that Dean is getting married soon, but it seems to be helping, because we're very chilled right now.

We hear a knock on the door and Dean frowns.

He made it clear that he wants to spend his last hours by himself (Derek and I obviously don't give a shit about his rules). He didn't want to see anyone. Very strange, but not surprising...

He stands and I follow him.

When he opens the door, he chuckles.

All his groomsmen are standing there: Liwa, Malusi and Joe. They come bearing gifts.

I am so relieved to see Dean smiling.

Malusi: You are one weird motherfucker.
How dare you ban us from seeing you?

Joe: Can't stand you.

Muzi really did the damn thing. They all
look dapper.

They hug Dean and walk in.

Liwa is not himself.

I hug him as everyone makes their way to
the bar.

Me: Hey.

Liwa: I didn't think Dean's wedding would
be such an awkward experience.

Me: It doesn't have to be. At the end of the
day, you guys truly love each other. I
know you'll pull through.

Dean walks to us and looks at Liwa.

Dean: Want to talk?

Liwa nods.

Dean: Let's go to my study.

I watch as they walk away. I know it's too
soon to ask Derek to join them, so I won't

even bother. I know Derek won't be intentionally cold and mean to Liwa. He just needs time. Once he's ready, he'll reach out to everyone. I make my way to the bar and find Derek, Malusi and Joe laughing.

Malusi: Hello, Ziyanda.

Me: Hey.

I really tried to like this guy, I really did. I just can't get over how he continuously cheated on Nandi. It genuinely baffles me.

Joe: Ziyanda Dlamini.

Me: Hey, Joe... Where's Gabi?

Joe: She'll join us shortly.

I nod lightly.

Nandi is one of the Bridesmaids, so we'll see her later.

Derek: Baby, would you like some wine?

Me: Why are you guys drinking? You want to get there drunk?

They chuckle and I walk away and fetch Little Star. She is in heaven as I give her all my attention...

When Nomvuyo and Gabi arrive, I find myself laughing. Gabi was convinced that Nomvuyo didn't like her, and Nomvuyo just didn't care. However, I must say, after my baby shower, they became acquaintances.

Gabi: Zizi, my makeup artist is coming. Please wash your face.

Me: My face is already done, Gabs.

Gabi: No, your makeup needs to match the dress you're wearing.

Lord... If only Muzi was here to hear what Gabi is saying about his makeup service.

I chuckle and nod.

Me: Alright then.

I look at Nomvuyo.

Me: Ya wena.

Nomvuyo: Gabi is exhausting.

Gabi: Vuvu, this is a wedding! We have to be on-point!

Nomvuyo: I need a drink.

They both walk to the bar and I walk to the lounge where I left Star, who's now crying her lungs out...

We're now on our way to the Mzinyathi's. Liwa is a more relaxed. I'm glad that his conversation with Dean went well.

Derek is his usual kind self. I'm glad he's not making things awkward.

Derek is driving with Dean and Liwa.

Malusi is with Joe and Gabi. I am with Nomvuyo, she's driving of course.

Nomvuyo: I see the Three Musketeers are better.

Me: Thank God.

Nomvuyo: Liwa was ready to ghost on everyone. I had to tell him to stop being a baby.

Me: Of course you did.

Nomvuyo: They can't avoid each other forever.

Me: True.

We continue chatting till we get to the "venue."

The place looks exceptional. Ngathi we're in a South African version of Wonderland. Dean and the guys make their way to their designated room, and Nomvuyo and I walk around.

This is a very intimate setting. Last time I checked, only 30-40 people were invited. Is it weird that I suddenly want my wedding to take place tomorrow? Lol, I have so many cute ideas.

I lied. I'm not going to have a small dinner. I'm going to have something like this.

Whoa, I have FOMO right now. I need some alcohol to help me snap out of it. I get a text from Derek, saying he already misses me.

Nomvuyo: Something about weddings, huh?

Me: Yep.

We go to the bar and Nomvuyo orders mojitos.

Just then, my phone rings.

Me: What does Mdu want now?

Nomvuyo: Don't be mean.

I roll my eyes as I answer.

Me: Mdu.

Mdu: Ziyanda, ukuphi?

Me: Just got to the venue.

Mdu: Tholi and I are in the car. Please come.

Me: Hmkay.

I end the call.

Me: I'll be back.

Nomvuyo: Shap.

I make my way to the parking lot and see Mdu's car. I get in at the back and smile when I see Tholi.

Me: Long time!

Mdu: She wants to go back home.

Me: What do you mean?

I look at Tholi, and she looks at me nervously.

Tholi: Nolwazi's parents still don't know about us.

Me: I doubt they'll even care at this point. Nolwazi knows, and she invited both of you. She wouldn't have invited you if she didn't want you here.

She sighs.

Me: Stop overthinking it. Vuvu and I are here, so you won't be alone.

She looks at Mdu nervously.

Tholi: I'm sorry for overreacting. I won't leave.

Mdu: I'm just confused as to why you don't listen to me, but as soon as this one talks to you, you go back to being rational.

Me: Who is this one? Unganginyeli wena.

Mdu: Fuck off, Ziya-

Tholi: Guys, not today. Please stop.

Me: Let's go, Tholi.

I get out of the car and open her door.

She gets out and looks around nervously.

Me: Trust me, these people have bigger shit to worry about right now.

Tholi: But, Ivy-

Me: This fancy dress won't stop me from doing the most.

She giggles.

I smile and take her hand.

She has really come far... She has had some dark days due to her Postpartum Depression. I try to check in as much as I can, but a bitch is also dealing with her shit...

Mdu: I'll see you later. I'm going to check on Nolwazi.

Tholi and I make our way to the bar and she orders a virgin mojito.

Nomvuyo: I need to find my children.

She looks at me.

Nomvuyo: Have you met Liwa's sons from his previous marriage?

I look at her in shock.

Me: Liwa has sons??

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Bongani and Lungile.

Me: The fuck? Are they his biological sons?

Nomvuyo: Yes.

Me: I thought they were Jennifer's, not his.

Nomvuyo shakes her head lightly.

Tholi looks confused.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, I need to find them. I know they're up to no good wherever they are with Nyami...

She walks off and I shake my head.

Tholi: How are you?

Me: I'm okay, hey... just surviving... How are you?

Tholi: Right now, I'm nervous... But generally, I've been stable.

I nod.

Me: Where are the twins?

Tholi: A friend of mine is taking care of them.

A friend? Who is this friend? She has friends?

Me: Hmkay.

She chuckles.

Tholi: I've made a few friends, Zi. Mdu is no longer the only friend I have.

Me: Good. He's a terrible friend. We both laugh and continue chatting. I just want to distract her from her thoughts- get her comfortable and relaxed.

It's now around 1pm, and we're supposed to be seated ngabo half past.

I'm slightly tipsy, and I want Derek.

Me: Will you be fine if I leave you here with Star for a few minutes?

Tholi: Yes, I will. Everyone is minding their business. Star should keep me entertained.

Me: Shap.

I make my way inside and bump into Sly.

Sly: Extra guests are not allowed inside the ho-

Me: Hai, futsek.

That futsek came straight from my vagina.

Anyway, I walk past her and make my way upstairs. When I get to the guys' room, I find them chatting and laughing.

There's so much testosterone in this room, that my thighs twitch a bit.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Lol, as Dean would say... Uvukile umalambane. He no longer sad and lonely, I see.

Me: You guys seem to be having a good time.

I look at Dean.

He looks so happy with his people.

Dean: Ufunani?

Derek walks to me.

Derek: Everything okay?

At this point, I don't know if it's the alcohol, or I'm just a little hoe, but things need to happen. It also doesn't help ukuthi he looks good.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I snap out of it.

Me: Woza.

I take his hand and lead him out.

We walk to Liwa and Nomvuyo's bedroom and he closes the door.

Derek: Everything okay?

Heyi naye he asks too many questions...

After a quick and temporarily satisfying session, I fix my dress and he laughs quietly.

Derek: I don't think I'll ever get used to your randomness.

Me: I needed a quick fix.

He wraps his arms around me and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: You can have me anytime you want. I'm at your disposal.

I smile.

Me: Go back to your people.

We share a kiss and walk out.

We bump into Sly.

Sly: Derek, are you ready?

Derek nods coldly.

Sly: You'll find me in the other room. Meet me there in 5 minutes.

She smiles and walks off.

I look at Derek in confusion.

Derek: I'm the Best Man, remember? Still don't understand.

Derek: Sly is Nolwazi's Maid of Honour. And then it clicks.

Me: I see...

Derek: She's been doing the most.

Me: Who wouldn't... You are the Great Dlamini's property, after-all.

He laughs.

Me: Geesh, so who's Liwa's partner?

Derek: Liwa is with Thuli. Malusi is obviously with Nandi. Joe is with Nomi. Then Mdu is with Ivy.

Just then, Gabi and Joe emerge from one of the rooms.

Clearly I wasn't the only one craving a quick fix.

Gabi: Zi!

She takes my hand.

Gabi: Let's give them space... We'll see them soon...

Me: Bye, Star.

Derek: Bye, baby.

Gabi and I walk away.

Gabi: I had to do some last minute changes.

I look at her in confusion.

Gabi: That sly friend of Nolwazi's placed my Joey with Thuli. I wasn't comfortable with that so I had to make sure he's placed with the drunkard. I'm sure she won't remember half of the day.

Yho ngaze ngahleka. Gabi doesn't play when it comes to her Joey.

Gabi: I don't know how you're so comfortable with Sly being so close to Derek. Sly is messy!

Me: Derek will handle her.

Gabi: If you say so!

We get outside and Tholi waves.

It seems like everyone is here, and they're all heading to their seats.

Gabi: I need champagne first.

She goes to the bar while I go to Tholi. I take Star from her. Star is now pouting and staring at me. She's obviously not happy that I left her here. I give her a kiss and she rests her head on my neck.

Tholi: You've been gone for a while.

Me: Nolwazi needed help with something. She nods and we make our way to our seats...

INSERT 246

I'm sitting in between Tholi and Nomvuyo. Everyone is seated and we're waiting for the vocalist to officially bless us. I told Nolwazi (when we were still planning her wedding) to find someone

who'll blow us away as she walks down the aisle. It's 2018, we can't be using that boring song the colonisers brainwashed us with...

Anyway, I'm glad she went with that idea, because this guy on the piano has been doing an amazing job.

We're now waiting for Nolwazi.

Thandeka and Lindelwa are sitting side by side, looking very emotional.

Zimkitha is sitting on the other side with my mom and dad.

Star is staring at her father and giggling.

Derek looks so good up there.

Dean and Nolwazi agreed that the groomsmen and bridesmaids will sit at the front- not the front row- but at the front where they'll be standing with the priest. It's a cute setting and I think I'm also going to use it, but only our family

will sit there... I think it will be comforting to have them up there with us.

The pianist changes the tune and the vocalist starts humming sweetly. K'shuthi it's time.

We all stand.

I look at Dean and smile. He looks so happy. He looks like a completely different person, the Resting Bitch Face has completely vanished.

My eyes land on Derek and my smile widens. This one lowkey drives me crazy, but he can never find out...

We turn heads as the vocalist starts singing Jennifer Hudson's "Still Here."

Yhu, I am a sobbing mess.

Nolwazi emerges and she looks breathtaking.

Heyi, even Nomvuyo's stiff face softens up and the idiot sheds a few thug tears.

Listen, I have never been to a wedding, so this shit is overwhelmingly emotional. Now, I'm even thinking about Derek and how much I love him. It's a crazy wave of emotions.

I am amazed at how this vocalist is able to pull off this song without screaming... Her sweet voice is soothing, and it's not taking our attention away from Nolwazi.

The thing with this song is that it can confuse you... One minute you're singing it as a gospel song, thanking God that he's by your side... The next minute, it has you thinking about your lover... It's a versatile song, and I'm touched that Nolwazi chose it. It's a beautiful song...

Dean looks like he can't believe any of this is happening. He has been trying to keep it in, but now he's just letting the river floweth. In fact, everyone is sobbing.

Because everyone that is here truly cares

about these two people, we're not dealing with pretentious bitches that only attend weddings with shady motives. The only shady bitch here is Sly.

Anyway, we're all emotional right now. Dumakude and Nolwazi finally get to the front and Dumakude actually hugs Dean. Shocker.

Thereafter, he walks to his seat.

Dean wraps his arms around Nolwazi and they share a long hug.

My phone vibrates and I check the message.

Derek: I don't understand why I have to sit here. You're too far for my liking.

I chuckle. When and how did he even send this message, considering that he is sitting in the front?

I look at him and he sulks.

Nomvuyo: I want my husband.

People want their people. Dean and Nolwazi got us in our feelings. Nolwazi and Dean hold hands and sit on the two chairs placed for them. The priest smiles as he looks at them.

The vocalist finishes off the song and we all sit.

Little Star is busy pulling this wig, and I'm five to smacking her chubby ass.

Priest: We are gathered here to unite Dean Langelihle Hlongwane and Nolwazi Camill-

Dean clears his throat loudly and the priest looks at him worriedly.

Is Dean going to stop the wedding?

What's happening?

Dean: It's Dr. Dean Langelihle Hlongwane. Are you kidding me?

Everyone laughs and the priest nods.

Priest: Pardon me, ladies and gentlemen... We are gathered here to unite DOCTOR

Dean Langelihle Hlongwane and Nolwazi Camille Dumakude in marriage.

The priest looks at Dean with a raised eyebrow and Dean nods.

Yhu, Dean is the worst.

Priest: Their decision to marry has not been entered into lightly and today they publicly declare their private devotion to each other. The essence of this commitment is the acceptance of each other in entirety, as lover, companion, and friend. A good and balanced relationship is one in which neither person is overpowered nor absorbed by the other, one in which neither person is possessive of the other, one in which both give their love freely and without jealousy.

Nomvuyo looks at me and chuckles.

Priest: Marriage, ideally, is a sharing of responsibilities, hopes, and dreams. It takes a special effort to grow together,

survive hard times, and be loving and unselfish.

For the next ten minutes or so, he goes through bible verses and preaches. Once he's done, he asks Nolwazi and Dean to stand.

Priest: Do you both pledge to share your lives openly with one another, and to speak the truth in love? Do you promise to honor and tenderly care for one another, cherish and encourage each other, stand together, through sorrows and joys, hardships and triumphs for all the days of your lives?

Nolwazi and Dean: We do.

Priest: Do you pledge to share your love and the joys of your marriage with all those around you, so that they may learn from your love and be encouraged to grow in their own lives?

Nolwazi and Dean: We do.

Priest: May these rings be blessed as a symbol of your union. As often as either of you look upon these rings, may you not only be reminded of this moment, but also of the vows you have made and the strength of your commitment to each other. Dr Dean, please repeat after me... Everyone laughs.

Priest: I, Dr Dean Langelihle, promise to love and support you, Nolwazi, and live each day with kindness, understanding, truth, humour, and passion. With this ring I thee wed.

Dean takes Nolwazi's hand, repeats vow, gifts ring, places ring on Nolwazi's finger.

Priest: Nolwazi, please repeat after me... I, Nolwazi, promise to love and support you, Dr Dean Langelihle, and live each day with kindness, understanding, truth, humour, and passion. With this ring I thee wed.

Nolwazi takes Dean's hand, repeats vow, gifts ring, places ring on Dean's finger.

Priest: Now, I would like to make a public announcement, just in case you start thinking that I'm an incompetent person for this role... Dr Hlongwane has given me strict instructions to not give any of you the right to come out should you have a problem with this union. He has asked me to read this note...

The priest gets a piece of paper from the podium and opens it.

Priest: If any of you are against my union with Nolwazi, then now is not the time to express your unsolicited opinion, in fact we're not interested. Lwazi and I are getting married, and if any of you even try to stand and cause a scene right now, I'm afraid I'll do some regrettable things in front of the priest...

We all laugh.

Trust Dean to do such. He is such an idiot.

Priest: Dearly beloveds... I have no right to go against Dr Hlongwane's wishes, therefore, none of you will be given the opportunity to speak up should you believe these two should not be together.

We continue laughing.

After a while, we settle down and there's silence.

Priest: Go on no-

Out of nowhere, this child I'm holding starts blabbing very loudly.

Haibo, guys. I try to shush her, but she continues. Now she's busy saying dada... very loudly. Now everyone is looking at me. I'm not sure if they're judging me or what. Is there a formula that keeps your child quiet when you're in serious settings? Eish, I try shushing her, but she continues blabbing away.

Priest: I guess someone couldn't keep their opinion to themselves...

Everyone laughs and I sigh. This is the last thing I need right now. I'm supposed to be invisible, and Liyakha is outchea embarrassing me.

Dean and Nolwazi look at me and laugh. Little Star continues speaking her language.

Out of nowhere, Derek walks to me and takes her. She quietens down as he walks back to his seat. She's now nuzzled in his arms. I want to disappear.

Priest: That is one chatty baby...

Everyone laughs and I roll my eyes.

Priest: Now... as I was saying...

We all focus.

Priest: Go now in peace and live in love, sharing the most precious gifts you have—the gifts of your lives united. And may your days be long on this earth.

The priest smiles.

Priest: I now pronounce you husband and wife. Dr Dean Langelihle Hlongwane, you may kiss the bride, Nolwazi Camille Dumakude. Nolwazi will not change her surname. I am with her there. I'm not planning on letting go of my surname, especially because Derek's surname is not even "his..." There are too many complications here.

Anyway, Dean wraps his arms around Nolwazi's waist and they share a very long kiss.

I sigh in relief.

I'm glad that nothing has happened so far. So far so good.

*** Side Note: The priest's Wedding Ceremony Script is taken from the following website:

<http://ravieandchelseaswedding.blogspot.com/.../wedding-cerem...>

INSERT 247

Derek takes my hand and leads me into the house while carrying a very happy Little Star.

We get to Liwa and Nomvuyo's room. He puts Star on the bed and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: I was going crazy.

I laugh.

Me: Nkanyezi, it wasn't even an hour. He sulks and presses me harder against him until I feel his erection.

Heyiii!

Makunyiwe once!

We both glance at Liyakha, who is looking at us so innocently, that I have to stop

myself from picking her up and kissing her.

Derek: Surely 5 minutes won't kill her?
I laugh as I pull him to the bathroom and we don't shut the door completely, because she'll start crying.

I live for these random quickies with Derek! Even though they leave me wanting more, I'm always excited to sneak away with him...

As he's pounding me senselessly, Star starts crying.

Yhu, uzoba strong. We have bigger things to worry about right now.

I'm five to paradise right now, and Derek is going faster.

Just as I squeal, we hear voices. The next 30 seconds confuse the shit out of me.

Out of nowhere, Nomvuyo is busy yelling my name and Liwa is laughing, Little Star is still crying her lungs out. Derek quickly shuts the door and he cums first... I follow shortly after and groan in defeat. I just want to lay on a bed like a lifeless chicken and have him do things to me while taking his time. I'm thoroughly horny, man...

Me: That wasn't enough...

He plants a kiss on my lips and fixes my dress.

When he opens the bathroom door, we find Nomvuyo and Liwa there. Nomvuyo is comforting Star.

Nomvuyo: You filthy whores!

Liwa is looking at us, clearly amused.

Star rests her head on Nomvuyo's neck and sobs quietly.

Hai suka, she must stop being so possessive and dramatic.

Within minutes, she's asleep.

Nomvuyo: You should be ashamed of ourselves!

Me: Oh, please... What exactly brought you here in the first place?

Nomvuyo rolls her eyes.

Derek takes Star from Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: You can take her to Zimi's bedroom.

Me: No. Sly will kidnap my child.

She laughs and nods.

Nomvuyo: Hambani ke. Liwa and I need to talk.

Me: Mxxxm!

I follow Derek out of the bedroom and he takes my hand and leads us out of the house.

I need to find Dean and give him a big hug. He's finally married!

We bump into my parents and my mom insists on holding Liya. Derek gives her the sleeping Mini Petty.

Mom: How beautiful was that?

Me: I was sobbing from start to finish. It was really beautiful.

Derek holds my hand and my mom smiles.

Mom: I'm sure you can't wait to marry my baby.

Derek: Definitely. I had to stop myself from fetching her and joining those two.

Dad: I would smack you. You know very well that you're both not ready.

Yoh, uDerek wabantu waswaba.

Me: We'll see you around.

Mom: Shap, baby.

We walk off and Derek continues sulking.

Derek: He didn't have to be so mean.

Me: Askies... Do you think I should apologise to Lwazi for what Star did?

Derek: Don't be ridiculous. If she's affected by a baby being a baby then she needs to check herself.

Me: Hmkay.

Shame, he's obviously touched by my father's words.

We find Dean and Nolwazi talking to a few people. Dean stops talking and opens us his arms so I can squeeze him.

Me: Yaaas!

He squeezes me back.

Me: I'm so happy for you guys.

We let go of each other and I hug Nolwazi as well.

Me: How are you?

Nolwazi: Ecstatic!

She is beaming.

Me: I'm glad everything is going well.

She is smiling from ear to ear.

Derek and Dean share a hug.

Nolwazi: Where's Star Junior?

Me: With me mom.

She laughs.

Nolwazi: Such a firecracker. She's worse than Simo.

Me: So embarrassing.

Nolwazi: She's a child. Dean and I were expecting Simo to cause drama.

Me: I chuckle.

Nolwazi is pulled by one of her friends and I focus on Dean.

Dean: You okay?

I nod.

Me: I have to find Tholi.

Dean: Shap.

I walk away and look around. I can't spot her.

I call her and she answers.

Me: Tholi, where are you?

Tholi: The bathroom.

Me: Which one? This place is huge?

Just then, Mdu and I spot each other. He's standing with Ivy. Tholi tells me where she is and I walk to Mdu.

Mdu: Where is she?

Me: I'm going to fetch her.

Ivy: Ziyanda, you are at my sister's wedding yet you have the audacity to disrespect me.

I walk away and make my way to one of the bathrooms. I knock and she opens.

Me: And then?

Tholi: I don't want to be the cause of any drama.

Me: You won't, Tholi.

She sighs.

Me: You need to stop hiding from your problems. You and Mdu created a fairytale knowing very well that there would be backlash. Manje are you planning on hiding forever?

She looks down.

Me: Are you going to hide your twins forever? Come on, Tholi.

Tholi: No.

Me: Then buckle up and own up to your shit.

I take her hand.

Me: Let's go.

Tholi: I think I need a drink.

I shake my head.

Me: You know you can't have alcohol.

She grunts and we make our way outside and go to the bar. I get myself another mojito and Tholi gets a virgin one.

Me: Ivy tried testing me, but I walked away. Yazi I'm really growing up. It took everything in me not to smack her.

Tholi giggles.

Me: That girl is a bully. Don't allow her to make you feel like a child.

Tholi: She's too much.

We continue chatting till everyone heads to a big table that has cake pops. Each pop has a guest's name and table number. I mean... I need to start my own event company yazi...

Tholi panics as soon as she realises that she'll be sitting with the family.

Me: You'll be fine... You're probably sitting next to me.

I also dislike the fact that I'm with the family, but it's not like I have a choice. I'm just glad that Nomvuyo will be there.

We walk to the other side of the yard and go to our table. We're the first ones to get there. I quickly look around to try check who we're with.

Me: You're sitting next to me. Nomvuyo is sitting next to Ivy, so she'll regulate her.

Tholi groans as she sits. I sit next to her and finish my mojito, then one of the bartenders, takes my glass and I ask for another one.

After a few minutes, Derek walks to our table and plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: You good?

Me: Yep, you?

He nods.

Me: Are you over my dad's comment?

Derek: Can't be mad at him.

I chuckle and he looks at Tholi.

Derek: You look gorgeous, Tholi. Tholi blushes profusely.

Tholi: Thank you.

Mdu walks to the table and kisses Tholi.

Mdu: Chubby Cheeks.

Tholi: Hey.

Mdu: I've missed you.

He sits next to her and showers her with kisses until she tells him to stop.

I focus on Derek.

Me: Are you okay?

Derek: Is it weird that I want to leave and go to sleep?

I chuckle.

Me: This is me we're talking about. I totally understand.

Derek: I'm becoming anti-social like you.

Me: And I'm becoming social.

He groans and we continue chatting until everyone takes a seat.

Our table has the following people: Tholi, Mdu, Thandeka, Dumakude, Lindelwa, Liwa, Nomvuyo, Ivy, Derek and myself. When Dean and Nolwazi walk in, we all stand and clap. They look like lovestruck teenagers.

Nolwazi has changed and she looks more relaxed.

I personally wish I was sitting with my parents. It looks like they're having fun there with Gabi. Zimkitha is sitting that side as well. Part of me understands why she's being side-lined, but it's a bit sad. I know she wants to be close to her sons. I usually sit next to Nomvuyo or Dean when we're together, so this feels a bit strange. I miss the shady whispers... Now, I have to constantly make sure that Tholi is fine (poor girl looks like she's about to collapse). Dean and Nolwazi are sitting in between Ivy and Derek. Nolwazi is sitting

next to Ivy, and the twins are next to each other.

Dean: Liwa, go do your thing, please.

Liwa: Am I not stepping on anyone's toes?

Dean: No, go.

Liwa stands.

I'm confused.

Derek gets closer to my ear.

Derek: Sly is the MC.

I frown.

Sly is a wedding planning, a hoe, and an entire MC? Shuu, what a woman!

Derek: But Dean wants none of that, so Liwa will be the MC.

I sigh in relief.

Why would I want to sit here and listen to someone who doesn't respect the principle of marriage, preach about marriage? Sly can miss this gig shame.

Nolwazi: Will you be able to do it, Liwa?

Liwa chuckles.

Liwa: This is me we're talking about,
Lwazi.

He walks away and we watch as he takes
the mic. Sly walks to her seat and I laugh
to myself. Derek is also laughing.

The waiter brings my mojito and I
continue drinking in peace.

I guess this wedding will definitely be
drama-free. I'm very relaxed at this
point...

INSERT 248

Liwa: Good afternoon, everyone.

We all greet him back. He definitely looks
better than he was earlier. He's back to
being his usual jolly self.

I glance at Derek.

Me: Did you talk to him?

He shakes his head.

Me: How is the vibe?

Derek: He's respecting my need for space.

I nod and focus on Liwa again. Chile, I know how Derek can get when he's a little pissed, so I'm not about to trigger that shit. He already looks like he's over the wedding a bit. He really is becoming anti-social.

Liwa looks good up there. I'm sure

Nomvuyo's inner thighs are pulsing.

Liwa: Some time last week, my daughter, Nyami, wanted to know what it's like to be married. I immediately told her to leave me alone and she was initially shocked. However, we've taught her to respect other people's need for space, so she did what I told her... leave me alone... But when she left me alone for a while, I

went to her and asked why she was ignoring me...

We all laugh.

Liwa: It's such a strange thing... You find yourself wanting your space, but at times when you're given the space, you end up missing your partner and feeling like a child when you're apart...

I give Derek a look and he chuckles. Liwa is definitely dragging him.

Liwa: From my observations though, it's the man that usually ends up sulking and regretting the space... My friends are probably the clingiest men you'll ever find, in a cute way though, not the creepy way. Nothing we do is creepy. We are adorable... I know most you are used to men that don't particularly like you, they're just dating you to pass time, so you don't really understand what I'm saying.

My jaw drops. Haibo, the shade?

Everyone laughs.

Liwa: My friends are very much attached to their partners. It's unfortunate that I can't hook them up with some of you ladies, because they're all lovestruck... We become puppies for these women... well, except Malusi, of course... Yhu!

I laugh a little too hard at that one.

Liwa points at Malusi.

Liwa: Ladies, you can have this one... he has selective memory when it comes to his relationship...

Heyiii!

I am finished! Draaag him, Liwa!

Nandi is laughing a little, but I know that shit hurts. Uzoba strong shame. Liwa is clearly going to roast people today.

Liwa: Anyway, I would like to introduce our first speaker...

He clears his throat.

Liwa: I am personally afraid of him... He probably slices raw meat with his nails...

I look at Dumakude, and he is chuckling.

Liwa: When this man walks in the room, all of us scramble... I sometimes wonder if he has friends...

Dumakude continues chuckling.

Liwa: Ladies and gentlemen, The one and only, Dumakude...

We all clap as Dumakude makes his way to the front and Liwa gives him the mic and stands away from him. Liwa is such a fool.

Dumakude greets us and we greet back.

Dumakude: Liwa, I will deal with you later... I'll let you have your moment...

We all chuckle.

He becomes serious.

Dumakude: Raising a daughter in this day and age is honestly the toughest role I have ever had... When I was growing up,

things were different. Our mindsets, in particular, were very closed-off. I must admit that it's been a challenge to unlearn my understanding of parenting. We grew up thinking our parents were somewhat Gods, that what they set the rules, and we had no right to question them. Our respect came from fear more than anything...

This is about to be a free parenting lesson, and I'm here for it. Lord knows my childish ass needs it.

Dumakude: We had no say in the house. We had no power to make choices that we felt were good for us. We had to ask for permission every step of the way. We had to keep our feelings to ourselves, because we were children. Even when we were older, we were reminded that we were still children, therefore, we mustn't get carried away. It was like prison. One

wrong move, the consequences would be very heavy... I can safely say that while my parents were alive, I had never heard them apologise for anything. In their eyes, they were never wrong. Even when I was hurt by something they said or did, I had to convince myself that I was being dramatic, and that I was imagining their wrongdoings.

Thank God my parents are not like that. Dumakude: When I had my own children, I found myself behaving the same way as my parents. However, Nolwazi fought for her rights. Mdu came out as stubborn as me, and Nomzamo... well... Ivy is Ivy...

Everyone laughs. I try not to roll my eyes.

Dumakude: I remember when Nolwazi was still a child, I had shouted at her for something she did. I was very harsh that day. That night, when we were having dinner, she stopped eating and looked at

me seriously. She was 11 years old. I don't think I'll ever forget that day. She looked me dead in the eye and said the following: "Dad, I understand that you're older than me and you're my parent, but I didn't like the way you spoke to me. Yes, I was playing with the stove, but I don't like how you shouted at me. I didn't, and still don't, know that I'm not allowed to play with the stove. Next time, please give me clear instructions, and I will try my best to follow them. Just don't shout at me for something we didn't include in the house rules."

Everyone chuckles.

Dumakude: My first instinct was to beat her. I wanted to beat her thoroughly, so she would never speak again. I was so angry at myself for even taking her to a private school, because I was convinced that she learnt all that nonsense at school.

Thandeka is the one who had to calm me down and make me understand the importance of that moment. Unlike me, Nolwazi found her voice, and was confident enough to make me realise that I needed to check myself...

He continues speaking.

Dumakude: From that point, I had to unlearn most of the things I inherited from my parents...

He sighs.

Dumakude: Nolwazi has become a powerhouse, and I pride myself in her. I always prayed that she would find someone who is not intimidated by her success. Someone who would compliment her, and be confident enough to stand next to her proudly... I'm afraid she has found someone whose confidence is a little over the top. God definitely answered my prayers...

We laugh.

Dumakude: Dean is something... He is arrogant, very arrogant...

Haike, he mustn't come for Dean. He's also an arrogant man.

Dumakude: However, he knows that there is a time and place for arrogance... In a way, he is just like me... I've accepted that we're similar in many ways, that's why we clash most of the time.

He smiles.

Dumakude: These two love each other. Their story is quite heartwarming. Dean's timing may have been sketchy, but his love for my daughter is unquestionable.

He never fails to make it known that he is all about Nolwazi. I'm not worried about my daughter, she's in good hands.

Aww, how sweet.

Dumakude: My prayer is that you both make mistakes and learn from them as a

team. There's no such thing as hierarchy in a marriage, according to me. Your wife shouldn't be silenced just because you think you're the head of the family. If you ever try that with my daughter, I will fetch her myself...

He smiles.

Dumakude: None of us are perfect. You both need to understand that you're human, you're bound to mess up and hurt each other, but you should always be intentional about solving your problems. If you feel like you can't solve the problem yourselves, you should consult a neutral mediator, and if it means seeking professional help, then do that. If both of you still want to make it work, but don't have the right tools to fix things, then you must actively look for those tools. As long as both of you still want to be together,

then you'll be able to make it through the dips.

Shuu, I feel like he's speaking to me directly. I'm touched.

Dumakude: And don't forget to give each other space. Just because you're married, it doesn't mean you have to be in each other's spaces 24/7. It's always good to take a step back and be by yourself at times, as long as you talk about it.

Disappearing randomly is not okay. You always have to talk to each other, explain your feelings to each other... Never get to a point where you think your partner knows you and what you're thinking. That will never be the case. You may finish each other's sentences, and know how to make each other happy, but you will never have the power to know what your partner is thinking or feeling, unless they tell you. Don't ever make assumptions.

Communication is important. There's nothing as counterproductive as the silent treatment, especially if it takes place without an understanding of why it's taking place. Talk to each other. When you don't want to talk, tell each other. Don't ever make assumptions.

We all clap. Yhu!

Dumakude: Nolwazi, I love you. I'm very happy for you. Everything you went through makes sense now. Your experiences were preparing you for this phase in your life. This is when you get to sit back and soak it all in. You deserve to be happy.

Aww, guys. He's getting emotional.

Dumakude: Dean, I know we have a strange relationship, but I want you to know that you have a father in me. I can't thank you enough for providing a safe

space for my baby. I wish you two all the best.

We all clap as Dumakude walks to Dean and gives him a hug. Thereafter, he hugs Nolwazi.

I'm such an emotional mess.

Derek is now holding my hand.

Hai, guys, love is beautiful. When you find “that” person, and everything just make sense, consider yourself blessed.

Liwa clears his throat and we focus on him.

Liwa: A husband and wife had been married for 60 years and had no secrets except for one: The woman kept in her closet a shoe box that she forbade her husband from ever opening. But when she was on her deathbed—and with her blessing—he opened the box and found a crocheted doll and 95,000 in cash.

“My mother told me that the secret to a happy marriage was to never argue,” she explained. “Instead, I should keep quiet and crochet a doll.”

Her husband was touched. Only one doll was in the box—that meant she’d been angry with him only once in 60 years.

“But what about all this money?” he asked.

“Oh,” she said, “that’s the money I made from selling the dolls.”

We all laugh.

Liwa is such a fool.

He continues telling us corny jokes and I drink away, trying not to pounce on Derek and dry hump him. Tholi also seems a bit relaxed next to me.

INSERT 249

I feel Derek's lips on my ear.

Derek: You're tipsy.

Me: I am?

He nods and I groan.

Derek: Drink some water.

He pours some water for me and takes my mojito. Phela I told the waiter to keep them coming back to back. I'm sure I've had five mojitos since we sat here.

I watch as he finishes my mojito and frowns.

Derek: It's so strong, Ziyanda.

Me: Stop judging me.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my cheek. We're about to be served our food now. A bitch is hungry. Liwa comes back and sits. I start clapping for him and everyone at our table joins me. I feel like a proud mother. He's doing amazing!

I look at Derek and he leans closer to me. Yazi, I'm so glad that I have a man that understands that I love gossiping, and he takes my non-verbal signals very seriously.

Me: Can you imagine Sly MCing?

He chuckles.

Me: I'm sure she'd be encouraging us to cheat and not let marriage cockblock us.

He laughs.

Derek: We'd end up having an orgy. We laugh and continue making fun of her.

At least I don't have to worry about this one Deaning on me. I ain't engaged to no snitch.

I walk to the other table to check on my parents. They are having a good time this side, even Star is awake and smiling.

Me: Hey.

Mom: Hi, baby. How are things that side?

I grunt and she laughs.

Mom: Dumakude's speech was sweet.

Me: It was.

I look at my dad.

Me: You hurt Nkanyezi's feelings.

Mom: I told him he has to apologise. That was not nice.

My dad chuckles.

Dad: Derek needs to stop taking himself so seriously.

Me: You know he's sensitive.

Dad: Uzoba strong.

Me: Anyway, how are things this side?

Mom: As you can see, we are having a good time, and you are disturbing us.

Me: Hehe!

Mom: Go sit with your family, sisi. Even Liyakha is having fun with us.

I laugh and make my way back to my table.

Ivy: Mdu, you really brought that homewrecker here? Haibo! Is this the moment?

We all stare at Mdu. The vibe instantly changes.

Mdu: As you can see, I am here with Tholi. Tholi's face is completely red. She probably wants to run away.

Mdu: Mom, Dad... You're the only ones that are not aware of this, but we're in a relationship.

There's silence.

The other tables have no idea ukuthi ziyabuya la. They're chatting and laughing happily.

Mdu: I know this is not the time nor plac-

Dumakude: You are absolutely correct.

Now, shut up.

Whoa!

Mdu tightens his jaw.

Dumakude: Now is not the time nor place to discuss your stupidity.

Haibo, guys!

Mdu: There's no need for you to insult me.

Mdu is very stupid right now! Why is he starting a fight with his father? Dumakude will whoop his dumb ass, and I will gladly enjoy the show.

Dumkaude looks at him coldly, but Mdu doesn't seem fazed.

Mdu: Tholakele and I have been together for a while. We're approaching three years soon.

Yhu.

Mdu: I'm not asking for anyone's permission.

He is doing this the wrong way. Why is he being so dramatic? No one is fighting him.

Thandeka: Who are you talking to like that?

He keeps quiet. Dumakude excuses himself and walks away.

Nolwazi: Mdu!

Mdu: What? Dad needs to stop thinking I'm 10 years old.

Thandeka: Mduduzi!

Mdu: I'm tired of him thinking he can rule our lives. We are adults now.

Dean: Mdu.

Mdu looks at Dean.

Mdu: This has nothing to do with you.

Dean: You weren't saying that when you were running to us for help.

Mdu hisses.

Tholi stands and rushes out.

Thandeka: What has gotten into you?!

How dare you address us like that?!

Mdu: Stop being dra-

I stand and grab his arm.

He tries pushing me away, but Derek also stands.

Me: You're being unnecessary.

I pull him and he stands. He walks away and I follow him- I'm sure Derek is also following us.

We make our way inside the house and I look at him in shock.

Me: What the hell is wrong with you??

Mdu: I'm tired of being judged.

Me: Manje that means you have to do the most at your sister's wedding?

He groans.

Me: You shouldn't have spoken to your father like that. That was disrespectful!

He doesn't say anything.

Me: You need to fin-

Just then, Dumakude walks in. Before we can even process his presence, he smacks Mdu and leaves us stunned.

Mdu loses his balance and Dumakude looks at him coolly.

Kanti where is Derek? Now is the perfect time for him to intervene. What if these people start having a physical fight?

Mdu rubs his chin and looks at his father angrily.

Dumakude: Do you need another reminder?

Mdu shakes his head.

Dumakude: Good.

They stare at each other.

After a while, Mdu walks away. Why would he leave me with this man?

Dumakude looks at me and I try to look at him as well.

Dumakude: My wife tells me you used to date Mdu.

I clear my throat.

Dumakude: Why didn't your relationship work out?

Hai, what's happening?

Me: Too much toxicity.

He nods.

Dumakude: I would have loved to have you as a daughter-in-law.

I have to stop myself from vomiting.

Dumakude: Did you know about Tholakele?

Me: Yes.

He doesn't say anything.

I guess this is the perfect time to advocate for her.

Me: Tholi's not a bad person. She's been through her struggles, and she's still trying to move past her PTSD. Mdu has provided a safe space for her. I think she deserves a chance.

Just then, Derek walks in and I sigh in relief.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Yes.

He takes my hand and looks at Dumakude.

Derek: Mam'Thandeka is looking for you.

Dumakude nods and walks away.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Did he come for you?

Me: He'd never.

Derek: Good.

He wraps his arms around me and we share a kiss.

Me: What the hell was that?

He chuckles.

Derek: Poor Tholi almost passed out.

Me: How is she? Did you check on her?

Derek: She's fine.

We walk out and make our way back to our table.

The tension is deep this side.

Derek and I sit and have our own conversation. I swear being in a relationship is nice sometimes. Bheka manje I have someone to talk to despite the shit that's taking place right now.

Nolwazi stands and walks away. Dean looks unhappy.

Dean: Ivy, why would you even bring this up right now?

Ivy: The problem is that fat pig next to him. She's the one-

Tholi: Shut up, Ivy!

Heyiii, Derek and I instantly stop chatting.

Tholi: I am sick and tired of your disrespectful mouth! You are constantly saying hurtful things to me, as if I'm a child. If you don't like me, then you can keep your distance the same way I have. I'm tired of taking your insults!

Heyiiii! Standing ovation! Standing ovation!

I must be dreaming!

Mdu looks like he has seen a ghost.

Tholi: You will no longer insult me. I know you hate me, because of the hurt I've brought to your family, but you don't know the full story. You have never bothered to ask what truly happened. Nolwazi and Dean know what happened. I'm sorry, but if Nolwazi understands, then I'm sure you can also find it in your heart to understand.

Shook!

Ivy: You think I want to have a conversation with you? You broke my sister's heart!

Tholi: And I've apologised for that. What's happening? What happened to Tholi?

Ivy: If you think I'll ever be civil with you, then you have another thing coming. You and Kwanele are fucked up.

Tholi sighs.

Tholi: I'll give you your space.

Ivy: You're not welcome here. Hamba vele.

Tholi stands.

Mdu: Tholi, you're not going anywhere. If anyone has a problem with you, then they should leave. Tholi keeps quiet.

Mdu: I'm tired of hiding you.

He makes her sit and looks at his family seriously.

Mdu: We have a lot to be grateful for.
Tholi and I are happy, and nothing you
say will change things.

Ivy: This is ridiculous.

Me: No, you are ridiculous. You keep
thinking your bluntness is cute. No one
wants to hear your rude opinions.

Ivy: Of course you have to say something.
You freak out when things aren't about
you.

Me: You know every well that you're the
entitled and attention seeking one here.
The only problem is that no one cares
about what you have to say.

She looks at her parents.

Thandeka looks defeated.

Me: Today is supposed to be about your
sister, but here you are throwing a
tantrum, because you're not willing to
accept things that have nothing to do with
you.

Tholi: All I ask is that you stop insulting me. I've had enough.

Ivy stands and walks away.

Liwa: Uhm, Dean, you should probably check on Lwazi.

Dean also stands and walks away.

Thandeka: We need a quick meeting.

Mduduzi, woza.

Thandeka, Dumakude and Mdu stand and also walk out.

I'm sure people are wondering what the hell is happening... I look around and realise that they're too busy chatting, eating and drinking. I'm sure they don't think anything hectic is happening.

Nomvuyo: Kodwa-

Me: Nomvuyo, not now. Ivy needs to grow the fuck up. Stop defending her nonsense.

Nomvuyo keeps quiet and shrugs.

I look at Tholi and smile.

Me: Bitch.

She giggles and takes a sip of her juice. Nothing beats that feeling when you finally find your voice. It's even better when you also find the courage to use your voice.

I'm happy for Tholi!

INSERT 250

Things have been awkward since Tholi put that little heffer, Ivy, in her place. Mdu, Nolwazi, Dean, Thandeka and Dumakude are still not back. Clearly they're having an intense family meeting.

Me: Aren't you going to check on Dean?

Derek: Angizingeni.

Tholi: Maybe I should leave.

Me: You're not going anywhere. Ivy must leave if she has a problem with you.

Liwa: Can't we have a normal day without drama?

We all sigh.

Just then, my phone rings and it's Dean. I answer.

Me: Hey.

Dean: Please come to the guest house.

Me: Why?

Dean: Just come.

He ends the call and I look at Derek.

Derek: Can't people solve their problems without you?

I groan.

Derek: I'm starting to regret introducing you to these people...

We both stand and make our way to the other side of the yard, into the guesthouse.

We find Dean there.

Me: Where's Nolwazi?

Dean: In the bathroom.

Derek: What's the way forward?

Dean: She's not listening to me.

Derek: What's wrong with her?

Dean: You idiot, were you not present when that shit took place?

Derek: It's not that deep, really. Am I the only one who was expecting such to happen? Ivy has always made it clear that she wants nothing to do with Tholi. Did you all think things would miraculously change?

Dean: I don't need your negativity.

Derek: Nolwazi needs to get out of that bathroom and fix her makeup. She can't lock herself up the whole day.

Yhu, what has gotten into Star?

Dean looks like he wants to punch Derek. I'm sure he was expecting him to lick his wounds.

Derek: It's not that deep. We've been through worse. Nolwazi must get it together.

With that said, he walks out nonchalantly.

Dean: I'm going to punch him.

Me: I mean, he's sorta kinda right. We all knew this was going to happen.

Just then, Nolwazi walks out of the bathroom, looking sad.

Me: Hey...

Nolwazi: This is the worst day of my life. I keep quiet.

I'm tipsy. I don't have it in me to be Iyanla right now.

She throws herself on the couch and huffs.

Dean: Nolwazi, do you want me to cancel everything and ask those people to leave?

Nolwazi looks at him in shock.

Part of me wants to walk away, but ngithanda izindaba, so I want to witness this tiff.

Dean: What do you want? If you're okay with locking yourself in here, then I'll go tell the guests to fuck off.

Nolwazi: Excuse me?!

Dean: What did you expect? Ivy always causes drama!

Nolwazi: So now you're blaming me??

Dean: I'm not blaming you for someone else's actions. I just don't understand why you want to wallow in self-pity. It's our wedding day, for fuck's sake. Ivy's antics shouldn't stop us from celebrating this day.

Nolwazi stares at him.

Dean: Onc-

Me: Okay, the harsh words are unnecessary.

Dean looks at me angrily.

Me: Nolwazi, you have to get it together. The Ivy and Tholi thing was bound to happen. At least the drama was only

witnessed by us. Everyone else is still having a good time- they didn't see anything.

She sighs and looks at Dean sadly.

Nolwazi: I'm sorry...

Dean nods lightly. He's still angry. I think he's angry at her for reacting so dramatically (I'm the most qualified to identify a fellow dramatic person).

Nolwazi: I'm sorry, Dean. I've been acting like a child.

Dean: It's okay.

Nolwazi: I know you're still angry.

She stands and sighs.

Nolwazi: Ziyanda, please get Sly.

Haibo, is she crazy? She knows I don't get along with her friend.

Before I can say anything, Dean gives me a look and I nod begrudgingly. I then walk out and close the door.

This has got to be the strangest wedding...

Thankfully, I bump into Sly.

Me: Nolwazi is calling you. She's in the guesthouse.

I don't even give her the chance to respond to me. I walk back to our table and ask the waiter for another mojito. I don't want to be sober at any point of this wedding.

Derek is also drinking now. I guess he's over everything.

Derek: Is Nolwazi done crying?

Me: Ngidi!

He grunts.

After a few minutes, the whole family walks back and people ululate and cheer. Nolwazi looks much better, but Dean still has his grumpy face. Ivy is MIA and I think that's good, we don't need her negativity!

Liwa: Okay, I understand that we've just experienced a tense moment, but can we all get it together? This is supposed to be

the happiest day of your lives, but you're so miserable...

I feel bad for Dean. He was really looking forward to this day, but even the weeks leading to the wedding were dramatic. It's clear that he has checked out.

At this point, I need me some alcohol. I can tell that Dean has genuinely checked out- he's over everything. Ngapha Derek also seems disinterested. I guess they are twinning. I miss my child now. I stand and go to the other table. I take Star from my mom and shower her with kisses. I'm going to steal her, because I know she'll spread some positivity on our side.

Mom: How are things that side?

Me: Yoh, aku-tense!

I tell her what happened and she chuckles.

Mom: I'm glad I'm not there. I'm too tired to deal with your drama.

Me: I came to take my child.
I leave as she's laughing at me.
I get back to the table and take a sip of my drink. Star looks around and her eyes land on Dean. She says his name and starts bouncing. I'm hoping she'll lighten up his mood. Derek takes her and gives her to Dean, who smiles. Children can sense when things aren't okay, and they'll try to cheer you up in their own unique ways.

Liwa: Are you guys ready?

The plan was that Liwa would introduce all of Dean and Nolwazi's loved ones and they would speak and wish them well, but now it seems like no one is in the mood.

Kunzima.

I glance at Nolwazi, and I can tell that she is not 100%. I'm sure she's now worried about Dean zoning out. She glances at me pleadingly and I take a sip of my drink.

Angizingeni. Yazi had things not went down the way they did before the wedding, my ass would be working extremely hard right now, trying to fix this mess. I would have called everyone aside, let them shout and scream at each other, and then facilitated a deep nyana talk... Thereafter, once everyone had said their peace, we would all come back here feeling lighter and better. Right now, the tension is still hectic, because people haven't really expressed how they truly feel about the Tholi and Mdu situation (excluding Ivy, of course), because they're obviously considering the wedding. If I was in my Iyanla zone, I would have stopped at nothing to make sure that Nolwazi's wedding goes well, and that we find more effective ways of dealing with glitches. But, I'm not in my Iyanla zone. Nolwazi said some shady shit about me,

therefore, I am not planning on involving myself in any of this. As much as I want to call Dean aside and tell him to snap out of it, I don't want to offend anyone. Nolwazi will have to deal with her grumpy husband by herself. I'm also dealing with a grumpy baby daddy.

I look at Derek and chuckle. He has a resting bitch face right now. He's mean, this one. I don't understand why he has lost his patience, because in this group, drama is a thing.

Liwa: Is everyone ready to speak? I'm about to go to the front. Eish, as much as I want to be a bitch, I'm struggling right now. It's not nice seeing these people grumpy like this...

I clear my throat and they glance at me.

Me: I know this is not exactly the right place to have an intense conversation...

However, the tension is a bit too much,

that I'm afraid we can't really move on until we have addressed it properly.

Dumakude: What do you propose?

Me: You all speak to each other briefly.

I look at Mdu.

Me: Can we all agree that the manner in which you brought up your relationship was rude?

Mdu tries saying something.

Me: Just acknowledge that you could have introduced Tholi in a more respectful way. Your sister's wedding wasn't a smart move.

He sighs and and nods lightly.

Mdu: I'd like to apologise to all of you.

He looks at his parents.

Mdu: I should have sat you down a long time ago. Tholi and I are deeply in love. It was never planned, it genuinely happened unexpectedly. I've been keeping this a secret for so long, that I get defensive

whenever I feel like she's being judged or attacked. I don't want to get into the whole story now, but I apologise for disrespecting you.

Thandeka: You know we are reasonable people. You are making it seem like we would have cut you out of our lives and resented you for following your heart. I'm really not happy with how all of this unfolded, and I don't appreciate how you disrespected us. However, I am willing to hear both of you out once Nolwazi's wedding is over.

Mdu nods.

Dumakude: We'll speak after the wedding. Okay, I guess he's not about to engage in my therapy session. Go figure.

Mdu: I'd also like to apologise to Nolwazi and Dean. I'm sorry for ruining your day. I'm really sorry. He looks at his sister pleadingly and she shrugs.

Nolwazi: I should have known that such would happen. It was my responsibility as your big sister to ensure that you tell mom and dad about your situation. I should have known... I don't have any hard feelings...

She looks at Tholi.

Nolwazi: I apologise for my sister's actions. I think her pr-

Derek: Stop making excuses for her.

Haibo, uDerek ungenwe yini?

Derek: You have allowed allowed that girl to disrespect you, and now she thinks she can disrespect everyone she comes across. We're tired of dealing with her unfiltered mouth.

Maria Josefa.

Tholi clears her throat and we all look at her.

Tholi: I accept your apology, Nolwazi. I'd al-

Me: Dean?

I'm not about to let Tholi apologise to anyone. She didn't do anything wrong. She must stop feeling guilty for shit that she didn't cause. Mdu was supposed to introduce her properly. Nolwazi should have pushed Mdu to introduce her properly. And Ivy should not have attacked her like that. Tholi didn't do anything wrong. She's been respectful from the beginning.

Me: Dean, would you like to say anything?

Dean: I've said my peace.

Me: Alright then-

Derek: Nolwazi, aren't you going to apologise to Ziyanda?

I look at Derek sharply. Is he drunk?

We all look at him.

Derek: I find it ironic that the person you were convinced was going to cause drama is the one actively trying to avoid it...

There's an awkward silence. Nolwazi clears her throat and looks at me.

Nolwazi: Thank you for pushing us to communicate. I also apologise for everything I said before the wedding.

Me: Sure... Now, can we move on without the tension?

They all nod.

Liwa: Zizi, you are exceptional! Thank you!

He smiles at me.

Liwa: A toast?

He asks one of the waiters to pour everyone champagne.

Liwa: Thank you.

He looks at us and we raise our glasses.

Liwa: To family, friends, love, and most importantly, forgiveness...

I gobble it up and focus on my very strong mojito.

We ask Liwa to delay his MCing for a while, just so we can eat.

Everyone seems to be in a better place, because the conversations are flowing. I look at Derek and he looks at me blankly.

Me: Grumpy much?

Derek: If I don't defend you, who will? Yhu, my thighs twitch immediately.

Me: Let's go pee.

He chuckles as we stand and make our way inside the house.

Me: Why are you being so mean to Lwazi?

Derek: Something is off about her. I don't know if it's the wedding stress, but she's doing the most. Me: So what were you saying about defending me?

Derek: That it's my duty?

Me: Aha.

Derek: And that I won't tolerate people making you the bad guy?

Me: I'm listening.

He steps closer to me.

Derek: Or how I will always have your back?

Me: Go on...

He chuckles as he wraps his arms around me and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Enough talking...

When we return to our table, Sly is delivering a speech.

Derek and I laugh quietly as we sit.

Sly: Lwazi and I have been friends for many years...

I feel Tholi nudging me and I snap out of it.

Tholi: Behave.

I roll my eyes and she giggles quietly.

Derek and I have been whispering shady things to each other during Sly's speech.

He has become my partner in crime. I'm

glad we both don't like Sly, otherwise he'd be reprimanding me for being shady. Once she's done, everyone cheers and claps.

Liwa: Thank you, Slindile.

He continues talking.

At this point, I'm there between very tipsy and drunk. Derek has stopped me from drinking, so now I'm only allowed to have water. I won't lie, things are a blur. I don't even fully recall the moment Nolwazi and Dean spoke and thanked everyone for coming.

People are now drinking and dancing. The vibe is very positive now.

Me: Star, let's dance.

He gives me a look and I huff.

Nolwazi is dancing with her friends.

Everyone else has also left the table. It's just the three of us seated: Dean, Derek, and I.

I go and sit next to Dean. He's now between Derek and I.

Me: Hey.

Dean: Hello.

Me: You've been awfully quiet.

He shrugs.

Me: Everything okay?

Dean: Yep.

I eye him suspiciously.

Dean: Udakiwe.

Me: Just a little.

He looks at Derek.

Dean: Can we talk?

Derek: Sure.

They both stand.

Me: Uhm, what's happening?

Dean: Not everything needs your two cents.

Me: Rude! They chuckle as they walk away, leaving me all alone. I ask the waiter to get me another mojito.

I sit there and watch as people enjoy themselves. I mean, it's a great wedding. I now have to deal with my wedding FOMO, because I'm suddenly thinking of ideas and shit.

My wild thoughts are disturbed by my phone ringing. I answer it without checking the caller id.

Me: Hello?

I am shook when I hear Zweli's bold voice- Dean and Derek's father.

Zweli: I am on my way to my son's wedding. Why was I not invited?

Me: Excuse me??

I sit up and look around as if he's already here.

Zweli: It's about time I talk to my sons...

Me: You are not wanted here.

Zweli: I will see you soon, daughter-in-law.

He hangs up.

I immediately stand and look for the twins.

I find them in the house, in one of the rooms. They seem to be having an intense conversation, and I'm not even going to try to ask what they're talking about.

They stop talking as I walk in.

Me: Before you call me nosy... I thought I'd let you know that I just got a call from Zweli.

They stare at me blankly.

Me: Zweli. Your biological father.

They don't say anything.

Me: Guys, he says he's coming here!

They're still nonchalant.

Me: Did you hear me?!

Derek: Let him come.

Me: What are you going to do?

Dean: You worry too much.

I look at them strangely. What has gotten into them?

Dean: Now, can you excuse us?

Me: If any of you even try to involve me, kuzonyiwa.

They chuckle and I roll my eyes.

I walk out and close the door.

Derek better tell me later what they were discussing, because it seems intense.

INSERT 251

I make my way to Zimkitha.

Me: Zweli says he's coming!

Her eyes immediately pop out.

Zimkitha: What?!

Mom: He says he's coming here?? To the wedding??

I nod nervously.

Zimkitha: Did you tell Derek and Dean?

Me: Yes. They don't seem to care.

Mom: Oh no... Derek will be the first one to beat him up.

Dad: Where are those two?

Me: In the house. My dad nods and stands. Zimkitha is already dialing a number on her phone.

Mom: Are you calling him?

Zimkitha is now fuming.

Mom: Zimi, you need to calm down.

She is already walking away.

My mom kisses Little Star.

Mom: Yazi this family is too much for us.

Me: Is it too late to run?

Mom: No, we can run away with Liyakha and block our phones. Me: Where should we go?

Mom: We'll have to leave your father. He can be an annoying man sometimes. I think he enjoys being with Dean and Derek more than enjoys being with us. We both laugh.

Mom: Woo, the twins would be miserable without you.

I roll my eyes.

Me: They are tiring. I'm sure it's not too late to find another man that will tolerate my craziness.

Derek: Yoh, Ziyanda.

I turn and squirm when I see him there.

Derek: You want another man?

Me: I mean...

He wraps his arm around me and kisses me.

Derek: I thought I make you happy.

Me: Partly. He sulks and I also wrap my arm around him.

Me: Love you.

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Mom: Where is Dean?

Derek: He's with Mr Dlamz.

Mom: Those two are extremely close.

Derek: Dean is obviously trying to steal my side of the family. He must go bond with Dumakude.

My mom and I laugh.

Mom: So, your father is on his way...

He shrugs and I look at him closely, trying to figure out how he's feeling.

Mom: How do you feel?

Derek: I'm okay. I'm over this wedding and this day.

Mom: Nkanyezi, I'm asking about your father.

He shrugs again. He obviously doesn't want to discuss this.

Mom: Manje, why are you over your brother's wedding?

Derek: Unnecessary drama.

Mom: I'm just glad it didn't involve my child.

Derek: Ziyanda is never the cause of drama. People just find ways to include her in their shi-

He clears his throat.

Mom: Say it... In their shit, vele.

They chuckle.

Me: I miss Dean. Let me go check on him.

Derek lets go of me and takes Star from my mom. Thereafter, he sits next to her and I leave them. I make my way inside the house and find Dean and my dad talking.

This time, I refuse to leave. I feel like something is being hidden from me, and my nosy ass can't take it. Maybe I should persuade Dean with my sisterly tactics.

Dad: Ziyanda, how are you, baby?

Me: I'm okay.

I'm drunk.

Dad: Hmkay...

He stands and walks out. As soon as the door is closed, I stare at Dean and cross my arms.

Me: What's wrong with you??

Okay, I guess the alcohol in my system is going to make it hard for me to try and act cute and persuasive.

I sit next to him and he looks at me amusingly.

Dean: Did Derek tell you that you'll be planning another wedding for Lwazi and I?

Me: Huh?

He chuckles.

Dean: This is not how I imagined my wedding to be. We need another one.

Me: Yoh, okay.

Dean: I'm fine, Ziyanda.

Me: You've checked out.

He shakes his head.

Dean: I'm fine. Let's go, I need some alcohol in my system.

I look at him suspiciously and he stands and pulls me up.

Dean: Let's go.

I stop him from walking and try my best to look at him seriously.

Me: Dean, your father is coming. Why are you guys so nonchalant?

Dean: That man is the least of my worries right now. If he wants to come, then he must come. He will get the welcome he desires.

I sigh.

Me: You're being weird.

Dean: It's all in your mind.

He smiles and walks out. I follow him and close the door. It's clear that I'm going to be left in the dark.

When we get outside, people are legit having a great time. They're singing,

dancing and drinking. Good for them, ngoba thin' abanye we're not really having a great time.

Nomvuyo: You've abandoned me.

Me: Go to your best friend, Ivy.

She rolls her eyes.

Nomvuyo: Come give me some sugar.

We share a hug and get drinks.

Me: Where's Tholi?

Nomvuyo: She's with Nolwazi's mother. I saw them getting in the house.

Me: I'm sure that will be a good interaction.

Nomvuyo: That poor girl has been through enough.

Me: So you agree that Ivy was being unnecessary?

Nomvuyo: I never defend Ivy. I just have a better understanding of her.

Me: Mxm.

Nomvuyo: Like YOU always say, there's always a valid reason/reasons behind people's actions.

Me: No, don't try to twist my words. Yes, there's always a reason behind people's actions. However, when you say the reason is valid, then you're making it seem like the behaviour should be excused. What I always say is that there's always a deeper explanation behind our actions, BUT that doesn't mean we are exempt from being held accountable for those actions.

Nomvuyo sighs.

Nomvuyo: No one bothers to truly get to know Ivy. There's a lot you don't know.

Me: And I have no desire to get to know her. I don't care how messed up your life is, there's no reason for her to be crass 24/7. She takes rudeness to another level.

Nomvuyo: But-

Me: Vuvu, let's not talk about Ivy. If there's one thing that has the potential to make us fight, it's her. Let's drop it.

She nods and sips her drink.

Nomvuyo: Anyway, where are the twins?

Me: They're around here.

Nomvuyo: This has been an awkward wedding. They should have waited for the tension to settle for a few weeks.

Everyone's emotions are still all over the place.

Me: I agree.

Nomvuyo: Hopefully nothing else happens. The Ivy thing has dampened everyone's vibe.

I decide not to tell her about Zweli. We will see how that unfolds later.

I honestly have no idea when I got this drunk, but whoa, ngiphelile.

Derek: Maybe we should go.

Dean looks at him sharply.

Derek: What? It's not like we're enjoying ourselves.

Dean: Mxm.

Derek chuckles.

Dean: Ziyanda, go take a nap. Yazi as much as I want to fight him, my ass really needs to regain my strength. I wasn't tracking my alcohol intake, as a result, ngiphelile.

Derek: Let's go to the house.

It's now around 3pm.

Derek and I go to the house and into one of the guestrooms.

As soon as my head hits the pillow, the drowsiness hits. The only problem is that I don't want to sleep. I want to be awake, just in case Zweli arrives. I have a feeling Derek might need some taming.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: Are you really falling asleep?

I shake my head and he chuckles.

Derek: I won't leave you alone.

He shouldn't vele. Next thing Sly sneaks in and steals my underwear, and I end up losing my clit or one of my butt cheeks.

I smile when I feel Nkanyezi next to me. I rest my head on his chest.

Me: Wake me up in 10 minutes.

Derek: Hmkay.

All I remember is zoning out.

When I wake up, and don't find Derek next to me, I immediately panic.

I quickly put on my shoes and just as I'm about to rush to the door, Derek emerges from the bathroom.

Derek: And then?

I sigh in relief.

Me: Oh... You're here.

I sigh again and he looks at me amusingly.

Derek: Where did you think I was?

Me: I don't know...

I look at him.

Me: What were you and Dean talking about?

He frowns.

I'm still drunk.

I'm sure I don't look as good as I looked earlier, but I don't even care.

Me: Nkanyezi.

Derek: Baby.

Me: What were you talking about?

Derek: When?

Me: When I found you guys here.

Derek: Nothing deep. I was just checking on him.

I look at him suspiciously and he smiles.

Derek: Are you ready to go out?

Me: Can I drink again?

Derek: No. I want you wide awake. I have plans for you tonight.

Me: Yaas!

He takes my hand and leads the way out. When we get outside, people are still enjoying themselves. It's now around 4pm.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Yes?

Derek: When is our wedding?

I shrug.

Me: We're still recovering from the past few months, Derek. We haven't really healed from what happened.

He groans.

Me: This Zweli situation is too much.

As we walk to the backyard, my phone rings.

Me: It's him.

Derek: Zweli?

I nod nervously as I look at him.

He tries taking my phone, but I manage to hold on to it. Thereafter I answer.

Me: Hello?

Zweli: Daughter-in-law... I have arrived... Who does this man think he is? God? Does he expect the world to shake now that he has graced us with his presence?

I'm angry. I'm glad he's here, because I'll definitely give him a piece of my mind!

Before Derek can even stop me, I'm already walking to the other side of the yard- to the gate.

When I get there, I find a really fancy car driving in. I hope that full panty of a wife is with him, because she also deserves to be dealt with! How is she okay with living with such an egotistical personality?

When they get out of the car, I legit have to two step.

This man looks exactly like Dean and Derek. He is just older. Probably in his

60s... As much as I don't like him, I must admit, he looks good for his age.

Zweli: Ahh, there she is!

He laughs boldly as he walks towards me, with his wife, who looks like she's in her 30s. Why am I not surprised that he's with a younger woman?

When he gets to me, he smiles proudly and rubs his chin.

Zweli: Hello, dear.

I don't know what's going through my mind right now.

He tries hugging me, but I take a step back.

Out of nowhere, Zimkitha emerges and walks straight to us.

Zimkitha: Get out of my house.

Zweli: Zimi...

He stares at her almost admiringly.

Zweli: Zimi... How are-

Zimkitha: Get out!

Vicky: Zimkitha, I thin-

Zimkitha shoots her a look and she immediately shuts her mouth.

I don't think I've ever seen Zimkitha this angry. She looks like she is ready to kill someone.

Zimkitha: Get ou-

Just then, Dean also pitches out of nowhere and walks towards us.

There's a deep silence.

What is he going to do? What is he going to say? Yoh, my heart can't take it!

Seeing him a bit close to Zweli is creepy, to say the least. This is his father- his biological father. And he's only meeting him for the first time right now.

Zweli stares at him for a long time...

Zweli: My son...

Zweli smiles.

Is this man crazy? How can one be so delusional and pompous?

Zweli: I finally get-

Heyiii uDean wayifaka inqindi!

I think none of us were ready for that, because we all just stood there as Zweli collapsed and zoned out.

Dean looks down at him calmly and then looks at Zimkitha.

Zimkitha tries speaking but words fail her.

Haibo, is Zweli okay? I'm concerned, because that punch was earth-shattering!

Dean: That should bring him back to his senses.

With that said, he takes my hand and literally pulls me away from the scene.

Me: Dean!

He ignores me.

We eventually get to the guest house and find Derek and my parents there.

Me: Dean!

Derek: Everything okay?

Dean nods and sits.

Mom: Is he here?

Dean: Yes.

I need a drink. I feel like I'm completely sober right now and that's not good.

As I'm about to walk out, Derek pulls me aside.

Me: Derek, I just need-

As soon as I see the look on his face, I keep quiet.

Derek: I know I've been acting indifferent about this whole thing, but the truth is, I'm not fine.

He looks at me pleadingly.

Derek: I need you. I nod.

Me: I'm not running away. I just need a drink.

Suddenly, I want to vomit.

Yhu, my emotions are all over the place. I'm nervous!

I go to the bathroom and Derek follows me. He has suddenly become the clingy Derek that can't separate from me when he's faced with a hectic situation.

He watches as I vomit and doesn't even pull a face, like he normally does- that's how I know he's really not okay. I think he's also afraid.

I rinse my mouth and step closer to him.

Me: I don't know what's going to happen, but you know I'll be right by your side.

He smiles and nods.

As he plants a kiss on my lips, he groans.

Me: What?

Derek: Stinky.

I push him away and dig for bubblegum in my pockets... We continue to thank God for dresses with hidden pockets...

When we walk out, hand in hand, we find Nolwazi there as well. She looks worried.

I guess they've just told her about Zweli.

Nolwazi: So are you going to have this conversation here and now?

My dad sighs.

Dad: He insisted on coming... We'll see where this meeting takes us. We should avoid causing a scene, and we should also consider that this is not the right time and place.

Nolwazi sits next to Dean and takes his hand. He doesn't react.

Derek and I sit next to each other, and I have to stop him from squeezing the life out of me.

Just then, the door opens, and Zimkitha walks in first.

Vicky follows him, and then Zweli walks in after everyone. He looks proper shook. I guess Dean's punch may have humbled him a bit.

My dad stands and closes the door. After, he turns and looks at Zweli seriously.

Dad: Have a seat...

I can literally feel Derek's body heating up, and I'm praying he continues to stay sane...

INSERT 252 (Unedited and Short Insert)

I feel like I'm in the twilight zone.

What's going to happen? What is Zweli going to say? Most importantly, how are the twins going to react?

My dad clears his throat and we all look at him.

As I'm sitting here, looking at this man, I can't help but feel sick.

Why are we entertaining him? This man is a rapist! It genuinely just hit me now that this monster took advantage of Zimkitha, and impregnated her! Why are we sitting

here, trying to have a conversation with him? Is it fair to Zimkitha, most importantly? Surely he's a trigger, and I know for a fact that I would never want to sit next to my rapist and have him laugh to my face boldly as if what he did was okay!

Suddenly, I'm the one heating up, and Derek can sense it, because he pulls me closer and caresses me.

Zweli doesn't deserve to have a dignified conversation with any of us. What he did to Zimkitha was despicable, and I think it's not fair for him to think he can parade around our space with no worries. He's a rapist!

Zweli: Well-

Dean: Did you really think we would sit here and welcome you with open arms? What's happening?

Dean: You are not going to address any of us. Who the hell do you think you are? My dad clears his throat and we all look at him.

Dad: Unfortunately, you do not have the privilege of being respected and listened to. Your manhood was stripped off the second you decided to sexually abuse a woman.

Oh my goodness, my body immediately cools down. Why do I suddenly want to cry? My dad is not about to entertain a rapist!

Dad: We've been trying to figure out how to best deal with you. Do we lock you up and torture you ourselves? Do we hand you over to the police and open a case?

Dean: The bottom line is this... You do not deserve anyone's attention. You raped Zimkitha and took advantage of the fact that her parents weren't emotionally

attached to her. You took advantage of her circumstances, because you knew she wouldn't speak up.

Dean takes a deep breath.

Dean: We have to live with the fact that we're a product of sexual abuse. Our biological father is a rapist.

There's a long silence in the room.

Suddenly, we all realise that this might be the moment Dean breaks down since this whole thing was revealed.

Dean: You have the nerve to walk in here proudly... Who the fuck do you think you are?

Zweli seems shocked.

Dean: Zimkitha has had to hide this from everyone... She has had to love us regardless of the fact that we remind her of the violation she experienced because of you.

The tension is sickening.

Dean: All these years, you've been living a great life, and now you want to come disrupt our lives?

Zweli: Who says I raped Zimkitha?

We all sit back and listen to him try to justify his nonsense. Very typical.

Zweli: Zimkitha enjoyed every moment of it!

My mom even had to walk out from disgust. I'm certain that Zweli reminds him of my rapist. That man even had the audacity to say my vagina was wet, so clearly I was enjoying it.

Zweli is a trigger. If I feel like this right now, then how the hell is Zimi feeling? This man needs to leave ASAP. I don't know what the plan for the future is, but he needs to leave! Zimkitha obviously hasn't developed the confidence to deal with him, because she hasn't said one

word, and she looks like she is about to collapse.

Vicky is also another one who looks like she is about to pass out.

So she didn't know about Zweli's true past?

Dean: If you think any of us want you in our lives, then you are truly fucked up. Let this be a warning, if you ever try to contact any of us, moving forward, then I will kill you.

Dean is truly Zimkitha's son. There's something thug-ish about them noLiwa. Now I'm very interested in Dean's history. I feel like he may have done a few shady things to his enemies, like his mother... Gosh, Derek better not be shady, because I'm not about to be a mob wife.

Derek clears his throat and everyone stares at him.

What is he going to say?

His moments of silence scare me, because I never know what's going to come out of his mouth once he finds his voice.

Derek: This has been eye-opening for me...

He stares at Zweli.

Derek: I thought I was going to beat you to a pulp, but now that you're sitting here, I realise you're not worth it. More than anything, you have revealed just how ignorant and insensitive you are. You will never acknowledge the hurt you've caused, and it's not our responsibility to put it through your thick skull

Okay...

Derek: This is the first and last time I'm addressing you. Like Dean said, if you try to contact any of us, then that we will have a serious problem.

He then shifts and sits up so he can stare at him properly.

There's a fierce silence.

Derek: Reach out to Ziyanda again, and you'll regret it. Yhu, is he also a gangster of some sort?

He then takes a deep breath and looks at Zimkitha.

His mood shifts. We can all sense it.

Derek: Zimkitha, I don't know how you're able to sit here and not breakdown...

He sighs.

Derek: Something tells me it's because you love us so much, that you think Dean and I need this interaction for our healing...

Zimkitha tears up.

Derek: I'm sorry for not trying to understand your part... Yes, I was coming to terms with everything, but you definitely deserved and still deserve more empathy. You took it upon yourself to not have an abortion, and I'm still trying to

wrap my head around that. You still managed to love us even when it didn't make sense for you to do so.

He sighs.

Derek: If I didn't know it before, then I genuinely know now. You really love us, and not even the trauma you experienced, because of this pompous thing, was enough to let you discard us.

Zimkitha wipes her tears.

Derek: From today onwards, I'm going to actively try to re-establish our relationship. Knowing that you went through so many obstacles just to ensure that we were safe, makes me disregard everything else.

Zimkitha immediately sobs.

Derek stands and goes to comfort her.

Liwa, who is standing in corner, with his arms crossed, is expressionless.

How in the world did I forget about him?

Zimkitha is his world! What is going through his mind right now as the man who caused her so much pain is sitting here, clearly not giving a shit.

Vicky stands and looks down at Zweli.

Zweli stands sheepishly. Where is his boisterous laugh now?

Before he can even take a step forward, Liwa is already on him!

For once, I'm not trying to break up a fight. Zweli's old ass needs a good beating, and Liwa is thoroughly sorting him out.

Even my dad is not stopping him.

Vicky tries screaming, but Nomvuyo warns her.

Nomvuyo: Ngizokunyisa.

Vicky immediately shuts up.

We are all just sitting here, watching a magnificent case of ass-whooping.

How glorious!

Once Zweli is unconscious, we all stand.

Dean: I guess you beat me to it.

I chuckle. This idiot still has time for stupid puns.

Liwa is not finding any of this funny.

Nomvuyo takes him to the bathroom...

My dad looks at Vicky.

Dad: As his personal assistant, please ensure that he leaves as soon as he wakes up.

Yaas! Spicy much?!

As we're about to walk out, Mdu, Tholi, Thandeka and Dumakude walk in.

Mdu: What the hell is this man doing here?! Who invited him here?!

We all look at him strangely.

Ukhuluma ngani lo?

Thandeka: Mdu says Tholi's father is here.

I wanted to meet him, and give him a piece of my mind! Tholi told me everything!

Huh? Are they okay? What are they even talking about? Where's Tholi's father?

Dean: You must be mistaken.

Tholi looks down at Zweli and blinks a few times.

Tholi: This man is my father.

What's happening?

We're all just looking at them in confusion.

I'm genuinely lost.

Mdu: His wife reached out to us some time last year. '

We continue looking at him in confusion.

Mdu: To cut a long story short, tests were done and he really is Tholi's father.

Jehova!

Zimkitha looks at Tholi.

Zimkitha: Zweli is your father?

Tholi nods lightly.

Tholi: I don't really know him though.

We are all stunned.

Nolwazi: Wait... Wait a minute... This man is also Dean and Derek's biological father...

Dumkude: What?

There is complete silence.

Everyone in the room processes this.

What the hell??

Nolwazi: This means Tholi is related to Dean and Derek...

She looks at Dean and then Derek,

Nolwazi: Tholi is your sister...

Dean immediately bursts into laughter.

At this point, I am beyond amazed that I also can't help but laugh.

Soon, everyone else is laughing expect

Tholi, Mdu, Thandeka and Dumakude.

They have no idea what's happening.

Yhu, I thought I had seen and heard it all!

INSERT 253

It's been a few minutes since we all found out that Zweli is Tholi's father as well.

I still don't have a clue how the hell this happened, and I have a lot of questions.

I'm confused.

Derek walks out of the guesthouse.

I want to follow him, but I also want to stay here to find out what the hell is happening. If Derek is breaking down right now, his timing is off. I want to ask questions!

I walk out and find him standing a few meters away.

Me: Need space?

He shakes his head. I walk closer to him. I decide to be quiet and let him vent if that's what he wants.

He chuckles and shakes his head lightly.

Derek: I apologise for putting you through this.

Me: Your family needs a reality show.

Derek: Our family?

Me: Hai, we're not married yet. I'm not claiming you and your people.

He chuckles and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: We deserve a holiday.

Me: Just the two of us?

Derek: And Star.

Me: I can tolerate her.

Derek: Don't come for my child.

I sigh.

Me: So, Tholi is your little sister?

Derek: I'll address that another time. My brain is still processing it.

I nod.

Derek: I want to leave. Can we leave?

Me: I don't know. Is the wedding over?

Derek: It was over before it began.

Me: Let's go then.

I take his hand and we walk back to the guesthouse and find everyone sitting in the lounge. Zweli is now awake and looking a tad traumatised.

Derek: We'll see you all another time.

Thandeka: You're leaving??

Derek: This has been a horrible wedding. Ziyanda and I are exhausted.

Hai, uDerek! Just like that??

They all look at him as if he has just slapped each and everyone of them.

Dean stands.

Dean: See you around.

They share a hug and Dean looks at me.

Dean: Shap.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Nisale kahle.

I walk to the bedroom where my mom had placed Star. She is fast asleep. I carefully take her and make my way to the lounge.

Me: Bye, everyone.

They all say bye and I walk out alongside Derek.

Free at last!

I'll call Tholi later and ask her to come over for lunch or something.

Derek and I have been in the house for an entire week.

The plan was to go to Mpumalanga, but Liyakha has a cold. There's nothing as painful as seeing a baby in pain, even worse when that baby is yours. All I want to do is hold Little Star and take her pain away. She's not her usual chirpy self, instead she's always moaning and sobbing.

Anyway, she's getting better by the day, and I'm getting fatter by the day. I need to get back to work and do something with my life. I miss being in the classroom. I

miss being around lots of children and being asked millions of questions all day. I love Derek and Liya, but I also love my career.

I go to Derek's study and find him typing away.

Me: What are you up to?

Derek: Just responding to work emails.

Me: Can we talk?

Derek: Sure, give me a minute.

I nod as he finishes what he's doing. After a while, he puts his laptop aside and looks at me amusingly.

Derek: What's up, baby?

Me: I want to go back to work.

He nods.

Me: As much I like staying at home and being with Little Star all the time, I don't think I'm meant to live like this. I need some activity in my life.

Derek: Baby, who stopped you from working?

I roll my eyes.

Derek: The past few months have been emotionally, mentally and physically taxing for us.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: We've had to deal with a lot of traumatic shit...

Me: At least we're working on things.

He nods.

Derek: I don't take your presence in my life for granted. You know that, right?

Me: Ditto.

He smiles.

Derek: Tell me what you need.

Me: I need to go back to work.

Derek: What else do you need?

Me: All my other needs are taken care of.

Derek: Good. So, what do you need from me specifically?

Me: I need you to give me my job back.

He smiles widely.

Derek: You want to come back to our school?

I nod.

Me: I haven't forgotten how messy the staff is. You need me, Ngidi.

He laughs.

Derek: Is that all?

Me: For now.

Derek: Good.

Me: My weight is getting out of control.

Derek: Is it?

Me: I'll just blame it on my meds.

He chuckles.

Derek: That sounds more like a You Problem.

I roll my eyes.

Derek: Sishada nini, Ziyanda?

Me: Uh... Angazi.

Derek: Do you still want to marry me?

Me: It depends...

We chuckle.

Me: Let's wait for the dust to settle. We also still need to deal with our demons.

Derek: We're getting there, you and I.

Me: Definitely.

Derek: Come give me a kiss.

I stand and walk to his side of the desk, then we share a kiss.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Derek: When would you like to get back to work?

Me: I'll send you an email.

He chuckles and plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Okay, Ms Dlamini.

He spanks my ass as I walk away from him and give him his space.

Now, I can start doing lesson plans and getting my resources ready... I couldn't be happier!

I haven't spoken to Dean since his wedding.

Yazi, after the Nolwazi thing, I've been trying to keep my distance. I don't think I'll ever be fully comfortable around them. Anyway, I miss his arrogant ass.

It's been two weeks. Last time I checked, they just came back from their honeymoon. I hope the vacation has calmed Nolwazi down, and made her go back to her usual cool self. Insecure women scare me. I've been in her position before, but I managed to do all the work, and I realised that I was my own worst enemy. I hope she'll eventually get over how her previous marriage made her feel. She can't get into another marriage with baggage from her first one. That's unfair... Heck, this is why I'm not rushing to get married to Derek. Listen, me and this man

still have a long way to go, but at least we're actively trying to better ourselves as individuals and as a couple. Our sessions with Melinda are setting us up for success to some extent. We communicate more effectively...

Anyway, I miss Dean.

I decide to call him.

Dean: Hello.

Me: Hey, how are you?

Dean: You care?

Me: Excuse me?

Dean: I haven't heard from you in weeks.

Me: I was giving you your space.

Dean: Did I ask for space?

I groan.

Me: Anyway, I miss you. We haven't met up in a while.

Dean: You miss me?

Me: Bhuti, angijoli nawe. Do you want to meet up with me or what?

He chuckles.

Dean: I'll pick you up in a few minutes. I was actually on my way there.

Me: Shap. We can get ice cream.

I end the call and get ready. Little Star and I could use some fresh air.

Derek is at work, so I'll see him later.

Me: How was your honeymoon?

Dean: It was really good.

Me: I'm sure Lwazi is pregnant.

Dean: Wouldn't mind.

Me: You want another one?

He nods as he kisses Nkanyezi.

Me: Hmkay.

Dean: How have you been?

Me: I've been good. The past two weeks have been chilled.

Dean: Derek tells me you refuse to go on holiday.

Me: It's not that. Star was sick.

Dean: She has grandparents.

Me: Hai, I wanted to take care of her.

He shakes his head lightly. I think I'm subconsciously scared of going on vacation with Derek. Shit never ends well.

Me: How have you been?

Dean: Good, I guess.

Me: Your wedding was a little dramatic.

Dean: Best wedding ever.

We chuckle.

Me: No, seriously, how are you? I felt bad for you.

Dean: I'm okay.

Me: So now we're being dishonest?

He sighs.

Dean: I hated every second of that wedding.

Me: You can still have another one...

He shrugs.

Dean: Nolwazi and I weren't in a good space.

Me: Even when you left for your honeymoon?

He nods.

Dean: But, we ended up talking. We were honest with each other.

Me: Utheni?

Dean: I was slightly turned off by her insinuating that my relationship with you is a threat.

I keep quiet.

Dean: She questioned my love for her, and for me that has always been a deal breaker.

Me: What did she say?

Dean: We had a back and forth, but she finally realised the extent of the insecurities caused by her previous marriage. I also promised that moving forward, I'll play my part in helping her get over those insecurities.

Me: What part will you play?

Dean: Couples therapy.

I keep quiet.

Dean: Before Nolwazi, I dated Ntsiki. I had to deal with her insecurities. Before Ntsiki, I was with another woman who didn't trust me... Now, I have to get married to someone who will question my love for her for the rest of our lives together?

I sigh.

Dean: I'm not going to distance myself from you. She needs to work on herself, and I'll definitely help her. We've just found out that Tholi is my sister. What happens if we form a close relationship? Is Lwazi going to ask me to distance myself from Tholi as well? That's not how it works. She needs to deal with the root of the problem. I can't avoid forming relationships with people just because

she wants me all to herself. It doesn't work like that. '

Me: How did she respond to that?

Dean: Nolwazi is very understanding. You may think she's crazy, but she's a very rational person. I hope you can look past what she said... We all make mistakes.

Me: Haibo, what did I say?

Dean: You're holding a grudge.

I hiss.

Dean: She is very remorseful. Don't make her feel like her mistake is unforgivable. I value both of you, and I think it's unfair that I should deal with such tension.

Me: You're such a baby.

He chuckles.

Me: So... Tholi is your sister...

Dean: That shit is crazy...

Me: Are you done processing the news?

Dean: I'll call a family meeting soon.

Me: Zweli is such a deadbeat.

Dean: That motherfucker is fertile as fuck.
We both laugh.

Dean: He has children everywhere. He said we have four other siblings. Imagine.

Me: What?!

Dean: He even has the nerve to ask us to meet them.

Me: So he raised them?

He nods.

Me: Sies, he has no shame!

Dean: He is delusional. He should be grateful that I haven't murdered him.

Me: Dean, have you murdered someone?

He looks at me amusingly.

Me: I get angry... I get very angry... But I've never threatened to kill someone, because my ass knows I'd never do such... But the way you say it, I actually believe you.

He laughs.

Dean: You're so dramatic.

Me: You haven't answered my question!

Dean: I killed Ntsiki.

Heyiiii! My eyes pop out.

Me: WHAT?!

He laughs.

Me: WHAT?!

Dean: Relax, I'm just kidding. He chuckles and I exhale loudly.

Me: Vele, what happened to Ntsiki??

Dean: She's living her best life in another country.

Me: Really? Are you spying on her?

Dean: Not necessarily.

I sigh.

Me: Don't scare me like that.

Dean: I don't kill people, Ziyanda. I'm not a murderer.

Me: Good. There's nothing cute about killing people.

Dean: And I aim to be cute...

He pouts and I laugh.

Just then, Little Star starts kicking and he takes her from her stroller.

When I get back to the house, I'm feeling slightly better about my relationship with Dean. I'm used to speaking to him almost everyday, so that two week silent treatment was too much for my poor heart. I'm glad that he's in a better place with Lwazi as well, because bashadile labantu and it was disheartening to witness the tension between them.

When I walk to the lounge, I gasp.

The whole space has been rearranged.

Me: Yay! Indoor picnic?!

Derek nods as he pours me a glass of Storm...

A man that knows I will never let go of my ghettoness. I had been telling him how much I was craving Storm and he kept

laughing, but I'm glad he was actually taking notes.

Little Star is also excited, but ke yena she's always excited when she sees Derek.

Me: Can I take a quick shower?

Derek: Okay.

He hands me my Storm and takes Little Star.

Derek: I'll give this one a quick bath in the meantime.

Me: Perfect.

I give him a kiss and make my way to the bedroom.

Kumnandi ukujola sometimes.

When I get to the lounge, I find him dishing up for us. Little Star is chilling on the couch happily. She needs to fall asleep ASAP, because I'm ready to pounce on Derek.

Me: What inspired this?

Derek: It's been a while since I reminded you how much I love you.

I blush.

Derek: I also want us to discuss our wedding.

I nod.

Me: When would you like to have the wedding?

Derek: I don't want to push you.

I sigh.

Derek: What's stressing you?

Me: I just don't want us to rush things.

He nods.

Derek: Do you think we're not ready?

I sigh.

Me: It's not that we're not ready... I'm just overthinking it...

Derek: Your anxiety is freaking you out. I nod.

Derek: You're not questioning my love, are you?

Me: Euww, you sound just like Dean.

He laughs lightly.

Me: I'm not questioning your love.

Derek: What will make you feel at ease? Is there something I can do?

Me: You're doing everything I need you to do...

He smiles.

Me: Is there anything you're lacking from me?

Derek: No. You're everything and more.

Me: You sure?

Derek: I said what I said.

Me: Okay, Nene Leakes.

I look at him seriously.

Me: I think I'm scared... I hate how deep our fights get.

Derek: How else are we going to figure each other out? Our journey to truly knowing each other won't be sunshine and rainbows.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: I know that I'm ready to marry you, because I've seen your dark side. I've gotten the opportunity to come face to face with the not so pleasant side of you, and despite all of that, I still want to be with you. I love you even more now, because we've found a way to deal with our demons. I'm not forcing you to be here, and you're not forcing me to be here. Isn't that enough?

He sighs.

Derek: Yes, our fights are crazy, but we're learning to fight in a healthy manner. We're both actively working on being better people. It would be a different story if we stuck to our toxic ways.

Me: You're doing a good job at easing my anxiety right now. He smiles.

Derek: I'm not going to push you. I just want you to know that I love you, and this

relationship has made me learn and unlearn so many things... Everyday, I wake up, and consciously choose to be a better person for myself, for you, for Liyakha and Lelo... and that idiot, Dean... I chuckle.

We sit in silence for a while.

I take a sip of my drink and stare at him.

Me: Let's get married in September...

Spring is a great season.

Derek: Are you serious??

Me: Yep.

He exclaims and pulls me excitedly.

I guess we're getting married in six months...

If anyone even attempts to ruin my shit, they'll catch these hands, I swear...

INSERT 254 (Unedited)

It's been a month since the wedding, and our lives are going back to normal... well, my life at least.

I'm finally going back to work, and my heart can't take it! I'm beyond excited! It's my last Saturday as a Professional Girlfriend.

Zimkitha is on grandma duty.

Shame, I can see that she's trying to reconnect with Derek, and I'm also playing my part in helping them rebuild their relationship.

I invited everyone over for lunch.

Everyone.

I feel like I'll be able to control everything, because they're all coming to our space.

I'll be able to check them properly if they get out of pocket.

Liwa and Nomvuyo arrived early, because Nomvuyo was instructed to prepare the

food by me. Liwa and Derek are slowly getting back to a good place.

Mdu and Tholi arrive.

Tholi immediately offers to help Nomvuyo in the kitchen. I'm glad they enjoy cooking, because mina Dean will drag me till Kingdom comes if he sees me anywhere near the kitchen.

Mdu helps me set the table.

Me: How are things?

Mdu: Really good...

He looks lighter. He looks like a man that's not carrying secrets. He's still a baby bitch though. Outchea involving me and letting me take the blame for his problems. Nxx. This is exactly why we didn't work out. He stays running away from his problems.

Mdu: Ziyanda.

Me: Huh?

I snap out of it.

Mdu: Thank you for having my back.

Me: I have Tholi's back, not yours.

He chuckles.

Mdu: Stop pretending to hate me. You and I will always love ea-

I push him away and continue setting the table as he laughs.

Mdu: Stubborn ass.

Me: Futsek.

We continue going back and forth until Tholi walks out and laughs.

Tholi: I'm starting to understand why you guys didn't work out.

Me: Uyadina lo. I leave them there and go check on Zimkitha, who's playing with her grandchildren.

Me: Hey, Zimi.

She smiles and looks at me.

You know who Zimkitha reminds me of? Jessica Lange's character on American Horror Story Murder House (Constance

Langdon). She has that mysterious vibe, but the one thing you can never question about her is her love for her children. You can tell she has had to fight her way through a lot of things, but her love for children is raw.

Zimkitha: Is everyone here?

Me: Not yet. Dean and Lwazi are on their way. Niki is also on her way.

Zimkitha raises an eyebrow.

Me: What's wrong?

Zimkitha: Niki? Your best friend?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Haibo, the one who is dating Kwanele?

Me: Yep.

She looks at me weirdly.

Zimkitha: Baby, Kwanele will also be here?

Me: I assume Nikiwe will come with him.

Zimkitha: Does Tholi know that he will be here?

Me: Huh?

She keeps quiet and stares at me.

Me: Oh no!

It hits me.

Zimkitha: There you go... Baby, for a smart woman, you sure can be slow at times...

Me: Oh no! Tholi has been open about how she hasn't seen or spoken to Kwanele in a very very long time! I don't want this to be the first time they interact. It shouldn't be in front of everyone! Also, the point of this lunch is for us to spend quality time with each other and get over the tension experienced over the past few months!

I immediately dial Niki's number and she answers.

Niki: Bestie boo.

Me: Don't come with Kwanele!

Niki: Huh?

Me: Don't come with him! Both his ex-wives are here.

Niki: I wasn't planning on coming with him vele. I don't want him to feel awkward around your childish friends.

Me: Wow!

Niki: So the younger wife is there?

Me: Ya.

Niki: Good. She needs to come out of hiding, so Kwanele can officially cut ties with her. He's tired of the hide and seek.

Me: They're still married! Shit, I completely forgot!

Niki: I'll be there in five minutes, bye.

Me: Just don't cause drama!

Niki: Don't worry, I'll go to her as a woman.

We both laugh.

Me: Woman to woman...

Chile, I hope Tholi is ready for Niki's unpredictable ass.

Everyone is finally here. Nolwazi, Dean, Nomvuyo, Liwa, Tholi, Mdu, Zimkitha, Niki, Derek and I. I was going to invite Gabi, Joe, Malusi and Nandi, but Derek said I shouldn't, because they weren't deeply involved in the drama. My parents made it clear that they don't want to be anywhere near us. Lol, they want peace in their lives.

We're now seated and having starters.

Me: So, I invited you all, because I think we need to rebuild relationships... We've all been through so much, that our relationships have been affected. I'd like us to start working on rekindling the love we have for each other.

Dean: How noble of you.

Me: Your sarcasm is not appreciated, idiot.

He chuckles.

Me: I hope by the end of the day, we'll find next steps to improve our relationships.

Zimkitha: I appreciate this gesture, because I need it more than anyone else. I don't like feeling out of touch with any of you, because you're my babies.

Dean: Hearing you that say that now is very strange considering that we're your biological children.

Zimkitha looks down ashamedly.

Derek: It's good to know that my mother is not a random woman, but someone I've been close to nearly all my life. There's some comfort in that.

Dean: Definitely.

Me: What does this mean for your relationship with Lindelwa, Dean?

Dean: We're okay. I'll work with her privately to fix things.

Me: Don't abandon her. She's your mother as well

Dean: Okay, Iyanla.

Me: No, I'm serious. Don't make her feel inadequate now that Zimkitha can openly say that you're her child. Remember, she couldn't have children. You're all she has, so don't abandon her.

Derek: She's right.

Dean: Of course you're going to be her suffix.

Derek: Always.

Everyone laughs.

Dean looks at me seriously.

Dean: I won't abandon her.

Me: Good.

Liwa: Ziyanda, are you really drinking Storm?

Dean: She's a ghetto mess.

Nolwazi: I also wanted to mention that...
Yoh, Zizi.

They all laugh.

Nolwazi needs to tread lightly. We're not that cool yet. I'll go sit on Dean's lap just to remind her not to come for me... Lol, I kid, I kid.

Me: Leave me alone.

They continue laughing.

Nomvuyo: You can start dishing up for yourselves.

I look at Derek.

Me: Would you like me to dish up for you, Mr N?

Derek: What an honour, Ms Dlamini.

Me: I've got you.

I stand and make my way to the food station. These domestic bitches really want all out. I wish I could cook like them. Sometimes, I want to have sex with Derek while he's in the kitchen, but he never

allows me to disturb him. Maybe if I could cook, he'd be open to making cooking a sexy bonding experience. I also want him to find me in the kitchen with my legs wide open, ready for him to eat me as well...Or give him head while he's busy grilling things there... A girl can only dream yazi... Right now, he thinks it's hazardous for me to be anywhere near the kitchen...

Anyway, I dish up for us.

Derek: Love the proportions.

Me: I'm not that bad, you know.

Derek: Maybe I should start teaching you.

Me: That's all I want, Star.

He laughs and plants a kiss on my cheeks.

Dean: Ziyanda, where is my food?

Me: Uyanya wena.

Dean: Tholi, you have to dish up for me.

You have to go through initiation.

Everyone laughs.

I look at Nolwazi and she seems fine.

Chile, things will never be the same.

Tholi: Okay, I'll dish up for you... Lwazi, would you also like some food?

Nolwazi: Yes, please.

Tholi nods.

Mdu: Ngathi you're going to be a problem. I won't allow you to-

Dean: Mdu, shut up. This is a family affair. You're still a boyfriend... You think Tholi won't be able to find a stepfather across the street?

Me: Ohhhh!

Mdu uswabile.

Me: Shots! Shots! Shots!

Tholi: Ahh, Zi...

Me: Uphapha too much lo. Dean and Derek are the big brothers. His days of thinking he's the big guy are over.

Yhu, Mdu keeps quiet and focuses on his drink. Uswabe kancane. Derek must also

finish him off. Niki and Nomvuyo are chatting away about other things. I'm starting to feel like they're getting too close, and I'm not involved. Very disrespectful, considering that I'm the foundation of their lil friendship.

Liwa dishes up for Nomvuyo and Niki. Overall, the vibe is great, and everyone seems to be having a good time.

As we're eating, the topic of my wedding comes up.

Nomvuyo: Baby, when are you guys doing it?

Me: We haven't decided.

Dean: I'm sure you're the one delaying the process.

Me: Ungenaphi wena?

Derek: We'd rather wait till we're ready, than have a mess of a wedding, like someone I know...

Everyone gasps and there's an awkward silence.

You know, ever since Derek and Dean's twinship was revealed, Derek is becoming more like Dean with each passing day. I can't complain though, because he's saying all the things I keep in my mind. Seconds later, everyone starts laughing, including Nolwazi.

Nolwazi: At this point, crying doesn't even help. Our wedding was a hot mess.

Nomvuyo: That's what happens when you try to avoid drama, it comes at you very fast.

Nolwazi: Trust me, I've learnt my lesson.

Niki: Good. We don't want another season of Blame Ziyanda for Everything. Next time, there'll be hell to pay.

Yoh.

Nolwazi smiles sweetly.

Eish, uNiki.

Nomvuyo is smiling mischievously.

I clear my throat and they all look at me.

Me: Anyway, we haven't decided, but we'll let you know once we have a date.

Liwa: Great. Manje what about lobola? I know our family dynamic is a little strange, but surely Bab'Dlamz is going to make you pay?

Me: Actually, my dad doesn't want lobola. They all look at me weirdly.

Liwa: Why?

Me: He doesn't want Derek to pay a ridiculous amount, and then we end up having a rocky start.

They all look at me in silence for a good minute.

Out of nowhere, they all laugh loudly, including Derek.

Me: What's wrong?

Liwa: Has your father not figured out that money is not an issue this side?

I look at Derek and he shrugs.

Dean: You poor people and your humility.

If I were your father, I'd suck Derek dry.

Me: Futsek!

They continue laughing.

Tholi, Niki and I are the only ones not finding this funny.

Yazi being poor is a problem.

UNomvuyo yena angazi uhlekani ngoba esinye isihlupheki. Usinde ngoba her mother chose the right family to help.

Nxa.

Now I'm wondering how much money these people have. Like, I've always known that they're well-off, but clearly I underestimated their wealth. Derek and I need to have this discussion. I think he's been downplaying himself.

Jesu, that time mina all I have is one lousy investment account, a life policy nyana and a retirement annuity policy set up...

Derek wraps his arm around me.

Dean: Money is not a problem for us, Ziyanda. Tell your father to stop being humble.

Now I'm the one oswabile.

I keep quiet.

I'm so defeated. Here I was, proud that my father is a very considerate man, kanti all of that will be a joke with these idiots.

They continue chatting and I drink my Storm. . Derek kisses my cheek.

Derek: Your father and I have an agreement.

Me: What agreement? Why don't I know about it?

Derek: Rela-

Me: Don't tell me to relax. I can't be kept in the dark about such.

Derek: We'll talk later.

Me: You bet we will.

He continues planting kisses on my cheek till I relax.

Derek: Good.

He lets go of me and focuses on his plate.

By the end of the day, everyone's spirits are high, and it feels like the good old days. Yes, we're aware that we still have a long way to go, but things are much better.

Niki pulls Tholi aside, and my nosy ass makes my way to where they're standing.

Me: Everything okay?

Tholi already looks red. Her chubby cheeks are flushed.

Niki: Tholi, Kwanele didn't send me here. You do know that I'm friends with Zi, right?

Tholi nods.

Me: Tholz, relax. She's not going to bite.

Tholi: I know what you're going to say.

Niki keeps quiet.

Tholi: Please give me his contact details.
I'll reach out to him.

Niki nods.

Niki: He's been adamant that he doesn't want to disrupt your new life... I think you two need to sit down and talk about everything, because he really cares about you.

Tholi nods.

Niki: Ziyanda has his number. She'll send it to you.

Tholi: Okay.

Niki: Thanks. It was nice meeting you.

Tholi: Okay.

Niki gives me a hug and makes her way out.

Tholi: You have his number??

Me: Yes. What if something happens to her? If she's not with me or some of her

other friends, then she's with him. It's for safety reasons.

Tholi: Oh... That's good, I guess...

Me: How have you been?

Tholi: I don't know... The past month has been overwhelming.

Me: You haven't even dealt with Dean... Prepare yourself.

Tholi: He seems like a nice person.

Me: He is.

Tholi: I'm just worried about Derek. I'm getting weird vibes from him.

Me: He's still processing the news. He'll come around. She nods.

Me: Is Nolwazi's family treating you right? She nods and smile.

Tholi: Mam'Thandeka is amazing.

Me: Good for you. We should have a playdate tomorrow with the kids.

Tholi: I'd love that.

Me: I'm going back to work on Monday.

Tholi: Really? That's nice.

Me: Have you decided what you want to do?

Tholi: Let's catch up tomorrow. Mdu is already throwing looks my way.

Me: Okay then. Should I come to your place?

Tholi: Yes. I heard you can't cook, so I'll prepare everything.

A bitch finds her voice and thinks it's okay to come for me... Yazini neh...

She sees my face and giggles.

Tholi: I'm just teasing you.

She gives me a hug.

Tholi: See you tomorrow.

Me: Shap.

She walks away.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

Liwa: Thank you for hosting us. I appreciate how you're trying to get us back to how we were.

Me: It's a pleasure, Liwa. We share a hug.

Me: I hope this is the last time we're dealing with secrets.

Liwa: I highly doubt...

I look at him suspiciously and he laughs.

Liwa: See you around.

Me: Shap.

I walk with him to the other side of the yard, where everyone is.

Nomvuyo: Bye, baby.

Me: Bye.

We share a hug.

Liwa and Nomvuyo leave.

I can tell that Dean doesn't want to leave.

To be honest, I also don't want him to leave. I always have a good time when I'm with him and Derek. I've genuinely missed him, and he's been so busy lately.

We don't see him as much as we used to, even Derek himself has been complaining.

Derek: We're meeting up tomorrow, right?

Dean: Definitely.

Me: Hey! Why are you meeting up without me?

They both chuckle.

Derek: You're always part of the package.

Me: I'm meeting up with Tholi though.

Dean: Perfect. I think it's time we bond with her and set some rules. Me: Rules?

Nolwazi walks to us and smiles.

Nolwazi: Ready to go?

Dean: Yep. He looks at us.

Dean: Shap.

Derek: Bye.

Me: Shap.

We share hugs and they leave.

Derek and I finally have the house to ourselves, and I'm glad his people cleaned up before leaving...

INSERT 255 (Unedited)

When we get to Tholi and Mdu's place, we are welcomed by the smell of food.

Do you see why I keep getting fatter?

Tholi gives me a hug and then stands there awkwardly. Shame, she doesn't know what to do. She keeps avoiding the twins' eyes.

Me: Uhm, so ya... Dean and Derek, I would like you to meet Tholakele... She's the sweetest. Tholakele, this is Dean and Derek. They recently found out that they're twins.

Tholi looks at me weirdly.

She still doesn't understand my dry sense of humour?

Dean and Derek are chuckling.

Me: Tholakele, we are so glad that you have finally been found.

I stop myself from laughing.

Me: We are here today, because we have important issues to discuss. I'm not sure if you're aware of a show called uTatakho?

We are from that show.

Dean and Derek continue laughing quietly.

Does Tholi not have a sense of humour?

Lol, this is payback for making fun of my lack of cooking skills.

Me: Are you familiar with the show, uTatakho, Tholi?

She looks down and her face turns red.

Me: It's been brought to our attention that your biological father was quite an excellent player of hopscotch.

Dean: More like dick hopscotch.

Yhu, we end up laughing loudly and Tholi squirms.

Me: Tholi, I'm just kidding!

She looks at me begrudgingly.

Dean wraps his arm around her shoulders and squeezes her.

Dean: Hey, Tholi.

She looks like she is suffocating in Dean's broad arms.

Tholi: Hey.

Dean: How are you?

Tholi: Okay and you?

Dean: Couldn't be better. I just found out I have a baby sister.

Tholi looks shook.

I think I'd also be shook if I were her. This situation is creepy.

Dean: Are you going to invite us in?

Tholi: You didn't give me the chance to.

Dean lets go of her and she looks at Derek nervously.

Derek and Dean have these random moments where their personalities swap. I don't know where this thing comes from, but it is very recent. I'm still wrapping my mind around it. When Dean is the meanie, Derek sticks to his sweet vibe, but when Dean becomes extra kind, Derek becomes a meanie.

Tholi: Hi, Derek.

Derek: Hey, Tholi.

She hesitates and he opens up his arms and they share a hug.

Tholi: You smell nice.

Derek: Thank you.

Dean: I don't smell nice?

Tholi: You-

Dean: Are you insinuating that I stink?

Tholi: No, I ju-

Dean: That is very offensive.

Tholi looks like is about to burst into tears.

Derek chuckles.

Shu, they are really going to mess with her, hey?

Dean: Just kidding...

Tholi sighs in relief.

Tholi: Uhm, you can come in.

She moves out of the way and we walk in.

I take her hand.

Me: Relax!

She sighs heavily as she closes the door.

Dean: Where's Mdu?

Tholi: He's with his friends.

Me: Perfect.

Tholi: You must stop being mean to him.

We make our way to the lounge, where we find her twins.

Dean: What are their names?

Me: Cupcake and Muffin.

Derek's arm is around my waist, and he's pressed against me. Clingy Derek is in town, and that lets me know that he is still battling with this. He's not fully ready for this moment.

I take his hand and we walk to the kitchen. I turn and look at him gently.

Me: We can leave.

He shakes his head.

Me: Are you sure we're not moving too fast for your liking?

Derek: We're already here. I'm sure she'd be hurt if I left. She needs the assurance more than we do.

Me: If it's too much, let me know. I'm more concerned about you than anyone else. We'll do things at your pace.

He wraps his arms around me and we squeeze each other.

Me: I love you, okay?

Derek: I know. I love you too.

We share a kiss and make our way back to the lounge. Dean is already abandoning Little Star for Tholi's twins. I go take my child from the stroller- she is also not happy about this new development. She thought this was going to be a playdate, but she wasn't ready for being sidelined just a bit. She is grumpy, and I don't blame her!

I shower her with kisses, and she smiles. Just as Derek is about to take the other twin, heyii, she cries and starts kicking. Derek gets closer to me and takes her. Dean: Look at how traumatised the secrets are.

Me: Are you calling these babies The Secrets?

I laugh.

Tholi: That's mean.

Dean: It's like they know that they were conceived underground, and they can't

make noise. They're used to silence, and Star's noise is traumatising them.

Yhu, uDean!

I continue laughing.

Star eventually calms down and when I try to take her from Derek, she legit refuses.

I take Tholi's other twin.

They're such cute and chubby boys. They look more like Tholi than Mdu.

Tholi: Would you like anything to drink?

Me: G&T, please.

Derek: Water is fine.

Dean: I'm not thirsty, I'm hungry.

Tholi: The food will be ready soon.

She walks away.

Dean stares at Derek seriously.

Dean: You okay?

Derek: Yep.

Liyakha moans and looks at me. She's hungry now.

We've been trying to get her to gradually stop breastfeeding, but I'm the one who's struggling the most. I enjoy feeding her and being close to her. I don't want to stop. I feel like I'm going to be that mother that breastfeeds until the child is four years old.

Anyway, I take Star and breastfeed her.

Tholi is relaxed now and Derek also seems more open to the idea of having another sibling.

Dean: Tholi, how are you feeling about all of this?

Tholi sighs.

Tholi: I'm still shocked and confused.

Dean: I think the first step is to take a paternity test. We should confirm that Zweli is indeed our father.

Tholi: I already took the test.

Dean: And the results confirmed that he's your father?

Tholi nods.

Dean looks at Derek.

Dean: You think we should also take one?

Derek: Yes.

Dean nods.

Dean: I'll organise everything.

Derek looks at Tholi.

Derek: Have your therapy sessions been helping you?

She smiles lightly and nods.

Tholi: I'm really struggling to get used to living with Depression. I just hate that I'm not in control of my mental state, I'm relying on medication.

Me: It will get better.

Tholi: I think now that Mdu's family knows everything, I will get better. These secrets were killing me slowly.

Derek: Secrets have never been good.

I look down ashamedly. I hope he's not throwing shade at me for not telling him sooner about his true identity.

Tholi looks at me.

Tholi: I don't tell you this often, but I really can't thank you enough for your support. There were moments when Mdu had no idea how to help me, but you always knew what to do. Thank you for always taking your time to be there when I needed someone in my corner. I'm grateful that you're in my life. I've learnt a lot from you, and I know I still have more to learn. You inspire me, Zi. You're my role model.

Whoa!

Me: Are you trying to make me cry?

She smiles.

Tholi: I love you.

Aww, Chubby Cheeks!

Me: I love you too, Chubby Cheeks!

She blushes.

Me: You've come so far. I'm proud of the woman you're becoming. Witnessing you find your voice has been great!

She smiles and looks at Derek.

Tholi: I hope we'll be able to form a relationship... once you've processed and confirmed all of this...

She sighs.

Tholi: I've never experienced love from family since my mother passed away.

Me: How's your brother?

Dean: You have a brother?

Tholi nods.

Tholi: Uhm, I thought you knew?

Dean looks slightly puzzled. How does he not know this?

Tholi: The whole reason I married Kwanele was to keep my brother alive. Kwanele took over the expenses. Because of him, my brother is getting better.

Dean: Huh? Kwanele is taking care of your brother?

Tholi: Not anymore. Mdu took over, because... well, he doesn't like Kwanele.

Dean: No one likes that epileptic son of a bitch.

Me: Dean!

I look at him angrily.

Me: I will not allow you to be so disrespectful and crass! Do you think Kwanele chose to be epileptic?

Dean: I hope he has grown a backbone. I hiss.

Tholi: Please don't say bad things about him. Kwanele is the first person in my life to take me in without any conditions. He sacrificed his marriage for me.

Me: Technically, if it weren't for Tholi, you wouldn't even be with Nolwazi.

Dean keeps quiet.

Tholi: I'll always be grateful for his presence in my life. He was the first man to...

She hesitates.

Dean: He broke your virginity?

Tholi gasps and instantly turns red.

Dean: You think I want to sit here and listen to you tell me about how that weakling popped your cherry? Are we supposed to clap hands for him?

Tholi tries speaking.

Me: Tholi, let's get the food.

I stand and pull her up.

It's going to take a while for her to get used to Dean's bluntness.

She'll be fine...

Another month has passed.

We're all in a better place. Derek and I have been meeting Melinda separately and as a couple. Our communication

continues to improve. With each passing day, I feel more comfortable with the idea of being with him for the rest of my life. How could you not fall deeply in love with someone who makes you his priority and tries his best to be the lover you need? I'm also doing my best to make sure that I make him happy and love him the right way. We've finally found that balance. We're meeting each other's needs! Love it! I think our relationship is at its peak. Derek is nowhere near healed though. There are times when he can't even get out of bed and he isolates himself. I completely understand though, because it's all part of the process. He has a lot of shit to deal with, and the sexual abuse he endured is something he still isn't ready to delve into. Melinda refuses to give me full updates, so I'm not that informed

about how he's doing with regards to that subject.

The crew is also doing well.

Nolwazi is really trying to rebuild our relationship, and I can't ignore her efforts. We've been through so much, that I don't have the energy to keep the grudge going. Petty has let it slide, so I'm cool with Lwazi.

Nomvuyo, on the other hand, genuinely doesn't give a shit about Nolwazi. They're cool, but we all know that they don't like each other, and that's okay. They respect each other.

Liwa is also doing very well. He has started attending sessions with Derek and Dean. Melinda and his team are doing the things, because they're back to hanging out and having boys nights.

Zimkitha is a force to be reckoned with. This woman's strength is mind blowing,

but her therapy sessions have allowed her to be more vulnerable. She's unpacking all her traumas, and I know it will take a very very very long time before she becomes okay. I'm just glad she's not holding anything back now.

Dean is his usual arrogant self. Our relationship is also at its peak. After Star, he's my go-to guy. I have no idea how I coped without Derek and Dean. They've become such an important part of my life, that I struggle to understand what life was like without them.

Tholi is finally part of the crew! They're now invited to all our get togethers. She is becoming such an outspoken person, and we're all enjoying this side of her. She's still shy, but once she gets comfortable, she's a blabbermouth, just like me.

Overall, everyone is good.

We're still fucked up people though. I still need to work on my sarcasm (I've been told it's getting out of control). Derek needs to work on his inconsistent moods. Nomvuyo needs to work on her stinky attitude. Liwa doesn't need to work on anything, he's perfect. Nolwazi needs to work on letting us in and being more open. Dean... Dean just needs to change and find Jesus. Zimi yena needs to forgive herself for everything that transpired. We're still fucked up, but the love is there...

I still maintain though, anyone that tries to ruin my wedding, will be dealt with.

INSERT 256

My wedding is supposedly in four months...

Uhm, is it too late to postpone?

Like, how long does it take to plan your own wedding? Don't people start planning a year before? What was I thinking? Will I be able to do it?

Heyi, my anxiety is showing off. Every moment is ruined by these thoughts.

Derek has been trying his best to keep me calm but kuyafana.

I'm back at work, and it's safe to say none of these teachers like me. People really amaze me. They want to form all these unnecessary friendships and cliques at work, but as soon as someone who is not interested in all of that comes in and holds them accountable for what they are getting paid to do, these bitches start being angry and petty.

Thankfully, I don't give two shits about forming close relationships with colleagues. As long as we treat each other with respect, then I'm good. I won't stop doing the right thing, because ngincenga i-friendship. I got stabbed by a psycho ex girlfriend while pregnant all in the name of friendship. I really don't need more friends.

So, yes, I'm not very popular around the school. I'm that "supervisor" that gives you the look as soon as you go out of line. They need to understand that we are taking care of children, and sloppiness is dangerous. Children cannot be in a classroom unsupervised. We have all seen how scary schools are becoming because of unruly children. An adult always has to supervise. I've given out warnings like crazy since I came back. Lesson plans have to be detailed and personalised

according to the needs of your students. I can spot a lesson plan that is taken from the internet, and if your shady ass can't plan, a warning is given.

We're serving children, so any negligence and foolery is dealt with accordingly.

I'm a teacher/principal. I alternate between the two. I've decided to be a substitute teacher, so I can help out in the office as much as I can. At least I don't have to be in the classroom everyday. I teach when people are absent. Derek is still mentoring me, and he's planning on doing a proper handover soon. I surprisingly like our work dynamic. We work really well together. The only problem is that I'm with him 24/7 now, and we all know how I feel about space, angithi? Yena he is enjoying himself. He keeps saying this is his ideal way of life-being with me 24/7. I'm just waiting for

the handover, so he can occupy his time with other things and not be based at school.

I'm busy teaching, when Derek walks in the class.

The students are obsessed with him. I know for a fact that the girls have crushes on him. I allow them to hug him, and then they go back to their seats.

Derek: Bab- Ms Dlamini.

He smiles.

Me: What's up?

Derek: I have a meeting to get to. I probably won't come back this side... unless you insist on me fetching you?

Me: I'll be fine.

I'm officially a driver, but do I have any desire to drive? Nope, not at all. I genuinely don't understand why anyone would want to subject themselves to such

a chore. Uber is my best friend. If someone has a problem with that, then they can make it their responsibility to transport me.

Derek: I'll see you later.

He's been MIA quite a lot these days, attending meetings.

Me: Shap.

He wants to give me a kiss, but stops himself.

The students know that Derek and I are a thing. There was no way we were going to keep it a secret. He's about to be my husband. I'm not his lil girlfriend anymore. Bitches must know that the bag has been secured.

Anyway, I get back to teaching...

I'm in the office with Andile, and we're discussing how we're going to implement extra lessons during the weekend. Some

parents are not satisfied with their babies' results, so I suggested extra lessons.

Andile: Are you willing to come in and teach during the weekend?

Me: Hell no. I have a family.

Andile: Then we should hire tutors.

Me: Definitely. I think we should hire student teachers. This will give them the opportunity to earn some extra cash and also get some experience on the side, while they're getting their teaching degrees.

Andile: Great idea.

Me: Will you organise stocko?

Andile: Spillion.

I laugh.

I still need to find him a person. Things obviously didn't work out with Nomi. He has made it absolutely clear that he wants nothing to do with her.

Just then, my phone rings and I answer.

Me: Zimi?

Zimkitha: Hello, baby.

Me: Is everything okay?

Zimkitha: Yes. I just wanted to give you the goss-goss.

We both laugh.

Zimi and I are pretty close now. She's my new gossiping buddy, because Nomvuyo is too busy trying to get another baby.

Nolwazi is also trying to conceive. People want to have their babies fast fast, because they're worried about their age.

Not my struggle.

Andizi.

Me: Tell me phela.

Zimkitha: Nkanyezi and I just came back from a property meeting.

Me: For?

Zimkitha: He's planning on expanding the orphanage.

Me: Really?

Zimkitha: He didn't tell you? We are collaborating with a certain young lady, who is an advocate for woman and child abuse. We're planning on opening a home for them.

Me: Hmm... I had no idea.

Zimkitha: I'm sure he'll tell you all about it..

Me: So that's the gossip?

Zimkitha: Angithi I'm building context for you.

I chuckle.

Zimkitha: So, we went to check our various properties...

Me: Okay.

I don't know, man, but I'm slightly annoyed that Derek didn't tell me about this. This seems like a big deal.

Zimkitha: As soon as that girl saw Derek, she was already planning their wedding.

Me: Huh?

Zimkitha: Derek has a secret admirer.
She tells me how this girl is all giddy and
lovey dovey around Derek.

I can't help but laugh.

Me: I'm sure Derek noticed. You know he
pays attention to such.

Zimkitha: I think he's pretending not to
know, because when I hinted in the car,
he dismissed me.

We laugh.

Me: Let her write fairytales about him. I'm
sure he's very uncomfortable. It serves
him right for not telling me about this big
project.

We continue catching up.

When I get home, I find Derek dishing up
for himself.

It's around 7pm.

Me: Hello.

He smiles and gives me a hug.

Derek: I'm getting Star tomorrow. I miss her.

Me: Hai, my parents are still bonding with her. We'll fetch her on Friday.

He sulks.

Derek: Would you like me to dish up for you?

I shake my head.

Me: I'm still full from lunch.

I go to the bedroom and get ready to take a shower. Lol, I always have to pinch myself in such moments, to remind myself that I'm not dreaming. I'm in such a good space, and Derek and I are closer than ever...

It's just this one thing that is annoying me right now.

Once I'm done showering, I go to the lounge and find him watching the news.

Me: How did your meeting go?

Derek: It was okay.

Is he really not going to tell me about this project? The nerve! Petty awakens, assembles her tools, and gets ready...

Me: Hmkay.

He continues focusing on the news.

This negro!

I cross my arms and huff.

Derek: Everything okay?

Me: Mmm.

He nods and focuses on the screen.

Nxa, I stand and go to the bedroom. I'll wait for him to tell me. I don't know why I'm so offended that he is not filling me. It seems like a big deal to me, if they're looking at properties.

I fall asleep, and feel his arms around me later...

I seriously need to start planning my wedding.

Derek is not even saying anything. Clearly he's busy with other things, like expanding Twilight behind my back and not involving me. I'm so offended that he's keeping me in the dark about this. Doesn't he need my help?

Or maybe this is him trying to tell me that my ass doesn't have to be involved in everything?

Yoh, my anxiety has taken this thing and made it such a big thing. My mind has so many questions and unjustified conclusions. I can't even help myself.

I get to school and go to the classroom I'll be substituting.

These teachers who think they can claim to be sick without doctors' notes obviously don't know me. I told this one to come back with a note, and she said she will. If I find that the doctor has a shady Indian surname, best believe I'll do my research and find out if they're real...

These teachers have been getting away with nonsense. How are we going to achieve excellent standards if we have lazy people working for us? Haibo, I don't have time for such. She'll get a warning if she comes with a fake doctor's note.

Anyway, I get to the class and prepare my resources.

Derek has been MIA. Angimazi nokuthi ukuphi.

I'm teaching the Grade Rs today, and I know my mood will drastically change.

Those cuties always bring out the best in me. I'll soon forget about Derek's shadiness and these problematic employees...

The kids are always on their best behaviour when I'm around. I pride myself in forming relationships with them. They respect me, because I respect them and I'm not stingy with my love. It's easy to manage behaviour when the respect and genuine love is there. I don't instill fear in them. Children at that age will never be completely quiet. It is highly impossible for their space to be dead

silent, so I've implemented a system where I tell them what type of voice they should use in class. If they are working in groups, they should use their Normal Voice (Table Talk). If they are working individually then they should use their Whisper Voice (for when they need something from someone and they don't want to disturb the rest of the class). When they are in front of the class, teaching or presenting, then they should use their Teacher Voice (loud and proud). This just helps regulate the noise. I can't expect 5 or 6 year olds to be completely silent. That's just abuse.

Anyway, I'm teaching phonics, and it's always a good idea to make the content relatable and fun for the little ones. I usually introduce phonics by making up a story about how the letters found their voices (sounds).

As I'm teaching, Derek walks, in smiling like a mad man. Mxm. Uyangibhora lo nama secret deals wakhe.

He is followed by a woman.

I don't usually pay attention to the people Derek brings to my class. Every time I'm in the classroom, he makes it a point to bring in guests to see how we implement our learning model. I'm so used to being observed that the people have become faceless.

He's definitely my biggest cheerleader shame. He makes me feel like I'm the best teacher in the world...

But, I still don't like his secretive ass.

Me: Okay, so I have a story for you!

The tiny students giggle and exclaim happily.

Me: Are you ready to hear the story?

The students nod excitedly.

Mer: Alright... So...

Derek and his guest sit at the back of the class. I made it clear that no one should disrupt my class, so if observations are done, then they should observe from the back. Kids are easily distracted.

Me: So, once upon a time, two best friends were about to play outside... Do you want to know who the best friends were?

Students: Yes!

Me: Well, the first friend's name was "S!"
They giggle.

Me: Do we know S?

Students: Yes!

Me: When S speaks, what sound comes out of his mouth? I want one student to tell me.

They all raise their hands excitedly.

Me: Yes, Amo.

Amo: The sound that comes out of S's mouth is "ssss!"

Me: Is Amo correct?

Students: Yes!

Me: Let's all make the sound!

All the students make the "Sss" sound.

Argh, this truly is my calling. How am I turned on right now? Not in the creepy sense though.

Me: Excellent! Do we remember how S looks?

Students: Yes!

Me: Show me. Take out your magic pens and show me.

All the students put out their tiny index fingers (the magic pens) and "write" the letter S in the air.

Learning has to be fun for kids. If you have to act a fool and jump on tables, then so be it.

Me: Yes! You're all so amazing! So, The first friend was "S", and the second friend's name was "H!"

They all laugh.

Me: Do we remember H?

They all sound out the letter and “write” it.

Me: Great! So, S and H were the best of friends! One day, S’s mother, warned them not to play with glue. They loved playing with it! She said, “You two will be stuck together forever if you continue playing with glue! You will never be able to things by yourselves. Everything you do will be done together. You will sleep together, eat together, and even go to the toilet together!”

All the students laugh.

Me: She also told them that their voices would be combined!

They giggle.

Me: Would you love to be with your best friend all the time?

Some of them say yes and others say no.

Teacher: I wouldn't want to be in that position!

Students: Why?

Me: I love my space! Imagine having someone around you every second of the day!

I hope Derek caught that shade.

Me: Anyway, S and H went outside. Do you think they listened to S's mother?

Students: Nooo!

Me: Exactly! They went outside and H took out some glue. They started playing with it and smearing it on each other...

Can anyone tell me what smearing means? S and H "smeared" the glue all over each other.

One student raises his head.

Student: It's like putting something on something.

Me: Yes! It's like marking something in a messy way!

I explain smearing and ask them to give me sentences using the word. Thereafter, I add the word on the board, under the “new words” section.

I try not to teach things in isolation. If we’re reading and we come across an exclamation mark, then I revisit what I taught them about punctuation and they will see how it’s actually being used in books. I integrate everything- spelling, reading, writing, language and grammar, letters and sounds. They learn better that way.

Me: Now, back to the story... S and H were having lots of fun with the glue. Out of nowhere, H tripped and fell on the right side of S. Can you all show me your right side? Touch it.

They all touch their right sides.

Me: Good. So, H tripped and fell on S's right side. When H tried getting up, S screamed painfully.

The tiny kids exclaim.

You'd swear this is a real story.

Me: Why do you think S was screaming?

I ask one student.

Student: S was screaming because they were glued together!

Me: Yes! S and H were now glued together! They didn't listen to S's mother! Do you see what happens when you don't listen to your parents?

The students giggle.

Me: Now, S and H were together forever!

Students: Nooo!

Me: As soon as S spoke, H also spoke.

They now spoke at the same time!

Students: Nooo!

Me: Do you want to know what came out of their mouth?

Students: Yes!

She writes the letters “sh” on the board.

Me: Shhhh!

The students are beyond shook.

Me: Have we ever heard that sound before?

Students: Yes!

Me: Say it after me... Shhh! The students repeat.

Me: Where have you heard it?

Students start throwing out answers...
shop, she, shark, sheep, shot, etc.

All I want to say, “SHIT I’m good!”

Me: Exactly! We have all heard the sound before! That is how “S” and “H” became best friends forever!

The students laugh and clap happily.

Me: This week we are going to learn all about “Shhh!”

Just then, our receptionist walks in, and walks to Derek. He follows her out and

leaves his guest. Gosh, now I have to answer questions and be interactive. Once I'm around kids, I don't like interacting with adults.

After a while, the lesson ends.

The guest is still here.

Me: Do you all have your lunch?

Students: Yes!

Me: Good. You're all lined up in 10... 9...

As I count down, the students push in their chairs and line up in two lines by the door.

They're so cute.

Me: Yaaas! You're all superstars!

I take stickers from the desk and place a star sticker on each student's forehead.

They love these!

Me: Alright, my babies. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?

Students: Okay!

They walk out... Can't this guest follow them and go observe how they eat? We have a solid lunch procedure.

Guest: Wow...

She stares at me in shock.

Guest: I don't think I've ever seen such. You're amazing! I'm so impressed!

Me: Thank you.

She walks to me.

Guest: I'm sorry for being rude. Hello, I'm Buhle.

Me: Hey, I'm Ziyanda.

Buhle puts out her hand.

Me: Sorry, my hands are dirty from the markers.

Buhle nods and smiles.

Buhle: You're amazing! Oh my goodness!

I smile lightly.

Me: Thank you.

Buhle: How long have you been teaching?

Me: Few years.

Buhle nods.

Just then, her expression changes. Does she have Tourette Syndrome? Outchea twitching out of nowhere.

Buhle: Uhm, Derek, your principal, invited me over... I didn't expect it to be this great!

My principal? Lol.

Me: My principal invited you over?

I look at her amusingly. There's something child-like about her.

She nods excitedly.

Buhle: We're going to collaborate soon.

Me: Is it? Collaborate on what?

Buhle: Well, I volunteer at the orphanage he is associated with. We met there...

Is this lady okay? Is she blushing?

Me: Hmkay...

Buhle: I have an NGO that offers support to abused women and children.

Wait, is this the woman Zimi told me about?

Is this the collaboration I'm excluded from?

Me: Go you.

Buhle: So, we're thinking of collaborating and making a bigger difference, you know?

Me: I see...

She giggles.

Wow, she really is in love with Derek.

This is surprisingly hilarious.

Buhle: I'm beyond excited. I managed to make him see the bigger picture, you know?

Me: Hmm.

You don't say, moghel!

Buhle: How is he?

Me: Who?

Buhle: Derek. How is he...generally?

I sigh...

I obviously can't burst her bubble. I'll let her enjoy her fairytale, while I deal with her prince charming on the side, for keeping me in the dark!

Me: I mean, he's okay... Nothing too special.

Her expression changes. She looks shocked that I've just downplayed Derek's greatness.

Buhle: He seems like a good man...

She stutters.

Buhle: A good leader, I mean...

Thatha girl. I think I'm entertained.

Me: Is it?

Buhle nods.

Me: Siyambongela yazi uDerek. Clearly he is an impactful man. Everywhere he goes, he attracts people. How admirable.

Buhle: I look forward to working with him.

Me: You don't say...

I walk to the table and start tidying it up. I have another class soon.

Buhle: How long have you been teaching here?

Me: I'm just substituting for a sick teacher.

Buhle: Is it? But are you teaching somewhere else?

I shake my head.

Me: Not at the moment. I'm just a professional mother and recovering drama queen right now.

She laughs.

Buhle: Oh okay, what an interesting profession.

Me: Indeed...

I finish cleaning up and look at her.

Me: Have a good day further, Buhle. I hope you enjoy the rest of your visit here.

Buhle: Thank you. I just need to find Derek.

Me: I'm sure you have his number- call him. He does have a tendency to be all over the place when he is excited. Buhle smiles.

Buhle: Then, he'll need some taming. Maria Josefa! She wants to tame Derek Nkanyezi Star Ngidi? Heeh!

Me: Yaas. Do best.

Buhle laughs.

Me: Bye.

Buhle: Bye.

I walk out and head to the office. I need to call Dean so we can laugh about this lil situation...

INSERT 257

I go outside for some fresh air.

Petty keeps trying to lead me to Derek's office, but I have to keep her in check. I'm actually mad at Derek for doing this behind my back. I'm offended! Buhle is not even my biggest concern, I know

Derek will deal with her once he is tired of her giggles and twitches.

I dial Dean's number and he answers.

Me: Langa, you won't-

Dean: Where are you? Just walked past your class.

Me: Are you here?

Dean: Yep.

Me: Oh, great.

Dean: I'm in the office now.

He doesn't sound too happy.

Me: Hai hai, I won't come if I have to deal with your grumpiness.

Dean: Just come.

I grunt as I end the call and walk to the office.

Actually, this is the perfect time to confront Derek about this, in front of Dean. I know Dean would have Deaned a long time ago if he knew about this project.

I open the door and find him there, sitting on Derek's desk, looking very grumpy.

Buhle is also here.

She looks like she is about to pee her pants.

Me: Am I interrupting something?

Dean glances at me.

Dean: I was just catching up with Derek's new friend.

I look at Buhle.

Ziyanda: Did you find Derek?

She shakes her head.

Konje she wants to tame Derek.

I can't help but stifle a laugh.

Me: I think he's in the computer lab.

Dean: Ziyanda, do you-

Me: Langelihle, can I have a word with you?

Dean looks like he has a lot to say. Does he know Buhle? Is he also in on this? Now, he's also going to get a piece of my mind!

Me: Dean, a word?

He looks at me begrudgingly as he stands.

He walks past Buhle, and I move out of the way so that he can get out. We both walk out and I close the door.

I grab his arm and we walk outside.

Me: First of all, how dare you?!

He looks at me in confusion.

Me: How dare you not tell me about Derek's project?

Dean: What project?

Me: The expansion thingie.

Dean: Thingie? What are you? A child?

Me: Dean, I don't have time for your nonsense. Why didn't you tell me that Derek is planning on opening a shelter for abused women and children?

Dean: What the fuck are you talking about?

Me: You don't know?

Dean: You're busy asking me about shelters, are you even aware that that woman we left there is planning on having babies with your idiot?

Me: Ya, I know. I wa-

Dean: You know her?

Me: She's the one Derek is partnering up with for this project.

Dean is speechless, he is processing. I'm sure he's also offended that we are in the dark.

Me: Anyway, let me tell you about that lady...

I start laughing as I think of all the ridiculous things she said.

I tell Dean all about it.

Dean: Tame him?

Me: That's the cherry on top.

His mood lightens up and we laugh about it.

Me: Don't be mean to her.

Dean: You know I don't have time to entertain such. He looks at me seriously.

Dean: I've dealt with such women... You always have to nip it in the bud, because it gets out of control.

Here we go again. Dean never fails to let everyone know that he has had to deal with crazy women. He never fails to inform us how his mere looks are powerful enough to drive people crazy.

Blah, blah, blah.

I roll my eyes.

Me: Dean, it's not that deep...

He keeps quiet.

Me: Besides, Derek has to deal with her, not you or anyone else. I know he'll do best. The situation with Busi showed me that I can fully trust him.

Dean: Nawe why didn't you let her know you're the wife?

Me: I didn't want to burst her bubble. She seems innocent.

Dean: Have I told before that you can be stupid?

I roll my eyes.

Dean: It's the innocent-looking ones that are creeps. I'm sure she has Derek's pictures all over her house.

Me: Dean!

He chuckles.

Me: Leave her alone. I trust Derek.

I take his hand and we walk back in.

As we're walking towards the office, we see them approaching us from the other side.

Dean and I chuckle as we watch.

Dean: They'd make a cute couple.

Me: Ukhuluma amasimba ke manje.

He continues chuckling.

Dean: Since you say I'm being too uptight and protective, I'm going to have fun with

this... It's about time I get Derek back for making fun of my wedding. Ngizom'nyisa.

Me: What are you going to do?

Dean: You'll see.

He smiles mischievously. At this point, I'm not getting involved. Once they start this thing of theirs, we all have to take a step back. Their paybacks are usually dirty.

They finally get to us.

Buhle stares at Derek and then at Dean.

Buhle: Are you twins?

Derek nods lightly and stares at Dean.

I can already imagine what she's thinking... Derek is the sweet, loving one, and Dean is the fucked up one... I'm sure Dean's meanstreak has made her love Derek even more, the pure twin.

Derek: This is Dean... And this is Ziyanda, she's-

Dean: She's a very good teacher. I'm sure you've noticed.

Buhle nods.

Lol, what is Dean up to?

Derek tries to speak, but Dean interrupts him once again.

Dean: I would like to hear more about your project with Derek. He didn't tell me about it, which is quite surprising... I wonder why he has kept you hidden...

Buhle is blushing profusely, while Derek looks like a lost sheep. Nxa, serves him right for keeping me in the dark. Dean must do best, I'm sure it will be entertaining!

Dean: How about we go out for lunch?

Buhle glances at Derek, who is staring at Dean in confusion.

Dean is too far gone at this point. I'm glad he's here. Derek deserves to be tortured for doing secret deals.

Buhle: I would love to. I'm quite famished. I clear my throat.

Ziyanda: Enjoy your lunch... I have a child waiting for me at home.

Derek: What's-

Dean: D, get your shit and shut up.

Lol, let me teach my last class and head home. My mom is sleeping over tonight.

Dean gives me a squeeze and I walk away.

Derek is now following me.

When I get to the class, my kids are not back from lunch.

Derek: Ziyanda.

I look at him blankly.

Me: I can't stand your shady ass.

I want to be mad at him, but I'm struggling. He knows how to sulk, this one.

Me: Derek, when were you going to tell me?

Derek: Uhm, today.

I look at him seriously.

Me: Is there a reason you haven't said anything about this project?

Derek: Baby, I was going to tell you. I've just been preoccupied.

Me: This seems like a big deal to me.

Derek: I'm sorry.

Me: Go have your lunch.

He tries stepping closer to me, when the door opens and one of my students walks and tells me that they're ready for me.

Derek groans and walks out.

I follow him and find my students lined up. I'm glad my mother will be with us tonight. She's the perfect person to quieten my anxious thoughts.

Mom: As long as you told him that you're hurt.

Me: I did.

Mom: I'm sure he feels bad.

Me: The problem is that I understand how meaningful Twilight is to him and how he's always wanted to do something like this... I'm hurt that he didn't think it was important to tell me. The last time I checked, this was still a thought, and now he's executing... Am I being dramatic?

Mom: Not at all. It's not like he forgot to tell you that he didn't run an errand...
I sigh.

Just then, someone clears their throat and we both turn to find Derek standing by the entrance of the dining room.

Derek: Good afternoon.

Mom: Hello, Nkanyi.

She stands and gives me him a hug.

Mom: Let me check on my granddaughter.
She walks away.

Derek sits next to me.

Me: You're back early.

Derek: That lunch was unbearable.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Dean got me, I guess.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Wanna talk? I nod.

Me: I'll use my "I" statements.

Melinda taught us a basic method of communicating our feelings. It's a series of sentence openers that allow you to express how you feel to the next person- very basic, but effective.

Example: "I feel..." "When you..." "Because I think it means..." "What I need..."

Me: I feel hurt. When you don't include me in such an important venture, because I think it means you don't value my opinion or you don't think I can contribute or assist in any way. What I need is for you to explain why you didn't tell me, just to ease my anxiety, which has already drawn its own conclusions.

He nods lightly.

Melinda also taught us how to respond to “I” statements.

Example: “You sound...” “Because I...”
“Next time, I...”

Derek: You sound hurt and excluded, because I failed to do what a life partner does, which is communicate. I failed to let you in on this important project. Next time, I will definitely tell you about such, like I have always done in the past. I apologise for hurting your feelings.

Just like that, my anxiety cools down.

It’s amazing the difference it makes when someone acknowledges how they have made you feel- without trying to justify themselves or make excuses.

Me: Thank you. I forgive you.

We stand and share the longest hug.

Me: You do know that Buhle has a crush on you, right?

He grunts and I chuckle.

Me: Derek and Buhle sitting in the tree. K-i-s-s-i-n-g!

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: First comes love. Then comes marriage...

He lets go of me.

Me: Then comes baby in the baby carriage, sucking his thumb, wetting his pants...

He starts walking away.

Me: Doing the hula, hula dance!

I rush in front of him and twerk playfully.

Derek: Not funny.

I continue making fun of him till we get to the kitchen, where we find my mother cooking.

Mom: What's all the noise for?

Derek: Your daughter is annoying.

Mom: Hai, Ngidi, she's yours now...

He grunts as he pours himself some water and walks away.

Mom: All good?

Me: Yep.

Mom: Nikhulile yazi. Phela ngabe you are packing your bags now, ready to go to Soweto.

We laugh and I run away before she asks me to help her cook.

Dean needs to fill me in.

INSERT 258

It's Thursday evening. Derek and I are making our way to Nolwazi and Dean's place for dinner. Nolwazi was the one who invited us.

Derek: Everything is in order for tomorrow, right?

Me: Yep.

Tomorrow is our first Fun Day. I planned the whole thing, and I am thoroughly exhausted. Thankfully, we managed to convince my mother to stay for the rest of the week, just to help out with Baby Star. The older that little girl gets, the more attention she requires, and my mother is addicted to her...

Me: It's funny how I'm busy planning school events, but I haven't even thought about our wedding.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Does this mean you want us to postpone?

Me: Relax, things will work out.

Derek: Are you sure you'll cope?

I nod.

Me: The last weekend of September will be fine.

He brushes my hand before focusing on the road...

When we get to the house, we find Liwa and Nomvuyo there.

Lol, shame if Vuvu thought avoiding Nolwazi would be a thing then she was dreaming, because Liwa and Nolwazi get along like a house on fire. I think Liwa is overcompensating for his wife's snaax behaviour.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Heyiii!

We share a hug.

As soon as he sees Derek, he looks at him seriously.

Oh no... What now? Is there another beef?

Liwa: Hi, Mr Principal...

Out of nowhere, Dean and Liwa start laughing loudly. Derek looks at me and I quickly let go of his hand and shrug.

Me: Andibazi nobazi!

Liwa pouts.

Liwa: Want me to tame you, Mr Principal?

Dean: I just love what you're doing for the community Derek... It's just... so inspirational!

Liwa: Such an advocate for change, you know?

Nolwazi: Guys, stop!

Derek wants to punch them.

They continue making stupid jokes.

There's no stopping them.

Just then, Mdu and Tholi walk in.

Me: Chubby Cheeks!

Tholi: Zizi Bear!

Me: Yhu, when last did I hear that name...

Tholi: Mdu told me he used to call you that.

I look at Mdu.

Me: Hello.

Mdu: Ya wena.

He pulls me for a hug and I grunt. I push him off and hug Tholi.

Me: Where's Muffin and Cupcake?

Mdu: In the other room, where the creche is.

Lol, the number of children in this group is too much.

Nolwazi: The food is ready, you can all go to the table.

We walk to the table and sit. I'm sitting next to Tholi, whom I've discovered is also a little gossipmonger. She loves whispering silly things when we're sitting next to each other.

Me: Where's Zimi?

Dean: She says she's on her way.

Me: Cool.

Dean: Why didn't you come with your mother?

Me: She enjoys her personal space. She likes being with her granddaughter.

Dean: She must stop behaving like Nkanyezi is her only grandchild. I'll also start fetching her to sleepover here.

Derek: We'll see about that.

Dean: Wena thula. Uphapha too much.

Liwa: He needs taming.

They start laughing all over again.

Shame, I'm starting to feel bad for my Star. He looks at me disapprovingly.

Derek: See what you've started?
I try to give him a kiss but he refuses.
Such a sulky man.

Zimkitha walks to the table, looking very very good. Heyi uhambela phezulu umuntu.

Everyone stares at her and she laughs.
Zimkitha: Hello, children.

Nolwazi: You look great!

Zimkitha: Sengivukile phela.

Heeh, is Zimkitha getting mature dick?
She sits next to her best friend, Liwa. We have all accepted that nothing will ever come between them, even Derek and Dean have accepted that she will always love Liwa more than them. Their connection is on another level, and we respect that.

Zimkitha: How's everyone?
She looks at Derek.

Zimkitha: Why are so grumpy?

Derek keeps quiet.

Nolwazi: They're making fun of him.

Zimkitha: About?

Mdu: Apparently some woman has a crush on him and claims that she will tame him.

The way things spread in this group?

Zimkitha: Oh, Buhle?

Zimkitha laughs sweetly.

Zimkitha: It's a harmless crush. It's expected... I mean, look at Star!

Derek grunts and remains quiet.

We all dish up for ourselves and continue chatting. After a while, Zimkitha looks at us seriously and we quieten down.

Zimkitha: So... There's something I'd like to tell all of you.

Dean: No. I don't have it in me to deal with another blow.

Derek: I agree. Please keep it to yourself.

Zimkitha chuckles.

Zimkitha: This has nothing to do with you.

I sigh in relief.

Zimkitha sighs and clears her throat
lightly.

Zimkitha: I just want all of you to know
that I am in a relationship.

There's silence.

What?

I knew she was getting grown and experienced dick!

Mdu: Uhm, that's good to know, I guess.

Zimkitha looks at Dean and Derek.

Zimkitha: Are you okay?

Derek: You're in a relationship?

Zimkitha nods and smiles. The past few months have been hectic and she was beginning to look like her problems. All of that is in the past now, because she is looking rejuvenated and younger.

Me: Yaay! I'm happy for you!

She winks at me.

Dean: Uyajola?

Nomvuyo: Argh, stop acting like kids.

Zimkitha is old and her life has revolved around us since we were young. It's about time we set her free!

Nolwazi: I couldn't agree more. We can't hold her back.

Zimkitha: I wasn't necessarily asking for permission. I just want you to know... I'm in a relationship.

Me: Yaaas! How old is he?

She chuckles.

Zimkitha: Old enough.

Dean: Old enough for what, Zimkitha?

Zimkitha laughs.

Me: Yaaas, Zimi!

Tholi gets closer to my ear.

Tholi: She's having sex?

I chuckle.

Bless this one's soul.

Zimkitha is a freak. All those years her parents held her hostage meant she couldn't express the freak in her. Liwa always tells me about her escapades once she was free from her parents.

Derek: Do we know this man?

Zimkitha clears her throat and glances at Liwa.

Dean: So Liwa knows him?

Zimkitha takes a sip of her drink.

Derek: Who is he?

Yoh, now they're flooding her with questions.

She exhales loudly.

Zimkitha: ...ki...

She didn't really speak clearly, so we didn't catch that.

Dean: Ubani?

She clears her throat lightly.

Zimkitha: Bheki.

Dean: Bheki who?

She glances at Nolwazi uncomfortably and then at Tholi.

There's a long silence.

I'm so confused.

Does everyone know who this Bheki is?

Tholi: Bheki? Bheki Buthelezi?

Zimkitha takes a sip of her drink and nods.

I'm lost.

I want to ask questions, but ngathi now is not the right time.

There's a long silence once again.

Dean: You're in a relationship with Bheki Buthelezi?

Zimkitha nods.

Nolwazi: Bheki? Bheki Buthelezi?

Zimkitha nods again.

Mdu: Kwanele's father?

She exhales loudly once again.

Zimkitha: Yes, I am in a relationship with Kwanele's father, Bheki Buthelezi.

Liwa: Who just so happens to be my father.

Heyiiiiiii!

WHAT?!

I kid you not, every single person stands and looks at Zimkitha, Liwa and Nomvuyo in shock.

Maria Josefa!

Not this shit again!

INSERT 259 (Unedited)

I'm the first to sit.

Suddenly, my stomach is just full.

I pull Derek and he also sits. I hold his hand and squeeze it.

Dean, Lord... Dean...

No one hates Kwanele like Dean...

Now, Kwanele is involved in this messy fruit salad??

Everyone sits.

Liwa: I don't understand what the drama is about. None of this affects you.

Dean: Shut the fuck up.

Liwa: Make me.

Dean and Liwa both stand and we all khuza them.

Me: We're already trying to wrap our heads around this and now you want us to deal with your misplaced rage?

Ningalinge!

Whoa, I legit just sounded like my mother. These people are making me age!

Dean and Liwa sit and look at each other angrily.

We sit in silence.

I stand and walk inside the house.

Derek follows me.

Derek: Are you okay?

He looks worried.

Me: I've had it with this family!

I go to Dean's study, and Derek continues following me like a puppy.

Derek: What... What do you mean?

I take Dean's easel and its stand.

Derek: Ziyanda...

Me: Awume tuu Derek.

I walk back to the table and he follows me.

He thinks I'm breaking up with him?

Uyahlanya. No is not that time for his drama.

Everyone stares at me as I put the easel on the stand.

I then go back inside and get my bag. I know I always have random board markers somewhere. I search my bag and find a blue board marker.

I walk back to the table and they all stare at me.

Me: I'm tired! I'm tired of the constant surprises!

I open the marker.

Derek: Baby-

Me: Not now, Derek.

I write Zimkitha's name. Big and bold on the left.

Me: Zimkitha, name all of your children!

Liwa: Do-

Me: Liwa, I swear I will fold your balls if you say one word.

Nomvuyo: Heyii ung-

Me: Shut up!

I look at Zimkitha.

Me: Name your children!

Zimkitha clears her throat.

Zimkitha: Princess and Liwa.

I write those names.

Zimkitha: Dean and Derek.

Me: Is that all? Do you have other children stashed elsewhere?

Liwa: Ziyanda.

Me: What?

I look at him sharply.

Me: If you want the trapped Soweto girl in me to come out and cause havoc, then please continue adding your two cents.

Liwa keeps quiet.

Me: Is this it, Zimkitha?

Zimkitha: Yes.

I write Zweli's name next to Zimkitha's.

Me: Name his children.

Zimkitha: The ones I know about?

Me: Zimkitha!

Liwa: Heyi wena, don't ever addre-

Derek: Liwa.

Liwa: She mustn't di-

I walk straight to Liwa and pull him up.

Me: Seeing as you're behaving like a child, I'll treat you like one.

I take his hand and lead him away from the table.

Me: I'm putting you on timeout for 5 minutes.

Liwa: What??

I make him sit and leave him there.

I walk back to the table and find everyone chuckling.

Me: This is serious. Zimkitha please name Zweli's children.

Zimkitha: Okay... So there's obviously Dean, Derek and Tholi.

I write them down.

Zimkitha: Last time I checked, his eldest son is Sam... He was born before... before, uhm Dean and Derek happened.

I write down Sam.

Zimkitha: Sabelo is around the same age as Dean and Derek.

I write down Sabelo.

Zimkitha: And then there's Bathandwa and Nelly. Nelly is a girl. She was adopted though.

Nomvuyo: He had the nerve to adopt!

Me: So three of them are his biological children? Sam, Sabelo and Bathandwa?

They're all boys?

Zimkitha: Yes.

Me: Do you know their mother/mothers?

Zimkitha: She passed away.

Me: Okay.

Dean: However, he mentioned that we have four more siblings.

Nolwazi: Maybe he included Nelly, even though she's not his, biologically.

Me: Probably.

Zimkitha: That's all I know, Zizi.

Liwa walks back to the table and I stare at him. He goes to his seat and keeps quiet. Good.

Me: Okay... So this explains why there are so many twins here. It truly runs in the family.

Tholi still looks shocked. Mdu keeps making her drink water.

Me: So let me get this straight...

I stare at them.

I take a very deep breath.

Me: Nolwazi and Tholi were married to Kwanele. Kwanele is Bheki's father. Bheki is Liwa's father, meaning Kwanele and Liwa are brothers. However, Nolwazi and Tholi are no longer with Kwanele.

Nolwazi is with Dean, who just so happens to be Tholi's brother. Nolwazi is married to Tholi's brother, and Tholi is married to Nolwazi's brother. Now, because Kwanele is tied to Liwa, then it

means he is also tied to Dean and Derek to some extent.

There is complete silence as everyone processes this.

My anxiety is skyhigh.

I walk to the house, for I feel an attack approaching.

Melinda taught me another technique of coping.

These steps are known as AWARE: 1.

Acknowledge & Accept 2. Wait 3. Actions (to make myself more comfortable) 4.

Repeat 5. End

I go to one of the bedrooms and close the door. I lie on the bed, facing up, and close my eyes.

Step 1: Acknowledge and Accept I am coming to terms with my surroundings and that I am having an attack. I'm not trying to suppress the attack or pretend it's not happening. I am in the moment,

and I am embracing it. I accept that I am afraid. I am scared. I am stressed. I am overwhelmed. This attack won't kill me, and it won't last forever, but it will happen... It is happening right now... It has to happen. I have to let it happen... Just let it be...

Step 2: Wait There's a part of me that wants to run around like a headless chicken... I will not do that... I will wait. I will count to ten... I will not try to fight this attack...

Step 3: Actions This attack has a soft landing... I am ready for it and I am welcoming it... I am comfortable and safe. I'm belly breathing: a) One hand just above my belt line, and the other on my chest, right over the breastbone. b) Open my mouth and sigh gently, as if someone had just told me something really annoying. Let my shoulders and the

muscles of my upper body relax, down, with the exhale. c) Close my mouth and pause for a few seconds. d) Keep my mouth closed and inhale slowly through my nose by pushing my stomach out. e) Pause. f) Open my mouth. Exhale through my mouth by pulling my belly in. g) Pause. h) Continue with Steps d-g.

Step 4: Repeat I'm not fully calm, so I'm going to start again. I will repeat the previous steps.

Step 5: End

I finally feel like myself again.

I open my eyes and blink a few times.

I stay still for a few seconds, and then I wiggle my fingers and toes.

Okay, I'm fine.

I slowly sit up and take deep breaths.

Derek is here.

He's standing by the door. He knows I don't want to be held while I'm having an attack, because it makes it worse.

Derek: Can I?

I nod and he walks to the bed and sits next to me.

He takes my hand and caresses it.

Derek: Let's go home.

Me: I'm exhausted.

All the Fun Day planning, and Zimkitha's news have left me tired.

He stands and pulls me for a hug. He doesn't squeeze me, he just wraps his arms around me lightly.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I was too overwhelmed. There was no way I was going to avoid that attack.

He plants a kiss on my forehead and takes my hand. He leads the way and we make our way back to the table to say goodbye.

Derek: We'll see you tomorrow.

Nolwazi: Alright, enjoy the rest of your evening.

Derek nods.

Me: Bye, everyone.

Nolwazi stands and gives me a hug. I don't want a hug, but I try not to show it.

They all say goodbye. As we walk away, Dean follows us and walks us to the car.

We stand by the car and Dean wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: Ngizobashaya if they continue stressing you, yezwa?

Me: Argh, you're also a problem in my life, so shut up.

Dean: I'm offended.

Me: I want to go home.

Dean: Will I see you tomorrow?

Me: I don't know. I'll let you know.

Derek: Let's get going. She needs to sleep.

Dean looks at him.

Dean: We'll talk later.

Derek nods and gets in the car.

Dean: Are you sure you'll be fine?

Me: Hai, man. I'm not sick.

I push him off and get in the car.

Me: Bye.

Dean: Shap.

Derek drives off and I sink on my seat and doze off instantly.

Yazi this family is a lot.

I should call Tholi later and check on her, because she also looked like she was going through a lot.

INSERT 260 (Unedited)

The following morning, I really struggle to wake up.

It's not going to be a good day.

I don't want to talk to anyone.

I don't want to smile or laugh.

I want to be miserable and alone.

But, I have a work function to attend. I have to pretend to be chirpy. I have to interact with parents and pretend to be excited.

I just... I'm tired, man. I'm tired of this family. Every time we think everything is cool, something comes up. Now, Liwa's father, whom we thought didn't exist,

turns out to be Nolwazi and Tholi's ex-father-in-law.

Derek walks in with a tray. He places it next to me and walks out.

When I woke up earlier, I told him I'd like to be left alone as much as possible. He agreed and said he loves me.

I don't have any complaints when it comes to him. He continues to love me the way I want to be loved.

I get out of bed and go brush my teeth.

Thereafter, I eat breakfast and sit there for 30 minutes, trying to convince myself to get out of bed and take a shower.

Eventually, I get up and go to the bathroom...

Derek: Ready to go?

I nod.

We make our way out and drive to school... Star is going to be with granny

dearest. I don't have to deal with her today.

When we get to school, these fucken teachers are chilling in their classes instead of setting up on the field and making sure that we're ready. Parents and students are going to start coming in in 2 hours.

I go to one of the classes and find them in there, busy with their phones.

They all stand when I get in.

Me: Really? What happened to team work?

They make excuses about how they were getting a few things from the classrooms...

I leave them there.

Derek bumps into me and sees that I'm evidently pissed.

He tries getting me to talk.

Me: Derek, not now.

I walk past him and go outside.

For the next hour, I'm running around like a headless chicken. I'm panicking now, because it seems like we won't be ready soon.

Ngathi I didn't plan this shit myself.

Do you know what my crazy ass did as soon as those teachers finally came to "help"? I told those bitches to fuck off and go home... and to never come back...

I have no idea where they are now.

I'm overwhelmed, but I'm too busy to pay attention to my anxiety. I have shit to do.

I walk inside the office and bump into Derek again. Where the heck has he been?

So mina I must run around while he disappears? Really?

Derek: Baby-

Just then, Dean, Liwa, Mdu, Malusi, and Joe walk in.

Liwa: Dlamz, what do you need us to do?

Yhu, did I not burst into tears? That's the first time anyone has asked me how they can help!

They all stare at me as I cry.

Derek tries holding me and I push him away.

He must stay away from me!

I eventually stop crying and wipe my face.

Me: Please make sure that every station is set up and that the sound system is ready.

Liwa: On it.

Me: Good morning, by the way.

Liwa gives me a hug before walking out. I hug Malusi and Joe as well before they walk out.

Dean: And then?

Me: Nothing.

Dean: Yoh, sivelelwe yile-depression.

He walks out.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Is the problem with me? Because you seem to be okay with everyone else.

Me: Where have you been? Why am I the only one who is running around trying to get this place ready?

He knows very well that my main love language is Acts of Service, so I need him to be hands on in such moments.

Derek: I was fetching Star. Your mother was complaining about her crankiness.

Me: Since when does my mother struggle with Liyakha's crankiness?

He tries speaking.

Me: Mxm.

I walk out.

Ya, our communication is great, blah blah blah, but I'm highly annoyed right now, and if I stayed there for a second longer, I would have taken it too far.

By the time parents and students arrive, the space is ready and it's as if we were ready from the get go. The sound system

is perfect and the vibe is great. The space is filling up and everyone seems to be in high-spirits.

I'm with Little Star right now, because she's apparently so moody, that my mother can't take it. She's been crying and acting up all morning.

The teachers I technically fired earlier have called me and asked to speak to me. We go to one of the classrooms, and they apologise and make lame excuses for their behaviour.

Me: I'm extremely disappointed. None of you exhibited the traits of a team. We will deal with this on Monday.

Nxa.

Me: Just make sure you stick to your roles till the end of the event. No one is allowed to be in these classes, they should be locked.

I watch as they walk out.

Star starts crying.

Me: Yini kanti?

I sit on a desk and breastfeed her.

Man, I'm really have a bad day. I knew I should have stayed in bed. I am beyond cranky.

I think the best solution is for me to chill here for a while, until my mood improves. I just need some solitude.

My thoughts are interrupted by the door opening.

No.

Buhle peeps in and smiles.

No, I don't need this. Not now, please, Universe.

Buhle: Hey, Ziyanda.

I look at her.

Ziyanda: Hi.

She closes the door and walks in.

No, please go away!

Buhle: Is this your daughter?

Eish.

I nod lightly and look at Star, who seems to be doing better.

Buhle: Derek invited me...

No shit Sherlock.

Me: Hmkay.

She sighs loudly. I focus on Star.

Buhle: I want to ask you something.

I look at her blankly.

Buhle: How lon-

Me: Hold on.

I finish up with Star, and then hold her properly.

Buhle stares at Star and smiles ever so brightly.

Buhle: Can I hold her?

I raise an eyebrow.

She's not serious. She can't be serious.

There's no way Star will even last a second in her arms. She'll be traumatised

by her loud cries and screams, and vow never to have kids...

Me: No, you can't.

Buhle: Oh... I understand.

She steps closer to me and touches Star's cheek. Yoh, she is not going anywhere mos. The Universe is not on my side today. Maybe it's because I decided that it would be a bad day before it even began. Now I'm being tested with all this human interaction.

Buhle: She's really cute.

Me: Thanks.

I take a step back, because I can tell that Star is also not enjoying this interaction. I don't want her to start crying. I won't be able to handle it. I'm also fragile right now.

Buhle chuckles.

Uhlekani? Ngizom'phoxa phela.

Just then, Star starts crying.

I try not to cry too. I hate it when she gets like this, because she overwhelms me. I hate not being able to make her stop crying in such moments.

I guess I understand my mother's frustrations.

I look at Star in defeats as she sobs.

Me: Yini manje?

She cries louder and more intensely.

I try to comfort her.

Me: Star...

Buhle: Uhm, do you need anything?

I shake my head and continue comforting her.

Me: She's just being dramatic.

Her cries continue to intensify. I'm 5 to crying too!

Suddenly, the door opens, and Derek's scent fills the room. I want to cry even more, because I need a hug from him.

Derek: And then?

Me: Uqalile. I don't know what's happening.

Derek chuckles as he walks towards me and takes Star.

He plants kisses on her chubby cheeks.

Derek: Star, what's wrong?

I grunt.

Me: I'm not in the mood for her drama.

Not today.

Derek continues focusing on her.

Derek: Your mother is over you. Stop this.

Star's cries are becoming less intense.

He gently rubs and pats her back. She eventually stops sobbing and the hiccups stop.

Derek: There you go...

He plants kisses all over her face and she giggles.

Mxm. Damn drama queen.

Me: I need some fresh air.

Yoh, nkos' yami.

I walk out of the classroom and go to the bathroom first. I sit there for about five minutes and try to gather my thoughts. Just then, someone walks in.

Derek: Baby.

I groan.

Derek: Baby.

Me: Leave me alone.

Derek: I've given you your space... We have to nip this in the bud.

He stands by my closed door, and I unlock it. He pushes it and looks at me softly.

Derek: Can I come in?

Me: There isn't enough space for the two of us.

Derek: Perfect. He steps in and I make space for him. After a struggle, we manage to close the door.

Derek: "I" statements?

I sulk and nod.

He keeps quiet and waits for me to speak.

Me: I feel frustrated... really really really frustrated.

He nods.

Me: When you disappear, knowing that your presence is needed. I'm frustrated, because I think it means you're not as invested as I am in this event. What I needed was for you step up... and you eventually did after a while...

He nods.

Derek: You sound angry, because I disappeared without informing you. Next time, I will let you know if something else requires my attention and I won't be able to assist you. I will also make sure that I don't leave you stranded. I apologise, baby.

As usual, hearing him acknowledge how his actions have affected me makes me feel much better.

I smile and hug him.

Me: I forgive you. Thank you, baby.

Derek: You rarely call me baby, so this is great.

I giggle and give him a kiss.

Derek: I'd also like to say something.

Me: I'm listening.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: I feel sad and defeated, when you shut me out the way you have been doing today. Every time I tried speaking to you, you attacked me. I didn't like that, because I think it means you want nothing to do with me.

Whoa, okay...

I have to think before I speak. He has just expressed how my actions have made him feel... I can't justify my actions, because that means I'm refusing to acknowledge the result of my actions (despite the intent behind my actions)... Yes, I was cranky and overwhelmed, but I don't

need to mention that right now. I should just absorb his words, reflect on how I contributed to the mess, and what I'll do next time.

Me: Okay... You sound sad, because I haven't been kind to you, and I have been dismissing you. Next time, I will try my best to remain kind even when I don't necessarily want to be around you or anyone. I will not attack you, instead I will politely let you know that I'm not in the right space to communicate. I'm sorry for making you sad. I love you, Star.

He smiles.

Derek: I love you even more.

Me: No, I love you more, silly!

We go back and forth and eventually share a kiss.

I feel lighter.

Derek: Let's go... I have to welcome everyone.

Me: Shap.

When we get to our tent, we find everyone there.

They all look at me carefully.

Me: I'm fine, guys!

They all sigh dramatically and I roll my eyes.

Me: Mxm!

Liwa: Did you see your girlfriend, Mr Principal?

Once again, they make fun of Derek- now even Malusi and Joe are part of the mess.

Gabi: I don't understand why you haven't beaten the bitch! Bitches are sneaky!

I shut them out and take Little Star from Nomvuyo.

Gosh, now they're all debating about how to handle crushes when you're married.

Derek walks away. He has a speech to make.

Malusi needs to shut up, because we all know he failed multiple times to handle crushes. Akafebi akafebi! He must sit this one out.

Their debate is interrupted by Derek. He's on stage. Everyone quietens down.

Derek: I would like to officially welcome you all to our first Fun Day. I trust that you are ready for today's festivities. I would like to reiterate that all the ticket sales are not going in my pocket, as much I would love the extra cash.

He chuckles.

Derek: My wife and I have decided to partner up with a disadvantaged school. All the money we get from our school events, moving forward, will provide resources for that school, and food for the students. Last week, we asked you to nominate one parent in each grade to work hand in hand with us, and ensure

that the money actually does what it's supposed to do. Please check this week's newsletter for more details.

The crowd claps.

Derek: I hope you all have a good time.

Thank you.

The music plays and everyone continues with what they were doing.

Zimkitha is busy preparing her stall, she'll be selling waffles in a stick. She keeps chasing away the kids, telling them that she's not ready yet.

I need to meet up with Niki. We have a lot to catch up on. The bitch is living her best life with Kwanele, going on baecations and shit kanti akazi ukuthi she's going to be joining this family too!

The debate about crushes is still on.

At this point, I've shut them out. I'm genuinely exhausted yazi. I want to sleep.

Just then, we spot Derek walking towards us.

Everyone chuckles when they see that he's with Buhle.

Zimkitha: Don't act weird, please. This girl has an innocent crush!

Gabi: Fuck that shit.

Nolwazi: Eish, I have to agree with Gabi on this one. Some of these women have bad intentions. Surprise, surprise.

They eventually get to us.

Derek looks a tad uncomfortable, and I'm enjoying this.

This is how they made me feel when they said Andile has a crush on me! Payback is a bitch!

Buhle assesses the scene, and everyone assesses her as well.

Zimkitha: Hey, dear. How are you? Buhle clears her throat.

Buhle: I'm well, thanks, Zimkitha. How are you?

Zimkitha: I'm great!

Derek: Buhle, this is my family.

Buhle keeps quiet.

Derek: This is Dean, whom you have met, and Nolwazi, his wife... They got married recently... This is Liwa and his wife, Nomvuyo.

I can see her trying not to stare at Nomvuyo for too long. Lol, that's what always happens when people meet her for the first time.

Derek introduces everyone.

I focus on Star, and when I look up, I find Buhle staring at me.

She seems confused.

Derek: And this is Ziyanda and Little Star... My wife and daughter.

Buhle's face instantly changes.

Hawu, kanti doesn't she know that I'm Ngidi's person? Mos Derek mentioned that he's engaged... right? Didn't she see how Derek was around me and Star? Or was I that cold?

Derek: I thought you managed to infer that Ziyanda is mine...

Nomvuyo: Clearly you need to work on your PDA skills.

Derek looks at me and smiles. I look at him blankly. It is very clear that this poor girl feels blindsided. Her face says it all!

Derek said she would tell her about me!

Derek: So, yes... This is my family...

Dean is shaking his head lightly and chuckling.

This snitch is enjoying this shit. In fact, all of them think it's a joke. Even Tholi seems entertained, with her red ass chubby cheeks.

Liwa: Hi, Buhle. We saw each other earlier, remember?

Buhle clears her throat and tries to smile. Yoh, the awkwardness is out of this world!

Buhle: Yes, we did...

Derek: Baby, I was just telling Buhle that you like the idea of opening a home for abused wives and children.

Me: I love it.

She looks at me.

Me: I think it's brilliant.

I'm sure talking about her project will loosen her up.

She clears her throat.

Buhle: I'm glad you like it.

Nomvuyo: Great! So, you're all going to work together! Ziyanda will be a great addition to your little tag team!

Liwa: I'd also love to be invol-

Nomvuyo: Liwa, I'd like a wors roll,
please.

Liwa grunts as he stands and walks away.
Yoh, nanguNomvuyo with her nasty
attitude.

Buhle: It's nice to meet you all. She walks
away quickly.

There's a long silence.

Tholi: That was awkward!

Me: No shit, Sherlock.

I look at them as they continue with their
conversations as if nothing happened.

Me: You are such a mean bunch.

Liwa: Is this the part where you
mysteriously feel sorry for a stranger and
then drag us into it?

Mdu: And try to make us feel bad?

Nomvuyo: And throw a pity party?

Dean: Or try to befriend them, because
you're weak?

Me: Wow!

I look at Derek.

Me: She seemed surprised that I'm your "wife."

Derek shrugs.

Me: Gosh... Take your child...

He takes Star and I walk off.

I have finally realised who Buhle reminds me of... Tholi... I've mentioned that there's something child-like about her, right? Yep, that's the Tholi factor. All innocent-looking and shit.

I walk into the building and check the bathrooms first. Akekho.

I walk around and reach my classroom. Sure enough, she's there. She's on the phone.

I stand there, until she turns and sees me. She looks at me in shock. She looks like she's on the verge of tears.

Buhle: Uhm... Ziyanda. I close the door and take a few steps towards her.

She steps back.

Bathong, is she scared of me? What is she expecting me to do? Beat her up?

What a joke, madahling.

I stare at her.

Me: Is this the part where I come to you
“woman to woman?”

She tries speaking, but ends up stepping back once I get close to her.

I try not to laugh. I find it funny that she keeps stepping back as if I’m planning on doing something. Doesn’t she know that I’m not that person anymore? Growth is a real thing in my life, you know?

But ke, let me have some fun.

Me: No one will hear us fight. We may as well beat each other up, and get it over and done with. Phela you’re coming for what’s mine.

She looks around the class. Lol, is she trying to find a weapon?

Me: I've been told that I'm an irrational person when I'm too passionate, whether the passion is positive or negative...

She stares at me.

Me: But, I've also been told that there are times when my reactions don't make sense... especially if I react differently to what is expected.

I try to pull a straight face and not laugh. This is very ridiculous. And even if I did want a fight... Why in the world would I pick it with her? It is very clear that she has never gotten into a fight in her life.

That would be bullying, and I'm no bully. I fight people that say things with their chests.

And like I said, she gives me Tholi vibes. There's no way I'd put my hands on cute Tholi. In fact, there's no way I'd put my hands on anyone, unless the case is extreme.

Me: You seem to have taken a liking to Derek.

She looks down.

Buhle: I... She huffs in defeat.

Me: Who wouldn't like him? He's a sweet guy.

She looks at me in confusion.

Me: A stupid, but cute and sweet nerd, right?

She must think I'm crazy. Lol.

Me: We don't have to have this conversation... do we?

Sarcasm alert.

Buhle: No.

Me: I don't have to tell you to watch yourself?

Buhle: You don't.

Clearly it's missed.

I look at her softly.

Me: Good.

Buhle: I didn't, and still don't, mean any harm. I apologise.

I nod lightly.

She's taking my words too literally.

Me: I'd hate to deprive women and children of a new home...

Buhle groans.

There goes my sarcasm. I hope she doesn't take that comment too personally.

Buhle: You... knew all this time?

Me: About your crush? Of course. Even our receptionist warned me about you.

She sighs.

She's defeated.

Me: Like I said, I'm a recovering drama queen. I'm also a recovering petty person.

I may have relapsed via the lunch thing with Dean. I allowed that to happen.

She keeps quiet.

She's processing.

Me: We won't have this conversation again, yes?

Buhle: Yes.

Me: Good. In case you haven't noticed, there are a lot of stray dogs around here, ready to attack on my behalf.

She is confused.

She is lost.

Me: So, now that the official introductions have taken place, do you mind telling me about your project? I'm intrigued.

Surely, this is an olive branch? Poor soul looks shook.

She clears her throat.

Buhle: Let me go to the bathroom first...

I shrug and sit on the desk.

Me: Hmkay.

Buhle walks out.

Derek's handsomeness is putting me in difficult situations yazi... Had I been with umubiza ngabe ayikho yonke lento.

INSERT 261

Derek and I are finally in bed, after a long hot day.

Me: Star, awusho, why didn't you tell Buhle about me? Jokes aside. He grunts.

Derek: How was I supposed to know that she's slow? Adults are supposed to have common sense.

Me: Did you see how shook she was? He shrugs nonchalantly.

Me: I spoke to her and she was legit terrified. Am I really that scary?

Derek: You have your moments.

I punch him lightly and he chuckles.

Derek: I'm going to cancel this whole thing and do my own thing.

Me: Huh?

Derek: I have a strange feeling about her.

Me: Dramatic much?

Derek: Dean is right. It's never a good idea to work with someone who likes you.

I laugh for a good minute.

Me: What about me? Didn't we work together? Also, Dean said that? The one who was probably pounding Nolwazi in his office?

Derek: You can't compare our situation with this one.

Me: Why not?

Derek: We both had feelings for each other. This shit right here wasn't one sided.

Me: Bhuti, ngathi you're forgetting that you had a crush on me first, and I wanted nothing to do with you!

Derek: I don't know what you're talking about.

Me: Derek, you annoyed me for weeks! I had to block you!

Derek: But all of that changed once you met up with me in person. Do you want me to remind you how dizzy you got as soon as you sat opposite me and refused to take off your sunglasses, because I was mesmerising.

Me: Wowww!

He laughs as he continues making fun of me.

Heyi, thinking back, I was very taken aback by Derek's charm that day.

Derek: And then the you saw me at work... Remember how stiff you became?

Me: Argh.

Derek: Don't ever come for me. I have the receipts.

Me: Argh, whatever.

He looks at me more seriously.

Derek: The point I'm trying to make is that we both wanted each other. I don't want Buhle, but she obviously wants me.

Even after she found out about my relationship status, she would still breathe my name heavily and act all giddy. I don't like that shit.

I sigh.

Derek: Baby, you don't have to pretend to be okay with this. I genuinely don't mind distancing myself from her. I don't think we'll work well together.

Me: I'm really okay with her. Derek, after the Busi thing, you really proved yourself to me. I no longer stress myself about my position in your life. You continuously choose me, so a little crush isn't going to send me to the mountains, crying. I feel secured, and I know you can handle working with Buhle.

Derek: Then you mustn't complain when I become cold.

Me: None of that is necessary. You two are working on something that will change

people's lives. The cause is bigger than this little crush she has. Focus on what's important.

Derek: I'd like you to be more involved.

Me: I'd love to... Tell me more about it...

He smiles as he begins telling me about the project.

I'm going to keep a close eye on Buhle.

Yes, her lil crush is cute and innocent, but I'll definitely be watching her. Petty is always ready to drag someone, both figuratively and literally.

The following day, I get a call from Zimkitha.

Me: Zimi.

Zimkitha: Hello, sthandwa sami. How are you?

Me: I'm good, and you?

Zimkitha: I'm great. I was just checking in.

Me: We're just resting.

Zimkitha: Kanti when are you going to start planning the wedding?

Me: I'm still thinking about what I want... I don't know, I'm going with the flow.

Zimkitha: Hai, Ziyanda. A wedding is not something you can put together in a month.

Me: I'll make it work. You must remember that it will be extremely intimate, so I'm not planning for a crowd.

Zimkitha: Either way, you need to get to work. You also need to tell everyone about it. I don't understand why you're so secretive.

I sigh.

Me: Hmkay.

Zimkitha: So I'd like you to come over for lunch.

Me: Hmm. What are you up to?

Zimkitha: Nothing, I just want you to meet Bheki.

Me: What?!

She laughs.

Zimkitha: I want you to meet him.

Me: Zimkitha!

Zimkitha: Zizi, just be here at 2pm.

Me: Should I come with Der-

Zimkitha: No! Just you!

Me: Why?

Zimkitha: Those boys can be dramatic. I don't need their drama today.

Me: Heeh!

We laugh.

Me: Alright then, I'll see you later.

Zimkitha: Shap. Love you.

Me: Love you too.

I end the call.

Derek: She wants you to meet her man?

I nod.

Derek: I'm not invited?

Me: Nope.

Derek: Good.

Me: Tjo.

Derek: I don't think I'm in the mood to see the man that has sex with Zimkitha.

Me: Nkanyezi!

He grunts and continues watching TV.

Me: I'm actually excited! What should I ask him??

Derek: Why he allowed Zimkitha to continue living with her abusive parents, knowing that he could take care of her.

Whoa.

Derek: Why he chose Thenjiwe over Zimkitha.

Just like that? Ngaswaba same time.

Derek: Need more questions?

I look at him in shock.

He increases the volume and I know that's my cue to either shut up or leave. I choose to leave, because I'm not about to interact with Mr Grumpy.

By the time I get to the Mzinyathi castle, I am beyond nervous.

Derek made me realise that there's actually a lot that needs to be examined with this situation. How is Liwa okay with this? When did he find out?

I make my way to the porch and find a man there...

This is definitely him.

Why was I expecting an ancient man with wrinkly hands?

This man looks good for his age.

He looks at me and smiles.

What do I call him?

Bheki? Bab'Bheki? Bab'Buthelezi?

Bab'Bae?

Bheki: Ziyanda?

I suddenly can't speak! What do I call him?

He stands and puts out his hand.

Me: Sawu-

Just then, Zimkitha walks out and I sigh in relief.

Zimkitha: Zizi. Hey, baby.

She gives me a hug.

She looks at me and then at Bheki.

Zimkitha: Have you introduced yourself?

Bheki: I was about to...

Hai nina! These people are in love!

I just... I don't know how to respond to this... Zimi has always been... Zimi, you know?

Zimkitha: Zizi, this is Bheki... We have a rich history...

She looks at him and smiles mischievously.

Zimkitha: Bheki, this is Ziyanda. My other daughter.

Bheki nods and puts out his hand again.

He looks at me and smiles warmly.

Bheki: I've heard a lot about you, Ziyanda. It's nice to finally meet you.

I automatically put out my hand.

Me: It's nice to meet you too... I recently found out about your presence.

He chuckles as we shake hands.

Bheki: So I've been told.

He is very soft spoken. Akaphaphi.

I don't know why I find myself comparing him to my father. My father is also soft spoken. He has a lot to say, but he's not out there, unless he's really comfortable around you.

Me: Uhm, so what should I call you?

Bheki and Zimkitha laugh.

Zimkitha: Call him whatever you want.

Bab'Bae.

Me: Bab'Bheki or Bab'Bu-

Zimkitha: Haibo, that's too formal. Bheki is fine.

Me: Alright then.

Zimkitha: We'll have lunch inside. The weather is a bit shady. She takes my hand and then takes Bheki's hand.

Zimkitha: I'm famished!

Ya neh... I guess this is a real thing. I'm not dreaming. Zimkitha is openly in love!

Me: Where's Vuvu and Liwa?

Zimkitha: They're spending the weekend at the other house with the kids.

Me: So you have this mansion to yourself?

Zimkitha: Not really.

Yoh, she looks at Bheki.

Weird enough, the thought of Zimi having sex is not too gross. She definitely looks like a freak. I mean, she's always been open about her hoe phase!

We're now eating and chatting. I like Bab'Bae. He's chilled. I think more than anything, I like the way he looks at Zimi. They also have these moments where

they stare at each other and smile for a few seconds. Very cute.

Me: So, are you divorced, Bheki?

Bheki: Yes.

Me: Apparently your ex wife is crazy.

That's out of my mouth before I can even stop myself.

Zimkitha laughs.

Bheki: She is insane.

Me: Then why did you choose her over Zimkitha? Zimi is not crazy.

Me and my big ass mouth!

There's silence.

Shit.

Bheki sighs and looks at me seriously.

Bheki: I was told to prepare myself for your inquisitiveness.

Me: Am I offending you?

Bheki: Not at all.

I sigh in relief.

Bheki: Our lives have been complicated for many years.

Me: If you loved Zimi, and you loved her when you guys were still young, then how come you're only reconnecting after all these years? Why wasn't she your first choice?

At this point, I'm unstoppable.

Bheki: That's a mouthful...

He sighs.

Bheki: We weren't allowed to be together. Her parents resented me. We were forced to separate.

Me: You didn't fight for her?

Bheki: You have to understand that things were different back then. As children, we were not allowed to go against our parents... This rule followed us even when we were adults. Our families took control of our lives, and because we didn't know any better, we had no choice but to

allow them to. This was the culture back then. Parents had power over us. None of us even attempted to go against them... None of us had the courage to go against them.

Me: So you were also forced to marry Thenjiwe?

He nods.

Bheki: My path was set in stone. Till this day, I don't know what the arrangement was with Thenjiwe's family. All I know is that I had no choice but to marry her. Her family seemed to have more power than my family.

Me: So... Liwa and Princess... Did you and Zimi have an affair?

Bheki: Zimkitha has always been the love of my life.

Me: You just couldn't be together.

He nods.

Bheki: You young people look at us now and think we are weaklings, but you have no idea how harsh our living conditions were back then. We were basically commodities. Our parents gave birth to us and then sold us off as if we were packets of sweets. We were powerless. There was no such thing as “rights.” It’s so easy for you to look down on us, and say we’re weak...

Zimkitha: Times have obviously changed, but we’re still unlearning everything we were taught by our parents. You all expect us to switch up and adapt immediately to how things are now, but it’s very difficult. We come from a different generation.

Me: I understand...

Bheki: We were very oppressed.

Zimkitha’s parents married her off, because they were going to benefit from Luvuyo’s family. My family married me

off, because they were going to benefit from Thenjiwe's family.

Zimkitha: I still maintain that they were worried that their bitter daughter wasn't going to find a husband by herself.

I chuckle.

Me: So...

I look at Bheki.

Me: How did you feel about not being there for Liwa and Princess?

Bheki: I was there... They just didn't know me as their father.

Me: Really??

He nods.

Bheki: Obviously I didn't have quality time with them... I regret that...

I nod.

Me: And how did you... uhm... process the abuse Zimkitha experienced at the hands of Zweli?

Zimkitha: Let's finish up. The dessert is read-

Bheki: Zweli?

He looks at Zimkitha questioningly.

What's happening?

Bheki: Zweli abused you?

Whoa!

Zimkitha sighs.

Zimkitha: I'd rather we talk about that later, please.

She looks at him pleadingly.

Haibo, so he doesn't know?

Bheki nods and then looks at me.

Bheki: How is Derek doing? Has he processed the news?

Oh okay. So he knows that Zimi is their mother...

Me: He's gradually coming to terms with it.

He nods and smiles knowingly.

Bheki: And Dean?

Me: He hates your son's guts.

Bheki: I've been informed...

Me: How is Kwanele?

He smiles warmly.

Bheki: He's doing really great. Your friend has managed to loosen him up. He is in a good space.

Now I legit miss Niki.

Bheki: I'm hoping he'll marry her.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Bheki: I've never seen him this happy.

He's been through a lot...

He sighs.

Bheki: I failed him as a father... I contributed to his life falling apart.

Zimkitha: At least he's finally finding his voice... We can't keep holding on to the past. We need to start living in the now. They look at each other again.

I guess I like Bheki.

Yes, I like him. I fully support this relationship. They're adorable!

When I arrive home, I find Andile in the lounge.

Me: And then?

Andile: Hello to you too.

Me: Is everything okay?

Andile: Ya, Derek and I have some work to do.

Me: Oh okay...

I smile and open up my arms.

Me: Hello.

He stands and we share a hug.

Andile: Hey.

He sits and Derek walks to the lounge.

Me: Hey, Star.

Derek plants a kiss on my cheek and sits next to Andile.

Me: Aren't you going to ask me how my lunch with your stepfather went?

He looks at me sharply.

Me: Ohho.

As I turn around, something in my brain clicks. I turn again and look at Andile.

Andile: And then?

I smile mischievously.

They both stare at me.

Andile: No, Ziyanda.

Me: Please?

Andile: No.

Me: Andile, come on! It will be better this time.

Andile: No.

With that said, he takes his laptop and focuses on it.

Me: Just trust me.

He ignores me.

Derek: Baby, we have work to do.

Me: Hmkay.

I walk away and go to the bedroom...

He just needs to trust me, that's all!

INSERT 262 (Unedited)

Me: Star.

He looks up from his food.

Me: You good?

He nods and focuses on his food again.

I've had to be very patient with him, because I understand what he's been through. Too many secrets were revealed back to back, and he has moments where you can clearly see that he's battling with everything. It hasn't been easy supporting him.

However, he still has that spark in his eyes when he's around me, and that's all the motivation I need to continue being strong for him. I appreciate how in his time of need, he knows without a doubt that he can count on me.

Me: Star.

He looks up again.

Me: Bheki isn't a bad person...

He doesn't say anything.

Me: I've never seen Zimkitha this happy.

Derek: I told you I don't want to discuss this.

I nod lightly.

Derek: I'm processing it.

Me: What exactly are you processing?

Derek: That Liwa's father is not a rapist and mine is.

Yoh, I immediately keep quiet and finish my food.

Yabona ke, I'm not going to delve into this issue with him. It needs Melinda.

Me: Do you need space?

He nods.

Me: Okay.

I stand and walk towards him.

Me: Can I get a hug before I leave you?

He stands and I wrap my arms around his waist.

Me: I love you. He buries his head on my neck for the longest time. I hold him tightly and we continue standing there for a while.

He eventually puts his head up and looks at me. Shame, man, he's sad.

Derek: I want to get over this phase.

Me: Allow yourself to go through the pain that comes with each difficult situation.

That's the only way you get over it. You can't push it away or run from it, because that only makes it worse. Just feel the pain... Bask in it until you feel like you have gathered enough strength to truly move on from the situation. No one is timing you or expecting you to heal instantly. Go through your pain.

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Me: I'll be in the bedroom watching Married to Medicine.

He nods lightly and we share kiss.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

We let go of each other and I take my plate and go to the bedroom. My mother is still gallivanting the streets with Little Star. I get to the bathroom and chill there, hoping that Star will come up soon so I can squeeze him for the rest of the night.

As for the Zimkitha issue, I'm going to put it on pause. I was planning on telling Dean and Derek about our lunch and giving them new insight on Bheki. However, I don't want to annoy them. When the time is right, I'll do the things.

A couple of days have passed, and Star is feeling much better.

We are in his (soon to be mine) office, working. I'm busy checking the teachers' lesson plans, and Derek is doing his own thing. I must say that as much as I enjoy my personal space, I do love these moments with Star. We sit silently and do our work without bothering each other. We both have the same working styles, we love silence- complete silence.

Derek clears his throat and I look at him.

Derek: Have I told you you look stunning today?

Me: No, not at all, Mr Fiance.

Derek: You look stunning!

We laugh as we reminisce about Xolani, who is living his best life overseas. People are travelling and flourishing, I tell you. He got out of rehab, and went on his Eat Pray and Love journey. I once attempted that shit, and it caused more chaos than peace!

Derek: We should get going. Our meeting is in 30 minutes.

Me: Shap. Give me 5 minutes.

Derek: Okay.

We're meeting up with Buhle this afternoon. Derek told me all about the project and now I have ideas for how they can spice things up and make it better.

Andile walks in. He's been out the whole morning.

Me: Hiiii!

Andile: You're on timeout.

He's been ignoring me since I told him about my plans to hook him up with someone.

Derek: We'll see you tomorrow. I doubt we'll come back after our meeting.

Andile: YOU can come back. SHE mustn't.

Me: Boooo!

Derek chuckles.

Me: Should I call the nywembulance?

Andile grunts as I pack up and continue making fun of him.

Derek: Trust me, she's not your type, Andile.

Me: Derek!!!!

Derek: Hai. I don't think Andile will like her.

Me: Shut up! No one needs your little opinion!

Derek laughs and walks out. I look at Andile.

Me: See you tomorrow. He continues ignoring me.

Me: Love you too!

I walk out and follow Derek. He is going to get a piece of my mind! Bloody sellout!

We watch as Buhle makes her way inside the restaurant.

Me: Don't be mean.

Derek: Hmkay.

She finally gets to us.

She stares at Derek for the longest time before looking at me.

Buhle: Good afternoon.

Derek smiles and stands.

Fake smile.

Derek: Hi.

He opens up his arms and they share a hug.

Buhle is holding on for dear life...

Derek: How are you?

Buhle: I'm good, and you?

Derek: I'm good, thanks.

She looks at me and I smile lightly.

Me: Hey.

Buhle: Hey, Ziyanda.

I move my bag from the chair, and she sits.

Buhle: Is Zimkitha still joining us? Derek shakes his head.

Derek: She's not feeling well.

Lol, more like she's in Loveville and she has no time for us.

Buhle: Oh, alright. I hope she gets better.

Derek nods lightly.

Derek: So, you really didn't realise that Zi is my person?

Lol.

She smiles and shakes her head.

Derek: Hmm.

He looks at me.

Derek: Does that say something about my displays of affection?

Me: Derek, awume kancane. We have important things to discuss.

He's trying to make Buhle uncomfortable, but he's doing it in a slick way. Outchea smiling and being extra nice.

I look at Buhle.

Me: What inspired you to start your NGO?

Buhle sighs.

Buhle: When I started as a journalist, I covered a lot of abuse stories: women getting killed by their husbands and boyfriends, children being molested... It was too much... I knew I had to do something else besides covering these stories, something tangible.

I nod slowly.

Me: So, you're a journalist?

Buhle: Yes.

Me: That's amazing. How do you help them psychologically, because I'm sure they suffer from PTSD.

Buhle: I've partnered up with a few psychiatrists.

Me: Wow, that's really great, Buhle. Well done.

She stares at me in confusion.

Does she still think I want to beat her up?

Me: I've personally experienced abuse, and I'm fortunate to have had people in

my corner from the get go. I think what you're doing is admirable. I love that you're not just focusing on women, but children too. Childhood trauma can ruin one's adulthood, so if it's dealt with accordingly, the child has the opportunity to become a sane adult.

Buhle: Definitely. That's why my life revolves around this NGO.

Me: How do you balance your personal life and this?

Buhle: It's a struggle. My friends always complain.

Derek: You get too involved with work?

Buhle nods.

Me: It's important to find that balance though... You can't fill up other people's cups while yours is running dry.

Derek coughs a few times.

Argh... I'm sure he wants to point out the irony, since I love filling up other people's cups.

Me: Anyway, what's the way forward?

Derek didn't really give me the full details.

Buhle: We don't have the full details yet.

I nod.

Me: I'd rather listen to what you have in mind first, before I bulldoze you with my ideas. I tend to get too passionate.

She smiles.

Buhle: I don't mind, really. If it's going to benefit other people, then I'm all for it.

Derek: We are thinking of opening a space for the women and children Buhle encounters.

Me: What kind of space? A home? A clinic? A mental health facility? Buhle sighs.

Buhle: Most of them depend on these men for everything. I would like it to be a shelter.

I nod lightly.

You can see that she means well.

Me: Well, I'm all about mental health, so I have spoken to someone I know, a psychiatrist that has her own practice. She's willing to collaborate, and bring in her people. They deal with every problem in the book: anxiety and depression, eating disorders, addictions, post-traumatic disorder. She's willing to do all of this free of charge.

Buhle: Wait, are you serious??

I nod.

Derek: Is this Melinda?

Me: Yep.

Derek caresses my thigh under the table. I didn't tell him about this, I wanted to surprise him, to show him that I'm really excited about this great initiative.

Buhle: Oh my goodness! You have no idea how stressed I've been. The group of

professionals I'm working with have been slacking a bit. I've been cracking my skull, trying to find a way...

Me: And as much as I think working with the police is good, I also think you need to collaborate with private security companies as well.

I look at Derek.

Me: They might come at a price though...

Derek: That's fine.

I nod and look at Buhle.

Me: I really like your initiative...

Buhle: You have no idea how much this means to me. I'm grateful for your interest.

Me: Star, I was also thinking that the children can enrol at your school-

Derek: Our school. I grunt and look at Buhle.

Me: We can ensure that they receive good quality education.

Buhle tries to keep in the tears, but fails
dismally. Aww!

Derek: I didn't even think of that.

We watch as she wipes her tears.

Buhle: Shuu, I was never ready for this.

We all chuckle.

Derek: Please excuse me...

He looks at me.

Derek: I need to call Andile. I'll be back
shortly.

Ziyanda: Andile, neh...

Derek: Hai, don't start...

I chuckle as he stands and walks away.

Buhle: Ziyanda, thank you. I'm really
excited about this.

I nod.

Me: Me too.

Buhle drinks her coffee happily and
finally relaxes...

I look at her coolly and drink my water.

Now I'm convinced that Andile will like

her. She's sweet, and has built a good life for herself.

I have briefed Andile about Buhle, because today is the day! He is finally going to meet her! I've been telling him about her for a few days now.

We're looking at different properties today, and Derek has invited Andile, because he's an expert when it comes to this department. He has a diploma in Property Development and Management. Derek and Andile had to leave me at school, because I had a meeting with a parent, but I'll be joining them as soon as I'm done here...

My Uber finally drops me off. I see them standing a few metres away, and I walk towards them. Ziyanda: Hello everyone.

Derek pulls me and gives me a kiss. Okay, someone is in an affectionate mood.

I look at Buhle and smile.

Me: How are you?

Buhle: Good, and you?

Me: I'm okay.

I then look at Andile and grin.

Me: This is Buhle.

Andile: Derek has already done the introductions.

Me: Hmkay.

I need to find out what he thinks about her!

Derek: Let's get going.

He looks at Buhle.

Derek: Buhle, I can give you a lift.

Lift? What lift?

Buhle: Thank you, I'd appreciate that.

I notice that there are only two cars, Derek's and Andile's. That means she

didn't bring her car... This is the perfect opportunity for Andile to bond with her!

Me: The baby seat might make you uncomfortable. I think you should go with Andile. Derek chuckles.

Andile: Let's go...

Andile starts walking and Buhle follows him. Aww, look at them!

Derek takes my hand and we walk to the car.

Derek: Ziyanda Dlamini, you never cease to amaze me...

Me: Zip it, you sellout!

I haven't forgive him for trying to sabotage my mission.

We finally get to the first property.

Derek: What do you think?

Buhle: I don't like the location.

We make our way inside and the agent shows us around.

Andile: This might take up more money.
This building is too damaged.

Derek nods lightly and looks at me.

Derek: Baby, what do you think?

Me: I agree with Buhle. I also think the area is shady. I'm pretty sure there are drug dealers around here.

Derek chuckles and nods.

Me: I told you we should go to Soweto.
Soweto is very central and safe, contrary to popular belief.

Buhle: Soweto?

I look at her seriously.

Is she coming for what's mine?

Me: Is there a problem with Soweto?

Buhle: No, not at all... I just didn't think about it...

Me: Hmkay.

We continue walking around.

Andile and I are walking side by side. I slip my arm through his. Derek and Buhle are on the other side.

Me: Sooo?

Andile: I don't like her.

Me: For fuck's sake, Andile, kanti ufunani??

I'm so touched! Why doesn't he like her? Why doesn't he at least try?!

Andile: I don't know if you're aware, but this woman likes Derek... a lot...

Me: You managed to gauge that in 20 minutes?

He's annoying me.

Andile: She was acting all weird in the car, asking me about him... and how long you guys have been together. Too many questions...

Me: Excuse me?

I let go of his arm.

Andile: Ziyanda, I know someone who's in love, and this girl is definitely in love with Derek.

He looks at me seriously.

Andile: Watch out for her.

He walks away and leaves me there...

Petty slowly stands and gets ready to take out her boxing gloves, and I quickly silence her.

I take a deep breath and shake my head lightly.

I need to focus.

We spent the rest of the afternoon checking out different properties.

Derek: I think we should take a few days just to think about the properties we like, and each decide on our top 2.

Buhle: Seeing as you have done so much already, I'd like to invite you for lunch or dinner at my place.

I swear I have to blink a few times...

Derek: Uh, sure... I'll let you know when Zi and I can come.

She looks at him. Is that disappointment in her eyes? Am I seeing properly?

Buhle: Alright.

Me: Include Andile in your plans. He is very skilled when it comes to such, we will need his input.

Buhle: Sure...

Me: Great, have a good day further.

Buhle: Okay, bye.

Andile: Do you need a lift?

Buhle: No, thanks. I'll take an Uber.

Andile nods and looks at Derek and I.

Andile: See you tomorrow.

Me: Shap.

Andile walks off.

Buhle: Thank you for today. I will see you soon.

Derek: Bye, have a good day further.

Buhle: Bye, Ziyanda.

Ziyanda: Bye.

She requests her Uber and gets in the car.

Derek looks at me concernedly.

Me: What?

Derek: Easy, tiger.

Me: Mxm.

Derek: What's happening? Your mood did a 180.

Me: Just annoyed.

Derek: I'm cancelling this shit.

Me: Derek, no... This is a big project.

Derek: We don't need her. You know this.

I shake my head and sigh in defeat.

Lol, have I been underestimating this crush situation? Have I been downplaying it?

Petty nods and crosses her arms, but the rational part of me silences her quickly.

Chile, this is a sticky situation mos.

Derek: Let's go.

We make our way to the car.

Derek: How about you drive?

Before I can even protest, he is already going to the passenger's side.

Me: Arghhh.

We get in the car and his phone instantly beeps.

As I'm about to start the car, he puts his phone close to my face.

Derek: Bheka.

He gives me his phone and I read the message.

"Hi, Derek. Thank you so much for today. I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate your help. I always look forward to meeting with you, because you're so knowledgeable, and I learn a lot from you. As stated earlier, I'd like to invite you over for lunch. Let me know when you can come and if you have any

allergies... Looking forward to seeing you!
-Buhle.”

I read this message again.

Heyi man, I read it one more time, just to
be sure.

I give Derek's his phone.

Me: And you expect me to drive?

I get out and he also gets out and we
switch places.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Minute.

He nods and keeps quiet. He starts the car
and drives off...

Is a bitch being tested right now?

Is this the part where I take my micellar
water and remove the clown makeup?

Hehe ngiyavivinywa!

And as if that was not enough, that
weekend showed me flames!

Derek shakes me lightly.

Me: Hmm.

Derek: Vuka.

I open my eyes and look at him angrily.

Me: I don't want your dick right now,
Derek.

Derek: Buhle just called me now.

Me: Huh?

I'm not hearing him properly.

He repeats himself.

Derek: Buhle called me. She sounded
drunk.

I immediately sit up and switch on my
side lamp. I look at the time. It's 3am.

Me: What??

Derek: She said it was a mistake. She was
drunk.

I get out of bed and put on my slippers. I
start walking around, looking for my
gown.

Derek stands.

Derek: Zi?

Me: Where does she live? Ngifuna ukumnyisa, akhohlwe negama lakhe.

Derek: Baby, cal-

Me: I'm a clown neh? So being nice has made this bitch think I'm a clown?

Ngiyadlala mina, ngiyi-comedian?!

I continue venting.

I'm drowsy and angry.

Derek manages to calm me down.

Derek: I'll talk to her. Trust me.

Me: I trust you. It's that air-head-no-brain-long-stiff-necked-ass-bitch that is proving to be untrustworthy!

Heyiii! I want to see her now!

Derek: Ziyanda.

He holds me.

Derek: I'll deal with it.

Me: You bet you will!

I take a few breaths and calm down again.

Me: I'm triggered. I'm triggered!

Derek: Ziyanda, I will deal with it.

I look at him.

Derek: I won't have you fetching women on my behalf. It's not a good look for you. I will handle it, trust me.

He calms me down and we get back in bed.

Sizosinda les'febe sama orphanage. Had I been with an equally ghetto man right now, we would be knocking on that bitch's door this instant, and he'd watch me beat some ass! She would really know what PTSD is!

She must thank the universe that I managed to upgrade and get myself a man that considers my image, because the way I'm feeling right now? My image is the last thing on my mind.

INSERT 263

I haven't slept one bit.

It's now 7am, and my heart has been beating fast since Derek woke me up at 3am to tell me that a certain heffer had THE AUDACITY to drunk dial him!

Derek: Baby.

Me: Derek, awume kancane ngabo baby. Go fetch that dumb bitch.

Derek: It's 7am.

Mxm.

I get out of bed and go to my mother's room. She's fast asleep and Star is already up and kicking. Somehow, when she's with my mother, she never bothers her if she wakes up. With me, she usually cries to let me know that she's up.

Lol, my mother has secretly informed me that she quite enjoys being with Derek and I. She says she's never seen us this peaceful, so every time we invite her over, she has no problem with coming through.

Unfortunately, her husband has requested that she come back, as he misses her. Now she is going back home.

As I take Little Star carefully, my mother opens her eyes.

Mom: You're disturbing my sleep!

Me: Askies!

She rubs her eyes and looks at me.

Mom: Why are you up so early?

Me: I couldn't sleep.

Mom: Eish, don't tell me you two are fighting.

Me: No, not at all.

Mom: Then what's wrong? Having another episode?

I get in bed and sit close to her.

I begin telling her about this Buhle situation from the beginning.

Once I'm done, she sighs.

Mom: Derek will handle her.

Me: I will also handle her.

Mom: Haibo, Ziyanda, are you thinking of doing something to this girl? Sisi, I've been through enough trauma caused by your old ways.

She chuckles.

Mom: At least you have a man who's willing to let the world know he loves you. I know my son will do the right thing. Just don't make a fool of yourself.

Me: Hai mama, she can't disrespect me and get away with it.

Mom: I'm not going to encourage you to fight.

Me: Just one slap will suffice.

Mom: Ziyanda.

I sighs heavily and kiss Star.

Me: Her sleeping patterns are improving.

Mom: She sleeps better when I'm around.

Me: Haike, gogo.

She laughs.

Me: I was thinking...

Mom: Yes?

Me: Now that Derek and I are in a better space, and the wedding will be soon, I think I'm ready for Lwazi to come live with us.

Mom: I was actually going to discuss this with you. She's been nagging me about it.

Me: Really?

Mom: She wants to be with you. I also want you to take her, because I can't take her drama. The moods have started, and the complaining is too much. You have to take her.

I laugh.

Me: Let's find out what Derek thinks.

Mom: Great. Let me take a bath first.

Me: Okay.

I get out of bed and walk out with Little Star.

When I get to the bedroom, I find Derek making the bed. Little Star mumbles

excitedly and he takes her from me and showers her with kisses. I finish up making the bed.

Derek: I have decided that Zimkitha will handle this project, moving forward.

I try speaking, but he looks at me sharply.

Derek: This is non-negotiable. We are distancing ourselves from this woman.

Me: I wasn't going to disagree.

Derek: Oh.

Me: I think that's a good idea. I just don't want you to cancel the entire project, because she's a horny skank.

Derek: Like I said, Zimkitha will deal with her.

Me: Good.

Derek: Are you feeling better?

Me: A little bit. I just get angry when I think about it.

Derek: We haven't have sex in a few days...

Me: What does that have to do with Buhle
pissing me off?

Derek: I'm just saying... We have a lot of
pent-up frustrations.

Me: Yazi, I don't have time for this...

Deep down, my ass knows that I'm a
horny mess. I just don't like having sex
when my mother's around.

Derek: We haven't taken a shower
together in a week.

Me: Derek, you're disgusting.

Derek: Come on, nana, you don't wanna
miss this one.

He laughs as he continues making fun of
me.

Me: My mom is leaving today. We can
have all the sex we desire once she has
left.

Derek: Alright then... I'll take a bath with
my daughter, since you're not interested.

He walks to the bathroom and leaves me alone.

I sit on the bed and take his phone.

I read Buhle's message again and all the anger I managed to store away resurfaces.

I dial Niki's number and she answers after a while.

Me: Niki!

Niki: Hiii!

Before she can even tell me about her adventures with Kwanele, I tell her about my dilemma.

Niki: WHAT?!

Me: I'm fuming!

Niki: Cancel that shit! Cancel that stupid project!

Me: But the projec-

Niki: Heyi! Heyi! Heyi! Cancel that nonsense! She obviously doesn't care about it. Stop that shit. She must go find

someone else to sponsor her old age home!

Me: Niki, it's not an old age-

Niki: I don't care if she's catering for hobos, prostitutes or the president! She must be slapped, dragged and then thrown away!

I grunt.

Niki: Futsek maan! So she was scouting for a man, and Derek seemed like a good one, because your dumb ass was entertaining her! Ziyanda, when will you learn?! These desperate-no-good-horny-blood-sucking-heffers have no problem with getting their hands dirty!

Me: I don't need you to shout at me right now!

Niki: Deal with that bitch! Make sure she stays very far from you and Derek! Fustek maan! Ukujwayela amasimba!

I sigh.

Niki: It's too bad I'm not in Jo'burg right now. We would be rearranging that heffer's vagina!

I knew she would react like this. Part of me is glad she's not in Jo'burg, because I wouldn't have the self-control to stop myself from fetching Buhle if Niki was physically here. This one is always ready for war.

Mom: So, you're okay with Lwazi moving this side?

Derek: Of course.

Mom: Thank God! My husband and I have missed our personal space.

Me: Manje when should she come this side?

Derek: I think we should wait till the third term ends.

Mom: Perfect. She'll be very excited.

Me: Are you sure you're okay with this?
Derek nods.

Derek: Lwazi is ours, after all. The only reason we let her live with your parents was because we were still finding our feet. We've settled down now, and I know she'll be happier because she'll be with you more.

Mom: And she'll help with little Nkanyezi. She's obsessed with her.

Me: Everyone is obsessed with this one. I look at my very happy and cute baby, and can't help but think back to my struggles before she came along. Yhu, I've been through the most with Derek yazi. You'd swear we've been together for 20 years...

And then some random person thinks she can come here and take my Star?
Anganya.

Derek: Besides, there's plenty of space in this house, and we prepared her room a long time ago, because we knew this day would come.

Mom: What's the plan with Lelo?

He sighs.

The situation with Busi is also another problem. Busi is using this child to control Derek. He's even thinking of taking her to court, so he can have sole guardianship, but knowing the type of person Busi is, he's afraid she might end up becoming a threat and pulling Ntsiki's stunts. For now, he gets to spend time with Lelo whenever he wants to. He just hates not being in control of the situation.

Derek: I'm thinking of taking her to court. I'll be happier with a more structured schedule...

Mom: I'm sure an agreement can be reached without involving the court though. Phela courts are unpredictable.

Derek: We'll see...

We continue chatting for a while.

Mom: Alright then, now that we have a way forward with Lwazi, and I've spent some quality time with you two, I think I can leave.

Derek: It's always good having you here. Thank you for always coming.

Just then, we hear footsteps and Dean walks in.

Ever since he was given the keys, he thinks he can just barge in anytime. I haven't seen him since the Fun Day at school.

He walks to my mom and gives her a warm hug.

My mom is in heaven. Dean's hugs always leave her blushing.

Dean: When are you coming to my house?

Mom: You always invite my husband,
manje what am I supposed to do?

Dean: I don't appreciate how you're
always spending time with these two, and
you leave me in the dark.

My mom laughs.

Mom: All you have to do is ask.

Dean: Good.

He looks at me.

Dean: How are you?

Me: Okay and you?

Dean: I'm good.

He looks at Derek.

Dean: Wena?

Derek: I'm good.

Dean: Hmkay.

He looks at my mother.

Dean: Ready to go?

Mom: Yes, baby. We can leave now.

Dean takes my mother's bag. He offered to take her to Soweto.

Dean: I'll see you two when I come back later. I have a date with Bab'Dlamz.

My mom says goodbye and we walk them out. They drive out and we walk back inside...

Derek: I love your mother, but something's got to give.

We get to the lounge.

Derek: I can't not have sex, because she's around. We're too old for this. We even have a baby for crying out loud.

With that said, he takes off his t-shirt and grins.

Me: I'm not even going to argue with you...

I pounce on him and hope that Little Star will stay put for just a little while...

INSERT 264 (Unedited)

Okay...

My wedding is officially in three months.

Eish, time is really not on my side mos.

I think I'll leave work early today just to go home, take a long bath, lock myself in the house and start putting everything on paper.

Also, I have no choice but to go home early, because I don't know what I was thinking bringing Little Star with me to work. Seeing as Nomvuyo is a professional housewife, she has been taking care of her. There's no way I'm hiring a random person to take care of my child. Nowadays, you can't trust anyone with children. Vuvu came through for us... Derek was supposed to stop working at the school a week ago, but he has been

coming anyway. The man is obsessed with me, if we're just keeping it real. As for Buhle, Derek accepted her lunch invitation. When he came back from her place, he was grumpy as hell. All he said to me was that Buhle is cancelled and he wants nothing to do with her. I didn't even have to ask him to give me the full details, because I knew that Buhle received the mean version of Derek, therefore, she definitely got the message. So, I've managed to let go of the situation, because I have bigger things to worry about, like my wedding. As I pack my things, Andile walks in. Andile: Ready to leave?

Me: Yep.

Andile: Asambe.

Me: Star, I'll see you later.

Derek: Shap, baby.

I give him a kiss and I push Star's stroller out of the office and follow Andile.

Me: Andile, let's grab something to eat first.

Andile: Alright.

Andile is also leaving work early, because he has to work on his thesis.

We get in the car and he drives off. I did mention that I always find a way to avoid driving myself to places, neh?

Me: Do you mind helping me plan my wedding?

Andile: I don't have time.

Me: Heyi, Mr PhD.

He chuckles.

Andile: You need to stop making me your puppet.

Me: I like messing with you.

I actually enjoy Andile's company. Besides my close people, I consider him a good friend of mine, and I love the fact that he is clueless about the drama in my life. He's a breath of fresh air.

We arrive at the restaurant.

Andile: You're still coming to the Beer Festival with me, right?

Me: Definitely. Niki and Vuvu will join us.

Andile: Great... The more the merrier.

Me: Sarcastic much? Yini, do you want me all to yourself? He chuckles.

Andile: Uyabheda wena.

He glances at me.

Andile: Lookie lookie...

Me: Where?

I glance around and spot Buhle.

Me: For fuck's sake.

Andile: Should we turn around?

Me: She doesn't scare me, Andile.

Andile: That's exactly why we should leave.

Me: Mxm.

We continue walking till we reach the table.

She's with another woman.

Lol, she's trying to hide, but it's impossible with the way this place is set up. They're sitting opposite each other in a booth.

Me: Buhle?

She lowers the menu and looks at me in fake shock.

Buhle: Ziyanda! Hey!

Her voice is loud, a bit too loud.

I'm surprised Petty is still sitting down.

Buhle: Hey.

I smile.

Me: What a coincidence. Liwa tells me you were with Zimkitha earlier.

Buhle: Uhm, yes... We were discussing the property.

Me: I apologise for going MIA. Things are a bit hectic right now. I'm planning my wedding...

She twitches.

Buhle: No, it's not a problem. It's okay, really.

I smile and look at Andile.

Me: You two still remember each other, right?

This bitch doesn't deserve Andile.

Buhle: Yes.

The woman sitting opposite her clears her throat and we all look at her.

Woman: I mean, I may as well leave you guys.

Buhle: My apologies. Phumi, this is Ziyanda.

Phumi: Hi, Ziyanda. I'm Phumi, Buhle's friend.

Something about her instantly reminds me of Niki, whom I miss like crazy.

Me: Nice to meet you.

Phumi: How do you know each other?

Buhle must explain how she knows us.

Buhle: We, uhm, work together. The project.

Phumi: Ahh, I see.

Andile: She's Derek's fiance as well.

Lol, okay, Andile.

Phumi: I see.

Phumi: And you are?

Phumi looks at Andile.

Andile: Andile.

Phumi: Are you also part of the project?

Andile: In a way...

Phumi: That's nice.

Hmm... My brains starts getting to work.

Phumi looks at the stroller.

Phumi: Is that your baby?

Right on cue, Liya starts whimpering. She can hear voices and she wants to be part of the conversation.

As soon as I take her out of the stroller, Phumi exclaims.

Phumi: She is so cute!

Me: Don't compliment her too much.

Phumi laughs and stands.

Star stares at Phumi in amazement. She starts blabbing and Phumi smiles.

Phumi: I am very broody right now. I don't understand what's happening.

Me: Don't be fooled by the cuteness.

Phumi: Please sit with us for a few minutes. I'm in love with your baby!

Before we know it, Andile and I are now sitting with them, because Phumi suddenly developed love for my Star, and insisted that we join them.

Star's cuteness is going to be a problem, because now I'm sitting next to Buhle, and I'm trying not to get too carried away and punch her.

Phumi: Her cheeks are so chubby! I'm in love!

Star looks at Phumi. She seems to like this woman. Could it be that she's confusing her with me, since she's fat like me?

Phumi: Can I hold her?

Me: Sure.

Star immediately starts exploring Phumi's face with her chubby hands and dances excitedly. I hope Buhle can see what happens when people don't run after my man- they get the rare opportunity to hold my baby and bond with her. Nxa. I stare at Buhle.

Me: How have you been, Buhle?

She takes a sip of her drink.

This is how I know that I've grown. How am I this close to this bitch, and I haven't dragged her yet?

Buhle: Good, thanks, and you?

Me: Surviving. I'm busy planning my wedding right now, so things are hectic. Yes, hoe, squirm- squirm like the little snail that you are.

Andile: Phumi, are you pregnant or do you have a baby? This child is never this happy to see strangers.

I move my attention from this thirsty one to Phumi, who's sitting next to Andile. Star slaps her lightly and Phumi laughs. Andile is right, this child never likes people, and for her to be this excited around Phumi is a good thing, I guess.

Me: Just don't kiss her.

Phumi: Of course not. I can't be spreading my STDs.

Phumi looks at Andile.

Phumi: As far as I'm concerned, I'm not pregnant, and no, I don't have a child.

Andile nods lightly and I stare at him.

My brain is telling me, "Nooo," but my heart is saying, "Yaaas!"

Phumi: Can't the baby just love me because I'm an amazing person?

I hear Buhle grunting.

My presence is obviously making her uncomfortable, and I'm loving it. If I can't

start a fight, then I may as well make her fidget.

Me: Do you want kids?

Phumi: Me? Fuck no.

Ziyanda: Watch your language!

She definitely reminds me of Niki.

Phumi looks at Star and smiles.

Phumi: Do you know what fuck means?

Star stares at her with big fascinated eyes.

Phumi: What's her name?

Me: Nkanyezi. We call her Star.

Phumi: Aww!

My phone vibrates, and I check it.

It's a series of messages from Nomvuyo.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda! Ye wena, Ziyanda!

How could you not tell me that that woman called Derek at 3am?! Ziyanda!

Oh Lord...

How in the world did she find out??

Zimkitha is the only one who knows.

And Niki.

Gosh, Niki probably called her.

I sigh as I text her back.

Me: Vuvu, I'll call you later.

My phone vibrates.

Nomvuyo: 3am? 3am, Ziyanda?!

Lord.

My phone vibrates again.

Nomvuyo: I told you to deal with this person, Ziyanda.

As I'm responding, the waiter emerges and asks for our orders. I look up from my phone.

I snap out of it.

Me: We won't be staying.

I stand and take Star from Phumi.

Me: We have to go. I have a family emergency.

I place Star in the stroller and she sulks. She likes attention lo.

Me: Andile.

He looks at me as if I'm disturbing him.

Me: We'll get something to eat along the way. We have to go.

He nods and stands.

Phumi: I'll see you at the Beer Festival.

Oh?

Andile: Sure.

Could this be it?

Could this be the moment?

I look at the twitching hoe.

Me: I'll send you Melinda's contact details, so you can discuss how she can assist you.

Buhle: Thank you.

She clearly needs Melinda more than the people she's helping.

Me: Bye, enjoy your lunch.

Phumi: Shap. Bye, Star.

Lol, Star is grumpy.

Andile pushes the stroller and I follow him out of the restaurant.

Me: Andiii!

Andile: What?

He tries to keep a straight face.

Me: Is she the one?!

Andile: I don't have time for this.

Me: Hmyghad! You like her!

Andile: Ziyanda.

Me: Is that your type?? You like feisty BBWs?

He ignores me.

Me: Wow, I'm actually so shook! You like her!

We get to the car and he continues to ignore me.

Andile: Am I dropping you off at home or are we getting something to eat first?

Me: I'm hungry.

Andile: Hmkay.

He starts the car and shuts me out as I make fun of him. He was so talkative around Phumi, and I have never seen him like that with other women. We finally have a breakthrough!

Me: So... You said you'll see her at the Beer Festival...

Andile: She said she's planning it.

Me: Really? Is she an event planner?

He nods.

Me: Hmm, maybe she can help me plan my wedding?

Andile: Leave me alone.
I continue making fun of him...
So I guess I have to find a way to make
Phumi more visible in our lives...

INSERT 265 (Unedited)

Okay.

My wedding.

What do I want to do?

Blank.

Argh, my brain is not willing to work with
me.

I'm so uninspired.

Should I hire a planner?

Phumi comes to mind and I chuckle.

Lol, as if I'd hire a Beer Festival planner to
plan my wedding... But then again, I'm

sure the bitch has the range, considering how big this festival is...

Anyway, I don't know her that well, and Andile mentioned that this is her first planning job.

When Derek gets home, he finds me in his office, trying to concentrate.

Derek: Hey, baby.

Me: Starrrr!

He looks at me weirdly.

I'm tipsy.

I've been drinking wine since I got back from my lunch with Andile.

Derek: How's the planning going?

Me: It's not going.

He raises an eyebrow.

Me: I don't think I can do this in three months.

Derek: What do you mean?

Me: I didn't really realise how much time I'd need.

He keeps quiet.

Me: Can we push it to December?

I keep quiet.

Derek: If that's what you want.

Me: Derek, things have been hectic.

Derek: I said you can postpone if that's what you want.

Me: So why are you suddenly cold?

Derek: I'm not cold.

Me: I'm asking for two extra months, and you're acting like I've secretly cancelled your gym membership.

Derek: Excuse me?

I stand.

Me: You're being grumpy for no reason.

Two months won't kill any of us, instead it will give me more time to think and plan.

How was I supposed to plan a wedding when the family drama was and still is occupying most of our time?

Derek: Don't talk to me like that.

Me: Hai suka, nawe you must take control of your moods and stop switching up on me when things don't go your way.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: What? The wine in my system is making it very difficult to stop talking.

Derek: Are you not the one who said September is fine?

Me: And now I'm telling you that it's not fine, so what?

Derek: Mxm.

He walks off.

Me: Futsek.

Heyi, when he turns around, my stomach churns.

I genuinely have no idea where that futsek came from, and I regret it the second it's out... The wine is making it difficult for me to stay kind in this moment!

Derek: Ziyanda.

He stares at me seriously.

Derek: This is turning ugly. I'm walking away.

I bite my lower lip.

It's not easy getting rid of old habits. I'm not used to "fighting" in a healthy way. I'm used to going crazy, throwing things, shouting, and then storming off.

I continue biting my lower lip, because I know that my mouth wants to go off on a tangent.

I take a few deep breaths.

Derek: I'm not about to have a back and forth with you. We'll talk about this when we're ready... I'm going out for fresh air... With that said, he walks out and leaves me there.

Mature motherfucker.

I finish up my wine and go upstairs to get my noise-cancelling headphones. Melinda and I reached an agreement: if I start

feeling like I'm really angry for whatever reason, I should listen to music until I'm calm. I've been establishing this habit, and it has been working...

I listen to my specific "Angry" playlist and sit there...

After a while, I'm back to normal. I immediately feel horrible for how things turned out.

I have no idea when I dozed off, but when I wake up, I can smell Derek's food.

Obviously his safe space is the kitchen.

My stomach growls as I walk there.

Tjo, he's dishing up for himself only.

Me: Star...

He turns and looks at me.

Me: Can we talk?

Derek: No.

Yoh.

Me: Oh okay.

If there is one time I wish I was skinny, it is now. I want to hide behind a cupboard and not be seen.

I walk away with my tail between my legs. I go upstairs and find Little Star up. I play with her and I think she senses my mood because she rubs her face on mine and I shower her with kisses.

Me: Your dad is pissed.

She just smiles.

Me: You think sex will help?

She continues smiling.

Me: Manje ngizom'ngena kanjani because he's angry angry.

She giggles.

Me: I should use you?

She giggles away.

Me: I don't even think your cuteness will work.

She stares at me and widens her eyes.

Me: Wait, do you actually understand me?

She opens her mouth.

Me: Oh my God, you do.

She giggles.

Me: So, let's talk ke...

Am I really doing this with a baby right now?

I guess I'm trying to buy time.

It's nice to be the one barking and saying you need people to leave you alone and give you space, but when that shit happens to you and you're put on timeout, it stings a bit.

I have to suck it up.

I'm awakened by Derek taking Star from my arms...

Clearly my baby and I ended up passing out.

I want to wake up and talk, but my head is heavy.

When I feel him holding my feet, putting on my socks and tucking me in, I know that there's hope for tomorrow.

I pass out once again.

I wake up very early the next morning.

I think I'll work from home.

I go to Star's nursery, and find her still sleeping.

I go back to the bedroom and find Derek getting up. He's obviously getting ready for work.

Me: Morning.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Can we talk before you shower?

Derek: Sure.

He sits on the bed and I sit on my side.

Me: So, I want to apologise for how I behaved yesterday... The alcohol contributed to the mess.

I sigh.

Me: I'm sorry for switching up like that, and most importantly, I'm sorry for swearing at you. I should have communicated my wedding planning frustrations in a more respectful manner, instead of snapping as if you knew about those frustrations. I apologise for my conduct, and hurting your feelings.

He nods lightly and processes what I've said.

Derek: I'm glad you're acknowledging that you have never communicated your frustrations with me. Had I known that you were having a hard time planning, then I would have been more understanding.

I nod.

Derek: You don't think you'll be able to plan everything by September?

I shrug.

Me: I think I was just feeling uninspired yesterday, and it frustrated me.

Derek: You didn't answer my question.

Me: I don't know.

Derek: Okay. Will you let me know once you know?

Had this been months ago, I'd think

Derek's statement is mean, but after our sessions with Melinda, I've come to understand the importance of clarification.

We vowed to never make assumptions.

Derek: Will you let me know once you know?

Me: Yes, I will.

Derek: In the meantime, what can I do to inspire your planning process?

Argh, and just like that I'm on him till he lies down.

Me: I'm sorry!

I hide my face on his neck and inhale his scent.

Derek: Zi, we're sti-

Me: You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. I know I don't tell you this enough.

I lift my head and find him smiling.

Me: I'm sorry.

Derek: I forgive you, baby.

Me: Really?

He nods.

Me: Yaay!

His chuckle sends shivers all over my body, especially my vagina.

Derek: You still haven't answered my question.

Me: Which one?

Derek: What can I do to help inspire your planning process?

Me: I have a few ideas...

Derek: Is it?

I grin.

Derek: I'm listening.

Me: The first idea requires you to be on top of me first, and ends with me splashing these sheets with my yummy juices...

Derek: In this idea of yours, you're not on top?

Me: Hai, Derek, I have a hangover, and you want me to work hard?

He chuckles and repositions.

Derek: You need to guide me then.

Me: Gladly...

By the time I'm trembling and squealing,
the word "museum" is ringing in my
head...

I think Derek is on the right track...

I need more inspiration!

I managed to convince Star not to go to
work.

We'll work from home, man... while
having lots of sex...

Me: I didn't even get to tell you about my
lunch with Andile.

Derek: What happened?

I tell him everything.

When he hears Buhle's name, he rolls his
eyes.

Me: Bottom line is, we finally found a
perfect match for Andile!

Derek: Don't you think this situation is
strange?

Me: My whole life is strange.

Derek: She's Buhle's friend.

I keep quiet.

Derek: And I made an executive decision that we both stay away from that woman.

Me: But Phumi is-

Derek: No, they are friends. What makes you think she likes you? What makes you think she will leave her friend to hang out with you?

Yoh ngavele ngaswaba.

Derek: I don't want you to associate yourself with that woman or any of her people.

I sigh.

Derek: If Andile made a connection with this Mpumi person, then he'll pursue her. He's a grown man, and I think you've guided him enough.

I keep quiet.

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Remember what Monique said in that episode of Charmed School?

Me: Argh.

I hate when he starts using lines from reality shows to check me.

Derek: When you do the clownery, the clown comes back to bite.

I grunt in defeat.

He got me on this on.

Me: Okay, I'll back off.

Derek: Good.

I sigh.

Derek: Now, give me a kiss.

He pulls me and I kiss him begrudgingly.

Just then, I get a call from Niki.

Me: Yini?

Niki: Girl, check Twitter. Another one bites the dust.

Me: Shap. I'll call you once I've caught up.

I end the call. Lol, whenever there's drama trending on Twitter, Niki and I are on it. We love reading people's drama, especially if it involves a man and his side chick being exposed...

I go to WhatsApp and follow the link Niki sent to me.

Heyiii, a wife is blasting a woman for inserting herself in her marriage.

I read the tweets aloud for Derek.

Kunzima. Apparently, the affair has been taking place for a few weeks now. The husband has been frequenting Jwansbag lately, and comes back to Swaziland , where he's wife is, feeling fresh from the "cheap pussy" he's getting eGoli.

Heyiii this wife is going in!

She's even attaching snapshots of the messages between her hubby and the woman.

Chiile, them texts be steamy!

Derek shakes his head lightly.

Derek: Social media has ruined people's way of thinking. How does posting such help in any w-

Me: Whooaa!

Derek: What?

Me: I know this person.

Derek: The wife?

Me: No, the side chick!

He doesn't say anything.

Me: This is Phumi!

Derek: Who's that?

Me: Derek!

Yhu, this wife even went as far as posting pictures of Phumi and the husband...

Me: This is Phumi, the one I was telling you about just now!

Derek: Buhle's friend?

Me: Yes!

He chuckles as he stands and takes Little Star from the other couch.

Me: Yoh, it's really her!

Derek: What's that saying? Birds of a feather...

Yoh, I'm so shook by all of this!

Phumi's face is all over Twitter.

Yhu, andizi...

INSERT 266

It's Friday, the day before the Beer Festival.

Me: Star, so you're really not joining me?

Derek: Definitely not. Do I look like I attend backdoor events?

My jaw drops and he chuckles.

Me: Rude much?

He shrugs.

Me: It's not even a backdoor event. It's at a proper venue, so I don't know what you're talking about.

I decide not to tell him that Phumi is the planner, because I know he will check me immediately.

Me: Argh, I'm going to see Vuvu. I don't need this negativity in my life.

Derek: Do you feel insulted?

Me: Yes! That was rude!

Derek: Cc me in a complaint email.

Me: Very funny. And then he cries when I give him that futsek that comes straight from my vagina...

I get my bag.

Me: Bye.

Derek: Are you driving?

Me: No, Zimkitha sent her driver.

Derek: Wena na.

He still refuses to speak about Zimkitha and her man. Angazi ke because it's clear that she will bring him to the wedding. I have accepted him as her man, and she has every right to bring him as her plus 1.
Derek: Aren't you going to give me a kiss?

Me: I don't like you right now.

Derek: Udlaliswa ngemali?

I swear I interact with 100 versions of this man on a daily basis.

Me: Yes, actually, ngidlaliswa ngemali.

Derek: Hmkay.

He continues focusing on his phone and I walk out and make my way to the car that's waiting for me.

Zimkitha is disgustingly rich.

That woman's grandparents and parents made sure they set her up for success, despite how fucked up they were, and now she has also ensured that her children are set for life. She always says

that should her children and grandchildren never want to work, they can easily quit their jobs, and their standard of living will never drop, because money will never be an issue. Anyway, I get in the car and greet the driver. He has been Zimi's driver for many years now.

As we're about to get to the mansion, my phone vibrates.

I lose track of my surroundings for a few seconds as I read the text.

It's a bank notification.

I dial Derek's number and he answers after a while.

Me: R10 000, Derek??

Nang'omunye.

Derek: You said that udlaliswa ngemali.

Me: And you decided to take my statement literally?

He chuckles.

Derek: You can always transfer it back.

Me: I can't hear you. You're breaking.

He laughs lightly.

Derek: I love you. Don't take my banter seriously.

Me: But you always take mine seriously.

Derek: Yours is a little extreme.

Me: Hai, let's not have double standards.

Derek: Okay. I'll ask for proper forgiveness when you come back.

Me: Okay.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you too. Bye.

Derek: Shap.

I end the call and we finally get to the Mzi castle.

I thank the driver and make my way inside the house.

Nyami is the first to run to me and give me a hug.

She has gotten so tall. She's starting to look exactly like her mother, while she has her father's lovely personality.

Nyami: Aunty Zi, Nkosi just took his first steps!

Me: Aww, really??

She nods excitedly as we walk to the family room, where we find Nomvuyo, Liwa, Zimkitha, Bheki.

Little Nkosinhle is busy walking and falling while everyone cheers for him.

Me: Sanibonani.

Zimkitha: Hey, baby!

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Hiii!

I give Liwa and Zimkitha a hug, but when I get to Nomvuyo, I get a very cold shoulder.

Lord.

Me: Bestie boo, come on.

Nomvuyo: I don't have time for you. Who even invited you here?

Liwa: I did.

Nomvuyo: Mxm.

She continues focusing on Nkosi.

Eish, I have a lot of ass kissing to do for not being in contact with her for a few weeks.

I go to Bab'Bae, looking like an evolved snack.

Me: Hi, Bheki.

He smiles and opens up his arms and we share a hug.

Bheki: Hi, Ziyanda, how are you?

Me: I mean, I'm not okay. My best friend refuses to even acknowledge my presence.

Nomvuyo: Don't you dare involve Bheki in your nonsense.

I sigh in defeat.

Me: I'm too tired for this. Can we talk?

She leaves Nkosi and I follow her to the dining room. We sit down opposite each other.

Me: Things have been a bit hectic.

Nomvuyo: Why didn't you tell me that there's a woman threatening your relationship?

Me: Okay, let's not get ahead of ourselves. She's not a threat. She's just dizzy.

Nomvuyo: Did you tell her to back off?

Me: Derek did.

Nomvuyo: And did she back off?

Me: Yep.

She grunts.

Nomvuyo: Hmkay.

Me: You love me?

Nomvuyo: Hai.

Me: We're still going to the festival ksasa angithi?

Nomvuyo: No.

Me: Vuvu, really?!

Nomvuyo: No. I don't attend such things. I don't even drink beer.

Me: Wow!

Nomvuyo: Just call me when you're ready to really deal with that girl... the proper way...

With that said, she stands and walks away.

Gosh, Nomvuyo has taken her drama to another level, ngathi ngijola naye.

I walk back to the lounge and we all chill for the rest of the day...

Niki: I knew your ass would be late!

Me: My child is acting up!

Niki: Hai suka, just get here, because the queue is getting long.

Me: Shap.

I end the call and finish getting dressed. I always use Little Star as an excuse if I'm tardy.

Me: See you later.

Derek: Are you coming back?

Me: Where else would I go?

Derek: Angazi, I'm just asking.

Me: Uyayibuza i-nonsense sometimes.

He chuckles.

Derek: Spicy much?

He pulls me and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: You've been cranky all morning.

Me: Is it?

He plants a kiss on my lips.

Derek: Enjoy yourself.

Me: Hmkay.

Derek: Why are you grumpy?

Me: I'm not grumpy.

Derek: When are you supposed to get to the venue?

Me: I should have been there by now.

Derek: Surely Niki won't mind waiting a bit longer?

I don't say anything as takes my bag and puts it aside.

Sometimes, I shouldn't have to ask for sex, he must just realise that my crankiness can only be cured by his dick.

He drives me to the venue.

Derek: Are you sure you'll be okay here?

Me: I'm sure once I've consumed alcohol the crowd won't bother me.

He looks at me seriously.

Derek: Don't get carried away.

Me: I'll be fine.

Derek: Okay.

I give him a kiss and get out of car. I make my way to the queue and he drives off. At least the line is not that long. I think Niki was just exaggerating so I can get here quickly.

As I'm about to walk in, after a security guard confrims that my ticket is good, another security guard pulls me roughly.

Me: Who are you pulling like that?

Security: I need-

Me: Don't you ever put your hands on me!

What the heck is wrong with him??

He starts telling me that there might be something wrong with my ticket.

Me: Ungazongibhedela wena. My ticket has been scanned and approved!

We start having a back and forth.

This man is beyond disrespectful and I feel like shouting at him is not even enough. How is a grown ass man fighting me over something that makes no sense?

I genuinely feel like he's singling me out for some reason, and I'm not having it.

Now, other people are involved and three women are defending me.

Out of nowhere, I see Andile. He walks towards me smiling.

Andile: You actually came?

He's with Phumi.

Phumi: Hey, Ziyanda.

Me: I'm going to need you to tell this bouncer to reevaluate how he is addressing me. Do I look like a dog? The bouncer looks at me angrily.

Me: Futsek wena. See, now I'm going- Andile pulls me and makes me stand next to Phumi while he talks to the bouncer. We've done enough talking! Clearly he wants to fight me!

Phumi: What's happening?

Me: He says there's something wrong with my ticket. My friend is already in and she has the same ticket as mine, so what the hell is he talking about?

Phumi goes to the bouncer, and talks to him.

She comes to me and explains that he thought my ticket was fake. Before I can even address him for disrespecting me, Andile wraps his arm around my shoulders and forces me to walk away.

Imagine! Me? An entire fake ticket? Sies!

Me: Fokken hond!

Phumi: These bouncers can be unnecessary. I'm sorry, Ziyanda.

Me: Mxm.

We eventually get in.

I am calmer now.

Me: Thanks for sorting it out. I was genuinely starting to feel like the nerd that always gets left out in high school parties. So embarrassing.

Andile: He was being unnecessary.

Phumi: You looked like you were about to hit him.

Me: Oh no. Ever since I started living with caucasians, I fight different. Now all I do is pull out my taser. I'm not ratch anymore.

Phumi laughs.

Phumi: So, moving to the burbs changed you?

Me: Too much. I'm no longer an uncultured swine. I'm very classy.

Phumi continues laughing.

A girl can only dream.

Me: On a serious note, thank you for helping me out, guys.

I look at Andile and he smiles. I then looks at Phumi.

Hmm, they actually look good next to each other. Andile with his tall macho self, and Phumi with her voluptuous and confident self.

Me: I know this is a beer festival, but do they only serve beers? I don't drink beer.

Phumi: The VIP section has everything.

Me: Oh okay. Let me find out where this one is.

Phumi: Your friend?

Me: Yep.

I take out my phone and call Niki.

Me: You actually left me, and I almost got into a fight with the bouncer. Kanti unjani, Nikiwe?

Niki: Hai sisi, didn't I tell you to come earlier?

Me: I'm the by wors stall, woza.

I end the call and she arrives in a few minutes. Wow, my friend is really glowing yazi. Kwanele is clearly doing a great job here! I know for a fact that I look like my fiance's family's problems. My glowing days are long gone.

Before Niki and I even greet each other, we have a back and forth about me arriving late. Eventually, we stop.

Me: Anyway, Niki, this is Phumi, whom I recently met. You know Andile...

Niki: I sure do.

Niki looks at Phumi and smiles.

Niki: Hey, Phumi... Nice to meet you.

Phumi: Likewise.

Me: She organised this whole event. How amazing?

Niki: Yaas! We stan a boss bitch!

Phumi smiles.

Niki then looks at Andile.

Niki: Hello, bhuti wePhD.

Andile chuckles and they share a hug.

Niki: Okay, can we drink now? A bitch is thirsty.

Phumi: Sure... I'll show you guys where the VIP section is...

Phumi takes us to a segregated section that has a bar.

Me: Thanks for doing the things.

Phumi: You're welcome.

Me: Congratulations on your event. I'm sure you're shitting your pants though. I know how it feels to plan something and not be able to enjoy it because you're hoping it goes well.

Phumi: You have no idea.

Niki: And I'm sure you're also dealing with people's stares and whispers from the Twitter drama.

Ziyanda: Niki!

Jesu, why do I have such a forward friend? Is it too late to cancel her subscription in my life?

Niki shrugs and looks at Phumi coolly.

Niki: I'm not judging you.

Phumi sighs.

Niki: I'm really not judging you, hey. I'm actually shocked, in a good way, that you're here, and you don't seem to give a shit.

Phumi: Can't hide forever.

Niki: That stupid wife must deal with her cheating husband and leave you alone. I don't understand why we like giving these men power over us. Now, we're out here fighting each other while the men walk around with their sweaty balls.

Phumi: Mxm. He's walking around freely while I'm being shamed.

Niki: He's here? The nerve!

See, I'm nosy. I want to ask Phumi what really happened, but I keep hearing Derek's voice in my head telling me ukuthi ngingaphaphi kakhulu.

Andile: Uhm, okay... Let's not make this a bashing men session. Phumi, your friends are probably worried. Zi and Niki, I'll get you guys drinks and then go look for my friend...

Friend? What friend?

Me: Shap.

Phumi: See you around.

Niki: Stay strong!

Me: Shut up and sit down.

Phumi chuckles as she walks away...

Niki: That poor girl is clearly 5 to breaking down! You can see it in her eyes!

Me: Andile will comfort her.

She laughs.

Niki: You tryna hook them up?

Me: There's already a connection nyana. It just needs to develop more.

Niki: Hmm, I mean, it's a little ironic ukuthi Andile has rejected two women you've tried hooking him up with before, but he is attracted to this specific one.

Me: What's ironic about that?

Niki: Nothing, friend.

Me: Argh, I don't need your negativity. Derek is already on my neck.

Niki: You and Star just need some alone time. You're losing weight, and you don't look your best.

I look at her in shock.

Niki: I mean, the makeup is helping you out, but you're not the gorgeous Zi I know. You look exhausted. You've never been one to have bags under your eyes, but look at you now.

Me: That's not a nice thing to say.

Niki: If I don't tell you then who will? You don't look like yourself. You look tired.

Me: I am tired.

Niki: Then take a break from everything.

Me: I just got back to work. I hadn't been to work in months.

Niki: Derek's issues have definitely put your ass to work.

I sigh heavily.

I mean, I know I'm not looking my best at the moment, but to actually hear someone else say it is a bit different. It just confirms my current state of ugliness.

Niki: You just need a breather. Take a break from everything this side. Go to a secluded place where you'll fuck your man, sleep, eat, drink, fuck him again, get drunk, and sleep again.

Me: I need a drink.

Niki: Love you, kiddo.

I groan as I walk to the bar to get myself a drink.

In two hours, I'm already tipsy. I have been told that I'm ugly, so I'm currently drowning my sorrows in alcohol.

Part of me is crushed a bit.

By being selfless, I've let go of myself. Niki is absolutely right. I look a hot mess. How am I going to have a wedding looking like this? I'm not even losing weight in a cute way.

I go to Andile, who's sitting next to his friend.

Me: Can I talk to you?

He stands.

Me: Why haven't you told me that I look a mess?

Andile: Sorry?

I groan.

Me: I've let go of myself.

He looks at me strangely.

Me: I've become gross and ugly!

Andile: Uhm, what's happening?

Me: Mxm.

Andile: You're not ugly, Zi. I don't know what's happening right now.

Me: Argh, never mind.

I drink some more.

I loosen up and forget about my problems.

Niki and I are now dancing happily.

Phumi emerges out of nowhere.

I'm having a good time at the moment.

Niki and I always manage to make the most of our time together. As long as we're together, we're bound to have fun.

Phumi tries speaking, but Niki pulls her and dances for her. Phumi has no choice but to join us. She mustn't stand there like a lost puppy. She laughs and ends up joining us. We dance for a solid 20

minutes. I mean, how do you not dance when you hear Gqom and Amapiano? After the Gqom set, we sit and continue drinking..

Niki's favourite song comes on and she stands and dances while Phumi and I hype her up. Lol, heyi, do you know how possessed you get when you hear people whistling and shouting, "Yebo!" and "Jaiva wena jou shit!" Rha, you go crazy. Futhi there's this specific whistle tune that is famous in Soweto. Haibo, when these big-stomach, or very skinny, thirsty men start hyping you up with their whistles, you feel like a lunatic getting ready to go to ghetto heaven.

Soon, a group of women have joined us and they're opening a circle.

Okay, I appreciate my fellow ratchet sisters, but I need some space right now. I'm suddenly over everything.

That's only disadvantage about going out with me. I can switch up in a second and want to go home- like now.

I stand and walk away from the scene. I just need a few minutes to gather myself. Also, I'm glad that Andile and Phumi are sitting next to each other, chatting away! I text Derek, letting him know that I'm ready to come home. He tells me he was already on his way to fetch me. He knows me too well.

Phumi says my name. She gets to me and smiles.

Phumi: Everything okay?

Me: Have those girls left our area?

She laughs.

Me: Talk about invasion of space.

Phumi: Niki chased them away. Ngathi they wanted the alcohol.

Me: These undercover hobos from Jo'burg will be the death of us.

We laugh.

That's why I've stopped going out. I'm tired of dealing with my backward ghetto sisters.

Me: How are you? I'm sorry about Niki's big mouth.

Phumi: I'm good... I'm not one to feel sorry for myself for too long. At some point, I have to move on. I'm not going to ask her for the full story. From my deducting reasoning, I've gauged that she is the innocent one in this mess. The guy basically lied to her...

Me: Good. These men will make you a clown if you're not woke.

Phumi: Hai, they can do that elsewhere. I clear my throat and smile.

Me: Andile, on the other hand...
It's time.

Phumi: What about him?

Me: He's a great guy, neh?

She chuckles.

Phumi: He's okay.

Me: I'm an English teacher. Please don't insult me by using tired adjectives.

She laughs.

Phumi: From what I've seen, he's cool.

Akaphaphi. I don't like men that are too forward.

Me: He's very down to earth.

Phumi: He tells me you wanted to set him up with Buhle.

Me: It was quite evident that your friend was thirsty. I wanted to help quench her thirst.

Phumi: Hey, don't come for my friend.

Me: Thirsty... very thirsty.

Phumi: She didn't know you guys were married.

Me: Well, she needs to work on her inference skills... Maybe I should have

went to Twitter as well, because it seems like it's the quickest way to check people.

Phumi: Futsek, Ziyanda!

I laugh.

Me: Too soon?

She also laughs.

Phumi: Ngiyashayana yazi.

Me: My taser is ready, boo. Remember, I fight different.

We continue making fun of each other.

I like Phumi. I know a person with a good heart, and she definitely has one.

Unfortunately, she is Buhle's friend, so I can't insert myself further.

Me: Anyway, yes, Andile is an amazing man.

Phumi: Aren't they all.

Me: You'll see for yourself.

Phumi: Hai hai, I don't want him or any other man.

Me: Hmkay. I'll check in after five years when you're life partners.

She laughs.

Phumi: You're ridiculous.

Me: Anyway, I'm leaving now... Star is waiting for me outside.

Phumi: You're leaving already?

Ziyanda: Yep. I'm over the crowd.

Phumi: Party pooper!

I chuckle as we share a hug.

Me: I feel like I shouldn't like you.

Phumi: I don't blame you. I legit have that effect on people.

Me: Uyanya kanti.

Phumi: I feel like I shouldn't like you as well, but I do...

Me: I have a long list of people who'd say the same thing. You're not alone.

My phone rings. It's Star.

Me: Let me say goodbye to Niki and Andi. I know they won't want to leave.

Phumi: Bye, see you around.

Me: Shap. Don't go back to that liar. He played you.

Phumi: Andizi!

Me: Yaas!

She goes the other way and I walk to our section, where I find Niki, Andile and Andile's friend, Thando.

Me: Guys, I'm going home now.

Niki looks at Andile.

Niki: What did I say?

Me: It's getting crowded.

Niki: I'll stay with Andile.

Me: Shap. Just let me know when you're both home.

Niki: Okey dokey.

I give her a hug.

Andile: Is Derek here?

Me: Yes.

Andile: I'll walk you out.

Me: Thanks.

I say goodbye once again and then Andile and I start walking away.

Andile: Are you okay?

I smile.

Me: Yep.

Andile: Are you sure?

I nod.

Me: I was just in my feelings earlier. Niki basically told me that I look a mess and I'm not as cute as I think I am.

Andile: That's not a nice thing to say.

I chuckle.

Me: That's exactly what I said to her.

Andile: And it's untrue.

Me: No need to lie. I know I look a hot mess. It's been a rough year.

He keeps quiet.

We finally get to the car and the window slowly goes down, revealing Star's face.

Derek: Lookie here.

Andile: Hey.

Derek: Are you having a good time?

Andile: It's not too bad.

Derek nods.

I look at Andile.

Me: Thank you. I had a great time.

Andile: Sure. See you on Monday.

Me: Hmkay.

We share a hug and I walk to the other side and get in the car.

Derek: Shap.

Andile: Bye. He walks back in.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: Hello there.

Me: Hey.

He leans closer to me and gives me a kiss.

Derek: Ready to go?

Me: Yep.

He starts the car and drives off.

INSERT 267

I swear we haven't even driven for two minutes, when I get a call from Andile.

Me: Hello?

Andile: You will not believe what just happened.

I'm hearing Niki in the background. She doesn't sound too happy.

Me: What's wrong? Is Niki okay?

Andile: As soon as I came back from walking you to the car, a fight had broken out.

Me: What??

Andile: Niki was beating up Buhle.

Me: What?!

I look at Derek.

Andile: Next thing, there are two other girls trying to attack Niki. They're Buhle's friends.

Me: WHAT?! I look at Derek.

Me: Go back to the venue.

Derek looks at me in confusion.

Me: For once, can you not give me a hard time!

Derek: Wow...

He does as I tell him.

Me: They jumped Niki?!

Andile: They tried to.

Me: Is she hurt?

Andile: Not at all. We stopped them before they could do any damage.

Yoh, my head is spinning!

How did things even escalate to that point?

Within a few minutes, we're back at the venue.

I end the call with Andile, and as I'm about to get out of the car, Derek locks it. I look at him sharply.

Derek: What's happening?

Me: Buhle's friends tried jumping Niki.

He sighs heavily.

Derek: So you want to fight them as well?
I take a deep breath. A very very deep
breath.

Me: Derek, had it been Dean who got into
a fight or got jumped, you wouldn't be
sitting here behaving like you're better. I
really don't need your righteous attitude
right now.

He nods lightly.

Me: Please unlock this car and leave if that's what you want to do. I'd like to check on my best friend.

He unlocks the car and I get out.

I go straight to the section we were in, but I don't find them there, instead I see Phumi.

She's sitting next to two other women.

Phumi: Zi, hey...

She looks a little shaken.

Me: What's happening?

Just then, one of the women stands and steps closer to me.

I'm not sure, but I think she calls me a weak bitch and then mentions that I let my friends fight my battles.

She doesn't seem sober.

But she wants to fight.

Phumi: Unathi, stop this!

So her name is Unathi?

Unathi steps even closer to me.

So she wants to fight fight?

I take two steps back, and before she can even say anything to me, a very hot and quick slap has already landed on her face.

Phumi: Ziyanda!

Unathi tries coming for me, but some guy stops her.

She is stumbling and slurring her words. A mess, chile.

The guy keeps saying that they should have stayed at home and she should have listened to him.

Mxm. Just then, I feel Derek behind me. I feel him place his arm lightly around my waist.

Me: Where's Niki?

Phumi: She's with Andile.

Me: Where?

Phumi: I'll take you there.

Me: Are these your friends?

Phumi looks at them. The other one is looking at me as if she also wants to fight. I'm surprisingly calm right now, but I'm more than open to dealing with anyone that even sniffs my direction.

Me: Please take me to Niki.

Phumi nods and starts walking. As I turn, someone pulls my nicely-tied bun.

The other friend is now trying to attack me, but Derek is blocking her.

What a ghetto mess!

I keep hearing Phumi tell her friend to stop, nami I can't get to her, because Derek is blocking me.

Derek takes my hand and we walk away from the scene.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Can you imagine if I was wearing a wig?

He looks at me in confusion.

He's expecting me to be fuming, but like I said, I'm surprisingly very calm. I was expecting such to happen, especially because alcohol is involved.

I just want Niki.

Phumi walks to us.

Me: What the fuck is going on?

Phumi: Buhle was looking for me. My friends were all chilling in the other VIP section. When she found me with Niki, she started shouting at me for abandoning them that side. She also mentions that she spotted you. I guess Niki heard your name and she confronted Buhle. The confrontation turned into something else...

Me: Where's Niki?

She begins walking and we follow her. We walk to another VIP section. This one is not even packed. In fact, it looks like a VVIP section.

Phumi: There she is.

I find Niki with Andile.

As soon as she sees me, she frowns.

Niki: I thought you left?

Me: Andile told me what happened.

Niki looks at Phumi.

Niki: Tell your friends that moving forward, it's on sight...

Phumi: Niki, don't do this...

Niki: How dare they try jump me? I would have beaten them regardless.

Phumi looks at me in defeat.

Phumi: All of this because of a crush?

See now she trying to test me.

Me: So it's okay for your friend to call my fiance at 3am, drunk?

Phumi: Huh?

Me: Mxm.

I look at Niki.

Me: Are you okay?

Niki: I'm fine, boo.

She takes a sip of her champagne.

Niki: It's been a while, but I still got it.

Ngim'nyisile.

She drinks her champagne happily.

Phumi: Buhle called you at 3am?

She's now looking at Derek in shock.

Derek: Nikiwe, we're leaving.

Niki: Hai, I-

Derek: Nikwe.

Niki groans.

Andile: I'll take her home.

Me: Are you driving??

Andile: No, Uber.

Derek: It's fine, I'll drop you off.

Me: Where's your friend, Andile?

Andile: He left.

Me: Okay.

Derek: Let's go.

Niki: Such party poopers!

Andile looks at Phumi and then at Derek.

Andile: If you're taking Niki home then I'll stay.

Derek nods.

Me: Niki, asambe.

Niki grunts as she takes her bag.
As we're about to leave, some guy
emerges from God knows where, and
tries speaking to Phumi.

Phumi: Leave me alone!

Derek: Mvelo?

The guy looks at Derek and smiles
sheepishly.

Derek: You're back?

Mvelo: Not reall-

Phumi walks off and Mvelo rubs his head
in defeat.

What in the ghetto mess is happening??

Mvelo: I'll call you... I have to go.

Derek: Sure.

Mvelo walks away.

Niki: Is that the married guy??

It looks like it.

I glance at Andile, and he looks at me
blankly.

Niki: Let's go get drunk elsewhere, Andi.

Andile nods lightly and we all walk away. We get in the car and Derek drives off. My mind is all over the place, but I'm glad Niki is in the car, because I know she will do best.

Niki: Ngidi, you know that guy?

Derek: He was part of our company's IT department back when I was still an accountant.

Niki: He's an IT specialist?

Derek nods.

Niki: Abafebi abafebi. You'd swear they are innocent computer geeks kanti they love spreading their dicks like the viruses they are hired to get rid of.

I chuckle.

She is tipsy and unbothered.

Niki: Manje when last did you speak to him?

Derek: Few years ago.

Niki: Do you know about his drama with Phumi?

Derek: How would I know? I haven't spok-

Niki: Okay, Mr Grumpy. Relaxa, yoh!

We drive in silence for a while. Niki calls Kwanele to let him know that she's planning on going out.

Derek: Where am I taking you?

Niki: Andi, are we still going out?

Andile: Yes.

Niki: Where should we go?

They deliberate till they make a decision and we drop them off.

Niki texts me a while after dropping them off, letting me know that Kwanele will be around, so I shouldn't worry about her.

The following day, when I check Twitter, a certain video is trending.

The video doesn't show their faces, but I know that's Niki.

Lord, there's no mistaking Niki's ass...

All I can see is Niki throwing punches at Buhle, who is on the floor, trying to wrap her legs around Niki.

Out of nowhere, two women try to lunge at Niki, but two guys prevent them. Niki then stops beating Buhle and turns to face the two women who tried jumping her. Before she can throw punches, everyone is separated.

The video ends.

I watch it again.

I call Niki and she answers sleepily.

Me: Have you checked Twitter?!

Niki: Am I trending?

Me: Your faces aren't clear, but everyone wants to know what caused the fight and who is involved.

Niki: Is it a good angle?

Me: Niki!

Niki: It's already out there. You want me to be miserable?

I sigh heavily.

Niki: We'll talk later, I'm still sleeping.

Me: Shap.

Niki: Shap.

I end the call and take out one Storm from the fridge.

Derek's people are meeting for lunch. I declined the invitation and told Derek that he could go without me.

I plan on sleeping for the whole day...

INSERT 268

So another month has passed. The drama in our lives has paused, and I'm hoping it stays this way.

The fighting situation died down on Twitter, and as usual, people moved on and focused on other pressing matters. Niki still maintains that she will gladly deal with people who come at me. She still maintains that Buhle didn't get enough punches. She still maintains that

the other friends who tried to jump her will bump into her one day, and she will gladly finish what they tried starting. Nomvuyo laughed when she heard about what happened. She laughed even more when she saw the video.

Anyway, I'm now focusing on this wedding.

I thought of the word "museum" while Derek was rearranging my guts and it's been in my mind for weeks now.

I'm in Derek's study, trying to jot down my ideas.

The door opens and he walks in.

Derek: Hey.

Me: Hello.

Derek: I'm going to see Melinda.

Me: Oh okay then.

My appointment with her is tomorrow. I had forgotten.

Derek: See you when I come back.

Me: Shap.

He walks out and I go back to planning. I haven't seen Derek's people in a month. Ever since Niki told me that I'm ugly, I've had to take a step back and fill up my cup. Another wakeup call for me was having to go to hospital for two days the previous week. I was inexplicably exhausted. When we got to the doctor, I was told that I'm experiencing extreme burnout. I personally never thought such existed. I always hear people saying they have burnout, but I always thought it was a made up thing... Turns out it exists. I was basically bedridden for a week. Now, it's a new week, and I'm feeling much better.

Clearly staying away from the main source of my exhaustion is a good decision. I've been avoiding everyone like the plague.

Anyway, my wedding...

Derek thinks I've really postponed it, but I think I'll manage to get everything done by October latest.

He loves surprises, so maybe this should be a surprise wedding...

Actually!

I call my mother and ask her what she thinks.

Mom: Surprise wedding?! Yini leyo?!

I chuckle.

Me: Mama, the more I speak about it, the more it sounds like a great idea!

Mom: Heyi! Heyi! Yini leyo??

I laugh at her.

Me: It means Derek won't know ukuthi siyashada until he gets to the venue and he sees us there.

Mom: Ziyanda, I'm not understanding!

Me: Yoh, mama. I want a surprise wedding. This means I will plan

everything secretly and then Derek will only find out during the people!

Mom: Ziyanda, that sounds like a good idea to you?!

Me: Yes! That's it, I'm doing a surprise wedding!

She sighs in defeat.

Me: Don't tell anyone! I'll come over sometime this week to discuss everything with you and your husband. No one should know!

Mom: Hai okay then.

I end the call. Wow, I suddenly feel excited and rejuvenated.

Unlike me, Derek can handle surprises! I'm going to make him think I want nothing to do with a wedding, and then I will surprise his ass!

Whoa, the ideas start flowing and I jot them down!

Super duper excited, I tell you!

When Derek comes back from his session with Melinda, he's extremely down.

I'm caught up between wanting to give him his space, and suffocating him with hugs.

I go to him.

Me: Need space?

He shakes his head.

We reposition on the couch so his head is on my chest.

Me: Wanna talk about it?

He shakes his head.

We sit in silence for a very long time.

He eventually puts up his head and looks at me.

Derek: I feel like shit.

Me: At least you don't look like shit...

Unlike some of us...

He chuckles.

Derek: You don't look like shit.

Me: Derek, I'm losing all my weight and not even in a cute way.

He continues chuckling.

Me: You still look sexy.

Derek: I don't feel sexy. I plant a kiss on his nose.

Me: Talk to me.

He sighs.

Derek: It's like I'm taking 5 steps forward and 10 steps back.

I keep quiet.

Derek: We discussed the sexual abuse and I lost it...

Me: Is it something she said?

Derek: The more we delve deeper into it, I just feel more disgusted.

I sigh.

Derek: I can't believe I really went through that shit. It blows my mind.

Me: I'm sorry.

He rests his head on my chest and we're silent again.

I genuinely don't know how to make him feel better. I've been through all of this, but I always try not to bring that up, because I want him to go through this in his own way, and not make it about me. All I know is that the journey to health and happiness is never sunshine and rainbows.

He has to go through all of this. I'm just glad he's no longer suppressing his trauma.

Derek: Zi.

Me: Hmm?

Derek: You're the highlight of my entire life.

Me: Aww, Star...

He looks at me and smiles lightly.

Derek: You stress me out about 99.9% of the time, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

Me: I stress you out? Do you know how frustrating it is living with you these days? I'm stressed 99.9% of the time! He chuckles and I plant a kiss on his forehead.

Me: You're my person, Nkanyezi. I also wouldn't have it any other way. It's really nice discovering myself alongside you.

Derek: I doubt I would have the courage to face my demons if you weren't in my life.

Me: Chile, and your demons are hectic. He chuckles.

Derek: Gimme a kiss.

He repositions till his face is touching mine.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

Now I'm really convinced that a surprise wedding will do him good!

I've just had a meeting with the lady who'll be designing my dress. Derek and his brothers always use the same guy when it comes to their formal wear, so I'm planning on meeting up with him to discuss my vision for the crazy men in my life. At least he knows them, so I don't have to worry about sizes and all of that. I bump into Phumi.

Lol.

Andile asked me to back off after the festival, and because my ass was suffering from burnout, I did exactly that. I have no idea what's going on between them, but it seems like they're going on dates and shit. Phumi: Fancy bumping into you in these streets.

Me: Hello, Phumi.

Phumi: Hey, how are you?

Me: I'm good and you?

She chuckles.

Phumi: All my friends have temporarily cancelled me because of you.

Me: Haibo, what did I do?

Phumi: Niki beat up Buhle!

Me: Manje? Niki is a grown ass woman, and she can do whatever she wants.

Phumi: She punched her, Ziyanda!

Me: Charge it to the game.

She sighs.

Me: That girl that called me a bitch and tried putting her hands on me is your friend?

Phumi: She was drunk.

Me: Udakwa snax.

I grunt as I think back to how close she was getting to me, outchea calling me a bitch ngingamazi nokumazi. I should have sat on her chest and suffocated her.

Phumi: Anyway, I'm friendless because of you.

Me: Uzoba strong.

She sighs.

Me: Why exactly did they cancel you?

Phumi: They think I didn't have their back.

Me: Hmm, kunzima.

Phumi: I planned that event. It would have been a bad look for me. I was already trending on social media for some fucked up shit. How was fighting going to help me regain the dignity I involuntarily lost?

Yoh, she has real problems, mos.

Me: Askies. You want to grab a drink?

She grunts and nods.

We walk to the car and get in.

Me: Uhm, don't mind my shady driving. If we die, we die.

Phumi: Hai hai!

I laugh.

Me: I'm serious. Derek keeps forcing me to drive.

Phumi: Let's say a quick prayer first.

Me: Mxm!

I start the car and drive to Hyde Park Corner.

They serve our drinks.

Me: So, what's the problem with your people?

Phumi: I understand their frustrations, I really do, but they're not willing to hear me out.

I keep quiet.

She looks like she needs to vent.

Phumi: I've always been the struggling one in our group.

Me: Struggling in what sense?

Phumi: Every sense of the word! Money wise, ndoda wise, career wise... Zonke. I nod.

Phumi: I recently got into this planning route. My friend's boyfriend introduced me to it... The friend you slapped, Unathi. Mxm.

Me: Hmkay.

Phumi: Anyway, this was the first time I felt energised in years! I loved every minute of the planning and execution process.

Me: Good for you.

Phumi: And then Mvelo came along...

Me: Konje who's Mvelo?

My ass knows who Mvelo is!

Phumi: Bitch, don't play dumb.

We chuckle.

Phumi: Mvelo and I built a great thing... I was falling hard for him... Until the Twitter thing happened.

Me: You didn't know that he's married?

Phumi: I had no clue. He played me.

Me: Manje what is he saying?

Phumi: I'm genuinely not interested anymore. He's just sorry that he got caught.

Me: Yoh, amadoda.

Phumi: Don't say that... You seem to be holding on to a good one.

Me: Hai nami I had to go through the most first.

Phumi: You know, after everything I've been through in my life, I've finally gotten

to a place where I know my worth. When Mvelo and I started our relationship, I made it clear that I value honesty more than anything. That was the perfect time for him to come clean about his situation. However, he looked me dead in the eye and had the audacity to say he also values honesty.

Sies.

Phumi: I made myself clear. This lie was a deal breaker. There's no negotiating yourself out of a deal breaker. As hurt as I am, as sad as I am, I'm never going to take him back. He needs to deal with the consequences of his actions. I will find another love, there's no such thing as soulmates.

Me: You don't think soulmates exist?

She shakes her head.

Phumi: That whole concept makes people feel like they will never be loved again.

How many times have you been in love?
After your first love, did you not think
that the world was over? But look at you
now...

Me: I mean...

Phumi: I'm going to have a lot of
opportunities to love and be loved. Mvelo
is not my be all and end all. I'll be fine.

Me: Yoh...

I ask for another drink.

Phumi: I'm going through the most right
now, but my career is finally coming
together, and that has always stressed me
out more than anything.

Me: What are you working on now?

Phumi: I'm working for an events
company. We do weddings, birthdays,
baby showers... blah blah blah.

I decide not to tell her that I need help
planning my wedding.

Derek would kill me.

Also, she's friends with that Buhle.

Why am I sitting here with her?

She's friends with that hoe!

I think she sees my facial expression,
because she asks what's wrong.

Me: You're friends with Buhle.

Phumi: And you're friends with Niki.

Me: Niki aside, your friend did some
shady shit.

Phumi: Niki also did some shady shit.

I grunt in frustration.

Phumi: At the end of the day, like you
said, our friends are grown, and we can't
stop them from doing what they think is
best.

Me: So calling Derek at 3am is best?

She sighs.

Me: Your friend was beaten up for a
reason.

She sighs again.

Phumi: I didn't know about that call.

Me: Mxm.

Phumi: Let's not discuss our friends. I'm not going to badmouth Buhle, she's a very close friend of mine.

I don't say anything.

Phumi: However, once she's okay, I'll talk to her about her actions.

Me: I was cool with her, because I respect what she does for a living. I knew about her crush, but pretended not to know, because I didn't want her to feel awkward. I didn't want her to feel uncomfortable.

Phumi: You knew?

I nod.

Me: She crossed the line with that call and inviting him over for lunch. She crossed the line and disrespected my relationship.

Phumi: Yoh.

Me: Derek also tells me that even after he told her about his relationship status, she was still acting like a lovesick puppy.

Phumi finishes her drink.

Me: What would you do?

She laughs sarcastically.

Phumi: You don't want to know...

My phone vibrates. It's a message from Derek asking me to get him biltong.

After a few minutes, I focus on Phumi again.

Phumi: Look at you blushing...

I sigh.

Me: Manje what's happening between you and Andile?

She smiles.

Phumi: I've been instructed to keep my mouth shut when it comes to you.

Me: Woow! I'm offended!

She laughs.

Phumi: We're just getting to know each other, nothing serious.

Me: Hmmkay.

Phumi: I'm not rushing into things again. Ngifundile.

The waiter brings our drinks.

Me: Yoh, I forgot I'm driving.

Phumi takes my drink.

Phumi: I'll have that...

I ask for water.

Just then, I get a call from Niki.

Me: Nikwe.

Niki: Where are you? I'm in the mood to drink!

Me: Hai, Niki, I'm driving.

Niki: Yhoo, where are you? Derek can fetch us later!

I tell her where I am.

Niki: I'll be there soon. My Hunters must ready. I need a palate cleanser.

She ends the call before I can even respond.

This is going to turn into something else, and I'm not ready.

Me: Niki is on her way.

Phumi: Ziyanda, you're really testing me.

Me: Aww, you like me and you're scared of liking me.

I gasp dramatically.

Me: Is this a forbidden love?

She laughs and rolls her eyes.

We continue chatting till Niki emerges.

When she gets to the table, she eyes

Phumi, who eyes her back.

Niki: Am I beating up another one today?

Phumi: Unganya.

She sits and then drinks her Hunters.

Niki: Haibo, kanti kwezakalani la with you two?

The waiter comes and gets her order.

Me: She's been cancelled by her friends.

Niki: Which friends?

Niki finishes her drink.

Phumi: You caused an entire scene!

Niki: If this is some kumbaya moment, then I want none of it. I hit your friend, and I would gladly do it again. We all have choices in life, and I choose to beat up bitches that come for me and my friends. Do I care that I trended? Nope. Do I care what you or anyone else thinks? Nope. I'm not here to collect awards for being the best behaved in class or the pretty untainted rose. You expected me to invite your friend over for tea and discuss her hoe-ish ways? I heard her saying Ziyanda is annoying, and I explicitly heard her saying Ziyanda is a cockblocker. As a result, punches were thrown.

Me: Wait, what?

An entire cockblocker??

Me: She said I'm a cockblocker?! I can't help but laugh.

Phumi: She was drunk.

Lol, so Phumi left out that part when she was telling me how the fight broke out.

Niki: Since we're blaming it on the alcohol, then nami I was drunk. We were all drunk! End of story!

The waiter brings more drinks for Niki.

Niki: Anyway, how are things with you and Andi?

Phumi sighs heavily.

Phumi: Ziyanda will tell you all about it.

Niki: Are you leaving?

Phumi: I have a meeting in 30 minutes, so I want to walk around and get the alcohol out of my system.

Niki: Hmkay.

Phumi gives me the money for her drinks.

Phumi: I'll see you around.

Me: Shap.

Niki: Tell your friends that it's on sight...

Phumi: Hai man.

She takes her bag.

Phumi: Bye, guys.

Me: Bye.

She walks out. I look at Niki.

Niki: Your appearance is improving bit by bit. Continue doing whatever you're doing.

Me: Disrespectful bitch.

Niki: On a serious note though, I have no idea why you would want to hang out with Phumi... Stay away from her.

Me: I just bumped into her.

Niki: Hmkay.

I take a sip of my water.

Me: I won't stay long. Derek is expecting me soon.

Niki: Good, I miss him. Maybe I can tell him how you "bumped" into Phumi.

Me: Nikiwe.

Niki: What? He's your fiance. He knows everything, angithi?

I grunt and finish my water.

This is Nikiwe threatening to expose my shady ass. Now, I have no choice but to tell Derek about this accidental drink session...

I'm so annoyed by this driving situation.

A person can't drink happily now because of a stupid car.

Anyway, I drop off Niki and head home.

When I get there, I find Dean in the kitchen.

I haven't seen him in weeks. I had blatantly told him that I need to be away from everyone, and I was shocked when he said, "Okay."

Little did I know that he's been holding a grudge...

Me: Hello.

He ignores me and dishes up for himself.
Oh, the drama...

I walk in and find Derek playing with
Little Star. I sit next to him and give him a
kiss.

Derek: My biltong?

I take it out of my bag and give it to him.

Derek: I was ready to throw a tantrum.

Me: I see...

Derek: Do you have something to tell me?

Me: Huh?

Derek: You're sitting at a distance and
you're tense.

Me: Uhm, I'm just tired.

Derek: Hmkay-

Me: Okay! I was with Phumi I bumped
into her we went out for drinks but I only
had one drink and then we talked about
the fight and then I asked her how things
are with Andile and she told me they're

getting to know each other I'm sorry I
promise it was a coincidence.

He stares at me for a long time.

Derek: Thank you for letting me know.

I close one eye and open the other.

Me: Are you angry?

He chuckles.

Derek: No.

I sigh in relief.

Derek: I still maintain that you should
keep your distance.

Me: Okay.

He kisses Little Star and stands.

Derek: She's sleepy. Let me put her to
sleep.

Me: *whispering* What's wrong with your brother?

He laughs.

Derek: Angizingeni.

He walks away and I groan as Dean walks in and sits on the couch opposite me.

I stare at him as he eats.

Lol, he's so serious.

Me: You want space?

Dean: Mxm.

Me: Come on, Dean, I was tired of everything.

He looks at me blankly.

Me: You'll have to get over whatever you're pissed about because I'm going to need your help planning this surprise wedding.

Dean: What??

Me: Shhh!

I stand and go sit next to him.

Me: Dean, I swear if you even think of Deaning on me, I will personally chop your toes off and feed them to the rest of your family!

Okay, that's a little dark, but he gets the point.

I can't think of anyone else- Dean is the perfect person to help me out. We worked so well together for his Engagement Day, so I know this will be a success.

I know he won't Deaning on me. He will be killed.

INSERT 269 (Unedited)

Okay, so this surprise wedding is really happening. I make my way to Dean's workplace.

I've never been here.

I've never seen Dean in his element.

When I walk into the big premises, I call him and he says he'll send his PA to come fetch me.

I feel like it's my birthday, I don't know why I'm so excited.

A few minutes later, a young lady comes to fetch me. She smiles as I follow her into the elevator.

When we get to the floor, she takes me to Dean's office.

Me: Langa!

The PA looks at me in shock.

Dean: Ya wena.

I walk to him and give him a hug.

Dean: Is the boardroom ready?

The PA says yes.

Dean: I'll be there in a few...

Just then, Nolwazi walks in and I immediately tense up. Shit, I forgot she also works here!

Nolwazi: Zizi?

Me: Hey, Lwazi...

She walks to me and we share a hug.

Nolwazi: What are you doing here?

Me: Me? Oh, uh-

Dean: I'm mentoring her for the day.

Nolwazi: Oh?

Dean: She's been complaining about the teachers not doing their job... I want her to join us for our team meeting today.

Nolwazi: Oh, that's perfect. Why didn't you tell me, Zi? I'm an expert in team dynamics.

Me: Really? I had no idea.

She smiles.

Nolwazi: Don't worry, I'll also help you out.

Man, I just came here to discuss my wedding, but I'll take the extra lessons on team dynamics, I guess.

Nolwazi looks at Dean.

Nolwazi: Ready?

Dean: We'll be there in a few.

Nolwazi: Alright.

She walks out.

Damnit, she is sexy.

Dean is sexy.

They are sexy.

There's something sexy about people in their element at work. I don't know, they turn me on... But then again, I'm weird as hell...

By the end of that meeting, I'm reminded why Nolwazi is a boss bitch!

Me: Lwazi, I'm in love with you!

She laughs sweetly.

She handled her team like a true leader.

They were discussing why staff morale was low and how they are going to work together to fix things.

What did I learn from that meeting?

I'm a cold bitch at work. I'm too strict. I need to find other ways of connecting with my teachers. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but I'm glad I've reached this Aha Moment. I think I have the same leadership style as Dean. We are authoritative and we want shit done. We don't care about the emotions, people must just do their jobs.

Nolwazi has taught me a lot. I'll implement some of the strategies she displayed in that meeting. I'll also be meeting with her for one on one meetings. She's going to be my mentor, moving forward.

This whole insecurity thing made me forget how amazing she is. I'm glad I came here, because she's a hard worker and I can learn a lot from her.

Me: Thank you for lying for me.

Dean: You seem to think I'm a snitch.

Me: Well...

Dean: I'm not a snitch. I said what I said.

Man, the joy I feel when these men in my life start using my ratchet TV lingo? Love it!

Me: I don't think I tell you this enough, but I love you.

Dean: Mxm.

Me: I love youuu!

I stand and give him a squeeze.

Dean: Ziyanda.

Me: Say you love me tooo!

I look at him and he stifles a smile.

Me: Deaaan!

I plan on annoying him until he says it back.

Dean: I love you too.

Me: Yaas!

He gives me a hug and then we sit.

Me: Okay, so while Derek and I were having sex, I had a great idea.

Dean: Masimb' akho, Ziyanda.

I laugh.

Me: Side note, I had a session with Melinda last week, and I came to a very strange realisation.

Dean: What?

Me: I've noticed that ever since we found out that you and Derek are twins, your personalities tend to alternate.

Dean: Huh?

I explain to him my observation. When the other one is happy and approachable, the other one becomes cold and closed-off.

Dean: Really?

Me: Yes.

Dean: Huh, that's interesting.

Me: So I was telling Melinda that because you're both technically my husbands, I've had to deal with this transition.

He chuckles.

Me: And my personality also switches according to your vibes.

Dean: Uyabheda wena.

Me: I'm serious. I find myself addressing Derek the same way I'd address you...

And then I address you the same way I'd address Star...

Dean: You know Derek is Sensitive Susie, so why would you do that?

Me: Hey, akatefi akatefi ubhuti...

We laugh.

Dean: Can we discuss this wedding before Nolwazi disturbs us?

Me: Okay. I take out my notebook.

Me: So, as I was saying, Derek and I were having some breathtaking sex-

Dean: Futsek.

Me: Mxm.

Dean: Just get to the point.

Me: No, I'm trying to build context. You need to understand how intense the situation was... It was truly inspirational.

Dean: Fuck you, Ziyanda.

Me: That's exactly what Star was doing me.

He stands and I laugh.

Me: Okay, I'm kidding!

He sits and looks at me threateningly.

Me: Is that the look you give to your employees and then they end up shitting their pants?

He bursts into laughter.

Me: Okay, on a serious note.

I open my notebook.

Me: I've been inspired... The word "museum" has been in my head for weeks now.

Silence.

He is looking at me carefully.

Dean: I'm waiting for you to say you're kidding.

Me: I'm not joking.

Dean: You are such a fucken weirdo, I can't stand you.

I laugh.

Me: Listen to meee! He shakes his head in defeat as he listens to my idea.

By the time I'm done, he looks a bit convinced.

Me: Do you get my vision?

He sighs.

Dean: Let me pray about it.

Me: Argh.

He chuckles.

Dean: I think it could use a bit of tweaking...

Me: Then give me some constructive feedback...

Dean: Alright then...

It's the 1st of September.

Things have been great.

Dean and I make a mean team, as usual.

Basically, September will be Derek's Appreciation Month.

Dean suggested I do something special before the wedding.

We decided that everyday will be special.

I will do something for Derek everyday or give him gifts till our surprise wedding.

He will be loved left, right and centre!

We have planned the following:

1st- indoor picnic (he looooves this) + sex

(yes this shit is a gift especially if I get on

top) 2nd- movie date 3rd- milkshake date

4th- cologne (gift) 5th- basket filled with his favourite snacks (delivered at work)

6th- personalised wooden watch case for

his exclusive watches 7th- personalised

whiskey and beer glasses 8th- desktop

decision spinner 9th- photo album we'll work on together (I'll print all our pictures) 10th- coffee mug filled with Little Star's cute faces 11th- personalised cozy throw 12th- leather journal 13th- vision board exercise 14th- locket cufflinks with our photos (for our wedding) 15th- a letter I actually wrote while I was pregnant with our first child (wrote this while we were fighting) 16th- couple's key chain (with our initials and the date we started working together) 17th- a big empty jar (we will write what we're grateful for on a daily basis and read the notes every new year) 18th- a tie (for our wedding) 19th- sands of time hourglass (for his office) 20th- homemade cupcakes (I swear I will learn and master this shit with no one's help) 21st- box filled with "Open When..." letters 22nd- box filled with "Why you're amazing"

letters just focusing on his awesomeness
23rd- big goofy painting of us (Derek, me, Little Star, Lwazi and Lelo)
24th- puzzle made from one of our many cute pictures (we'll work on it together)
25th- Let's Get Naked- The Sexy Activity Book for Couples (it's an actual book)
26th- socks (for the wedding)
27th- vows (I'll make this sexy beast write his vows without him realising what he's doing)
28th- personalised love book (an actual story book based on our love story- it will even include illustrations)
29th- jar filled with kindness (notes filled with kind words for when I'm in one of my moods and he feels lonely)
30th- I haven't decided what I will do... We'll see when the time comes, but it will definitely be heart-warming.

So, yes...

September will be his month.

We will get married on the 1st of October.

Planning is going well, and I think we'll pull it off.

INSERT 270

It's the 9th of September.

Today's gift involves working on our very first photo album. We're so technologically driven, that we lose touch with the simple things. Our grandparents and parents have stacks of photo albums and those things never get damaged, instead the memories are so deep, that you feel like you were there with them as you look through the photos.

I want that with Derek. I want to bond with him as we go through our memories. Many years from now, I don't want to be

showing my children a Google Drive folder, I want to show them hundreds of physical pictures that captured lovely moments in my life.

Derek has been glowing and I've been gaining my weight back.

Stress is not good for me, and I'm glad Niki told my ass to get it together. Bheka manje ngabe ngi-shady on my wedding day!

Dean is such an arrogant sweetheart, and just like Derek, my love for him multiplies on a daily basis. As soon as he sees that I'm about to panic about something related to the wedding, he stops everything and takes me out for ice-cream.

To ease my anxiety, he has managed to ensure that all the daily gifts are ready, even the personalised ones. Now, all he does is deliver the gifts everyday.

How blessed am I?

Anyway, today is Photo Album Day.

Derek is still at work.

I go to work three days a week, and then work from home for two days.

Derek has decided that he'll stop

Principaling at the end of the term.

His moods have drastically improved.

Melinda made me realise something...

Derek's unspoken love language is

Receiving Gifts! We've always thought

that it was Quality Time, but September

has made me realise how happy he gets

when he receives gifts. He hasn't been

cranky since he's been getting gifts

consistently! I don't even think he realises

this.

Anyway, Dean arrives and drops off the

album and all the cute decorations.

Me: Thank you, Mr Postman.

He chuckles.

Dean: See you tomorrow. Love you.

Me: Love you too!

He gives me a squeeze before leaving.

When Derek comes back from work, he knows that something is going down and the smile on his face says it all.

Aww, clearly I need to do this more often.

I don't think I show him enough how much he means to me... I've just been so caught up in the drama that I forgot to remind him how valuable he is.

Derek: Hey.

Me: Hiii!

Derek: What's happening?

Me: I ordered burgers for dinner, because it's going to be a jam-packed evening. No cooking.

Derek: Hmm.

Me: Go take a shower.

Derek: Hmkay.

He walks away happily.

When he comes down, I ask him to come to the dining room. The table is set up and all our resources are here.

Derek: What's happening?

Me: Well, I'd like us to work on our very first photo album.

Derek: Aww, baby.

Me: I think this is a great bonding experience.

He wraps his arms around me and gives me the juiciest kiss.

Derek: You're too special.

Me: Nkanyi, you're the special one. I enjoy seeing you excited like a little boy. He smiles.

Me: I've ghat you.

Derek: That's the tea.

I giggle and kiss him.

Me: Let's get started...

We sit next to each other.

Me: I've printed all our pictures. We're going to create a cute photo album and decorate it.

He sighs heavily.

Derek: Are you trying to give me a heart attack?

I smile.

Derek: This is too much for my fragile heart.

I plant a kiss on his lips.

Me: How do you think we should do it?

Derek: Chronological order.

Me: Okay then.

We take all the photos and arrange them chronologically.

He takes the one when we were at the zoo for his birthday.

Derek: Still the best birthday of my entire life.

Me: I aim to please.

Derek: We make a cute couple yazi.

Me: Wow, so you're only realising this now?

He chuckles as he looks through the photos.

Derek: I'm mad that Mdu has trademarked the name Chubby Cheeks. It would fit you perfectly as well.

Me: Hey!

He laughs.

Me: You know I don't like pet names. Baby is fine.

He plants a kiss on my cheeks.

Derek: You're the apple of my eye.

Me: Staaap!

He smiles as we start putting the photos and decorations.

Me: Do you believe in soulmates?

He looks at me.

Me: Phumi was telling me how she doesn't believe in them.

Derek: I don't know... I think our hearts are capable of loving even after we think it's impossible.

Me: So you can have more than one soulmate?

He shrugs.

Derek: I guess... When I was with Busi, I thought she was my soulmate, but look how that ended...

Me: I get it...

Derek: However, you're definitely my soulmate.

Me: Really?

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: I'm just asking. You don't think you'll get tired of me?

Derek: Bullshit.

Me: Hmkay.

We continue chatting.

Me: So... How is Mvelo as a person?

He laughs lightly.

Derek: I was wondering when you're going to ask me about him.

I pout.

Derek: He's a good guy.

Me: Manje do you agree with how he did things with Phumi?

Derek: No. I find it selfish. What he did showed that he is nowhere near ready for a serious relationship that is based on trust and honesty. I'd never lie about such a big thing.

Me: Exactly. He is shady as hell.

Derek: You can't start relationship with lies. It almost never works out.

Me: Poor Phumi is going through the most.

Derek: Ziyanda, I don't get you. I genuinely don't understand you sometimes.

Me: Whyyy?

Derek: Phumi is Buhle's friend. What makes you think she will befriend you and be loyal to you?

Me: I feel like she's my friend-soulmate. When I'm with her, I legit get the vibes I got when I first met all my close friends... That feeling when you know that you're meant to be close with the person.

He shakes his head.

Derek: Unbelievable.

I pout.

Derek: So you want to be friends with her?

Me: She also likes me.

Derek: You want to be friends with her?

I shrug.

Derek: I don't want you to be involved in unnecessary drama. Your wellbeing is my priority. Seeing you and Niki fight that day really affected me. I hate that someone got you that angry.

Me: I wasn't angry though.

He looks at me.

Me: Oh, trust me, I wasn't angry. Had I been angry, I would have blacked out and done crazy things. Derek, you've never seen me angry angry.

Derek: Don't scare me.

I laugh.

Me: That girl got close to me and called me a weak bitch. I was going to leave her, but she kept coming closer to me. I know a bitch that wants to fight, and she wanted a fight. I just gave her a little smack that's all.

He laughs.

Derek: I don't want you to fight people, especially if I'm the cause of it.

Me: This was beyond you. I wasn't even thinking about the crush thing. I was going to check on my friend, and then some stranger tried getting to my face

and I stopped her. I felt disrespected and in that moment the only way I could fix things was to hit her. Talking wasn't going to help. Those people were ready for war when I got there.

Derek: I was amazed by Niki. She was ready to fight one-man.

Me: They were weak. She would have survived by herself. They didn't have that thing. That's why I had to go back, to make sure that she wasn't being jumped by bullfighters like us.

Derek: Kanti Ziyanda who have you fought?

I chuckle.

Me: Ask Mdu... He has seen it all...

He laughs.

Derek: On a serious note, I've told Zimkitha to cancel the project.

Me: What?!

Derek: The lack professionalism is too much. I want nothing to do with Buhle and her ghetto friends. Me: I'm also ghetto.

Derek: And I love you and your ghettoness. I wouldn't change anything about you.

He sighs.

Derek: Buhle must find a man that will also tolerate her. I am not that man.

Me: Eish, so you're cancelling the whole thing?

He nods.

Derek: I don't have time for that shit. She was still lovesick even after she found out that I'm engaged. I tried downplaying the situation, but I don't have the time. Buhle must go flourish elsewhere.

Me: I'm not complaining.

Derek: You have every right to feel some type of way about women coming at me

with other motives. I just don't want you to ever worry about dealing with them. I'll do the dirty work.

Me: My vagina is twitching.

He chokes and laughs.

Me: Wheww...

We continue working on our photo album till we are done...

Day 9 went well!

We are now halfway there!

It's the 15th.

Star is happy. I am happy. We are happy.

Go monate, maan!

So today's gift is a letter I wrote to Star back when I had a miscarriage.

I wrote it after we had a verbal altercation and he basically blamed me for the miscarriage out of anger.

I have made a copy of the letter and put it in an envelope. I've tried my best not to

dwell on that experience. It has got to be my biggest emotional battle till today, because I wasn't ready for it.

I find him in the bedroom, watching TV.

Me: Have a moment?

He nods.

I get in bed next to him and hand him the envelope.

Derek: Hmm...

He smiles.

Me: Open it.

He lowers the TV volume and opens the letter.

It reads:

Dear Derek,

I'm sitting here trying to figure out how exactly I feel. As I'm sitting here, I'm bleeding heavily and I have abdomen pains- I've never experienced such excruciating pain. Our unborn child is basically fighting his/her way out of my

system, and nothing has prepared me for this experience. I feel like I'm dying as well. A part of me is dying and I can't do anything about it.

I keep thinking about what you said to me. You said I never wanted this baby so I must be happy that all of this is happening. You're blaming me for all of this. You think I'm enjoying all of this. I don't understand why you would even say such. You're taking all your anger out on me, and you're forgetting that I'm the one who is in contact with the blood. I'm the one dealing with the pains. Do you honestly think I'm that evil that I would enjoy going through this? Continuously changing pads, knowing that it could have been my baby? I don't wish this on my worst enemy. I was slowly coming to terms with this baby, and now it's gone.

Now I have to live with the guilt for the rest of my life. I feel guilty that I wasn't open to the pregnancy like you. I feel guilty for not accepting the baby sooner. I feel guilty that you're hurt because of me. Your comments have left me feeling like a criminal.

I'm so angry at you. I can't believe you would say such. You always say the cruelest things when you're angry. Your tongue is lethal when you're angry, and you have a meanstreak that only becomes visible when you're angry...

However, despite all of this, my love for you remains unchanged. I've been trying to convince myself that I have never hated anyone the way I hate you, but all of that is a lie. Somehow, even within this chaos, my love for you is the only thing that gives me a sense of peace. It's as if my heart knows without a doubt that I could

walk away and search for love elsewhere, but all roads would lead right back to you. I believe that our feelings can never be replicated. This here journey is ours, the two of us, and at the end of the day, I wouldn't face it with anyone else.

I know you're angry. I'm also angry.

However, I don't hate you. I could never hate you. I'm human. I understand that we get carried away sometimes, and our emotions dictate us. I get it.

I just wish there was a better of communicating our anger instead of lashing out and saying hurtful things. I'm also guilty of this. I'd like to build a healthy relationship with you. I hope things will work out in the future. They have to work out, because I'm not willing to give my heart to someone else again.

We have to figure it out...

I love you,

Ziyanda.

We sit there for a very long time.

Eventually he puts the letter aside and pulls me closer.

Derek: We're nowhere near perfect, but we're slowly getting there.

I nod.

Derek: I'll always be patient with you.

Me: Me too.

He plants a kiss on my forehead.

Derek: I think about our unborn baby every single day... I still think it was a boy.

I roll my eyes and chuckle.

Derek: And then we were blessed with Lwazi, Lelo and Liyakha. Liya is just over a year old now...

Me: Hey... Triple L.

He chuckles.

I legit never noticed.

Me: Star.

Derek: Yes, baby?

I take a deep breath.

Me: I'm pregnant.

There's silence as expected.

Derek: Excuse me??

I look at him.

Me: I didn't renew my injection.

His jaw is on the floor.

Me: I'm literally 4 weeks pregnant.

Silence.

Me: Star?

I look at him nervously.

I thought this would be a great surprise.

I actually want another baby.

I don't know what has possessed me, but I legit want another baby.

Before I know it, his arms are around me and then his on top of me and then I'm on top of him and then we out of bed and then his lifting my fat ass up.

Derek: Are you fucking with me?

I shake my head.

Yhu, I'm suddenly so emotional.

I've never wanted something so badly.

Like, I was secretly praying that I was pregnant. Derek has no idea how many pregnancy tests I've taken...

And now, it's happening, and I'm planning on being present from beginning to end...

What a journey it has been with my Star...

INSERT 271

I've been getting calls like crazy.

Derek's people are calling me, because they've just received invitations.

Nomvuyo: Uthi yi-celebration yani le?

Me: We're celebrating love.

Nomvuyo: Whose love?

Me: Vuvu, this is a couple's thing!

Nomvuyo: Hmkay... Phela mina I'm trying to make a baby, so I don't have time for nonsense.

Me: So my things are nonsense now? Are we there now?

Nomvuyo: Hai suka. I still don't like you.

Me: This distance between us is getting out of hand. Before you know it, I won't even love you anymore.

Nomvuyo: Wow, I'm so touched.

I laugh.

Me: I miss you. Can we do lunch this week?

Nomvuyo: Okay, baby.

Me: I'm in the mood to be with the caucasians, so you must book an exclusive restaurant.

She laughs.

Nomvuyo: Shap. I'll see you soon.

Me: Love you.

Nomvuyo: Love you too. I end the call.

Derek: So what's this event about?

Me: I haven't seen your people in a while. I'd like us to celebrate each other and how far we've all come as individuals and couples.

He looks at me suspiciously.

Me: Just trust me. It's going to be amazing.

Derek: Okay.

Me: I got you a nice lil outfit.

Derek: Is it?

Me: Yep.

Derek: Listen, I really don't give a shit about any of that. I'm having another baby.

I smile.

Derek: But we need to start discussing our wedding- I'm not trying to put you under pressure, but I'd like us to discuss it. I don't want you to do everything on your own.

Shit.

Derek knows when I'm lying!

What am I supposed to do?

Oh, no, I'm panicking!

Derek: Zi?

I snap out of it.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Ya, why?

Derek: You zoned out.

Me: I'm hungry. Lies. I'm full. I literally just ate.

Derek: What are you craving?

Me: You.

He blushes.

Me: Woza phela.

I pull him for a luscious kiss.

That was a close one!

Okay...

It's Day 20 and I'm about to bake. All the ingredients are here and the recipe as well.

Sometimes, recipes can be confusing. I think the perfect thing to do is watch YouTube tutorials.

I take my phone and start searching. I find the perfect video and get to work! I don't understand why people like complicating things. Baking doesn't even seem like a big deal. You mix shit up and put it in the oven. Cooking is more complicated, in my very humble opinion.

When Derek gets home, the kitchen is not as tidy as it usually is.

Derek: Baby, did someone break in?

Me: Very funny.

He helps me tidy up.

Derek: Were you baking?

I nod and look at him sadly.

Me: Derek, I don't know what to do anymore.

Derek: What's wrong, baby?

I show him my cupcakes and he tries to hide his shock.

Derek: Baby... What happened?

Me: I don't know!

I don't even know where to begin. All I can say is that amacupcake wami aswabile. They legit look like they were given a hot smack and then aswaba. They didn't rise and shine like the cupcakes in the tutorial!

Derek: I'm not an expert when it comes to baking...

I sulk.

I worked all day on these.

Derek: Did you add all the ingredients?

I'm so disappointed.

Me: Yes.

Derek: Aww, baby...

I sigh.

Derek: Did you open the oven while they were in there?

Me: How else was I going to see the progress?

Derek: Ziyanda, you're not supposed to open the oven. The cold air has a negative effect.

Me: But I wanted to see how they looked. I groan.

Stupid cupcakes can't even handle a breath of fresh air? Weak ass bitches.

People are dying out there, but they're affected by a little air?

He wraps his arms around me.

Derek: At least you tried.

Me: Don't patronise me!

Derek: We can go get some?

I shake my head.

Me: Cupcakes are stupid.

He stifles a laugh and I push him away.

Me: It's not funny!

Derek: I'm not laughing, baby. I mean, it's the thought that counts!

Me: Mxm.

I walk away and leave him there.

Dean walks in with a few bottles of wine.

Derek: Long time no see...

Dean: I've been busy.

Derek: Too busy to even come check in?

Dean: I'm currently working with a very dramatic client, who is a perfectionist.

Ungijwayela kabi lo.

Me: What's with the wine?

Dean: I had a busy day. Thought we'd share since you're an alcoholic.

Me: Exsqueeze me?

Dean: What?

Derek: Don't come for my wife.

Dean: Angazi ukhulumani ke wena because you're still living in sin here. You're a boyfriend.

Me: Rude! Derek laughs.

Me: Go away, you're not welcome here!

Dean sits.

Dean: Open this wine and let's test it out.

Derek: For what?

Dean: That stupid event she has invited us to.

Derek: So this is going to be a wine-tasting session?

Dean: Ziyanda will probably finish these bottles.

Me: Dean, this is insulting! I'm not an alcoholic!

Dean: Hmkay.

He stands and gets glasses and the opener. He only gets glasses for the two of us, because Derek has quit wine, stating that it no longer excites him.

Derek and I look at each other.

Derek: Dean, we're busy.

Dean: So?

He pours me a glass and gives it to me.

Wheww, it smells so good!

Dean: Good shit, I tell you.

Me: I'm not in the mood, Dean. I don't want to drink.

Dean: Yini wena? The only thing that would stop your alcoholic ass from drinking would be pregnancy.

Me: Well...

There's silence.

He is processing.

He puts down his wine glass, sits back and stares at us.

Dean: Nithini?

Derek: We're pregnant.

Dean: How? When? Why? Where?

Derek: Uh, we fucked... Uhm, about four weeks ago, almost five... I guess I don't shoot blanks... Uhm, we were probably on that couch you're sitting on...

Derek smiles.

Derek: I think I covered all your questions.

Yhu.

Dean doesn't say anything.

Me: Dean?

I go sit next to him.

Me: Are you okay?

Dean: Are YOU okay?

Me: Me? I'm fine. Why wouldn't I be okay?

Dean: Your last two pregnancies weren't exactly the best...

Me: Aww, you're worried about me?

Dean: Mxm.

Me: I'm okay. I want this, I really do.

Dean: You do?

I nod.

Dean: Are you sure?

Me: Yes!

He looks at Derek.

Dean: Hoping for twins? Derek nods.

Me: Hai hai, that's stretching it.

Dean: I'm sure it's twins. I can feel it.

Me: Haike.

He chuckles.

Dean: Were you planning on hiding this from me?

Me: Yes! It's still early to announce.

Dean: Wow, so you were going to leave me out?

Derek: Of course not. Your nosy ass was going to find out one way or another.

We laugh and he pulls me for a squeeze.

Dean: Congratulations, kiddo.

Me: Thank youuu!

Dean: So we'll enjoy ourselves this time around?

Me: Yes!

He smiles and continues squeezing me.

Derek: So mina I don't get a hug?

Me: No.

I'm enjoying this hug a bit too much, and I refuse to let go of him. I love cute and cuddly Dean- he hardly shows up.

Dean: So I don't have a drinking buddy anymore?

Me: You must stop making it seem like ngiyisdakwa.

We continue chatting.

Dean: What were you up to today?

He knows very well what I was doing.

Derek: She was baking.

Dean: Hawu, where's the cake? It could go well with this wine.

Me: Dean.

He chuckles.

Dean: Where's the cake?

Derek stifles a laugh.

Dean starts laughing.

Dean: Why the fuck would you even touch an oven? You can't even fry an egg properly.

Me: Mxm.

I move and go sit next to Derek.

They start laughing.

Dean: Did you take pictures of the mess?

Derek: No, I'd never do such.

They chuckle knowingly.

I grab Derek's phone and he tries to take it from me.

Me: Don't you dare touch me!

I unlock his phone and go to his gallery.

Me: Woow!

Yazi this nigga took pictures of everything! Every damn thing!

Me: Derek!

He looks at me guiltily.

Me: Arghh!

I stand and leave them there as they continue laughing.

It's now the 27th of September.

The planning process is going really well.

My mother has also been assisting me, even Zimkitha ended up joining the team.

I had to involve her, because she has the

connections and she insisted on handling the finances. I didn't even fight her, because these people's relationship with money is completely different to my relationship.

My father is still trying to understand how a surprise wedding works. He's always asking me random questions.

Anyway, it's starting to sink in that I'm planning my wedding.

My fat ass is pregnant and getting ready to get married to my wounded sexy beast. Today, we're going to be working on our vows. I won't tell Derek why we're doing this today specifically. I know he'll enjoy the activity and won't ask too many questions.

He's been gone since 9am and it's 2pm now. I decide to call him.

Derek: My love.

Me: Hey, when are you coming back from your meeting?

Derek: I'm actually on my way back. I'll see you soon.

Me: Shap. Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

I end the call and take out our journals.

He walks to the patio and finds me with Little Star chilling and waiting for him. As usual, he gives all his attention to Liya before even focusing on me.

He sits and gives me a peck on the cheek.

Me: Sooo... I'd like us to start thinking about our vows.

Derek: What vows?

Me: Our wedding vows. He raises an eyebrow.

Me: You know, just to get us thinking and uhm excited?

Derek: Ziyanda, my vows have been ready for a very long time.

Me: Huh?

Derek: Get ready. I'd like us to go to your parents' for dinner... We have to tell them about the twins.

Me: Hai hai hai! Twins?

He chuckles as he stands.

Derek: Are you going to change or you're ready?

Me: Derek, what about our bonding exercise for today?

Derek: Like I said, my vows are ready. You just need to make up your mind about the date. I've been ready since the day I met you.

With that said, he walks away and leaves me hanging.

When we arrive at home, my mom is in the kitchen, in a very good mood.

We go to the lounge and find my dad watching TV.

Me: Koko.

He smiles when he sees us and immediately reaches out for Baby Star. I'm slowly drifting into the background yazi. People don't give me these warm hugs now, instead this child receives all the love. Manje Derek thinks I'll survive with twins? Hai, I don't want twins.

Derek and I sit next to each other and watch as my dad showers the drama queen with kisses.

I smile as soon as I hear Lwazi's voice. She has grown into such a cutie.

Lwazi: Hiiii!

She throws herself on top of me and gives me a kiss. Derek's hand instantly covers my belly as Lwazi lands on me quite roughly.

Lwazi: To what do we owe the pleasure?

Me: Whoa, look at you using sophisticated language.

Lwazi: I can't be a lawyer that can't speak fluently.

Me: Yaas, baby.

She looks at Derek.

Lwazi: Uncle D!

Lol, she alternates between "Daddy D" and "Uncle D." I guess it depends on her mood.

She gives him a hug and then goes to sit next to my dad so she can also play with Little Star. At least Lwazi still gives me my deserved attention.

Lwazi: Mommy, how's the weddin-

Me: I'm pregnant!

My mom screams from the kitchen.

Mom: WHAT?!

She rushes to the lounge.

My dad looks at us in shock.

I look at Lwazi and decide that I need to start hitting her for ukuphapha. She can't keep running her mouth with no consequences.

INSERT 272

Dad: You're pregnant?

Lwazi: Pregnant?!

Me: Lwazi, go play outside.

Lwazi: But-

Me: Ufuna impama?

She immediately keeps quiet and walks out.

Uyaphapha lo. I've made up my mind- I'm going to start hitting her.

My dad's expression changes.

I can't read him.

Me: Are you angry?

He sighs.

I look at Derek, and I also can't read his expression. I hope he's not angry that I blurted it out like that.

Derek: Ziyanda and I made a joint decision that she would not renew her contraceptive.

Aww, he doesn't want me to be in trouble by myself.

Mom: Hawu, you usually fill us in when you're making drastic decisions.

Me: The decision was made recently. I- we didn't know that it would happen so soon. I look at my dad and try to read him. I know my mom doesn't have a problem with it, she's my bestie this one.

I just feel bad for my dad, because in all honesty, the man has had to deal with a lot of things because of me. From moving out and cohabiting, to having a child before getting married, to having a miscarriage, and now getting married in a

very peculiar way. I know deep down he has always wanted to have proper lobola negotiations, but now Derek's family dynamics don't allow for such to happen. Now all he'll get is a bank notification. I mean, he said the money is enough to make him accept all the bullshit. I still don't know how much they gave him. I have my personal reservations about lobola, but if my dad and Derek have no problem with the setup, then it's not my place to stop him.

Me: Are you angry?

My dad sighs.

Dad: Why would I be angry?

Me: We're not married. .

Dad: Ziyanda, your relationship with Derek has been very strange from the get go, but one thing I'm certain of is that you have worked really hard to create a safe space for the family you are building.

I sigh in relief.

Dad: I can't expect you to have children when I am ready or when your mother is ready. I can't dictate your life.

Me: That means a lot to me.

Mom: Heyi kodwa you are fertile, Ziyanda. Thank God for contraceptives, I'm sure you'd be running a preschool by now.

Me: Wow!

I'm glad they're not being dramatic about this.

We continue chatting and catching up.

Dad: When are you planning on getting married?

Okay, so he's going to play along.

But then again, I'm sure this is a genuine question, because he legit doesn't understand this surprise wedding thing.

Derek: You know my stance. I've always wanted to marry her, but I'd rather not put pressure on her.

Mom: Wena na.

Derek: We'll get married when both of us are ready. Right now, I'm just happy that Ziyanda is embracing the pregnancy, so we can both be excited about it.

Mom: Aww!

I look at him and smile.

Derek: I look forward to the next 8 months.

Mom: How far along are you?

Me: Approaching five weeks.

Mom: Hmm, alright then. I'm very happy. I don't want to be an old grandmother. Your kids need to enjoy my greatness while I'm still fresh.

Me: Haike mama.

We continue chatting and I decide to make my way out of the house to find Lwazi.

I find her sitting by the gate, busy on her phone.

Me: Lwazi.

She looks at me.

Lord, she is all sad and sulky.

Me: Come, let's take a walk.

We walk out of the yard.

Me: Should I go first or you want to go first?

She grunts.

Lwazi: I don't like it when you dismiss me like that. You hurt my feelings.

I nod lightly.

Lwazi: Last week, you also did the same thing. Whenever you're stressed, you shout.

I sigh.

Me: Okay, I hear you...

I sigh again.

Me: I'm sorry for hurting your feelings.

Let me explain why I was angry just now.

You weren't supposed to mention the wedding, Lwazi. It's a surprise wedding,

and Derek doesn't know anything about it.

Lwazi: What's a surprise wedding?

Yoh.

Me: It means Derek has no idea that the ceremony will be taking place. I'm going to surprise him. She looks at me in confusion.

Lwazi: So who's going to be at the wedding? Your friends don't know about it?

Me: I'm going to trick them into coming.

Lwazi: What will they wear? Will they know the dress code?

Me: Like I said, I'm tricking them into coming. They think they're attending a different event.

Lwazi: What about Daddy D? How will he get to the event?

Yoh, Jesu.

I explain everything properly.

She is quiet for a few seconds.

She's processing.

Lwazi: But mommy, you didn't tell me that it's a surprise wedding.

Me: I didn't?

Lwazi: No. You just mentioned that your wedding is on the 1st.

Me: Really?

She nods.

Lwazi: I thought everyone knew. I don't even know what a surprise wedding is.

I groan.

Lwazi: Is that why the designers have been coming to us instead of us going to them?

I chuckle.

Me: Yes, I don't want you guys to bump into Derek that side. It's closer to our house.

Lwazi: Ohhh...

I nod.

Lwazi: So what will Daddy D wear?

Me: Dean and I organised something for him.

Lwazi: So what about your dress?

Me: I'm going to wear two dresses.

Lwazi: Really??

She looks at me excitedly.

Lwazi: So where are you going to hide your dresses? Are they ready? What if Daddy D sees them?

Shit, I didn't think about that.

Lwazi: Hmm, you didn't think about that, did you?

Me: Nope.

Lwazi: Why don't you bring them here?

It's not like Derek will search my bedroom.

I laugh and wrap my arm around her shoulders.

Me: You smart little girl.

Lwazi: I'm not little anymore.

Me: Argh.

She giggles.

Me: I'm sorry for hurting your feelings. I will pay attention to how I address you when I'm stressed.

Lwazi: I forgive you, mommy. I'm also sorry for almost messing up your plans.

Me: It's okay. It was an innocent mistake.

Lwazi: Do you forgive me?

Me: Of course, I forgive you.

We continue walking around the area...

I guess hitting her will never work, because Melinda has been very influential in how I interact with her. With all relationships, communication is more effective than holding on to anger and releasing it in negative ways. I don't want Lwazi to grow up thinking that the only way she can be taken seriously is through stubbornness and drama. Heck, I'm approaching 30 and still unlearning all

those toxic methods. I want her to become an emotionally stable woman who is not afraid to express herself and also be accountable for her actions. Hitting doesn't really help. However, it's still an option I am more than willing to explore should shit get out of hand.

As we're driving back home, I can see that Derek wants to say something, but he's not saying anything.

Me: Khuluma...

He sighs.

Derek: Is there something I'm doing that's preventing you from wanting to take the next step?

Me: I'm confused.

Derek: When Lwazi tried asking you about the wedding, you were quick to cut her off.

Oh shame...

He's so convinced that I don't want anything to do with marriage, that he's beginning to take it personally.

Derek: I can't help but think I'm the problem.

I don't say anything.

Derek: Am I the problem?

Me: You're not.

He sighs.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Derek, can you stop overthinking this? Can we focus on the pregnancy?

Derek: Did you agree to the engagement just to shut me up?

Me: Haike.

Derek: I'm just asking, Ziyanda. I want to know if I'm the problem.

Me: You're not the problem.

Derek: Okay.

Me: Can we please not make this a thing?

Derek: It's not a thing.

Me: It is. I can tell it's bothering you.

Derek: Well, wouldn't you be bothered if you were me?

Me: Jesu.

I decide to drop it, because I might end up telling him everything. He's too sulky for my liking.

It's the evening of the 30th.

I've been so busy and occupied, that I haven't really processed what the hell I'm doing.

What if Derek doesn't find any of this shit cute?

I call Dean and he answers.

Dean: Dlamz.

Me: Dean, I'm panicking!

Dean: What's wrong? Everything is in order for tomorrow.

Me: What if he hates it?!

Dean: If there's anyone who'll never hate anything you do it's Derek.

Me: Dean!

Dean: Relax, Derek will love this. We both know him. There's nothing he wants more than to marry you. He called me after you met up with your parents, thinking he's contributing to your fear of marriage. Trust me, this surprise will blow him away in a good way.

Me: You think?

Dean: I know this, and you also know this. Derek will appreciate this. Had it been me, I would leave your ass, but Derek is completely different. He will love this.

Me: Okay.

Dean: I'd tell you to have a glass of wine, but the twins are cockblocking.

Me: Argh.

Dean: Relax. Everything is ready for tomorrow. Your perfectionism came in

handy, because you ensured that shit was done accordingly. All that's left is for you to tie the knot.

Me: Thank you.

Dean: But you do know that this ceremony doesn't mean you're actually married, right? You still need to sign the papers.

Me: Ya, Dean, I'm not a fool!

Dean: I'm just checking.

Me: Mxm. Bye.

Dean: Bye. I'll see you tomorrow.

Me: Shap. Love you.

Dean: Love you too, kiddo.

I end the call and focus on Little Star, because whoa, I'm going crazy...

The following morning, I wake up and go to the balcony.

I feel sick.

I stand there for a few minutes.

Haibo, am I really doing this? A surprise wedding?

Yoh, Niki is going to kill me! Nomvuyo ke yena? She will cancel me forever!

Just then, Derek walks out and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: Morning.

Me: Hey.

Derek: Are you okay?

Me: Aha.

Derek: Sure?

Out of nowhere, I burst into tears.

Derek: Zi...

Yoh, I let it all out.

The anxiety, the stress, the excitement, the anticipation... Konke, I let it all out.

He holds me and I cry for a good five minutes.

Derek: Baby...

Me: I don't know why I'm crying...

Derek: Isn't it too early for such symptoms?

Me: Don't question me!

Derek: Okay, I'm sorry.

I look at him and he wipes me tears.

Me: Love you.

Derek: Uhm, love you too.

Me: No, I'm serious, Derek. I really love you. I just can't imagine what my life would be without you. I really love you.

He smiles.

Me: I know I can be mean to you, but I hope you don't doubt my love for you.

Derek: I also have my mean moments.

Me: You do.

Derek: I love you even when you're mean.

I smile and kiss him.

Me: Let's take a bath.

Derek: When are we going to see the gynae?

Me: We can go next week.

He nods.

Derek: I'll set an appointment.

Me: Alrighty.

I take his hand and lead him inside.

I desperately need to let out my stress physically...

Derek: So, where exactly is this event taking place?

Me: One of Zimkitha's properties.

Derek: Why aren't you using one of my properties?

Me: Derek, awume. I don't have time for this little beef with Zimi.

Derek: I'm not bee-

Me: Actually, I have the time today!

He looks at me in shock.

Me: Do you expect Zimkitha to stay single for the rest of her life? All of you are in serious relationships, so yena she must be everyone's third wheel forever?

He tries speaking and I stop him.

Me: Hai, let her be! She loves that man, and none of us have the right to stop her from following her heart. It's not like Bheki is affecting any of us. The only person who has the right to be angry is Liwa, but he's so far up her ass, as usual, that he has no problem with this!

Derek: He's far up her ass?

Me: Okay, I didn't mean to say that, but you get what I'm saying. He sighs.

Me: I'm not going to have a back and forth with you. It's my turn to make the executive decision- you will apologise to her today and let it go.

Derek: Yes, ma'am.

Me: Good, now get dressed.

Derek: Why are you dressed so casually?

Me: My dress is that side. I have some last minute things to fix. You'll meet me there.

Derek: Hmkay.

Me: Shap.

Just then, we hear footsteps.

Zimkitha: Koko!

Derek rolls his eyes.

I'm sure he regrets giving these people the keys to the house.

Zimkitha: Hello, children.

Hehe, she is really living her best life. It is very evident that she is well taken care of.

Zimkitha: Ziyanda, are you ready?

Me: Yes.

Zimkitha: Let's go, I've been waiting for a while.

She looks at Derek, who is getting dressed.

Zimkitha: Hello, Nkanyezi.

Derek: Hello.

Me: I'll give you a few minutes to sort this out. I don't have time for drama.

I walk out and leave them there.

As I walk out to Zimkitha's car, it fully sinks in. Because these people are linked somehow, they're all going to be in the same space.

Jesu, Kwanele is Niki's plus 1. Bheki is Zimkitha's plus 1. Phumi is Andile's plus 1. Luyanda is Jeff's plus 1 (and me and that girl don't get along). Ziggy yena I told his ass not to bring Ivy otherwise uzonya. Dean resents Kwanele. Derek is not sure about Phumi. Niki is still feeling some type of way about Nolwazi and the way she singled me out. Tholi's ass is still married to Kwanele. Kwanele is Liwa's brother. Does he know though? Mdu hates Kwanele. Niki won't be happy that I invited a few of my varsity people (she doesn't necessarily like them).
What the fuck was a bitch thinking?
I need holy water.

However, I still maintain, anyone who'll try ruin this shit will most definitely catch these hands!

INSERT 273

When Dean walks into the room, looking all sexy and snatched, my heart races.

Dean: Ziyanda, you're starting to freak me out.

Haibo, I'm really throwing a surprise wedding? Who the hell do I think I am?!

He walks to me and gives me a hug and I cry all over again.

Yes, I've been crying since I got here.

Zimkitha even gave up on my ass and let me be.

Dean: What's making you nervous?

Me: Everything.

He sighs.

Dean: Do you see how good I look right now? Your tears are fucking my outfit up. I push him away and sit on the bed.

Dean: Where's your makeup artist?

Me: I asked her to give me space.

Dean: Safa yi-space. Kanti why are you so addicted to space? Now you're even chasing away makeup artists, because you want space?

Me: Futsek! Futsek, Dean!

He chuckles.

Just then, the MUA walks in and smiles.

MUA: Ready, dear?

Dean: Don't call her dear, she'll kill you.

MUA: Babe?

Dean: Even worse.

MUA: Okay then... Ziyanda, are you ready?

Dean: Listen, I'm just trying to help you out...

It is very clear that this artist is already planning her own wedding with Langelihle.

Dean: Will you be able to hide her puffy eyes?

MUA: I know what I'm doing. She'll look amazing.

Dean: Good, because you won't be paid the rest of your money if I'm not satisfied with your services.

MUA: Are you the groom?

Dean: Will that change anything?

Me: Dean!

He is grinning.

He likes messing with people. That's why no one likes his ass!

The poor MUA is now traumatised and deeply in love.

Dean: I'm just joking. I'll be back shortly to check on you.

She smiles at him and he looks at me.

Dean: Wena, stop crying.

Me: Hmkay.

He walks out and closes the door. She looks at me and smiles.

I feel so bad right now, because I completely forgot her name, and now I have no idea how I'm going to talk to her without exposing my shadiness.

MUA: I see he's married...

I nod.

MUA: He is really sexy. I don't like he's attitude, but he's really hot.

Me: I know.

She starts making small talk and I try not to be rude. I just want silence. I want to gather my thoughts, but I obviously can't tell this poor woman to shut up.

She takes out her brushes and products. She's also going to be doing my hair.

MUA: I'm glad you liked the looks I sent you.

Me: They're perfect.

I had sent her pictures of my dresses, because she wanted to make sure the makeup will go with everything.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to meet up with her in order for her to experiment with my face, so she used one of her people as a canvas and sent me pictures of the looks.

As she's applying primer, the door opens and my mother walks in.

Mom: I can't believe this is happening!
She is so excited!

Mom: Zizi, the place looks stunning!

Me: Right?

She smiles and looks at the MUA.

Me: This is my mother.

MUA: Hey, ma. I'm Kate.

Ahh, yes... Kate...

I legit saved her name as MUA. I got her number from one of my varsity people.

Mom: It's nice to meet you, love.

Kate: Will I do your makeup as well?

Mom: Just touch up, sweetie. I sweat a lot and it's not like I need a lot of makeup.

Ngimuhle.

We laugh and continue chatting. I'm glad she's being her usual bubbly self right now, because I need all the positivity the world has to offer.

My phone rings.

Mom: It's my son.

Me: Which one?

She giggles.

Mom: Derek.

She gives me the phone and I take a deep breath before answering.

Me: Hey, Star.

Derek: Is everything ready?

Me: Not yet. I'll tell you when you should come.

Derek: I'm going to fall asleep.

Me: Then that's a you problem, not a me problem.

Derek: I'm not even in the mood for this, Zi. Can't I bunk this event?

Me: If you want to be alone for the rest of your life, then don't pitch.

He chuckles.

Derek: Alright, I'll see you soon.

Me: Shap. Love you.

Derek: Love you too.

I end the call and sigh heavily.

Me: He's getting restless.

Kate: Men are such babies!

Mom: Tell me about it!

Me: Hai, mama, that's my father you're talking about.

Mom: Hmm, you don't know him like I do!

I listen as she tells me about my dad's annoying tendencies.

Good distraction, this one.

It's now around 11am, and I know that people are here. I send Derek a text, letting him know that he can come with Little Star.

Kate helps me get into my first dress.

Kate: Bitch, this is a lewk!

I smile.

Shame, I do look good yazi- to think I was looking like a hobo for months!

Hai, I have redeemed myself!

The colour combo for the wedding is gold, peach and mint. It's a subtle combination that is not too bright and overwhelming- I love pastels. We're going to be outside, and the greenery of this property goes well with the colours.

I honestly don't give a shit about the finer details like spoons and table cloths.

Zimkitha and my mother handled all of that. They handled the decor and table settings and whatever.

All I care about is the experience... I need everyone to leave this place feeling all warm and fuzzy. I'm wearing a half sleeve scoop neck tea-length tulle dress with 4 layers, because I'm not trying to look like a blob of heavy material. My mom thought lace would make it tacky, so we decided to go with pearls for embellishment. Even the pearls had to be carefully placed on the dress, because my mom doesn't want me to look ridiculous. At least I'll literally be clutching my pearls should anything bizzare occur. Because the dress is already accessorised, my hair is not dramatic. Kate managed to create a fishtail braid with a low bun. I can't stand anything being around my neck or those long earrings- I opted for simple freshwater pearl earrings. Little Star always pulls those long earrings anyway, so I've had to stop buying them

altogether. I'm wearing very comfortable nude ankle buckle strap block sandal heels. Heels and grass don't mix, so I'm aiming for comfortability more than anything.

So, yes... I look gorgeous.

But I'm shitting my pants!

Derek calls to let me know that he has arrived. I tell him where I am.

Kate: Babe, you look drop dead gorgeous! This dress is perfect for you.

Me: Thanks, Kate.

See, I made sure that the dress is not too weddingy, but it still makes a statement. I don't want Derek to figure everything out too quickly.

Kate: Calm down! There's no way this man is going to say no to marrying you! I take deep breath.

Gosh, I want to poop.

Just then, we hear a knock on the door.

Kate: Come in!

Jesoooo!

As soon as I see him and how cute Little Star looks in the mini version of my dress, I cry.

I'm trying to keep it together, but my emotions are too strong, and they're coming at me all at once.

Derek stands there in complete shock.

Ngapha I'm sobbing and Kate is comforting me.

I don't even know when he walked over to us, but he's now by my side.

Kate gives me some tissue and I wipe my tears. I honestly can't help it. I'm nervous, stressed and excited.

Derek: Baby...

Yhu, I finally understand how Tholi feels. Sometimes, the tears just take over and you have no control over them.

Kate: I'll give you some space...

She walks out and closes the door.

I decide to focus on Little Star, because if I even look at Derek in the eye, I'll start crying again. I take her from him and kiss her.

Liya: Mama! Mamama!

Me: Shit.

Derek: Language.

I take a deep breath and finally look at him.

Derek: I'm speechless.

Me: You're so used to me looking shady that this is a shock for you.

He laughs lightly.

Derek: You're beautiful, Ziyanda. You're always beautiful, but this? I wasn't ready.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Clearly I haven't been taking this event seriously.

Me: I went all out.

Derek: I can see.

He smiles.

Derek: Shit, you look really good.

Me: Language!

He chuckles.

Derek: I'm turned on.

Me: No, now is not the time.

He sighs heavily.

Derek: Can I get a kiss?

Me: Derek, no!

He groans.

Derek: So, what's the agenda?

Me: You'll see...

Derek: You are so full of surprises.

Me: Yep...

I'm on the verge of tears!

Just then, my mother walks in with my dad.

Mom: Rhaaa! Look at my babies!

Lol, my dad looks like he's about to pass out!

Mom: Anisebahle!

Derek: Ziyanda has left me speechless.

They share hugs.

Mom: Derek, baby, Dean is looking for you downstairs.

Derek: Alright.

He takes Little Star and plants a kiss on cheek.

We watch as he walks out and closes the door.

Dad: Let's sit.

We all sit on the edge of the bed. I'm in between them. We sit in silence for a very long time.

When I look at my dad, I see that he's crying. He wipes his tears, and of course I instantly start crying as well. My mother is also crying now.

We cry for a good five minutes without saying anything to each other.

My dad takes a deep breath.

Dad: As strange as this whole thing is, I couldn't be happier right now. I've never seen you this content, confident and secure. Derek is the right man for you, and I know you two will be just fine.

These tears!

Dad: All I've ever wanted is for you to be happy, truly happy. I've seen you at your lowest, and I've always prayed that God gives you the strength and patience to deal with the challenges you're presented with. I'm proud of the woman you're becoming. You still have a lot to learn, but you're on the right track. I love you, and I am happy that you have finally found someone who prioritises your happiness and growth.

Yoh.

Mom: I'm not going to say much, because you both know that once I start crying, I never stop. All I want you to know, Zizi, is

that your father and I will always be there for you. Don't ever think our door is closed. For you, the door is open 24/7. I encourage you to continue working towards becoming a good, kind, loving, respectful and dedicated woman. Don't ever think there is a limit, there is no bar when it comes to growth... You must always aim to become a better version of yourself.

Jesu.

They continue filling my cup with love and positivity. As emotional as this is, I am so grateful that they're here.

Dad: Alright, let's pray and freshen up.

Mom: Where's that Kate of yours? My face needs her!

I laugh.

My parents and I finally make our way downstairs. The house is empty. People

are at the reception area. No one knows that the backyard is where it's at.

I could use a shot of something strong right now, but I'll settle for water.

We make our way outside, and sure enough, everyone is there.

I try to read the vibe. There's excitement in the air, but the tension is definitely below the surface. It's there, but no one is acknowledging it.

Niki: Biiiiitch!

My varsity people are the only ones who haven't arrived. I invited four of them.

Even if they don't come, I'll be fine, really.

Oh... Jeff and Ziggy aren't here as well. I'm sure they're high wherever they are.

I can't see Kwanele as well.

Niki: You look amazingggg!

Me: You too!

Niki: Yaas, bitch, yaaas!

I'm so tempted to tell her what's really happening, but I can't!

Me: Kwanele?

Niki: He's on his way. He had to go see his mother. The drama in our lives right now?

Me: We really need to catch up.

We take a few pictures and then I go to the Serious Squad- Nolwazi and Nandi. They just look like old money.

Nolwazi: Hey, Zi!

Nandi: Wow, you look wonderful!

I give them hugs and compliment them as well.

Nolwazi: Geesh, one would swear you're getting married!

Nolwazi and her smart mouth.

Me: Oh no, you know me and my delaying tactics.

Nandi: Heyi, don't rush into things vele. It gets hectic.

Of course it gets hectic when your man is generous with his dick. If Derek ever pulls such stunts, I will kill him.

But, let me not judge them. Nandi and Malusi clearly love each other in their own unique way.

I am pulled my Gabi and she takes me to the champagne fountain.

Gabi: Zizi.

Me: Yes, Gabi?

Gabi: This is a surprise wedding, isn't it?

I look at her in shock.

Gabi: I knew-

Me: Shh!

Gabi: *whispering* I knew it!

Me: How the hell did you figure it out?

She grins.

Me: Just zip it, okay?

She giggles.

Gabi: My lips are sealed.

She takes some champagne and I leave her there. She has no idea that she has just ignited my anxiety!

Right on time, Dean walks to me and wraps his arm around my shoulders.

Dean: Breathe.

Me: Gabi knows!

Dean: Knows what?

Me: About the wedding!

Dean: Of course she does... She's been married too many times.

I groan.

Dean: Relax, we are all here now. Things will go smoothly.

I nod and sigh deeply.

Just then, one of the security guys walk to Dean and I.

Security: We have a dilemma.

Me: What? What's wrong?

Security: There's a man who's refusing to leave there by the gate.

Me: Huh?

Zweli.

I'm going to kill him!

Dean is already walking away and I have to speed-walk just to catch up.

When we get to the gate, this man is standing there, dressed casually. He looks like le-type yaboDerek.

Okay, it's not Zweli.

Dean: And then?

Him: I came to stop this wedding.

Me: Excuse me?

Him: It can't happen.

Dean: And who the fuck are you?

Him: Nandi cannot get married to that son of a bitch again.

Dean and I look at each other in confusion.

Him: You have to let me in.

Me: Sorry, who are you?

Him: Sifiso...

Dean: Who told you that Nandi is getting married?

He shrugs.

Him: I need to-

Me: Hey! Hey! Futsek! This is not Nandi's wedding!

He looks at me in shock.

Me: No one is getting married here, and this is my event. Go home!

Him: Oh-

Me: Hamba bhuti. I have no idea who you're are, but this is my event. Hamba, hamba, hamba!

He looks at me sheepishly.

Dean: Just leave. This is not Nandi's event.

He sighs heavily and nods.

Sfiso: I apologise.

Me: Bye bye.

We watch as he gets in his car and drives off.

This is exactly why I insisted on having security, as bougie as it sounds... I don't want random people popping up!
Nandi needs to check her side niggas!
Today is not the day!

INSERT 274 (Unedited)

As soon as I see Jeff and Ziggy, I lose it! My shady weed-smoking friends have arrived!

Jeff: Zi Monster...

Ziggy: This setup is too bougie for me.

Me: Shut up, and give me hugs!

I squeeze them one at a time...

Me: Where's Luyanda?

Jeff: I didn't tell her about this event. I know you two don't get along.

Me: Aww, how thoughtful of you.

Jeff: Besides, she's still dealing with her daddy issues.

Me: Argh, I've missed you two!

Ziggy: Is champagne the only thing on the menu?

Me: No, you can get something else at the bar.

Ziggy: Alright. Mate, should I get you something?

Jeff nods and Ziggy walks away.

Jeff: You look gorgeous.

Me: Argh, I've missed your slow self.

He chuckles coolly.

The weed he has been smoking for all these years has made him speak very softly and slowly. He is the chilliest person I know. I think he's high 24/7.

Me: You've stopped being an escort, right?

Jeff: Zi, come on, you always ask me this question.

Me: Jeff, you're too unpredictable. I need to be sure that you've stopped doing crazy things.

He smiles.

Jeff: I'm not into that shit anymore...

Luyanda would leave me...

Me: Has she recovered from her kidnap trauma?

Jeff and Ziggy's life is a movie. The stories I have heard are completely bizarre.

Jeff: She's made lots of progress.

As we're chatting, I feel Derek's presence behind me. He wraps his arm around my waist.

Lol, he has never liked Jeff. I think he's jealous of how much I adore him. He always gets touchy feely when I'm with Jeff.

Jeff: Ah... Derek, how are you, mate?

Derek looks at Jeff blankly.

Derek: Good and you?

Jeff: I'm great, thanks... You two look amazing... When are you tying the knot?

Argh.

I'm thankful to see Ziggy walking back to us.

Ziggy: Derek, how are you doing?

Derek: Good and you?

Ziggy: I'm good, mate...

He gives Jeff his drink.

Derek looks at me.

Derek: A word?

Me: Sure.

I look at Jeff and Ziggy.

Me: No smoking today.

Ziggy: How do you expect us to stay sober? I've just seen that dude that tried intimidating me a while back.

Me: Which one?

Ziggy: The one that looks like Derek.

Me: He tried intimidating you?

Ziggy: I'll tell you all about it...

I chuckle and walk away with Derek.

Me: Is everything okay?

I look at him knowingly and he grunts.

Derek: I miss you. You've been running away from me.

Me: No, I haven't.

We go inside the house and he wraps his arms around me once we're in the kitchen.

Me: Are you okay?

He nods.

Derek: Are you okay?

I nod.

Derek: People can't stop complimenting you.

Me: It's insulting, really. Am I that basic that as soon as I wear a cute dress, people are blown away?

Well... This year hasn't really been the best. My appearance has been the least of my worries. I mean, at least now I know that Derek really loves me.

Derek: You need to stop bad mouthing yourself. You're beautiful.

Me: Hmkay.

We share a kiss.

Me: Let's go back outside before you get the wrong idea.

Derek: I'm just trying to hit.

Me: Eeuw, don't ever say that! That is not your lingo! He laughs.

Derek: Angithi that's how your high friends speak, mate.

Me: Argh, Derek!

I take his hand and we walk out again.

Liwa: Ziyanda Dlamini! Ziyanda Dlamini!

Me: Liwa Mzinyathi!

We share a warm hug.

Nomvuyo eyes me suspiciously as I give her a hug. I don't even want to give her the opportunity to say anything.

Nomvuyo: Baby, umuhle kanjani.

Me: Thank you, bestie boo.

We walk to the reception and the vibe is still a little tense.

Just then, Kwanele emerges and I swear we all turn to look at him.

I immediately look over at Dean and his face says it all. Nolwazi is already holding his hand.

Niki gives him a hug.

Tholi's face is red red red.

Mdu is also tense.

What a joke!

I walk to Kwanele

Me: Kwani!

Kwanele: Hey, Zi.

We share a hug. I'm happy to see him- it's been a while.

Niki: Whew, chile, look at all these pressedt people!

Me: They're not looking anymore.

Niki: Your people are the most judgemental bunch I've ever come across. One of these days, we need to dissect how they think they shit carrot cake.

Me: Come on, Niki.

Niki: Hai, sithule siyabuka...

Me: Anyway, how have you been, Kwanele?

Kwanele: I've been good, Zizi. A lot has been happening, but I'm surviving.

Me: You two look all glowed up! These baecations you've been taking clearly have a good effect.

Kwanele: Travelling has been the highlight of our year.

I nod and smile. They're cute. At this point, I hope no one will come for Kwanele, because baybeee, Niki will personally address them!

When I turn around, Zimkitha and Bheki are walking towards us.

Bheki: Kwanele...

They share a hug.

Kwanele: Thenjiwe wanted to see me.

I glance at Zimkitha and I can't read her.

Bheki: We'll talk about that another time.

Kwanele shrugs and looks at Zimkitha.

Kwanele: I guess you two are out in the open now?

Zimkitha smiles sweetly.

Zimkitha: It's been rough, but we're good.

They share a hug.

Zimkitha: Have you seen Liwa?

Kwanele: Not at all.

Oh, so he knows?

Me: You know?

Gosh, here goes my big ass mouth.

Kwanele: That we're related?

I nod.

Zimkitha: We told him.

Me: Ah, interesting...

Just then, Liwa and Nomvuyo walk to us and Liwa is all excited to see Kwanele.

Okay.

But then again, Liwa is really a ball of love and energy. I think it takes a lot to truly upset him. The only way to get him upset is if you come for Zimkitha or Nomvuyo.

We have all seen how he gets when these two are endangered in anyway. Generally, from my observations, people who are extremely happy have some hidden craziness that only erupts once in a blue moon.

Liwa: What a grand entrance...

Kwanele chuckles.

Kwanele: I'm glad that everyone is so excited to see me.

Liwa laughs.

While they chat happily, I walk away. I mean, they make a cute family, but I hope this doesn't mean they're going to

abandon this side of the town. Nomvuyo seems more excited that side. I'm sure it's because of her little connection with Niki. I think I'm jealous.

I walk to the other side, where the rest of the crew is.

Argh, they are so sour.

Yazi I feel like I'm in the middle of all of this, trying to make sure everyone is okay and that they get along.

Me: Hey, guys.

Nolwazi: Hey. I look at Dean.

Me: You okay, buddy?

Dean Why wouldn't I be?

Lord, I'm not interacting with him when he's like this. He'll kill my vibe.

Me: Tholi?

Tholi: I'm fine.

I don't even bother with Mdu, because I know he'll tell me the truth.

Me: Dean, a word?

Nolwazi lets go of his hand and we walk away from everyone.

Me: You need to get it the fuck together. He doesn't say anything.

Me: You're ruining my mood!

He sighs.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: Why are you even bothered by Kwanele? He literally didn't do anything to you!

Dean: I'm still dealing with the consequences of his bullshit.

Yoh.

He takes a deep breath.

Dean: But, I'll try to coexist.

Me: Good.

Dean: I'm sorry.

Me: Okay, now brighten up and stop being sulky. You know that you and Derek are too close to my heart. Your moods affect me.

Dean: Okay, I'll brighten up.

Me: Thank you.

We share a hug.

Dean: Are you ready to start?

I nod.

We walk back to the reception area and

Dean gives me the mic.

Me: If you can hear me, clap twice.

A few of them clap twice.

The claps wake them up.

Me: If you can hear me clap once.

Most of them clap once.

Me: Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?

Everyone: Spongebob Squarepants!

Thank God they all understand the teacher in me. They're all used to these strange attention signals.

Me: Good afternoon, everyone.

They greet back.

I see Andile and Phumi walking towards us.

Hehe, so this is really a thing??

Me: Thank you for coming to this event. You are all here, because I care about you. I question why I love some of you, but it is what it is.

I hear chuckles.

Me: I hope you're well.

I sigh.

Me: Alright, we are all grown, and I think it's important for us to acknowledge the tension here.

I smile.

Me: I have the perfect way to get all of you to loosen up... Can you all follow the guy on my right. He will lead you to our first activity.

If they want to act like kids, best believe I'm going to treat them like kids.

I watch as they all walk to the other half of the yard. Zimkitha's property is quite spacious, and I'm taking advantage of all this space.

When we get there, we find a few tables set up.

Me: Alright, so this is what we're going to do...

They look nervous.

They know I'm up to know good.

Me: We're going to play 30 Seconds!

They all look at me weirdly.

Me: You have all been divided into teams. Each table has a set of names, and it's

your responsibility to find your name and wait for my next instruction.

I hear murmurs.

Me: Go on then!

They hesitate, but end up walking around, looking for their names.

It takes them ten minutes to find their names.

I look around and smile.

Table 1: -Dean -Nolwazi -Kwanele -Niki -Tholi -Mdu -Liwa -Nomvuyo

Table 2: -My mom -My dad -Zimkitha -Bheki -Thandeka -Dumakude

Table 4: -Andile -Phumi -Derek -Me -Jeff -Ziggy

Table 5: -Nandi -Malusi -Gabi -Joe

Table 6: -Lwazi -Nyami

Me: Alright, now that we're sorted, we can start.

I walk around before I go to my table. I check on Lwazi and Nyami first. They have the kiddies version of the game. They've played it before, so I know they're good.

I walk to the elders' table and find them having more fun than everyone else. They are laughing happily at the stupid things they blurt out when giving clues.

Thandeka is the panicker- she starts shouting and speaking fast when she realises that she's running out of time. My dad is obviously the calm one, who gives precise clues. My mom is just like me- competitive and aggressive. Dumakude is surprisingly the funny one who gives ridiculous clues. Zimkitha is the giggler- she laughs as soon as she takes out a card. Bheki is the one who just doesn't get the game. He takes his time explaining one

thing and then my mom checks him. They are having too much fun.

I walk to Derek's table.

I placed him here on purpose. I want him to open himself up and get to know my people. He refuses to see them as cool people, so I'm hoping this activity will enable him to loosen up. When I get there, I find them having fun.

I'm shocked that Derek is chuckling and smiling.

Phumi is the dramatic one, shouting at Jeff, who is giving out clues like a snail. Of course Derek is the one giving the most precise clues- I'm with a smart man, who can articulate himself. Ziggy is evidently high and unbothered. Andile is also another one who is articulating himself well. I'm just glad they're okay. I'll join them once I have checked on the last table- the hectic section.

I walk to Malusi's table, and they're laughing and having fun. You can tell that they have a stronger connection with each other. There are no problems with them.

I walk to THE table.

Of course there's tension.

They are actually the root of all the tension.

Me: Okay, clearly you're choosing to behave like children.

I look at them angrily.

Me: Dean, Kwanele, Liwa and Mdu you're in one team. Nolwazi, Niki, Vuvu and Tholi, you're in the same team.

They stand in their teams and I give the guys a card.

Me: Dean, go first. Your time starts now.

I look at him seriously. He promised that he'd be a team player, but now he's being

weird. If he gets his act together, then people will get along.

He stares at me and then nods.

Dean: Alright, I don't like losing, so you all need to make it snappy.

Liwa: You better not fuck it up.

They chuckle.

Okay, this is good.

I stand there for a few minutes. Once I'm satisfied, I walk back to my table and join them.

In 20 minutes, every table is filled with cheers, laughs and shouting.

We're slowly getting there.

I'm a teacher. I'm not afraid of tense or awkward moments. This is exactly how I deal with my kids when they've having conflicts or when it's the first day of school and everyone is all tense and quiet. I take the mic.

Me: Badabababa...

Everyone: I'm lovin it!

Me: Yaaas!

I can feel the tension melting away.

Me: Alright, please pack away the game.

I'm giving you 2 minutes.

They do as they're told.

Me: Excellent. Now, please check under your tables, and you will find a box. Please place the box on your table.

They do as they're told.

Me: Good. Now, each box has packs of spaghetti and marshmallows... Please give me a thumbs up if your box has these things.

I see those thumbs.

Me: Thank you. You are such great listeners.

They chuckle.

Me: You will be working in teams. Each table is a team. You will work together to

build a tower using the spaghetti and marshmallows. The aim is to build the tallest and most stable tower. If your team's tower is the tallest and it stays put for over a minute, then you're the winners! You have to work together!

Liwa: Are you timing us?

Me: Yep, you have 10 minutes.

Zimkitha: Are you also taking part?

Me: Yes.

Nomvuyo: That's not fair. I'm sure you know how to build a tall tower.

Me: No-

Niki: Vele she shouldn't play.

Derek: It's hilarious that you assume we can't do it without Ziyanda.

Liwa: We'll beat you.

Derek: Alright, then, we'll see...

Dean: Can we start?

Thandeka: Savelelwa.

The competitiveness is hilarious.

Me: Okay. Your ten minutes starts now.

Just like that, everyone starts...

I go to Dean's table first.

There are too many strong personalities here.

Dean, Liwa and Mdu are already doing the most.

Kwanele: Can I make a suggestion?

They all keep quiet and look at him.

Kwanele: While it's great that you all know each other, let's take into consideration that we have never worked together collectively. How about we first discuss how we want to approach this instead of rushing into it?

Yaaas! He must tell these erratic idiots to check themselves!

I walk away and hope they figure it out.

I go to the oldies, and boy are they chilled.

Me: What's your plan?

Thandeka: We are taking our time.

Me: I can see...

I walk away and go to Lwazi and Nyami.

Me: What are you guys doing?

Lwazi: Well, before you do anything, you always have to plan.

Nyami: There's no use rushing into something if you don't have a vision.

Lorrrrd!

Them educated kids!

Lwazi: The plan is to create a strong foundation first and then we will build on the length.

Me: Alright then, let me leave you to it!

I walk to Derek's table.

They've started building.

Me: Did you guys-

Derek: Not now, baby.

Me: Okay, civil engineer.

I continue walking around...

It's safe to say everyone is now working as a team.

Dean's table is the only exception. They're all too stubborn. The women ended up building their own tower, because they got sick of the guys butting heads. Once there's 5 minutes left, I let them know and they continue working hard...

Me: Alright, let's see...

Out of nowhere, the one built by aboDean collapses.

Everyone laughs at them. I don't think this will make Dean feel better.

Mom: You were not working as a team!

Everyone continues laughing at them.

I go to the elders' table.

Me: Alright, so obviously yours doesn't make the cut.

Shame, it's the lowest.

Dumakude: When you get to our age, you don't stress about unnecessary things.

We all laugh.

Their tower is the neatest. It looks well-put together.

Zimkitha: Quality over quantity!

Me: Yaas!

We continue laughing.

Me: So, we're left with Nolwa-

It suddenly collapses.

Niki: Hai man! Of course it's going to collapse, because you talk too much!

Me: Don't be a sore loser.

They sigh in defeat.

Just then, Malusi's team yells, as their tower collapses.

Gabi: Argh, this is so frustrating!

We laugh at them.

Me: Haa... Lookie here, we're left with two towers...

Nyami and Lwazi carefully lift their tower and place it on Derek's table.

Everyone gathers around the table.

Nolwazi: They're the same height.

Me: Now we have to see which one can last longer.

Nyami: No worries, ours will not fall apart.

Liwa: That's my baby. Tell them!

Dean: Your stupid ass couldn't even build one yourself, so don't ride on Nyami's shine.

Nomvuyo: Heyi! She is our daughter!

Niki: Haike sizwile.

Mom: Thina we are represented on both teams! Nkanyi is representing us this side, and Lwazi is also representing us. We are covered either way!

Of course Derek and Andile's team would have a solid tower. These two work really well together. Phumi was the one who kept Jeff and Ziggy in line, because they were the naughty boys who didn't take anything seriously.

I'm not trying to brag or anything, but Derek's brain does the things. I'm finally with a man that attempts to meet my intellectual greatness... Lol, I kid, I kid... I start timing them.

After two minutes, both towers remain victorious.

Lwazi and Nyami give each other hugs. I'm so proud of them!

Lwazi: The key to success is teamwork!

Nyami: Together Everyone Achieves More!

We all laugh as we're being schooled by kids.

Derek: Liwa, what were you saying, again?

Liwa: Argh, don't rub it in.

Derek: You all forget that I'm the smartest here.

Me: Tell them!

Nomvuyo: I don't like arrogant men.

Derek: And I don't like dumb women.

Yhuuuu!

Me: Okay! Okay!

Nomvuyo: Ngizokuthola, Nkanyezi.

Derek smiles and gives her a hug.

Had Dean said that, Vuvu would be on him. She obviously gets along with Derek more.

Me: Alright then, thank you for taking part in these activities. I think it's safe to say we're all open and less tense?

They all agree.

I look at them.

They're no longer standing in little cliques. Dean is even standing next to Kwanele. Niki is with Nolwazi. Nomvuyo is next to her daughter- the bitch really isn't about that life.

Derek's arm is even around Zimkitha's shoulders. Progress!

I'm less anxious now, because the vibe is more chilled.

Me: Alright, let's have some drinks and then we'll move on to our next adventure...

Everyone walks to the reception.

Nolwazi walks to me.

Nolwazi: You are really special, Zizi.

I smile.

Nolwazi: I feel so stupid for even assuming otherwise... You're so selfless, and you really prioritise everyone's happiness.

Me: You finally realise that I'm not a bad person?

She laughs.

Nolwazi: This was amazing. Good job, Zi. We share a hug and make our way to the reception.

Phumi: Zi!

We share a hug.

Phumi: I didn't even get to say hi properly.

Me: How are you?

Phumi: I'm great, and you? You look gorgeous! You must give me the designer's contact details.

Me: I'm also great. Thank you, boo, I'll give Andile the number.

She laughs.

Phumi: Aren't you going to ask how things are going?

Me: Angithi you guys said I must stay out of your business.

Just then, Andile walks to us and we share a hug.

Me: Andi, what's happening? I don't like being out of the loop.

Andile: None of your business.

Me: Arghh!

I push him away and walk to Derek.

Me: You okay?

He gives me a kiss and smiles.
Derek: You are something else.
I smile.

A man walks to us and clears his throat.
No one knows him, but I do...
He's a friend of mine from varsity, Linda.
He is an excellent public speaker and I've
asked him to play a very important role
today. We all look at him and he smiles
warmly.

Linda: Ladies and gentlemen, my name is
Linda, and I am going to take over from
Ziyanda...

People are confused.

Linda: Alright, before we begin our very
exciting journey, please ensure you that
your drinks are refilled, because we will
not come back this side.

Gabi and Nolwazi go straight to the
champagne fountain.

After a few minutes, we're all waiting for the next instructions.

Linda: Thank you... Now, please follow me...

We all follow him while chatting and laughing.

He leads us to what looks like a guesthouse.

As soon as we walk in, everyone exclaims. Dean and I look at each other briefly and he winks.

Nandi: Wait a minute...

Gabi: What's happening?

Everyone looks around in shock.

Linda: I would like to welcome you to our very own museum... The Love House...

Nolwazi: Dean, look!

Nolwazi exclaims as she looks at a huge painting of herself. She's in hospital, giving birth to the twins, and Dean is right next to her, holding her hand...

The painting looks real.

Gabi: Joee, come see!

Lol, Joe laughs as he looks at the huge photograph of Gabi in very sexy lingerie...

Even I am turned on by the photograph.

Gabi: Remember this photo? This is the first photo I sent to you!

Dumakude: Is that us? There's also a gigantic black and white photograph of their wedding, just after they have been announced husband and wife and they are kissing. They are so young!

Linda: Alright! Let's not get carried away... We will go through every piece together... For now, I need your attention.

People were already exploring the space. They gather around Linda, beaming.

Linda: Today, we're celebrating love. Raw, challenging and unconditional love...

Linda definitely has that thing, because now the mood has changed. As much as

everyone is excited, they're now
concentrating on every word that is
coming out of his mouth...

There's silence.

Linda: Let's take a walk down memory
lane together...

With that said, he turns and walks, and
like little kids, we follow him quietly...

Now my anxiety is creeping back in!

Derek is holding my hand.

Chile, my heart is racing!

INSERT 275 (Unedited)

Derek: Ziyanda.

Me: Shh.

I look at him and smile.

The tears are now very close to rolling down my eyes, but I'm keeping it together.

I'm suddenly so overwhelmed.

Linda: Alright, here's our first stop.

Of course my mom is already sobbing. It's a black and white photo of her with my dad. All these photos are huge. I'm not even exaggerating. We managed to print life-size photos just to give it that museum feeling.

Zimkitha is the one who worked on the photos.

Linda: Here, we have the Dlamini family: Nonhle Sandra Dlamini and Patrick Dlamini. They have two children, Lwazi and Ziyanda Dlamini.

Lwazi is holding my hand and smiling brightly. She's a Dlamini now. We just need to sort things out legally.

Dad: I remember this moment like it was yesterday.

Now we're all looking at him as he smiles and reminisces.

Dad: We had been in a relationship for a week, and your mother was in a bad mood that day. I had asked to take her out to the cinema, and she flat out told me that she was not into that type of stuff, instead she wanted a picnic... I had no money to organise a picnic. We were at a friend's house when she basically snapped at me for not listening to her.

Yhu, my mother was crazy mos.

Dad: I had no idea how I was going to get her to lighten up. A friend of mine loved taking photographs, in fact he worked for a popular magazine at the time as a fashion photographer. He was there with us that day, so I asked him to take a few photos of us... As soon as he started

snapping, your mother's mood switched. As you can see from the photo, she was quite the poser.

We all laugh as we look at the photo. My parents are standing by a gate. My dad is sitting on a rock, while my mom is on his left, with one hand on her waist and the other touching my dad's shoulder.

Dad: She was always dressed like she was on a runway.

Mom: I loved fashion.

It's such a cute captured moment, and now that I know the story behind it, my heart is melting.

My dad looks at my mom warmly.

Dad: You've always been my best friend.

Mom: Your crazy best friend.

Dad: I'm glad you said it.

We laugh once again.

Linda: What have you learnt from your long lasting relationship?

My dad sighs.

Dad: Well, one thing I have learnt from my marriage is that when it comes to choosing your life partner, you should never compromise. It's important to set out your expectations and needs in the beginning stages. Discuss both your expectations, and if there's a clash, then walk away. Too many times, we settle for people who are not as invested- hoping that one day they will realise how great we are... Unfortunately, that rarely happens. If your partner is not reciprocating your efforts then you must leave. Don't compromise.

We have a moment of silence as we process what he has said.

Mom: What I have learnt is that kindness should always be the main trait we look for in relationships. Knowing that you're with someone who treats you tenderly

makes you sleep better at night. If your relationship is filled with kindness, it means you both consider each other's feelings, you're generous and there's just a gentle aura covering both of you.

We have another moment of silence.

Linda: Thank you... That was really heartfelt.

My parents nod.

Linda begins walking and we follow him.

Linda: Our next stop...

Dumakude chuckles and we all look at him.

Dumakude: The best day of my life.

Aww.

Linda: The Dumakude family... Vusumuzi Dumakude and Thandeka Dumakude. The parents of Nolwazi Camilla Dumakude-Hlongwane, Mduduzi Benjamin Dumakude and Nomzamo Ivy Dumakude. I try not to roll my eyes.

Thandeka: Our wedding day... Definitely one of the highlights of my life.

Dumakude: Thandeka was never the usual conservative wife... My parents resented her at first. She insisted on getting her first degree before marrying me. I loved her spunk... I still love it, even though she drives me insane most of the time.

We chuckle.

Linda: What have you learnt from your relationship?

Thandeka: I could have easily changed who I am just to please Vusi's family. They wanted a subservient woman, but I wasn't that woman. My parents taught me to always stand up for myself. I went to school because I wanted to empower myself. I could have easily disregarded all of that just to fit in and live "comfortably" in the box allocated to me. However, going back to what Zi's father said, I didn't compromise. I stayed true to myself, and Vusi loved me. He didn't try to change me. I made it clear that if he wasn't going to help me grow into a better person, then I would leave. But he accepted me. He has been my best friend ever since... His parents even ended up accepting me... So what I have learnt is that it is important to

stay true to yourself. A relationship is great if the person helps you become a better version of yourself. If they are pushing back your growth, then they are not the one.

Moment of silence.

Dumakude: What I have learnt is that it's okay to unlearn all the things we have been taught by society. You and your life partner have every right to do what works for the two of you, not what works for the rest of the world, or what works for only you and not your partner. It's a union, therefore you're constantly learning and unlearning things just to get to a better place.

Whew, chile! A bitch needs a notebook for all these lessons!

We follow Linda to the most controversial photo of them all!

None of us have ever seen it!

Zimkitha and Bheki!

They look like they are 16 years old.

Zimkitha is the cutest. They're wearing school uniform, and it looks like they're in a field somewhere.

There's a long silence.

Lol, Linda is so good at this. It's like he knows that this photo is igniting strong feelings, and he wants them to simmer.

Linda: Bhekumuzi Buthelezi and Zimkitha Mzinyathi...

He looks at all of us intensely.

Liwa: Father of Kwanele and Lindiwe Buthelezi... Silence.

Linda: Mother of Princess Mzinyathi, Liwa Mzinyathi, Derek Mzinyathi, Dean Mzinyathi... and Nomvuyo Mzinyathi.

Yoh, he's even using the wrong surnames. Tense.

Now we're all looking at Zimi and Bheki. Zimkitha sighs heavily.

She's obviously trying to keep it together. I don't like seeing her like this.

Zimkitha: I've faced many challenges in my life, but not being able to love Bheki openly has been the worst... I'd rather not discuss our journey, because I'm still in the process of unpacking my traumatic experiences... All I want you to know is that Bheki has always been the love of my life, and that he has supported me from the beginning, even when we couldn't be together... Knowing that I might have a future with him was one of the things that kept me going even when I wanted to give up.

She smiles and looks at us.

Zimkitha: Love truly heals. That's what I have learnt. The only thing that has kept me going for all these years is love. I had love for my children from the moment they were born, whether they know it or

not. I had love for Bheki, even though we couldn't be together... Love has truly kept me alive.

She slips her arm under Bheki's arm and sighs.

How cute.

Linda: Bab'Bheki?

Bheki sighs.

Bheki: Love really is patient. Zimkitha and I are only building a proper relationship now in our late 50s, yet our love is still authentic. We lived apart, built lives for ourselves, yet our love patiently waited for us to be reunited again...

We are silent once again.

We follow Linda.

Everyone is shocked now. There it is, a picture of Nolwazi and Kwanele...

Nolwazi is sitting on Kwanele's lap and they are laughing. Lord, the joy in their eyes?

There's an awkward silence.

I glance at Nolwazi.

She is staring at the picture intensely.

Dean is tightening his jaw. I didn't tell him about this. He didn't know that this would be added.

Linda: Kwanele Buthelezi and Nolwazi Buthelezi...

Yoh, Linda. I told him not to refer to her as a Buthelezi.

Nolwazi: Wow, I've never seen this photo...

She continues staring at it and then looks at Kwanele.

Nolwazi: Do you know it?

Kwanele nods.

My heart is fuzzy all of a sudden. I've never really witness them close and personal.

Nolwazi smiles.

Nolwazi: Well, it's no secret that Kwanele and I were married...

She sighs.

Nolwazi: I will not lie and say my love for you was insincere. You know we shared something special.

Kwanele doesn't respond.

I hope Niki won't hate me for this. It had to be done.

Nolwazi: However, you couldn't love me fully, because of other factors...

Tholi looks like she wants to run away.

Nolwazi: You weren't ready... and it hurt. It hurt like shit to not have you in my corner when I needed you the most.

She sighs.

Nolwazi: However, looking back, all of that had to happen for you to open your eyes and take charge of your life. It's unfortunate that a beautiful love story had to end, but look at you now... You and

I both know where you come from, and we've had many discussions about our union. We've both healed from the hurt... You have become a new person, and I'm grateful that being at your lowest made you realise that things needed to change... There's silence.

Kwanele clears his throat lightly.

Kwanele: Losing you wasn't easy, but I had to deal with it. Thanks to the fall of our marriage, I've become the man that I am today. I still have regrets, because my intention was never to hurt you, but I'm finally beginning to forgive myself. I refuse to spend the rest of my life mourning our marriage. I'm in a better place now and my heart has recovered...

Nolwazi nods and smiles lightly.

Linda: What have you learnt?

Kwanele: It is possible to recover from tragedy. I thought my life was over after

my divorce, but here I am now, living a great life. Healing is a messy process, but I'm on the right track. I've learnt that it's important to forgive myself. We make mistakes, we hurt people, we mess up... but if we acknowledge the mess we've caused, and learn from it, then we have every right to move on from it.

Aww, man!

Nolwazi: I have learnt the exact thing.

Forgiving yourself is crucial...

Moment of silence.

We then move on.

Kwanele and Tholi.

Kwanele mentions that his relationship with Tholi taught him the true meaning of trauma. He says being with her made him realise that he is also wounded. Tholi taught him patience and kindness. He had nothing but good things to say about her.

When it was Tholi's turn to speak, I'm sure we waited a good five minutes.

She finally clears her throat.

Tholi: Kwanele was the first man to show me love and kindness. Even though his marriage with Nolwazi was falling apart, he was always kind to me. He didn't push me to do anything I was uncomfortable with, instead he would give me my space. He opened up my heart to some extent. He took me in, took care of me and my brother, and didn't expect anything in return. Till this day, I will never bad mouth him.

She looks at him.

Tholi: You were at your lowest, and I didn't support you. I regret how I walked away from what we had. It was highly unfair, because you were faced with too many challenges at once. You deserved a proper conversation. You deserved a

proper goodbye, and I regret allowing my selfishness to make me forget how good you were to me...

Kwanele nods lightly.

Tholi: Thank you for letting go of me.

She stares at him.

Tholi: I'm working on myself right now, and it's really all because of you. If it weren't for you accepting me, I would still be living with my abusive aunt. You protected me from her. I wouldn't have met all these amazing people had it not been for you. Thank you, Kwanele.

How sweet, man!

Linda: Thank you...

We follow him.

Lol, Gabi killed me.

We got to her lingerie photograph and they explained the context of the photo.

Linda: What have you learnt?

Gabi: I've learnt that I have the capability of killing anyone that would take my Joey from me.

We all laugh.

Gabi: He's my everything, that's why we ended up getting married again. I love this man.

Joe: I love you too, baby.

They share a kiss and we clap and laugh.

Nandi obviously spoke about forgiveness.

I may have zoned out when Malusi spoke.

I have a tendency to not listen to cheaters' excuses. He needs to show Nandi that he's going to change instead of using

bombastic words to try and impress us.

I wasn't impressed, shame.

We get to the hottest love affair. The ones with the richest history, chile.

Linda: Nomvuyo and Liwa Mzinyathi...

They are already staring at each other.

Liwa: I don't think any of you, even Zimkitha herself, understand the depth of my love for this one... She's my Day 1.

Zimkitha: I still remember the day the truth came out. Jennifer threw a vase at Vuvu and it hit her head. She passed out instantly.

Nomvuyo grunts.

Zimkitha: But she got her revenge, of course. Nomvuyo is such a bullfighter. We all chuckle.

Liwa: I almost lost you... There was a time when we were distant... Building a life with Jennifer was torturous. You were also on the run, and we had no idea where you were. You really put us through the most kodwa Nomvuyo.

Zimkitha: She really did.

Liwa: But, we finally got the courage to stop lying to ourselves and everyone else. He smiles.

Liwa: My best friend and partner in crime... There's no one like you. I have no desire whatsoever to replace you. I could spend every second of the day with only you and I'd be just fine.

Nyami: Daddy, don't lie.

Zimkitha: Haibo, tell him, Nyami.

We laugh.

Liwa: Hmkay, I'm lying. Zimkitha you're also included. Zimkitha smiles.

They are really obsessed with each other.

Linda: What have you learnt?

Nomvuyo: Love has no boundaries.

Zimkitha is not even my biological mother, but there isn't a part of me that feels like we're not related. Our love for each other is that strong...

She looks at Liwa and smiles.

Nomvuyo: Your partner needs to be your best friend. You genuinely need to enjoy each other's company, even the silent

moments should be enjoyable. Their presence must excite you, rejuvenate you, heal you...

Liwa plants a kiss on her forehead.

Me: Awww!

I thought I said that in my head.

Linda walks and we follow him.

Finally!

Dean and Nolwazi!

That painting of them is the one.

Nolwazi: My Dean!

She smiles warmly.

Okay then, so she's not even going to wait for Linda to introduce them?

Nolwazi: Langelihle, the love of my life.

Dean doesn't look okay yazi.

Nolwazi: You have taught me how to love again. I was definitely confused and all over the place- I still am- but you opened up my heart and became a permanent resident.

She smiles.

Linda: Thank you for that, Nolwazi. Lol, he's so spicy.

Linda: Dean?

Dean: It's no secret that I hate Kwanele. Yoh.

We all look at him in shock.

Dean: For years, I couldn't understand why you would treat Nolwazi the way you did. I've held on to a lot of anger towards you.

There's an awkward silence.

Dean: I've never been one to let other people control my life, so I couldn't understand why you allowed the woman you call your mother to interfere in your marriage. I was there every step of the way, even before you divorced. I obviously ended up crossing the boundary, because I had no respect for you.

Uhm, Dean is a bit intense right now.

Dean: Did you have anything to do with my accident?

Kwanele: Excuse me?

Dean: Did you-

Niki: You are not about to a-

Dean: This has nothing to do with you.

Haibo, the look he gives her?

I've never seen him like this.

Niki tries speaking and I walk to her and hold her hand.

My friend is fuming. She already feels some type of way about Dean and this isn't helping.

Dean stares Kwanele.

Dean: Did you have anything to do with my accident?

Jesu, this was not part of the plan! Derek walks to Dean.

Kwanele: No, I didn't.

Okay, Kwanele doesn't look intimidated.

Dean: Your mother tried killing me.

Kwanele: How is that my fault?

Dean keeps quiet.

Kwanele: The real problem here is that you are blaming me for my mother's actions, Dean. You always have.

Dean: She is your mother.

Kwanele: But I'm not in control of her.

Bheki: Thenjiwe did what?

Dean: She tried killing Zimkitha as well.

Nkos' yami, this is getting out of control.

Nolwazi: Dean, stop this!

He looks at her.

Thandeka clears her throat.

Thandeka: In all honesty, this needs to happen. We need to clarify any misconceptions. Clearly Dean has been walking around thinking that Kwanele wanted to kill him.

I look at Dean.

We spoke about this. We agreed that he would finally let go of his anger, but I guess he needs to let it out first.

Dean: My frustration with you stems from how you handled everything. You have no idea how much damage your actions caused in Nolwazi's life. Till this day, we're still picking up the pieces.

Kwanele: I apologise for that, Dean. I regret how things were handled, I'm remorseful. What more do you want from me? Dean doesn't say anything.

Kwanele: I apologise for damaging Nolwazi. I apologise that you are still dealing with the aftereffects of our marriage. I'm sorry.

There's a long silence.

Dean nods lightly.

Dean: I've been a dick to you.

Zimkitha: Heyi! Language!

I chuckle.

Dean: I apologise for my actions.

Kwanele nods.

Kwanele: I forgive you.

Dean then looks at Niki.

Dean: I apologise for how I addressed you.

Niki: Don't ever address me like that. I am not some weakling you can run over. I don't appreciate your disrespect.

Dean nods lightly.

Dean: I apologise.

I nudge Niki and she takes a deep breath.

Niki: Hmkay.

Dean sighs and then looks at Nolwazi.

Dean: I'm sorry for my conduct.

Nolwazi: It's okay.

Linda: Alright then, that was unexpected. However, I did say that this is a challenging journey...

Lol.

Dean: Don't I get to say what I've learnt?

Linda: Go ahead, sir.

Dean: Well, I've learned that relationships require more than just love to function.

Silly things like your partner not respecting your time can tick you off... It's important to hold each other accountable, otherwise your unaddressed wrongdoings will pile up and end up destroying the relationship.

Of course he would come up with a harsh truth.

Linda: Thank you, sir.

Why is Dean being called sir?

Linda: Alright then, here is our next moment in history...

Argha man, look at Mdu and his Chubby Cheeks. They look so happy.

Mdu: Finally.

We all laugh.

Mdu: This one drives me crazy, but watching her grow into this feisty woman

has been an amazing experience. My Chubby Cheeks has taught me the importance of selflessness. Sometimes, your partner will need you more than you'll need them, and you really have to show up for them. At times, it's okay to put aside your needs just to save your partner from drowning. I've become selfless, because of my Chubby Cheeks. We all clap for him.

Tholi: Mdu has taught me that everything starts with self-love. There was no way I was going to love him fully until I started loving myself. Thank you, Duzi.

Oh, Duzi, neh?

They share a kiss.

Cute, man.

This whole thing has been too emotional.

Linda: Alright then, here's our next moment.

Niki and Kwanele. They're in an island,
living their best life!

Kwanele: I never thought I could love
again, but here I am...

They look at each other lovingly.

Kwanele: I've learnt to never
underestimate the strength of my heart. It
has the capability to heal and open up
again...

I personally clap for him.

I'm glad that he has moved on and
forgiven himself.

Niki: Well... I must say that I've always
had my reservations about this group. I've
always found you judgemental and
obnoxious.

Liwa: We are definitely obnoxious.

Everyone laughs.

Niki: But this museum has exposed how
loving you are... I think you still have a lot

to work on, but your love is cute or whatever.

Lol.

Liwa: You're technically part of the crew now.

Niki: Uhm, no thanks!

I chuckle.

Niki: Anyway, my relationship with Kwanele has taught me patience. It has taken a lot of patience for me to watch him grow into the man he has become. He was very bruised when we started dating...

She looks at Dean.

Niki: I've just had an aha moment...

She sighs.

Niki: The reason we just can't get along is because we're both in the same position. We're trying to be there for people who are still dealing with the trauma caused by a common factor. You hate Kwanele for

what he has put Nolwazi through, and I don't necessarily like you because of your negativity towards Kwanele. Dean nods lightly.

Niki: I accept your apology by the way...
Dean nods again.

Niki: Kwanele has taught me patience...
and now the patience is finally paying off...

We all nod. Good for them.

Linda: Thank you, Nikiwe.

He walks and we follow him.

Gosh.

I've been dreading this.

Mdu looks at me and grins.

Linda: Here we are, ladies and gentlemen...

A huge copy of the letter Mdu wrote for me is staring at all of us. Next to it, is an old photograph of us sleeping on a couch.

My roommate from varsity took this photo.

Everyone reads the letter silently.

Nolwazi: Bhenju, I had no idea you can be so deep!

Mdu: I must admit that I was quite shallow before I dated Ziyanda. I would be lying if I said she didn't add substance to my life.

He looks at me.

Mdu: I can never thank you enough for educating me about mental illnesses...

Because of our relationship and the challenges we faced, I'm able to fully support Tholi now.

I nod lightly.

Mdu: If there's one thing I took from our relationship, it's that mental illnesses are serious and it's our responsibility to get rid of the stigma attached to them.

I'm glad he learnt all of that.

Linda: Ms Dlamini?

Me: I don't think I learnt anything from my relationship with Mdu.

Everyone looks at me in shock. Mdu looks hurt.

Me: I'm kidding, geesh.

They chuckle in relief.

Me: I learnt that it is my responsibility to tell a person how I want to be supported. I need to communicate my needs and not expect them to figure it out themselves. I must guide my partner...

Mom: Yes, baby!

My stomach at this point is in knots.

By the time we get to Derek and I, I'm close to passing out. I don't even know how Dean got to my other side.

Mom: Look at my babies!

This photograph was taken by Nomvuyo. I don't even remember where we were, all I know is that Derek and I were so lost in

each other's eyes, that we lost track of everything. The photo says it all!
Just by looking at that photo, I'm already crying.

Now people are trying to calm me down. They don't understand ukuthi I'm dying from nerves.

I eventually calm down take a deep breath.

Linda: As we can see... this is an emotional moment... a raw moment...

Lol, argh, uLinda.

Linda: What's on your mind, Ziyanda?

I take another deep breath.

Me: Uhm...

I look at the picture.

Derek and I have come so far, it's unbelievable. We have survived so much shit...

I look at Derek. He always gets emotional when I'm emotional, so I can see he's trying not to cry.

Me: I have never loved anyone the way I love you...

Mdu: Ouch.

Everyone laughs.

I sigh.

Me: If there's anyone who deserves all my love, it's you.

He smiles.

Derek: My love for you has the power to suspend time... It always seems like the world is nonexistent, and it's just you and me...

He is absolutely right, because right now I'm lost in his gaze, and I have completely forgotten my surroundings.

Me: Derek...

Derek: Yes?

Me: I don't know how to say this...

He looks at me strangely.

Derek: You've already told me that other secret, baby.

I giggle.

I sigh and then look at everyone.

Me: I love every single person that is in this room. You have all touched my life in some way or another.

They smile at me.

Me: I hate the tension, I hate the fights, I hate the aggression... But I know that all of that forms part of relationships. Our journey will never be smooth sailing.

However, our love for each other is truly earth-shattering.

I sigh.

Me: Thank you for coming today. Thank you for taking part in my activities. Thank you for not complaining. Most importantly, thank you for reflecting on your separate journeys and

understanding how your past experiences have groomed you... Thank you for loving me. Thank you for forgiving me when I have wronged you. Thank you for just being awesome people. I have grown so much, and each and everyone of you has contributed to my growth. I love you. Suddenly, everyone is hugging each other and we're all emotional. I'm glad I'm not the only one crying now.

Lol I can see Phumi there, holding on Andile.

Jeff and Ziggy are high. They're hugging each other, those idiots.

Me: I'd like us to go to the backyard... I have one more surprise.

Nomvuyo: You make us cry and then expect us to take more of your surprises? I laugh.

Me: Follow me...

They follow me out of the guesthouse.

We all trek to the backyard.

As soon as we get to the setting, they all stare at me.

Confusion, confusion, confusion!

I look at Derek.

Me: Star, I most definitely want to spend the rest of my life with you... All that talk about you being the problem is bullshit.

Liwa: What's happening right now?

Me: Derek.

He looks like he's about to faint.

Me: Nkanyezi.

I take his hands.

Me: I pray and hope that this gesture shows you how committed I am and how crazy you make me. There's complete silence.

For a good minute, everyone is silent.

Liwa: What's happening right now?

They look around.

Niki: Nooo, biiiitch! Is this a surprise wedding?!

Yoh, uNiki.

Nomvuyo: Ziyanda?!

Jeff: Shit...

I look at Derek.

As soon as he turns from everyone, faces the other way, and bows his head, I also lose it.

Dean wraps his arms around Derek shoulders, and comforts him as he starts crying.

Nomvuyo: Wait, is this really happening?

Liwa: What's happening right now?

Nolwazi: Wait.

My mom is now comforting me.

Yhu, it is a mess.

INSERT 276 (Unedited- Excuse any errors
tuu kunzima right now)

I go to Derek and Dean.

Me: Star.

I give him a few seconds to gather himself.

Dean lets go of him and I step closer to
him and wrap my arms around his waist.

He buries his head on my neck.

Me: Star, you're scaring me. He puts his
head up and looks at me.

Argh, my heart.

Our foreheads touch.

Me: Are you okay?

He shakes his head.

Me: Need a moment?

He nods.

Me: Okay...

I let go of him and he holds me.

Me: Let me tell everyone to get drinks...

He lets go of me and I walk to the others,
who are now very excited.

When I get to them, Thandeka starts ululating and they all cheer.

Me: Please get yourselves drinks and finger foods, chill a bit, and give us some time.

Nolwazi: Anything for you, makoti.

They start singing and dancing.

Lol, I'm not even processing any of this. I want some alone time with Nkanyezi, because he legit looks shell-shocked.

I walk to him and take his hand.

Me: Let's go inside.

We walk away silently and make our way inside the house.

Me: Would you like some water?

Derek: Yes, please.

Shame, he's not fine.

I pour him some cold water and give him the glass. I watch as he drinks the water and groans. Derek: My heart is beating too fast.

I chuckle and take his hand. We walk up the stairs and make our way to the bedroom. We find Kate there, busy on her phone.

Kate: Aww, here's the lovely couple!

Me: Hey, Kate.

Kate: Are you ready for your next look?

Me: Not yet. Give us a few minutes.

Kate: Oh, sure... I'll be in another room. Call me when you're ready.

Me: Okay.

She walks out and closes the door. I walk to Derek and stare at him.

Me: You okay?

He shakes his head.

I'm still nervous and anxious. He hasn't given me anything to work with, besides his tears.

Derek: Come here.

He pulls me closer and wraps his arms around me.

Derek: What's happening?

He looks at me curiously and I sigh.

Me: Well... It's not a secret that I've been struggling to decide on when the wedding should take place.

He remains silent.

Me: So... I had a random Aha Moment- I realised that I do want to marry you... but I should make it a surprise, because everyone thinks I'm afraid of commitment, and I thought it would be a great gesture...

He nods lightly.

Me: So... I told my parents first, and they struggled to understand what I meant. They thought I was joking when I said I wanted to plan a wedding without your consent. He keeps quiet and I take a deep breath. I can't believe I actually did it. An entire month of planning such a detailed event? Lord.

Me: Anyway, I asked Dean to help me plan everything. We started off with the 30 Day gift thingie, and that's why I was giving you all those gifts- it was a buildup to today.

I sigh.

Me: And then I planned the museum thingie, because I wanted everyone to get over the tension.

I groan.

Me: Is it weird that I want to sleep? I'm too anxious right now and you're not helping!

Derek: You want to sleep?

Me: Yes! My heart is beating too fast. I'm sweaty. I'm overwhelmed. Sleeping is the only solution!

He tightens his hold on me.

Derek: I don't know what to say to you.

Me: I mean, are we doing this or not?

Derek: What do you think?

Me: I don't know, Derek. I'm not too confident right now.

Derek: This is me we're talking about- of course we're doing this...

The Anxiety Monster had gotten me, so hearing Derek say he's onboard feels great.

I exhale loudly and relax in his arms.

Derek: I genuinely don't know what to say to you.

Me: As long as you're okay with this.

Derek: Ziyanda, you mean everything to me. Why the fuck would I have a problem with this?

Me: I need to take off these heels.

I suddenly feel compressed. He lets go of me and I watch as he goes down and unbuckles the heels and takes them off.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Are you going to change this dress?

I nod.

Derek: It suits you. Breathtaking.

Me: Thanks. You don't look too bad yourself.

He chuckles as he takes off my dress.

Derek: The right thing to do right now is let off some steam.

Me: Couldn't agree more.

The second his lips land on mine, I'm gone, chile.

Yazi uDerek is a problem. My love for this one is too much, man, and now I want to let out all the stress and anxiety I've been feeling since this whole thing started.

By the time I'm reaching my orgasm, I'm sobbing and moaning his name like a wounded puppy.

Derek: I love you.

Me: I love you-

Heyiii, jiki jiki, the door opens. Next thing I know, Derek is trying to cover us.

My mom and dad just stand there like zombies.

Derek's efforts are unsuccessful, so we separate. He takes a pillow and covers himself with it, while I jump off the bed and kneel on the other side of it, so that my head is the only thing visible.

Why are my parents not walking off and closing the door like normal people?! Why are they just standing there like creeps?! Derek and I remain silent and just stare at them. He still has an erection. We were getting ready to go one more time before heading out.

Yoh.

My dad looks traumatised.

Just then, Dean also emerges and he processes the scene.

Dean: You disgusting whores.

Jesu.

My dad finally gathers up the energy to walk away. Really?! After all this time?!

Dean: Mama, go change into your next outfit. This is the last thing you need to see.

My mom also walks away. For once in her life, she's speechless.

Dean chuckles and looks at us.

Dean: Hurry up, we don't have the whole day... Do I need to teach you how to lock a door?

With that said, he closes the door.

Derek and I stare at each other for a good minute and he ends up laughing.

Me: Derek!

Derek: What?

Me: This is not funny!

Derek: They should have knocked. What did they think we were doing?

I groan and watch as he stands and locks the door.

Derek: Woza.

He pulls me to the bed.

Derek: Your parents are too forward.

I grunt...

Kate does a few touch ups and then leads me to the full-length mirror.

Yhu, this is really happening...

Kate: I have to give it to your mother, she has great taste.

My mom definitely took charge with the design of the dress. Me being me, I've never been the type of person who imagines her wedding and has a diary with all her plans. Mina my main concern is who the hell I'm involving myself with... That has been my biggest worry throughout my life- the man I'm going to spend the rest of my life with. So now that I'm actually getting married and I had to be aware of all the details, I didn't know

where to start. Thankfully, my mom took over. I just told her and the designer that I want to look amazing and be comfortable. I don't want my boobs to splurt out on the sides. I don't want my boobs to be trapped and pressed so high that they touch my chin. I don't want my arms to be squashed. I don't want my hips to be trapped and stop me from dancing. I don't want to drown in a dress. Most importantly, I want a dress with pockets... We all discovered that I had too many demands. They couldn't keep up. I know my body type- I have boobs, I have hips- basically, I'm not skinny. I don't want a big dress, because it will make me look gigantic. I don't want too much lace, because it tends to look cheap and tacky. I don't want a fairytale type of dress, it's too hot for that shit. I don't want long sleeves, because I'll feel too compressed. I

don't want too many crystals, because they also tend to look ghetto.

I gave them a hard time, shame, but they came through for me. I'm wearing a structured A-line dress with pocketed silk mikado skirt and low plunging neckline (to appropriately show off my boobs, which Derek adores) in bold lace applique. The embroidery is not too harsh- the designer managed to not make it look cluttered. I absolutely love the mikado, because the material is not heavy and hot. It's perfect for warm weather. Phela the tulle dress I wore earlier was already irritating me, and the layers weren't even that hectic.

One thing I did choose is my tiara. I chose a vine, because I have a low bun. A normal tiara wouldn't go well with my dress. My mom kept trying to make me get a full-on tiara and I checked her quick fast, because

I'm not trying to look like I'm taking part in a local modelling contest for Miss Soweto. Dean is the one who coughed out the money for this vine, as a gift, so I allowed myself to go all out and not even consider ukuthi I'm chowing the megabytes' university money. Bazoba strong. The vine compliments the bun that Kate had to redo, because Derek messed it up earlier.

The veil is simple and classic, nothing too special. It's not long, because it would disturb the flow of my dress, considering the material. Nakhona I can't be fussing about a veil when my ass already has a kid and I'm literally carrying a baby. I'm not about to be those in denial people who insist on covering themselves with a veil when their assess have a soccer team waiting there by the altar... Angithi bathi

a veil signifies virginity? K'dala ngaqala uku-have-a phela.

Anyway, the point I'm trying to make is that a bitch is cute, poppin' and comfortable.

I want to see Derek, but I've been told that I'm not allowed. I just don't understand why people are suddenly following traditional methods, when this whole situation has been strange and has broken a lot of wedding rules.

My parents walk into the room and we have another heartfelt moment. We begin praying and the tears start approaching.

Dad: Are you ready?

I nod.

Dad: Alright then...

Just then, there's a knock on the door and Dean walks in.

He wraps his arms around me and we share a long hug.

Dean: How are you feeling?

Me: I'm okay.

I take a deep breath.

Dean: I'm proud of you.

Me: Thank you.

He then looks at my parents and smiles.

Dean: It's time. We've been waiting for too long, and everyone is ready.

Me: Let's get this over and done with!

Dean: Hai phela, calm down. You must process and enjoy every moment.

Niki and Nomvuyo have already been here and the photographer has captured all the lovely moments. Now, I just need to walk down that aisle and do this shit.

Me: Are the singers here?

Believe it or not, my mother managed to find me two lead singers there by our church to come sing while I walk down

the aisle. Shame, they both deserve a record deal for their amazing talent, but at least I've given them a gig. My mom wanted the whole choir to be included and I checked her quick fast (once again), because I'm not trying to have people from the church choir fighting for a spot and trying to outshine each other while I walk down the aisle.

I have two singers and a pianist. That's all we need, not the whole congregation.

I don't know even know how I got here, but I'm here. I'm standing between both my parents and I am 5 to crying. I decided that I would walk down with both of them, because at least I'll have two people to hold me should I fall or faint. When I hear the song's melody, my heart skips a beat.

It's Ed Sheeran's Perfect. Derek absolutely loves the song...

The piano starts off...

My knees are weak!

Mom: Please don't fall, Ziyanda.

We chuckle through the tears.

People see us approaching and they stand. We walk to the end of the aisle. I decide to zone out. I'm going to focus on this aisle and try not to trip. Gosh, all of a sudden it looks like this is going to be a long trip. Derek is too far for my liking.

Ngapha my mom's singers are harmonising and killing it.

The guy sings the first verse beautifully...

I hug my parents and then hold my mom's hand and then slip my arm through my dad's arm. I make a mental note to not drop the bouquet.

We stand there for about minute. I'm trying to gather my thoughts and remind myself to be in the moment.

I'm getting married! I'm tying the knot with the love of my life!

Yhu, I'm so overwhelmed. I want to scream and cry...

The singers are also doing the most here with their harmony...

"... Baby, I'm dancing in the dark with you between my arms Barefoot on the grass, listening to our favorite song When you said you looked a mess, I whispered underneath my breath But you heard it, darling, you look perfect tonight..."

We begin walking and as much as I try to stop them, the tears keep flowing...

I even had perfect timing, because Beyonce's verse is now being sang so beautifully as I walk with my parents...

Well I found a man, stronger than anyone
I know He shares my dreams, I hope that
someday we'll share a home I found love,
to carry more than just my secrets To
carry love, to carry children of our own If
there's a song that I feel sums up what I
have with Derek, it has to be this one...

"... We are still kids, but we're so in love
Fighting against all odds I know we'll be
alright this time Darling, just hold my
hand Be your girl, you'll be my man And I
see my future in your eyes..."

I have no idea how I'm walking right now.
I feel like my parents are holding me. I'm
floating.

Mom: Ngathi kuzo-faint-a mina.

I can't help but let out a laugh.

I decide to focus on Derek, because we're
getting closer to him.

I was never ready.

Umuntu is shedding tears there and now I regret looking at him because I'm crying even more.

The song reaches its climax, where the singers' voices collide and intensify. What makes it even more powerful is that these are church folk, so their voices have that holy spirit element...

"... Baby, I'm dancing in the dark, with you between my arms Barefoot on the grass, while listening to our favourite song I have faith in what I see Now I know I have met an angel in person And she looks perfect And he looks perfect No I don't deserve this You look perfect tonight..."

When we get to the front, my parents hug Derek.

As soon as he's free, I try not to throw myself at him. I don't know if there are rules about holding your person before sharing vows, but I want to be in his arms

ASAP. I'm so glad that he obviously feels the same way, because we end up sharing the longest hug, crying our lungs out...

The piano is doing the most. I think it's evoking too many emotions, and these holy ghost singers aren't helping.

Once we're okay, we let go of each other. Derek hands me his handkerchief and I wipe my tears.

When I finally gather up the strength to look at everyone, I'm glad to see that these bitches are also crying. You can literally feel the love in this space-genuine love. I don't think I've ever been happier. My heart is full. All the nerves have perished and have been replaced by a calm aura... A calmness that is allowing me to be still and soak in every second...

Little Star starts crying very loudly.

My mother takes her from Niki and holds her. I know she wants to be held by me or

Derek, but she has to be strong. This moment is not about her. She eventually calms down. I finally look at Derek and smile.

Shuu!

He takes my hand and I take that as a sign for another hug. We're now embracing again and I'm trying not to cry yet again, but it's not easy. I'm so overwhelmed by the love I have for him.

I feel his lips by my ear.

Derek: Thank you for this.

Me: I don't want to let go.

He chuckles.

Derek: Love you.

Me: Love you too.

He gives me one last squeeze and lets go of me.

He holds my hand and then we look at the priest who is smiling warmly.

The piano stops playing...

There's a long silence...

Priest: We are gathered here today in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together Derek Nkanyezi Ngidi and Ziyanda Dlamini in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable union, instituted of God. Into this holy estate, Derek and Ziyanda come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause, why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold their peace.

There's silence.

Derek: That won't be happening, you can carry on.

Everyone laughs.

Priest: I require and charge you both, as you will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any barrier, why you may not be

lawfully joined together in Matrimony, you do now confess it. For be well assured, that if any persons are joined together other than as God's Word allows, their marriage is not lawful.

Yoh, that's a little dramatic.

Derek and I glance at each other and stifle laughs.

Dean: Carry on, mfundisi.

The priest nods lightly as everyone continues laughing...

When it's time for our vows, I say a silent prayer, because all the shit I prepared to say has been forgotten. I am blank.

Priest: Derek and Ziyanda are here to marry each other. No one else will create such a union. It is their words, their intentions, their vision, that must define and shape this marriage. So I call upon them now to state their promise before

this group: the pledges that will bind them together.

The priest stares at me softly and then I sigh.

I look at Derek and take a deep breath.

Me: Uhm, I had a whole speech prepared, but I'm genuinely blank...

Derek: I can go first.

He looks at the priest.

Derek: Can I go first?

Priest: Go ahead...

I sigh in relief.

Derek then stares at me and smiles.

Derek: I could never have a hard time explaining my love for you and my intent of growing old with you...

Haike, I hope he's not throwing shade just because I blanked out.

Derek: I have many vows, so I'll sum up them into five points.

Argh, why didn't I think of that? I'll copy him.

Derek: Firstly, I vow to always be your number one cheerleader. You are such a creative person and you constantly come up with amazing ideas on how we can improve things.

I smile.

Derek: So, I vow to be your number one cheerleader. You will never have to seek support elsewhere. I won't just cheer for you, but I'll try by all means to provide you with all the resources you need to be successful in your endeavors. I vow to celebrate you and your achievements. I will hold your hand and always have your back.

Argh.

Derek: Secondly, I vow to never stop laughing with you. I appreciate the fact that we always find a way to laugh at

ourselves and our surroundings. You're the funniest person I know, and I'm so thankful that we always manage to smile through our pain. You have enabled me to stop taking myself too seriously. I vow to continue finding humour in every situation...

Liwa: I thought I was the funniest person you know?

We all chuckle.

Derek: Thirdly, I vow to continuously work on myself to ensure that I'm the best husband. In my time with you, I have grown tremendously, and it's mostly because of your influence. You have shown me the importance of working on myself before I can open myself up to everyone else. Because of you, I have gained the courage to take a step back and unpack everything that has happened to me and start healing. I promise that I

will never stop working on myself. I will continue watering myself to ensure that I become a better version of myself with each passing day.

Me: Thank you.

Derek: Next, I vow to not only be a good husband, but a good father as well. I think it's important to note that this union doesn't only include the two of us, but our children as well- the family we're building. I promise that I will never leave you. At no point will you be left to take care of what we both started. We collectively agreed to build a family together, therefore, I will always uphold my responsibilities as a father. I will not fail our children. They will always have me, and I will prioritise their happiness more than anything.

He swallows his tears.

Derek: Lastly, I vow to be your best friend. Being your best friend means I'll always be honest with you. I'll be honest with what's going through my mind; how you make me feel; what makes me happy; what makes me sad; what hurts me; my hopes and dreams... Honesty will be the foundation of our relationship. I will be honest enough to not only tell you what your strengths are and what I love about you, but what your areas of growth are and how you can improve... I will always be honest with you, Ziyanda. He sighs.

Derek: Being your best friend also means I'm never going to lose patience when it comes to you. I will never question the intent behind your actions, because I've been in your life long enough to know that you genuinely love me, and you always have the best intentions... I will never be impatient with you. I will

constantly be empathetic, and put myself in your shoes. I will treat you with a deep sense of understanding; thoroughly unpack your actions and figure out why you do the crazy things you do, because I know for a fact that I will discover something that will make me love you even more...

See, now I'm crying.

Hearing him say that he will never stop trying to discover who I am truly warms my heart.

Derek: Being your best friend means I'm going to fully trust you. We will be each other's safe space. As soon as I'm in your presence, I will be completely naked, literally and figuratively.

We laugh.

Derek: I will not build a wall around myself. I will be fully open and allow myself to trust you. I will lean on you

without trying to be strong. I will never pretend that I have all my ducks in a row when I'm with you. You will be my home... my safe haven...

I want to hold him.

He takes a deep breath and stares at me.

Derek: Ziyanda, I take everything I have said seriously... Thank you for organising this special day. It's the best day of my life, without a doubt. You're my best friend and confidant. You are such a page-turner. Everyday with you is some form of adventure- sometimes the experience is gruesome because we find ourselves clashing, not seeing eye to eye- other times the experience is sweet and comforting... At this point, my love for you can't be put in words. I feel like I can show you more than I can vocally express it.

He grins mischievously and I smile.

Derek: I feel privileged to be on the receiving end of your love. You're loyal, you're protective, you're loving, you're honest... I'm so grateful that I get the chance to promise myself to my greatest friend. I pride myself in being your partner. I love you, baby. I've never loved anyone like this, and I know my heart is safe with you.

I want to kiss him!

He wraps his arms around me and we hold each other for a while, since we can't kiss yet.

I am sobbing...

INSERT 277

I take a deep breath.

Me: I vow to never stop drooling over you, because you are one fine specimen.

He smiles.

At this point, I decide to zone everyone out and just pretend Derek and I are by ourselves. I want this experience to be as authentic as possible.

Me: I have a list of vows, and I hope I go through most of them... I'll start with the important ones.

I continue staring at him.

Me: I vow to always beat you on Snakes and Ladders and Checkers. I'll try to not be a sore loser, but I can't promise you that. I also can't promise that I'll stop being arrogant whenever I win... I vow to never stop trying to cook for you, because I believe that one day I'll get it right.

I can hear Dean saying something and people laughing, but I continue zoning them out.

Me: I vow to always make you my chauffeur, because I seriously hate

driving. I vow to always keep the house squeaky clean, specifically the kitchen, just to avoid your dramatic mental breakdowns. I vow to squeeze the toothpaste from the bottom at all times. He chuckles.

I take a deep breath.

Me: I promise to listen to your advice, because you are a wise man and you always want the best for me. There are times when I don't see a situation for what it truly is because I tend to be too passionate, but you always stay level-headed. I will listen more. I will make you feel heard. I will process your advice and start following it instead of being stubborn. Your wisdom will not go to waste.

He squeezes my hands.

Me: I promise to love and honour you, but not to obey you, because you are not my

ruler. We collectively agreed that this union would be a partnership and friendship, therefore, at no point will one of us make the other feel like they are being controlled. I will respect you as my man, and we will not be bound by society's marriage norms. Being your wife is not a job position. Being my husband is not a job position. We both know what we need from each other, as a result, we will not feel pressured by external factors. At no point will we be each other's servants. Like I've stated, I will respect you as my man, not the man, because that comes with a lot of generational guidelines, and we both know I struggle with being told what to do. I know the specifications that come with being your partner, and because I've experienced being your woman, I am more than willing to stick around and learn more about you. I am

capable of meeting those specifications. I will love you the way you want to be loved... and still add my spice of course. I will not Google ways to satisfy you, instead I will find out directly from you what you need from me. You are Derek, my Derek, therefore no one else can teach me how to treat you other than you. See, now I'm in the zone. The words are just flowing.

Me: I vow to give our union 100% at all times. You will be my first priority. I will never stop telling you how much I love you. I will never stop telling you if you've hurt my feelings. I will never stop apologising if I've wronged you, even though this one is not easy. I will always give you 100%, and if I'm struggling to do so (because life presents us with a lot of challenges), then I will be honest with you. The bottomline is that I am

committed to you, and I am dedicated to nurturing our relationship.

I continue looking at him.

Me: I vow to work on myself as well. I have enjoyed being with you. You bring out the best and worst in me. Ever since I have been with you, I have had to come face to face with my demons and realise that I am far from perfect. I have grown deeply, because you constantly stretch me to become better... literally and figuratively.

I hear chuckles. My poor parents will be strong.

Me: You are my best friend, my partner in crime, my gossip partner. I trust you with my life. Besides my parents, I know for a fact that should anything happen to me, you will be the first person to jump and do something. I don't doubt your love for me one bit, because you always choose

me. You choose me every single day, and you never fail to show me that I'm always your first choice. You have even made it clear that you prioritise me over our kids, because you understand that it is better and crucial for them to be raised by wholesome parents. Thank you for being my best friend. I promise that we'll be best friends forever. For me, being best friends means we accept that our journey will not be sunshine and rainbows. We will be tested along the way, but we both continuously choose to get through those challenges together. Best friends have their serious moments, but they also have their idiotic moments, where they behave like crazy 10 year olds. May we never lose touch with the 10 year olds in us. I know you never got the chance to fully enjoy your childhood, so I promise to help you

channel the kid in you and not always take things too seriously.

He smiles.

Me: Lastly, I vow to hold on to forgiveness instead of anger and hurt. I will not hold on to situations once we have unpacked them and acknowledged and learned from them. Of course if you ever cheat, then you can consider yourself dead...

There's no forgiveness there, especially now that we're making this official.

He chuckles.

Me: I will try my utmost best to never go to bed angry at you. I know this is hard to implement, but I will try my best. Just like you, I am not worried about your intentions, because I know for a fact that you always want the best for me, and if you ever make a mistake, it never comes from a malicious place. I will always hold on to forgiveness. I am not about to spend

the rest of my life holding on to grudges...
I refuse to be petty when it comes to
you... well, at least I will try not to be...
He laughs lightly, because he is familiar
with Petty. The bitch is not going
anywhere, to be quite honest. I just need
to learn how to tame her.

Me: I love you, Star. Just like this ring, I
strongly believe that my love for you is
never-ending. It is never stagnant- it
continuously revolves and evolves. The
reason I love your name so much is
because you're truly the embodiment of a
star.

Me: A star can be defined by five basic
characteristics: brightness, colour, surface
temperature, size and mass. A star is a
massive ball of plasma that emits light
throughout the universe. Even when
faced with darkness, your good heart still

brings light... Your kind-nature shines through. You bring light to my life.

I can see him getting emotional now.

Me: A star's colour is determined by its temperature. For example, cooler stars tend to be redder in colour, while hotter stars have a bluer appearance. You are extremely mood lately, and I am starting to think this is going to be something I have to deal with forever...

He smiles.

Me: Apparently, two stars of a similar size may not necessarily have the same mass, because stars can vary greatly in density. Out of all the men I have come across, I have been blessed with you in particular. You are different, and I strongly believe that you were tailor-made specifically for me. There are too many sexy men out there, but your heart has the perfect amount of density for me. I can't even

begin to compare you to other stars. You are my star. I don't care about the other stars... Well, I do care about our dramatic little one, but you get my point...

He wraps his arms around me and we share a hug.

Me: Love you.

He doesn't respond.

Argh, I've never seen him this emotional.

He is clearly overwhelmed. I hope I've made him understand how much he means to me, and how amazing he is. He tends to doubt himself sometimes, and I completely understand, because all his life he grew up convinced that he was not worthy enough to be on the receiving end of his real parents' love.

There's a long moment of silence.

Priest: Ziyanda, will you have Derek to be your wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of

Matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, so long as you both shall live?

Me: Yes, I will.

Priest: Derek, will you have Ziyanda to be your wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of Matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, so long as you both shall live?

Derek clears his throat.

Derek: Yes, I will.

Priest: Excellent... Now, please repeat after me.

So I had a panic attack a few days ago when I realised that Derek won't have a wedding band for me, since he didn't know about the wedding... Turns out this man actually organised one back when

Dean's lady from overseas came to show us engagement rings for Nolwazi, back when he was proposing... Derek actually got the engagement and wedding ring during that time. I was shook to say the least.

Anyway, the priest smiles and asks us to repeat after him. Derek goes first, before sliding the band on my finger.

Derek: I, Derek, take you, Ziyanda, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance.

Priest: Bless, O Lord, this ring, that he who gives it and she who wears it may abide in peace, and continue in the favour, unto their life's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

And then it's my turn.

Me: I, Ziyanda, take you, Nkanyezi, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance.

Priest: Bless, O Lord, this ring, that she who gives it and he who wears it may abide in peace, and continue in the favour, unto their life's end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. He looks at us.

Priest: With these rings, I wed you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Everyone says Amen.

He bows his head and we all do the same and close our eyes.

Priest: Oh Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all

spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life. Send your blessing upon your children, Derek and Ziyanda, whom we bless in your name. That they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant they made. These rings are received as a token and pledge. May they ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to your laws; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There's a moment of silence as we process his words.

Priest: Oh God, look mercifully upon your children, that they may love, honour, and cherish each other, and so live together in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and of peace; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives

and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit ever. Amen.

Everyone says Amen.

We open our eyes and he looks at us softly, like a proud father.

Priest: May God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you. May the Lord mercifully with his favour, look upon you, and fill you with all spiritual blessing and grace; that you may so live together in this life, that in the world to come you may have life everlasting.

He smiles.

My heart beats excitedly.

Priest: I now pronounce that you are Husband and Wife, Mr and Mrs Ngidi, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Yaaas!

Priest: You may kiss the bride.

Heyiiii!

Thunder. Lightning. Storm. Zonke. That's how powerful that kiss was for me. It started off soft and delicate, with him brushing his lips on me like a floating feather. Then it intensified and I found myself crying through it all, because I realised that I'm going to be kissing him for the rest of my life...

There isn't even a pessimistic bone in me that is whispering nonsense and making me doubt what I have done. I am genuinely happy with my decision. Derek is the one, and this is by far the happiest day of my life.

Dean literally had to pull us apart, because I think we got carried away.